Supercat Sanvers 2020

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Summary

In this political AU, sparks fly on the campaign trail as presidential hopeful Cat Grant is reunited with Kara Danvers after years of separation and silence, and Alex finds herself butting heads with a new advisor who won’t back down in the face of her intimidation tactics.

Notes

It should be pretty obvious as the timeline gets clearer over the chapters, but I've aged up most of the main cast to make their career trajectories fit

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

“As much as I have appreciated your support and enthusiasm—and believe me, I have. You are the ones who made this experience possible, who inspired me to get out there day in and day out—I will be suspending my campaign for the time being,” Cat Grant announced. A hush fell over the room full of once rowdy and boisterous supporters, though after a moment of stunned silence, the room filled once more with shouts and questions and pleas to stay in the race. But Cat was already making her way off the stage and out to her waiting car, directing a few members of her team to stay behind and field questions, even if it just meant giving them vague pleasantries and the always frustrating reply of: “She has no comment at this time,” which was all the more frustrating because she did have a comment. Dammit, she was Cat Grant; she had a thousand and one perfectly worded comments. But each one of them would mean putting Kara in danger, so she kept quiet—a sacrifice she would willingly make again and again.

[4 months ago, October]

“Oh, and get Kara on the phone for tomorrow,” Cat added, drumming her perfectly manicured nails against the top of her desk, her mind whirring as she thought through her plan.

“Kara…?” Eve trailed off, a question in her voice that she wasn’t quite brave enough to voice as such.

“Danvers,” James cut in, earning himself a rare smile from Cat. “I’ll get you her personal email in a few.”

“That will be all.” With a flick of her wrist, Cat dismissed the group of core campaign staff that had gathered in her office for their weekly Monday morning briefing. When she looked up, however, she found James still lingering in her office. “What is it?”

“I—why are you calling Kara in?”

“Because I’d just love to know where she finds those poly-blend tartan skirts and clashing, kindergarten teacher cardigans—would really hammer home my message next debate, I think.” Her wit was as scathing as ever; apparently no amount of shaking hands and smiling and kissing babies would ever change some things.

“I mean, are you interviewing her for something?” It wasn’t that he didn’t want to see his friend succeeding—and surely, after last night’s debate performance, being a part of Cat Grant’s team would be seen as success—but he’d been there for the fallout after the last campaign, after the last time Cat left Kara behind.

Leveling him with a glare that would have sent most of her staff scurrying, Cat snapped, “I don’t pay you to question my decisions.”

“Sorry,” James muttered, turning on his heel and striding out of the office and over to Eve’s desk, figuring the least he could do was to make sure that Kara at least received the invitation. Whether or not she accepted was her decision to make.

Once he finished helping Eve, he slipped down the hallway and knocked lightly on the door to Lucy’s office. Even though she wasn’t in the inner circle the way she had been during Cat’s years in office as governor, she still tended to know gossip before almost everyone.
“Yeah?” Lucy called out.

“Hey,” James greeted, sticking his head in the doorway. “You free?”

“I’ll head out,” Alex offered, pushing up off of the desk and pulling herself back to a standing position.

“You’re just as much a part of this campaign as anyone else,” Lucy corrected her, gesturing for Alex to sit—though perhaps in a real chair this time.

Alex shrugged; she hadn’t gotten used to the idea of working full time for one single candidate. After nearly a decade of work based out of the DEO’s offices and constantly flying from city to city to help put out fires and manage crises as they arose, she was still working on learning what it meant to pledge loyalty to a person, rather than to J’onn and the DEO. Of course, he’d encouraged her, told her she could hold onto her DEO affiliation—it looked good for them, after all, and he wanted to claim credit for the work of his protégé—but she missed working at his side.

“You are,” James insisted, smiling warmly and taking the seat beside her as he nudged the door shut with his foot. Though, now that he thought about it, perhaps Alex wasn’t the best person to tell about Kara… She might be on Cat’s payroll, but her willingness to sever ties with clients who violated her rather strict personal codes—almost all of which seemed to revolve around the small handful of people she deemed worthy of her protection—was legendary throughout DC.

“So what do you need to know?”

“I could have just dropped in to say hello, Luce.” She arched a perfectly sculpted eyebrow at him and crossed her arms until he relented. “Okay, yes, fine. What do you know about…uh, tomorrow’s phone meeting?”

“What meeting?”

“Lucy Lane, not in on the gossip?” Alex looked genuinely astounded. Even though she was basically paid to know all the dirty details that never made it into the papers if she did her job right, Lucy often managed to be one step ahead of her when it came to the inner workings of Cat’s office.

“Hush, I still knew that Eve was sleeping with the new volunteer coordinator before they’d even stumbled out of the supply closet.”

Alex shuddered. “He was a walking, talking time bomb of a scandal.”

“And that’s why you had Cat fire him.”

“Among other reasons.”

Lucy snorted at the memory of Alex’s face when Mike had tried to hit on one of the new volunteers in front of her. The loud reaming out he got from Alex about abuses of power and inappropriate behavior in the workplace had been worth the meeting she’d been forced to have with the woman about why threatening physical violence against staff members, even those on their way out, was decidedly not a good idea from a legal perspective.

Remembering how they had gotten here, Lucy turned her attention back to James. “What’s this about a mysterious meeting?”

“Oh, uh…” James hesitated, casting a wary eye in Alex’s direction.
“If a scandal is brewing, it’s best I know about it now.”

“No, nothing like that. Cat asked Eve to set up a phone meeting with Kara.”

“As in my sister Kara?”

“That would be the one.”

Lucy narrowed her eyes, running through the possibilities for why she might want to talk to Kara. “Think she’s gonna try to get her on the campaign team? They worked pretty well together back when she made her run for governor…”

“Once she started calling her by her actual name,” Alex huffed.

“Would Kara even consider it?” James asked, looking more to Alex than Lucy. Sure, Lucy had gotten to know Kara since coming back to DC with Cat to stay on as her legal advisor after their four years in Sacramento, but she hadn’t been there the first time Cat left.

Alex shrugged. “She’s gotten older.”

“But I’ve never seen her that upset.” She’d shown up at James’ apartment the week after the election, tears streaking down her cheeks and unwilling to even talk about what had happened until she’d finished her first pint of Half Baked. Eventually she told him about how Cat had called her into her office only to offer her a glowing letter of recommendation for whatever job she wanted next. To anyone else, that would have been ideal, but Kara had expected to keep working with Cat, to be invited to come with her to Sacramento from National City. He still wasn’t sure exactly why she’d been as devastated as she was, but eventually she called in the promised recommendation and moved across the country to DC where she took up a post as a high-ranking congressional staffer.

“She made the best of it—got her foot in the door, and look at how well she’s done for herself since. I’m not saying Cat deserves to get her back, but I’m not about to dictate what Kara can and can’t do,” Alex said.

“That’s not what I’m saying, I just…” James trailed off, shaking his head. “I don’t know. I don’t want to see her get hurt again.”

“I think she’s been in this town long enough to hope for the best but not really to expect it anymore.” Watching Kara lose some of the optimism that she had clung to since childhood—her persistent belief that there had to be some greater purpose in all of it—had been painful, but Alex was glad to see a bit of realism infused into her perspective, even if she still had a tendency to buy into the relentless idealism of candidates that Alex had a hard time stomaching.

“I hope so.”

As the conversation turned to lighter topics—namely, Winn’s terrible blind date the night before that James had the good fortune of hearing all about on their metro ride in that morning—Alex’s phone trilled with a loud alarm.

Lucy cringed. “Christ, Alex, not everything is a crisis anymore. Maybe you turn that volume down.”

“I’m still a crisis manager.”

“No, I wrote your contract. I know for a fact that you are a ‘political consultant.’”

“Speaking of which,” Alex sighed, looking at the meeting reminder on her phone, “I’ve got to go
meet with the research team.”

“Cheer up. When you’re done, you’ll be an hour closer to happy hour.”

Grumbling about unnecessary meetings and interaction with other people, Alex straightened her blazer and wandered down the hallways she was still learning to navigate until she found the smaller conference room Cat preferred for meetings. A handful of people, only some of whom she recognized, had already found their seats at the table and pulled out papers or opened laptops to spreadsheets and documents. Fighting the urge to run back for something to use as a prop, Alex reminded herself that she had prepared, that her job wasn’t the same as theirs and she was damn good at what she did. No one trained under J’onn for as long as she had and came out of it unqualified.

The telltale click of heels alerted everyone in the room to Cat’s approach just a moment or two before she strolled in, phone clutched in one hand and a latte in the other. “You’re all here?” It wasn’t really a question, at least not one anyone would dare answer in the negative. “We’ll start with the topics we’ve gotten traction on since last night’s debate. Education—go.”

“Ah right.” A young man Alex was fairly certain was named Rob adjusted his glasses as he shuffled his papers. “You got some really positive op-eds in the Times—LA and New York, a real coast-to-coast marvel,” he clarified with a small chuckle at his own remarks. It was nerdy enough that Alex smiled. “The Daily Planet was a bit more neutral, but no overt criticism.”

“No surprise there,” Cat drawled.

“You’ve got a few religious lobbying groups that are upset that you dismissed school vouchers, but no one in the party base would really expect you to say otherwise unless you were in Philly or Boston or one of those cities that’s Catholic enough that people identify themselves by parish.” Cat didn’t seem upset, though she jotted down a few notes. “And there’s been some talk about support for you coming from the Silicon Valley start ups—keep talking about increased funding for STEM education, and we might get a couple early campaign endorsements.”

“No follow up?” Cat asked, looking out at everyone else, especially Alex. When there were no takers, she quickly checked off education and moved to the next item—she was nothing if not efficient.

By the time they made it to international affairs, Alex felt like she had a handle on how these meetings might go. Informed updates. A follow up question or two, especially when Cat wasn’t satisfied. Sometimes orders about new research to be undertaken—polls, reports, and the like. And then on to the next one. But when Kelly wrapped up her presentation on foreign affairs, Cat’s offer for further commentary wasn’t met with its customary silence. Instead another woman, one Alex didn’t recognize, cleared her throat and leaned in to the table.

“When asked about aid and disaster relief, you didn’t touch on some of the most prominent humanitarian crises. Look at Venezuela, Yemen, Syria. You barely touched on immigration and failed to offer any statements on your policies about refugees and asylum seekers.”

“Because it’s a political landmine,” Alex interjected. “Offering anything concrete this early when public opinion is as volatile as it has been on those issues would be a horrible idea.”

“Speaking up now would set us apart as the campaign finally talking about these topics, the campaign that doesn’t just offer vague platitudes about respecting human rights but actually gives concrete policies and solutions.”
“So that they can be brought up and derided and criticized by every single other candidate who was smart enough not to go specific this early in the game?”

“So that the young voters who care about these topics more than almost any other generation will show up for us.”

“They don’t outnumber the Baby Boomers and Gen Xers who won’t get behind a progressivism that starts spouting things about open borders with little to no security.”

“So you don’t care about everyone dying? Because that’s what those young people you’re so quick to dismiss will say, and they’ve been building grassroots organizations that have more reach than you care to admit.”

“I’m not paid to talk about things I care about; I’m paid to get Cat Grant elected president. As are you. You might want to start acting like it.”

“Ladies, ladies,” Cat cut in, looking mildly intrigued rather than simply annoyed. “I appreciate the passion, but let’s move some of these discussions to later strategy meetings.” Alex slumped back into her seat, resigned to dealing with the other woman’s frustratingly naïve idealism later. “Now, Maggie, how’d we do on human rights and advocacy issues—setting aside questions of international crises for now, please,” she added with a tinge of exasperation in her voice.

“Right.” The woman—Maggie—had the decency to look chagrined at least, Alex thought. She paid close attention as she spoke, finding herself almost disappointed at how thorough she had been, pulling sources from both sides of the aisle as she went through a rather comprehensive list of issues. When Cat asked for questions, Alex realized she had none.

“Before we adjourn, anything to add? Alex?” Cat peered over her glasses and down the table to where Alex had settled herself at the opposite end.

“Not yet. It’s early—now that you’ve proven yourself, I’m sure they’ll start to come for you. Until then, we wait. Stay smart, but don’t get overly defensive about slight criticisms.” She couldn’t hold back a pointed glare in Maggie’s direction.

“Alright then. Back to work with you all.”

Maggie sidled up next to Alex, leaning her hip against the table as she cocked her head to the side and regarded the woman. “So, what issue did you once care about only to have your heart broken?”

“What?”

“I mean…no one gets that jaded that fast without a reason.”

“I’ve lived in DC for over a decade.”

“Mm.” Maggie paused to consider it. “I suppose that could do it too.”

“What liberal enclave did we drag you out of?”

“Blue Springs, Nebraska,” Maggie answered, grinning at the surprised look Alex was quick to suppress—but not quite quick enough.

“Ah, well…I suppose idealism doesn’t have borders—just what you want for the country, right?”

“If that’s what you need to think to dismiss my proposals, sure.”
With a huff of annoyance, Alex stood up and stormed back to her office, determined to see Lucy and find out who the hell this woman was and how much longer they’d have to wait before she got shipped back to the middle of nowhere, Nebraska.

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Chewing on the end of her pencil, Kara read the email from an Eve Teschmacher for what felt like the tenth time in as many minutes. It was short with little in the way of information:

Dear Ms. Danvers,
I’m writing from Cat Grant’s campaign headquarters to see if you might be available for a phone conversation with the candidate. Please send me three times that would work for you at your earliest convenience, and I’ll schedule a time for you to speak with Ms. Grant.
Sincerely,
Eve Teschmacher

She cast a longing glance over at Alex’s whiskey, wishing, not for the first time, that it had an effect on her. Eventually she dialed her sister and curled up on the sofa.

After just two rings, Alex answered. “Hey.”

“Hey. How’s the start of your second week?”

“Ugh, I miss J’onn.”

“Ya know, back when you started I never expected you to be the poster child for the Department of Extranormal Operations.”

“Just call it the DEO,” Alex sighed, a slight laugh in her voice.

“Did you realize it sounds like you guys work on alien issues? Too many calls about UFOs and ET in people’s backyards?”

“We handle crises. They are extranormal events.” After a moment, Alex finally relented. “Okay, yes, fine. I didn’t name it!”

“I know, I know.”

“Plus, everything in this town goes by an acronym anyway.”

“Even the town,” Kara added with a laugh. “But what’s making you miss J’onn? Is it the lack of Oreos? I know Cat’s not big on junk food.” It wasn’t true of course; Kara had kept her office stocked with M&Ms. But she projected a certain image, and Kara wouldn’t be the one to bring it down, no matter how things had gone between them.

“No, no. Just some new researcher. The human right strategist or something. Thinks she knows better than everyone else. It’s my job to know what might cause an uproar, the kinds of things that bring down campaigns.”

“Aww, I’m sorry,” Kara commiserated. “If it makes you feel any better, I had a shitty day too.”

“Kara, it never makes me feel better when you’re upset.”

“Don’t let anyone hear you saying that. They might go thinking you’re a nice person.”

“Oh hush. So what happened to you? Whose ass do I need to kick?”
“Nothing like that. It’s actually—well, it’s your boss. Or her new assistant—Eve something.”

“Ah, the scheduler.”

“Yeah, she emailed me about having a phone conversation with Cat. Know why?”

“I don’t know. Maybe she wants you to come work for her again?”

Kara scoffed, shaking her head. “Yeah, doubt it. If she thought I was good, she’d have kept me on her team.”

“Hey, you’re plenty good. There’s a reason she sang your praises to everyone in this town. You could’ve gotten a job just about anywhere with her good word. Or, well, I guess mainly just with Democrats, but you get the idea.”

“I don’t—it’s not—I don’t know, Alex.” Kara burrowed slightly further into the blanket nest she’d built up around her while they talked. She’d gotten over the hurt, for the most part, but she still longed for an explanation—though she feared she already knew the real reason.

After a few moments of quiet, Alex spoke up. “Do you think you’re gonna talk to her?”

“I don’t know. Yes? Maybe? Probably?”

“Alright. Well you let me know if I need to kick her ass for you, okay?”

“Didn’t you just get a stern lecture about not threatening people at the office?”

“I’m going to kill Lucy.”

“There you go again!” Kara teased, laughing loudly at the sounds of annoyance she could hear through the line. “Anyway, I’ll let ya go. I just wanted to talk for a minute.”

“Still up for Thursday happy hour?”

“Wouldn’t miss it.”

Once she hung up with Alex, Kara flipped on the TV, intent on distracting herself for the rest of the night. Only, a few hours later, she felt like she couldn’t remember a minute of anything she’d seen, and she knew it would be a sleepless night if she left that email glaring up at her from her inbox.

Pulling it up, she began typing up a response, clicking through her calendar and finding times when she wouldn’t necessarily be missed from the office. Luckily it wasn’t close to an election year for Senator Rosen, so things were much quieter than they were elsewhere on the Hill.

Before she could hit send, in an act of bravery—or maybe it was just reckless, pent-up anger—she hadn’t anticipated, Kara switched over to her contacts and pulled up a number she hadn’t called in years.

“Hello?” Cat’s voice was cautious, and Kara could hear the news playing in the background. Apparently not much had changed.

“I hear you want to talk to me,” Kara said, catching the hitch in Cat’s breath that no human would have heard.

“I—yes, I had Eve email you about finding a time for us to speak.”
“Well, now works best for me, Cat. So what is it you want?”

“You really are a true Washingtonian these days, aren’t you?” When Kara didn’t respond, Cat continued, “As you probably know, I’m running for president.”

“Since I don’t live under a rock, yes, I am aware.”

“Right.” Kara was somewhat gratified to hear Cat sound rattled for a change. “My team’s done well so far. They’ve gotten me to where I am, and I’m grateful.” She paused, trying to find the right words, a diplomatic phrasing lest something be leaked to the press. “But they’re missing something.”

“Okay…”

“I think that something could be you, Kara.”

Kara hated herself for the way her heart sped up at that. “What do you mean?”

“Come work for me again.”

“Cat, I’m Senator Rosen’s chief of staff. I’m not coming back to be your personal assistant just because I was better than any of the other ones you had.”

“Good, I would be disappointed if you ever offered to drop back down to that level.”

“Then what is it you’re asking?”

“Come be my campaign manager.”

Kara gasped—she couldn’t help it. “Excuse me?”

“Greg is…adequate. Things function. But he’s not good or great. And you, Kara, you were always exceptional.”

“Cat…”

Hearing the warning tone in Kara’s voice, Cat cleared her throat. “Just think about it? We always did make a good team.”

“Did, Cat. Past tense.”

“I needed to let you dive—on your own, without my holding you back. And you did. Look at what you’ve done!”

Deciding to ignore what felt like half of the explanation she’d wanted for years now, Kara turned back to the job offer. “You know if I’m your campaign manager, you have to listen to me, right? I get a say. I can tell you no.”

“I still have the final decision.”

“Yes…but you don’t run a campaign by undercutting your right hand person every step of the way.”

“No, you don’t,” Cat conceded. “And I don’t plan on doing that with you. I saw what you did for Rosen. I could use someone like you by my side.”

“Give me 48 hours to decide.”
“I’ll be waiting.”
“We’ve got calls in from The Washington Post, The Daily Planet, and Politico for quotes and interviews,” James said, reading from his notepad as he strode across Cat’s office, ticking off items as they covered them. Cat barely bit back a roll of her eyes at the way Eve’s gaze seemed to follow him or the way she had nearly swooned when he rolled up his sleeves. “It would be a good idea to seize on the momentum we have going from the first debate.”

“Why not all three?” Greg suggested, looking between Cat and James.

Before James could let him down easily, as though it might be acceptable that her campaign manager did not yet understand this fundamental idea, Cat cut in: “Because we look desperate if we throw ourselves out there for anyone and everyone. What are you going to suggest next? That I go pitch myself to the conspiracy theory bloggers?”

“I think what Cat means,” James began, his tone soft and his expression sympathetic. “Cat said what she meant.” Her eyes flashed dangerously, a warning sign to abandon a pointless mission for those who knew to look. “Besides, I’m hoping we’ll get some more free publicity in Politico and The Hill soon enough…” With Greg demonstrating over and over again his inability to operate a political campaign of this caliber, she didn’t even have to feel guilty. It wasn’t as though she would leave him jobless; she’d already thrown in a recommendation or two to a few of the Representatives who would be up for reelection in the coming cycle. And he was really best suited to that level of work for now. Kara might not have called to accept the offer yet, but she hadn’t said no, and Cat counted that as a win.

“So…do you want to accept any of those interview offers?”

“Find out who would do the interview at the Post. If it’s not a front page writer, no. If it is…we’ll revisit this discussion.”

“On it.”

“Now, Winslow, where are we on numbers.”

Gritting his teeth at the use of his full name, Winn bit back a sigh as he distributed copies of their weekly social media reports and initial poll numbers from the pre- and post-debate surveys. “We saw a noticeable bump in page likes and Twitter follows during and after the debate, though Rudy Jones has us beat on those numbers.” Cat grimaced. Since when did some scientist plucked from the arctic tundra beat her at anything? “When it comes to more traditional markers of debate performance, you outstripped the competition by a wide margin.”

“Why don’t my social media numbers reflect that?”

“Well, you’ve got young people, including people too young to vote, on social media in numbers that are disproportionate to their electoral power. Jones is doing well with them—really well—and that’s driving up his numbers.”

“But he’s the kind of one-hit wonder who will draw them in without being able to sustain attention,” James assuaged Cat, noticing the way her pen flew across her notebook and knowing that traditionally meant she was brainstorming, often something drastic. “Don’t let him become your focus. Justin is the one to beat.”
“Just because he’s white and rich and not unattractive in the most boring of ways?”

Biting back a smile, James inclined his head slightly. “Because of those things, yes…but he’s tied to those old boy political networks in a way you never will be.”

“I have the support of the sitting President of the United States,” Cat interjected.

“Which she has not yet announced publically. And you know she’s made just as many enemies along the way as she has supporters.”

“They never would have been my supporters anyway.”

“But they are Justin’s. He’s middle of the ground, reliable, safe—all the things they’ll say you’re not.”

“All the allure of a mid-range sedan,” Cat scoffed. “Who wants someone with no real positions?”

“The kind of political machine that counts its victories in wins at the polls, not in progressive legislation passed.”

With a noise of dissatisfaction, Cat leaned back in her seat. “At least he was fairly terrible at the debate.”

James had to agree with that statement. His approval rating might not have dipped much, but it certainly saw no spikes, his numbers remaining flat, stagnant—never a good sign for the first big public appearance as a viable candidate. It meant that even someone like Jones, whose numbers had plummeted during talk of issues like immigration, foreign policy, and military affairs, was getting more traction in the media than Justin—at least until the golden boy’s newest publicity stunt.

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Down the hall, Maggie was busy fumbling with the fancy coffee machine in the office kitchen. “Goddamit,” she grumbled as she received a loud beep of an error message once again. She just wanted her coffee. Was it really such a big ask?

“Having trouble there?” Lucy asked, biting back a smile at the frazzled expression on Maggie’s face.

“I want to preface all of this with the fact that I was a barista in college. I am perfectly aware of how to make coffee. But…yes, I am having some issues.”

“Here, let me. God knows if you break the coffee maker, the whole office will hate you.”

“More than they already do?”

Pausing her quest to reset the machine, Lucy swung back around to look at the woman. “What’s wrong? Also, wait, who are you?”

“Oh, sorry. Maggie Sawyer.” She extended her hand to shake Lucy’s. “One of the new researchers.”

“Oh, yes, okay.” She hadn’t met the woman, but after a long conversation with Alex, she was beyond curious. After all, it wasn’t every day that someone managed to get underneath Alex’s skin—not just to annoy her, which was easy enough, but to do something that actually stuck with her for days.

“What have you heard?” Maggie hated how paranoid she probably sounded, but she’d already been in enough places where everyone talked about her behind her back; she didn’t need to repeat that
experience.

“Lucy Lane, legal counsel. I drew up your paperwork. Just because I don’t know your face doesn’t mean I don’t know your name and title.” Also something about her being “the most insufferable, naïve pain in the ass” Alex had ever had the displeasure to work with—and she’d worked with Republicans!

“And salary,” Maggie added, managing to crack a smile.

Drumming her fingers against the countertop, Lucy finally nodded her head decisively and linked her arm in Maggie’s. “Come on. While the machine resets, we’re going out to get a proper coffee.”

“Oh I should probably—”

“Unless it’s a meeting with Cat, it can wait for caffeine.”

“Oh, okay.” Lucy’s tone brokered no disagreement. “I think there’s a Starbucks a few blocks over…”

“Uh…at S and 12th?”

“Damn, right at the corner of all the hip neighborhoods,” Lucy teased, pulling the door to the office open and smiling at the feeling of sunshine and fresh air.

“Oh, uh, I guess…” She didn’t add that she’d desperately searched for the areas where non-straight and non-white people seemed to have moved historically, then placed herself right at the intersection of the two.

“Been out to any of the bars yet?”

Maggie shook her head. “No, mainly just staying in and setting up the apartment.”

“Well then tomorrow I insist: you’re coming with us to happy hour.” Alex would just have to deal.

“I wouldn’t want to impose…”

“No such thing. This town is all about who you know, so you better start meeting more of us.”

Forcing a smile, Maggie nodded. “Okay then. Thanks.”

“Anytime. So tell me about yourself.” So far she hadn’t quite been able to find the infuriating side to the woman Alex described, but maybe if she talked about herself or her work Lucy would.

“I, uh, grew up in Blue Springs, Nebraska. Moved to Missouri for most of high school. Went to college in Chicago and worked there for a think tank for a few years, then went back to the rural
Midwest to do some grassroots organizing for a while.”

“Damn, you’ve really got that bio down to a few concise sentences, huh?” Lucy teased.

It helped that Maggie didn’t want to dwell on much of it, but she just laughed. Looking around, she realized she had yet to venture this far from the office—at least not in this direction. “Where are we going?”

“Shh, just enjoy the weather. It’s rarely this nice here.”

“I’ve heard you guys don’t really do snow too well.”

“Oh…yeah, that’s fair, though I meant the summer on the swamp we enjoy here. Luckily we’ll be jetting around the country with the campaign by summer, so we won’t have to worry too much at that point.”

“Sounds delightful.”

Lucy laughed, still trying to figure out why Alex hated the woman so much. Sure, she’d fought her on positions, which Lucy knew Alex didn’t like, but she didn’t seem the kind to play dirty or go straight to condescending.

Maggie looked around while they walked, watching the blocks change as they moved from neighborhood to neighborhood, finally ending up somewhere Lucy had called Adams Morgan and then to a storefront with open windows and an assortment of mismatched chairs and couches and tables. The pastry cases were filled with a variety of sweets that had Maggie’s stomach rumbling loudly, and the walls were lined with an array of artwork that seemed like it shouldn’t work together but somehow did. It was only after getting much closer that she realized it was for sale—all done by local artists. She made a mental note to come back here; it seemed like her kind of place.

“What do you want?”

“Oh, uh, just a regular coffee is fine.”

“Black coffee and a double-shot latte to go. Oh, and two of the chocolate chip cookies, thanks,” Lucy ordered, swiping her card before Maggie could even reach for her wallet. “I dragged you out of the office, let me.”

“Thanks.”

Once they had their orders, Lucy led them back outside, walking at a more leisurely pace this time. “It’s a nice place to work, though don’t go taking anything from the campaign in with you. Seating is sort of open, and you never know who’s sitting next to you.”

“Got it.”

“So, I talked enough on the way here.”

“It was all really helpful,” Maggie interjected. She didn’t want to sound ungrateful.

“Obviously, I said it. But is there anything you want to know about? Being new can suck for the first few weeks.”

“Oh, um, what’s up with everyone in the office?”

“In what sense?” She was fairly certain she already knew, but succeeding here meant knowing how
to ask for exactly what you wanted.

“I mean…every office has its internal politics—the kind of people you don’t want to piss off, the kind you will no matter what you do…”

“And you’re wondering if you already fucked up?”

“I just—maybe,” Maggie conceded.

Deciding it was better to act like Alex hadn’t come bursting into her office almost immediately, Lucy gave a broad overview. “Well, there’s Cat, obviously. You want to keep her happy. You do that by being competent, showing up on time, and staying late when you need to. Disloyalty and incompetence will get you fired. And coming to work while you’re sick will bring down her wrath.”

“Do we…telework?”

“It’s for the best if you do.”

“Noted.”

“I guess you’ll be working with the researchers for the most part. They’re good—kinda quiet, nerdy bunch if you ask me.”

“Thanks,” Maggie replied drily.

“Telling it like it is. James is her communications director; he’s good people. Very sweet and well-intentioned, even if he sometimes he misses the mark a bit. Great kisser too.”

“What?”

Waving off Maggie’s surprise, Lucy sipped at her latte. “Oh, we dated on and off for a while. Then he dated Alex’s little sister for a hot second, but they decided they were better as friends.”

“Okay…”

“Then there’s Winn—he lives in James’ apartment building; they’re out in Chinatown. I swear, if James and Kara had ever asked him to date them together, he would’ve been the happiest boy in the world.” Maggie snorted; at least she had another non-hetero in the office. “He does all the IT and runs numbers and projections—basically Cat’s CIO. She poached him from the private sector.”

“So he probably already knows my whole life story?”

“Probably? Try definitely. There’s a reason we’re friends. Which brings us to me: the best person you’ll ever meet.”

“At least you’re humble.”

“Humble people don’t make it a full day here.”

Maggie nodded and sipped at her coffee, finding that it had finally cooled enough that she only scalded the tip of her tongue a little bit this time.

Lucy tilted her head to the side, trying to run through who else was in the main office. “There’s Eve, Cat’s scheduler. She’s nice enough—but boring for my taste. Greg is her campaign manager, though rumblings on the ground suggest he’s getting axed. Heard from a friend that Cat’s been trying to pawn him off all the way down at the Representative level! Vasquez heads Cat’s personal security
detail and runs logistics. She’s good people too. And then there’s Alex…” Lucy paused, waiting to see if Maggie would say anything.

“I think we met.”

It was only years of playing politics that let Lucy refrain from snorting loudly at the understatement. “I assume you already know all about what she does.”

“Not really,” Maggie admitted.

“Seriously?”

“Should I?”

“She was second-in-command at the DEO.”

“Oh,” Maggie breathed out, realizing now why all of Alex’s attention had been on potential scandals and missteps. She’d heard of the DEO, of course, even though part of their whole mission was the idea that no one should actually know about them; their work should be invisible, after all. “Why does Cat need a fixer at all times?

“Alex is here as a political consultant.” Maggie arched an eyebrow at Lucy, who looked almost impressed. “Fine, fine. Look, she’s a woman running in what already looks like it could be a dirty race. She’s got the money to spare, so why not get someone who knows her shit? Plus, it’s better to have someone still tied to an outside organization to do any dirty work, you know?”

“I thought Cat wanted to run a clean race.”

Lucy huffed, beginning to realize a bit of why Maggie might have annoyed Alex. She may well be as idealistic as Kara had been, but she lacked the saving grace of being Alex’s sister. “Running a clean race for president means that you don’t launch an attack on day one. You don’t go digging for dirty laundry that has no bearing on your opponents’ ability to govern. You wait until they go low more than once to get in a few jabs yourself while the news cycle is still focused on how much worse they are than you. Got it?”

“Yeah,” Maggie shrugged. It was less of a fight than Lucy had expected.

“Look, letting them go low while we go high doesn’t really work so well with certain kinds of people. We’re still trying to run a campaign driven by the issues. That’s why she hired all you researcher types this early in the game.”

“No, I get it.” Maggie paused, looking down long enough to step on a rare leaf that hadn’t yet been crunched. “So…where do you live?”

“Down in Woodley Park. It’s how I know all the good coffee spots in the area,” she added with a smile. “We’ll probably do drinks out this way tomorrow, so try to remember how we came.”

Catching sight of Maggie’s brief look of concern, Lucy laughed loudly. “Don’t worry, kid, we’ll walk over together and put you in an Uber to get you home in one piece.”

By the time they made it to the office, Maggie felt like she was finally starting to get a handle on the other people here, though she still slunk back to her office and set herself back on task, pulling up tabs on some of the prison reform initiatives that had been quietly creeping into more popular media sites recently. It would be good for Cat to get ahead of the curve here.
“Any calls?” Cat yelled over to Eve, who had been doubling as her assistant until the campaign kicked into high gear and they were forced to find someone new.

“Still no, Ms. Grant,” Eve replied in that frustratingly cheerful tone that Cat sometimes loathed.

She checked her phone once more, realizing that Kara probably assumed she had until 9pm for her 48 hours, rather than a customary COB deadline. She certainly wouldn’t crumble and go texting her first; she wasn’t desperate. Though there was nothing wrong with wanting answers—answers that would help her to plan her campaign.

She debated heading home early—not that 6pm was really early to most people, though she liked to keep herself at the office late, especially on the days Carter was with his father. But she’d had an early morning packed full of back-to-back meetings with possible funders, then she’d headed out to the suburbs to give some rousing, inspirational speech to her newest team of volunteers for Virginia and Maryland before making her way back into town for a stump speech at an educational outreach advocacy group. It was enough to exhaust anyone, and perhaps a bit of cooking and a hot bath would distract her from thoughts of Kara and the phone call that just wouldn’t come.

After another half hour of silence, she sent Eve home, finally beginning the process of packing up her own things for the day. With a text to her driver, she made her way out of the office, pretending not to notice the few sets of eyes watching her leave—surely the sign that blazers would be shucked off, drinks possibly had at desks, gossip bandied about more freely without fear of accidentally ratting out a colleague—no, when that was done, it was done purposefully and quietly. With a long exhale, she felt herself begin to relax once the car door had closed behind her. It wasn’t until she shut and locked her front door that she let some of the public armor slip away, kicking off her heels and hanging up her coat, then her blazer.

After turning on some soft music, Cat pulled open the door to her refrigerator, looking about until she found the ingredients she needed. Typically she tried to go out for most meals when Carter was gone; there was something uniquely depressing about cooking for one single, solitary person—a meal she would eat with the background noise of the evening news and the glow of her cell phone as she scrolled through updates from her team. If it weren’t for Carter, she might have gotten used to it. But she missed hearing about his day, listening to him talk about his classes, even if it sometimes felt like pulling teeth to get information now that he was a bit older. More importantly, she missed having him at the table—another mouth to feed, someone to consider as she planned out her schedule.

Forcing those thoughts away, Cat filled a pot with water and set it on the stove to boil, preparing the vegetables as she waited.

By the time she had finished eating and washing the dishes, she felt herself growing increasingly annoyed. Still, Kara had yet to call. While she had given her 48 hours, she didn’t exactly think it would come down to the wire like this. Deciding that a distraction was in order, she went upstairs and began filling a bath with a few drops of calming essential oils, sighing as she sunk into the water that was just a touch too hot, and felt the last remnants of the day’s stress dissipating.

It was then that her phone trilled—the ringtone especially loud and grating in the quiet sanctuary of her tiled bathroom. When she saw Kara’s name, she debated not answering, but her curiosity got the better of her, and she flung an arm out to grab for it.

“Hello?”

“Hey, sorry for the late call.”

“As long as it’s a sign of your devotion to your employer,” Cat said, wishing she had come up with something better. She’d avoided a more scathing remark; after all, she still wanted Kara to work for
her. But that had felt oddly…detached. It didn’t fit.

“Um, yeah. Anyway.” Cat could just picture the woman pacing her apartment—hideous fuzzy socks on and maybe an oversized sweater wrapped around her shoulders. “I want to talk to you in person before I make my final decision.”

And there it was—that snap of boldness, decisiveness, exactly the things Greg lacked, exactly the things she’d always wanted to watch Kara claim for herself. “That’s fair.”

“Just because we worked well together six years ago doesn’t mean we still will.”

“And talking to me will let you decide?” She hated how nervous she was at the idea of having to sell her personality in one go. It was fine with donors and interviewers. Ask her to sell herself as a candidate, and she excelled. But with Kara, it had always been different. She knew Cat well enough to see right through any bullshit. It was what had made her an excellent assistant.

“It’s a better indicator than the first phone call in years.”

“Alright. Do you need Eve’s number?”

“No, Cat. Just the two of us.”

“You know I can’t exactly be seen taking someone else’s chief of staff out for drinks if there’s a chance you won’t be joining my team.”

“Let me come to you then.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Cat agreed. “Fine.”

“I’ll be there soon.”

Finding that she could no longer enjoy her hot bath without worries clouding her thoughts, Cat pulled herself up and located clothing other than the pajamas she had put out for herself. Before she’d even finished getting dressed, she heard a knock at the door. Cursing, she scrambled, pulling a sweater over her head and running her fingers through her hair.

“I think soon was a bit of an understatement,” she huffed, swinging the door open.

“I was, uh, in the neighborhood.” Kara finally glanced up at Cat.

“Well, come in. No use lingering outside.”

“Right.” Kara let herself be led into the living room and perched on the edge of the pristine sofa. She found herself wondering whether Cat had a room with furniture that looked lived in—perhaps the room that Carter used.

“So, how are you going to test me to see if we still work together?”

“It’s not like that.” Kara shook her head, trying to find the words that had been so clear back in the safety of her own apartment. “It’s just…do you respect me?”

“Of course I do. I wouldn’t ask you to be my campaign manager if I didn’t.”

“But you sent me away.”

“For your own good.”
“You sure about that?”

“What are you implying?” A low growl seemed to underlie Cat’s words, and Kara watched her posture grow rigid as her whole body tensed.

“I mean that a lot happened my last week on the campaign.”

“Yes, I lost my campaign manager. You, a mere assistant, stepped up in a way no one else had—no one else could—and carried us through to a victory. Well done. Did you need more congratulations than the glowing recommendation I already gave you?”

“The night you won, Cat.”

Cat pursed her lips. She could feel her jaw clenching but couldn’t bring herself to care about how much her dentist would scold her for it.

Seeing that Cat wouldn’t say anything herself, Kara clarified: “I kissed you.”

“You did.”

“You kissed me back.”

Cat simply looked at her, regarding her with an expression that seemed suspicious and disdainful and, Kara might even venture to say, hurt.

“I’m not wearing a wire,” she huffed out, realizing that might be part of Cat’s concern.

“I’m not wearing a wire,” she huffed out, realizing that might be part of Cat’s concern.

“Why are you bringing up ancient history?”

“Did you get rid of me because I crossed a line?”

And for all Cat’s ability to maintain professionalism in the most trying of times, she felt her defenses cracking and crumbling at the sight of Kara curling in on herself, looking every bit the part of a woman who had spent the past six years wondering if she did something awful. With a sigh and a wistful shake of her head, Cat finally replied, her voice barely a whisper: “No. I—I let you flourish with someone else because in a moment of weakness I did kiss you back. I made that choice, and I should not have. I’m sorry.” By the end her tone was brisk once more; she knew it sounded cold, but she wouldn’t betray herself like that. She wouldn’t be the politician that fell for some young assistant, even if said assistant was now in her 30s and off running campaigns and whipping a large staff into shape.

“Oh.” It was…good. It was what she had needed to hear, though finding out she had been a mistake wasn’t really a mood lifter.

“Does that clear things up?”

“It does. Thanks.”

“Does that mean I’ll get an answer?”

“Why do you want me back now?”

“So just more questions, then,” Cat sighed, smiling despite herself. “You stepped up when no one else did. During a crisis, you are still the one I need at my side.”

“You have my sister for crises.”
“I have her for public crises. I need someone who will hold my staff accountable, make them into a real team, rather than just component parts working side-by-side. You can do that—I know you can. For Christ’s sake, Kara, if anyone can hold me accountable, it’s you.”

“Are you, the great Cat Grant, admitting that you might make mistakes?”

“Don’t get cocky this early on,” Cat chided her, though she was ecstatic to hear the teasing of Kara’s tone, to feel something of their old easy back-and-forth reemerging.

“Wouldn’t dream of it. I’ll at least wait until I start on Monday.”

“We’ll announce you at our morning briefing. I’ll have Lucy send over the paperwork this weekend.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Kara pulled herself up to standing, pausing before turning back to Cat. “Thanks for, you know, answering me honestly.”

“I would have been honest back then if you’d asked.”

“I don’t think I was quite ready to hear it then.”

Cat nodded in understanding. Truth be told, she probably wouldn’t have been ready to say it then. Getting what she wanted and having to immediately throw it back, push it away to another city on another side of the country to flourish away from her had been the right thing to do, but oh, how it had hurt. “Looking forward to having you at my side again.”

“Looking forward to taking you all the way through to the White House.”

“I did look pretty good there, didn’t I?”

“I tuned in to every press briefing for those two years for a reason.”

With a small laugh, Cat guided Kara to the door. “Goodnight, Kara.”

“Night, Cat.”
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Happy hour and angst and threats of violence, oh my!

The low rumble of Alex’s phone against her desk snapped her attention back to the present. It was a text from Lucy: “T-1 hours until happy hour!” accompanied by that gif of Leo from The Great Gatsby she’d been quite partial to this week.

“I’m so ready,” Alex sent back.

“Kara still coming?”

“Of course. When has she ever missed half-priced apps?”

“Fair. Ok, I have to finish her contract so we can leave on time.”

“Got it. See you then.”

Alex settled back into her chair and refocused on her computer where she’d been digging through past statements from all of the other candidates as well as their campaign contributions so far. She knew Cat didn’t want to use the information, but it was always nice to have something on file if shit hit the fan.

She doubted that Dr. Rudy Jones would prove a long-term threat, but there were more than few ecoterrorists who had voiced support for him, and she found proof of a meeting between him and one small group of them when he was stumping last month. It was certainly enough to keep almost everyone away from his name at the primaries.

Siobhan Smythe was easier to dismiss. She seemed to be styling herself the new Cat, operating under the delusion that people might come support her at the polls for what? Being a decade younger with about two decades’ less experience? She was an easy check off of Alex’s list of worries.

Colonel Stephen Branch was a bit of a surprise candidate—especially as a Democrat. His military background certainly drew some of the more conservative voters in, but after spending as much time as Branch had treading the right-of-center party line, he’d be more of a threat at the presidential election than he ever would be in the primaries. Of course, Alex had more than enough proof of statements he’d made against liberal causes over the years to assuage any lingering doubts she might have about his potential viability as a candidate.

Then there were the others—the ones who would be gone before they’d even made it through the debates. The philanthropist. The avowed socialist. The businessman who wanted to push the politicians out of politics.

But Justin Kennedy…he was the threat, and not just for his last name, which obviously held a certain allure, even if his relation was beyond distant, if it existed at all. But somehow accusations seemed to roll off him, never sticking long enough to do damage. He just flashed a hint of a crooked smile and pushed back his perpetually windswept, wavy hair and watched the rumors die before they ever reached him. It was infuriating. Even with a few terms in Congress, his positions weren’t legible
enough to put under scrutiny, and his approval ratings were neither particularly high nor particularly low. And somehow being average in every sense of the word seemed to be the winning combination this primary season. He’d emerged as the media darling from the outset, and even a dismal debate performance had done little to damage his campaign.

Alex spent her last hour at work digging through all of the locations where he’d campaigned, scouring the records of donations his campaign had accepted, and prying into his personal history as a last ditch effort to find something damaging other than general mediocrity. The super PAC supporting him had questionable donors, but it was all too easy for him to shrug, say he had no control there. His audiences were largely white, but he made sure to offer just enough vague platitudes about “improving race relations” to ensure that any accusations of racism would be scoffed at as he pledged some insignificant amount of money to a charity that served minority communities or something that would inevitably increase his standing in the polls. By the time Lucy got to her door, Alex was beyond frustrated and very much ready for a drink.

“C’mon, Alex, I want a table, and you know your sister will kill us if we’re late.”

“Yes, yes,” Alex sighed. Anything food-related was sacred in the Danvers household; she knew better than to be late.

“I should probably mention, we’ve got a bigger group than usual coming today,” Lucy began, smiling much too innocently at Alex.

“Lucy…” Before she could ask, she heard the sound of Maggie Sawyer’s voice floating down the hallway. “You didn’t.”

“I did. Be nice,” Lucy warned.

Suddenly much less enthusiastic about the prospect of drinks, Alex threw her bag over her shoulder and locked her door. With a forced smile on her face, Alex greeted the rest of the group, temporarily appeased when James and Lucy flanked her, creating a kind of barrier—whether it was for her sake or Maggie’s protection, she wasn’t sure.

“To Madam’s Organ!” Winn cheered, leading the charge down the stairs and out of the office into the crisp fall weather. The first few quiet blocks were a nice way of readjusting to the outside world. Alex kind of loved that Cat had set up her personal offices in two converted row homes out in Mount Pleasant. She’d rolled her eyes when the story first broke, but more and more she had come to realize that it was a politically astute move. Cat had placed herself in the town—not shying away from her “DC insider” status, which never would have worked anyway—without going near K Street or Capitol Hill or any of the other places that would have brought with them accusations of quid pro quo favors and cozying up with lobbyists before she’d ever taken office. She’d even managed to find a neighborhood that was close to the “real people” without picking one that would get her accused of furthering DC’s rapid gentrification. And by only keeping her core staff there, sending the larger groups out to headquarters in the Virginia and Maryland suburbs, she kept the family-oriented blocks quiet enough to fly under the radar. It was sort of perfect.

“Earth to Alex,” Winn said, waving a hand in front of her face.

“What?”

“You zoned out there…you alright?”

“Just fine.” She cast a pointed look in Lucy’s direction, though, to remind her of all the reasons why she was not actually fine with the situation as it was.
Figuring she should distract from Alex’s annoyance, Lucy tried to engage Alex in conversation. “Is Kara there yet?”

“Probably close. She’s biking down instead of dealing with metro.”

“Ooh, I’ve been thinking about biking here,” Maggie interjected, ignoring the fact that it was Alex speaking.

“Do you have a death wish?” Winn squeaked, gesturing as a middle-aged man in a suit whizzed past them, one hand on the handlebars and the other holding a phone up to his ear, seemingly oblivious to—or at least unfazed by—the cars flying past and veering dangerously close to him.

“I’ve been here for less than two weeks, and the metro has caught fire. Twice!”

Alex turned her snort of laughter into a cough lest she give Maggie the satisfaction of getting a response out of her.

“Did anyone die, though?” Winn countered, looking exceedingly smug for someone perfectly content with weekly track fires.

“That biker dude seems pretty alive too. Also, he’s the one talking on the phone. I’m not that dumb.”

Before Alex could say anything to the contrary, Lucy tugged on her arm, drawing her attention. “Think I’m gonna try the nachos today… What about you?”

“Uh, probably just gonna get a drink and steal some fries from Kara’s plate.”

“Good luck with that,” Lucy laughed, keeping Alex engaged in conversation while James wandered over to talk to Maggie and Winn.

Eventually they made it to the bar—Lucy was just proud that exactly zero fights of a verbal or physical nature had broken out between Alex and Maggie under her watch—and found Kara sitting alone with what looked like enough food for the whole group. Before Kara could say a word, Alex reached out and swiped a handful of fries, laughing at the pout on her face. “C’mon, big sisters get first dibs. It’s, like, the main rule of having siblings.”

“For that you’re buying the first round.”

“For you and only you,” Alex clarified, glaring at Lucy, who looked ready to jump in with her order. “Fine.”

Once everyone had gotten food and drinks, they shoved in around a table that was probably meant for a group half their size.

“Toast time!” Lucy called out, picking up her glass and holding it aloft. “To Kara joining us!”

“What?” Maggie asked, finding herself shushed by the full group until James leaned over and whispered an explanation in her ear, quick to remind her that everything was on the down low until it was announced on Monday.

“To only one workday left!” Winn added, getting the momentum going again. They all drank to that.

“To wiping that smile off of Justin’s face,” Alex chimed in, her tone quieter, just in case, but no less heartfelt for its lack of volume.
“Ugh, fuck him.”

“He’s the worst.”

“Could he be more boring?”

“Cat might be scary, but at least she’s interesting.” The group chuckled at the small shudder that ran through Winn’s body at the thought of some of the more…memorable reaming outs he’d been unfortunate enough to witness or receive.

“And smart.” Alex wouldn’t come work for anyone who wasn’t.

“And hot.”

Maggie cocked her head to the side and regarded Lucy, trying to figure out if she were just observing in a detached, People Magazine kind of way, or if perhaps she played for her team as well. In her curiosity about Lucy, Maggie completely missed the flash of jealousy that crossed Kara’s features, disappearing almost instantly into a small laugh and a flip of wavy blonde hair.

“To Vasquez finally being here!” James waved her over to their table and shuffled even closer to Winn to make room for her to sit between him and Lucy.

“Sorry! Had to help get everything coordinated for Cat’s travel next week.” Spotting Kara she grinned. “And there’s the reason why another ticket had to be purchased for everything. Making my life hell from day one.”

With a sheepish smile, Kara bit her lip. “Hate to break it to ya, but it’s not even day one.”

“Oh, what will we do with you?” Catching sight of Maggie, Vasquez extended her hand. “Susan Vasquez, but I think only my parents call me Susan these days.”

“Maggie Sawyer. Either half of the name works.” She immediately liked Vasquez. The haircut and the short nails and everything about her demeanor just seemed to scream, “One of us!” and Maggie was more than here for it.

“Welcome to the inner circle of hell, Sawyer.”

Lucy whispered something in her ear that left Vasquez biting back laughter and stealing a sip of Lucy’s wine to hide her reaction.

“Wanna share with the whole group, Luce?” Alex asked, folding her arms across her chest.

“Nope. More fun this way.” Especially since she was telling Vasquez about how quickly Maggie had managed to worm her way under Alex’s skin—hence the enforced separation at the table.

Figuring she could lend support to the new person, Vasquez leaned past James and Winn to engage her in conversation. “So, how’s week one been?”

“Is it that obvious that I’m new?”

“Half of this town’s only here for a term; you’ll be just fine once you learn a few basic rules.”

“Care to enlighten me?”

“I don’t know, boys, do we want to fill her in? Or should we let her learn the hard way?”
“I had to learn the hard way.”

“That’s cause you didn’t listen, man,” James teased, shoving Winn lightly and stealing a bite of his nachos.

“Since this one’s really more for us than for you: you stand on the right; walk on the left.”

“Where?”

“Metro escalators,” all three answered in unison.

“Got it.”

“Never talk campaign strategy in public.”

“The Capitol Hill Club is not, as its name might suggest, a fun or happening place to be.”

“Don’t drive or walk down M Street if you’re in a hurry.”

“NoMa is now the only way to refer to that metro stop. AdMo is tragically reaching that point of public acceptability too. Don’t say CoHi. Ever. It’s like fetch, and it’s never going to happen.”

“Tortilla Coast on Capitol Hill is where all the young Republicans hang out. Avoid it at all costs.”

Maggie wondered how much teasing she would have to endure if she pulled out a pen and paper to take notes. It all seemed like valuable information, and she hated the thought of losing it just because her brain was going into overload mode.

“I’m going to get another round of drinks. Anyone need anything?” Alex’s announcement finally broke the string of advice, for which Maggie was grateful.

A few calls for beer rang out until Lucy announced that, as it was Maggie’s first time out with them, she should get a bit of special treatment.

“Oh, it’s really fine.”

“It’s tradition. We all survive one very hungover Friday. So, what’s your drink of choice?”

Figuring it would look worse to continue declining, Maggie finally answered: “Whiskey. Neat.”

Soon enough, she found herself being handed glasses of whiskey—a new one finding its way into her hand whenever she finished the last—and she was grateful that it looked like the rest of the group was switching to something a bit harder so that she wouldn’t end up the only drunk one at the table. Kara kept food orders coming, and Maggie soon found an entire basket of deep fried macaroni and cheese balls in front of her. Normally she’d decline in the interest of keeping at least one of her arteries functioning; that night she looked like a kid on Christmas morning.

Conversation flowed more easily then, and Maggie lost track of time talking to Vasquez about the few gay bars in town that weren’t openly sexist and racist. She was most excited about the gay kickball league, though, and vowed to put it on her to do list…if she remembered anything about it the next morning.

As the sound of music came pumping through the stairwell, Lucy jumped up and pulled Vasquez with her, intent on hitting the dance floor before it got packed with “those fresh out of college types.”

“Boys…” Kara trailed off, wiggling her eyebrows at James and Winn, who just looked at her. “The
music is calling, and I’m not dancing alone.”

Eventually they relented, both of them a bit too gone to realize they were completely forgetting Lucy’s strict instructions not to leave Alex alone with Maggie.

“So,” Alex began, tracing her finger around the rim of her glass, “you’re only an ass to me?”

Blunt. It was better than petty and passive aggressive, Maggie supposed. “I’m not an ass. I’m good at my job.”

“Your job is to get someone elected.”

“My job is to do research and advise her on stances that fit with the principles she claims to uphold.” Maggie mentally congratulated herself for getting the words out of the jumbled mess they’d been in her head.

“For the express goal of getting her elected. I don’t know if you get it, Sawyer,”—the two syllables of her last name slurred together, the only sign that Alex had been pretty much keeping pace with Maggie all night—“but campaigns are about winning.”

“Who wants to win if you give up everything you stood for?”

“It’s called politics.”

“And Cat’s whole schtick is about bringing something different to the table. Well, I want proof that it’s not just business as usual.”

“You still need that business to get anywhere. You don’t make a difference if you can’t even get on the ticket. And you’ll never get on the ticket if you’re trying to play a different game than everyone else.”

“I think you’re underestimating young people who don’t want—”

“Jesus Christ,” Alex interjected, her fingers tensing around her glass. “Seriously, where the fuck did we find you? Cause I googled Blue Springs, and fuck if I’ve seen a redder district.”

“And?” Maggie challenged.

“What? You just lived in some liberal bubble there that let your naïveté go unchecked?”

“Clearly it doesn’t matter. I looked you up too. You grew up in some progressive little hippie town, but you act like all your hopes and dreams died there, Danvers.”

Alex swore she could feel anger ripping through her, white hot and looking for any outlet. Sometimes idealism needed to die, buried deep under the responsibilities that superseded it. “So what, Sawyer? Your parents just coddled you? Patted your head and promised you that everything would be alright if you just hoped hard enough? Try living in the real world for half a goddam second.”

“You know what? Fuck you, Alex,” Maggie spat, kicking back her chair and grabbing her bag. “Don’t ever talk to me about things you couldn’t possibly understand.” Wholly unwilling to let Alex see her cry, Maggie stormed into the bathroom, intent on grabbing a handful of toilet paper before figuring out where the hell the stairs were in this godforsaken building. And god, why was the whole world spinning?
She burst through the bathroom door, completely oblivious to everything around her until a startled
gasp pulled her attention. Lucy sat perched on the edge of her sink, her legs wrapped around
Vasquez’s waist and her lipstick smeared across Vasquez’s jaw. Normally Maggie would have been
quite pleased at the confirmation of just how gay this office was turning out to be. At the moment,
she could only manage a startled, “Oh,” before stuffing a handful of paper towels into her pockets
and spinning on her heels to leave.

“Wait! What’s wrong?” Lucy yelled, pushing Vasquez away but stumbling when she tried to get to
her feet. By the time they made it out of the bathroom, Maggie was gone, though Alex was sitting
alone at the table. “What the hell did you do to her?” Lucy demanded, pushing roughly at the back of
Alex’s chair.

“To whom?”

“To the woman who’s now crying, you dumbass.”

“All I did was—”

“All you did was—”

“I—”

“—that’s not…fine,” Alex relented, catching the look on Vasquez’s face and knowing none of her
arguments would hold water. She hated how rational Vasquez was even when she was drunk.
Though, now that she thought about it, she didn’t remember her drinking much of anything…maybe
that was why she made such good choices.

“Go make it better,” Lucy instructed her. “Or you’re buying all the drinks next week.”

“Yeah, yeah. She better get yelled at too,” Alex grumbled, pulling on her leather jacket and storming
down the stairs, her mind racing with memories of just how many things did die back in Midvale—the
life she’d come to know, interrupted by the arrival of a child who crash landed from outer space;
the mysterious government agency that had taken her father away for “recovery missions” all
because they found out about Kara; the responsibility of being Kara’s only tether to this world;
the weight of every fucking expectation heaped upon her; the call to tell them her dad was missing in
action, presumed dead, no body, fragments of phrases gleaned from eavesdropping on the phone call
that shattered her mother for years as she withdrew from them, from the house, from everything they
once knew. By the time she burst out into the cool night air, blood was pounding in her ears and her
thoughts raced with memories of all the losses she’d pushed down over the years.

With a half-hearted glance around her, Alex shoved her hands in her pockets and crossed the street to
head home, figuring a long walk in the cold might do her some good. She barely made it a few steps
before she found some group of men leering at Maggie, watching as one of their own forced his way
into her space, laughing too loudly and asking her what a pretty lady like that was doing out all alone
on a Thursday night when she could find such good company inside any one of the bars.

“Back the fuck off,” Alex growled, nearly rolling her eyes at the fake innocent smile he shot her.

“No harm in talking.”
“You’re touching her. Hands off.”

“Come on, tell her there’s no harm in talking,” he whispered, his breath hot against Maggie’s neck.

At the sight of the other woman visibly tensing, Alex grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and pulled him away from her. “I told you to get the fuck away from her.” Alex’s voice was low and dangerous, and anyone slightly smarter (or at least less arrogant) would have backed away. He just leaned in, his smile finally wiped away with a knee to the groin that left him doubled over in pain.

“Come on,” Alex grumbled, grabbing Maggie by the arm and leading her quickly and efficiently away from corner where she’d been standing.

“That’s my bus stop,” Maggie muttered, trying to pull away from Alex.

“You’re plastered, and I’m not leaving you defenseless with a bunch of entitled bros.”

“I can handle myself.”

“Sober? I don’t doubt it.”

“Really? What happened to my special little bubble? Don’t you want to leave me there and let me learn how the real world works.”

The words hit Alex hard. “I—that’s never what I meant. I wouldn’t wish that on anyone.”

“Whatever. I still don’t need your protection.”

“Then consider it the gift of my company.”

“Oh joy. The gift that keeps on giving.”

Alex almost smiled at that. “Where do you live?”

“Why? So you can mail clippings about the value of cynicism? So you can tell me why it’s so very wrong that I’m fighting to stay positive in a world that keeps giving me reason after reason not to?”

“I just want to get you home safely.”

“And, um, uh, 12th!”

“Up for a walk, or should I call us a cab?”

“You don’t have to take me home.”

“I’m the reason you left before you could get late night drunk food and sober up.”

Eventually, Maggie relented. “Fine.”

Alex kept them heading in the general direction of Maggie’s apartment. For a while, they walked in silence, the sounds of Adams Morgan’s nightlife dissipating as they got into neighborhoods lined with row homes and the occasional small business or apartment building popping up on the corners or off side streets.

It was only the sudden movement of Maggie rubbing her upper arms that caught Alex’s attention. “Are you cold?”
“No, I just rub my arms for fun,” Maggie bit back. “I left my coat at the bar.”

After pulling out her phone to text Vasquez to get Maggie’s coat, Alex shrugged off her own jacket.

“What? No, I don’t want your pity.”

“Shut up and take my jacket.”

“No.”

“It’s my fault you left yours at the bar.”

Maggie paused and considered it, finally grabbing the offered coat and pulling it on. It was warm and soft—clearly well-loved. Maggie hated that it seemed like a genuinely kind gesture. “Thanks,” she mumbled.

“Yeah, whatever.”

“What? Admitting that you did something less than awful might undercut your Machiavellian philosophy?”

“Big word for someone throwing back whiskey all night. I think ya missed a syllable or two, but I got the gist.”

“Fuck off.”

“If the men in this town weren’t terrible, I would.”

“That so? Everyone on this campaign swinging my way?”

“Huh?”

“S’nothing. Doesn’t matter.”

Alex furrowed her eyebrows in confusion, but let the matter go. At least for now. The streets soon grew crowded and lively once more as they walked through another stretch of bars and restaurants before finally getting to 12th.

“Oh hey, I’m home.” Maggie sounded genuinely surprised as she looked up and caught sight of the row home where she was renting the upper floor.

“You okay getting in?”

“I’m drunk, Danvers, not blackout.”

“Fine.”

Maggie handed back Alex’s jacket, immediately missing the warmth. “And, uh, thanks.”

“Yeah, don’t mention it.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Apologies in advance for any and all 2016 flashbacks in this extra long chapter...

“I feel like I was run over by a truck,” Lucy whined, dropping her head to the desk. She still hadn’t turned on the overhead lights—her computer monitor was bad enough.

“There, there,” Vasquez said, lightly patting the top of Lucy’s head. “I brought you a plain bagel.”

“I didn’t even drink that much!”

“Welcome to getting older. It sucks.”

“You’re one year older than me.”

“Like I said, welcome to getting older. It sucks.” With a smile that could only be given by someone not hungover, Vasquez pushed the bagel in front of Lucy. “It’ll taste better while it’s still hot.”

Grumbling, Lucy tore off a bite and stuffed it into her mouth before dropping her head back down to the desk. “How many hours until 5?”

“Far too many to start counting now.” With a sympathetic smile, Vasquez stood up. “Alright, I’ve gotta go play personal security guard while Cat fires Greg.”

“About damn time.”

“Yeah…still not sure what she saw in him.” On her way out the door, Vasquez paused to shove the bagel closer to Lucy with an insistent, “Eat.”

Once Vasquez had left, Lucy picked up her phone and dialed James’ extension, listening as it rang straight through to voicemail. For his sake, she hoped Cat didn’t need him before the firing, or it’d be his ass on the line next. Then she tried Alex’s, cringing as an actual voice came through the line—much too loud for this early in the day. “Come down to my office,” she managed before hanging up.

“What’s up?”

Lucy cast an accusatory glare in Alex’s direction. “Why don’t you look dead?”

“A very long walk and a very large coffee.”

“Mm, coffee.” Lucy had finished hers what felt like much too long ago. “You make things right with Maggie?”

“We’re fine.”

“Fine by her or fine by you?”

“Why aren’t they the same thing?” Lucy just leveled Alex with a look that allowed for no arguments until she relented. “Okay, yes, fine by her. I think. I don’t know. I got her home safely, okay?”
“So chivalrous.”

“How does the metro start and stop so hard when it moves so slow?” Winn whined, melodramatically flinging himself through the doorway and into a chair.

Alex and Lucy laughed. “Speaking of, where’s your metro buddy?”

“James? Like the crazy man he is, he went to the gym this morning. This morning!”

Even Alex cringed at that. She liked her runs, but not on a morning like this one.

“Can I interest you in half a bagel?”

“Not a chance in hell. No food. No thank you. I won’t bring Cat’s wrath down on me like that.”

Lucy wrinkled her nose in disgust at the image. “Fair enough.”

“What is this? A little morning soiree? I don’t pay you to socialize!” Cat snapped, wrapping her knuckles loudly against the door on her way past the office.

“Right, sorry,” Alex mumbled, slipping out of the office with Winn hot on her heels.

“I need Greg’s contract.”

Lucy nodded, pulling up the file and printing a copy for Cat. “Need me in the meeting?”

“If you think you can hold your head upright for that long.”

Appropriately chastised, Lucy nodded. “I’ll be fine. I just—”

“Your excuses already bore me.”

“Right.” She followed Cat down the hallway to her office and settled in across from Vasquez, unable to hide a satisfied smirk at the sight of the lightly bruised skin just barely peeking out from underneath her collar.

“Teschmacher!” Cat yelled from behind her desk, tapping her foot until the girl came running into the office.

“Yes, Ms. Grant?”

“Where’s my latte?”

“Right here, Ms. Grant.” She handed over the cup, biting her lip in fear as Cat grimaced.

“Next time, let’s remember to bring it to me while it’s still hot, hmm?”

“Right, yes. Of course.”

“Send Greg in when he gets here,” Cat sighed, rubbing her temples and trying to stave off a migraine. She wondered if Eve too had been dragged out to whatever grimy pit the rest of her staff had found their way to the night before that had left them all incompetent this morning.

Lucy and Vasquez sat quietly while Cat tsked at her screen and quickly typed out an email to someone. Greg finally arrived four minutes late.

“Have a seat.” And it only went downhill from there, as Cat firmly—though, Lucy had to admit,
rather fairly—went through what had gone wrong, the ways he had failed to adjust based on earlier meetings, the times he had forgotten to respond by stipulated deadlines, and the reasons she had for not believing him ready to run a campaign at this level. “I’m willing to recommend you to a few Representatives who will be up for election this cycle. Perhaps more experience when the stakes are lower would serve you well.”

He’d tried protesting throughout, only to find each one of his arguments broken down piece-by-piece and refuted. By the end, he simply nodded his head, resigned to his fate. It wasn’t a particularly cordial departure—he still threw his things into a box and cursed under his breath the whole time—but it was nowhere near as bad as any of them had feared it might be.

Once Vasquez had seen Greg out the door, taking his key and badge with her, she made her way over to Maggie’s cubicle.

“How ya holding up?”

“Oh, you know, the usual stampede of elephants in my head. It’s fun.”

“Well, if you want to follow me back to my office, I do have your coat…”

“Thank you so much!” Maggie let Vasquez sling an arm around her as they walked down the hallway. “Ugh, it’s my favorite. I was so sad when I thought it was gone forever.”

“Nah, we’ve got each other’s backs around here.” Before Maggie could scoff or roll her eyes or protest, she added, “Even Alex.” To Vasquez’s surprise, Maggie just shrugged. She wasn’t about to disagree when Alex had come and kneed someone on her behalf, then walked her all the way home. “I just…I’m sorry that she upset you last night.”

“It’s whatever.” It certainly hadn’t been the worst thing anyone had ever said to her.

“It’s not, though. We’re not one of those offices where everyone secretly hates each other and makes work a living hell.”

“No, let’s wait until we’re out of the office for that,” Maggie joked, though a part of her still stung at the knowledge of exactly what Alex thought of her.

Nudging the door shut, Vasquez sat down and gestured toward the extra chair for Maggie to sit. “I don’t know what she said to you. I don’t doubt that it was out of line,” Vasquez conceded. “But I also promise that she’s not normally like that. She’s strict and isn’t afraid to clash on issues at work, but she has reasons there. Last night…I don’t know what you two talked about.”

“Literally nothing,” Maggie interjected. “She went after me again for being too idealistic. We talked about hometowns. Then she freaked out.”

“Ah,” Vasquez sighed. Of course Maggie had no way of knowing what talk of home would do to Alex. Figuring in the long run Alex would forgive her this one breach of confidentiality, Vasquez looked up at Maggie. “This week is the anniversary of Alex’s dad’s death.”

“Oh.”

“So just…I don’t know. Cut her a little slack? Give her a second chance? If she warms up to you, she’s one of the best people you’ll ever have in your corner.’

Maggie could feel her head barely moving as she tried to process everything. She muttered a, “thank you,” before making her way back down to the research room and returning to her thoughts. She
was still angry with Alex for making assumptions about her childhood, but perhaps she had done the same thing right back to her.

When Maggie went out for lunch, she picked up an extra dessert and tossed it to Alex after getting back to the office. “For making sure I got home safely.”

“You didn’t have to,” Alex said, examining the sweet as though it were some alien object.

“I’m aware. Just shut up and enjoy the damn brownie, Danvers.”

That got a rare smile. “Thanks.”

As Alex settled back into her chair, she pulled the brownie out of the bag and broke off a corner. There was something about Maggie that just seemed to nag at her, and she hated not being able to name exactly what it was. She was infuriating—that much was obvious. And overly optimistic. But the way she’d snapped the night before…that was different; there was something darker in it that seemed to resonate with Alex in a way she wasn’t wholly comfortable with. And as much as she loathed the self-righteous thing, she also found herself drawn in, like Maggie was the kind of person Alex wanted to argue with, like she was the kind of person who would make her ideas sharper, better, get her to where she needed to be. There was a kind of electricity there, a crackle to their conversations that she didn’t get with most people, who either obstinately opposed her without reason or cowed to her demands almost instantly. Before she knew it, she had finished the whole brownie and decided she had already wasted much too much time thinking about Ms. Maggie Sawyer.

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“Rosen has my replacement ready,” Kara texted Cat. She was glad for it. Marcus had been the deputy chief of staff and knew more than enough about the inner workings of the office to ensure a smooth transition. And as excited as she had been about the prospect of moving up to the level of a presidential campaign, she knew she would have been plagued by guilt had she left Senator Rosen without an adequate replacement. The woman had given her a chance and helped her to flourish in ways she hadn’t expected.

“Good because Greg’s out,” Cat sent back. A moment later: “Ready for a full week of travel?”

“Couldn’t be more excited!” Kara could just picture Cat in her office, rolling her eyes at the enthusiasm.

“Yes, yes. Just be sure you’re packed.”

“Yes, boss.”

Cat hated the thrill that ran through her at the text, at the smile she just knew would have been on Kara’s face when she hit send. Shaking her head, she turned her attention back to her computer where she’d been running through one of her speechwriters’ drafted remarks for her first few days of visits out to Iowa, with a quick stop in Chicago, then down to sweep through a few of the southern states that she was fairly certain would never go blue in a general election but which could still nudge her higher in the primaries.

Nearly two hours later, Alex found Cat still immersed in documents, her glasses perched on her nose as she made edits on hard copies and pulled up town maps to plan a few “unannounced” visits she might make, the kind that delighted small town voters and offered those photoshoots at diners and cafes that were good for inspiring pathos and all the sorts of emotions she normally mocked.
“Cat.” Alex’s tone was clipped, and it drew Cat’s attention immediately.

“What?”

“Turn on the news. We have a problem.”

Cat clicked on one of the large screens that lined the wall behind her desk, finding one of the news programs she could bear to watch. “Is that…” she trailed off, zeroing in on the text scrolling across the bottom of the screen. “Who in the fuck?”

“Stop,” Alex ordered her. “If there’s a leak coming out of this office, you need to be quiet and tamp down on this immediately.” Alex stepped outside and turned to Eve’s desk. “If anyone calls for Cat, tell them she’s in a meeting. Cancel any of her plans until I’ve finished in there. No one is to be let inside without my explicit orders.”

“Um, okay,” Eve nodded, pulling up Cat’s calendar to begin rescheduling calls.

Alex sent a text to Vasquez: “Watch anyone coming and going. Check bags. No documents or computers in or out. Looking for bugs, wires, cameras.” She followed it with one to Lucy: “See breaking news re Cat. Meet us in her office once you have more info. We’ll need legal on it stat.”

She kicked Cat’s door shut, locked it, and pulled down the blinds to keep anyone from seeing in through the large glass panes. “You’ve seen the headlines?”

“Yes,” Cat managed through gritted teeth.

The same damn headline continued scrolling across the bottom of the screen, interspersed with a few random updates about an earthquake in Europe and some proposed legislation. “Breaking: Trouble in Paradise? Inside source promises a tell-all exposé about Cat Grant’s campaign. More tonight at 7.”

“It’s Greg. It has to be Greg.”

“How was he this morning when you fired him?”

“Fine. The typical begging and defensiveness, but nothing out of the usual. I offered him a recommendation, which, I’ll be honest, was far more than he ever deserved.”

“Cat,” Alex repeated, the warning in her voice obvious. “Is there any chance it’s someone else?”

Cat considered it. In all honesty, there were probably too many to count. No one made it this far without making enemies along the way. “Well, only people in this office would really be able to offer insider knowledge.”

“That narrows the list significantly.”

“Lucy and James have been with me for years. If they wanted to turn on me or make demands for something, I don’t know why they’d have waited this long.”

“Fair.” Alex refused to let her own feelings about her friends cloud her judgment.

“The IT hobbit might have been able to get access…”

“Winn?”

“That’s the one.”
“I mean, yes,” Alex hedged. “But he’s also fast asleep on his desk. Doesn’t really seem like he’s up to much at the moment.”

“For god’s sake, why do I even pay you people? If you’re not out trying to sabotage my career, you’re sleeping on the job!”

Alex rubbed at the back of her neck and tried to offer what she hoped was an encouraging smile. “Still, it’s probably one less person to worry about.”

“Fine,” Cat huffed, pulling out the staff phone directory as she began checking off names. After a few minutes she looked up again, throwing her pen to the desk. “This is useless until we know more.”

A knock at the door drew both of their attention. Standing behind Eve, Lucy looked more than a little annoyed. “Um, she says she’s to be let in, but I was told not to let anyone in,” Eve explained when Alex pulled the door open.

“She’s okay.”

Lucy straightened her jacket and strode over to one of the free chairs. “I assume you’re looking for legal solutions?” Alex nodded; Cat didn’t deign to give a response to such an obvious question. “If it’s really a staff member, they’re bound by non-disclosure agreements in their contracts.”

“So then shut this story down,” Cat growled.

“It’s not that simple. We can’t preemptively shut down a story—first amendment, you know that as well as I do.”

“Fine,” Cat grumbled. “Find out who’s breaking the story. Find out how they got it. I know for a fact that we couldn’t publish things we obtained illegally. Get as many lawyers around here as you need. Only ones you can trust. See if you can’t find some legal way of stopping it before it even starts.”

“And in the meantime, we’re in crisis mode. Nothing leaves this office that doesn’t go through me.”

“Got it.” With a salute to Alex, Lucy headed back to her office.

Cat turned back to Alex. She wouldn’t admit it, but she was beyond grateful to have her full time at this moment.

“I need you to be honest with me. What around here could sink a campaign?”

“Nothing!”

“Cat. Everyone has something.”

Shaking her head, Cat ignored the memory of being pressed up against a wall and kissed hard by the woman she was bringing on as her new campaign manager, the same woman whose name still fell from her lips every so often when she woke gasping and sweaty and tangled in her sheets. “I don’t know.”

“Okay: day-to-day things. We’ll start small.”

“I used to call my assistants by the wrong name. Still do every now and then—keeps them from feeling complacent.” Alex rolled her eyes, remembering the stories Kara told her back in the day. “I’ve been known to throw out a latte or two if not made to my specifications. I once tried to fire
someone for bringing me Chipotle as though it were an acceptable lunch.”

“I’m aware. It was my sister.”

“Right…” All the more reason not to bring up the election night incident. “During Eve’s first week she charged some of the clothing I had ordered to a campaign account. It was returned and switched to my personal account before the end of the day.”

“Still something to think about.” Alex jotted down a few notes. “What about people you fired? Think about optics. Do you have documented reasons for all of them?”

“Here? Yes. Back at CatCo? Maybe not always. But that was so many years ago!”

“Speaking of CatCo… You appointed James CEO when you left, then hired him as your communications director. Nepotism? Anything that might make it sound like you were trading positions in your cabinet as governor for favorable coverage in the press?”

“Absolutely not. The Tribune was harder on me than most of the California papers were.”


“Dear god, what do you think I do in my office? Send nude photos of myself and store them on my work computer?”

“You wouldn’t be the first.”

“I’m not that dumb, Alexandra.”

“It’d be smarter to call me Alex.”

“Sassy for someone suggesting I’m sexting in a glass-paneled office.”

“Well, what about relationships? Anyone in the office know something I don’t? You’re single; it’s already one of the things about you that doesn’t play well in the public eye.”

“Ah yes, god forbid a woman accomplish something without a man to take credit for half of it.”

Hiding a grin, Alex tried to refocus the conversation. “I need to know these things.”

“Fine,” Cat snapped, meeting Alex’s gaze head on and looking for a moment as though she might actually be enjoying this. “In the hell that has been this campaign season, I have seen absolutely no one in a romantic context. While working as Olivia’s Press Secretary, I saw one or two people—perfectly clean, vetted by the White House—for a month or two each. There were a couple of quiet one-night stands after the second break up. And I purchased two rather high-end vibrators on my own personal account for my own personal use in the rare moments I spend away from this goddam office.”

Hoping that Cat didn’t notice what Alex was fairly certain was a continually deepening blush on her cheeks, she nodded. “Alright then.” She cleared her throat, not missing Cat’s smirk. “What about financials?”

“Outside of the biggest donors, I really don’t know who gives what. You’ll have to ask the fundraising team.”

“I’ll go do that now, then I’m going to talk to a few people around the office. They’ll already all have
seen the news, but a bit of intimidation doesn’t hurt for discouraging future leaks.” When Cat turned back to her computer, Alex strode right back to her. “No you don’t! No emails. No phone calls. Nothing goes out of this office until we know what’s we’re dealing with and are prepared with official statements that James and I have vetted.”

“I’m simply checking my email.”

“No responses. I mean it.”

“Yes, yes. Send James in, would you?”

“Will do.”

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By the time Alex had interrogated and threatened most of the staff, it was nearing the 7 o’clock deadline for when the exposé would apparently begin. The whole office was on edge, and most already had the news playing on their screens, additional tabs opened to articles speculating about what might be revealed.

“Thought you might need this.” Maggie’s voice broke Alex out of her daze.

“What?”

“Coffee. Figure this is your moment to shine, which means you’ll probably also be up until god knows when…”

“Oh, uh, thanks. That’s actually really nice.”

“You know, I’m not actually the worst person ever.”

“Bit of a pain in the ass, though.”

“Right back at ya, Danvers.”

“Do you, uh, want to watch in here?” Normally Alex liked working alone, loved solitude in times of crisis, save perhaps for J’onn’s calming presence at her side. But somehow the thought of sending Maggie away was distinctly unappealing, no matter how frustrating she was. “I have a much bigger screen,” she offered by way of explanation.

“Sure…” Maggie perched carefully on the very edge of the chair in Alex’s office, ready to flee should it turn out that this had all been some misunderstanding or prank. “How’s the crisis-handling going? If you can say.”

“What sucks is that right now it’s just this terrible anticipation. We know it’s coming, but we don’t really know what it’ll be. Lucy’s still working on trying to get someone to name the source to stop this all before it begins, but I doubt they ever will.”

“If we knew, would we even be able to stop any of it? Freedom of the press and all, right?”

Alex shrugged. “Depends on what it is. You all have NDAs with your contracts. If someone from the press hacked Cat, it’d be easy enough to stop it. If it’s just some disgruntled asshole employee talking about his feelings…we’re pretty much fucked.”

“What a way to kick off the campaign, huh?” Maggie shook her head, finding herself relaxing into the seat a bit.
“It’s always something. I just…by going to the media first, this person’s making my job so much more difficult. Normally I get to be on the offensive. Waiting sucks.”

“Well, you’ve only got”—Maggie checked her phone—“two minutes of torture left.”

“Oh god. I can only imagine Cat wants to claw someone’s eyes out.”

“Quite the apt image,” Maggie snorted. “Saw Kara heading into her office on my way over. Hopefully she doesn’t lose any limbs.”

“Kara’s here?” It was more than a little strange that she hadn’t let her big sister know, Alex thought. Then again, maybe Cat had demanded she come over once 5 o’clock hit, officially ending her employment for Senator Rosen.

“Just got here.”

Alex decided to drop her concern for the time being, turning up the volume on her TV and opening a blank Word document to take notes. They’d all been tasked with watching different channels, and Alex was simply grateful to have dodged Fox News duty.

Two conventionally attractive people soon flashed into focus, their hands folded in front of them and headlines scrolling across the bottom of the screen. Once they got their generic greetings out of the way, the man lost his smile and put on what looked like a young model’s approximation of “serious.”

“This afternoon we promised to bring you inside knowledge from the Grant campaign, and tonight, we deliver. After a week of solid media coverage and high polling numbers, the news of a leak from within her staff might come as a shock. But when you hear how she treats her staff, maybe you’ll reconsider those positions.” After that grave beginning came a litany of complaints: Cat’s choice to use wrong names on purpose; the way she threw out full meals and beverages if they didn’t meet her standards; rumors about how she would get back on the campaign bus and insist on getting as much hand sanitizer as her team could round up to wash off the germs of the commoners she only pretended to care about.

It was…unflattering, but something they could combat with good PR and an emphasis on everyday people, the kind of hardworking Americans that Cat used to employ at CatCo and would help get back to work all around the country if elected. The revelations about Cat’s personal shoppers at Barney’s and the sheer amount she spent on shoes would probably lead to a few wardrobe adjustments that Cat would fight Alex on tooth and nail, but it was all manageable.

“That’s not so bad, huh,” Maggie shrugged. Sure, they were the kind of things people in her hometown expected of Cat, used to dismiss her and the “blue state liberals” who would never understand what it was like to work with their hands, to barely get by at the end of the month when bills were due. But there was nothing illegal. Nothing so egregious that it would necessarily derail the campaign.

It wasn’t. And it left Alex feeling on edge. The leaker promised an exposé, and this was anything but. “I’ll be back.” She walked quickly down to Cat’s office, knocking once before flinging open the door.

“So,” Cat drawled. “I’m some kind of sexist hypocrite now.”

“What? Oh, with the whole refusing to use Eve’s real name thing? Yeah,” Alex admitted, adding that to her list of points to address. “We’ll want James to help work issues of class and opportunity into your speeches for next week, though. Especially out in Iowa and down South, we’ll really need
to convince them that the lattes and the shoppers and the imported cuisine are, hmm, once in a while indulgences. We could spin it. Make it humanizing, you know?”

“What are you talking about?”

“The coverage…” Alex trailed off. Alex felt like the air had been knocked out of her chest at the realization. “Fuck, what did you see?”

“The tally of the number of times I called Lois Lane a—”

“Cat,” Kara’s voice broke through the beginnings of her rant, and she motioned for her to stop. Turning to Alex, Kara detailed the report: “It was everything she’s ever said in the office or over email about other women—insults about their looks, their choice in men, them as people…”

“Oh please, Lois has said the same and worse about me.”

“Not the point. She’s not running for president.”

“Stop!” Alex ordered, pacing the length of the office now. “Fucking hell. I want everyone who had a different channel in here now.” Kara snapped to attention and took off for the hallway, apparently having been filled in by Cat in the interim. “What channel did you have?”

“MSNBC.”

“So progressives…they’d be most upset if they heard you hate women. I got one of those middle-ground, middle of America shows, so they make you out to be some rich, disconnected snob.” The pieces fell into place as she paced. “Cat, this isn’t just one exposé; it’s a calculated strike on pretty much every front.”

“So it’s not as simple as just speaking at EMILY’s List, then?” As calm as her voice was, Cat could feel her heart pounding and her hands trembling ever so slightly in anger. It was every politician’s worst nightmare: a —gate before she’d even found her way to the White House.

Alex swore loudly before pulling herself together as James, Lucy, and Winn trudged in with Kara in tow. “What do you have? One at a time.”

James, who’d gotten a right-leaning station focused more on Wall Street and the stock market than on news from the streets, had heard all about Cat’s financial indiscretions. Unlike the Barney’s shoppers Alex learned about, he’d gotten to hear that Cat had apparently invested a not insignificant amount of money in an aborted Jekyll and Hyde musical, as well as a number of failed startups that seemed perfectly designed for mockery.

“I’ve invested in several successful startups as well! And most of this isn’t even run through me; it goes through a damn foundation that I haven’t touched since before I was governor.”

“All that they’ll care about is seeing your name tied to it,” Alex sighed, motioning for James to step back before he could deal with the brunt of Cat’s anger.

“Libertarian sites are reporting all sorts of quotes about you suggesting that, uh, I believe the polite word you used was idiots, should be stripped of the right to vote. Um, stuff about the second amendment. Some things that sound rather anti-free speech.”

“I ran a newspaper!”

“They’re also saying they’ll be filtering out your emails over time,” Winn added, his voice quiet and
his gaze anywhere but Cat’s face.

“Excuse me.”

Alex looked like she was on the verge of murder, but she took a deep breath and turned to Lucy instead. “What did you get over on Fox News?”

“Apparently Cat’s agenda includes tearing down proper family values. She’s abandoned her own children and will encourage others to do the same. All sorts of stuff about abortion that got really nasty.” She looked down to consult her list. “Oh, and her husband left her because she’s a lesbian. As are most of her female staffers, apparently. I’m sure we’ll get some conservative freak on the internet suggesting that there are orgies in the office next,” Lucy snorted, trying to find an ounce of humor in a shitty situation, even as she worried that perhaps she and Vasquez had been the reason for that last particular line of attack.

“Could they not even get the facts right to expose me?” Cat huffed, slamming her planner against her desk. “Everyone already knows about Adam after the governor’s race, and we’ve since found our own way. It’s not perfect, but family rarely is. And I have never once abandoned Carter!” Her voice rose in pitch, and her cheeks took on a light pink tinge.

“Oh, uh, they didn’t say that,” Lucy interjected. “They literally mean that by working full time you’ve abandoned them to nannies and fathers who I’m sure should have been free to pursue manly pastimes. Like wood-chopping and fire-building and hunting with those machine rifles they so desperately need.”

“Right. God forbid Carter get to see that women can be just as successful as men. Must make me the devil incarnate.”

“Okay, let’s focus on getting a coherent message,” Alex began, only to find herself cut off by Cat’s ranting once more.

“Yes, I advocate for gender parity and access to birth control and women’s health. No, I’m not evil and saying no one should ever have children. Yes, I think there’s still work to be done on LGBTQ issues—”

“And no, you’re not a lesbian,” Alex finished for her.

“Obviously not. I like men too,” Cat huffed, choosing to ignore both the shocked looks being sent her way by Winn and James and the absolutely delighted smile on Lucy’s face. Alex seemed not to have noticed the “too” tacked on at the end of her statement.

Getting into crisis mode, Alex stepped forward into the center of the room. “Okay, Lucy, go get on the emails. Almost no one has access to those, so there was probably something illegal done to get them.”

“If it wasn’t someone employed by the news, we still won’t be able to stop them from spreading the emails once they’re released,” Lucy interjected.

“Well figure it out! If we can find out where it came from, we can go after them, right?”

“Right.”

“And take Winn with you! Winn, start trawling the web. Find sites publishing the emails or claiming to. See if you can’t trace leaks back to a source.”
Lucy and Winn nodded and slipped out of the office.

“James, get the researchers, the strategists, the writers, the poll people, I don’t care, just figure out what we need to say to mitigate the damage to each of the targeted bases. And no one comments until we have set language.”

“On it.”

“And me?” Kara asked.

“The three of us have some image adjustments to make. And a mole to catch. Once we know who it is, I’ll make them go away.”

“Alex…”

“Not at the office, Kara. Here you let me do my job the way it needs to be done. You can guilt me about it back home if you must.”

Cat watched the exchange closely, following their arguments—both verbal and non-verbal. Eventually she cut in, “Alex, you start investigating. Kara and I needed to meet about my image for the trips. May as well start fresh now.”

Alex nodded and let herself out, shocked to find Maggie still in her office. She was sitting on the floor now, a laptop perched on her lap and a mug of coffee by her side. “Hey,” Maggie waved. “Sorry, I’ll leave. Wasn’t sure when you were coming back.”

“Oh, uh.” Alex paused, trying to figure out how she felt about Maggie’s decision to camp out in her office and wait for her. “I mean, you can work in here?”

“You sure? It was just getting a little loud down in at the research cubes with everyone pairing up on issues.”

“You don’t have a partner?”

“I’m new, Danvers. Plus, I’m our civil rights issues person, which means I get point on women and the gays,” she laughed.

“Oh god, yeah, let’s make it clear that Cat’s a feminist but not a lesbian.”

Tilting her head to the side, Maggie bit back her gut reaction toward defensiveness. “I mean…would it be the worst thing in the world if she were?”

“What? No! No, I’m not saying that. It’s just that she’s not.”

“She could be. It’s not like we’re bad people.”

“No, I never said… Wait, what?”

“What’s the question?”

“You said we.”

“Uh-huh.” Maggie could feel her stomach clench. She hated that every time she came out there was still a moment of panic, of wondering whether she’d be cast out once more, ostracized from friends and family and colleagues all because she kept hoping for people to be better.
“You’re…”

“Gay? Yeah, Danvers, it’s not a bad word.”

“Oh. I just—I didn’t know, that’s all. Sorry, I shouldn’t—I didn’t mean to sound rude. If I did. Obviously I’m all for, you know, gay rights! I just, right, Cat’s not gay. So I’m just trying to point out where this insider is wrong. Because, you know, discredit part…”

“The whole thing comes under question. Yeah, I get basic politics.” Maggie’s tone was distinctly colder. “I should probably go back and work with the other researchers. Good luck.”

“I—no, Maggie!” But she was already gone, and Alex couldn’t help feeling like she’d fucked up almost as badly as she had the night before. Rubbing her head, she sank into her desk chair and unlocked her computer. Nothing like work to distract her from any lingering pangs of guilt.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Lots of Alex and Cat (and a side of slightly clashing personalities) as they work to deal with the fallout from the scandal

After a certain point, Alex wouldn’t have been able to say what time it was, the minutes having rolled into hours as the staff worked together to find a way through the kind of scandal designed to bring campaigns crumbling to the ground. She and James had set up camp in his office, one of them running down the hallway to Cat and Kara every few minutes to relay information and update strategies. Really, the whole office had pretty much spilled out into the hallways, the barriers between departments having fallen for the night. Doors were propped open and higher cubicle walls actually taken down to allow for fast communication once Alex banned the use of the email server until they knew more. Once she’d done a sweep for bugs and found none, she’d put Winn in charge of going through every single computer in the office, but it was a slow process, and she wasn’t willing to take chances.

“They’re making memes of her,” James sighed, pulling up some listicle that had already been compiled of the first wave of them.

Alex squinted as she leaned over to see the screen. “She never said those things!”

A loud laugh filled the air, finally breaking some of the tension that had been escalating for hours. “No, Alex, she didn’t. Miranda Priestley did.”

Alex blinked, trying to place the name. “Did she run for office?”

“No. The Devil Wears Prada…it’s a movie…didn’t Kara watch it all the time for a while?”

“Oh…yeah, now I remember. I mean, any chance we could turn it into something positive? People like Meryl Streep, don’t they?”

James shrugged. “I’ll set some of the social media interns on it on Monday.”

“It’s certainly better than the other things people are writing about her.”

“What have you got?”

“We’ve got some super liberal feminist blog calling her out for being anti-women. A far-right blog suggesting that she fired Greg because he wasn’t a lesbian—apparently her staffer of choice.” She paused at that. “Did you, uh, did you know Maggie was gay?”

James barely looked up from his computer. “Uh, I think she was talking to Vasquez about gay dodgeball or something the other night.”

“Oh.”

“Why?”
“No reason.” Alex shook her head. Apparently she was the only one who hadn’t noticed. She wondered what that made her. “I, uh, I’m gonna go check in with Cat and Kara.”

Before Alex could even open her mouth, Cat let out a loud groan of frustration. “My top donors have called a meeting.”

“What?”

“For tomorrow. They want to know if we should call this off before it gets even worse.”

“By ‘it,’ do you mean the whole campaign?”

Cat nodded slowly. She could feel the weight of the stress pressing down on her. It had been one thing to laugh at a few quotes about Lois Lane. Seeing her whole life laid out in front of the public, all of the worst details stripped from their contexts and held up for scrutiny, for her humiliation—it was a whole new level. She’d already gotten texts from Carter asking what he was supposed to do, as well as a sharply worded voicemail from Adam’s father blaming her for dragging his family’s name through the mud again.

“We won’t give in that easily,” Alex declared, forcing herself to sound far more confident than she was. She’d dealt with things that were messier, but rarely had they gotten this far into the public eye already. A part of her wanted to call J’onn, but she didn’t want to seem dependent, like she couldn’t do this on her own. “If the donors are insisting on meeting, we will.”

“It’s just a few,” Kara amended. “The local ones—DC types.”

“We can handle them. They’ve seen people bounce back from worse.” Of course, those people had been white men, but Alex was adamant. If Cat was the kind of person Alex thought she was, she would fight tooth and nail to reclaim her rightful place in the race.

“It’s tomorrow. 10am.” Cat drummed her nails against her desk. “I want as much information as I can now, and then I want to go sleep for a few hours before I have to face the lions.”

Alex called everyone down to the large conference room. “Fast updates now,” she yelled, getting the attention of anyone she might have missed on her first sweep through the hallway.

James, Alex, Kara, and Cat took their places at the front of the room, flanked by Winn and Lucy. Rather than muster a few hopeful words that wouldn’t possibly inspire anyone this late at night, Cat simply gestured at Alex and James to begin.

“This isn’t good,” Alex started. “But it’s also not the end.”

“With your help, we’ve isolated the main criticisms coming out of these leaks,” James added.

“But what about her emails?” one of the younger members of the social media team yelled.

“They’re not out there yet, and Winn, Lucy, and I are working to make sure it stays that way,” Alex answered. “So that’s not our primary concern at this stage.”

“What is,” James cut in, “is getting out a comprehensive response.”

“We’ll focus on everything they got wrong—point out quotes that were made up or ripped from context; distance Cat from her investment firm and philanthropic foundation; and make it clear that these leaks are not to be trusted.” Alex turned back to James to let him outline the media strategy.
“We’re not as concerned about the attacks on Cat that make her out to be overly liberal. We can deal with them down the line, but they’re less likely to hurt us in the primaries.” The staff nodded along with him as he spoke. “The biggest weaknesses here are the attacks on Cat as a sexist who only pretends to be a feminist to get votes and as an out-of-touch former CEO with too much money to possibly understand the concerns of most Americans.” He watched as everyone took notes. “We’re extending Cat’s trip out to the Midwest by a few days before she heads down South to emphasize that she does want to be with the people, wants to get to know them and fight for them.”

“We’ll be going to the Iowa State Fair, talking to some of the bigger unions, scheduling a few photo ops on farms and factories,” Kara explained.

“Uh, who are you?” one of the researchers called out.

Fidgeting with her glasses, Kara waved. “Right, uh, I’m Kara Danvers.”

“Don’t you work for Senator Rosen?” another strategist asked.

“She did,” Cat answered, her voice sharp, effectively ending further questioning. “She’s my new campaign manager. She was supposed to start on Monday but, in light of all that’s going on, was willing to dive right into the thick of it. She’ll be meeting with each of your department heads when we get back from our Iowa trip.”

“So, uh, as I was saying,” Kara began, finding her footing once more and trying to remember that she could do this, that just because this wasn’t the kind of catastrophe she’d weathered before, she could still get this campaign through it and help Cat to clinch the nomination. “Once we’re out on the road, we should be able to get some good publicity, but we’ll need your help in laying the groundwork first.” She turned to James.

“We’ll need to give a few interviews, issue statements, get something posted on our website—you know the drill. Angela,” he called out, and a middle-aged Black woman who spearheaded their economic policy research looked up from her computer. “Grab as many domestic policy people and interns as you need and work on getting together a statement about the investments and expenses. You might actually get your best audience somewhere like the Times or even the Wall Street Journal. They’ll understand outsourcing investment portfolios and taking risks—you’ll probably get the best bet for a sympathetic interviewer there.”

Angela nodded and began pulling up tabs, already thinking about who she knew and might be able to call for a favor.

“Maggie,” came James’ booming voice. “I want you in charge of finding left-leaning publications and shows to combat charges of sexism. Make it clear that Cat’s been a longtime advocate for women’s rights. Talk about the equal pay policy she enforced at CatCo and the legislation she passed while governor. Use the leaked info about LGBTQ issues to our advantage, though don’t go far enough to alienate centrists, okay?”

“Got it.”

“Since these issues can be a bit more sensitive, run any statements by Alex first.” Biting back a groan, Maggie just nodded. James turned to address the rest of the staff. “I know she’s new, but if she says she needs you, you stay and help.”

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No matter how stressful the next few hours were, Cat was proud to call everyone in the office
members of her team. Running on nothing more than the takeout she paid for them to order—delivered to the corner of the block and picked up by Alex and Kara alone—and breakroom coffee, they managed to exhaust their contact lists and call in favors to ensure that Cat would have the chance to make her own statement. Now they could only hope that her responses would keep the scandal from becoming the only item to dominate the weekend headlines. By the time she sent them all home, knowing full well they’d be in bright and early just a few hours later to ensure that the donors saw an office bustling with life and staff still energized to fight for this campaign, she was half-ready to sleep on the couch in her office.

A small knock startled her, and Kara slipped in through the door. “Hey.”

“Ready to run back to Rosen’s office yet?” Cat asked, a hard edge to her voice that she couldn’t quite shake—the kind born of guilt and frustration and an anger that bubbled in the pit of her stomach.

“You’re the one who said that if anything happened, I was the one you wanted by your side, right? Well here I am.”

“Yes, here you are in the midst of one of the most public scandals to hit in years,” Cat scoffed. “I’m not giving up hope yet, and neither should you, Cat.” Kara’s voice was soft but firm, and it reminded Cat of all the reasons she’d wanted to have Kara back on her team. “But you also need sleep.” Before Cat could protest, she continued, “It’ll help to have a few hours to yourself before the meeting tomorrow. We still need their support.”

“You’re right,” Cat admitted, pointedly ignoring Kara’s shocked smile. “I’ll go home for a bit.”

“Er, well, that’s the thing…”

“What?”

“Your house is surrounded with reporters and photographers and kids just hoping to get a photo to sell to the tabloids for a few bucks.”

Cat cursed under her breath. “So what am I supposed to do?”

“Come with me,” Alex said, poking her head through the doorway. “We still need to cover a few things that are best talked about outside of the office. I have a guest bedroom.”

Cat narrowed her eyes. “Where do you even live?” Alex was one of the few people whose personnel file was allowed to remain almost completely blank.

“You’ll see.”

Looking thoroughly unconvinced, Cat turned to Kara. “Am I going to die in some black hole where no one will ever find me if I go with her?”

Kara simply laughed and shook her head. “You’ll be shocked by the normalcy of it all.”

If Cat hadn’t been trained to watch for reactions from years of investigative reporting early in her career, she would have missed the flash of indignation that made Alex look more like Kara’s frustrated big sister than the hyper-competent, intimidating fixer she liked the word to see her as. “Well, as long as my campaign manager knows where I was last taken if I never return…”

“Save some of the theatrics for the news outlets tomorrow,” Alex grumbled, grabbing Cat’s bag for
her and guiding her down to the basement exit out to the alley behind the houses.

“How did you even find out there was a door down here?” Cat asked, grimacing at the dirt and spider webs that decorated the narrow, crumbling back stairs.

“I had it fixed my first week here just in case we ever needed to leave without being seen,” Alex explained as though it would have been anyone’s first thought upon starting a new job to creep through the office’s unfinished basements and check for alternate escape routes.

Cat couldn’t find it within herself to protest when she found a small nondescript sedan with tinted windows idling out back and not a reporter in sight. She had already signed off on statements that were making their way around, and she would deal with them tomorrow with her dignity intact, not like some disgraced starlet chased from door to door, hounded by the very worst the press had to offer.

“Evening, ma’am,” came Vasquez’s voice from the driver’s seat, and she looked entirely too pleased about her role in their back alley getaway.

Ignoring the “ma’am,” having learned long ago not to fight Vasquez on it, Cat just sighed. “I did wonder where you had gotten to this past hour. Here I thought I’d have another person to fire today.”

“Just off to some secret lot to pick up a secret car that is totally not owned by the DEO.” Vasquez caught Alex’s gaze in the rearview mirror, a mischievous smile on her lips.

“Oh shut up and drive.” Alex had met Vasquez during her early days at the DEO, back when J’onn had hired Vasquez to do a bit of freelance consulting, and with running in similar circles, they’d bumped into each other more than a few times over the years. Of all the people Cat could have chosen, Alex thought Vasquez was one of the best.

“Is Carter safe?” Cat asked after a few blocks of silence, Alex having pulled out a stack of printed documents to read over.

“Yes, ma’am. I assigned two members of your security detail to his father’s house. So far there have been no attempts to find you there.”

“And my house?”

“MPD has officers keeping the reporters off your property. They’re coming and going—never quite staying long enough to get in real trouble.”

Cat sighed, letting out a low groan of frustration. She just hoped that once their statements came out in the morning news, the fixation on getting to her would begin to die down.

A few minutes later, the car came to a stop. “This is us,” Alex said, stuffing the papers back into her bag and pulling herself up and out of the car. “Let me go check the property just to be sure. Vasquez will bring you in once we’re clear.”

“Oh for god’s sake,” Cat huffed, but Vasquez remained stoic, and Alex had already swept off into the night.

“We’re just doing our jobs, ma’am.” After another minute or two, Vasquez’s phone chimed, and she led Cat to the front door. “I’ll be here for both of you in the morning. Be safe.”

Peering around the entryway, Cat took in her surroundings. “Your super-secret black ops headquarters are outside of Dupont? We’re basically in some sleepy little Georgetown townhouse.”
“And?”

“I expected something…less domestic.”

“First of all, this is my house, not the DEO.”

“In that case I expected it even less.”

“Second of all, you’ve only seen a room, so don’t worry too much about how normal I am. Wouldn’t want to disappoint…”

“So do I get to see more?”

“The whole guest bedroom.” Alex smiled at the look of frustration she got in return and led Cat up the stairs. “There are some fresh clothes that you can wear to bed in the top right drawer. When you’re done, I’ll be downstairs. There are a few things I still need to ask you before we deal with the press and donors tomorrow.”

When Cat came back downstairs, she found Alex sitting in an armchair in the living room and took a seat on the couch. “What do you need to ask me now?”

“I want you to think long and hard about anything else that could come up if we can’t stop the emails before they leak. I cannot do my job as well as I should if you’re not honest with me.”

“I send hundreds of emails every single day. I am absolutely certain there are things that will piss off donors and other politicians and the general public. But I am telling you right now, I have not done anything illegal.”

“You know I’ll still be looking, right?”

“I’d expect nothing less from J’onn’s protégé.”

“But okay, let’s focus on the areas they hit tonight. Maybe nothing was illegal, but sometimes a big enough scandal is worse than a minor crime. Money, spending, things you’ve bought.”

“I needed to look good in my job. I was a CEO. A governor. The White House Press Secretary. Of course I spent what normal people might consider an obscene amount of money on clothing.”

“There are plenty of other politicians who spend similar amounts of money,” Alex dismissed the concern with a wave of her hand. “I already have expense reports ready to go for that.”

“Oh. Well that’s good, then.”

“What about the foundations? CatCo’s philanthropic branch?”

“I don’t know,” Cat admitted. “Once I was elected, I put my CatCo shares into a private trust. I’m not a voting member of the boards anymore to avoid conflicts of interest.”

“And you have proof of all that?”

“I do.”

“We’ll make sure Angela stresses that.” Even as she said it, Alex already had her phone out to text Angela, whose phone and computer had been some of the first ones Winn cleared per Alex’s orders. “What about your family?”
“The media already broke the news about Adam years ago.” Cat was barely able to hide the bitterness; it was a nasty attack that had hurt her far more than it hurt her campaign. Although she’d never admit to it, she almost dropped out of the race—would have, were it not for Kara’s relentless hope, her ability to break down Cat’s walls and get her to speak honestly about what had happened all those years ago. “They know about my ex-husbands. They already hate me for being single.”

“Any bitter exes who might come out of the woodwork to make a few bucks for some tawdry interview?”

“I don’t think so.” She was careful—had been even back before she knew she’d end up here, running for President of the United States. And for those who might still be bitter, there was, at the very least, the threat of mutually assured destruction in place as a backup measure.

“I don’t like surprises. Last chance: anyone I need to go warn?” They both heard the “warn” for what it really meant: threaten.

“No. The people I was with know to be quiet—normally they have a reason to want the same.”

“What about people who could come forward—not the ones you dated, but people who knew about those relationships? Anyone scandalous in that list of exes and one-night stands?”

Twisting a ring around her finger, Cat let out a sigh. “We’re bound by confidentiality?”

“Not necessarily… But you’re a client, and I only make money if I have happy clients.”

Hearing the truth in Alex’s declaration, Cat looked up and held her gaze. “I slept with the president.” Before Alex could interject, she clarified: “It was back in college. We were in our 20s.”

“Which one?”

“Which one? There’s only one current president.”

“You…you slept with Olivia Marsdin?”

“Oh don’t worry, it was well before she got married, and it had nothing to do with her naming me as her Press Secretary.”

Alex nodded, her face a mask of professionalism even as her thoughts spiraled rapidly. “Did anyone know?”

“I doubt it. I mean, it was Radcliffe, but certain things were still a little hush-hush. At least back then.”

“Right…” Alex took a deep breath. “So when we’re out there telling the world you’re not gay, we’re not lying?”

“No. As I said before, I like men and women. I mean, not very many of either—I still have standards.”

“Future world leaders only?” Alex joked, though her voice was strained.

“Something like that,” Cat drawled.

“I have to ask: is that any part of the reason why you hired Vasquez or Maggie or…?”

“Or Lucy or you?” Cat countered.
“No, I meant because they’re gay.”

“And you’re not?” Cat snorted. There was nothing like being accused of things she would never do to push her past the point of propriety.

“No.”

“Yeah, okay. I really don’t have the time or inclination to deal with your midlife closet crisis. So go ahead and return to accusing me of only hiring the staff members I want to fuck.” She ignored the small voice in her head yelling out Kara’s name; she brought her back because she was competent and loyal and damn good at her job.

“I’m asking because there are already news stations saying it, and I need to know if there’s anything out there that could lend their story even the slightest bit of credibility—true or not. It’s the same reason I had to ask if you hired James as a favor, and it’s the same reason I’ll need to ask you about a hundred and one other issues along the way. This is a big fucking deal, and I need you to treat it like it is.”

“You think I’m not? What? You think because I’m not cowering and ashamed about having slept with my college friend, about being bi and unmarried, that I’m not dedicated to minimizing the damage? I am working my ass off, as I have been since day one. If you think I’m about to roll over and let that walking, talking personification of white male privilege win this thing, you clearly don’t know who you’re working for, and I suggest you pack up your things and get the hell off my campaign.”

For a long, tense minute, they sat staring at one another. Finally, Alex nodded her head slowly. “Good. That’s exactly what I need to see from you. Not the anger alone—it won’t play well on television—but the righteous indignation.” Alex stood, pacing back and forth in front of the fireplace. “Hold fast to that one fact: you’re staying here because you know you’re the best person for this job. You’re fighting to do right by your country, and if that means that your life is going to be held up to a level of unprecedented scrutiny, so be it. You have principles and integrity enough to own up to past mistakes, even when no one else in the race is being held to that same standard.”

Cat felt the tension ease out of her. “There’s the woman I hired.”

“And there’s the candidate I want leading the free world,” Alex countered. “Now let’s find this bastard and make him pay.”

“I’ll drink to that.”

“Tomorrow. Tonight you sleep. When you’re done with the board, drinks are on me.”

“I suppose that’s fair.” Cat stood and stretched, rolling her shoulders in a vain attempt at getting rid of some of the tension that had settled there early in the day. “Oh, and Alex?”

“Yeah?”

“Now that you’ve asked once, you don’t ever accuse me of sleeping with my staff again.” She punctuated the “ever” with a step forward that was surprisingly menacing for a woman so tiny.

Standing her ground, Alex waited a beat. “I don’t ask because I believe it. I ask because they will.”

“Understood.” Cat took a step backward and headed toward the stairs before turning back, her lips pursed and her fingers drumming against her thigh. “And, Alex?”
“Yeah?”

“What I said about you… It’s 2019. Maybe try loosening up a bit? Not for me—for you.”

Before Alex could say a word, Cat was already gone.
State of the Union? What State of the Union? Please enjoy a more preferable political situation.

Thanks to lurkz for talking me through the specifics of what can and cannot be done through legal means! Hopefully I’ll never need to know for real life

By the time Cat’s early alarm went off, Alex was already up and fully dressed. There was a pot of fresh coffee that actually smelled halfway decent, and three different outfit options from her own closet were hung up and waiting for her downstairs.

“Do I even want to know how you got my clothing?” Cat asked.

“No.” Having a handful of aliens around helped, especially when some of those aliens could fly and move at super speeds and phase through walls, but there was no reason for Cat to know about her secret backup. “I’d go with the gray or the navy—look serious, without going full on dour politician in all black.”

“There’s jewelry to fix that,” Cat huffed. She’d pulled off black plenty of times already, and there was no reason to stop wearing classics now.

“Not for a few weeks. Nothing bold or flashy or obviously expensive. You’re one of us now: an everyday American.”

“I already hate it.”

“Don’t let them hear you say so. We’ll have you in light jewelry for a while.”

Nodding slowly, Cat pulled down the gray suit, resigning herself to looking like some boring lawyer-turned-politician for the next few days. Although she’d never admit it, she appreciated having to focus her attention on small details: finding understated jewelry and outfits that looked professional but not overly fashionable. It kept her from dwelling on her upcoming meeting with the donors, the interviews with the press, the voicemail from her mother she’d been purposefully ignoring.

Once Cat went back upstairs, Alex poured herself another mug of coffee, blaming her lack of sleep on having spent much of the night strategizing and calling in favors and having her old boss break into her current boss’ home. The fact that every time she’d closed her eyes, her dreams had been haunted by thoughts of Maggie’s hurt expression and Cat’s derisive, “You’re not?” could be written off as nothing more than nerves about today.

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“Perfectly hot latte, just the way you like it.”

Cat pulled her sunglasses down and looked up at Kara. “You don’t have to do that now. You know that, right?”
“I wanted to. You deserve one quiet moment before you have to deal with everything.”

“Thank you,” Cat whispered, somehow feeling more vulnerable in that moment than she had with the every miniscule, terrible detail about herself being broadcast around the country.

The sharp rap of Alex’s knuckles against the doorframe startled Cat back into the present. “I’ve got one last round of statements for you to approve.”

Fishing for her glasses, Cat took the offered stack of papers, skimming through article after article that thoughtfully and carefully responded to accusations without veering into defensive rhetoric that would only bring closer scrutiny. There were the headlines that were easier to dismiss—the quotes that could be revealed as fakes or put into context; they had all gone to friendly journalists and papers, the ones already fighting for Cat, even before they’d announced any official support for a candidate. Others were more nuanced: the Wall Street Journal piece Angela had gotten pushed up to today’s issue, paired with a roundtable featuring investment bankers and financial backers who talked about the importance of risk-taking and bold decisions. It was a bit more Wall Street-meets-California Republican than they would have wanted earlier in the campaign, but now it made Cat look less eccentric and, by its placement, even gave the illusion of her having received the support of those financial experts.

“These are fine,” Cat finally declared, having scribbled a few edits and notes along the margins of the statements that wouldn’t go out until that night or the following morning.

“One more thing.” Alex braced herself. “The critiques about your treatment of other women hit hard, and your numbers with women voters are dropping fast. You need to keep that voting base if you want to stay competitive with Justin.”

“I’m aware,” Cat snapped. Taking a deep breathing and closing her eyes for a moment, Cat looked back at Alex. “Do you have a plan, or are you simply alerting me to my plummeting campaign status?”

“You won’t like it. But if you do it right, I think it’ll give you a jump, at least with those voters.”

“Well when you phrase it like that.”

Kara cleared her throat and tried not to laugh at Cat’s sarcasm.

“Do a one-on-one interview with Lois,” Alex stated bluntly. Cat let out a bark of laughter. “I’m serious. All the most damning evidence that’s been leaked so far is about the things you’ve called her over the years and your dismissal of her journalism.”

“She says the same about me!”

“So then go out there and show the world that it’s nothing more than professional one-upsmanship or whatever you want to call it. Rivalry, I don’t care.”

“She’s not good enough to be my rival.”

“Cat.” Kara placed a hand gently on Cat’s shoulder and tried to ignore the way the woman flinched at her touch. She quickly withdrew her hand. “It’s a good plan.”

“Or think about it this way: if you don’t do it, you risk having Lois Lane be the reason that you lost the election.” Alex smirked at the way Cat’s expression morphed into one of determination.

“Set it up.”
“We want to read it and have a say on the final version before it goes to print,” Kara added.

“Already on it!” Alex yelled from the doorway, before heading down the hallway to the researchers’ room. Half of them appeared to have slept in the office, their desks covered with coffee cups and pizza crusts and jackets rolled up into makeshift pillows. When she made it down the row to Maggie’s cubicle, she paused for a moment before knocking lightly. “Hey.”

“Hey. Do you need me to fix something with my draft plan?”

“Oh, uh, no.” Alex shook her head. “I just talked to Cat about an interview, and I want your help.”

“Okay…”

“Do you mind talking about it in my office?” Until they had confirmation on the source of the leaks, paranoia was the default mode around campaign headquarters.

“Sure.” Maggie tried to get a read on Alex as they walked down a few doors to her office. She was tense and a bit awkward, but not much more so than usual, and surely some of this was to be expected with the ongoing scandal. And it wasn’t like she needed Alex’s approval—she’d given up on counting on other people years ago—but she felt like they were finally getting somewhere, like she might not have to tiptoe around her at the office. “What’s up?” she asked as soon as they were behind closed doors.

“Cat’s going to do a one-on-one interview with Lois Lane.”

“Uh, you sure Lois is gonna agree to it after everything Cat called her?”

Alex shrugged. “Apparently it’s an ongoing, two-sided thing.”

“So why do you need me?”

“I want you to prep Cat for her interview.” Anticipating Maggie’s objection that she was the fixer, Alex continued, “You’re the one who’s done all the research, figured out what polls well, what issues are important at the moment.”

“What happened to the woman telling me that my suggestions are basically a walking time bomb of a scandal?”

Looking wholly unabashed, Alex shrugged. “On immigration, they were. But right now, the bigger scandal is Cat looking like she hates women, so if we swing a little too far in the other direction…”

“Though not so far that we dare to imply she might love women,” Maggie retorted. Wincing slightly, she shook her head. “Sorry.”

“No, uh, no. You’re fine. And, well, you weren’t completely wrong. Not that we should say it! Just make Cat out to be a feminist, okay?”

“I can do that.” After a beat, Maggie leaned in conspiratorially. “So…she swings both ways?”

“I’m not telling you anything until I’m convinced you’re not the leak,” Alex replied gruffly, crossing her arms and turning back to her computer.

“You wound me!” Maggie gasped, feeling herself relax, even as Alex technically accused her of leaking information and compromising the whole campaign. Somehow the situation felt lighter, like the tension of the night before had eased back, leaving them in whatever vague, undefined land they
had occupied after the night at the bar.

Rolling her eyes at Maggie, Alex continued as if there had been no interruption. “Good job on the draft statements.”

“High praise.”

“Any luck on getting the equal pay angle into major papers?”

“Even better—well, I guess you get to decide that…” Maggie trailed off, shaking her head as she refocused. “I found a few different women who worked for Cat—one of them was another reporter with her back in the early years of her career. Another worked for her at CatCo. And then someone who worked for the Grant for Governor campaign back in California.”

“Uh-huh,” Alex hummed, waiting for Maggie to continue.

“They all have stories—and I mean, the kind of stories that people remember stories, you know—about Cat as a boss and a coworker, the way she supported them and all sorts of shit that you just know will sell papers. I found an op-ed columnist at the Washington Post who agreed to interview all three of them.”

“That’s good—really good. I mean, we’ll be accused of cherry-picking people, avoiding the ones with bad stories, but they’re already getting their press.”

“Mhm. And it’s a good group—we’ve got some diversity in there, and they’re all pretty well-spoken. I’m just saying, if it goes well, they might be the kind of people we want to get up on stage at a campaign rally, maybe even in an ad.”

“We’ll run the names by Cat first, but if the column goes over well, get someone from marketing on this, okay?”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. And take point—don’t let anyone else take credit for it.”

“Thanks,” Maggie murmured, oddly touched by the effort Alex was making to support her.

“Just making sure you don’t get screwed over.”

“Right…”

“Get me those names before Cat’s out of her meeting with the donors. This afternoon we’ll all meet to prep for the interview with Lois.”

“Will do.”

After she checked that meeting off her to-do list, Alex walked back down to Cat’s office, where she and Kara had been going over donor bios since she left. “How’s it going?”

“Oh just great,” Cat answered, her lip curling up in distaste. “They’re all donating for different reasons, hoping I’ll stress different things in the campaign, so really, it should be a piece of cake to appeal to them all as a single group in”—she checked the time—“ten minutes.”

“You’ll be great,” Kara promised her, and it was so achingly sincere Alex couldn’t help but feel as though she were intruding on a moment that wasn’t meant for her. “Just remember what we talked about: remind them of how much good you did as governor and why they supported you in the first
place. The scandal is momentary; the right candidate can make history.”

“Glad you’re putting those marketing classes to work,” Alex teased, nudging Kara with her shoulder.

“Shut up.”

“No, I’m serious. It’s not a bad way to spin it. Let Cat’s successes speak for themselves—they’ve lasted a hell of a lot longer than her years in office in California did—and the same can be said for the kinds of policies she’d put in place as president. Make the scandal out to be something short-lived.”

“What we need is to get the media distracted by something new,” Cat mused, already swept away by thoughts of what could be used to change the headlines. “The interview with Lois will help some, but it’ll keep the focus on reactions to the scandal.”

“We need that for a bit,” Alex clarified. “You deserve a chance to respond. We’ll want the headlines to change before public opinion can swing back the other way again.”

“Any ideas? This is Washington; surely there’s some politician out there messaging random women on Twitter about a toe fetish or something equally scintillating that would have every paper clamoring to get the first inside scoop.”

Alex and Kara both cringed. “I’ll, uh, look into it,” Alex volunteered. “We could always go live with Rudy Jones’ meeting with those ecoterrorists.”

Cat shook her head. “I want something bigger from someone already in the system, not some unqualified outsider throwing his hat in the ring.”

“Or something totally unrelated to politics,” Kara offered.

Catching sight of the time, Cat took a deep breath. “Showtime.”

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“Lexapro, cheeseburger, and a drink. Now,” Cat hissed, trying to keep her gait even and measured as she strode through the door to her office, keeping her back turned to the small crowd filed out of the conference room and heading to the door.

“Yeah, I’ll, uh, be right back,” Kara said, ignoring Cat’s protests that her job was no longer fetching food and pills for her. Shuffling into the back stairwell down to the unused basement, Kara took off her glasses and watched through the walls as the donors drifted outside and toward the parked cars. She was ready to give up, convinced that they weren’t going to say anything useful, when she caught sight of Dirk Armstrong holding back two or three of the others. Refusing to feel guilty for using her powers for good, she listened as he spoke.

“We’ve opened the floodgates. Just one more day for the emails to go live, then the press will do the rest, and I have a guy ready to swoop in and save this race. By the end of next week she’ll be out.”

“And you’re sure about him?” asked one of the others—Kara couldn’t place the name; he hadn’t been a donor back in California.

“Positive.”

“Oh Rao,” Kara muttered, flinging herself back up the stairs three at a time and racing into Cat’s office, where she was filling Alex in on the meeting. “Cat!”
“Hold on,” Alex ordered, waiting for Cat to continue.

“No! This is important.”

“And this isn’t?” Alex glared at her sister.

“Alec,” Kara huffed. “I followed some of the donors out. After a few of the things they said, I was suspicious.” She didn’t add that there were a few racing heartbeats that didn’t make sense for the situation unless they were hiding something. “The leak—it’s Dirk Armstrong.”

“That lying prick,” Cat cursed.

“Jesus Christ, Cat,” Alex growled, turning on the other woman. “That Armstrong have any relation to your recently fired campaign manager, Greg Armstrong?”

“He’s Greg’s uncle.”

After slamming the door shut, Alex rounded on Cat. “I’m out here trying to make it clear that you don’t indulge in dirty politics like trading positions for donations, and you didn’t want to tell me that you already had?”

Standing up, planting both hands on her desk, and leaning in to mirror Alex’s positioning, Cat snapped, “I did no such thing. Dirk’s a longtime donor and an old CatCo board member who has tried time and time again to bribe me into switching my policies to better help his business, and you know what I’ve said each and every time? No!”

“So then how much money did he offer for you to change your mind just this once?”

“I told him that Greg could submit a resume, just like every other candidate. And he did. And it was good, dammit. He worked his way up, and his references all checked out.”

“Now, if I go look for past campaign contributions, will I find some generous donations to all of those past bosses?” Alex asked, pulling herself back a bit.

“I assume so,” Cat relented, sighing and rubbing at her temples. “I knew some of the people he’d worked for—I didn’t think they’d lie to me.”

“Aren’t you giving him a recommendation to keep him content?” Alex shot back.

“Not anymore! Besides, everyone knows that when you’re recommending someone to a job three steps down from where they were, it’s not exactly a good sign.”

“She has a point,” Kara interjected.

Alex nodded slowly, working through it in her head. “Kara, go talk to Lucy and Winn. Try to trace the hack to Greg’s work computer or phone. Get Lucy prepared for any legal action.” Once Kara left, she turned back to Cat. “Does Dirk have anything on you?”

“Besides all of my personal emails, apparently?”

“You told me they don’t have much in them.”

“Nothing different than you’d find in the inbox of any politician,” Cat hedged. “But no, Dirk shouldn’t have anything on me.”

“So if it’s as I suspect, and he was the brains behind the attack, not Greg, I can go after him?”
“I pay you not to know what you do,” Cat answered. After a moment she added: “But yes, you can.”

“Good.”

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Just a short few hours later, Alex forced herself away from her computer and her growing stack of evidence against Dirk to meet Maggie and Kara in Cat’s office for interview prep. On her way, she ran into Lucy.

“Alex,” Lucy hissed.

“What? I need to meet with Cat.”

“Winn found something.”

That caught Alex’s attention enough for her to follow Lucy back to her office. “Trace the leaks?”

“No, but he found some spyware installed on the campaign laptop Greg had to leave behind after we fired him.”

“Shit,” Alex swore, resolving to have Winn do random checks on computers after they traveled anywhere. “But it’s illegal to do that, right? So we can stop it.”

“We have no way of tracing it to Dirk, and the news outlets don’t necessarily know that it was obtained illegally, so it’ll be hard to keep them from publishing what they have.”

“Do you think Greg knew?”

Lucy shrugged. “Maybe after he got fired? Once he was angry enough for it to seem like a good idea.”

Alex drummed her fingers as she thought. “So you’re saying you won’t be able to stop this through legal means?”

“We’re trying. If and when we get something to pin this on Dirk we can go after him for sure.”

“Okay.” With a definitive nod of her head, Alex turned on her heels and strode out the door.

“Alex,” Lucy called out, a warning tone in her voice. “What are you going to do?”

“My job, Luce—same as you.”

Lucy groaned and dropped her head to her desk.

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“Nice of you to make it,” Cat snapped without looking up from her phone when Alex walked in.

“Sorry, Lucy was filling me in on the updates.”

Looking between the two women, Kara decided to proceed with the meeting as though there had been no interruption. “Right, so I was just telling Maggie that Lois agreed to the interview, but only if we do it tomorrow.”

“So soon?” Maggie asked. She thought it would have been a struggle to get the woman to say yes at
“Oh she’ll want to make sure it’s still front page news,” Cat sighed. “But I won’t come to her stuffy little office.”

“James already got her to agree to do the interview here. I think…” Kara hesitated, trying to find the right words. “She’ll be hard on you, but she should be fair.”

“Well she better be. We still get the say on final approval, right?”

“Of course.” Kara turned to Maggie. “Cat’s already set with talking points about her platform.”

“Obviously,” Cat huffed. “I wrote most of it.”

Kara spun on her heel and glared at Cat until she relented, gesturing for Kara to continue with a flick of her wrist.

“Anyway, James went over most of the issues with us already, but we’ve never been on the defensive when it comes to gender issues. We don’t—we need to strike a balance between addressing criticism without letting it dictate the whole conversation.”

“Makes sense.”

“Since you’ve been looking at all the responses, we figured you’d be the best person to help Cat focus on what’s hitting home with people and what she might not need to worry about responding to.”

“Right, yeah.” Maggie attempted a smile as she looked over at Cat. This was her first real chance at impressing the woman since her Skype interview, and she was determined to do well. The fact that both Alex and Kara had settled in and were apparently going to observe her did little to quell her anxiety. Taking a deep breath, she pulled out her notes. “People are most concerned about the idea that you don’t support other women, especially your staff.”

“Won’t that be addressed with that little roundtable you pulled together?” Cat looked up at Maggie over her glasses.

“It will…but one story doesn’t fix this much damage. You need to hit home on these points again and again. Remind voters of what your voting record is. Talk about your generous parental leave policy at CatCo and the ways you worked to ensure gender parity in staff salaries.”

Cat nodded and jotted down a few notes. “And?”

“Drill down on some of the positions they attacked you for—your support of women’s bodily autonomy, things like that. The ones who care about your interview won’t be upset, but they probably won’t have seen the right-wing coverage criticizing you for it. This is your chance to spin it and go on the attack a bit too.”

“Try to stick to phrases like bodily autonomy, health care, birth control, right to choose,” Alex interjected. “Abortion as a word somehow manages to put off even people who support the right to it as an option.”

“Ah yes, how could I forget about the squeamishness of the centrists. It’s why we talked about ‘LGBTQ rights’ and ‘community relations.’”

“And, uh, not on those issues, but when it comes to the name-calling or the wrong-name-calling, it all.
wouldn’t be a bad idea to apologize and talk about how you’ve learned and evolved in your position,” Maggie continued.

“Don’t apologize,” Alex insisted.

“I wasn’t planning on it.”

“But evolving on certain issues can play well in the public eye—shows you’re not trying to hide things and can learn and grow as a person and a candidate.”

“I thought we could role play a few sample interview questions,” Kara added, feeling her cheeks color slightly at the uptick in Cat’s heartbeat. “I mean, you know, I’ll ask questions as Lois, and Cat can practice the language for her responses. That way you two can offer any suggestions.”

“Fine,” Cat shrugged, settling in and pushing away her notes as she turned to face Kara. “Fire away.”
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Dirk and Lois make their appearances, and we start getting a bit more Kara as she settles into her new job and supercat right alongside it (of course with a side of brunch and a somewhat-less-oblivious baby gay Alex)

“Monday, 11am, the slot’s all booked for you, alright?” Dirk said, settling into the driver’s seat of his SUV. After a pause, he nodded his head emphatically. “I told you, it’s better to spread it out. The emails will leak tomorrow.” … “Fine, I’ll talk to you then.”

“Here’s the thing, Dirk,” Alex drawled, looking at him through the rearview mirror, “if you’re going to do something illegal, you probably shouldn’t talk about it in public.”

“This is illegal! You’re breaking and entering!” Dirk yelled, scrambling for the door, only to find the lock jammed shut. As he turned and reached for the glove compartment, Alex simply laughed.

“You should know it’s illegal to travel with a loaded gun in DC. Thank god I was here to take it apart for you. Otherwise you might have gotten yourself into some real trouble.”

“I—uh—yeah…”

Straight to business, Alex ignored his spluttering. “I now have you on tape talking about leaking the emails.”

“You have nothing in the way of proof about which emails or who’s actually responsible for getting them,” Dirk shot back, once more finding his footing and the kind of fake courage born of enough money and privilege to avoid most consequences.

“No,” Alex conceded. “But I also did some digging…” He looked back at her. “I do wonder what your shareholders would think if they found out that you’ve been embezzling funds from your own company… Maybe they’d be more interested in learning that you were the owner of Metro Ink—you remember that little promising paper you pitched to the CatCo board a few years back, right? Didn’t end up helping CatCo, but you got yourself a new house in the Hamptons.”

“No one could have known that the paper wouldn’t help CatCo!”

“But they should have known that you owned a large share of it.” Dirk was silent, his arms crossed and his lip curled up in anger. “You know what I think the public would be most interested in, though? Your nephew Greg’s affair. And damn, cheating on a pregnant wife… that’s a new low. People just love a good, juicy scandal—but you already knew that, didn’t you?”

“Don’t drag him into this.”

Alex scoffed at the belated attempt at being valiant. “You already did, and you know it.”

“What do you want? Money?”

“You’re not going to leak those emails. You’re not going to come forward with anything more about
Cat or her campaign or anyone tied to it. You’re going to fade away into your pitiful little life and not bother us again. Got it?”

“Or what?”

Taking a deep breath, Alex leveled him with a glare. “I found all of that and more in three hours. Come for us again, and every resource the DEO has to offer will be directed at finding out every single thing you and Greg have ever done wrong. Whatever the media doesn’t pick up, I will personally deliver to the authorities with a pretty silver bow on top.”

“Cat better stop counting on my campaign contributions,” Dirk spat at Alex.

“Oh, she wouldn’t want money from someone like you anyway.” With a wink, Alex slid across the backseat, using a gloved hand to open the door.

“Where’s my gun? It’s my property!”

“I assume you’re exactly the kind of lowlife scum who would shoot me in the back the second I gave it to you. So I think I’ll just hold onto this. Consider it an insurance policy.”

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“It’s handled.” Cat reread Alex’s message for a second, then a third time, confirming that it was really over, there would be no more leaks, no mass release of her emails. She felt herself exhale fully for what might have been the first time since the whole scandal began the day before.

“You okay?” Kara’s voice broke through her haze of tempered relaxation.

“Yes,” Cat breathed out. “Better than okay.”

“What happened?”

“The emails won’t leak tomorrow. No more news. Now it’s just dealing with what we have.” Sure, before any of this happened, dealing with what they had now would have seemed a burden too heavy, but now it felt so very manageable.

“Cat, that’s amazing! How—”

“We don’t ask.”

“Alex?”

“We don’t ask.”

“Right.” Kara fell silent and found the floor was suddenly particularly interesting.

“Kara,” Cat’s voice was soft, but there was also a note of warning in it that Kara couldn’t ignore.

“No, I know. What’s important is that you’re all set for your interview tomorrow.”

“I think we did enough practice questions to last a lifetime.” Even though her patience had worn thin around the one-hour mark, she had to admit that Maggie had done her research. It might have been overkill, but at least she was prepared.

“It’ll be good for our trip too.”
“Speaking of, it’s not even your first week, and you’re already staying at the office until”—Cat glanced down at her phone—“ten at night. Go home. Go enjoy whatever life you might still have.”

“You hired me as your campaign manager. That means I eat, breathe, and sleep this campaign—I knew that going into it.”

“You haven’t even officially started yet,” Cat countered.

“I’m not going to abandon you, Cat,” Kara shot back—the unspoken, “like you did to me,” hanging heavily in the air.

“Well, I suppose I should head out for the night.”

Kara cleared her throat and stood quickly. “Alex said you’re spending one more night at her house?”

“Apparently Vasquez has deemed it unsafe for me to deal with the handful of vultures still lurking outside my home.”

“What’d you think of Alex’s house?” Kara asked, figuring it was better to change the topic than to let Cat get riled up about a decision that was probably for the best.

“Decidedly uninteresting.” She looked up, her eyes glinting with mischief. “Unless you want to tell me where the hidden rooms are?”

“She’d kill me.”

“That means she has them.”

Laughing and shaking her head, Kara held the door open for Cat. “Come on, let’s get you back to her place so you have plenty of time to investigate before bed.”

“You laugh, but I was an excellent reporter.”

“You think I haven’t read your columns? Please, you won awards for them. Of course I had to see for myself.”

Ignoring the flutter of excitement at the idea that Kara had cared enough to look up her best articles, Cat strode through the doorway and out into the hallway. “Do I have to leave through Alex’s little dungeon again?”

“One last time. Vasquez is already here for you, though.”

“Fine,” Cat sighed, traipsing down the creaky stairs and through the basement once more.

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The next morning, Kara was waiting for Cat in her office when she arrived.

“Isn’t some chipper for being in the office early on a Sunday morning?”

“Some of us didn’t go hunting around Alex’s house all night…”

Cat’s cheeks turned a very light shade of pink. “I was simply looking to see if she was home yet.”

“Behind padlocked closet doors?”
As a matter of fact, yes, I think that’s exactly where I’d find her,” Cat drawled.

“What?”

“Oh god, you’re both useless,” Cat huffed, sinking into her chair and turning on her computer. “Now tell me, is that first room with all weapons just for show? Is it to keep people from going any further?”

“Why? Were you too scared to investigate more?” Kara teased.

“No,” Cat shot back, looking beyond indignant. “Alex simply arrived back home.”

Kara tried unsuccessfully to hide a soft laugh behind her hand. “Right… How are you feeling about the interview?”

“About as excited as I was for my last root canal.”

“Well, I sort of figured you might need something in the way of encouragement…” Kara trailed off, pulling something from her bag. “Here, I know we’re on image patrol for a while, but I thought you could use a boost of the old Cat Grant confidence before the interview starts.”

“Did you just call me old?” Cat asked, though she couldn’t quite hide the way her gaze softened at Kara’s holding out one of her favorite necklaces—a gold statement piece that went particularly well with the black suit she chose for the day.

“Not a chance. I’d like to live, thank you very much,” Kara teased, moving behind Cat and quickly doing the clasp of the necklace. She pretended not to notice the hitch in Cat’s breath or the way Cat went rigid at the feeling of Kara’s fingers against her neck. “Now that’s the Cat Grant who took California by storm.”

Swallowing harshly, Cat nodded stiffly. “Right.” A moment later she added, her voice significantly softer, “Thank you.”

“Of course.”

As if she’d planned to interrupt the perfect moment, Lois took her cue to stride through the door of Cat’s office, a smirk curling up the corners of her mouth as she found the woman seated at her throne. “Kitty.”

“Lesser Lane,” Cat shot back, arching a perfectly sculpted eyebrow and gesturing for Kara to leave the office.

Once Kara left, Lois settled in at the seat across from Cat, pulling a recorder and a notebook out from her purse. “I see the world finally got to know what you really think of me.”

“Mm, shall I sic the older Danvers on you and let her find everything you’ve ever said about me?”

“What? Think Kara couldn’t manage it?”

“Of course she could. The problem is that she wouldn’t.”

“They are quite the pair, aren’t they?”

“Only the best women working on my team.”

“Casually weaving in the gender issue. Well done,” Lois conceded, gracing Cat with a small smile.
“Would you expect anything less?”

“From you? Not a chance in hell.”

“As far as verbal sparring partners went you were always…adequate.”

Lois tipped her head back slightly and let out a loud laugh. “Want that to be my headline? Cat Grant on Female Staff: They’re Always Adequate.”

“Oh hush, you know I’m better than anyone else running.”

“Certainly better than Daddy Dearest.”

“Oh god, of course I’m better than any of the Republicans,” Cat scoffed, feeling grateful that she would only have to deal with one of the motley crew of contenders—likely General Lane, though Miranda Crane had been slowly climbing in the polls too.

“Well what about those Republicans?” The shift in Lois’ demeanor was stark as the teasing disappeared, replaced with serious looks and her best journalistic tone. “Do you still think that you’re the best person to face them in a general election when you come bearing the weight of this much baggage this early in the game?”

“I think no one would have come after me this early if I weren’t already the best candidate to beat a Republican challenger,” Cat answered smoothly, arching an eyebrow in challenge. “Obviously being hit with such a low attack this early in the race is not ideal, but I like to think of it as an opportunity—an opportunity to address critiques and to persevere in running a clean, issues-driven campaign even in the face of all this negativity.”

“Does this mean you have nothing to say about the other hopeful nominees?”

“Oh, I don’t think I’ve ever been without something to say,” Cat chuckled, “but our records speak for themselves. Just look at the policies I put in place at CatCo or the legislation passed under my leadership in California; you’ll see that out of everyone in this race, I have done the most to advance the rights of women, minorities, and everyday Americans.”

“How do you balance what your record says against those quotes, the stories that were released?”

“If you’ve been following the news, you will have seen our responses. So much of what was leaked to the press is demonstrably untrue, and even more of it is ripped from context. Of course, there are moments in the past when I could have done better—and I like to think that I have grown as a person and a candidate since then. Think of the things we’ve said about one another over the years.” Lois’ mouth twisted into something that almost looked like a smile. Leave it to Cat to remind her on the record that she’d said just as much in return. “We started out together at The Daily Planet, thrown into the pit with men who didn’t think we should be there and spoke crudely in some vain attempt at scaring us off. But we don’t scary easy—no, we women have learned to fight for our places in newsrooms and boardrooms, in the streets and even in the White House. But sometimes that’s meant picking up those same bad habits to show we could take it,” Cat conceded.

“So how would your White House be any different?”

“It’s been a long time since I left that first newsroom. I’ve learned that there are better ways to act and to treat my staff. I’ve found that a workplace founded on mutual respect and, yes, high expectations,” Cat added with a small smile, “is one that encourages my team to do its best work. I’d bring that kind of attitude to Washington. I’d build on the progress President Marsdin has made in encouraging cooperation over competition. And I’d surround myself with people from a variety of
backgrounds to stay informed about the concerns of all citizens, not just those of the privileged few who have historically held the ear of those in charge.”

Outside of the office, Kara beamed as she listened to Cat answer with practiced ease, staying positive and bringing her answers back to what she would do and all that she already had done—just like they’d practiced with Maggie the day before.

“What has you all smiley?” Lucy asked, pausing at Kara’s office, which she’d already started decorating, figuring she wouldn’t have much time before she left with Cat for Iowa the next morning. “That’s an ‘I spent last night getting laid’-level smile, if I’ve ever seen one.”

“Stop,” Kara hissed, her cheeks coloring slightly. “I did no such thing! I was here last night helping Cat prep for the interview.”

“Then what’s with the megawatt smile? Because it’s a Sunday, and we’re in the office, so it has to be something.”

“I’m just proud of Cat, that’s all.”

Lucy narrowed her eyes, filing that detail away for later. “Weirdo. Anyway, we’re doing brunch after Cat’s done with this interview. Wanna come with?”

Stuck between the lure of delicious breakfast foods and the desire to be there for Cat if she needed help getting ready for the trip, Kara finally answered, “Let me see how the interview goes. I might need to stick around here or help Cat get home if the reporters are still camped out at her place.”

“Damn, I need to find myself a woman as devoted to me as you are to Cat,” Lucy laughed, stopping only when she realized that Kara had turned a deep shade of red. “Oh my god, do you have a crush on Cat?” Lucy hissed, shutting the door to Kara’s office and throwing herself into a chair. “I mean, she’s hot—I’ll give you that. And now that it’s confirmed that she likes women too, it makes her that much more appealing.”

“Stop!”

“Aww, little Danvers is in lo-ove,” Lucy crowed in a sing-song tone, only to be silenced by a death glare. “C’mon, you know I’m only teasing. Pretty cool that she’s bi, though, huh? Did you suspect it?”

Kara flashed back to Cat’s breathy sighs, the way she had possessively looped her arms around Kara’s neck and pulled her in closer, how she had let herself be picked up and pushed up against a wall, tipping her head back and baring her neck to Kara’s heated kisses, until a crash from down the hallway had startled them apart. “I, uh, I don’t know, maybe.”

“Hmm… I always thought she could be. Though there’s always the wishful thinking thing too—really throws off my gaydar. Is she gay, or do I just desperately want her to be gay?” Lucy mused, shaking her head at herself. Forcing a laugh, Kara nodded along with Lucy. “Anyway, let me know when you figure out if the Queen will let you eat pancakes with us.”

“Yeah, yeah. I will.”

“I promise it’ll be fun. Plus, I need some more bodies there in case Alex and Maggie decide to go at it again.”

“Oh god, did something more happen?”
“No…or at least, not that I know of.”

“So then no,” Kara teased.

“If anyone could hide something from me, it might just be your sister.”

“I’m telling her you said that. It’ll make her happy.”

“I need her even happier if we’re going to survive this campaign. Set her up on a date or something instead—get some of that pent-up energy out.”

“Ew, Luce! She’s my sister!”

“Well take comfort in the fact that she clearly hasn’t gotten laid in ages if her temper’s anything to go by,” Lucy snorted, laughing at Kara’s spluttering.

Once Lucy left and Kara cleansed her head of any images she decidedly did not want to remember, she tuned back in to the interview next door, listening as Cat artfully redirected a pointed critique to a discussion of her policies. She sent an emoji-filled text to Maggie thanking her for all of her hard work the night before. When she heard the interview wrapping up, she sent James a reminder to have his camera ready for the shot of Cat and Lois looking as friendly as they could manage to be printed alongside the interview.

Once the pictures had been taken and Lois walked down to her car, Kara hurried back in to see Cat.

“How’d it go?”

“It was me. Of course it went well.” But she couldn’t quite hide the small smile at the knowledge of just how well it went.

“I’m still glad to hear it.”

“As am I. Now it’s on to the next stage.”

“Do you need any help getting ready for the trip?”

“Since we’ve added a few days and new stops, I want to go over details about what to say to each group, how to maximize the positive publicity without seeming as though that’s the only reason I’m there.”

“The State Fair will be a big one for publicity even without us, so that should make it easier. And when we go out to some of the farms and factories, I’ll make sure James keeps it to just one or two cameramen and photographers.”

“Good,” Cat mused, drumming her nails against her desk.

“Do you want me to stick around and help you plan out stops for those extra days?”

Cat looked up suddenly, as though just realizing Kara was still in the room. “Surely you have a life—better places to be on weekends than with your boss.”

Kara just shrugged. “I don’t know how many times you’ll need me to say it, but I’m committed to this, Cat. You’re trusting me to run your campaign, and that means I’m going to make sure it’s the best it can be.”

“Well, at least let me order us some food, then. It’s the least I can do.”
“Okay!”

Cat bit back a smile; apparently Kara hadn’t lost her enthusiasm for food over the years. “You go order. Use my card to pay.”

“You sure you want to subsidize my eating habits?”

“Kara, the whole world now knows exactly how much I spend on shoes. I think we both know I can afford brunch.”

“Right.” Kara accepted the offered card and walked out into the hallway to call in an order, making sure to include a few “healthy” dishes that Cat would insist on, even if she’d steal a bite or two of the more sugary and fatty items Kara would pile high on her plate. Once she’d gotten their order in, she walked over to Lucy’s office.

“You free for the day?” Lucy asked.

“Actually I’m gonna be stuck here for a little bit helping to get ready for our trip.”

“Boo, you whore.”

“Don’t Mean Girls me!” Kara shot Lucy a look of mock indignation that couldn’t last as she broke out into a grin. “I expect text updates if Alex doesn’t stay in line.”

“Gonna tattle on her to Eliza?”

“I am the campaign manager.” Kara puffed out her chest slightly. “It’s now my job to make sure the team runs smoothly, and if that means keeping my sister in line, so be it.”

“I can’t wait to tell Alex you think you’re in charge of her,” Lucy cackled. “Have fun strategizing with your crush!” Her voice was low, but Kara still let out a squeak of protest. Lucy grabbed her coat and darted out of her office before Kara could say any more.

Determined to have a sit-down chat with Lucy about what could and could not be said around the office, Kara headed back to her desk to respond to emails until the food arrived. When it did, she nearly sprinted down to the door and left a generous tip for the speedy delivery.

Popping her head into the doorway of Cat’s office, Kara held the bag aloft. “Food’s here!”

“Perhaps we move our meeting down to the smaller conference room? Wouldn’t want another catastrophe…”

“It was one time,” Kara grumbled, dutifully toting the bag of takeout down to the conference room anyway. “Seven years ago!”

“It took almost as long to get the syrup smell out of my carpet,” Cat shot back.

“Okay, but at least maple syrup smells amazing.”

“No, Chanel No. 5 smells amazing. Syrup smells like the floor of a Denny’s.”

“Have you ever even been inside of a Denny’s?”

“Depends. Does it make me sound more like a relatable, everyday American if I say yes?”

Kara laughed loudly as she popped open the various containers and boxes. “I don’t think anyone
would believe you went voluntarily. Or sober.”

“Does anyone go to a Denny’s sober? Or voluntarily, for that matter?”

“Wouldn’t know,” Kara shrugged. “I’ve always been a bigger fan of the all-you-can-eat pancake special at IHOP.”

“Well there’s that down-home charm I hired you for,” Cat teased, feeling almost human for the first time since Friday.

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Within the hour, Lucy, Vasquez, Alex, and Maggie were settled in at a booth at The Diner, four mugs of steaming hot coffee settled in between menus on the table. Lucy had crammed in next to Alex, though Vasquez moved too slowly to get in the booth first, leaving Alex and Maggie facing one another. Figuring she had done enough to prevent carnage and deserved a relaxing meal, Lucy ordered a bloody mary with her eggs benedict and sat back while the rest of the table ordered.

“I need to start biking or something if I’m gonna keep eating like this,” Maggie groaned, looking around the restaurant at plates piled high with delicious food.

“Oh please, you got the tofu scramble. It’s like you went looking for the healthiest item here,” Alex scoffed.

“You got an omelet,” Maggie shot back.

“Duh, I’m not trying to throw up on my run later.”

“Where do you run?” Maggie asked, looking genuinely curious.

“The better question is: where doesn’t she run?” Vasquez chimed in between sips of coffee.

“Normally in Rock Creek Park,” Alex answered.

“Ah yes, she likes to go show the Cross Fit boys how it’s done.” Maggie tilted her head until Lucy elaborated: “They meet up at that old-school gym equipment down by my apartment and go all macho bro mode. One time one of them made the mistake of trying to tell Alex she was in the wrong form to do a pull-up and would hurt herself.”

Leaning in as if she were divulging a secret, Vasquez whispered, “So obviously she waited until he’d started at one of the other bars, then matched him until he collapsed.”

“And then did ten more for good measure,” Alex added, looking beyond pleased with herself.

“So wait, where is this workout equipment? The gyms down here are so expensive.” Even with the pretty generous salary she was making working for Cat, Maggie didn’t want to spend her savings on exorbitant gym costs when her rent was already startlingly high compared to what she’d paid out in Chicago and Nebraska.

“Just follow Alex on a run—she’ll lead you right to it,” Lucy teased.

To Maggie’s surprise, Alex just shrugged. “If you want help figuring it out the first time, I can show you.”

“Really?”
“Why not?”

Maggie could think of about a dozen reasons already. Instead she agreed, “Okay. Just tell me when.”

“It should be quiet with Cat and half the office out on travel this week. Tuesday morning work for you?”

“Sure.”

“And ya know, Luce, we’ll be right down the hill from your apartment…”

“So tempting,” Lucy drawled. “And yet, I think I’ll sleep in like a normal person.”

“Sometimes I see James there… It could be a slightly less terrible version of those office bonding activities we’re supposed to do.”

Lucy didn’t add that most mornings she woke up with another staff member in her bed and they did plenty of bonding on their own, thank you very much, though she did smirk at Vasquez from behind her coffee mug. “Hard pass.”

“Alright then, Sawyer, it’s just you and me. Hope you can keep up.”

Holding Alex’s gaze, Maggie arched an eyebrow. “It’s on.”

Pulling out her phone under the table, Lucy texted Vasquez: “Dude. If I didn’t know any better, I’d swear this was flirting.”

A few seconds later, Vasquez coughed and choked on a mouthful of coffee. “Sorry,” she muttered. “Just gonna…run to the bathroom.”

After a moment, Lucy followed close behind. “I’m gonna go make sure she didn’t die.”

“So…” Alex trailed off, looking significantly more awkward than she had a few minutes ago.

“Think they’re hooking up?”

“What?”

“Or is that just a drunk thing?”

“What?” Alex repeated, blinking slowly.

“Oh shit, do people not know? Fuck, okay, act like I didn’t say anything! Maybe it was a one-time thing.”

“What? Lucy…and Vasquez?”

“Sorry, god, I don’t want to be the one spreading gossip this early. I’m sure it was just that once.”

Alex nodded slowly, trying to figure out how many things she’d apparently missed over the years. Ever since Cat had suggested she might be gay—not that she was, of course—Alex felt like suddenly everything around her was designed to bring it up. There was the fact that she apparently worked in the gayest office ever, but then smaller things started appearing too: the line of rainbow flags strung up outside of restaurants and bars all around Dupont and Logan Circle; the background character in one of her favorite shows had come out last week; some Facebook event for National Coming Out Day this week kept popping up on her timeline.
“Are you okay?” Maggie asked, growing increasingly concerned at the way Alex seemed to have completely checked out of the conversation.

“Oh, yeah, fine!” Her voice was higher pitched than she would have liked, but at least Maggie looked less concerned. “Sorry, I just— took me by surprise about Lucy.”

“What about me?” Lucy asked, throwing herself dramatically back into the booth and looking up at Alex.

“Oh, nah. They can always call if they run into legal trouble. Sadly it’s just Vasquez we’re losing for this one.”

The words seemed to have all sorts of new connotations, and Alex forced herself to nod and smile. “I’m sure Kara will have plenty of fun games for you to play on the ride.”

Their food arrived then, giving Alex a bit of time not to worry about saying the right thing as she shoved eggs into her mouth and tried to ignore the vague sense of anxiety that had been nagging at her since Friday.
“You okay?” Kara whispered, catching sight of Cat’s clenched jaw.

“Just dandy,” Cat muttered. “The man-child one row up and to the left doesn’t even have the common courtesy to try to hide the fact that he’s taking my photo, and I’ll be stuck with him on this godforsaken airplane for the next few hours while we fly out to bumblefuck nowhere.”

Even though Cat had kept her voice quiet, Kara leaned in to reply; they were in no need of a second scandal. “Switch seats with me. I’ll block his view.”

“What?”

“You can have the window.”

“But you said looking out at the view from up here was your favorite part of flying.”

Blushing, Kara remembered having to clarify that she meant on a plane, though Cat had seemed even more confused at the clarification. “There’ll be plenty of flights in our future.”

Eventually Cat conceded and moved in a seat, smiling gleefully at the look of disappointment that flashed across the would-be paparazzo’s face when Kara leaned forward and blocked his shot.

“Plus, we’re stopping in Chicago first, so you can ease into the Midwest,” Kara teased.

“Ah yes, with that travesty they call pizza.”

Kara snorted loudly. “Sorry, didn’t know you’d be so passionate about the matter. If I remember correctly, I thought you said something about pizza not being healthy enough to qualify as food.”

“If I’m going to indulge, it may as well be good,” Cat huffed. “I might have made California my home, but I started out in the Northeast, which means I know the difference.”

“How’s this for a trade? You smile big for the reporters and eat the deep dish pizza, and I promise to take you for amazing food at Alex’s favorite food truck.”

“You want me to eat food cooked and served from the back of a truck?” Cat looked downright incredulous.

“C’mon, you’ll look like one of the people.”

“I hate this.”

“Don’t let them hear you,” Kara whispered, her tone lilting and far too cheery.

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Back at campaign headquarters, Alex basked in the relative calm after the storm of activity that weekend and the rush that always came with last minute changes—in this case, keeping James back at campaign headquarters to stay on top of the press for the first week before joining Cat and the team when they flew down South. Alex had gotten confirmation from Kara that everyone arrived at the airport on time, then a string of emojis before she had to switch her phone to airplane mode for takeoff. With Vasquez and Winn gone and James tied up with interviewers all day, Lucy had been in and out of her office a few times, so it was no surprise when she came back again with two coffees
“Before you get your coffee…”

“What?” Alex whined. “You don’t get to taunt me with caffeine and then take it away.”

“Kara and I were talking…” Well, really Lucy had been talking at Kara, but it still counted.

“About?”

“You.”

“Rude.”

“How long has it been since you went out on a date?”

“I don’t know,” Alex answered reflexively. In fact, she was fairly certain it had been over two years, save for a fake date or two to gather intel. “It doesn’t matter. I’m busy with work.”

“We’re all busy, Alex. It doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t indulge in a bit of self-care.”

“How is a date self-care? It takes work and energy and time that I don’t have.”

“Well, yes,” Lucy conceded, dropping into one of the chairs now that it seemed like this could be a very long conversation. “But it also has rewards, you know.”

“I’ve yet to experience those rewards,” Alex huffed, reaching for the coffee cup. She’d gone out with guys that seemed nice enough, but somehow by the second or third date, they were just as exhausting as the terrible ones and left her craving the solitude of her own bed in her own apartment without the expectations of someone else weighing down on her at all times.

Lucy held it just out of reach. “Just let me set you up on one date. If you don’t like him, fine. But you need to try.”

“If I say yes, do I get my coffee?”

“Yes.”

“Then yes.”

Lucy handed over the cup. “Don’t forget, I’m a lawyer, so I’ll totally hold you to it.”

“Don’t forget, I’m trained in several forms of martial arts and know how to use dozens of weapons.”

“Is there an end to that threat?”

“I prefer to let your imagination run wild,” Alex shot back with a wicked smirk.

“Yeah, yeah. Just be nice to the man.”

“Wait, you already know who you’re setting me up with?” Alex’s interest was piqued, even if she didn’t really want to go on the date at all. Lucy nodded. “Who?”

“Why? So you can stalk him and find out everything there is to know about him and decide you hate him before you’ve even met?”

“It sounds perfectly logical to me.”
“No.”

“I hate you.”

“I’ll text you details when I have them!” Lucy called over her shoulder, already texting Vasquez and Kara the good news.

Grumbling to herself, Alex flicked on the television in her office, figuring she could catch up on the news as an easy way to pass the time on a relatively slow day. Cat’s responses had been getting decent traction so far, and the social media team had been working nonstop to keep the best articles about Cat front and center. She tuned in just in time to hear someone giving a brief recap of the weekend’s events and was pleased to find that it wasn’t nearly so damning an account as the same newscaster had given just two days earlier.

Kicking her feet up on the desk, she listened as they went through the other candidates, checking off who had visited Iowa and New Hampshire and South Carolina and detailing what they’d done there. Four candidates—two of the Democrats, one of the Republicans, and some third party candidate who’d barely even made the news—had dropped out of the race, even in the midst of the scandal, which boded well for them. General Lane and Senator Crane had spoken together at some anti-immigration rally. Alex scratched a note to herself about a potential Lane-Crane ticket down the line. They’d sound like they emerged straight from the pages of a Doctor Suess book, though a decidedly devious one if they stuck to their platform. Siobhan had gone to an EMILY’S List event. Alex made a note to ask Kara to make sure the organization was still firmly backing Cat; she wasn’t overly concerned, given that they had already made an official endorsement for the Grant campaign, but it was good to keep everything in line.

As the 10 o’clock news rolled into the 11 o’clock news, Alex got up and stretched, intent on wandering around the office to see who else was in, maybe scare some of the interns and new researchers who might have been slacking off in Cat’s absence.

Before she could leave, she caught sight of Max Lord’s face swimming into view and had to repress her instinct to gag. Turning up the volume, Alex listened to a new newscaster introduce him with glowing accolades as though his business had somehow saved an already thriving state.

“Thanks for that, Cindy, though it’s people like you that keep this city accountable.” Alex’s lip curled up in distaste at the smarmy way he smiled at her. “I’m here today under circumstances that I don’t think any of us could have expected: the wake of the scandal surrounding Cat Grant—a woman near and dear to so many of us in California.”

“It certainly took us by surprise!” the woman—Cindy, Alex remembered—interjected. Alex scoffed at the idea that she was surprised; the news outlets had more notice than anyone else.

“I spent this past weekend watching coverage and sorting through everything that was released for myself. I wouldn’t want to rely on secondhand coverage—no matter how great it might be.” Alex found herself grabbing a pen just to have something that wouldn’t cost a fortune to replace to throw at the wall. “As much as I have supported Cat—both as a governor and as a personal friend—I find the things we’re learning about her campaign and her business to be, if I might speak frankly, quite troubling.”

“They did seem to rock the boat—really upset the image she’s cultivated for herself over the years.”

“An image founded in action!” Alex yelled at the screen as though they could hear her.

“And so, it is with a heavy heart and a firm sense of duty toward my country that I am announcing
my candidacy for President of the United States of America.”

“Lucy!” Alex roared, listening as the sound of stiletto heels came clicking down the hallway. When she got into Alex’s office, Alex just gestured at the screen, where a rolling banner now announced Max’s candidacy.

She’d missed whatever Max had said next, but caught Cindy looking slightly curious, if a bit confused. “And you’re running as a Democrat?”

“I know, in what world does a libertarian run as a Democrat?” Max laughed. “Then again, ask anyone and they’ll tell you a California Republican is still more liberal than a Texas Democrat.” Cindy laughed along with him that time. “But in all seriousness, I think the Republican Party has for too long held a monopoly on certain ideas. As anyone can see from the kind of work I do in my labs or the organizations I’ve donated to over the years, I lean left and strive toward progress and change in so many significant ways, even if I think that the government shouldn’t always be the ones driving that change.”

“Well, that sure does come as a surprise. Should we expect to see you out on the campaign trail yourself now?”

“I’ll be out with everyone at the Iowa Democratic Fundraising Dinner this week, and I’m sure you’ll start to see my name popping up in coverage soon enough.”

“What the fuck?” Lucy’s jaw hung open as she watched the news shift over to commercials—specifically to a commercial for Max’s campaign funded by a new super PAC, “Businesses for Progress.”

“Dirk,” Alex growled, putting together the mysterious phone call with a promise for an 11 o’clock timeslot, the ambiguous promise about “having a guy” that Kara had overheard after the donor meeting. “That fucker.”

Before Alex could do anything rash, Lucy put a hand on her arm. “Okay, let’s think this through. Honestly, will he get any of the voters Cat would have gotten?”

“He might,” Alex admitted. “On Wall Street and business issues she ran a bit closer to the centrists, but he might claim those votes, or at least some of their big donors, especially if he runs the kind of dirty campaign I suspect he will.”

“Do you think Cat knows yet?”

“They’re still up in the air for another half hour.” Alex pulled out her phone and sent articles along with a few lengthy messages to Kara so that they’d get the news before some reporter asked about it and put a surprised Cat in the spotlight, leaving her looking uninformed. “God, so much for a quiet week.”

“Look, it’s not another scandal. It sucks, but he’ll be bound by the same kind of rules Cat is, which puts them on an even playing field.”

“Except it doesn’t,” Alex said bitterly. “He’s a white man without the burden of a scandal weighing on him already.”

“Let’s see how he does in Iowa before we panic.”

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Kara yawned and rolled out her shoulders as she waited for her phone to restart while they stood away from the crowds beside the baggage claim carousel. Watching as little red notification numbers popped up, she was shocked to see dozens of texts and emails from campaign headquarters. She skimmed through them quickly, growing increasingly incredulous.

“Um, Cat?”

“Hmm?”

“We have a problem.”

“Did those emails leak?” Cat hissed.

“No! No, not that big of a problem—it’s just a new candidate.”

“Oh,” Cat let out a sigh of relief. “That’s fine. They’ll have already missed the first debate, so they’re coming in at a disadvantage.”

“Um, well, that’s the thing. He’s already well-funded…by Dirk.” She kept Alex’s profanity-riddled messages to herself, though she managed to find the confirmation that he was funding Max’s super PAC among the obscenities.

Cat’s eyes flashed up at Kara, and she swore she saw red. “Excuse me.”

“Max Lord is running for president now. He’s saying he didn’t want to, but he was persuaded to join because you had too much baggage now with the scandal and all.”

After a moment of two of stunned silence, Cat found herself laughing—a small chuckle at first that grew into something larger and almost uncontrollable. “I just…of course he is.”

“Are you okay?”

“Just swell, Kiera. My conniving ex-donor is funding a campaign for my ex-boyfriend to run against me for the role I’ve been preparing for my entire adult life.”

“Your ex-boyfriend?” Kara tamped down on the surge of jealousy she felt coursing through her veins. She tried to convince herself that it was just righteous indignation; Cat could clearly do better than Max. She ignored the small voice yelling that she would have been better for Cat by a landslide.

“We all make mistakes.”

“Well yours is going to be at the fundraising dinner in Des Moines this Thursday.”

“Fabulous.”

“Let’s get out of the airport so we can talk freely, okay?”

“Fine,” Cat huffed.

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After a strategy session in the hotel room with Kara, James, and Alex via Skype, Cat felt slightly better. Kara had spent the ride back reading through Max’s campaign website at a pace that had to have set some kind of world record and had already identified several weak points in the barebones policies he had laid out, while James focused on how they could adjust Cat’s public image to position her as the stronger candidate not only opposite Justin but opposite Max now too, on the off
chance that his campaign took off. And Alex had spent her time digging up as much dirt on Max as she could find, though Cat asked her to hold off on personal life research unless it became necessary. There was no doubt in her mind that Alex was already doing the research, but at least she could keep her hands clean for now.

“Ready to have some of that famous deep dish pizza you love so much?” Kara teased, trying to lighten the mood.

“Can’t wait,” Cat deadpanned.

On the ride down to Gino’s East, Cat listened as Kara and Michael, the head of their Illinois headquarters, hit her with facts about how they’d been polling out there and what topics to talk about (as well as the ones to avoid). Kara held up the phone with James on speaker to contribute as well.

“The scandal hit, but it wasn’t as big of a story here as it was in other places,” Michael informed Cat. “At least in Chicago, you’re still polling ahead of Justin, who’s kept his second-place standing.”

“And Chicago is already a deep blue pocket in a pretty blue state,” Kara chimed in, “so you won’t have to worry too much.”

“I scheduled a photo op at the Chicago Southside NAACP offices,” James reminded Cat, his voice crackling slightly through the speaker.

“Make sure to hit home on your points about education, especially making sure public schools in low-income neighborhoods are receiving adequate funding.” Kara handed over a half-page of bullet points their team had put together with statistics about funding disparities between schools that catered to primarily white neighborhoods and others in communities populated by first- and second-generation immigrants and people of color.

Michael cut in again. “And talk about police oversight—make some of the points you made at the debate even stronger and clearer. Your meetings with Black Lives Matter coordinators went over well, but you can’t let a meeting be the only thing you do.” Cat nodded along. “I know you haven’t really gone on the attack yet outside of the debate, but Justin’s poor record on just about everything related to race is what’s keeping you above him here. It might not play as well outside of the city, but while you’re here, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to hit him on that a little.”

“Now that he’s made some statement about my record on women’s rights when he has absolutely no room to judge, I think it wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world,” Cat admitted.

“Plus, that fundraising dinner is when things start getting a bit more heated anyway.” Kara caught Cat’s expression of surprise, though she hid it quickly. If Cat expected her to be just as naïve as she was years ago about how these things worked, she had another thing coming.

“We’re just about here, ma’am,” Vasquez announced, slowing down the car. “Do you want me to do another lap around the block?”

“No, I’m ready.”

After one last moment of calm, Cat plastered a broad smile on her face just in time for Vasquez to pull open the door.

“Hello, Chicago!” she waved, feeling her smile grow more genuine at the sight of homemade “Grant for President” signs held aloft and local newspaper reporters lining the area outside Gino’s.

She signed a few posters and took a few softball interview questions on her way in, finally making it
into the restaurant and taking a seat alongside a few of the members of the Chicago Board of Education who she’d arranged to meet with for lunch. They all smiled for more photos, then did a second round when their pizza was delivered.

“Is this your first time with deep dish pizza, Miss Grant?” a young reporter asked.

“It is,” Cat admitted. “But it already smells delicious!”

Cat reached out and accepted the offered plate, motioning for her dining companions to go ahead and get some as well. “And you know what? Can we order a second pizza for my campaign staff? They work so hard—they deserve some of this famous Chicago food too!”

“Well played,” Kara muttered, her voice barely a whisper in Cat’s ear.

Fighting back the surge of excitement at exactly how close Kara was, Cat nodded, then turned ever so slightly to her under the guise of asking what toppings they wanted. “Will I be mocked and memed if I eat this with a fork and knife?”

Stifling a giggle, Kara shook her head. “No, you’re fine.”

Once everyone at her table had a slice in front of them, Cat cut into hers and popped a bite into her mouth before giving some quote about how they might make a deep dish fan out of her yet. “I should bring my son here. You know how much food teenage boys eat. Maybe one of these could actually keep him full for more than an hour,” Cat joked, smiling at how well her comments seemed to be going over.

With the pleasantries out of the way, Cat turned back to the Board of Education members, who had brought with them a local principal and teacher who both joked about loving the chance to get away from the school cafeteria for lunch. While they ate, they talked about Cat’s platform, and she hit home hard on equitable funding and equal opportunities for all students. But then she turned the conversation over to them, asking what their experiences had been. “I can read all the articles and reports, but it’s never quite the same as getting to hear from the people who live it every day. So you tell me: what would help you?”

By the time they finished, Cat was fairly certain she could count on their support in the election, and Kara was already smiling at the great publicity they were getting from a photo James had taken of Cat laughing out loud, a half-eaten slice of pizza on the plate in front of her, looking every bit the part of the down-to-earth candidate invested in the needs of local communities.

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Back in DC, Maggie strolled down the hallways, feeling the shift in mood from the weekend with good publicity rolling in. She’d been pleased to see Cat at the NAACP offices dropping in some of the quotes and figures she’d sent to Kara that morning. “Hey, Danvers,” she greeted with a little knock on the door.

Blinking rapidly as her eyes readjusted after looking at screens for hours on end, Alex managed a quick hello back.

“Need help with something?”

“No…just trying to get ahead of the new Lord campaign. Didn’t really expect another challenger this late in the game, especially a well-funded one.”

“Ugh, he’s such an ass.”
“He really is.”

“Oh, hey look! Something we agree on,” Maggie joked, actually earning a smile from Alex.

“Yes, yeah. Is there something you needed?”

“I just wanted to say hey. See if you were still up for a run tomorrow morning. If you’ve got too much going on with Max, though, it’s totally fine. I get it.”

“No, I promise, if anything, this makes me want to run more. I mean, hitting things would be preferable, but running will do.”

“Sparring does tend to help more with that particular impulse,” Maggie conceded.

“You box?”

“A little. Did some wrestling back in high school after I moved.”

“One day I might just take you up on it if that’s an offer.”

“Yeah? Alright, Danvers. We’ll see what you’ve got.”

Alex laughed and shook her head. “Let’s see if you can even keep up on our run first. I’ll meet you at your place at 7—sound good?”

“Uh, sure. I can meet you somewhere if it’s easier.”

“Nah, it’s fine. It’ll be my warm up.”

“Alright, well, I guess I’ll see you then.”

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After a moment’s indecision, Kara knocked lightly on the door to Cat’s hotel room.

“Yes?” Cat answered the door, her dress pants having been replaced by sweatpants, but her blazer and blouse still on.

“That’s a good look,” Kara teased. “Bet it would play well in the media.”

“Ah yes, just the message I want.” Cat rolled her eyes but opened the door further to allow Kara inside.

“I brought tea—thought you might want something warm after a long day out in the Chicago fall weather, which is kind of like DC deep winter…”

“Thank you.” After a pause, she added, “You really don’t need to keep doing these things.”

“Cat, it’s my job to make the campaign go well. And that means keeping you healthy and happy.”

Cat bit back any and all inappropriate comments about things that would make her happy—a long list that started with Dirk’s head on a silver platter and ended with a delightful blonde campaign manager in a less-than-professional situation.

“Ready for the drive to Davenport tomorrow?” Kara asked, curling a leg under herself as she settled down on the less uncomfortable looking of the two hotel chairs.
“Actually, I wanted to see what you thought of going to Iowa City first. It barely adds an hour to the drive.”

“Um, yeah, I guess. You need to be back in Davenport for your meeting with the manufacturing union reps tomorrow night, but I think otherwise things should be moveable. Maybe check with James first?”

Cat pulled out her phone and quickly sent a text to James confirming that things could be moved before turning back to Kara. “I know we’re doing a morning photo op at the Center on Halsted with some of the local LGBTQ groups, but I thought we might drop in for the Iowa City Coming Out Day events too.”

“Are you, uh, coming out? I mean—that’s great! And I certainly wouldn’t say no—not that it would be my choice. But, um, maybe we should check in with Alex and James to figure out how to word things in the wake of…you know, everything.”

“You’re rambling.” Kara stopped talking, quickly shutting her mouth and looking to Cat. “I’m not coming out. I’m a politician recognizing a community I have publicly supported for many years. And it’s all well and good to do so in Chicago, but I thought it might have a bit more of an impact in a state that isn’t quite so blue, even if the town itself is a bit more progressive.”

“Oh,” Kara breathed out. “That sounds like a great idea.”

“I’m aware.”

Kara just rolled her eyes. “Let me get James on this—”

“No need. I think it’ll be better to have it be more of a surprise visit. It’ll seem less staged.”

“I suppose plenty of people will take pictures and post them anyway…”

“And if they don’t, I do employ a full staff of people who I assume can take a few basic photos while we’re there.”

“Right, yeah. So, should we get you some rainbow t-shirt? Glitter? Pride flags?”

“I think my planned suit will be just fine,” Cat replied, although she wasn’t able so suppress the fond smile. “I won’t stop you if you want to dress yourself in all sorts of gaudy, glittery rainbows, though.”

“It’s just a shame I left my Pride outfit back in DC.” Of course, there were more than a few ways she could go get it and be back in plenty of time, but it didn’t seem worth the risk.

“And what might this famous outfit involve?”

“Well, I do have lots of glitter and some rainbow temporary tattoos. Then I got this Wonder Woman crop top and…” Cat’s mind just about shorted out at the image, and she promptly lost track of the other things Kara was saying. Because now all she could picture was Kara Danvers and the abs she was fairly certain were hiding beneath those hideous cardigans and Loft blouses, maybe coated in glitter—an offense she might actually willingly excuse, given the right circumstances.

“Yes, well, I should really be heading to bed.”

“Oh, sorry! Lots to do tomorrow! I’ll see you in the morning.”
Cat quickly shut and locked the door behind Kara before changing the rest of the way into pajamas and groaning into the pillows. Eventually her sleeping pills managed to win out against the tempting images swirling through her imagination and the rush of blood that left her heart racing and her skin feeling heated to the touch.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Alex and Maggie finally go out on that run together, while Cat and Kara take Iowa by storm

Chapter Notes

A/N: For those invested in the details: I’m aware that the Iowa State Fair is in August, while the party dinner isn’t normally until the first week of November (and is on a weekend), but in the interest of not dragging out the fic and starting way back in the summer I decided to play with the timeline a bit. Otherwise things are pretty much happening on their typical schedule.

And for those who have been asking, I'm posting updates every Tuesday and Saturday. I have a week of travel coming up later this month that might delay a chapter or two, but I'll try to say something in advance if I think I won't have a chance to post.

Anyhow hope you enjoy! I've so appreciated all of your comments and really love getting to hear your thoughts!

Tuesday morning found Maggie jogging slow laps around the block to try to warm up before Alex arrived. It wasn’t like she had some compulsive need to impress the woman, but she didn’t want to drag her down, especially when she was already going out of her way to change her routine. Though Maggie wondered if she even had a routine...maybe she was like one of those CIA spies who followed a different route every single day and always left at different times.

At 7 o’clock sharp, Alex jogged up to her. “You ready?”

Ready as I’ll ever be, Maggie thought, catching sight of the skintight black catsuit that Alex apparently wore to run. Suddenly she felt distinctly underdressed in her leggings and an old long-sleeved coming out day shirt she’d gotten her last year in Chicago. “Yeah!”

As they began jogging down the block, Alex asked, “How long do you normally run?”

“Uh, it’s been a little while, but a few miles.”

Alex seemed to consider it, then nodded once, apparently having chosen their route. “Got it.”

They ran in silence for a few blocks, Alex gradually increasing their pace until she found one that she seemed to think would fit. When it became clear that Alex was not a “talk and run” kind of person, Maggie took to observing her instead. She kept pace almost perfectly without recourse to a watch or a phone or anything that would seem to be built to measure those kinds of things. When they got to red lights, a flicker of annoyance would cross Alex’s features, but she never said anything. She also wasn’t like some of the other runners out this early who ran in place or hopped up
and down or started stretching while they waited. No, she stood calmly, every so often lifting up onto the balls of her feet, as she watched for a break in the traffic that would allow them to cross before the light actually changed.

Eventually they ended up jogging down a steep incline and suddenly Maggie was on a path set off from the road and surrounded by something that, at least on one side, actually looked like nature.

“Where are we?”

“Rock Creek Park,” Alex answered, glancing over to see Maggie taking in her surroundings.

“Ever see any dead petty officers?” Maggie joked, her laugh a bit breathless, though she hoped Alex wouldn’t notice.

“Really? An NCIS joke?”

“You recognized it as one,” Maggie shot back.

“It used to play on the televisions at my gym all the time. What’s your excuse?”

Maggie found herself idly wondering what it would take to make Alex breathless. Apparently a fast pace and several miles did absolutely nothing in the way of winding her. Remembering she had to answer the question, Maggie shrugged. “Ziva was hot.”

Alex just rolled her eyes and picked up the pace slightly as her thoughts began to meander into potentially inappropriate territory, like wondering whether Maggie thought she was hot—not that it would matter either way, of course, which is exactly why she shouldn’t dwell on those types of questions.

Finally they made it down to the assortment of workout stations, and Alex guided them over to the side. “There are others that we passed along the way that are good, but on weekday mornings I normally stick to the basics.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Cool, uh, I’ll probably start on one of the pull-up bars here. Do you want to grab the shorter one, or start over at the bench for sit ups, or…?” Alex trailed off, gesturing around them at the variety of stations.

“You calling me short, Danvers?”

“I’m just pointing out facts, Sawyer,” Alex countered.

“Well, I may be short, but I bet I can keep up.”

“Alright, then, let’s go.” There was a teasing smirk on Alex’s face that Maggie found unfairly attractive. It just increased her desire to beat Alex. As they began, she realized she had not accounted for the reality of looking at Alex as she made hoisting her entire body weight up and over a bar again and again look absolutely effortless. She’s straight! Maggie internally yelled at herself again and again as she tried not to notice her body’s reaction to the open display of strength and athleticism.

After 20, Maggie dropped, the muscles in her arm twitching and feeling a bit like they’d been swapped out for jello while the rest of her body had been filled in with lead. Alex did a few more before dropping to the ground herself. “Abs next?”

“Yes, please.” At least crunches and planks were things Maggie had been able to keep up with even
in the midst of moving across the country. She kept pace with Alex this time, and ended up doing a few extra sit-ups after they were done, ignoring the small voice inside her head asking why she felt the need to impress Alex.

When they went back to the bars again for chin-ups, Maggie found herself tapping out even earlier and stepping back to watch Alex work—something she realized several other people were also doing—some of them much less subtly than others. And if she glared at the men whose gazes looked a lot more like leers, she told herself it was just because no woman deserved that sort of shit while she was working out.

Alex counted herself out, figuring she could do at least five more before dropping back down to show Maggie some of the other stations. Five. She happened to glance up and see Maggie looking at her. Maybe it wouldn’t be the worst idea to do ten more. As inspiration, of course. Nine. Now Maggie seemed distracted by someone on the path or at another station. Eight. She wondered if it was a woman she found attractive. Seven. Maybe that woman looked like Ziva. Six. Maggie’s attention was back on her. She made sure her form was perfect. Five. When she began lowering herself, she noticed that Maggie had pulled her shirt up to wipe sweat off of her face. Four. Holy shit those were abs. The shirt was back down now, but the image remained. She ended up faltering and had to drop down off the bar, ignoring all the questions swirling in her mind about why she’d fallen when she’d never before had any problems making it to thirty.

“Damn, that was impressive.”

“No, I fucked up at the end there,” Alex scoffed, rolling out her shoulders.

Maggie tilted her head to the side, a question on her lips and a hypothesis slowly forming in the deep recesses of her thoughts, but she ignored it for now. “Anything else?”

Alex guided her through a few more exercises before leading them up what felt like a never-ending hill that Alex thought was “fun” to take at a sprint as they passed cyclists and other runners.

“What the fuck was that?” Maggie panted as they waited for the light at the top of the hill. She could still feel blood pulsing behind her eardrums, and the metallic tang of it stung at the back of her throat.

“What? Can’t keep up?” Alex teased, though Maggie was pleased to see her chest was rising and falling somewhat rapidly too, her cheeks flushed a light pink.

“Clearly I kept up. I just don’t have quite the same streak of masochism that you apparently do.”

“Sprints are good for you,” Alex offered by way of explanation before nudging Maggie when the light changed. Maggie just groaned as she forced her legs to keep moving along with Alex.

“Where are we going now?”

“I’m taking you back to your place.”

“What are you gonna do?”

“What do you mean?”

Maggie realized that now that they were talking, Alex’s pace had finally slowed some, and she was determined to keep that up for a bit, even though her lungs burned at the extra effort. “Isn’t that taking you further away from your place?”

“Yeah, but it’s fine. Worse come to worse, I’m a little late for work.” She already knew she wouldn’t
be; she’d just run a little faster once she left Maggie.

“Next time just point out where we’ll be, and I’ll learn the route.”

“There gonna be a next time, Sawyer?”

“Oh, uh, sorry. There doesn’t have to be. I didn’t mean to assume!”

“Nah, you’re fine. You kept pace alright,” Alex teased. “Friday mornings James joins in if you want to come with us. I bet we might even be able to get Lucy to join, since we normally grab breakfast afterward.”

“Yeah? That sounds fun.”

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After how well her morning speech and meeting at the Center on Halsted went, Cat couldn’t even find it within herself to make fun of Kara for her choice in music—well, at least not as much as she normally would have—or ask her to turn it down. The fact that she was singing along and apparently knew how to carry a tune did little to motivate Cat to put a stop to it. She finally snapped when Kara deemed a Backstreet Boys song from the 90s an “oldie but still a goodie.”

Vasquez barely bit back a laugh as they sped down long, open stretches of highway to Iowa City. Of course, anything would feel open after years of DC driving in bumper-to-bumper traffic, which somehow still managed to be better than metro rides with her face shoved in the armpit of some tall, sweaty man during rush hour. Kara had snagged a seat in the car with Cat under the excuse of needing to strategize for their new campaign stop, leaving Winn and Jasmine, James’ second-in-command who never seemed to click with Winn in the same way James had, to wrangle the interns and reporters onto the bus.

“So, think you’re gonna say anything at the potluck?” Kara asked through a mouthful of donut that Cat eyed distastefully.

“I’m just there to affirm my support for the community.”

“So supportive,” Kara teased. “Really an A+ ally.”

Ignoring Vasquez’s smirk, Cat leveled Kara with an unflinching glare. “What happened to the campaign manager who stuttered and stammered and barely found words when she thought I was coming out today?”

Kara had the decency to look slightly ashamed. “It’s just…with everything out there, you know? And people are already such assholes.”

“I’m aware. I can see the headlines now: Can’t Choose Between Men and Women. How Can We Expect Her to Choose for the Country?”

“People suck.”

“Strong language,” Cat teased.

“Like you said, a lot can change in six years.”

Ignoring the flutter in her stomach at the way Kara’s words seemed to carry extra weight, Cat turned to Vasquez. “How much longer until we’re there?”
“Still another hour.”

“Know what we could listen to in an hour?” Kara asked, smiling broadly from behind her third donut in what felt like as many minutes.

“If you’re about to name some Disney movie soundtrack, save it.”

“Some of those songs are very good.”

“Silence is also very good.” After a few minutes, though, Cat spoke up again. “Since we’ll be right down the road, I thought we might stop in at the University of Iowa as well. We’ll be back again before the caucuses, but it might make for good publicity. Court young voters and all that.”

“Want me to try to get together with a few of the precinct captains in the area? I know it’s a little early—”

“No such thing as early in Iowa. Not when it comes to volunteers.”

“Well, if you think Jasmine can handle the events today, I could swing by some of the local Iowa for Grant headquarters, maybe buy pizza for the volunteers, get a bit of inspiration going in advance of your future visits.”

“That would be great. You always were good at whipping up enthusiasm.”

Kara beamed and had her phone out to send scheduling emails within seconds.

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Back in DC, Alex was riding high on the endorphins from a good morning run, the hot coffee that Maggie had brought her after lunch, and the ringing endorsements coming in from LGBTQ groups all across the country. She’d been wary when Kara first told her of the plans to stop by multiple Coming Out Day events, given the rumors that were still cropping up in conservative blogs, but it appeared to have generated only positive publicity, at least among the populations who might have ever considered Cat as a candidate in the first place. There were photos and viral tweets and fluff pieces and, by the afternoon, even a few statements out from larger organizations like the HRC that thanked politicians, including Cat, for their unwavering public support. A chain of emails from Kara sent the fundraising team into overdrive as they reached out to groups and individuals with targeted messages, and Jasmine had the social media team out there engaging with local activists and retweeting the best candid moments from Iowa City.

“Hey, you,” Lucy greeted Alex, pleased to find the woman with a smile on her face. “Heard you played nice on your run this morning.”

“I’m always nice.” They both cracked up at that. “What’s up?”

“While you’re in a good mood…”

“Oh god, what are you going to say to ruin it?”

“You have a date on Thursday night.”

“Why?” Alex whined, looking up at Lucy with big brown eyes and a downturned mouth.

Covering her eyes, Lucy shook her head. “Oh no! That’s not working on me this time! You’re going out to dinner with a nice, attractive boy because that was the deal!”
“Make it drinks, and I won’t hate you forever.”

Lucy paused, pretending to consider it. She’d already known better than to schedule a dinner as a first date, of course. “Only if you let me pick your outfit.”

After a moment, Alex relented. “Fine.”

“Excellent! On Friday I want a full briefing.”

“Then you better come running with us.”

“Why? Why must I throw myself outdoors at an ungodly hour when I have a climate-controlled spin studio that I already pay to enjoy?”

“Because otherwise you don’t get the joy of my company.”

“Mm, yes, that sarcastic early morning Danvers charm.”

“Maggie didn’t mind,” Alex shot back, earning a curious look from Lucy, who quickly schooled her features into a more passive expression.

“She joining us on Friday morning?”

Alex nodded and actually smiled. Lucy resolved to dig deeper into what had happened on their morning run. “I should let her know that you’re in. I thought we could do the zoo run, that way she can get to know a little more of the city before we go back down into the park.”

“Uh, yeah… Should we meet at my place?”

“I’m gonna pick Maggie up, so maybe we just meet at the front gates of the zoo?”

“You’re picking her up?”

“She’s new to the city,” Alex explained with a shrug.

“When I was new you left me alone in the metro while they were doing track repairs and told me it would build character.”

Alex snickered, not even bothering to try to hide it. “Well it did, didn’t it?”

“And what? Maggie doesn’t need character?”

Maggie hesitated outside the door, finally sticking her head inside. “I, uh, know it’s probably in poor form to eavesdrop—”

“Nah, it’s a good practice, actually,” Lucy interjected.

“But I heard my name. Everything okay?”

“We were just talking about where we should meet on Friday morning for our run,” Alex answered.

“Oh, nice!” Maggie felt the tension ease out of her shoulders and the tightness in her chest loosened. It wasn’t a repeat of her old office; it would be better here—had to be better here.

“And more importantly, we’ll introduce you to the joys of the tater tot block over breakfast,” Lucy chimed in.
“The what?”

“Fear not, young one! We shall teach you the ways of brunching in DC.” Maggie laughed, and Alex just rolled her eyes. “And together we can interrogate Alex until she finally cracks and tells us all about her date.”

“Oh, you’re dating someone, Danvers?” Maggie ignored the pang of emotions that left her feeling slightly on edge, as though she was just…unsettled in some way.

“Not yet.” Lucy winked at Alex.

“Lucy’s setting me up with someone. The things I’ll do for coffee…”

“You’ll get a free drink out of him too!”

“Better be more than one,” Alex grumbled.

“I should probably get back to work.” Maggie gestured out into the hallway before excusing herself, trying to rid herself of the nagging feeling that something just wasn’t right.

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Kara knocked on Cat’s door, stifling a yawn at the late hour. She’d spent most of the afternoon and evening traveling around the surrounding towns while Cat met with a group of students at the University of Iowa and then again once they drove back to Davenport for Cat’s dinner with the union reps. In all honesty, getting to interact with the people on the ground who were organizing and volunteering at the local level was one of Kara’s favorite parts of the job. But being on for hours at a time while still having to toe the line about what promises she made when Cat wasn’t there got to be exhausting at a certain point, and the car rides around towns every half hour left her missing her bike back in DC and yearning for a breath of fresh air.

“Come in,” Cat motioned, swinging open the door to her hotel room. It was nice enough, but it certainly wasn’t like the room she’d had in Chicago. This one felt homier, perhaps, but not homey in the kinds of ways Cat would ever choose. The fact that she was still dressed—heels and all—felt right; this wasn’t the kind of place where Cat let her guard down, even a little.

“See you kept your pants on this time,” Kara joked, cringing slightly at the implications, though Cat simply shook her head and pursed her lips.

“I just got back a few minutes ago. Plus, this time you’re not dropping by unannounced.”

“Right.” Kara pulled out a small map she had been using to track her visits over the course of the day. “I made it out to quite a few of the local towns and met with as many of the volunteers as I could. Since Iowa City was a surprise, I couldn’t get as many there, but the ones I talked to are still enthusiastic. Even with the past weekend’s news, they still think you have a chance.”

“Good. What about the other candidates? How are their campaign teams doing?”

“Justin is polling strong too. His family has networks that he’s falling back on, and unfortunately those political machines are effective. Out here Rudy Jones isn’t a threat at all. Neither is Siobhan. Stephen Branch is doing okay, but I don’t know that he’d make it past that 15% level at the first round for most of the caucuses. Max has no local connections, and so far public opinion out in the Midwest has been pretty low.”

“But?” There was always a but.
“But if we go too hard at him for being a coastal elite, which is a big part of why he’s not doing too well here, you risk being hurt by it too. There are enough photos of the two of you together that an attack against one of you is an attack against both of you.”

“They really don’t think I’m better than him?” Cat scoffed.

“No, they do! For now. We just want to keep it this way. So we stay positive—keep meeting with unions and locals.” Kara began pacing as she got into it. “Make it clear that you’re different; you’re engaged and invested. Their concerns are your concerns. It’ll make it a lot harder for them to come after you or lump the two of you together.” When she looked up, Cat was smiling at her. “What? Did I say something wrong?”

“No, you’re just…” Cat hesitated, trying to find the right word. “You’re good at this. I clearly made the right choice in bringing you back.”

“Thank—”

Cat cut Kara off before it could turn into something emotional. They didn’t have time for it, and they certainly didn’t need any of the emotions that led to hugs that involved Kara’s strong arms wrapped around her or her senses overwhelmed by that damn fruity body wash that was somehow impossibly alluring on Kara—and only on Kara. “Keep it up. I don’t want to regret my compliments.”

“Yes, Cat,” Kara sighed, a teasing smile playing about her lips. “Now what about you? How was your dinner?”

“Fine. Exhausting. Too many men casually pawing at me.”

“Excuse me?” Kara’s voice was low and dangerous, and it sent a thrill through Cat.

“No worse than half our fundraisers in Hollywood. Just…unpleasant.” Kara tried to tamp down on the surge of anger she felt coursing through her. “Overall it went well.”

Hearing the obvious redirect back to campaign strategy, Kara forced herself to focus. “Think we’ll be able to count on them for support?”

“At least some of them. A few are clearly already committed to Justin. What he gave them, I’ll never know. But the others seemed to be listening to what I had to say. They like my plans for infrastructure—it’ll add jobs for blue collar workers.”

“Very FDR of you,” Kara joked.

“There are worse comparisons to be made…”

“True. Well, let’s keep hitting home on making you relatable. You and Max are both a little more pro-business, but we’ll try to emphasize the fact that you’re still concerned about workers and everyday people in a way that Max is not.”

“If we let him talk long enough, he might just do the work for us.”

“Cheers,” Kara added with a soft laugh. “Ready for tomorrow?”

“What? Think I can’t handle some farms?”

“Oh, I’m very excited to see you on a farm,” Kara teased. “Got some jeans and flannel?”

“ Wouldn’t you like to know.” Quickly backtracking to avoid going down a path that could only lead
to inappropriate thoughts, Cat cleared her throat. “Thursday is the big Democratic fundraising dinner. Then Friday morning is the state fair, right?”

“Right. Friday night we’ll do Omaha, then drive down to Lincoln so we’re there already on Saturday morning. Then we’ll head down to Kansas.”

“Why are we skipping Minnesota? That’s a Super Tuesday state.”

“Right, yeah…but Kansas and Nebraska are that Friday, and we wouldn’t want to overlook them.”

“Won’t it look bad to be so close to Minnesota and ignore it entirely?”

“I can talk to Vasquez and see about doing a long drive back up and flying down to Alabama out of Minneapolis. But it’ll mean skipping Wichita—it’s too far south to try to cram everything in.”

“Let me think about it. I’ll let you know tomorrow.”

“Alright. I’ll run logistics by Vasquez and see if James or Jasmine would be able to get us decent coverage outside of the reporters that are already with us.” Kara stood up to leave, figuring it was late enough that they should both get to bed before their next few jam-packed days.

“Don’t forget your flannel tomorrow,” Cat called after her, grinning at the look of surprise on Kara’s face. “I’m expecting boots and braids—the whole cowgirl aesthetic.”

“Well I’d hate to disappoint…”

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Kara felt like she was on autopilot all of Wednesday. True to her word, Cat did, in fact, manage to handle the farms. She might have complained about smelling like animals and “all the disgusting things they do” each time they got back into the car, but the second she opened the door, she was all smiles and a level of aww-shucks charm that Kara never in a million years expected to see. Of course, it still had its hard edges; her jokes were more sarcastic than down-home, and she always opted for policy talk over idle chatter.

But none of that was what stunned Kara. She knew Cat was a good politician, and even if just how good she was sometimes still came as a surprise, it was nothing new. No, what left her speechless was the moment she knocked on Cat’s door that morning and found her in a blue and white checkered plaid shirt tucked into sinfully tight blue jeans, her hair falling in loose waves around her face, and the whole outfit topped off with brown boots that, if Kara didn’t know they cost more than she made in a month, might have almost left her with the impression that Cat was ready to go do work on that farm. She’d stuttered out something about Cat’s looking exactly the part if Vogue had designed it, praying that Cat didn’t notice that her campaign manager seemed to have lost the ability to speak coherently.

Kara thought she had, at the very least, been playing it cool until she opened an email from Lucy containing a carefully curated assortment of about a dozen of the hundreds of photos that Jasmine had uploaded to their PR folder. Each and every one of them featured Kara in the background looking far too adoringly at Cat, including a few where her gaze was most obviously not directed at her face.

“Delete them!” Kara texted Lucy, only to get a string of the crying-laughing emojis back in response, followed by: “Knew it! You have it so bad!”
Thursday afternoon found Alex trying to insist to Lucy that they couldn’t leave at 5pm, since Cat was in a different time zone where the workday had not yet ended.

“You need to get dressed,” Lucy huffed. It didn’t matter that she already knew exactly what outfit she planned to have Alex wear; it would still take at least a few rounds of not-quite-right outfits to set Alex up to agree to that one.

“It takes, like, five minutes to get ready.”

“Alex!”

“What? I’m already showered and everything.”

“Come on. It’s not like Cat can call us in the middle of her dinner anyway. And you know Kara is all over the prep.”

“But…”

“Nope, we’re leaving.”

At the sight of Alex and Lucy heading out to get Alex ready for her date, Maggie found herself searching online for local gay bars. She tried to convince herself that the timing was purely coincidental. She’d been here long enough that she really ought to go explore on her own.

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“No.”

“You promised, Alex.”

“I promised you could help, Lucy. No blind date deserves a dress like that.” She strode purposefully across her room and hung the black dress back up in her closet.
“Okay, what about the maroon top? With the black jeans that make your ass look amazing? And then the heeled boots?”

“I guess…it’s less bad than the others.” Lucy smirked to herself as Alex instinctively reached for the items.

“I’ll go pick out a nice jacket for you. Don’t want to be late!” She hummed loudly enough to pretend she couldn’t hear Alex’s low grumbling about all the reasons it might be a very good idea to be late—or not to show up at all.

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Kara held up another face card to Cat. A white man in a navy suit smiled at her from the half-page color photo.


“Good.” Kara shuffled the deck and held up another.

“Lucianne. Wife of the current Iowa Governor. Don’t mention that he’s cheating on her. Do mention how much I’ve admired her work on making sure children don’t go hungry at school.”

“Definitely don’t mention the affair.”

“Kara,” Cat huffed. “We’ve been through this deck so many times between all the car rides, I could recite them in my sleep. What matters more is that I am ready on time and relaxed enough to seem likeable during my speech and not look murderous when Justin opens his mouth.”

“Okay, okay. Now which outfit did you decide on for tonight?”

“I thought I would do the burgundy dress—I know, I know, I’ll get hit for being too feminine, but I’d get attacked for wearing pants too. Plus, it really is my color.”

“And you’ll pair it with a blazer or some kind of jacket?”

“Yes, god forbid I show an arm.” As Cat talked, she walked over to her closet and pulled out the dress, stepping into the bathroom to pull it on, all the while continuing to yell back and forth with Kara about what points she should use to jibe subtly at Max, given that he didn’t yet have a firm platform but would be in attendance, surely trying to poach donors and supporters from her ranks.

Eventually Kara heard a low grumbling, followed by the sound of something banging against the door, followed by louder grumbling. “Can you zip this?” Cat snapped, eyeing the dress in the mirror as though it had done her some personal offense.

“Oh, uh, sure.” At that moment, Cat stepped forward from the bathroom looking like a vision, and Kara wondered why she had possibly volunteered to help cover up more of that perfection. With slightly trembling hands, she reached forward and pulled the zipper up slowly, watching as inch after inch of smooth skin disappeared. Unwilling to let go quite so soon, Kara smoothed down a few nonexistent wrinkles, her fingers lingering just long enough that she heard Cat’s breathing grow increasingly shallow, her intakes sharp and her exhales shaky. “There you go!” Kara hoped Cat’s human hearing wouldn’t pick up on the breathless quality to her voice.

“Thank you,” Cat managed, marching straight back into the bathroom, intent on getting her emotions—could she blame it on hormones? She really thought she’d aged out of them—under control. She
wasn’t about to become every stereotypical male politician who couldn’t keep it in his pants long enough to enact policies. With the practiced routine of skincare and makeup, she felt herself falling back into an easy rhythm, her pulse slowing and her mind drifting back to donor profiles and weak spots in the other candidates’ platforms. They were already down to six—Max, Justin, Stephen, Siobhan, Rudy, and herself—and only three of them were speaking at the dinner. By the end of the night, she hoped to have narrowed the race by at least another name or two.

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Alex nodded along as Rafael talked about his years in undergrad at Stanford. Ostensibly they were bonding over their love of the school and the Bay Area, but Alex suspected her vague, noncommittal noises didn’t quite count as bonding. She didn’t get it. By all measurements, he was attractive, with the whole tall, dark, and handsome thing down to an art. The fact that he was a researcher at a well-known think tank suggested that he was smart, and so far the conversation hadn’t shown otherwise. He was even funny, and Alex suspected that if they met somewhere other than this forced date, she might have almost liked him. But instead all she could think about were her failures: her failure to be charming enough back; her failure to feel the burst of excitement Kara described when she talked about her crushes; her failure to get out of her head long enough to focus on the conversation instead of whatever she might have to do at the end of the date.

“Really?” Alex asked during a lull in the conversation, hoping it made sense and vowing to pay closer attention going forward.

“I mean, it’s not like we were that good,” Rafael laughed. “It was more like being a starter for the Bad News Bears.”

“Oh I love that movie,” Alex volunteered, pleased to see Rafael smiling genuinely at her.

“Yeah? You a baseball girl?”

“Not really…I ended up a surfer instead. But one of the first movies I remember seeing in theaters was A League of Their Own.” She bit back any emotion at memories of her dad getting so excited to take her, buying them a jumbo container of popcorn even after her mom had specifically told them not to, and offering to teach her to play on the car ride home.

“Well if you ever want to rekindle the magic, I’d be happy to take you to the batting cages.”

Alex knew this was the moment Lucy would squeal about—the moment when she was meant to smile right back at him, maybe play a little coy, but eventually agree. They’d go, and he’d show her how to hold a bat properly, and she’d impress him by being quite good at it, then she’d cheer when he did well. They’d hold hands on their way out, and he’d kiss her and tell her how much fun he had, and she’d go gush to her friends about how well it went, and they’d be happy. Only…she wasn’t. She didn’t want to dwell on what that might mean about her. “Oh, uh, yeah, maybe.” Seeing the flash of disappointment in his eyes—a disappointment she just knew would be mirrored in the reactions of Kara and Lucy and her mother, if she ever found out—Alex corrected course. “We’re just starting to get into the thick of things on the campaign, you know? These days I never know when I’ll get a day off!”

“Oh yeah,” Rafael nodded along with her, looking significantly more relaxed. “I’m certainly not going to stand in the way of political progress,” he joked, his smile light and easy. “So you let me know what works for you.”

“Sounds good.” It did. But it didn’t make her happy.
When they finished their second round of drinks, Rafael paid and offered to walk Alex back to her place. With no good reason to say no, Alex agreed and struggled to sustain the conversation as they walked, even though Rafael seemed happy to talk about most things. By the time they got to her front door, Alex could feel the preemptive guilt sitting hot and heavy in her gut. He was sweet and smiling at her and still thinking that they might become something when everything just felt…flat. So when he leaned in and asked if he could kiss her, Alex found herself nodding and wrapping an arm around him as one of his hands cupped at her jaw. The scratch of stubble prickled at her mouth, and when he moved to deepen the kiss, she stepped back automatically, pulling away before things could escalate any more.

He smiled at her. “I had a really nice time.”

“I did too,” Alex lied. “Get home safely.”

He laughed at that. “I think I’ll manage that long trek back down to Dupont. Good night, Alex!”

The first thing Alex did was check her phone. The lack of work emails actually disappointed her, and she ignored the texts from both Kara and Lucy asking for reports on how the date went. She watched a few clips that had already been uploaded of the Grant rally in Des Moines and the march down the river and to the venue for the party dinner. She couldn’t help but smile at the sight of Cat marching along and keeping pace, even in stilettos. Across the river, Justin’s team had organized crowds at least as loud and large as Cat’s, though Alex was relieved to find that Stephen lacked the numbers they did, even though he was relieved to find that Stephen lacked the numbers they did, even though he was polling fairly well in some of the less liberal states. She flipped through photos, grumbling at the sight of Max trying to charm donors Alex knew damn well had committed to Cat already. For now, though, she could take satisfaction in the knowledge that he would have to sit through three speeches without getting to say a word himself.

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“That was amazing,” Kara gushed. “Seriously, I mean, if I weren’t already working for you, you totally would have converted me!”

Cat basked in the praise, still riding high on a wave of adrenaline and endorphins that not even Justin’s speech could have killed. His family might have had the clout to pull in big crowds and land him the closing slot, but most early reports seemed to have Cat listed as the surprise winner of the night. Sure, Justin hadn’t made any obvious missteps, and Max was frustratingly present throughout, but no one could refute the resounding applause that had filled the venue when Cat concluded or the sheer number of people that stood for her, displaying exactly the level of enthusiasm they needed to win Iowa.

She’d happily accepted the congratulations of her team, though they didn’t celebrate tonight—not like they did after the debate. No, tonight was about making connections and courting donors. As the crowds finally began dwindling, Cat had asked Kara to have Vasquez meet them at the exit, and by the time they were in the safety of the car, she felt like she could finally relax.

“Well done, ma’am.”

“If you’re congratulating me, you may as well just use Cat.”

After a long moment, Vasquez finally relented. “Well done, Cat. You really kicked ass up there.”

“That’s more like it.”

“Seriously, Cat.” Kara turned to face her. “That was absolutely the right start to really launch into the
thick of things. You were subtle in your digs and perfect in your delivery and so eloquent about your platform.”

“I pay you to say nice things. Let’s wait to hear what the press thinks.”

“You do not. You pay me to get you elected,” Kara countered, arching an eyebrow at Cat in challenge.

After a moment, the corners of Cat’s mouth curled into a small smile. “Then by all means, continue with the effusive praise.”

“This was exactly what you needed after the weekend. I couldn’t have put a better candidate up on that stage.” Kara couldn’t stop smiling as she scrolled through all the alerts she was receiving about the dinner—the majority of them positive—and before she knew it, Vasquez was pulling into the underground parking garage and leading them over to the elevator into the hotel lobby. They followed dutifully, and Kara waited outside while Vasquez checked the rooms, despite knowing full well that she was actually the best person to confront a possible intruder.

“All clear.” She held the door open for Cat. “I’ll be ready to pick you up at 9 tomorrow morning for your diner visit and then the state fair.” With a nod, Vasquez turned and went back to her room, intent on getting as much sleep as possible before a long day of crowds and driving.

“Cat, have you been looking at these headlines? They’re really, really good!”

“Well that is something. If they were only really good, I might not have looked. But really, really good…”

Kara pursed her lips in an excellent approximation of Cat until the other woman relented and took the phone from her hands. “Good. This is good.” She made a mental note to find Jasmine and email James and thank them for all the hard work and to get reports from Winn about whether their social media numbers went up at all and, more importantly, how Max was doing.

“Now tomorrow, you’ll go out there and show them you’re one of the people. Think you can do it?”

“I did the farm, didn’t I?”

“You did… It’s just a little different. That was controlled and scheduled. This is kids and country music and fried food.”

“Are you saying you think I can’t do it?” There was something playful and challenging and dangerously appealing in Cat’s expression as she stepped just a little closer to Kara, the champagne from the event making her feel a little lighter, a little freer from expectations.

“You’re Cat Grant,” Kara laughed, as though it answered everything. “You can do anything.” And oh, Kara thought, the way Cat smiled at that, her tongue wetting her lower lip, ought to be illegal. She couldn’t quite help the way her gaze fell to Cat’s mouth, couldn’t quite help but notice the way Cat’s pupils dilated slightly, her cheeks turning a pale pink. “I, uh, I should go.”

“Yes.” Cat stepped back quickly, her expression closing off as though there had never been any wavering. “I’ll see you tomorrow. Don’t be late.”

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Alex slowed her jog as she approached Maggie’s door, not seeing the other woman already outside and waiting for her this time. She wondered if she should ring the buzzer. Would they be labeled?
Maggie had mentioned something about renting “a floor,” which meant that knocking on the front door was probably the wrong choice, unless she happened to be that floor. As she fished her phone out from an inside pocket, she caught sight of Maggie stepping out onto the landing, but before she could jog up the few steps to greet her, she noticed a second person with her.

“Feeling properly welcomed to DC?” the other woman asked.

Maggie bit her lower lip and chuckled softly. “Definitely one of my better welcomes to a new city.”

“If you ever need some help remembering why we’re better than the Midwest, you have my number…”

“Yeah, yeah, I do.” Maggie looked up then and caught sight of Alex half-hiding behind the stairs.

“Oh, uh, hey there!” Alex’s voice sounded overly cheery, even to her own ears. “Just stretching a little while I waited!”

“So you really did have to run,” the other woman teased. “Here I was thinking you just wanted me out of your bed.”

“No,” Maggie laughed and rubbed at the back of her neck. “I really should go, though.”

“Have fun.” And with that she pulled Maggie in for a soft kiss that left Alex feeling as though she were intruding on an intimate moment. “Bye, Maggie.”

“See ya.”

“You, uh, you could always have cancelled.” Alex cleared her throat and looked down at her feet as she scuffed them along cracks in the sidewalk.

“No need,” Maggie answered, her tone veering into curt as she tried to parse out Alex’s behavior. On anyone else, she might have called it jealousy. But given everything that she’d seen of Alex, she continued to worry it might be some kind of deeply rooted discomfort with the very idea of a sexuality that wasn’t straight.

They ran in silence, and Maggie couldn’t help but notice that Alex’s pace was significantly faster this time—fast enough to make breathing difficult, rendering any conversation near impossible. They took a new route that morning, and Maggie tried to follow the houses and keep track of street names. Eventually they ended up back in familiar territory, and Maggie noticed the dreaded hill Alex had taken at a sprint earlier that week. Only this time, they turned the opposite direction, stopping a few blocks later in front of large blocky concrete letters that spelled out, “ZOO.” And as tense as things were, Maggie couldn’t help the gasp of excitement at the idea of getting to meet the pandas she’d seen all over the news back when they were first born.

“Lucy and James are meeting us here,” Alex explained, packing back and forth in the small seating area to keep lactic acid from building up in her legs and to avoid having to look directly at Maggie just yet.

“Okay.” After what felt like an eternity but was probably only a few minutes, Maggie spoke up again. “Did you see Cat’s speech last night?”

“Yeah. Yeah, it was really good.”

“Definitely kicked ass. Shame she couldn’t be the closer, but I guess being a political legacy gets you that spot, huh?”
“Probably. It’s alright. He might have had more people, but Cat’s were more enthusiastic.”

“How do you think the State Fair’s gonna go? Think they’ll get her to eat something deep fried on a stick?”

Unable to hold back a laugh at the image, Alex finally stopped pacing and seemed to brighten some. “God, I hope so.”

“Did you know they serve deep fried butter?”

“Why? Why is that possibly a thing?”

“Because it can be. Duh.”

“I think the worst Cat would eat might be a fried Oreo.”

“Yeah…can’t see her stomaching a pork chop, but maybe something sweet.”

“It’s a shame we couldn’t get Carter on this trip. I know he has school and all, but it would’ve made for some nice family-friendly headlines.”

“Such a traditionalist,” Maggie teased, though there was a bit of truth in it that she couldn’t ignore. She wondered if perhaps Alex was more against one-night stands than gay people… That might be better.

“I just know what plays well in the press.”

“Ah yes, that bottom line.”

After another minute or so, Lucy and James came jogging into view. “Ready to go?” Alex asked.

“Is this gonna be like last time where you ran past all the pandas and otters without even letting me stop to take pictures?” Lucy asked, fixing Alex with a hard glare.

“If you’re taking pictures, you’re not running,” Alex huffed.

“Maggie’s never even been to the zoo, Alex. Do you know how cruel it would be to make her fly past the otters without looking?”

Alex looked over to Maggie, assuming she would back her up, only to find big brown eyes looking much too endearing. “Fine. We can pause—for looking, not pictures! But we run straight through on the way back.”

Lucy appeared to weigh her options before finally reaching out a hand in agreement. “Deal.”

With that, they took up a quick jog, Alex leading the pack with James and Maggie flanking her on either side, and Lucy staying behind to observe. When Alex and Maggie had grown close, she wasn’t quite sure, but she wanted to get to the bottom of it.

“Right, Danvers!” Lucy yelled when it looked like Alex might try to keep them on the main path instead of leading them up into the Asia Trail.

“I’m going, I’m going,” Alex huffed, turning down the bamboo-lined bath. As she jogged past the first set of exhibits without stopping, she called over her shoulder: “They’re empty! No stopping for habitats only.”
When they got to the otters, Lucy made them come to a full stop to try to spot them, only to be disappointed when she realized they hadn’t woken up yet. “You have to come back,” Lucy told Maggie. “They’re the best.”

When Maggie laughed at the enthusiasm, James cut in. “Oh no, she’s quite serious. I took her on a date to the zoo once, and I think we spent half an hour just watching them play.”

“Definitely the cutest part of the date,” Lucy teased, sticking her tongue out at James.

They stopped again to watch the pandas, listening as Alex explained that this was actually one of the only times of day you were likely to find them outside playing instead of inside eating. The lack of tourists with screaming children was just a bonus.

As they ran, they reached a compromise: Alex agreed to stop to watch the seal feeding if they didn’t have to go through the small mammal house, which, she argued, would have taken much longer than they had anyway, especially if they wanted to go to breakfast before work. At the hint of a threat to her breakfast outing (and a chance to better observe Alex and Maggie’s interactions out of the office), Lucy quickly relented.

When they got to the parking lot at the end, Alex turned to Lucy with a glint of a challenge in her eyes. “Ready to actually run? And then we’re going straight down to the workout stations.”

“Race you to the top,” Lucy yelled.

“That’s not fair!” James called after her. “I ran all the way from Chinatown!” Of course, he wasn’t one to let a challenge sit, so he quickly took off behind the three women, shaking his head at the sound of Lucy’s laugh ringing in the air.

With a few measured strides and a concentrated effort, Alex quickly caught up to Lucy, matching her stride-for-stride. “Good try, Lane.”

“Not over yet,” Lucy shot back, opting to conserve oxygen instead of indulge in better trash talk.

Neither of them were surprised when James easily caught up with his long legs, and Maggie stayed right behind them, keeping pace pretty well. It wasn’t until they passed the vending machines that Maggie made her move, breaking free from behind them and darting forward with a surge of energy as she ignored the burn in her legs from the uphill climb. She wondered idly what it was this friend group had with enjoying uphill sprints. Masochists, all of them. But now wasn’t the time to think; now was the time to win.

“Cheater!” Alex yelled, realizing Maggie had let them deal with the wind and easily climbed behind them in the safe zone, properly conserving energy. Of course, she still wasn’t one to lose, so she ignored Lucy jumping onto James’ back and encouraging him to victory and took off after Maggie.

As Maggie neared the final bend to the benches, Alex caught up with her, and they both took the last few lengths at an all-out sprint, finally collapsing into themselves and each other as they crossed the imaginary finish line, both of them claiming victory with no one there to call it.

“I totally won,” Maggie huffed.

“In your dreams, Sawyer. I definitely passed the sign first.”

“I got to the sidewalk first,” Maggie countered.

“You’re both absurd, now come on, the faster we get through Alex’s crazy workout, the faster we get food.”
“God, you sound like Kara,” Alex teased.

“Oh man, she’s gonna love the State Fair, isn’t she?” James asked with a loud laugh.

They jogged more slowly down the hill, letting their heart rates slow down to normal levels and their breathing even out. When they got down to the stations, Lucy went straight to the benches to do a set of crunches, and James grabbed the one next to her to do elevated pushups, leaving Alex and Maggie to head over to the pull-up bars once more. Alex grumbled at the sight of another trio already using a few of them, but she quickly stood beside the unclaimed bar.

“Uh, we can take turns, I guess,” she offered, looking slightly apologetic.

“Yeah, sure. Want to go first? I don’t mind stretching a bit.”

“Sure.”

Lucy watched Maggie as Maggie watched Alex, smirking at the sight of Maggie’s jaw hanging open slightly. She wouldn’t fault her; Alex did look amazing, and there was something particularly impressive about the seemingly effortless way she stayed in perfect form. In another world, Lucy could imagine having met Alex in the military instead of politics, and she didn’t think too much would be different.

What caught her attention, however, was when they switched places, and Alex seemed to watch Maggie with equal intensity. It might have been watching for form, but Lucy swore there was something else in her expression, and it wasn’t until James asked why she was still paused halfway through a Russian twist that she forced herself to look away. “No reason,” she murmured. She knew better than to divulge gossip before it was confirmed; no one got to be the font of all office knowledge by spreading misinformation.

By the time they made it to breakfast, Lucy was beyond curious. She nearly pushed James into a waiter to make sure Alex and Maggie sat next to one another, ensuring she kept a clear view of both of them.

Once they got their orders in and had drinks—though tragically no bloody marys that morning—in front of them, Lucy turned to Alex. “So, Alex… How was the date? Get lucky?” Lucy asked, looking far too innocent as Alex spluttered out a sip of the slightly too hot coffee she’d just been given.

Maggie kept her eyes trained on her mug as she added another observation to her list of things about Alex. Maybe it really was more of an aversion to casual sex than anything else.

“It was… fine.”

“That’s it? Really? I go out of my way to set you up with a really hot guy who’s funny and smart and charming, and all I get is ‘fine’? Not cool, Alex, not cool!”

“He was great! Really, I mean, he was sweet. I just… I don’t know. I don’t have time to date.”

“Which is absolutely your polite way of saying you didn’t like him.”

“I didn’t say that!”

Lucy was more interested in the way Maggie’s eyebrows shot up at that detail than in Alex’s lies about semantics.
“No one calls a guy sweet in that tone of voice if they actually want to see him again.”

“I don’t know,” Alex shrugged, looking beyond defeated. “We just didn’t click. And you can’t accuse me of not trying! We kissed and everything!”

Maggie hated herself for the surge of something that felt far too much like jealousy that ran through her at the knowledge that Alex kissed some random guy. After all, she’d gone home with some random woman and done far more than kiss her. When she looked up, intent on being a better friend—if she could even call Alex a friend yet, which she wasn’t sure she could—she saw Lucy eyeing her suspiciously. Trying to avoid whatever a look like that surely meant, Maggie forced herself to participate. “Sometimes first kisses just aren’t that good. If he’s as great as you’re saying he is, maybe he should get another chance.”

Lucy didn’t miss the fact that not once did Maggie say Alex should give him a second chance—just that he should get one through some mysterious force in the universe.

“Why?” Alex shot back, looking like maybe she had reached her limit on being pushed on this issue. Lucy hoped they brought food over before it turned into a fight she never wanted to have or witness. “Why do I need to put myself out for something that isn’t that fun and takes up time I could be using for work or, hell, just for a goddam moment of rest and relaxation? Why am I fighting to go on another date that’s effort without any reward?”

“I didn’t—no—I just meant that, I don’t know, dating can be fun!”

“It sure looked like you had fun last night without having to be on a date,” Alex shot back.

“Hey, don’t turn this on me. There’s nothing wrong with going out and meeting someone, just like there’s nothing wrong with taking time for a relationship if it makes you happy.”

“And he didn’t, okay? Just like always, I failed at connecting and doing the whole happy dating relationship thing. They just—it doesn’t work for me, and it’d be really great if everyone could stop forcing it!” Alex let out a long, shuddering exhale as she tried to find her footing once more.

“I have a strawberry stuffed French toast!” came the cheery voice of their waiter, and Lucy tentatively lifted her hand, hoping that a bit of food to raise Alex’s blood sugar would do her some good.

Once they all had their plates, Maggie murmured a quiet apology to Alex and squeezed her thigh without thinking about it. She meant it as a comforting gesture, but the way Alex seemed to choke on her bite of eggs left her confused as she apologized more profusely and drew back her hand like it had been burned.

“It’s fine,” Alex managed. “Let’s just…talk about something else.”

After a few tense minutes of forced conversations and terse remarks from Alex, the food and coffee seemed to kick in as everyone relaxed slightly, eventually easing back into talk about their weekend plans and movies out in theaters and exhibits on display that they’d wanted to see but would surely miss as the campaign consumed more and more of their free time.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Kara and Cat head out to the Iowa State Fair with their team, while Lucy has some words for Alex. Also, this chapter has my favorite Sanvers scene from this fic out of everything that's been written so far...not sure it'll be yours, but it was a pleasure to write!

Ignoring the dull ache in her cheeks from smiling for too long, Cat leaned in for what had to be the hundredth selfie she’d taken in a row with some Iowan excited to see her. She’d already given her stump speech at the Register’s Soapbox, made it through the farm tour, and taken pictures with the giant butter cow and the sculptor, which the social media team had dutifully uploaded and tagged and tweeted and everything else that needed to happen.

“Ms. Grant!” a younger reporter yelled from the crowds still surrounding her, much to the chagrin of Vasquez and her small security team, who were trying to keep a low profile to make Cat seem approachable while still keeping her safe.

“She already took media questions,” Kara called back. “Now Ms. Grant is hoping to spend time with the voters and the people who have come from all over to see the attractions.”

“We just wanted to know if she had a response to Senator Crane’s stump speech,” the reporter pressed. Pushing through the throngs of people, she edged her way closer to Cat. “Crane stated, and I’ll quote, ‘Cat Grant is just the latest in a long line of politicians claiming to do what’s best for the people. But if you look closer, you’ll see she’s only in it for herself.’ Do you have a response? She also spoke at length about the way you treat your female staff.”

“I’ve spoken on the record plenty about the controversy that came to light last weekend and the few kernels of truth among the lies designed to stir up anger and fear. I have grown as a person since my time at CatCo. I’ve learned not to fall back into old management styles, and I couldn’t have more respect for my wonderful, diverse team on this campaign. Truly, I wouldn’t be where I am without them.” Turning to the crowds, she called out, “Can we give them a hand? They’re some of the unsung heroes here!”

The crowd whooped and cheered as Kara, Jasmine, Vasquez, a few of the local campaign team staffers, and the other security guards waved and smiled.

“She said you would be bad for women, Ms. Grant!” another reporter yelled, hoping to get in while Cat was answering questions again.

“Look at our records,” Cat replied with a breezy tone that masked the frustration she felt bubbling up inside her. “Tell me where she has voted in the best interest of women. When did she vote for equal pay? When did she fight for generous parental leave? When did she advocate for the accessibility of women’s health?”

“That’s all for questions,” Kara cut in, ensuring that Cat couldn’t work herself up to a second speech that they hadn’t allotted time for in their schedule. “Ms. Grant wants to make sure she gets to try some of this food we’ve heard all about!”
Vasquez’s team moved them toward some of the food stands, ignoring the din of calls for one last selfie or one more question.

“Alright, off to JR Donuts,” Kara announced, looking beyond pleased with their destination.

After a short wait in line that the press dutifully captured, Cat got up to the counter and ordered a large bag—enough to share with her staff. She suspected it still wouldn’t be enough to feed Kara, but surely there were slightly healthier options around.

Eager to catch a photo of the notoriously health-conscious candidate indulging, cameramen flocked to Cat as she bit into one of the fluffy little donuts, declaring it “a perfect treat for a beautiful day at the fair!”

“You have to finish at least one mini-donut,” Kara whispered through a broad smile for the cameras before Cat could set it down. She smiled at the way Cat gamely finished it in another two bites before offering the bag around to her staff to share. Kara happily fished in for a small handful of them. “Oh my god, these are amazing,” she moaned, and Cat fought the urge to kiss away the dusting of sugar that had stuck to the corner of her mouth.

Insisting that it was good press, Kara took them around to a few more stands, forcing Cat to try a bit of something called totchos, a fried Oreo, and a bite of pork chop served to her on a stick. She drew the line at the foot-long corndogs, and let Kara indulge alone in the breakfast tacos made of pancakes and a deep-fried Snickers bar that surely didn’t need any more fat to make it an indulgence.

“What’s next?” Cat asked Jasmine, rolling her eyes as Kara ran back to grab one more bag of JR donuts.

“Well, Justin did one of the roller coasters—”

“No. Absolutely not. I’m already putting myself one step closer to death with the fried food. I don’t need to risk it all again,” Cat whispered.

“What about the ferris wheel?” Jasmine suggested, motioning at the large, much slower-moving ride. “It’ll give you a chance to see everything. It’d be amazing if you could post a selfie from up at the top too—show just how much fun you’re having.”

Cat sighed and gave in. “Okay, fine. Are you coming up with me?”

“I was going to stay on the ground and take pictures of you, but we can send Vasquez up.”

“Oh, no! I wanna go!” Kara volunteered, happily munching on another donut, having returned with yet another large bag.

“You know this is still work, right?” Cat asked, arching an eyebrow at Kara.

“Who says work can’t be fun? You love giving speeches and pointing out how wrong everyone else is. I love eating donuts and going on rides!”

“Very well,” Cat huffed. “Come along.”

Another journalist—though Cat swore he couldn’t have been out of college—bounded up to them while they were in line for tickets. “Which ride are you going on, Ms. Grant? Did you see that Mr. Lord set up his own ride out in one of the side lots?”

Fighting hard not to roll her eyes at Max’s obvious display of his money and his technology, Cat
forced herself to smile as she replied, “We’ll be going on the ferris wheel today. I can’t wait to get a bird’s eye view of the fair!”

Eventually they managed to get their tickets and get through the long line to the ride, fielding questions from journalists and would-be reporters alike as they waited. Cat even got into a short speech on the need to defend and expand social security for all the hard workers she saw around her—an answer that earned a proud smile from Kara and a smattering of polite applause from those near enough in line to hear it.

“Enjoy the ride, Ms. Grant,” the ferris wheel attendant said as he carefully closed the door and tapped on the side of their cart.

“Thank you.” Once they were high enough off the ground, Cat let herself take a deep, calming breath. “I have to take a photo when we get to the top.”

“Already on it,” Kara assured her, pulling out a phone as they slowly climbed to the top, coming to a jerky stop each time a new cart was emptied and filled once more with eager kids and families. “Ready?” Kara shoved in close, and held the phone up high enough to ensure they were both in it with the full fairgrounds visible behind them. She snapped a few, knowing at least one or two would be immediately deemed “awful” and deleted. “Come on, think of donuts!” Cat pursed her lips and scowled, but at the sight of Kara sneakily pulling out what had to be her third bag of them, Cat found herself laughing right along with her campaign manager.

“I think that’s enough,” Cat finally said, reaching out for the phone.

“Okay! Pick whichever one you want.”

Cat flipped through them. There was one—the first they had taken—where Kara’s face was nearly pressed against her own, and her eyes were looking more at Kara than at the camera. Obviously that couldn’t be it, but she had trouble finding it within herself to delete it. The next two were okay, but not great. The fourth and fifth featured a very prominent scowl and were immediately deleted. The sixth, however, was just what she wanted. She was laughing and happy and looked years younger, even with the small laugh lines around her eyes. “Thoughts?”

“It’s a great photo,” Kara insisted.

Cat nodded and began typing out a caption about just how much fun she and her team had been having at the fair. Before she posted it, she hesitated, her expression growing tense.

“Smile, Cat,” Kara whispered. “We’ll be low enough for photos in one second.”

Lowering the phone, Cat smiled broadly and waved at the crowds, focusing on the cheers instead of the handful of loud boos coming from a group in Lane merchandise.

Once they got high enough up again, Kara turned to Cat. “What’s wrong?”

“I just…the photo,” Cat sighed. “Does it look…do we look like a couple?” Cat finally managed, refusing to make eye contact with Kara, even when she reached out and grabbed the phone to see for herself.

“No,” Kara insisted, though she could see why Cat might have thought that. Were they a couple, it would absolutely be a couple’s photo. They were happy and looked carefree, as though being up on the ride together was all that mattered right then and there. The fact that she could imagine it was on her, but it certainly wasn’t something the general public could think. “You look happy. Approachable, even. Post it.”
“Are you sure?”

“Cat, there are actual lesbian couples that get called gal pals for years.”

“I suppose,” Cat relented, remembering one night in DC when she’d been out with another woman and photographed. She’d felt her stomach drop, and she’d braced herself for the fall out all night, only to find that it never came. There was some post that mentioned the “two friends out to dinner in Georgetown,” but no more. And that had been an actual date, while this was…well, she couldn’t dwell on what it was. It was work. And the fact that her heart sped up when Kara came closer was just one of those things she needed to ignore as a consummate professional.

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“How’s it going?” Lucy asked, popping her head into Alex’s office.

“Good. They just set off for Nebraska a little while ago. Budgeting in some time for stops, they should arrive around—”

“Alex,” Lucy cut in. “Not the campaign. You. How are you?”

“Oh, uh, fine. Did you see Max’s stupid stunt with bringing his hoverboard prototype thing? And then Crane daring to come after Cat for being anti-women. I mean, I get that she’s probably the best on their side to be able to do it, but still.”

“Okay…this is still all work talk.”

“We’re at work.”

“It’s a Friday afternoon. Cat’s gone. We’ve approved the final draft of Lois’ article. What more is there to do?”

“Really?”

Before Alex could begin a laundry list of all the things they could be doing, Lucy stopped her. “I know, I know. But there’s no harm in just hanging out and taking it easy after what had to have been a 100-hour workweek with last weekend’s scandal.” Realizing that Alex wasn’t convinced, she continued: “The fundraising team already met their weekly goals. The researchers have been actively responding to all of Kara’s requests. Jasmine is killing it with social media, and James is back here getting plenty of quotes in at regular papers. He’s got a team reaching out to local studios to see about recording a few video ads. I’m done with paperwork. And you, my dear, don’t have a scandal to deal with at the moment. So come down to my office, and we’ll open that bottle of merlot I picked up for what was supposed to be a chill dinner last weekend, and we’ll just talk.”

After a moment, Alex sighed, and Lucy could see the fight draining out of her. “I guess.”

“That’s the spirit!”

They shut the door behind them, and Lucy made quick work of uncorking the bottle and pouring them two glasses of wine. “To the weekend!” Lucy toasted.

“To a weekend without work,” Alex amended, laughing as Lucy took a long sip of wine at that.

“We should go out—celebrate or something.”

“You know I already got that kind of thing out of my system while I was in school.”
“Could be fun. I could wingwoman for you. Maybe help you find someone who you actually click with…” She wondered if Alex would note the lack of pronouns. It wasn’t that she had any definite proof, besides the fact that Alex had totally pinged her gaydar the first time they met and had never once seemed to like a single guy she dated.

“Lucy, no.”

“Is this where I say Lucy, yes, and turn this into a meme?”

“No. It’s just a no.”

“You could use the stress relief,” Lucy teased, biting back a smile at the blush that spread quickly across Alex’s chest.

“I—that’s not—I’m just not…built for that.”

“I mean, it’s fine if you’re not! But…” Lucy swirled the wine around in her cup as she tried to figure out the right way to phrase it. “But maybe you’re just looking in the wrong places.”

“Well California didn’t work, and DC wasn’t much better, so that leaves me what? 49 more states to try.”

“I just mean…you know, there are other kinds of people out there too…”

“I’ve gone on dates with lawyers and teachers and researchers and scientists, Luce. I think there’s a point at which I have to admit it’s just not working.” She shook her head and drained her cup. “Love…it’s not supposed to be hard like this! Like, sure, okay, relationships are. You fight for them or whatever. But feeling something—literally anything—for another person shouldn’t take effort!”

“No, you’re right, sort of. There’s something that just clicks.” Lucy thought of how she felt for James, then later how she felt when she first met Vasquez.

“I want to be with someone I’m excited to run into! Someone who challenges me and makes me think. Someone who takes me on dates to do things that I’d actually like to do, instead of shit that some magazine suggested any random middle-aged woman would like to do. Someone I actually want to kiss at the end of the night and maybe even do more with down the line.”

“You can say fuck. I’ve been in the car when you’re driving; it’s not as though I haven’t heard you say it.”

“Shut up,” Alex grumbled. “I just…I don’t get that. Kara does, and you do, and, jesus, apparently even Maggie does on her first fucking night out in the city. And I don’t. And it’s fine, but it’d be really fucking great if everyone would stop reminding me that I’m not built the same way.”

“Hey, shit, I didn’t mean it that way, Alex.” Kicking hard to wheel her chair around her desk, Lucy pulled up next to Alex. “You’re perfect. It’s just, you know, sometimes you talk about these things like you might like to have them, and I want to make sure you get whatever you want, even if…even if it doesn’t take the form you thought it might.”

“Why do you keep saying that?” Alex snapped.

“Jesus, Danvers! Look at the people you named! You know where I’m finding happiness these days? Know where Maggie’s finding happiness? Know who Kara’s big crush is on?”

“Kara has a crush on someone?” Alex asked, her attention suddenly very much diverted.
“Not the point!”

“Fine,” Alex huffed. “But we’re circling back to it.”

“Ugh, stop it with corporate jargon this late on a Friday.” Shaking her head to try to get back into the moment, Lucy spun her chair to properly face Alex head-on. “We’re all currently crushing on or dating or sleeping with other women.”

“And?”

“And…yes, Kara and I have both been very happy with men in a way that Vasquez and Maggie have not. But maybe…maybe one of them might have a little more to say about feeling like things weren’t working with men.”

“I’m not gay.”

“Maybe you’re not.”

“Wouldn’t I be the one to know?” Alex snapped. “Wouldn’t I be the one feeling something for women? Wouldn’t I be the one telling all of you instead of it always being the other way around?”

Tamping down on her impulse to ask who else had already made this suggestion, Lucy tentatively reached a hand out to Alex. “Maybe…but sometimes it’s hard. Even these days, it’s still hard to recognize some of those feelings for what they are, especially if you’ve been pushing them down for a long time.”

“But I haven’t!” Alex swore half of the oxygen had suddenly gone missing from the room, and she wondered if it was possible to overheat in a climate-controlled office building. Surely it was. It had to be the reason for all of this.

Switching gears, Lucy sat back in her seat. “Okay, that’s fine.” Alex didn’t look remotely appeased. “Have I ever told you about how I came out?”

“Oh, no.”

“Well, you know I come from a military background.”

“Yes, your father is running for president. I know just a little bit about that,” Alex joked, relieved to focus on anything but herself and her racing heart.

“Well, you know as well as I do that Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell was the policy then. I mean, it wasn’t when I was little, but it was by the time I enlisted.”

“Right.”

“When I was at West Point, I had this classmate Kelly. She was on the lacrosse team—starting attacker.”

“Sounds like your type,” Alex snorted.

“Oh for sure. Anyway, I used to come out to the home games to cheer for her. She was pretty easy to spot cause she had this hot pink grip tape on her stick.” Lucy paused to pour herself a little more wine. “And we were best friends—I mean, totally inseparable. We studied together and we went for runs together and we talked late at night. And for a long time, I was really convinced that we were just that—friends. And it was cool, you know? I was busy and stuff.” Alex nodded; she certainly
hadn’t been overly concerned with trying to date on top of classes while she was in school. “But then we had one of our formals, and she went with this guy who was perfectly average and smart and handsome, even. But I couldn’t help but feel like he wasn’t good enough for her. And it took a while for me to name the emotions I was feeling for what they were—jealousy.”

“I need to go.”

“No, Alex, I’m not saying—”

“No! I need to—I have to go.” Thoughts of Vicki Donahue swirled through her mind—memories of fights after formal dances and pangs of something that felt much too much like jealousy; the warm comfort of curling up beside Vicki in her full-sized bed, of brushing each other’s hair and holding hands during scary movies.

“Fuck,” Maggie cursed as Alex’s surprisingly solid body slammed into her in the hallway.

“Shit, sorry. I wasn’t looking,” Alex mumbled, forcing her way past Maggie and into her office.

“Hey, you okay? You look like you saw a ghost or something.”

“Or something,” Alex grumbled.

“Did something happen? You wanna talk?”

“I don’t! I’m really fucking tired of everyone wanting to talk to me about my failed relationships and my emotions and things that I never asked to talk about!”

“Oh…I, uh, just thought you might want to see this article about Kara.”

“What?”

“Um, some Twitter user compiled a whole album of the best shots of Kara eating at the fair and tweeted them out with the hashtag: #GetYouAGirlLikeThat. She’s actually trending now…”

“What?” Alex repeated, feeling the confusion of her emotions blending with the confusion about whatever was going on with her sister and Twitter.

“Here, it’s easier to show you.” Maggie came around Alex’s desk and stood beside her, her hip casually touching Alex’s and sending goosebumps up and down Alex’s leg, which she fought to ignore.

Quickly flipping through the photos, Alex couldn’t help the loud laugh accompanied by an ungraceful snort. “Of course she would get caught every time she took a bite.”

“I mean…in all fairness, it looks like she took a lot of bites.”

“That’s Kara, alright.”

“Iowa seems to adore her. All the vendors are retweeting the pictures.”

“Well if anyone can spin this into a PR victory for Cat, it’s James.” Sinking down into her chair, Alex dropped her head into her hands and just let herself smile and laugh and feel genuinely light after a day that felt impossibly long.

“Want me to send it to him?”
“Yes, please. Also to me—I need to forward it to Kara and do my proper big sister duty of mocking her endlessly.”

“Oh, yeah, wouldn’t want to waste an opportunity like that.”

“Definitely not.” Alex felt herself actually relaxing, the earlier tension from her shoulders having eased its way out while she laughed, and her racing thoughts having slowed to give way to new musings about how best to tease Kara.

“Anyhow, I can head out. Seems like I bumped into you at a bad time.”

“No! No, I just…weird afternoon, that’s all.”

“Well, considering it’s a quiet afternoon—your sister’s becoming a momentary internet sensation aside—and maybe our last quiet afternoon for a long time, what do you say to going to one of those movies on your watch list? And you can choose; I’m down for anything, so long as we get to leave the office before some new crisis hits.”

“Yeah? Even if I pick the movie about the female scientists that’s kind of a documentary?”

“If you’re happy, I’m happy. Plus, don’t spread it around, but I’ll have you know”—Maggie leaned in conspiratorially and dropped her voice to a near whisper—“I experimented with nerdiness in college.”

“Oh fuck off.” Alex shoved lightly at Maggie’s shoulder, but the amusement in her eyes was as clear as the smile on her face.

“If I did, you’d be stuck without a movie buddy. And everyone knows it’s harder to sneak in snacks alone. Cause then you’ve got the drinks rattling around and smooshing your candy bars and turning your chips into dust, and it’s a whole debacle.”

“Got a lot of experience there, Sawyer?”

“You’re the one who’s so fond of pointing out that I grew up in the middle of nowhere. We had malls and movie theaters, and I’m not really one for shopping.”

“Color me surprised,” Alex deadpanned.

“Anyway, last chance: in for the movie or not?”

“Let’s do it.”

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“No. No, no, no, no, no. Don’t tell me you’re a fan of black licorice.” Maggie looked up at Alex in horror. “It tastes like feet.”

“How in the hell would you know what feet taste like?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Maggie teased, wiggling her eyebrows playfully. “Okay, fine, maybe it doesn’t taste like feet, but it’s awful. It’s worse than the lint-covered Lifesavers you’d get from the bottom of an old lady’s purse. This is like…the thing that the old man pulls out, acting like he’s just saved you from lint-covered sweets. Only it’s not even candy! Or sweet!”

“Excuse me, it’s not my fault you have such an unrefined palate,” Alex shot back, throwing a bag into their basket. She didn’t actually love it that much, but if it drew this kind of reaction from
Maggie, she absolutely had to have it.

“Unrefined palate?” Maggie nearly squawked. “You’re the one that’s choosing to ingest that monstrosity!”

“Well then, Ms. High and Mighty, what are you getting?”

“Obviously we need some classics: some M&Ms, maybe mix it up with Reeses Pieces. You want little things you can pop in your mouth without even looking, ya know?”

“Ew, why have Reeses Pieces when you could have Peanut Butter M&Ms?”

“I accept the terms of this compromise if you don’t buy that horrible licorice.”

Alex wavered, but finally conceded. “Alright. But you better get the jumbo bags.”

“Deal.” Humming happily, Maggie tossed two big bags—one of regular chocolate and one of peanut butter—into her basket along with the water bottles they had gotten.

“Is this just like home now?”

Shaking off the melancholy mood that normally came with mentions of home, Maggie replied, “Almost.”

“What would we need to add to make it perfect?”

“Uh, cut the ticket prices in half,” Maggie laughed, “and throw a flask full of scotch into that bag.”

“I like the way you think, Sawyer. There’s a liquor store down the block…”

“Really?”

“What? I can be fun too!”

“So long as this doesn’t end with a screaming match and a guy getting kneed in the crotch, I’m down for having fun with you.” Ducking her head, Maggie hoped Alex didn’t pick up on the possible double entendre.

“C’mon, let’s go. We need to hurry if we want to get settled in on time.”

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As the previews ran, Maggie and Alex giggled in the back row of the almost empty theater, passing the small bottle of whiskey—Maggie had relented and let Alex pick the bottle, since she pretty much got her way on all of the snacks—back and forth between them and eating handfuls of M&Ms from their bags.

During the actual movie, they quieted down, with Maggie turning every so often to whisper questions to Alex, her warm breath tickling Alex’s ear and making her squirm slightly. Alex fought to keep her answers short, even though the questions were engaged and informed enough that she felt like she could have spent hours parsing through the intricacies of the science she’d studied on the side (“just for fun,” as her roommate teased her) in college.

By the time it was over, neither of them much felt like leaving. Maggie ran and grabbed them both jumbo pretzels to ensure they weren’t totally hammered, while Alex read through the movie time listings, looking for something that might make a good double feature. After a moment, she spotted a
listing for the Wonder Woman sequel—the one that during brunch Maggie had mentioned wanting to see before it left theaters the following week—that started in just half an hour.

When Maggie returned, they sat together and happily ate their pretzels before Alex dragged them down the hallway to the Wonder Woman theater.

“Wait! Really?” Maggie’s face lit up in wonder and excitement. After the last weekend’s hellish hours, she’d been convinced she would have to wait for it to come out on DVD.

“Yeah, really. Now shhh!” They tiptoed down the hallway, looking far more suspicious than they would have walking normally. “Alright, get on my six,” Alex hissed, watching for anyone taking tickets.

“It’s a good six,” Maggie whispered back, the whiskey loosening her tongue and the pretzel not doing nearly enough to combat it. But Alex just ignored it in favor of covertly rolling into the theater only to find it somewhat empty without any guards in sight. “You sure this is the right one, Danvers?”

“Yeah, positive. I mean, I guess it’s already been out for months now. And it’s not really a popular theater. And we’re a little early…”

“Okay, fine, fine. Go find us seats.”

Once more they ended up in the back row and pulled out the bag of M&Ms to eat while they waited. “What are you doing?” Alex asked, watching as Maggie deftly dug through the bag.

“I don’t like the orange ones so much.” Arching an eyebrow, Alex stared at Maggie until she looked up. “What?”

“They taste the same.”

“If you close your eyes,” Maggie snorted, secretly pleased when Alex actually seemed to get the reference and laughed.

“Alright then, close your eyes.”

“Why?”

“I’m gonna feed you M&Ms, and you’re gonna tell me what color they are.”

“Fine.” Maggie closed her eyes and slightly parted her lips, repressing any inappropriate reactions her body might have had when Alex’s warm fingers were suddenly at her lips. She chewed for a moment before confidently replying: “Blue.”

“Lucky guess.”

“No such thing as luck when you have skill,” Maggie taunted, sticking her tongue out.

“Try this one.”

“Orange. Gross.”

“You’re peeking!” Alex scolded her. “No way you could have guessed it!”

“Am not!” Maggie shot back, barely holding in laughter. It was more fun than she’d had in ages.
“Are so! Okay, this time, I’m really looking!” Alex pulled a green M&M from the bag with the level of concentration typically reserved for high stakes science experiments or any menial task when drunk and carefully placed it on Maggie’s tongue, her face just inches away as she watched Maggie’s eyes to make sure they were fully closed. She couldn’t help but notice how long and dark Maggie’s eyelashes were. They were nice. And there were a few barely noticeable freckles on her cheeks that she’d never been close enough to see.

“Blue,” Maggie declared, her voice just a little shaky with Alex’s close proximity.

“No!” Alex crowed triumphantly. “It was green!”

“Well blue is half made of green, so I’m half-right!”

“You’re such a cheater!”

Maggie’s breath was ragged, like she’d been running a race, as she laughed right along with Alex, their faces inches apart, their mouths close enough that she could almost taste the whiskey and chocolate on Alex’s breath.

“Movie’s starting,” Alex whispered, forcing herself to pull back and ignoring the small voice in the back of her head that seemed to be yelling that this—this right here—was exactly what a good date should feel like.

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“How’s it feel to have the most eligible bachelorette in the Midwest standing beside you?” Kara teased Cat as they shuffled down the hallway and into their cleared hotel rooms, having spent what felt like an eternity shaking hands and giving quotes and meeting with local donors over a late dinner before the drive down to Lincoln, Nebraska.

“Well if it keeps people from attacking me in this bastion of Republican voters, by all means,” Cat grumbled.

“Hey, c’mon, one group of protesters doesn’t mean the whole state hates you.” Of course, the level of vitriol was…less than inspiring. But still, Kara maintained that the extremists would always be the ones to show up; they weren’t indicative of the full picture.

“Really? Because you heard the numbers Winn gave us. The second they got another viable male candidate in this race, the few that had stood with me jumped ship and went to him.”

“You don’t have to win every state to win the primaries.”

“But I need to win enough of them! I thought Justin was bad enough with his damn political family and old money, but now Dirk is bankrolling Max with everything he’s got through that stupid Businesses for Progress PAC, and every single thing they do reminds voters of the scandal. Because Max’s whole fucking candidacy is based in it.”

“Cat, look at me,” Kara ordered, swallowing the thrill that ran through her at having Cat’s laser focus suddenly directed at her. “Max is still new. He’s polling well because he’s a name that people associate with fast trains and cool gadgets. He’s polling well because he has someone paying to get his face out there all the time. He’s polling well because no one has had time to dig into him or even figure out what his policies are. Unlike him, you have the whole package. You’re a big name with a whole empire connected to you, but you also have experience and sound policies and a platform that I was willing to stake my career on. Do you get that?”
Cat wanted to answer with a kiss, to answer by pulling Kara into her and letting her feel just how much it meant to her that she’d been willing to give up a stable job for long hours and an unpredictable future. Instead she simply admitted, “I do.”

“So then be the Cat Grant I know and”—Kara bit back the ‘love’ that seemed poised to roll so naturally off her tongue—“support. Get out there remind them all that you are the best person for this job. Let me worry about Justin and Max, and you worry about you, okay?”

“I think this is the first time I’ve ever had someone suggest I need to focus even more on myself.” It wasn’t quite like having the old Cat back, but there was enough snark to seem similar.

“Well, there’s a lot of great stuff there to focus on. Plus, we’ve got another debate coming up in just a couple of weeks, and James and Jasmine have been working on a new group of ads.”

“Did we give any more thought to trying to bring back those women Maggie got together for her roundtable?”

“I mean, the article got picked up by a lot of outlets, and the three women have apparently been fielding calls asking for media appearances. If you’re happy with them as a group, we could try to get them placed somewhere or put one or two in an ad with you.”

“That works…run the options by James.” Cat felt herself settling again, finding her center of balance once more as she ran through the tasks methodically. “And the interview with Lois?”

“Will be in tomorrow’s paper.”

“Good.” She wouldn’t admit it, but Lois had done a decent job with the piece. It was balanced, without being so far in her favor as to be dismissed as a biased puff piece. The fact that Lois would rather die than see Max Lord win—and Justin wasn’t much better—probably helped, but she’d take the victories where she could.

“And tomorrow you’re meeting with volunteers for the Nebraska caucuses. And then we have a few stops around town to talk to the locals”

“I hate going where they hate me,” Cat huffed. She had thick skin—had to in her line of work—but there were only so many death threats that could simply roll of her skin without her feeling just a bit of the anxiety that came with them.

“They don’t hate you! They just…don’t love you yet.”

“I’m a liberal woman and an unmarried one who doesn’t seem to have any interest in dating men. They’re never going to love me, Kara.”

“Well…” Kara trailed off, picking at her nails as she thought. “We could, you know, arrange some kind of PR thing. So that you have a date for these events. We could say you’ve been keeping it quiet—didn’t want to drag someone else’s name and life into the press—but that he wants to help you now that you’re nearing the finish line.”

Cat paused, images of a life with someone else flashing through her mind. “Do you think I should?”

“I don’t…it’s not my decision to make.”

“It is actually. In part, at least. You’re my campaign manager.”

“But this is your life too.”
“What do you want me to say? I recognize that dating some straight white man would probably do some good for my image, that stability and two-parent homes look good, play well in the press. It would also be a lie that I’d be forced to stomach each time we went out together.”

“We could find someone you like.”

“You won’t.” Cat bit her tongue and prayed Kara didn’t ask any more questions. It was past late—hours past late—and too much stress and too little sleep were loosening her tongue in a way that could only ever be dangerous.

“That’s not true. Come on, I’ve kept up with the people you’ve dated over the years. I’m sure I could find someone where it wouldn’t be a chore.”

“Maybe it wouldn’t be a chore, but that’s not the same.”

“Then you pick! Tell me who you want.”

You, Cat screamed internally. You, you impossibly beautiful, brilliant, extraordinary woman. The silence stretched on for what felt like ages.

“Oh.” It was barely an exhale, but it seemed to fill the whole room. “Cat, I—”

“Just go, okay? Have Winn and James work on getting focus groups together to see how it would poll.”

“Cat,” Kara pleaded, watching as the woman seemed to close herself off in front of her, posture straightening and expression hardening. “Just talk to me, please?”

“Why?” Cat snapped. “There’s no reason. I’ll see you tomorrow at the events.”

Sensing that there would be no fixing anything this late, Kara just sighed and let herself out.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

This chapter is politics-heavy and all Cat and Kara after the first section. Also, please note that the fic is rated M (which may end up bumped up later on…), and it finally starts to earn it for reasons other than language in this chapter with NSFW sections at the beginning and end.

On Saturday morning, Alex woke with a gasp and a pounding headache. She hoped the dream and the hangover were both products of the whiskey and nothing more telling. The fact that the boxer shorts she’d pulled on before falling into bed were sticky could be written off as her body reacting to mental stimuli—nothing more. The fact that those mental stimuli involved her very naked, very female friend was also irrelevant.

Alex tried to close her eyes again to sleep off some of the hangover, but as she began drifting off, she found herself in bed once more, only now it was brighter out—the curtains open and sun filtering in, bathing her body in soft light. There were hands gripped around her waist, but they were nothing like the fierce ones that haunted her nightmares. They were soft and warm and grounding, slipping down to her hips and holding her still as waves of heat and pleasure seemed to lick up and down her body in time with the hot press of a mouth up and down her thighs before finally meeting her bucking hips and giving her everything she wanted. And, oh, she wanted so very much—wanted this in a way she never had before. It was something deep and consuming that threatened to overwhelm her in the most devastating of ways—and god, she wanted it, needed it. Pushing aside the covers, Alex reached her hands down between her legs, needing to pull this person closer, hold them tight against her. She was already so close. Her fingers threaded through long, thick hair, and her other hand pushed aside the comforter to reveal Maggie’s soft features—those long eyelashes and deep brown eyes and high cheekbones with their faint dusting of freckles—looking up at her, a soft smile on full lips that still glistened with the proof of Alex’s arousal.

Jolting awake, Alex forced herself out of bed and into the bathroom to splash cool water on her face. What she needed was food. Food and water and some advil. And then she’d be herself again.

They helped with the hangover, but not much else. So she pulled on workout clothes, laced her shoes, and jammed headphones in her ears, hoping loud music would drown out any errant thoughts.

The way down to the towpath was just busy enough between tourists and shitty drivers and hungover Georgetown students to force Alex to focus her attention on avoiding collisions. Once she got down to the path, however, her thoughts were left ample time and space to wander, and no matter how loud she turned up the volume on her music, images of Maggie kept swimming into view in her mind: Maggie emerging from between her legs; Maggie’s body sprawled next to her own, bare limbs tangled together; Maggie’s head thrown back in pleasure as they switched spots and Alex found herself between Maggie’s legs.

A bell dinged and a loud, “On your left!” startled Alex so badly that she jumped, grumbling at the sight of a biker whizzing past her and complaining loudly about “runners with headphones.” She understood the complaint, of course. They were just as annoying to her as a fellow runner. But what this man in head-to-toe lycra didn’t seem to understand was that she had a very important image to
Eventually she turned around and ran back home. A long, cold shower and a bit more food didn’t do much, but the news finally diverted her attention long enough to get her outraged at Max—and for once, she counted that as a victory.

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Even with the significant research Maggie sent to Cat and Kara about Nebraska Democrats’ voting trends and specific issues to focus on, their day in Lincoln and the surrounding counties had seemed to drag on for an eternity once they finished meeting with area precinct captains. Outside of the people who had volunteered to work for Cat’s campaign, again and again, the team wasn’t greeted with the kind of enthusiasm Cat saw in other state, and as they headed into areas more rural and conservative than Lincoln and Omaha, Cat was frequently greeted with either ambivalence or small parties of support with even larger groups of protesters that left Vasquez on edge and Cat ready to cede the state to one of the men they so clearly preferred.

“Give us a minute,” Kara said to Jasmine, motioning for Cat to follow her back to the car before they traipsed down the hill to meet with members of a local farmers association that held far more political sway than Kara had ever realized.

“What?” Cat sighed, rubbing at her temples and wishing the headache would go away. Between last night’s conversation and this afternoon’s protests, she swore the tension headache was only getting worse.

“Nebraska’s delegates are awarded proportionally. Realistically, this race is coming down to you and Justin.”

“Who they love,” Cat interjected.

“Who some of them love. What we need to do is make sure that Max doesn’t get high enough to split the vote. So I need you to get in there and seem a lot more relatable than Max Lord, that quirky, rich scientist who locks himself away in a lab instead of being out with the people.”

“But he’s a man, which they want, even if they don’t admit it. And he’s a libertarian, and they distrust the government as much as he does.”

“Not for everything. C’mon, Cat, I know you already know this. As much as they might say they hate it, they count on government subsidies for certain crops and all sorts of rules on imports and exports. Those won’t be the kinds of things Max thinks about because he’s never concerned about the human impact of his policies, just like he’s never thought about it when he’s inventing—no matter how much he tries to claim it’s all for humanity.” Cat didn’t respond, but she seemed to listen. “If Max came up with robots to automate all farming, do you think he would give a second thought to what it would mean for these farmers who’d end up losing their jobs?”

“No.”

“Exactly. And I know, I know, we probably can’t say it outright. But I bet you Alex and I could find a way to get that message out there as we get closer to the caucuses. And if I know you—which I do—I guarantee you’ll find a way to work it into a debate speech that’ll leave Max totally blindsided.”

“I am damn good at the debates,” Cat mused.

“Yeah you are. So now put on that charming smile and let’s go convince a bunch of farmers that you’re the candidate for them.”
Cat went and gritted her teeth at the inappropriate comments and defended herself on things she really didn’t think required a defense and spoke passionately about protecting workers’ rights and supporting American agriculture. It didn’t win her everyone—hell, it probably didn’t even win her half—but she had some who sat and listened, who engaged and pushed her on issues without simply dismissing her from the start as an out of touch politician who would never understand. That engagement was enough for Kara to chalk it up to a good meeting, insisting they’d do more and do better when they came back again closer to the caucuses.

Cat kept her politician smile plastered on her face throughout dinner, which at least brought her a more sympathetic audience in the form of other Democratic hopefuls for the coming election cycle. For the second night in a row, Cat ate steak without fear of someone calling her rich and out of touch for it. No, instead she was enjoying the local cuisine. It was heavier than she’d normally want, but after the day she’d had, Cat found she couldn’t complain.

By the time they made it back to the hotel, Cat was happy to collapse in her bed. Only Kara came knocking once more.

“What?” Cat practically growled. “What do you need now?”

“Just checking to see if you still wanted to do Minnesota tomorrow instead of Kansas or more of Nebraska.”

“By more of Nebraska you mean further into the rust belt where they hate me even more?”

“I mean…”

“That’s a yes,” Cat cut in. “We would’ve needed to come back to Kansas anyway, since we were only doing a few stops, so why not go to Minnesota and let them feel special, especially since they’re yet another caucus state.”

“That’s fine. Just remember, it’s a long drive.”

“I assume that means you’ll be scheduling publicity stops along the way?”

Kara grinned. “I promise to make it worth your while.”

Too tired to deal with the awkward back-and-forth that would result from calling out Kara on a promise that sounded sexual in nature, Cat simply sighed. “What time should I set an alarm for?”

“Vasquez suggested leaving here at 5. It’ll give us time to make stops along the way and still arrive in enough time to have the full afternoon.”

“Fine.”

Kara fought back the urge to ask Cat if she wanted company. She looked dejected in a way Kara hadn’t seen in ages, and Kara wanted nothing more than to be able to take that stress away, to bring back the Cat Grant she knew. But after last night, she suspected her continued presence wouldn’t help as much as she wished it would. “Night, Cat,” she whispered, quietly pulling the door shut behind her.

When she got back to her room, she settled in with her computer and phone, planning a day that she hoped would boost Cat’s spirits once more. There was nothing like an enthusiastic candidate to whip up votes. Just because Cat had been able to fake it well the past day or two didn’t mean she could sustain it indefinitely. Within a few hours, she felt confident that she had enough plans to remind Cat of exactly why she was doing all of this, why she was putting herself out there and subjecting herself
to personal attacks and a level of vitriol that no human being—or alien, really—should have to experience.

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Kara surprised everyone from the main team with their exact coffee order of choice—freshly made and still piping hot—the next morning as they stumbled sleepily out of hotel rooms, luggage dragging behind them and eyes still bleary from having stayed up late into the night making sure they were set for the new schedule.

“I love you,” Winn muttered—whether it was to Kara or to the double shot, double chocolate mocha she placed in his hands was anyone’s guess.

“Only one more trip on the campaign bus without James,” Kara promised him, her voice low enough to ensure that no one else could hear. It wasn’t as though Jasmine was bad at her job, but James and Winn had known each other for a while and, despite a rocky start, they’d found their way into a supportive friendship. Jasmine, on the other hand, tended to treat Winn as peripheral to the main staff—and in a sense, he was, but James knew just how deep his knowledge went and how much more he could do than his job description suggested. So on the bus, Jasmine left Winn with the press and the interns, keeping her focus on members of their Midwest offices who were deemed more valuable of her time and attention.

“Heard he’s headed down to Atlanta early,” Winn mumbled, his words still slurring slightly from not enough sleep or caffeine.

“Yeah, I figured it’d be good for him to look around for the best places for photo ops and to spend some time with the press before the whole group of us flies in.”

Seeing more team members finish turning in their room keys, Kara bid Winn goodbye and hurried over with their coffee orders.

“A double, one sugar, no milk, for Jasmine.” Kara handed the cup over to the woman, smiling broadly. She really didn’t dislike her, even if she thought she could treat Winn better.

“A red eye for our valiant driver.” Vasquez reached out and took the cup gratefully as she repeated her thanks to Kara again and again.

“And a non-fat latte, extra hot, for you.” Kara rejoiced at the small smile that curled up the corners of Cat’s mouth at the first sip. How she didn’t burn her mouth, Kara would never know, but she tried not to dwell on the question as those thoughts normally led into other thoughts about Cat’s mouth that would make a long car ride seated side-by-side a very unique kind of torture.

Eventually they managed to get everyone out of the hotel and into their vehicles. Kara distributed copies of their schedule to Vasquez, Jasmine, and Harold, the campaign bus driver, before climbing into the back of the SUV with Cat.

Around the time they hit the first hour of the trip, Cat fell asleep. Kara resisted the temptation to take a picture and instead focused all of her attention on texting back and forth with James while he sat on the shuttle to the airport and then waited for his flight to board.

Around hour two, they hit a pothole in the road and Cat’s head ended up lolling to the side at an angle that would surely leave her with a crick in her neck. Very carefully, Kara reached over and tried to nudge her back onto the headrest, only to have Cat’s eyes shoot open, catching sight of Kara hovering much too close, one soft, warm hand cupped around her jaw.
“Sorry,” Kara mumbled, hurriedly pulling back her hand and settling into her own seat once more. “You just—we hit a bump.”

“It’s fine.” Cat’s voice was still thick with sleep, but her tone was clipped. “How much longer?”

“Only a few more minutes until our first stop…then another 4 hours or so…” Kara tried to smile brightly enough to make up for the length of travel.

“Where exactly is this mysterious first stop?”

“Sioux City,” Kara answered, handing over a copy of their stop itinerary to Cat.

“And what are we doing there?”

“Picking up some pastries from a local bakery and taking them down to the Riverfront where you’ll talk to a few locals, get a couple of pictures taken by the photographer from the Sioux City Journal, and enjoy your breakfast.

The morning progressed according to schedule, and Cat felt herself growing more and more confident with the good press Jasmine and Kara generated for her with every “surprise” stop they made and every small town connection forged. She talked to single moms excited to vote for a woman who understood what it was like to balance work and family. She spoke to baristas and pastry chefs who were pleased with her plans for health care and had heard about the way she raised the minimum wage out in California. She took pictures with kids who really just wanted to know what it was like to be on television, but who were happy enough to say that they’d vote for her if they were old enough.

By the time they got back into the car for the last leg of their trip to Minneapolis, Cat had begun to feel like herself again—a slightly more exhausted and stiff version of herself, but still Cat Grant. “Thank you,” she whispered to Kara as they flipped through the handful of blog articles that had come out about her visits and the photos that had been uploaded over the course of the morning and early afternoon.

“Of course. It’s my job.”

“It’s…not all of this, no. Don’t sell yourself short,” she concluded, unwilling to get into the full extent of what Kara was doing, what she knew Kara knew damn well she was doing, when they had an audience. She would play good boss, but not vulnerable human being.

“You’re welcome,” Kara finally conceded. “I think you’ll be happy with what we have planned for Minneapolis.”

“If it was your design, I’m sure I will.” After a pause, she added, “Though if it’s yet another bakery that sells donuts, I’m going to get suspicious that you have some sort of deal with the donut-makers association.”

“Don’t be silly. It’s obviously the sugar lobby—much bigger voting base,” Kara teased, pleased to see Cat actually laughing.

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Once more, Cat had to congratulate herself on her choice of Kara for campaign manager. Rather than focusing on the finance and business sectors that dominated so much of Minneapolis’ economy, Kara scheduled Cat’s appointments as walking meetings through the Sculpture Garden and the Walker Art Center and had her spend a long chunk of time at Open Book, where she had the chance to speak
about her years as a reporter and then as the founder and CEO of a media company that was renowned for its generous support of the arts. The audiences were engaged and supportive, and it was just the right angle to clearly differentiate her from Max and Justin in the best of ways.

By the time they finished at a local theater, where Kara had bought out a full row of seats for one of their evening shows to invite some of the biggest local donors to the Grant campaign, Cat felt energized, despite the full day of campaigning. She had Winn join them in the car for the ride back to the hotel and listened carefully as he explained where they were in terms of polling and social media presence in comparison to where they stood before the trip and before the scandal, and in comparison to the other Democratic nominees. It wasn’t ideal, but her numbers had gone up in Iowa, where she, Max, and Justin were the three frontrunners, though, she was grateful to see, Max’s actual polling numbers didn’t match the enthusiasm he’d managed to generate with his late candidacy announcement and gimmicky tricks at the State Fair. Her campaign numbers were projected to go up in Minnesota as well, edging her more firmly into the lead. And, despite everything, she was still holding firmly in third place behind Justin and Stephen in Nebraska, which was about as good as she could hope for at the moment.

When they got to the hotel, she thanked Winn and asked him to send her updated social media numbers from Minneapolis in the morning, then turned to Kara. “Should we go over the plan for Alabama?”

“Sure!” Kara followed Cat back to her hotel room, where she handed her a map for their weeklong sweep through Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. Once they made it through the list of stops and the target audiences they were hoping to reach at each one, Kara launched into the key points to stress. “You’re polling well there—at least pre-scandal, you were in the lead. Justin’s family has a pretty sold hold in the Midwest, and you two go back and forth in the Northeast, but you do better with African American voters and a solid number of women, and that wins you most big cities and large swaths of the South. Use it to your advantage.”

“So go to conservative states and double down on a socially progressive agenda?”

Kara shrugged. “Pretty much. You can’t lose people who would never have considered voting for you in the first place.”

“Brazen…” Cat eyed Kara appreciatively, a smile curling up the corners of her mouth. “It looks good on you.”

“About as good as victory will look on you,” Kara managed, silently congratulating herself for managing to respond in kind without the slightest waver in her voice.

Looking up and holding eye contact, Cat tried to focus on every voice in her head telling her all the reasons this was a terrible idea, all the reasons she should send Kara back to her room and let the electricity crackling in the air fizzle out as she tossed and turned, riding high on endorphins and feelings that had no hope for an outlet. “You,” Cat began, the tenor of her voice low, “you should probably…”

“I really should…” Kara’s tongue darted out to wet her lips, her mouth suddenly much too dry and the air much too warm and thick with things that had gone unsaid and unaddressed for much too long. It was the sight of Cat’s teeth sinking lightly into her lower lip that finally drove Kara up and out of her chair, her feet failing her momentarily as she stumbled to right herself. “You’re right. I should—should go.”

Cat forced herself to nod and watched as Kara whisked out the hotel, a flash of blonde hair before the door clicked shut.
A full hour of chasing sleep to no avail later, Cat let herself be weak, let herself indulge for one short moment, promising herself that it meant nothing. It was stress relief and honestly, who could be faulted for needing that after the week she’d had? She forced her eyes to stay open as long as she could, knowing exactly what she’d see the moment they fluttered shut. She forced herself to focus on the sensations, not on any fantasy; on the feeling of her own hand slipping between her legs, not on what it would feel like if it were anyone else’s. She ignored the questions about why exactly she was so very wet. And when she came she didn’t think before muffling whatever words might spill from her mouth with an overly fluffy hotel pillow.

One thin wall away, it wasn’t that Kara was listening on purpose. It was simply that she was attuned to listening for Cat, attuned to making sure she fell asleep and anticipating whether she would need an extra shot of espresso in her morning latte, even if they had interns that could—and often did—go get it for her. And if, in her listening, she happened to notice a spike in Cat’s heart rate, her breathing growing ragged, the low groan of satisfaction that accompanied the sounds of fingers sliding across slick heat, it certainly hadn’t been intentional.

The insistent pulse between her own legs, however…well, attending to that was very much a choice. And Kara found she only had so much willpower left after forcing herself to leave Cat’s room. As she kicked off her pajama pants and ground her teeth together to keep from making a sound, she realized what was left of her will power wasn’t quite enough to stop her mind from drifting to thoughts of all that might have been happening next door. She blamed those thoughts when she came, shuddering under the insistent pressure of her own fingers, with Cat’s name on her tongue.
Avoidance was the name of the game on Monday, much like it had been all weekend. Alex responded to her work emails and holed herself up in her office to delving into all the ugly business dealings of Lord Technologies and the Kennedy political dynasty, intent on finding absolutely every bit of information that might be useful to Cat down the line. Kara was already diving deep into the issue-driven critiques, and they’d both been working with James and Jasmine to find ways to integrate veiled criticisms into Cat’s ads without being accused of going on the attack—at least not this early.

The few times other staffers came to her door, she was able to gesture to the large Excel sheets of campaign contributions to Justin and Max, as well as investment reports and any tax documents that had been made public over the years. For the most part, it was enough to deter pointless questions, and even Lucy had simply slipped back out at the sight. Much as she wanted to see where they stood after Friday, she also knew better than to interrupt Alex when she got into research mode.

Maggie popped her head around the doorway around lunchtime to see if Alex wanted to go grab a bite to eat, only to be confused when Alex nearly broke her pen in half and flushed a brilliant shade of red. “I, um, not today. Sorry,” Alex rushed out.

“Ah, alright. Lucy mentioned you looked busy. Want me to pick you up something to eat?”

“You don’t have to.” Alex didn’t even look up from her papers.

“Well, no, obviously I don’t have to…but I’m happy to. C’mon, you gave me a fun night on Friday.” Alex choked on air. “Let me repay the favor with a lunch on me.”

Biting back questions that Alex knew were beyond stupid—questions like, are we dating? Is this a thing you do with all your friends?—Alex finally gave in. “That’d be nice, thanks.”

“Anytime,” Maggie called over her shoulder as she headed back down the hallway.

“I see how it is. You talk to Maggie, but not me,” Lucy huffed, pouting at Alex and sinking down into a chair.

“She’s buying me lunch and respecting the fact that I’m busy. What are you doing?” Alex countered, pointing her slightly bent pen accusingly at Lucy.

“Obviously I’m checking in on my good friend.”

“I’m fine. Busy.”

“I can see that.”

“So then…” Alex trailed off, making a shooing motion with her hand.
“I just, after Friday, I wanted to make sure we were alright.”

“We’re fine.”

“You seem a little, I don’t know.”

“I’m fine,” Alex insisted. “I’m a little tired.” She was actually exhausted. She’d woken up to the same variations of her Friday night dreams every night that weekend, and eventually she’d decided that 4am was an acceptable wake up time if it meant not waking with a gasp, sticky with sweat and things she didn’t want to think about yet again.

“Do you want to work from home?”

“No. Thank you,” Alex added. “I’m getting things done, and Kara’s supposed to draft some policy responses to Max’s campaign website now that it’s finally starting to take shape. I want to go over them before she sends them to the research team for pre-debate background research.”

“Between the two of you, I swear, Cat’s gonna end up with a better researched platform to run on than the actual policies of half our past presidents.”

“So long as she actually gets to be president, I’ll happily over-prepare the hell out of her.”

“And then we all know Kara would happily spend every waking minute with her,” Lucy snorted.

“She really is devoted.”

“Yeah, or her big hero worship crush is showing.”

“She…on Cat?”

“Have you not seen the photos of Kara’s blatantly checking out Cat’s ass?” As she pulled them up on her phone, Lucy couldn’t help the loud cackle. “I can’t tell if she was more enamored with the donuts or Cat’s butt.” Lucy passed her phone over with a side-by-side comparison of Kara licking her lips at a donut and Kara grinning like an idiot with her gaze significantly further south than it should have been.

“Oh god. These haven’t gotten out anywhere, have they?” After everything else, it was the absolute last thing this campaign needed.

“No, don’t worry. They’re photos that members of our own team took. I downloaded the few like this for myself, but deleted them from the shared drive.” Seeing the tension slowly bleed out of Alex’s frame, Lucy scoffed. “Really think I’m stupid enough to leave ammo like that sitting around?”

“I mean, the donut photos are fine.”

“Well, yeah, they better be. Cause half the country’s seen them all over Twitter thanks to Kara’s very public love affair with fried food.”

Alex couldn’t help laughing as she flipped through photo after photo of the side-by-side comparisons. Admittedly, she was slightly worried about what Lucy did all day if she had time to make mini collages, but she’d let it slide for now. Alex made a mental note to have a sister night with Kara as soon as she came back. If her sister was crushing on their boss, she really needed to know. Not that Kara was exactly renowned for acting on her crushes. Other than a short fling with James, some boy she’d dated all of senior year, and the girl she’d pined after for all of study abroad junior
year, Kara seemed fairly content with focusing on her work and pining from afar.

“I think the one with the breakfast taco is my favorite,” Lucy said. On a late night Skype call, she and Vasquez had giggled like teenagers as they flipped through the pictures together, finally finding the perfect one to pair with the infamous breakfast photo that featured Kara, her eyes fluttering closed, a faint smile of contentment on her lips, and half a pancake and eggs taco clutched in her hands.

“Ooh, I missed that one.”

“Ah, it was an earlier one, I think.” Lucy leaned over to point it out, watching as photo after photo flicked by. “Here, let me try,” Lucy offered, reaching out for her phone as Alex got closer and closer to the end of the food photos and the start of Lucy’s personal ones. “Seriously, here, I’ll do it!”

Lucy moved to grab the phone from Alex’s hands, but it was too late; she watched the change on Alex’s face as a distinctly less family friendly photo popped up. At least it wasn’t Vasquez; Lucy could deal with Alex seeing her boobs—after all, she’d kept the photo because they looked great in it—but she’d hate to sacrifice Vasquez’s privacy like that.

“I—uh—here,” Alex stammered, nearly throwing the phone back at Lucy.

“Thank you.” Lucy cleared her throat and quickly found the photo she’d actually been looking for. Somehow it had ended up separated from the rest, though then the memory of their Skype call came flooding back to Lucy, and she remembered the very nice interruption in the midst of their giggling and talk of the campaign. “If you wanted to see the actual photo,” Lucy offered, holding back out her phone.

Alex peered over at the screen but didn’t grab the phone from Lucy this time.

“What? Afraid you’ll get cooties?”

“Excuse me, I’m not the one with naked pictures on my phone!”

“My…” Lucy wasn’t quite sure what to call Vasquez; they got dinner together and fucked a lot, and Vasquez definitely made her smile, but girlfriend seemed wrong—at least when they hadn’t talked about it. “My person is out of town.”

“So you and Vasquez are still a thing?”

“Wait! How the hell did you know?” She’d missed Maggie’s sexuality and Cat’s and, god, even her own, if Lucy’s suspicions were correct, but apparently she’d managed to catch onto the one office tryst that had actually been a well-kept secret.

“When we went to the Diner, you two snuck off,” Alex admitted.

“Wait, we weren’t even…” But then Lucy remembered what they had been doing, which was discussing whether or not Alex was a flaming homo and how long it would take her to realize it and then how much longer it would take for her and Maggie to jump each other’s bones after that. “It was just a kiss, god,” Lucy huffed, figuring it was best not to poke the bear before she’d had her post-lunch coffee.

“Yeah, and that photo I found was just a tasteful selfie?”

“I think it was very tasteful. And Vasquez seemed to agree.”
Wrinkling her nose, Alex just shooed Lucy away. “I have work to do, Lane. And so do you—work that isn’t just putting photos of my baby sister together in Picstitch.”

“Wow, you know what Picstitch is? God, next thing I know I’m gonna find out you’re active on Instagram,” Lucy teased.

“Out!”

“Yeah, yeah.”

A few minutes later, Maggie arrived with two bags of food. “I got mine to go just in case you wanted a lunch buddy.”

“I…” Alex paused, thinking of all the reasons she’d given to Lucy for why she couldn’t afford the time for a break today, all the reasons why she’d been trying to avoid Maggie in particular. But she found she couldn’t say no to the woman standing in front of her looking much too earnest with two bags of food clutched in her hands. Plus, maybe it would be good—she’d get new images of Maggie to fill her head now, images more grounded in reality than whatever weird dreams the whiskey had given her. “Yeah, alright.”

Grinning, Maggie kicked the door shut and set food out on the desk once Alex cleared a spot for them. “I got you a burger and fries cause it kind of seemed liked one of those days.”

“You’re amazing,” Alex gushed without even thinking about it. Over lunch, they chatted about the campaign. Maggie had spent the rest of her weekend doing research for Kara and Cat for their swing through the southern states, though she admitted she’d happily work on weekends if it meant never having look at a spreadsheet like the one spread across Alex’s desk. No matter how many times Alex insisted that it really wasn’t so bad, Maggie remained convinced that it was the product of the devil himself.

By the time they finished lunch, Alex felt lighter. It was easy to talk to Maggie, but they’d still chatted about nothing more serious than work. They were professionals and coworkers and friends, and it was just that they’d gotten a little drunk, and Lucy’s words had still been ringing in Alex’s ears, but there was no reason for those dreams to continue any longer.

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The flight on Monday seemed to stretch on for hours—well, it was hours, but Kara swore it was more like a short eternity as she sat still next to Cat, wondering if she could sense what Kara had done the night before. There was no reason for her to have been able to tell; Kara only knew about Cat because she could hear and see though walls—not that she’d violate Cat’s privacy by actually looking—and as far as she knew, Cat was as human as they came.

Cat tried not to read anything into Kara’s twitchiness. It was probably just nerves or stress; they were off to a whole new part of the country with a new set of objectives. Still, she couldn’t quite silence the small voice in her head that was screaming out that it was her fault, that she’d made Kara uncomfortable, that somehow the other woman knew exactly what she’d done after she left the night before.

By the time they landed, Cat was on edge and snappier than normal—a state that always put all of her staffers on high alert. She managed gracious smiles at the front desk of the hotel and then again for her first dinner out in town, but their evening staff meeting went worse than usual. Winn was too skittish to answer questions in full. James and Jasmine clashed on strategy. And Kara was too off-balance to get everyone on task. Eventually Cat dismissed them all with a flick of her wrist and a
growled order to “do better tomorrow.” Once her hotel room was empty, Cat set to work on her own, pulling up all the talking points for her scheduled stops the next day and reading over them until the exhaustion of too many early mornings and long days of travel finally forced her into bed.

The next morning, Kara seemed a bit calmer, and by the time they were in the car after a day full of stump speeches and meetings, she looked almost excited. “I really think you’re gonna love this stop,” Kara insisted. She’d added it to Cat’s calendar the same night she’d rearranged her schedule for the Minneapolis stops with the goal of getting Cat to focus on the issues that mattered to her, the ones that set her apart from the others.

Soon enough, Vasquez was pulling into the parking lot of a local grade school where a Women in STEM club from Alabama State University met with middle and high school students for free tutoring sessions to encourage the young girls to get involved with and stay interested in STEM fields. Even though Cat had been more known for her personal involvement in the arts and humanities, she’d also been one of the early supporters of increased funding for better STEM education in public schools thanks to her Silicon Valley constituents and was known for being an even bigger supporter of peer mentorship and the work of groups like the Boys and Girls Club.

The stop would be a short one—Kara hadn’t wanted Cat to get flack for taking away tutoring time from students who were already deprived of adequate classroom resources in underfunded school districts—but they had a few local news stations out and had allowed the students to invite parents and teachers alike.

Cat walked into a full house and raucous applause and soon found herself smiling in earnest. After saying a few words about how very important the work they were doing was and encouraging students to get involved and stay involved in local and national politics, Cat stepped back and let Kara take over with fielding questions. She tried to stick to questions from students and a handful of the adults, though she let a few of the reporters chime in as well.

“What makes you better qualified to talk about these issues than Mr. Lord, who’s actually been in the lab doing the work?” one of the parents asked, crossing her arms across her chest.

An easy smile on her face, Cat held the microphone up. “By that logic, when it comes to governing, I’m the only one of the bunch that’s led the executive branch of a government, so I’m the best qualified to govern,” Cat joked easily, earning a chorus of low chuckles from the audience and a few loud claps. “But in all seriousness, I know that I haven’t worked in a lab. I didn’t major in a STEM field. But I respect those of you who do. I respect the intelligence and hard work that goes into your jobs and your studies. It’s the reason why I fill my staff with people who do work in these fields.” Kara grinned as she listened to Cat building to a rhythm.

“I make sure that I’m consulting with the experts before I make my decisions because I know the value in asking for help. I know better than to lock myself away behind closed lab doors and build without thinking about the human impact of my work, just like all of the teachers and college students here know about going through the approval process for experiments and thinking through possible repercussions. I can’t say that every candidate in this race has seemed to do the same, but I hope that we can learn from each other.” Cat made sure to end on a positive note, remembering Kara’s suggestion to keep things light for today, which was meant to be about encouragement more than critique.

She went on to field questions about where funding would come from and what she thought about the disparities across populations in STEM fields and how she responded to people like Max Lord who preferred the complete privatization of these industries. Her favorite were the middle school students who were more interested in asking about her personal experiences than her policies. She
got to talk about Carter, which always won her a few extra points, and gushed about how impressive
the work he was doing was and how young people really were going to lead them into a future that
was just barely imaginable when she was in school.

Eventually Kara cut off questions, insisting that Cat wanted everyone to be able to get to their
homework and tutoring and get home at a reasonable hour for bed. Cat fought the urge to roll her
eyes at how maternal Kara was making her out to be. She knew it played well, so she let it happen,
even though she hated it—hated that she had to hype up everything soft and domestic about herself
in order to seem better qualified when she actually better qualifications than just about everyone
running on paper. Still, she was in a good mood, which was improved even more when Kara
informed her that she had the whole night off—a rarity when they were out on the road campaigning.

After a long call with Alex about Alex’s suggested revisions to debate talking points before they sent
them back over to the researchers and then a final promise to do sisters’ night that weekend as soon
as Kara was back, Kara set about finding food for dinner. With a bit of time on Yelp, Kara tracked
down a few of the restaurants with the best ratings and health inspection results and lowest rates of
food poisoning claims. A quick side-by-side comparison of their menus led Kara across town to an
Asian fusion restaurant for an order of lettuce wraps with several extra entrées for herself.

Hoping she wasn’t overstepping, Kara knocked lightly on Cat’s door. After a moment, a set of hazel
eyes met her from behind the just barely cracked open door. “What do you need now?” Cat sighed.

“I come bearing food. I even got you lettuce wraps—extra crispy.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Cat slid open the chain lock. “Just give me one minute,” she called out,
turning her back on Kara and walking away.

Figuring she could still follow her in, Kara caught the door with her foot and pushed it open, nearly
dropping her bags of food at the sight of Cat in nothing more than a towel, damp hair leaving
droplets of water along Cat’s shoulders that Kara suddenly had the intense urge to kiss away.

“I meant I’d be back for you,” Cat remarked, a slight smirk playing about her lips at Kara’s stunned
expression. No matter how dangerous it would be to act on it, she still enjoyed knowing that she
could fluster Kara. “But if you can manage to turn around, I suppose you can wait in here.”

“I, uh, I can…” But Kara didn’t finish saying that she could leave. Because she really couldn’t bring
herself to leave—not again. Instead she turned to the side and waited and made herself promise not to
take just the smallest of peeks because that wasn’t the way she wanted to finally see Cat naked, and it
was definitely not the way she wanted Cat to find out that she would still very much like to see her
naked.

A minute later, Cat joined her on the couch in gray sweatpants and a white t-shirt, and it shouldn’t
have been possible to look that attractive in such simple clothing, but Kara thought it looked perfect
for cuddling, for pulling Cat into her lap and kissing up and down her neck, and she really needed to
do something before this got any more out of hand. Maybe she should try dating someone else.
She’d never been a fan of one-night stands; they always felt…sort of cheap and unsatisfying when
there were no feelings behind them, no level of intimacy that made things better, made her feel more
than just sensations with nothing behind them.

“Kara?” Cat repeated, peering down at the woman who sat on the other end of the couch looking
somewhat shell-shocked.

“Hmm?”
“I asked if you wanted anything to drink.” Unable to help herself, Cat added, “You look a little thirsty.”

Blushing faintly, Kara nodded. “Um, yeah, if you have water…”

Cat handed over a bottle before sinking back down onto the couch with a to-go container of lettuce wraps that weren’t quite as crispy as they might have been had she been sitting in her favorite restaurant, but were a hundred times better than anything her recent assistants had managed to procure.

“I thought today went well,” Cat observed.

“Yeah, yeah, it definitely did. I liked the little dig at Max.”

“Hmm, yes, I was rather proud of it, if I do say so myself.”

Kara thought the little smile on Cat’s face was unfairly attractive, but she’d also give anything to keep it there. “Things like that at the debate will probably be your best bet when it comes to non-policy critiques.”

“Yes, we all know if I say something that’s too obviously critical, suddenly I’m the wicked bitch of the West.”

“I’d wear that on a t-shirt,” Kara laughed.

“Mm, maybe we could do a nice little redesign of Elsa with my face. Vote for the frigid ice queen 2020.”

“You’re, like, the opposite of frigid.”

“You mean hot?” Cat teased, smirking as Kara snapped her chopsticks in two.

“I just mean—don’t sell yourself short, that’s all,” Kara huffed, fishing in the bag for a new pair of chopsticks. Luckily she ordered enough food that they always gave her at least four sets, along with enough fortune cookies for a whole family.

“Maybe I’d rather own the whole ice queen thing. Queen of all Media—I do like my royal titles.”

“Shh, next thing you know, the press will be reporting that you’re trying to reinstate the monarchy.”

“Ah yes, my big gay dictatorship shall rule unfettered.” At this point the only thing she could do was laugh about it. Laugh and win. And push herself just a little harder on the treadmill as she thought about running fast enough to nudge Dirk off the edge of a cliff.

“Sounds like a solid plan. I’ll be sure to pitch it to Alex, make sure she’s onboard and has a good plan in place for PR.”

“I figure if we get someone like Ellen on it, she’s palatable enough to win over the swing state voters.”

“Sounds solid.”

“So it’s decided. Now I’d like you to work on getting Sarah Paulson as my running mate.”

“And if she insists on a job for Holland Taylor as well?”
“Oh we’ll find a spot for her, rest assured.”

Kara felt any lingering awkwardness dissipating as they planned out Cat’s cabinet, joking and laughing freely as though they didn’t have the care and weight of a whole campaign resting on their shoulders.

“Think you have any room for dessert after having plowed through enough food for five people?” Cat asked, gesturing at the stack of empty cartons in front of Kara.

“Hey,” Kara pouted. “I was hungry.”

“I’m not mocking you…completely. Though I did assume as you aged perhaps you would be forced to cut back like the rest of us. I suppose I’ll be over here stuck calling lettuce wraps an indulgence while you eat to your heart’s content forever.”

Kara just shrugged and grinned smugly. “You said something about dessert?”

“The chocolate mousse at that little corner restaurant two blocks over is supposed to be just exquisite…”

“I’m already on it,” Kara yelled, rushing over to the door and pulling on her shoes and jacket. If Cat was excited about a dessert, it was just about guaranteed to be perfect. “Be back in a jiffy!”

“Oh lord, I left you alone in the Midwest for barely a minute, and you’re already talking like you’re from Kansas,” Cat muttered under her breath.

“You’re welcome!” Kara called from the hallway. She resisted the urge to use a bit of superspeed, knowing it would be suspicious if she got back too fast, though Cat was accustomed to getting her way faster than most normal people.

When she got there, she found the order already packed up and paid for, with a small note: “For Kara – to help get you back in less than a jiffy.”

Smiling to herself, Kara happily accepted the small bag and bolted back to the hotel. Too impatient to wait for the elevator, Kara jogged up flight after flight of stairs until she flung herself through the doorway to their floor and knocked softly at Cat’s door.

“Well wasn’t that fast?” Cat drawled.

“Helps when someone else has already taken care of half the work.”

“We’re a team now—can’t have you acting like you’re still my assistant.”

“In that case, you won’t mind if I take the bigger mousse…”

“I didn’t say we were total equals,” Cat huffed, though she still handed over the container that looked a little fuller to Kara. The smile that lit up her face was worth it.

“Oh my god,” Kara moaned. “This is amazing.”

“Would you really expect anything less from a restaurant I chose?”

“No,” Kara admitted. “But still, this exceeds expectations.”

Figuring she really couldn’t ignore such a glowing commendation, Cat took a dainty bite and licked it off her spoon, feeling her heart flutter at the sight of Kara’s eyes trained firmly on her mouth.
Figuring it was acceptable to indulge her ego some, she let her tongue flick out just a bit more than was strictly necessary, relishing in Kara’s blatant appreciation. It was playing with fire, but god, she had to agree with Frost here because if fire looked like that and made her heart pound like that and her body feel like that, she’d let it consume her every time.

Forcing herself to breathe normally, Kara turned back to her mousse, honing all of her senses in on the taste and texture and smell of the dessert, letting herself nearly get lost in it. “So, um, anything else you want to eat while you’re down here?”

Swallowing a spoonful of mousse along with any overtly inappropriate answers, Cat shrugged. “I could be persuaded by a few options.”

“Yeah? What’s caught your eye?”

Cat narrowed her eyes, trying to figure out if the innuendo was intentional or simply the inadvertently flirtatious result of Kara speaking frankly without a filthy mind to cast everything she said in another light. But when Kara looked up at Cat, her gaze seemed to burn with an intensity that Cat had never been able to ignore. “Aren’t you my campaign manager? I thought you’d be the one telling me what should catch my eye.”

“You know I like to check in with you first—never want to be one of those managers that throws stuff at you and hopes it works.”

“We’ve worked together long enough that I trust you to know my taste,” Cat answered, spooning more of the mousse into her mouth and dragging her lips slowly across the spoon as she held Kara’s gaze.

“I’ve just never wanted to assume…” Kara trailed off, drawing closer to Cat.

“You’ve always been good at knowing what I want—sometimes a little too good,” Cat admitted, her voice nearly a whisper as her fingers found the lapels to the jacket Kara never even managed to take off before throwing herself back onto the couch with their desserts.

A loud blaring screech of a noise filled the air, momentarily overwhelming Kara as she fought to close off some of her senses after having opened them wide to let herself feel everything with Cat. For a moment, Kara was struck by the inane thought that this was all inside her head, some elaborate internal warning system set off to keep her from making the same mistakes that had driven Cat away all those years ago.

“Motherfucking hell,” Cat growled glaring up at the blinking red fire alarm as though it had done her some great personal offense, which, in a way, it had.

“You go out first. I promise I’ll leave, but I’ll wait until everyone else is out of the hallway,” Kara insisted. It wasn’t exactly odd that she would be with Cat, but she also didn’t want to take chances, especially given that there were hotel guests not involved in the campaign in the hallway who wouldn’t necessarily understand that a campaign manager and candidate had perfectly legitimate reasons for being holed up together in the same room in casual clothing at...11 at night.

Once Cat had thrown on a jacket and shoes and dutifully traipsed out into the hall, the fire alarms stopped just as abruptly as they had started.

“Just got back from the front desk,” Vasquez panted, apparently having run all the way down to the lobby and back up again in the same amount of time it had taken Cat to put on clothing she wouldn’t hate to be seen and potentially photographed in. “It was just something burning in the kitchen.”
“All that for what? Burnt toast?”

“I’m sorry, ma’am. They’re very apologetic, and I can probably arrange to have something comped for you.”

“No, no, it’s fine. Don’t need that story,” Cat huffed. “I’ll just—I’m going back to bed.”

“Have a good night. Sorry again for all of this.”

“Not your fault.” Cat blamed the universe. And Alabama. And whatever dipshit let something burn this late at night.

By the time she made it back to the room, Kara was already seated on the edge of the couch. “I’m gonna head back to my room. Have a good night, alright?” Her voice was tight, but the meaning of her words was clear.

“Right. Goodnight, Kara.”

“Night, Cat.” Without a look back, Kara left, letting the door fall shut behind her.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Happy Tuesday! Please enjoy a long, Alex-centric chapter also featuring her good friends Lucy, the internet, whiskey, and Kara

The week flew by in a blur of campaign research and requests from the team as they made their way across this trip’s trio of southern states. Alex was grateful for the distractions. It hadn’t stopped the dreams, but at least it left her with much less time to dwell on what exactly they meant. Friday was the first day when things finally quieted. The team had made it to South Carolina, their last stop on the trip, and Kara finally felt like she had enough research to make it through to Sunday. James and Jasmine had scheduled all the photo ops and interviews they’d needed to, and the social media team was fully informed of their tasks. Which left Alex with…time. Time without clearly delineated tasks to occupy her attention.

Maggie was over at some two-day forum the ACLU was putting on, and Lucy had gone to an afternoon spin class for her late lunch break. Alex might even have gone to see if James or Winn wanted to grab coffee, but they were both down in South Carolina with the rest through Sunday. She debated starting additional opposition research about some of the Republican candidates, but it seemed like a waste when the field was still so broad and they were all pushing each other to increasingly conservative positions that should make them easier and easier to spin as wholly unpalatable to centrist audiences.

Drumming her fingers against her desk, Alex clicked open an incognito tab, trying to figure out how to phrase her question. Eventually she settled on: “Dream meanings.”

The first sight seemed like a whole lot of psychobabble bullshit. The second one at least had a neatly ordered, alphabetical list of symbols. She wondered where to start. Sex seemed as good a place as any. She began skimming through something about how if the sex was wild she needed to be wild. She wondered what it meant if the sex was just good. Did she need to be a better person? She already thought that all the time; she didn’t need sex dreams to tell her that. Oh good, then there was some line about the dream probably being her subconscious’ way of telling her it had been too long—as if she didn’t already know. Fuck you too, brain. She kept skimming. Apparently dreaming about having sex with a friend could just show how close you two were. Or it could be latent attraction. The whole site seemed like bullshit designed to tell you whatever you wanted to know so that it could never be wrong. She exited out of it.

Next up, she tried a much more specific search that left her blushing until the very first article was a Q&A on a site with a name she actually recognized from a woman who seemed to be having her exact problems: recurring lesbian sex dreams and fantasies even though she was straight. The first few points of the author’s response seemed reassuring. It didn’t have to mean anything, could be the result of something she’d seen in her daily life—and really, a lot of people in her life were apparently sleeping with other women. Or hoping to. A small voice in the back of her head kept asking whether it was normal to be so relieved by such suggestions. She wondered if other straight people were so easily convinced they weren’t straight, or if it wasn’t even a consideration that crossed their minds. Ignoring it, she kept scrolling. Some of the points seemed less relevant to her, especially since she knew the person in her dream. Of course, the author ended with some bullshit about being open to
new experiences and labels, as though it were that simple, as though thinking about those kinds of things wouldn’t completely upend a life and every assumption that had, until that point, structured it.

When she found she could no longer focus on the spreadsheets to which she’d returned, she went back to her private browsing window. “Am I a lesbian?” she searched, feeling much too much like an old person who didn’t quite understand how to use google and assumed all things needed to be full sentences. There were several helpfully numbered lists. She could do that. She could answer questions. But the questions turned out not to be so straightforward. Did she like kissing women? Well she didn’t know, obviously. If she knew the answer to that, she’d have a goddam answer to her question. But she certainly shouldn’t try it if she didn’t already know. Then there were ones like, “Do you notice things about a woman’s appearance? Does your heart race or do you get butterflies when you notice an attractive woman?” Of course she did. Everyone did. After all, Alex thought, the media literally trained people to sexualize women, to see them and notice their appearances, right down to the smallest of details.

She switched over to a new test that was supposed to be less about the things she’d done and more about the way she felt. She wasn’t too into the whole thinking about feelings thing, but it seemed better than basing it on actions she hadn’t ever done and maybe never would. But soon she was being asked to consider what she fantasized about, how she felt about certain fantasies. Feeling a little silly but also desperately in need of answers, Alex shut her eyes and tried to think about what she was being told to.

“Wake up!” Lucy yelled, cackling loudly as Alex nearly fell out of her chair.

“What the fuck?” Alex grumbled, righting herself.

“I’m all energized from spin and totally bored,” Lucy whined, walking over to Alex’s desk.

“Go to your own office!” Alex hastily tried to shut her computer before remembering she didn’t have a laptop. Of course, it could never be easy, so Lucy noticed her attempts to flip down her monitor and rushed over. Alex managed to hit the power button on the monitor itself, but Lucy wheeled Alex’s chair away from the desk before she could turn off the computer itself.

“Workplace harassment!” Alex yelled.

“Best friendship privileges!” Lucy cried back, pushing Alex’s chair and trying to take up as much space as she could manage while the screen flickered back to life. “Oh,” Lucy gasped right before Alex tackled her from behind and pushed her aside, pressing the power button and watching as everything went black. “Sor—”

“Get out.” Alex’s voice was rough, and Lucy knew it was normally the relative calm before the storm, but she couldn’t just abandon Alex and let her think this was all shameful.

“Alex,” Lucy pleaded.

Alex looked genuinely angry by then. “I said get out, Lucy.”

“Goddammit, Alex, I get that it’s scary, okay? I get it! You think I was just chill with all of this? You think I wasn’t worried? You’ve heard my father talk. You know what it was like back when we were in high school, college, when I would’ve been enlisting.”

“It’s different,” Alex insisted.

“Get your stuff, we’re leaving early.”
“No, I have work to do.”

“No, I have work to do.”

“Really? So you weren’t just using your work computer to look up ways to tell if you’re a lesbian?”

Alex shushed Lucy, her eyes darting around as if to make sure no one was close enough to hear.

“Exactly. Not a conversation to have here. Let’s go. I’ll even be nice and let you choose between your place and mine if you leave now.”

“You place,” Alex answered automatically; she wanted an easy out if she needed to leave quickly.

“Fine.” Lucy waited while Alex gathered her belongings, then shepherded her out the door and down to the front steps. “We’ll walk and talk.”

Alex just nodded, falling into step with Lucy. She might be tiny, but she walked fast.

“No matter what age or how welcoming the city or your darling friends”—Lucy smiled broadly up at Alex and held her hands under chin, attempting to look angelic and failing to get Alex to crack a smile—“asking these sorts of questions can suck. It’s confusing, and no matter how many quizzes and tests you take, there aren’t any easy answers. It all has to come from inside of you. It comes down to how you feel.”

“I hate that.”

Lucy was secretly pleased that Alex had responded at all. “Yeah, it sucks. It really, really does.” They walked in silence for a little while. “So…who made you start asking questions?”

“What?” Alex hoped her voice wasn’t quite so high-pitched in reality as it sounded in her head.

“Who’s your Kelly? Or it doesn’t have to be a person, I guess,” Lucy admitted. “What was that moment where something shifted into place and suddenly everything started to make sense in a way you never imagined it would?”

“I—just—it’s not—you can have dreams about people without the dreams meaning anything.”

“You can,” Lucy conceded, dipping her head slightly. “But sometimes they do mean something. And sometimes they mean something that seems totally different than what you thought they might mean. Want to tell me about your dream?”

“No!” Alex nearly yelled, looking horrified at the idea.

“So a sex dream then?”

Alex’s answering blush was all the confirmation Lucy needed.

“How?”

And god, it broke Lucy’s heart just a little to hear how defeated Alex sounded. “Alex, I know you. I’ve seen the two of you interact. It’s not—it’s okay, you know?”
“It’s not, though. I’m an adult, Luce. I shouldn’t be confused anymore.”

“Well, who says you’re confused? You’re figuring things out—that means things are getting clearer.”

“It doesn’t feel like it. It feels like everything is getting fucked up when things in my life were finally going well.”

“Okay, look at me.” Alex glanced over at Lucy. “What’s the worst thing that can happen? C’mon, you’re our scandal expert.”

“For other people.”

“Alright, here are the details, same as you’d give them for a client: Alex Danvers. Political fixer. Mid-to-late 30s. DC resident. Problem: she might be into an out lesbian.”

“Shut up.”

“Make me. Tell me what you’d tell your client.”

“I’d tell her that it’s not an issue because the problem isn’t a problem the way you’re saying it.”

“Then tell me how it’s a problem when you say it.”

“Because…because, it’s like…like if everything you knew about yourself was suddenly a big question mark.”

“Everything?” Lucy arched an eyebrow in challenge. “Tell me, Alex. What’s different now?”

“Lucy, the shitty attempts at humor—really not what I want right now.”

“Fine, sorry. But Alex, seriously, what’s the issue? I get that it feels big and scary, like there’s this whole part of yourself that you haven’t been aware of. But you’ll still have your job. Cat sure as fuck isn’t gonna fire you over it, and pretty much no one in DC would. You’re still a private person—changing something that you didn’t talk about with anyone before won’t suddenly make it a public fact unless you want it to be. You’ll still have your group of friends; barely any of us are straight, so it’s not like we’re about to abandon you. So what’s changing?”

“I…what if it changes everything?”

Lucy waited a minute to see if Alex would elaborate. “Okay, do you think it’s going to change any of the things I talked about?”

“No,” Alex conceded.

“Okay. So right now, you understand that your job and your friends are about 90% of your life, yeah? You go on maybe four dates a year.”

“But what if…what if that changes? Or what if I want—I mean, what if it changes things between me and some of my friends?”

“Because if you’re out, suddenly those things that you felt about Maggie aren’t just innocent little butterflies that you can ignore?”

“I don’t want to talk about this.” Alex spun on her heels and switched directions, “I’m just gonna—I’m gonna head home.”
“Alex, come on, don’t shut me out,” Lucy yelled, jogging to catch up with Alex’s rapidly retreating form.

“It’s not like that, Lucy.” Alex hated how her voice cracked when she spoke.

“Then tell me what it is like.”

“What if I do like her? What then? Does it make me, you know, does it say something bigger about me? Is it just about her?”

“Is it? Because…look, I don’t want to make assumptions—”

“That’d be a first,” Alex snorted.

Continuing as though Alex hadn’t said anything, Lucy plowed ahead. “But it seemed like maybe I struck a nerve when I was talking about Kelly and feeling jealous of her formal date. And maybe it was just from that time you saw Maggie with the other woman. But maybe it was something more or older. And that’s okay too.”

“I just…it is, if it is the same with Maggie as it was with Vicki and all these other memories that I think, that I think I had pushed down so deep for so many years…then what does it make me?”

“Human, Alex.”

“Shut up.”

“I’m serious. Look, repressing feelings? That’s like, what we do best. What any of it says about you is up to you and only you, okay? Maybe you decide that all those things mattered—that those things were actually really important. Maybe you realize that you’re gay.” Alex took a shuddering breath, but she didn’t cut Lucy off, which Lucy took as a good sign. “Or maybe you still liked some of those guys and don’t want to write them off, and your sister and I will happily welcome you into our circle as a baby bi or pan or whatever label you choose. And maybe you just want to repress all of it, and you can call yourself Catholic and be done with it.”

Alex let out a snort of laughter, grateful for a note of levity in a conversation that was becoming much too serious much too fast. “I, um, I think I still want to go home now.”

“You’ll be okay? Do you want me to come with you?”

“I’m not a child,” Alex huffed.

“You’re not, but I’m still your friend. I can come over and just hang out. I could even try to stay quiet for a little while.”

“Much as I would enjoy watching you struggle like that, I really think I need some time alone.”

“Alright. Call me if you need anything? Please?”

“I will.”

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Alex spent Friday evening, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning holed up in her house. She ignored texts from Maggie about how cold the conference rooms at the ACLU were and how much she just wanted a snack, as well as calls from Lucy checking in on her and seeing if she wanted to do anything. After Friday night’s slight overindulgence with whiskey, she tried to limit herself to wine
and forced herself to eat and wait until evening to start drinking again.

After a full day of reading far too many online articles that left her with more questions than answers, Alex was exhausted and frustrated and no closer to certainty than she had been all week. And so she found herself returning to the one quiz that seemed the best. It was a more nuanced version of the Kinsey Scale, and she’d actually heard of that one, and nuance always sound like a good thing. Plus, it had a whole appendix with definitions, and that seemed ideal. Definitions were good. Solid. Fixed things that she could use to measure herself.

First up was sexual attraction. She skipped that one. Behavior. That was easy: she’d only ever slept with men. Not often. And she didn’t normally like it. But she did it. She felt satisfied as she answered the past and present columns. Ideal was…confusing. She left it blank. Then there were fantasies. She skipped that too.

Questions about who she had strong emotional bonds with and who she spent her time with were easy enough, though she didn’t really think that did a lot in helping her to figure out if she was a lesbian. But still, answered questions were answered questions. The question about the sexual identities of her friend group also had easy answers, even if she hadn’t realized it at first. She scoffed at the question about how she identified. Didn’t the test realize that she was only taking it to get the goddam answer to that question?

Which sent her right back up to sexual attraction and fantasies, which were…significantly harder. Closing her eyes, she conjured up Rafael. He was objectively attractive. If she saw that, it had to mean something, right? Maggie swam into view next. She was…well, obviously Alex had made observations about her when they first met. It was what she did—sizing people up. And sure, at the movies, Maggie had looked objectively beautiful. But clearly anyone could have seen that.

Growing frustrated by that column, Alex switched back over to fantasies and refilled her wine glass. She didn’t exactly fantasize much, save for the dreams of the past week or so. She wondered if they even counted. After all, she wasn’t actively conjuring up those images; they just…came to her. And the internet seemed to suggest that maybe dreams meant nothing. Or everything. Or something in between. And it was all rather confusing.

Committed to getting an answer once and for all, Alex grabbed her wineglass, then the whole bottle for good measure, and carried them up the stairs and into her bedroom. Closing her eyes, Alex tried to conjure up the images of her dream—the same ones that seemed to pop into her mind continually when she hadn’t wanted them but now felt like they had to be forcibly pried from deep in her subconscious, like her mind knew that she was about to turn them into something more and was willing to fight her on it every step of the way.

She finally managed to find her way back into the bed with Maggie crawling down her body. Her eyes flew open; she wondered if it was weird to be thinking about a real person. Figuring she’d make it up to Maggie by buying her a cupcake or something if she even remembered any of this the next morning, Alex let her eyes flutter closed once more, forcing herself not to panic, to live in the fantasy, see how it played out. And she couldn’t deny that what thrummed so insistently through her body felt a lot like need, a lot like arousal, a lot like all those things she really thought she’d never feel the way so many other people did.

When she tried replacing Maggie with Rafael, it felt forced, but it felt equally forced when Alex tried to shove some faceless, nameless woman into the scenario. Maybe it was a Maggie thing… It didn’t explain why she had felt similarly a few times cuddled up with Vicki in her bed in high school, or why that smug, brilliant woman who sat next to her in almost all of her graduate seminars at Yale had left her both furious and desperate for something she hadn’t quite been able to parse out, let
alone name, back then.

Resolving not to get caught up in questions about the past, Alex let her thoughts drift back to her dreams, to images of Maggie and the way she seemed to worship Alex’s body. She let herself sit with everything she was feeling. And for once she didn’t force herself out of bed as the fantasy progressed, didn’t let the guilt and shame overwhelm her. She tried to listen to Lucy’s words, tried to remember that it was natural, that she’d never judge Lucy, or Vasquez, or Cat, or Kara, or Maggie for their sexuality, even if she thought they made some questionable decisions at times. Channeling that sense of acceptance, she closed her eyes once more, finding herself in bed with Maggie again. This time she let herself think about what it might be like to feel that much soft skin against her own, what it might feel like if she let Maggie make it all the way down between her legs.

She felt her stomach tighten and goosebumps break out across her skin. The room seemed warm—almost too warm—but not in the way it did when she was panicking. It was close, but there was something else there too, something like a heat that came from inside her and threatened to overwhelm her in ways that she suspected might not be entirely unpleasant. She could feel her pulse thundering in her chest and echoing throughout her body, as though every part of her was pulsing in time with some deep-seated need. It wasn’t until she gathered the courage to trail a hand between her legs and found herself wet with the proof of the arousal she’d been denying for too long that the shame and guilt and self-loathing spiraled out of control, leaving her queasy and shaky as she sat on the edge of her bed. She wouldn’t—absolutely wouldn’t violate Maggie’s trust like that. She had her proof, but there was no need…no need to do something like that.

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Sunday afternoon, Alex almost sent Kara away when she showed up at her door, but she thought that would only intensify her guilt. And honestly, there was a little voice in the back of her head that sounded a lot like Lucy that kept whispering that she would feel better if she talked to people.

“Alex!” Kara flung her arms around her sister. “God, I’ve missed you.”

“Missed you too,” Alex managed through the tight hold Kara had on her. And that much was true.

“You look a little…did you stay at the office the whole time I was gone?”

“What? No,” Alex answered just a little too quickly.

“You look like you’ve barely slept.”

“Did you? You look like you’ve barely slept.”

“Wanna go for a walk?”

“Um, alright,” Kara agreed with a small shrug. She set the boxes of food she’d brought in Alex’s fridge and dropped off her bag before gesturing to Alex to lead the way.

Alex walked them down to the waterfront, letting the slightly too cold breeze rolling off the Potomac ground her. It was cool enough out that the throngs of people who strolled the path in the summer months had disappeared, replaced by a handful of avid runners and afternoon cyclists who passed by quickly enough that Alex didn’t worry too much about being overheard.

“Are you okay?”

“What? Yeah—yeah, no, I’m fine.”

“You seem a little…I don’t know exactly. Kind of like you did that time when Eliza and I flew out to New Haven and dropped by unannounced during grad school.”
Cringing at the memory, Alex shook her head. “No, it’s not—it’s not like that, I promise. I just…you know Maggie?” It was a dumb question, and she hated herself the second it left her mouth. Obviously Kara knew Maggie; they all worked together.

“Oh no, what did you do?” Kara prayed they wouldn’t need to get HR and legal on it.

“Nothing! God, I’m not a terrible person.”

“Right, right, of course.”

“Anyway, I just, we’ve been spending a lot of time together, especially since you left.”

“That’s…promising?” Kara watched Alex closely, trying to gauge her reaction.

“Yeah, yeah, I think it’s good. We run together, and we get lunch together, and we went and saw that documentary I wanted to see and the Wonder Woman sequel.”

“Sounds like fun!”

“It was! It was a lot of fun.” That part was easy; no one could object to her having friends.

“So then what’s up?”

“I just, um, well, at the movies the other night, things felt…different. I mean, I was really happy. It was fun.”

“That sounds like a good thing.”

“It was. But I just…after that, I started, it seemed like maybe, like maybe I was…I just, I started thinking about her.”

“Okay…” Kara trailed off, feeling as though she was missing some important detail.

“I mean I, um, I think maybe I started to…develop feelings. For her.”

“Like…feelings, as in…?” Kara had made the mistake of assuming once before with Vicki and watched as Alex completely shut down, refusing to talk to her for over a week and then acting like nothing had ever happened.

“Yeah, yeah, um, those feelings.” Alex shoved her hands in her pockets and looked out over the water at the small groups of birds that drifted down the river on the small ripples in the water.

“Alex, you know that’s okay, right? There’s nothing wrong with having a crush on Maggie or whatever it is.”

“No, I…I know, I guess.”

“And there’s nothing wrong if you’re gay or bi or—”

“That’s not what I’m saying,” Alex rushed to clarify.

“Okay! Okay, I’m sorry. It’s just, if you were…that’d be okay too. You don’t think there’s anything wrong with me, do you?”

“No! No, absolutely not, Kara. It’s just, well, it’s been so long since you seemed to have feelings for anyone that—I don’t want to say I forgot, but it’s just not the first thing I think of, you know?”
“Um, right.” Kara nodded enthusiastically, glad to hear that her infatuation with Cat wasn’t visible from states away.

“But I hear you’ve got some big new crush. And you know Lucy is rarely wrong,” Alex added in a sing-song lilt, happy to get the attention off of herself for a moment.

“She swore she wouldn’t say anything!”

“So it’s true!” Alex crowed, cackling at the look of betrayal on Kara’s face.

“That’s not fair.”

“All is fair in love and sisterhood, you know that. So spill.”

“Why don’t we go back to your place for this conversation,” Kara suggested. “I’ll tell you something for everything you tell me.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Alex nodded. “Deal.”

During the walk back to Alex’s place, Kara filled her in on the last days in South Carolina and how everything had gone. Short version: well. They’d gotten a few group of protesters with megaphones calling out lines from the released emails, and Alex resolved to look into them, see if they were protesting of their own volition or if they’d been sponsored by Dirk. With the amount of frustration still humming right under the surface, she could really use a good excuse to go threaten someone within an inch of his life.

When they got back, Kara set out the snacks she’d brought home, while Alex pulled out the bottle of wine she’d fallen asleep with, blessedly managing not to spill any before she woke with a start and put it back on her nightstand.

“Alright, you go first,” Alex insisted.

“I have a crush on someone.” Kara sent a shit-eating grin Alex’s way.

“I call bullshit—I already knew that one.”

“You made no specifications.”

“Fine, then I too think I have a crush on someone. Your turn. Something new.”

“Well…what exactly did Lucy tell you?”

“She showed me all the pictures of you gaping at Cat’s butt—also, way to be subtle, Kar.”

Blushing, Kara gritted her teeth. “She said she would delete them.”

“She did. From the server…”

“I guess that’s something. So alright, yes, I will confirm that I have something of a crush on Cat. Your turn.”

“I already knew that too!”

“No! You knew that I appreciated her butt. It could have been nothing more than an aesthetic appreciation”
“Fine,” Alex grumbled. “I kinda felt like I was out on a date with Maggie at the movies. And for once I didn’t hate it.”

“I kinda felt like that with Cat up on the ferris wheel at the State Fair—not that it was,” she rushed to add. “But it—it was nice, you know?”

Alex smiled wistfully. “Yeah, yeah, I do.”

Pulling open her bag of desserts, Kara gave Alex an option: “Banana pudding or pecan pie.”

“Um…did you bring back anything that actually sounds like something I’d enjoy?”

“Uh, I got you some bourbon on a little side adventure I went on.”

“And you haven’t offered it yet?” Alex asked incredulously, grabbing the bag and digging around for it herself.

“I didn’t bring it over. You sounded upset, so I went desserts only.”

“Fine,” Alex whined, stretching out the word into multiple syllables. “I guess a slice of the pecan pie will do.”

Kara was back from the kitchen with plates and forks before Alex could even blink. “Your turn,” Kara declared as she handed over a plate with a rather generous slice of pie and a scoop of vanilla ice cream that Alex assumed must have come from Kara’s stash in her freezer.

“I, uh, I had…had sexdreamabout Maggie,” Alex rushed out all in one breath.

“Is that, um, what inspired the sudden realization?”

“It played a pretty prominent role,” Alex admitted, cheeks burning with embarrassment.

Figuring Alex could use something equally embarrassing in return and feeling the need to tell someone—anyone—Kara took a deep breath. “I’ve had a crush on Cat for over six years now,” she nearly whispered. But still, it felt good to say it aloud.

“Holy shit,” Alex cursed under her breath. “Wait, you mean…?”

“Yeah.”

“Wow. After all that time?”

“Yep.”

“Did Cat…is that why she didn’t…?”

“No! Um, no, that’s not why she didn’t keep me on her team.” That much was true. “We talked about it before I took the new job. Apparently she really thought I should grow in a new role where I wouldn’t be remembered as an assistant.”

“Oh, that’s actually, I mean, that’s pretty nice of her.”

“Yeah,” Kara sighed. “So what about Maggie? Think she might like you?”

“I don’t know. She’s just really great. And she’s so pretty.” Alex sipped at her wine as she thought about their night together at the movies the previous weekend. “She’s funny too. And smart.”
“It sounds like you really like her.”

“I do. And it’s weird, you know? I don’t really get like this. But with her, I mean, it’s scary, and I’m still not really all the way here for what it might mean for me, but it feels kinda natural too. Like, I didn’t have to fight to feel the bare minimum for her.”

Feeling tears prickling at the corners of her eyes, Kara wished more than anything that she could hold Alex in her arms and let her know that it was okay, that it was good to feel like that for someone, that those fears about what it might mean weren’t at all what she should be focusing on right now. Instead she just hugged Alex, whispering that it was going to be okay, that she was proud of Alex for opening up and letting herself be honest about her feelings.

“So, um,” Alex sniffed, desperate to get the attention back off herself, “what is it about Cat that you like?”

“Besides the whole super powerful running for president thing?”

“Yes, you big dork, besides that.”

“Well,” Kara sighed, “she’s really pretty. And she’s brilliant and always so many steps ahead. God, she’s brave too, Alex. She puts herself out there every day, even when people are saying such awful things about her. And she’s such a good mom to Carter. Did you know she calls him every day, even when she doesn’t have more than a couple minutes of free time?”

“You have it so bad.”

“I know,” Kara groaned. She didn’t add that sometimes it seemed like Cat had it just as bad. And she certainly didn’t mention that they’d kissed six years ago and almost had again just a few days ago—would have, were it not for the fire alarm.

They sat in reflective silence for a few minutes, Kara picking at her dessert and Alex sipping from her glass. Finally Alex cleared her throat. Sharing didn’t come easily, but if there was anyone she trusted, it was Kara. And god, it felt good to be able to say some of these things out loud for the first time. “I, uh, I think maybe…maybe Maggie isn’t the first person I’ve felt these things for.”

“Yeah?”

“Well, um, back in Midvale. I think, do you remember Vicki?”

“Mhm. You two were inseparable until that big falling out.” Kara didn’t point out that she had already sort of assumed there might have been something similar with Vicki.

“I think…I think maybe I was jealous. When she was suddenly too busy for me because of her boyfriend. And at the time it was easy to write it off as being mad because we had plans and she would blow me off, you know? But I think there was probably something else there too.”

Kara nodded and rubbed at Alex’s shoulder. She didn’t expect it when Alex spoke up again.

“And then there was Naomi at Yale.”

“Who?”

“Remember the one I used to complain about all the time?”

“Oh, is this the one who sat next to you every class?”
“And seemed to be a big know-it-all? Yeah, same one.”

“So what about her?”

“I mean, obviously she was annoying—that’s still true.”

“Of course,” Kara giggled. “Had nothing to do with that time she corrected you on the first day of classes.”

“She was insufferable.” Kara didn’t point out that Alex had used many of the same words to describe Maggie or that maybe she had a bit of a type. “I was thinking about her, though, and I remember feeling something else. And it was so close to anger because it was still this—this, thing inside of me, like something that made me want to yell at her or grab her but also, maybe also kiss her,” Alex finished quietly, like she wasn’t quite sure about it still.

“She was pretty. You did show me the pictures.”

“Yeah. I don’t know. Maggie’s prettier.”

Kara had to bite her tongue not to “aww” at how adorable Alex was being. “You gonna talk to Maggie? Tell her how you feel?”

“What?” Alex didn’t even realize her voice could go quite that high and squeaky. “No! Absolutely not.”

“Why?”

“We work together, Kara. And we’re—I’m probably not her type anyway.”

“You’ll never know if you don’t ask…”

“And if she says no? Then how awkward will it be around the office?”

“Literally cannot be worse than the first weeks when you wouldn’t stop yelling at her,” Kara countered. “At least consider it?”

“Maybe.”

“Maybe tell her that you’re not straight? At least plant the seed, ya know? So that she can start thinking of you in a new light.”

“You sound a little like Lucy…”

“Maybe that’s not the worst thing in the world.”

“That’s true. She does have Vasquez.”


“They’re sleeping together, have been for a little while now. I think they’re not labeling it, though. But apparently they talked the whole time you were gone. And also sexted, which, no, did not ever need to see that proof.”

Kara laughed and covered her face with her hands as she shook her head. “Remind me never to check in on Vasquez at night when we’re out on the campaign trail.” Of course, her attention was normally much too consumed by Cat, if she wasn’t already with her treading whatever dangerous
line they’d been drawing in the sand and slowly inching closer and closer toward over the past few weeks.

“Deal. Now how about we reward ourselves for all the sharing with some television? I need to not have to think for a long, long time.”

“I’ll call in for Thai food. You can even pick what we watch.”

Alex couldn’t help but feel like perhaps that was a pity-induced offer, but if it meant her choice of show and Kara’s treating to dinner, she wouldn’t complain. After all, she did deserve it.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Primarily SuperCat with a bit of Carter for good measure in this slightly shorter chapter, but we’re finally getting places...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alex spent the entirety of the next week standing in front of her mirror and trying out different phrases. “I’m…” She shook her head; those words got stuck. “I like Maggie,” she repeated. That one was easy. She’d gotten used to it. It rang true and felt right in a way that the other still didn’t. “I have feelings for Maggie. Romantic feelings. Sexual feelings.” They were still all true.

“I’m not straight,” was as close as she managed when it came to labels. It scared the shit out of her and still left her racing for a drink most nights, but after days of practice, it started to feel like something she could live with, like something that was doable.

On Friday afternoon, after a week of avoiding the woman, Alex asked Maggie if she wanted to go to Jack Rose on Saturday to see if she couldn’t be convinced of the perfection of whiskey that made it the superior drink. Maggie agreed, and Alex found herself frantically texting Kara to try to find out where she was because she needed so much advice so fast. After all, Jack Rose was sort of fancy. And going there together—just the two of them—on a Saturday night, so that she could tell her that she was not straight, something she only knew because she couldn’t stop having sex dreams about her—it all seemed very date-like. And Alex wasn’t really upset about it, but she was also terrified. Because she’d never been excited like this for a maybe-date. And she’d definitely never had a date with another woman. Not that this was a date. She probably would’ve needed to specify that little detail in her question. She wasn’t sure she was ready to take that leap yet.

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Across town, Kara sat downstairs in Cat’s home office while Cat spent as much time with Carter as she could before he left for a school field trip for an overnight stay in New York City. They’d given the students a half-day to pack, and Cat had left the office promptly at 11:30, ensuring she would be home before Carter even returned and there until she absolutely had to drop him off at Union Station to meet the rest of his classmates for their bus ride up to the city.

After finishing up as much as she could without Cat at the office, Kara had made her way back to Cat’s place, having promised her that she’d be by with any work that Cat would need for the weekend, since the second debate was the following week.

Carter had flung himself at Kara when she arrived, much to Cat’s surprise. Then again, just because six years had gone by, she supposed it made sense that Kara would have made as strong of an impression on her son as she had on his mother.

“You’re so grown up,” Kara had marveled, holding him out in front of her.

“I’m 17,” he’d huffed, looking every bit the part of a teenager who was ready to start being
recognized as an adult already.

“Gonna be 18 in time to vote for your mom?”

“Not in the primaries,” he’d admitted, looking rather glum, “but I’ll be old enough by the presidential election.”

“Well then, I have even more reasons to make sure we get her there,” Kara had winked at him. “I won’t keep you from your mom, I’m sure she wants to see you as much as possible before you run off to Manhattan.”

“It’s only for two days.”

“But I was just gone for two weeks,” Cat had pointed out. “You’ll forgive a mother for wanting a bit of extra time with her son.”

“Yeah, yeah.” But he’d inched closer toward her and didn’t protest when she wrapped an arm around him and kissed his forehead.

With a smile and another hug for Carter, Kara had excused herself and made her way down to the large office Cat set up for herself the first month she moved into the old Kalorama house. It was different than the office she’d had back in California, which was all monochrome and open spaces and broad windows that left sunlight streaming in. This one was warm with rich mahogany furniture and long rows of bookcases. The leather of the chairs was maroon, and the only light in the belowground space came from the actual light fixtures. But somehow it suited Cat just the same, and it seemed presidential in a way, like she was already staking out her claim to belonging to that long lineage of past leaders.

Eventually Cat came back downstairs, looking wearier than she had in a while.

“Are you alright?” Kara asked.

“Fine. Just—it would have been nice to see him off, but apparently it creates a bit of a scene if I show up. His friend’s mom came to get him instead.”

“I know. I know,” she repeated, as if she were trying to convince herself. She’d always known she wouldn’t be one of the mothers who let that be her full-time job, and she didn’t feel guilty for having kept her career, but sometimes—moments like this—she felt a pang of longing for something more… normal. Once Carter left for college, she’d feel better, less like she was abandoning him each time she left for long campaign trips and sent him off to stay with his father. “No use wasting time. We have a debate to prepare for.”

“Right.” Kara pulled out the binders and packets they’d prepared for each of the different issues they expected to come up. “Where do you want to start: gun control, immigration, or climate change?”

“What a fun little trio of hot button issues.” Cat rolled her eyes, but soon pointed at climate change. They’d only recently filled the vacancy for the “energy and environment” researcher, and Cat worried they were a bit behind there, especially when, for reasons unknown to anyone else, Rudy Jones was still hanging around the race and rallying a troop of young environmental warriors behind him to shame the other candidates into pushing ever further to the left. And it wasn’t that Cat was opposed to change, per se, but she was also cognizant of what positions were and weren’t tenable in states where factories still dominated the economy and could cost her the general election.
No matter how determined Cat looked, Kara could tell she was still a bit off-balance from her change in afternoon plans. “Alright, Ms. Grant”—Kara dropped her voice low to mimic the moderator’s and fixed Cat with a hard stare—“how are you going to solve climate change in your first hundred days?”

“Really?” Cat arched a perfectly sculpted eyebrow at Kara.

Fighting to keep a straight face, Kara simply nodded.

If that was the game she wanted to play… “Well, first I plan to eliminate all cars—every last one of them. We’ll all end up very fit. And then we’ll plant trees everywhere—just clear out whole states to turn them into forests. Surely we can cram in elsewhere. New Jersey doesn’t have to be the most densely populated state in this great country. And I’ll get my assistant Kiera on anything that I’ve forgotten.”

“Sounds like a solid plan. But Dr. Jones has said that not only would he do that, but he’d also invest the entire military budget into researching the alternative fuels from other planets that Superman once mentioned in an offhand remark. How can you compete?”

“Well he can just have the damn thing,” Cat huffed, only cracking a smile once Kara did. “Are you ready to be serious now?”

“Absolutely.” Kara didn’t add that she doubted Cat would have been ready had she gone right from saying goodbye to her son to debate prep; there was nothing wrong with shouldering a bit of blame for a few wasted minutes.

From there, they launched into hours of intensive debate prep. Kara threw out the most damning quotes that had been released from Cat’s emails, any statements that the other candidates had made about her, the issues on which she was comparatively the weakest candidate—but again and again, she managed to smoothly transition back into the narrative Alex and Kara had helped her to spin.

Only once did she stumble—over a question about rumors of her support for LGBTQ rights and whether there was a personal motivation behind it, especially given how early in her career at CatCo she’d set herself and her company apart by coming out in favor of equal rights and offering benefits to same-sex partners at a time when most other companies wouldn’t have even considered it. Unlike the other details from the scandal that Cat easily dismissed as lies or scoffed at as unimportant, she seemed to freeze momentarily, hesitant to disavow an entire part of herself.

Eventually they settled on some wording that seemed to side-step the issue of Cat’s own investment, instead throwing the question back at the other candidates to ask why it had taken them so long to come around to the side of justice for all. But even with a solid response in hand, Cat still seemed rattled; her answers were all on target, but her delivery lacked its usual force.

“Want to grab dinner? Or would you rather be done for the night?”

Not wanting to admit that she wasn’t quite ready to be alone in her large house, Cat glared at Kara. “The debate is next week. Obviously we need to continue practicing.”

“Dinner it is! Want me to call something in?”

Cat shook her head, mumbling something about “unfair metabolisms.” “I had someone pick up groceries; I’ll make something. God only knows what cheesy, deep-fried monstrosity you’d whip up if I let you near enough to my kitchen.”

Kara gave Cat a small nod and smile, then followed her up the stairs. With Alex’s words about her
lack of subtlety ringing in her ears, Kara made a concerted effort to keep her gaze trained at the floor and her own feet.

“Is there anything you don’t eat?” Cat called over her shoulder as she reached the landing.

“Um…not a big fan of Portobello mushrooms.”

Cat cocked her head to the side. “Oddly specific, but that’s doable.”

Once more, Kara fought to keep her gaze elsewhere as Cat bent over to rummage in her fridge. “Do you want any help?”

Cat looked slightly suspicious. “How are you at following recipes?”

Striking her best Cat pose, Kara deemed herself: “Competent.”

“Well, I suppose you’ve proven competent everywhere else, may as well give this one a go too.”

They cooked in relative silence, the soothing noise of whatever music Cat had put on filling the room, interspersed with the sounds of chopping knives and sizzling oil and the occasional comment. It was nice, Kara thought; they worked as well together in the kitchen as they did in the office—not that she was considering any future visions of domesticity. Besides, she doubted the president was even allowed to cook for herself, so it would probably be a moot point, at least if everything went according to plan.

Over dinner, they went over a few more talking points for the debate, but even Cat had to admit that they were both fading fast. Two full weeks of travel and jam-packed days had left the whole team exhausted, and diving straight into an equally full workweek had perhaps not been Cat’s best idea. Maybe taking Monday off to work from home like Winn and Jasmine had done would have been a good idea. But she was Cat Grant; she didn’t just take breaks…save for Carter; he was always the exception.

“Want to review the latest batch of possible campaign ads from marketing? James vetted all the companies, though I don’t know if he’s watched all the tapes yet. It could give you something to check off your to do list without having to sit through another round of intensive questioning,” Kara added to help convince Cat that it wouldn’t be giving up if she stopped with that particular task for the evening.

“I suppose it needs to be done.”

Kara walked into the living room only to realize there was no television. “Um…should we go use your computer?”

“There’s a living room upstairs,” Cat explained. “It’s where all of Carter’s games are—much messier.”

Kara couldn’t help but grin at the memory of her first trip here. She’d wondered even then if Carter had a space that felt less like a museum or an antique furniture store than the formal living room on the first floor did. She followed Cat up another flight of stairs, only peeking for a moment into the master bedroom that she assumed must be Cat’s. The bed was large—definitely a king, maybe bigger—and covered in a plush white duvet. She didn’t risk lingering long enough to see what else was in there. Her confirmations about the state of the upstairs living room were soon confirmed as she found a well-loved armchair and a couch that actually looked comfortable enough to sleep on, along with stacks of board games and a few video game consoles and piles of blankets that gave the room a homey feeling.
Within a few minutes, Kara had gotten her phone synced with whatever state of the art wireless console Cat had surely gotten for Carter, and the videos were soon queued up and ready for Cat’s attention. The first was turned off mere seconds into it as the creative team had made the bold decision to call attention to her email scandal from the start. The next one had Carter front and center and was likewise dismissed; Cat liked to keep him out of the spotlight as much as possible—something for which he seemed eternally grateful.

The third was kept on as a possibility, as was the fifth. Cat made it all the way through both the fourth and sixth options, but dismissed both once she had the comparison between them and the other two. They sat side-by-side watching and rewatching the third and fifth clips, debating the merits of both. One hit hard on her experience—from her time abroad as a reporter who saw the realities of war and the horrors of famine and extreme poverty, to her years as CEO and Governor—while the other painted a rather presidential picture of her platform, focusing on all that she would become once elected. Obviously they could go back with tweaks on these ads before they ran, but Cat wanted to have a team that could be trusted with future ads, people who could carry her brand and vision out, not just in a basic clip, but in a longer narrative or with a new cast of people from her team and from the communities she visited.

With a big of digging, Kara was able to find videos both teams had put together for other candidates in the past, which is how they found themselves half an hour later with a soft, fleece blanket thrown across their legs, a bowl of popcorn between them, watching old campaign videos from the last few election cycles.

“They’re both obviously good,” Kara pointed out.

“They’re adequate,” Cat conceded.

“Which one speaks to you?”

“Really? This isn’t High School Musical. I don’t make my decisions by throwing a basketball and seeing where it lands.”

“That isn’t how Troy Bolton made his decision,” Kara huffed, pouting at the snort of amusement Cat let out.

“Excuse me, I didn’t realize I had an expert here, though I suppose, I probably should have.”

“If you must know, he follows his heart, which is why he ends up close to Gabriella at a school that has both theater and basketball.”

“So you’re telling me to throw money at both teams and go shack up with my high school crush? I suppose I could go see what Bobby Giordano is up to these days…”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“So what is it you mean?”

“I mean that some of your best answers in debates and interviews tend to come from the moments you had planned for but didn’t script. You’re not like the politicians who need everything on a big notecard and a teleprompter to seem human. You have a platform you really stand for, and you give answers you genuinely believe to be true.” She watched as Cat seemed to soften slightly under the ringing endorsement. “Trust your gut. Which video do you prefer? Which video gets out the message that Cat Grant wants the world to see?”

After a moment, Cat dipped her head slightly to the right. “Number five.”
“And there you go.” After a moment, Kara smirked up at Cat. “For the record, I thought five was the
better bet too.”

“And you didn’t tell me?” Cat looked vaguely exasperated, even though they both knew she would
have insisted on seeing every option for herself first anyway. “So why did you assume that I’d
pick it?”

“It mentions your career accomplishments first, before talking about you being a ‘good person’ or a
‘good mother’ or any of the other terms you hate because the men don’t have to say it except in the
Father’s Day special ad. Also, they took the footage that was clearly shot from the very best angle of
you at the first debate.”

Cat smirked over at Kara. “Have you watched all the angles to say that with such certainty?”

“Just doing my job, Cat.”

“Oh, I doubt that’s all it is…” For a moment, Cat looked almost startled, as though she hadn’t meant
to be quite so forward. But when Kara didn’t flee or laugh it off or try to deny it, the startled
expression gradually faded away, replaced by one Kara couldn’t quite name.

“I’ll write to James and let him know to commission the first set of ads from them. Obviously, if they
turn out poorly, we can still go with the third team and see if they do better. But at least it’s another
item on our list out of the way.” As Kara spoke, she pulled her phone out. “Oh shoot.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing—not really. I just have a…sister drama thing.”

“Are you two alright? I mean, I can’t have some silly little spat ruining my team.”

Biting the inside of her cheek to keep from smiling at how poorly Cat concealed just how much she
cared for her team—or, at least for the ones who did their jobs well—Kara shook her head. “It’s not
like that. It’ll be fine—just need to get to Alex’s to help her plan something.”

Cat resisted the urge to ask what it was; if it wasn’t related to work, she didn’t need to know. “Well, I
officially release you from your work duties. Go be a good sister.” As if to prove how serious she
was, Cat began walking, heading down the stairs and nodding approvingly when she heard Kara
following her.

“Thank you. And if you want to do more debate prep tomorrow or Sunday, I can be here. But you
should take at least one full day off. I mean, I know you well enough to know you’ll still be
reviewing your notes, but at least do it in bed in your comfiest pajamas.”

“I’ll see if I can’t manage.” Cat pulled down Kara’s coat from the hook by the front door. “Get home
safety. Make sure I still have a campaign manager and a fixer in good working order come Monday
morning.”

“When have I ever been less than ready for you?”

“We all know you were always a bit of an exception when it came to the general rule of
incompetence some days.”

“Or maybe you just have impossibly high standards.”

“They can’t be that high when you keep surpassing them,” Cat countered, feeling her skin tingle
slightly as Kara stepped nearer when she pulled on her coat.

“For you, Cat? Every time,” Kara whispered, leaning in and pressing a soft kiss to the corner of Cat’s mouth.

Before Cat could think about responding or asking what had happened or dragging Kara back in by the lapels of that jacket and ravishing her right there on the pristine formal living room couch, appearances and sister drama be damned, Kara was already out the front door and down the walkway, waving goodbye to Cat before disappearing into the night.

Chapter End Notes

See you on Tuesday to check back in with Alex and Maggie!
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Danvers sisters + Sanvers

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It took every ounce of effort Kara had to keep herself from simply taking off and soaring through the skies in time with her racing thoughts and heart. She had kissed Cat. Barely. But it wasn’t something that could be written off as a mistake or a misread situation. It was quite obviously a kiss. A kiss after a night of flirting after weeks of growing flirtation and too many almost moments for Kara to keep pretending like they were nothing more than colleagues who had kissed once all those years ago.

Every so often a small voice in the back of her head whispered that maybe she was about to go another six years without seeing Cat, though she kept replaying that night in Alabama when she just knew Cat was ready to lean in and finally break the tension that had been building since they took off on that first plane ride to Chicago. Surely she couldn’t cast Kara out of her life for doing something they both seemed to want.

Before she realized it, she was at Alex’s door, knocking firmly.

A moment later, the door swung open revealing an uncharacteristically frazzled-looking Alex.

“Hey.”

“You alright?” Kara asked softly, slipping in through the door.

“Fine.” Alex wished her voice’s pitch would lower just a bit. It would go a long way in convincing people that she really wasn’t on the edge of some nervous breakdown. “I didn’t realize you got my texts. You never responded.”

“Oh, right.” Because she’d been a little busy flirting with Cat. And then kissing Cat. And then walking here and mentally dissecting every millisecond of said evening—an evening she most definitely could not tell Alex about. “Sorry about that.”

“What were you up to? Got a hot date, or were you locked up in your room pining over your crush?” Alex teased, laughing at the faint blush that colored Kara’s cheeks. “I can see it now, whole diary pages with, ‘President and Mrs. Grant,’ doodled all across them. Or would you rather hyphenate it? Would it be Danvers, or would you want her to be a Zor-El?”

“Shut up,” Kara grumbled.

“Big sister privileges,” Alex called back, poking at Kara’s side.

“So then should I walk my little sister butt home and leave you all alone to panic about what to wear and say on your maybe-a-date with the woman you’re probably head over heels for?”

“No!” Clearing her throat, Alex scuffed her toes against the floor, the effect lessened significantly by the fact that she was only wearing little black socks instead of her boots. “No, uh, I could...I could
“Alright, well, what’d you say when you asked her?”

“Um, something about whiskey and this place being the best in the city.”

“Okay.”

“And I said something about wanting to make sure she gave whiskey a fair chance—let her see it at its best.”

“And you’re worried about the innuendo?”

Alex paused for a moment, suddenly looking stricken. “Now I am!”

“Hey, look, if she didn’t say anything, I’m sure she didn’t notice it. Or thought it was unintentional. How did she react to your asking her out for a one-on-one thing on a Saturday night?”

“I mean, she agreed to it? I don’t know, she didn’t seem to react any differently than she normally would. Well, she always seems a little bit surprised when people ask her to do stuff, but that’s weird because people like her a lot.”

Kara shrugged. “She’s probably still worried about being new and all. Plus, it’s not like you two were the best of gal pals her first weeks here.”

“Fair,” Alex sighed, walking back to the bedroom where she had a few outfits scattered across her bed. “Which one of these says: no pressure if you don’t want this to be a date, but also, I think I’m not as straight as I always thought I was and would maybe possibly like to confirm those suspicions with you in particular?”

“Alex! You said you weren’t straight!” Kara exclaimed, beaming over at her sister, who looked distinctly startled.

“What?”

“Last time we met, you were so worried about anything your crush might mean for you. This is progress, Alex! This is a big deal! I’m really, really proud of you.”

“I’m the big sister. Shouldn’t I be the proud one?”

“Please, we know it goes both ways.” Knowing Alex wouldn’t stand for any additional compliments or attention on herself, Kara shifted her attention over to the outfits on the bed, sifting through pairs of pants and button-ups and soft sweaters and blazers and leather jackets and even a dress that she hadn’t seen Alex wear in ages. “Well, you could pair that plaid button up with some skinny jeans and just throw out all the signs that scream, ‘I’m a lady that’s also into other ladies!’”

“It’s not like it’s much different from most of my wardrobe.”

Kara bit her lower lip and tried not to smile. “I know.”

“So…is that what I should wear?”

“What do you want to wear?”

“I don’t know. Jack Rose is a little fancier. Maybe I should wear a blazer on top of one of the button ups? But I don’t want to wear a full suit… Could I put it with just black jeans or something?”
“That sounds nice, Alex.” Kara didn’t add that it also sounded so very stereotypically gay; Alex could learn on her own timeline. “So, we’ve got your outfit all picked out. Are you feeling a little better now?”

“Well, what do I say to her?”

“What do you mean?”

“How do I—what if we don’t have anything to talk about?”

“Don’t you two talk all the time?”

“It’s different,” Alex huffed, running her fingers through her hair. “Now it’s like…like there’s this big new thing in between us. And maybe it’s going to change everything.”

“She was gay this whole time. And, right, haven’t you said that you kind of felt something for her for a little while now?”

“Maybe,” Alex admitted, pausing as she brushed the wrinkles out of a few of the shirts she had pulled down before getting them back on hangers and into her closet.

“So what’s different now?”

“Everything!” Alex hated it; it felt like every second of the overwrought emotions of puberty she thought she’d left behind. She sunk down onto her bed. “Now I know—I know that what we’re doing, it’s not just friendly.”

“It could be,” Kara pointed out, unsure of what exactly Alex needed to hear.

“But I don’t want it to be. Or—no, it’s fine if it is, I guess. But I also want more. Does that make sense?”

Kara smiled softly and joined Alex on the bed. “I do understand the concept of a crush.”

“Ugh, yeah, but it’s not like you could go hitting on the soon-to-be president, so you don’t have to feel like you’re screwing up the very possibility of your happiness every second you’re not doing something.”

Clearing her throat, Kara tried to look wholly unperturbed. “Right, right…it’s different, but, uh, surely there are some similarities.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I just—this is nerve-wracking, and I kind of hate it.”

“But isn’t it nice to have it be this kind of nervous anticipation instead of the deep-seated dread you used to get before dates?”

“Maybe…”

“I’m gonna go ahead and say probably.” Pulling herself up, Kara took Alex’s hands. “Look, you’re the bravest person I know, and this—whatever tomorrow night is—is just another little bit of proof of that fact. And no matter what happens, you’re still brave. And you’re still my big sister who I love more than anything, got it?”

Blinking back tears that seemed to have snuck up on her, Alex squeezed Kara’s hands back. “Got it.”
“And you’ll call me as soon as it’s over?”

“Yeah.”

“I love you.”

“You too.”

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Maggie spent most of Saturday morning running errands, picking up groceries and visiting the farmer’s market before wandering across town to the shoe repair place she’d heard good things about and entrusted with her second favorite pair of boots. It wasn’t until the afternoon when she looked up Jack Rose to get directions that she found herself feeling slightly nervous. For the second weekend that month, she and Alex seemed to be going somewhere very date-like. And it wasn’t…she knew it didn’t mean anything to Alex. Obviously the woman was straight—or at least thought herself a straight woman.

But a one-night stand or two only did so much to distract Maggie from the increasingly more-than-friendly feelings she’d been harboring toward Alex. At first it was so easy to call them anger or frustration and be done with it. The woman was infuriatingly arrogant and condescending at first brush. But then she’d gone and let herself get to know Alex better, and she’d come to realize that there was so much behind that initial armor—so much that she found she still wanted to get to know and learn and explore too.

And it was…it was okay to feel like that, she knew, but it was never a good idea to combine a straight girl crush with activities that could so easily be dates—and damn good dates if she were being honest. She wondered if there was a good way to tell Alex that they should maybe start inviting other people out with them to some of those movies and dinners and drinks. A smaller voice in the back of her head yelled out that adding other people was the very last thing she wanted, but she knew better than to leave her heart open to pain like that again.

She considered texting Lucy or Vasquez, but decided that, while they were friendly, they weren’t quite at that level of friendship. After all, both of them had been friends with Alex much longer, so even if they liked her too, it didn’t mean they would take her side if everything fell apart.

Eventually Maggie decided to treat drinks at Jack Rose just like she had their movie night outing—it was fun and friendly and a little too flirty for friends, but doable. She could act appropriately and be the good friend Alex needed her to be.

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“I’m here really early,” Alex whispered into her phone as she paced around the block where Jack Rose was located.

“How early?” Kara asked, trying to stifle a laugh. Of course, it was also adorable. Normally she had to drag Alex kicking and screaming out of her house to get her to dates, and apparently now she was so eager that she got there early of her own volition.

“Um…half an hour. Or well, that’s what it is now.”

“Oh jeez. Okay, well, why don’t you just walk up into Adams Morgan, do a lap, then come back, that way if she’s there early, she’ll see you walking down from the right general direction and won’t know you got there almost an hour early.”
“Yeah…yeah, okay. Alright, I should probably get off the phone.”

“You’ll be great!”

“Thanks, Kara. Bye.”

“Bye.”

With a deep breath, Alex set off up the hill, taking in the nightlife around her. It was a bit crowded for her tastes, though she knew this was nothing compared to later in the evening when people spilled out onto the sidewalk in hordes as though no one could possibly want or need to get through at a reasonable pace. She grimaced slightly at the sight of Madam’s Organ. She hadn’t been back since the fight she had with Maggie there. She hoped Maggie wouldn’t walk past it on her way down. She’d really prefer her to be in a good mood.

After making it all the way up to the McDonald's, Alex turned around and began walking back down, forcing herself to walk with the slow crowds instead of slipping between them. The longer she could make this walk take, the better.

When she finally got back to Jack Rose, she was a respectable nine minutes early. Figuring that wasn’t so bad, she slipped into the lobby and gave her name for the table for two in the cellar she’d reserved. In a moment of panic, she wondered if Maggie would think they were eating. Maybe she should have gotten a room up in the dining saloon…not that they really had anything vegetarian on their menu. But surely meeting someone this late for drinks didn’t come with the expectation of food.

Before she could call Kara to ask for advice, she caught sight of Maggie in the doorway, the streetlamps and moonlight illuminating her in a way that left Alex’s heart racing. She wondered if friends could tell friends they looked beautiful.

When Maggie noticed Alex, her jaw dropped for just a moment before she carefully schooled her features into a pleasant smile—a platonic, friendly smile. Just because Alex was dressed like a lesbian wet dream didn’t mean she should treat her like one. “Danvers!”

“Hey, Maggie,” Alex waved. “I just put my name in. Let me tell them that you’re here now.”

“Oh shoot, I hope you weren’t waiting long.”

“No, no, just got here a minute or two early,” Alex lied. As it turned out, their table was ready, and they were soon led downstairs.

“This place is really cool,” Maggie whispered to Alex as she took in their surroundings. She tried not to read anything into the way Alex seemed to tense up before letting out a shuddering exhale.

“Yeah…um, yeah, I really like it here. Not that I make it out too often. But, um, yeah. It attracts a slightly older crowd, which is nice. Plus, amazing drinks, so…win-win.”

“Sounds like it,” Maggie chuckled.

Their first few minutes were spent in idle conversation about their days and the upcoming debate and what Alex would recommend to drink. Even though Alex insisted that Maggie try at least one of the recommended whiskeys, she didn’t say anything when Maggie turned her attention to the list of scotches either.

Alex suspected she drank her first glass a bit too quickly for something so expensive and made a point of sipping at her water while Maggie nursed her drink.
“You okay?” Maggie asked, staring intently at Alex, who looked rather uncomfortable.

“Oh, uh, fine. Just…just thinking about the last time I was here.” She wasn’t. That was a lie. But it seemed like a good way to transition into the conversation she needed to get to tonight.

“That so?”

“Um, yeah. It was…a date.” It was almost true. She’d been here on a date once, even if it was over a year ago. The guy had been friends with Kara and asked her for recommendations on the kind of date that would make Alex happy; it was almost sweet.

“Oh.” Maggie hoped her smile didn’t look as much like a grimace as she felt like it might.

“Yeah, he was…sweet? I mean, he was. Objectively speaking. But, uh, remember what I was saying about Rafael?”

“Mhm.” Maggie took a slightly longer sip of her drink.

“We just didn’t click—or not in the way you’re supposed to.”

“Well, you know, there’s no one set rule for how you should feel.” Maggie wasn’t sure why she was trying so hard to convince Alex that she could totally like these men, even if she didn’t like them in the same effusive way people on television did.

“No…but generally, um, generally I think you’re supposed to have some kind of inclination to spend time with them.”

Maggie snorted loudly, drawing the attention of a few nearby tables. Waving away their concern, Maggie shook her head. “Sorry, sorry, probably not a laughing moment.”

“You’re fine,” Alex insisted, sipping at her water and wondering where the hell their waitress was so that she could order another drink for a bit more liquid courage.

As if summoned by magic, she appeared, and Alex ordered two more drinks, insisting to Maggie that she be allowed to give her at least one glass of her personal favorite whiskey to try.

“So you were saying?” Maggie asked once their waitress had disappeared again.

“Right. Well, yeah, I just—it’s never really worked, you know? Like, my job and career and all—they work. I mean, I’ve hit rough patches along the way, but I got the degrees I needed from the schools with the names that mattered and then moved to the right city for the kinds of work I wanted to do, and now I’m here, having made a name for myself.”

“That’s awesome, Alex. Really, it is.”

“Yeah…yeah, no, I’m not saying it’s not. It’s just…things never felt like they were clicking into place that way when I was doing the whole dating side of my life. And I…after a certain point, I assumed that’s just how I was built. And I was okay with it. Not totally happy, but content. I had work and a few close friends and that—those things were enough.”

“But now…?”

“Maybe…maybe it’s not enough anymore,” Alex breathed out. She took a few steadying breaths until their drinks arrived and she was able to fuel her words with something other than her own bravery. “Because, well, it was one thing when I thought I could never be excited about someone. It
was easier to accept then. But when...when something started to feel like, well, feelings—like, all the feelings I thought I'd never have—um, it's harder to act like it's a me thing. Maybe it was more about who I was dating."

“Oh.” Maggie tried to look excited for Alex; it was great that she’d found someone, and really, it was good that she’d now be formally off limits. “Got a crush, Danvers?” The attempt at teasing appeared to have fallen flat; she only got a forced smile in return.

“Maybe. But, um, it’s a little...different.”

“What’s he like?”

This was it. Alex knew this was the moment when she was supposed to say the things that would let Maggie know that she wasn’t straight, that she was available. She tried speaking but was instead hit with a wave of panic that crashed down, overwhelming her and leaving her gasping for air.

“Alex?”

“Smart,” Alex finally managed. “Um, smart and driven. And pretty cool. And attractive too.”

“That’s great.” Maggie forced the sides of her mouth to turn up into the closest approximation of a smile she could manage as she lifted her glass in a toast.

“Also a she,” Alex rushed out.

“What?”

“The person—she, not he,” Alex said, her voice a little firmer this time. She could still feel her heart thundering in her chest and her stomach flip-flopping inside her and making it damn near impossible to swallow anything, but she’d gotten the words out.

“Oh. That—that’s really great.”

“Yeah, um, I should go. I really—I forgot, I have to be somewhere tonight, and I—I’m so sorry, Maggie,” Alex rambled as she grabbed her bag and pulled out a handful of bills, throwing enough of them on the table to cover their drinks and tip and another round or two for Maggie to make up for her disappearing act.

“Alex!” Maggie called after her.

“Later—just, not tonight. Please.”

And Maggie had never quite been able to say no to Alex. And she certainly wasn’t about to start now when her “please” sounded that vulnerable and open and, god, she might even venture to say scared. So she sat and sipped at her drink and waited for their waitress to come back.

“Check, please,” Maggie muttered, ignoring the pitying look thrown in her direction as she paid the bill and finished both drinks. The whiskey actually was quite good, and there was no reason to let it go to waste, especially not when she needed a little something extra to take away the sting of finding out that she could have been an option for Alex—she just wasn’t the one who made her realize it.

Chapter End Notes
If you're curious about where Maggie and Alex were, this was the particular room I envisioned (http://jackrosediningsaloon.com/rooms/cellar/). See you back on Saturday and Tuesday with two long chapters and a rating bump on up to E for the latter.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

After a frantic few days in DC, they head out to Vegas for the second debate!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Just as Kara had predicted, Cat spent the entirety of the weekend preparing for the debate, going over the extensive research her team had prepared on the issues and Alex had compiled on the weak points in the other candidates’ platforms and personal lives, as well as the narrative Kara had helped her to sketch out for her platform—the same one that would unite her ad campaign and work its way into the imagery and language she used in her stump speeches and rallies from there on out.

Of course, the minute Cat set down her research binders or her computer or her notecards, all she could think about were Kara’s soft lips brushing against her own, the lack of hesitation and the way the whole damn display of confidence left her body on fire. Almost all of the reasons she’d used to justify pushing Kara away before seemed…insignificant now, no matter how devastating she knew the scandal would be to her career if anyone were to find out. Kara was older, more experienced now. She wasn’t some personal assistant who didn’t know what she wanted. She was a damn good campaign manager who had apparently spent just as many years as Cat had pushing down feelings that refused to stay buried. And god, how close they had come in Alabama…

Long training sessions with her pilates instructor and lengthy runs along the Potomac with Vasquez at her side for security could only relieve so much tension. She felt like her whole body was alive with it, like no matter what she was doing, there was always this molten hot desire just below the surface threatening to erupt whenever she was left alone with Kara, which was, of course, almost every waking moment as they prepared for Thursday’s debate.

On Monday, Cat thought it might have been her imagination playing tricks on her when it seemed like Kara sat just a little bit closer to her. She forced herself to be the consummate professional. After all, Kara clearly realized just how insane it would be to attempt something like a tryst during a campaign receiving scrutiny at a national level. Career suicide, really.

On Tuesday, Cat nearly flew out of her chair as Kara’s fingers skimmed across her shoulders. She swore Kara might have been able to hear her heart thundering when she leaned over Cat’s shoulder to read, instead of waiting for Cat to print a copy for her. But god, there was no way in hell she was imagining the soft brush of Kara’s lips against her ear as she murmured something about how good she though Cat’s responses were—to what, Cat couldn’t even remember anymore.

Wednesday evening brought a bit of much needed space as Cat boarded a plane for their flight out to Las Vegas for the second debate of the primary season. Carter had tried to insist it would be a great learning experience for him to come and see American democracy at work, but Cat had simply shaken her head at him and promised that he could come to the ones during his winter and spring breaks. Under the guise of needing to go over opposition research—not that she’d ever do it on a plane, no matter how many rows of seats her team had booked—Cat dragged Alex up to sit next to her instead of Kara. And once they were settled in at the hotel, it was all hands on deck for the last few hours of preparation in anticipation of the following day’s rally and campaign stops before the
debate itself.

On Thursday, Cat woke a few hours earlier than she should have in the new time zone but found she was far too wired to even try falling back asleep. After yet another read through of the notes and pages of statistics and citations she knew well enough to recite in her sleep, Cat got dressed and wandered down to the hotel’s gym. Apparently 5:30am in Vegas wasn’t a particularly popular time for a workout, and Cat was left with the gym all to herself—a fact she used to justify not waking Vasquez to come supervise her.

As she ran, she turned up the volume on the television, listening to the latest coverage about tonight’s debate. Phrases filtered down to her and spurred her to run faster and push herself harder: “Seems like Representative Justin Kennedy can do no wrong. … Questions linger about whether Cat Grant’s emails will be a topic of contention at tonight’s debate. Does the Democratic Party deserve a candidate with less baggage in the general election? … Colonel Branch might not have the numbers some of the others do, but will we see his larger bases of support in some of the early states like Nebraska and Iowa lend his candidacy an air of credibility? … Latecomer Max Lord has certainly done well for himself! Name recognition alone seems to have proved a boon, and the deep pockets of early supporters aren’t hurting.”

Nearly growling in frustration, Cat upped the incline and the speed, feeling her muscles burn slightly as her feet thudded against the belt. She wondered what it would mean for anyone to discuss the fact that she was the only woman left in her party’s pool of contenders, Siobhan having finally dropped out after weeks of dwindling financial support. If she said it, she was playing the woman card, of course, but every single day the coverage reflected that reality. She listened as news commentators called her “Cat,” as though they knew her well enough to dare saying it to her face. She watched as her outfits were scrutinized, her parenting decisions put under a microscope, her status as a single woman held up as proof of her unsuitability for public office.

“When you weren’t in line for coffee, I figured this was where I’d find you,” Kara said, her voice loud enough from across the room to draw Cat’s attention without completely startling her.

“And how did you know I wasn’t simply sleeping?”

Kara paused for a moment, realizing she couldn’t exactly tell Cat that she simply listened for her. “I knocked. You’re a light sleeper.”

“Have something urgent for me? Let me guess.” Cat tried to even her breathing, lowering the speed of the treadmill enough to speak more freely. “Max has unveiled some brand new casino game to get everyone excited about him and his name and his fucking brand right before the debate, even though it has absolutely nothing to do with politics. Am I right?”

“Actually I was just going to tell you that Alex and I are both up and ready if you wanted to go over anything before your breakfast out on the town and the rally.”

“But you’re the only one who wanted to come find me?”

“I volunteered,” Kara shrugged, letting her eyes flick up and down Cat’s body. “Figured I’d let Alex get our coffees.”

“So generous of you.”

“Mm, very,” Kara agreed, trying not to laugh.

Slowly, Cat reduced the speed and incline until she was at the awkward line between a slow jog and
a brisk walk, dropping it down one more notch as she walked for a few minutes to cool down. “Any last minute news about the actual debate?”

“Nothing new. What about you? Last minute questions? Comments? Urgent needs?”

Cat bit her tongue to keep from spitting out the obvious. “Just in need of a shower and a latte.”

“Well luckily for you, those are both very doable requests,” Kara teased. “Alex should be headed back with our coffees any minute now if you want to head up?”

“I’ll be up in a few minutes. I need to stretch first.”

“You know Vasquez would kill me if she found out I left you down here alone, right?”

“But I’d get off free?”

“You pay her,” Kara countered.

“Strong incentive to stay somewhat nice,” Cat mused as she wiped down the treadmill and wandered over to the mats. She grimaced at the idea of letting any bit of bare skin touch the communal surface, eventually settling herself by the wall and doing only the stretches she could do while standing with nothing more than her feet touching the ground. And if it left Kara with a reminder of just how flexible she still was, she wouldn’t complain. After all, she wasn’t exactly forcing Kara to stick around.

Finally they made it back up to the rooms where Cat found Alex waiting with her coffee in the hallway. It wasn’t nearly as hot as when Kara got it for her, but even Cat knew better than to say anything about it, especially when Alex had seemed even more tightly wound than usual. She hoped it had nothing to do with some burgeoning scandal that she’d yet to hear about, but then again, Alex didn’t seem the type to avoid being blunt to spare her feelings.

While Cat sipped at her latte, Alex and Kara went over a few last minute talking points for the morning’s rally. The theme of the day was all about progressive labor politics—an apt theme for a rally in a city built on the backs of all the invisible labor that went into staffing hotels and casinos, getting the food and drinks out and returning the rooms and game floors to the clean state they most certainly were not left in each night. Eventually Cat dismissed them, satisfied with the amount of preparation for the rally and in desperate need of a shower before they began anything new.

Once they were out of Cat’s room, Kara followed Alex. “You okay? I know we’ve been busy, but you still haven’t told me about Saturday.”

“Oh, um, it was…fine.”

“What happened?”

Alex hated the sympathetic tone and all the pity she just knew lurked behind it. “It’s not like she rejected me,” Alex grumbled. “I just…didn’t get quite that far.”

“So she…does she know you like her?”

Alex seemed to consider it. “I mean, if she thought really hard about it, she could probably figure it out.”

“So no.”
“Maybe.”

“Alex.”

“Look, she knows I have a crush on another woman, and according to Lucy, it’s pretty damn obvious that it’s on her,” Alex whispered, cognizant of how close they still were to other people’s hotel rooms.

“Well what have things been like since Saturday?”

Feigning distraction, Alex made a noncommittal noise as she fished around for her room key.

“Alex, what’d you do?”

“Nothing! We haven’t really gotten a chance to talk since then, that’s all.”

“Have you been avoiding her?”

“No! I’ve been helping Cat to prepare for the debate, which is completely different.” Room key in hand, Alex slipped it into the lock and let herself into her room. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I should go get ready for the rally too.”

Jamming her foot in between the door and the frame, knowing she could never end up with broken bones that way, Kara forced herself into the room. “Alexandra Danvers, are you telling me that you told this woman that you weren’t straight and then haven’t said anything to her for almost a week?”

“It’s really more like half a week,” Alex hedged, avoiding eye contact.

“Alex! This is not the way to go about winning someone’s affections! She’s probably nervous she didn’t react well or that she was the reason you ran.”

“That’s dumb.”

Kara groaned and dropped her head into her hands. “Just…text her or something—let her know you’re alive and not avoiding her. Say you were busy with debate prep or whatever excuse you’ve been using.”

“Fine, fine.”

Before Kara left, she placed Alex’s phone in her hands for good measure. Toying with the device, Alex finally pulled up her messages with Maggie. After a moment’s hesitation, she typed out: “Sorry for dropping a bomb on you and running the other day. Once the debate prep is over, things will be less hectic.” She wondered if she should add something about talking then, but that would mean she definitely had to talk about it again. Instead she settled on, “Hope all is well on your end.” Before she could second-guess herself, she hit send and threw her phone down onto the bed, resolving to ignore it until after her shower.

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The whole day seemed to fly by in a rush of meet-and-greets and stump speeches and rallies and photo ops, and before Cat knew it, she was sitting in her hotel room with Charlotte, the “style consultant” that she’d tried to argue she really didn’t need—especially not when she’d already heard everything she needed to hear from the woman before the first debate.

“What is wrong with the black?” Cat sighed, trying not to snap at the woman who was only doing
her job.

“It’s not right for the mood you need to set tonight.”

“And why’s that? I wore it for the first debate. Then you said it made me look authoritative, and why would I not want that again?”

“The scandal, Cat. Navy says trustworthy. It says stable, responsible, mature, qualified.”

“I am all of those things.”

“So then let everyone else see it in your outfit!”

Sensing that she wasn’t winning this battle—not with Kara and Alex nodding along with Charlotte—Cat finally relented and grabbed the navy suit, insisting on the white blouse with thin light blue vertical stripes instead of the plain white one that just seemed to scream, “I’m a boring young professional here for my first real job interview. Please hire me.”

Over the next half hour, her face was made up and her hair curled and her heels swapped on and off as Charlotte watched her walk in what felt like ten different pairs until she finally declared one a winner for reasons Cat couldn’t even begin to fathom when they were neither the most expensive nor the most fashionable pair of the lot.

“And now you’re ready,” Charlotte declared, stepping back to examine her masterpiece.

“Very presidential,” Kara concurred. “One last detail,” she murmured, fishing around in her bag and finally pulling out a small flag pin. She leaned in and carefully pinned it to the lapel of Cat’s blazer, ignoring Alex’s knowing look in favor of listening to the hitch in Cat’s breathing as she smoothed down the fabric and straightened the pin perfect before stepping to the side to thank Charlotte for her work.

“Ahh yes, because my readiness is dictated by my hair, not my talking points,” Cat grumbled, hoping her voice was still steady. She didn’t bother to hide her approving grin when Alex let out a snort of laughter behind her. “I take it you agree?”

“You’re already well prepared on that front,” Alex pointed out. “Think of this as…finishing touches.”

“That I could have done just as well on my own.”

“And yet, we pay someone else for a reason,” Kara cut in, stepping up to take her place at Cat’s side. “Come on, let’s get you downstairs so you’re not accused of trying to be fashionably late.”

With one last deep breath, Cat was up. And then it was all a whirlwind as they drove down to the venue, and Vasquez and her team escorted her over to the auditorium, and a gaggle of producers whisked her backstage to get her mic’d and in line for the announcer’s role call. Before she even knew it, the first name was being called, and within moments she was being tapped to start walking across stage as her name was announced to loud applause. She smiled and waved the way they’d practiced, ignoring the fact that the lights were so bright she could barely see anyone in the crowd, much less make out faces. Eventually she made it to the podium where her notes were waiting for her, along with water and a notepad and a pen.

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Kara paced nervously backstage. It wasn’t that she didn’t trust Cat, but she hadn’t been on the team
for the first one, hadn’t realized exactly how stressful it would be to sit and wait and watch and hope to Rao she’d done her best to prepare Cat for anything they might throw at her. Each time Cat gave an answer, falling back on hard facts and delivering stunning speeches, Kara felt like the band around her chest loosened just a little bit more, making it easier and easier to breathe.

Fighting the urge to go out there and hit Max Lord, she listened as he once more managed to bring up “the leaks from the Grant campaign,” as though it were still breaking news. What made it worse was that each time, according to Winn, his ratings jumped a little bit higher while Cat’s sunk. Finally Cat had the chance to hit back when asked directly about what she would say to Max’s questions about her fitness for office. “Well,” Cat mused, “Max seems to think that enough of his shiny new technology will fix all of society’s problems. If there aren’t jobs in one city, he’ll build a fast train to get people to a new one. But what he doesn’t realize—and it’s not his fault as an engineer because it’s never been his job to think this way in the way it has been mine—is that there are underlying issues, systemic problems with deep roots in our country’s history, that no amount of gadgets will get rid of.” Kara beamed. It was a hard-hitting criticism that managed to keep Cat focused on the positives, on what she did bring to the table. And by appearing to blame Max’s job and the kinds of paradigms and mindsets that went with it instead of the man himself, Kara hoped they would avoid the blowback that female candidates tended to get when they dared to be overtly critical of their peers. She tuned back in to hear Cat bringing it home, talking about how they needed “good, old-fashioned person-to-person conversations” and “deep empathy” and “experienced politicians”—all the things she brought to the table.

By the end of the debate, Cat had managed to get in critiques of both Justin’s and Max’s policies, as well as defending herself against unfounded attacks for her lack of understanding about foreign affairs—a point that had given Cat the perfect opening to talk about her years reporting abroad and then working in the White House, dropping in just the subtlest of hints that she doubted such major points on her resume would have been forgotten had she been a Mr. Grant. By the end of the night, her numbers were higher than they’d seen since the scandal broke by a wide margin, pushing her right up to where they’d been around the time of the first debate when she soared to prominence as a top contender for the candidacy.

Eventually they made it back to the private room at their hotel’s bar that Kara had booked, hoping it would be for celebratory drinks instead of consolation ones, but figuring it would be best to prepare regardless. Even Cat couldn’t help but cheer right along with the rest of her team when Winn announced the results of the post-debate polling and the social media followers they’d gained during the debate. People weren’t calling a clear victor yet, though it was official that Max had lost the shiny new veneer that had let him coast in with such high polling numbers late in the race, while Stephen Branch hadn’t done much to make a compelling case for his platform and Rudy Jones continued to perform poorly with mainstream audiences, leaving most commentators speculating on when he’d finally drop out of the race. She and Justin had both seen jumps in their polling numbers, though Cat’s jump had definitely been larger. Winn’s first calculations showed Justin as having had more speaking time while Cat had gotten more media attention and popular approval when she did speak. In either case, it was exactly what she’d needed to make it clear that this was still anyone’s game, and she wasn’t going anywhere.

Cat let herself be handed a flute of champagne as her team toasted her success, all of them beaming at her and singing her praises and recounting their favorite moments from the debate. And god, no matter how much work there still was in front of them, Cat found she could even mind the night off, the night to celebrate and cheer each other on and sit with the reality that the scandal hadn’t sunk her campaign, that she was still here and fighting and giving it her all with a loyal team standing behind her.

When the group began breaking up into smaller clusters and pairs as the evening wore on, Kara
found Cat seated down at the end of the bar, her eyes closed and a content little half-smile playing on her lips, still nursing the same glass of bourbon she’d ordered after the champagne toasts.

“Anyone sitting here?” Kara asked, her voice soft with just a hint of a laugh in it.

“Well I’m hoping that in a few hours I’ll be saving this seat for all the newspapers coming out to call me the winner of tonight’s debate,” Cat answered, a cocky smirk on her lips.

“As they should. You were—you were amazing, Cat.”

“Mm, I really was. Prepared me well.” Cat dipped her head in tacit acknowledgement of Kara’s work as she took another sip of her drink.

“It was so much more than just that, though. I mean, your points, yes, but then the rebuttals you came up with on the spot, and hitting so tactfully but powerfully on all the ways that you’ve been treated differently or are being held to higher standards—seriously, it was just…it was incredible to watch.”

“Did you stop pacing long enough to watch?”

“I might have been pacing, but I couldn’t keep my eyes off of you,” Kara answered, her eyes burning with sincerity and something so much deeper.

Tipping the last of her drink into her mouth, Cat nodded more to herself than anyone else. “On that note, I’m off to bed. Let the team enjoy the reserved room; they deserve it after all the late nights this past week. Just make sure the ones who are coming with us for the campaign stops around Nevada will still be alive enough to get themselves onto the bus tomorrow morning.”

Before Kara could respond, Cat had pulled herself up and was making her way to the door to get to the elevators with Vasquez at her side to check her room—a precaution Cat continued to insist was unnecessary.

Acting on little more than instinct, Kara jogged over to Alex, who was grinning at her phone.

“What’s up?”

“Oh, um, just texting with Maggie about the debate.”

“So things are okay between you two?” Kara wondered if Alex knew how much she was confusing the rest of the team with the big, goofy smile she was currently sporting.

“Uh, yeah…she said something about knowing how scary it can be.”

“You should still talk to her when you get back.”

“I know, I know,” Alex huffed. “Anyway, what’s up?”

“Ah, right. I’m…a little tired after all the prep. Could you just make sure the bartender cuts off anyone who seemed to be drinking too much? They can celebrate, but they need to be ready to get up early tomorrow and go out onto the campaign trail.”

“God, I’m so happy I’m not coming with you.”

“Yes, you get the delightful privilege of flying coach back to DC,” Kara teased.

“After a full day to hang out at the pool and bar in Vegas for free,” Alex countered, pointing a finger at Kara.
“Yeah, yeah,” Kara called over her shoulder as she made her way to the door at what she hoped was still a casual pace. She crossed paths with Vasquez on her way to the elevators. “All clear?”

“All clear,” she confirmed.

With a smile and a wave goodnight, Kara called the elevators and pushed the button for their floor, tapping her foot impatiently as she waited for it to make its painfully slow ascent. She wondered what exactly she was doing. It wasn’t like Cat had invited her back upstairs. But she also knew she hadn’t been inventing the way Cat reacted to her proximity all week, and she knew damn well that she’d never sleep with her mind racing the way it was and her body humming with need.

Once she made it to the floor, she strode purposefully down the hallway, taking a deep breath as she stood in front of Cat’s door. With a firm sense of purpose, Kara raised her hand and knocked twice on Cat’s door.

Chapter End Notes

On Wednesdays we wear pink, and on Tuesdays, the rating gets bumped up to E. See you all then!
“Yes?” Cat sighed as she pulled open the door what felt like mere moments after she’d finally sent Vasquez away to enjoy her night with the rest of the team. She’d barely even gotten her shoes and blazer off, let alone had time to relax after a long day.

“Hi.” Kara’s voice was soft, but her eyes shone brightly.

Trying to find words, Cat wondered if she should ask about a problem downstairs or see what Kara needed, but she couldn’t quite get herself to deflect attention away from what seemed like the obvious reason for Kara’s appearance.

Taking a deep breath, Kara stepped forward, hovering at the threshold to Cat’s room. “Can I come in?”

And Cat knew she should have asked why, but she found herself opening the door wide enough to let Kara through, then pushing it closed behind her. She could feel her heart racing as Kara stepped even closer to her.

“What are we doing?” Cat finally managed, her voice breathier than she would have liked.

“You need to tell me what you want, but”—Kara took a long, steadying breath—“but I’d like to finish something we started six years ago.”

With slow, deliberate movements, Cat stepped past Kara.

Kara felt her whole body seem to deflate. She should have known better than to risk it all again. But when she turned to leave, she saw Cat doing the chain lock and turning back to her with a near-predatory look in her eyes.

In mere moments, Cat was in her arms, her body pressed tightly against Kara’s as their lips molded to each other’s. And oh, it was so much better than Kara had remembered. All she knew was that she wanted, needed more of this, of Cat. As Cat’s fingers tangled in her hair, Kara was vaguely aware of moaning and parting her lips enough for Cat’s tongue to slip into her mouth. At some point her glasses were removed with a low string of curses after they’d banged into Cat’s nose. Kara fumbled slightly as she pulled Cat’s shirt from the waistband of her pants, impatient hands slipping under it as they found expanses of smooth, warm skin that left Kara keening. “Please,” Kara whimpered, though what she was pleading for she couldn’t say.

The pleas for more drove Cat forward as she pushed Kara up against the wall, rucking her skirt up high enough that she could press a thigh between her legs, groaning at the heat she could feel even through those damn navy pants that it had taken a trained stylist to choose. As she sucked Kara’s lower lip between her teeth, Cat felt Kara’s hands dropping down to her ass and digging in hard.
enough that it was almost painful in the most delicious of ways. Before she could quite comprehend what had happened, Kara spun Cat around, reversing their positions and pressing Cat hard up against the wall.

Cat couldn’t even mind the dull thud of her head against the wall—not when she had Kara’s teeth nipping at the sensitive skin of her neck, her lips and tongue chasing away the sting just moments later. She couldn’t even bring herself to worry about how much concealer might be required the next morning. It would all be worth it if Kara kept making her feel like this.

“Can I?” Kara panted, her fingers hooked under the clasp to Cat’s pants.

“God, yes.” And then Kara’s fingers were deftly undoing her pants and sliding under a layer of delicate lace that Cat was rather convinced was soaked through at this point.

Kara looked up at Cat with wide eyes darkened with lust and slightly parted lips as her fingers dragged up and around Cat’s clit, pulling a low moan from the other woman. As Kara honed her attention in on listening to the soft hitches in Cat’s breathing and the smallest indications of what she liked best, Cat felt herself hurtling closer and closer to the edge at an embarrassingly fast pace. With her teeth biting down on Kara’s shoulder and one leg wrapped around Kara’s waist, Cat felt her hips stutter and her whole body arch into Kara’s touch before she collapsed into impossibly strong arms that held her steady.

“Bedroom. Now,” Cat ordered as soon as she felt like she could probably walk again. Instead, Kara simply lifted her up, joining their lips as soon as Cat’s legs hooked around her waist. All too soon, Cat felt herself being lowered down to the mattress and looked up to see Kara kneeling in front of her, looking deliciously disheveled but far too dressed.

Cat made quick work of Kara’s shirt, deftly undoing the row of buttons before pushing it off her shoulders. “Stunning,” Cat nearly whispered, looking reverently up at Kara as her nails raked up and down defined abs. But she needed more. She’d waited for this many years, dammit, and she wasn’t going to go one more minute without having Kara laid bare before her. With nimble movements, she flicked open the clasp to Kara’s bra and watched as she let it fall from her shoulders. And oh, she was absolutely gorgeous.

Before Cat could do anything about it, Kara was backing up, urging Cat’s hips up as she pulled off her pants and let them fall to the floor. Everything seemed just a little hazy then. Cat took her time desperately sucking and nipping at Kara’s chest until she was whimpering, her hips rolling into Kara’s, desperate seeking some kind of friction. With quick roll of movement, Cat had Kara on her back, golden hair splayed out across the pillows and lust-darkened blue eyes staring up at her. Cat’s shirt was the next thing to go, followed closely by her bra. And oh, she had to shove down the pang of jealousy when she wondered exactly when and from whom Kara had learned to do that with her tongue.

She could have stayed like that for ages, but she’d already waited too long to taste the gorgeous woman beneath her, to feel her coming underneath her tongue, her hands, god, maybe even more if this was still a thing when they made it back to DC. As she kissed her way down Kara’s chest and over the skirt still bunched up at her hips that she would most certainly not be bothering to find the zipper for at the moment, Cat paused, her lips inches away from where she wanted to be. “Do you want this?”

“I want anything you’ll give me,” Kara answered honestly, lifting her hips as Cat pulled down the last layer between them. And then everything seemed to go black as Cat’s warm mouth was on her. It was so much better than anything she’d imagined over all those years. She bit down on her own fist, trying to stifle her needy whimpers.
“I want to hear you,” Cat nearly growled, reaching up and pulling Kara’s hand away from her mouth.

She was already close, so close, from touching Cat, and by the time Cat’s lips were wrapped around her clit, her tongue flicking across it, Kara had a death grip on the sheets, trying desperately to stay in control of herself. But when two slim fingers slipped inside of her, quickly finding a steady rhythm and curling up against her, Kara found she couldn’t wait, coming with a sharp cry and nearly sobbing in relief as Cat kept her fingers inside of her, slowing but not stopping as she worked Kara through what she swore might have been a second orgasm.

“That was…” Cat trailed off, left without words for a change. “Just gorgeous,” she finally managed, her lips trailing across Kara’s jaw before making it to her mouth. She lifted up just enough to let Kara finally slip off the wrinkled mess of a skirt and kick it to the floor.

Kara groaned at the taste of herself on Cat’s tongue. Unwilling to wait another minute, she flipped them over, curling around Cat’s side and letting her lips trail down Cat’s neck and across her chest once more. It wasn’t until she heard a stifled gasp that Kara opened her eyes and saw Cat’s hand between her own legs.

“What?” Cat arched an eyebrow in a teasing challenge. “You didn’t seem in any hurry to get down there. You know what they say, sometimes you just have to do things yourself.”

“And is that something you do often, Cat? Think of me and touch yourself?” Kara clamped her mouth shut, her eyes suddenly wide open. She’d been thinking it, but she hadn’t quite meant to say it out loud.

But Cat just smirked up at her. “Much, much too often,” she answered, her voice low and raspy.

And suddenly Cat found herself pinned to the bed with one strong arm as Kara claimed her lips in a bruising kiss and trailed her free hand down between her legs, her fingers dragging through the copious arousal that had already built up there.

“Do you want me inside you?”

Cat answered with a nod and a lift of her hips as she hooked her legs around Kara’s waist, letting her head drop back down to the pillows as she felt Kara filling her with one then two fingers. She was achingly gentle for someone who had just pinned Cat to the bed, and Cat was soon thrusting her hips up, desperate for more. “Harder,” Cat panted, winding her fingers through Kara’s hair and tugging as if to prove her point.

And oh god, Kara listened just as well in bed as she did around the office, seemed to anticipate Cat’s needs and fill them better than anyone else ever had. By the time she was pulsing around Kara’s fingers, Kara was already between her legs, her mouth and her talented tongue doing things that left Cat crying out and just barely remembering not to yell Kara’s name in case the walls were thinner than she’d like to hope they were.

Years of pent-up passion could only last them so long after a long, stressful day, and eventually they found themselves stretched out on top of the bed, half of the pillows scattered around the floor and one of the nightstands looking suspiciously like it had been cracked. Cat’s head rested on Kara’s chest, and Kara’s arm was draped protectively over Cat’s back.

“I wish we could stay like this,” Kara whispered, already knowing that she needed to go before anyone came looking for one of them.
“Me too,” Cat admitted, her voice soft.

After a few more minutes, Kara forced herself to get up, padding around the hotel room as she found her clothes, pulling them on and trying to smooth out the wrinkles.

With a sheet thrown around her, Cat joined Kara by the door before she left, pressing a soft kiss to Kara’s lips.

“You’re, uh, I’m still...you’re not going to push me away again tomorrow, will you?” Kara asked, her gaze downcast and her lower lip pulled between her teeth.

“No, Kara. Not again,” Cat assured her, squeezing Kara’s hands with her own until the younger woman looked up at her. “I promise.”

“Goodnight, Cat.”

With one last lingering kiss, Kara slipped out the door and down one to her own room.

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The next morning, Cat woke still exhausted, her body deliciously sore and her hotel room a bit of a disaster. It took a few moments for her to realize that it wasn’t her alarm that had woken her, but an insistent knocking at her hotel room door. Grumbling about early hours, Cat deigned to pull on the hotel room bathrobe, already making a mental note to scald herself in the shower to kill all the germs she was positive were crawling on the robe.

Glaring through the peephole, Cat found she couldn’t quite stay angry at the sight of Kara beaming back at her, looking far too awake for someone who had only slipped out into the hallway a scant few hours ago.

“Yes?” Cat asked, pulling open the door.

“I have the newspapers!” Kara announced, bounding into the room with a stack of papers in one hand and a piping hot latte in the other. The latte seemed to placate Cat some, but it was the headlines that left her smiling—well, the papers and the kiss from Kara that started tentatively until Cat pulled her in close, lingering for a few minutes until her curiosity got the better of her and drove her back to the papers. The coverage wasn’t universally positive, and some journalists still called it for Justin, but the majority of them featured prominent photos and glowing write-ups about Cat, lauding her ability to stay calm and focused on the issues.

The day only seemed to improve from there. Kara left Cat with a long, languorous kiss and a few wandering touches, and their first few campaign stops were a rousing success, even if Winn and Jasmine both looked like they were ready to keel over and die. At the very least, their hangovers appeared to have brought them closer, and together they staggered over to the nearest convenience store for bottles of water and Gatorade the second they reached their first stop.

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Back in the hotel, Alex shoved the last of her belongings into her bag, excited to be back in DC and in her own bed. And, if she were being honest, to see Maggie, even if she wasn’t particularly looking forward to the awkward second half of their conversation.

On the cab ride over to the airport, she sent Maggie a text asking if she might want to grab coffee the next morning. She’d already be miserable from a red eye flight on which she’d likely get little to no sleep—may as well just drag out her misery for a few extra hours. Almost immediately, Maggie
texted her back: “Sounds good! Want to meet at Tryst?”

Alex smiled at her phone, remembering that Maggie had mentioned something about falling in love with their waffles. “Sounds perfect.”

They sent messages back and forth about the debate and all the morning’s reports for the duration of Alex’s trip to the airport and then again once she’d made it through security and down to the gate to wait for boarding. As they began calling rows, Alex sent a quick goodbye text to Maggie, grinning when she realized that she had stayed up much later than she normally would to talk to Alex, then another message to Kara wishing her luck for their next couple of days of travel.

Once she got onto the plane, Alex dug her headphones out of her bag and popped them in her ears, hoping to drown out the sounds of mindless chatter and get at least an hour or so of sleep.

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Kara sat in the hotel bar while she waited for Cat’s meeting with possible donors and some of their fundraising staffers to end. She wondered if it would be presumptuous to assume that she would be able to follow Cat back to her room for a second night in a row. Maybe she should try to play it cool. But really, who was she kidding? She’d waited years for this; she didn’t need to wait 48 hours to seem like it wasn’t a big deal.

“Can you turn that up?” someone yelled, gesturing at the television screen hanging above the bar.

Kara looked up to find a flashing, “Breaking News!” banner scrolling across the bottom of the screen. She listened as the newscaster announced, “This just in: Flight 237 bound from Las Vegas to Dulles appears to be losing altitude. Early reports suggest that the pilot is looking for water or flat stretches of land to ground the plane after experiencing engine failure.”

“Did he—did he say to Dulles?” Kara called out, already standing up. She knew the answer, could feel it in her gut, could tell that something was horribly, horribly wrong. Without a look back, Kara bolted out of the hotel and down into a back alley. Tossing off her jacket and tucking her glasses away, Kara took off down the alley, launching herself into the air as she took off as fast as she could in the direction of the dotted line with the little arrow that the small map on the news had shown. She flew faster than she ever had, not exactly accustomed to using her powers for much beyond the occasional fun trip out for food she really wanted or to surprise Eliza back in Midvale. But soon enough she caught sight of Alex’s plane, peering inside only to find Alex looking resigned to her fate, patting the shoulder of the woman next to her.

Inspired by the confirmation that this was Alex’s plane, Kara soared faster, ducking as a flaming piece of the plane came flying at her. Looking around, Kara spotted a river and a lake not too far away and forced herself under the plane, crying out with the effort as she hoisted it up, managing to get it to level out as she attempted to guide it in the right direction. She could feel her muscles actually aching with effort in a way nothing on Earth had ever made them do before. But she was filled with renewed energy as she caught sight of Alex through one of the windows when she flew up to grab a wing to try to turn the plane enough to ensure it landed in the water and not the surrounding mountains.

“Kara,” Alex gasped, looking out and seeing her sister guiding their plane. And for the first time since she’d resigned herself to imminent death, to seeing her life end right as she’d finally started to figure out why parts of it had never seemed to make sense, she felt a rush of hope and warmth infuse her chest. And god, there was fear too—for herself and Kara and everything that would come next. But in that moment, she put her hand to the window and locked eyes with Kara, and she just knew that they would make it out safe, alive, together.
Eventually they crashed down into the water, passengers being jostled violently with the impact, but Alex knew it was nothing compared to what it could have been. They were all alive. Maybe a few were a little concussed, but they had survived. She felt their plane being dragged further to the side until it banked on the muddy shores. At the sound of distant sirens, Alex began anxiously looking for Kara, needing her to get out before anyone could find her and expose her to the world and put her in danger. A minute later, she saw her, caked with mud and water, clambering up and out of the water before launching herself into the sky.

The next few hours were a daze, as they were off-loaded and wrapped in blankets for trauma victims and led into transport vans to get them to the nearest cities.

Alex found a showered and changed Kara waiting for her in Las Vegas at the airport. And as scared as she still was for what all of the night’s events might mean for Kara long-term, she couldn’t do anything but let herself be wrapped tightly in Kara’s arms and held close as violent sobs wracked her body. She had resigned herself to her fate, but now that it wasn’t…it all seemed to hit her at once, leaving her shaking and overwhelmed and in desperate need of a drink.

“You’re okay,” Kara whispered, rubbing gentle, soothing circles across Alex’s back. “I’ve got you.” She held Alex’s hand the whole way back to the hotel and up in the elevator. And it broke her heart to see the way Alex blanched when the elevator shuddered to a surprise stop to pick up additional passengers. Alex had always been the strongest person she knew, and to see her so utterly devastated the way she was—it left Kara wishing that there were something more she could have done, some way she could have stopped it preemptively.

Cat was waiting in the hallway with a mug of hot tea and a bottle of expensive whiskey. She handed them off with a quiet, “I’m glad you’re okay. Let me know if you need anything,” before disappearing back into her room, not wanting to intrude.

James and Winn had dropped off food, apparently having gotten some signal from Kara, as it was all still hot and fresh from the grill.

“I want to go home,” Alex whispered. She could do this. She could make it through and be okay. But god, she hated the idea of being out here, alone in a room she barely knew.

“Tomorrow. We’ll get you out of here first thing tomorrow. And tonight, I’m here for you.”

Alex didn’t sleep at all that night. She wouldn’t say what she was doing, but Kara found her with two computers open and all sorts of information about flight plans and plane manifests and information about the airline’s parent company open.

“It was Dirk,” Alex announced at 4 in the morning.

“What?” Kara mumbled, rubbing her eyes. She didn’t normally need much sleep, but she found herself more exhausted than usual.

“Dirk. He’s on the board of the parent company for the airline. And I had gotten a threatening email that I’d ignored because, well, I get a lot of them in my line of work. But my name was on the list for plane tickets, and the plane had gotten inspected and cleared for flight just last week, but then it experiences engine failure—something this make and model don’t just experience regularly. And they don’t! Still don’t! Because it was a targeted attack.”

“Alex, hey, maybe you should sleep,” Kara suggested, patting the bed and lifting up the covers. “In the morning, I promise we’ll look into all of this.”
“No, Kara, I’m not crazy. This is what I do—it’s my job.”

“I’m not calling you crazy. I’m just…I think maybe you’ll have a clearer head in the morning.”

“I have a perfectly clear head right now.”

“Alex, you’ve been through a lot. You’ve been drinking. You haven’t slept in ages. We don’t even have the full story about what happened with the plane.”

“That’s not true. I have a guy at the DEO who’s hacked into the airline’s communication and the plane manufacturer’s internal reports. I have all the facts.”

“Please? Just sleep for a few hours?”

“He could be escaping right now!” Alex paced back and forth across the room. She knew she probably looked a little…off-balance, but she also knew what her instincts were telling her and had learned to trust them over years of work at the DEO.

“Why would he come after you? And why would he do it by sabotaging his own company?”

“I…don’t have an answer for the second one. Yet. But he’d come after me because he said he would. Because I threatened him and, you know, maybe broke into his car and scared him and stole his gun.”

“Alex!”

“It’s my job, Kara,” Alex huffed.

“When did your job start involving illegal activities?”

“It’s not…look, it doesn’t matter. Point is, it’s not exactly new, this idea that people might come after me. As much as I save reputations, I ruin them too.”

Kara’s brow crinkled in worry. “Have they before?”

“Um, a few times,” Alex shrugged, trying to act like it didn’t matter, like some moments didn’t still haunt her dreams.

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

“What good would it have done?”

“I could have…I don’t know! I could have found you a new job, a safer job.”

“I like my job,” Alex shot back. “And now I’m better trained and know how to protect myself. I mean, not from plane crashes from such a high altitude, but in general.”

“What…when has this happened before?”

“Um, the first time was during my first year,” Alex admitted, finally allowing herself to be dragged back into the bed and wrapped in blankets the same way the EMTs had done earlier. “A few men, uh, I was walking back to the metro late at night, and a group of them came up behind me and grabbed me. And god, the main guy, the one who grabbed me first, he just had hands that…they looked like death, like things that were made to kill people and nothing else. They were big and calloused and rough, and at first I thought maybe they were just going to mug me, but then someone in a van pulled up.”
Kara gasped, wrapping an arm tightly around Alex.

“I mean, it was okay. Somehow J’onn knew—actually, it’s how I found out he was an alien—and he saved me. And then he taught me how to defend myself and use all sorts of weapons, and the next time someone tried something, I was ready.”

“I don’t like this, Alex. You’re human. J’onn isn’t.”

“Everyone has their vulnerabilities, and I’ve learned to minimize mine,” Alex said, as though it were the most simple thing in the world.

“I still don’t like this.”

“I don’t like that you’ve exposed yourself to national scrutiny by saving a plane, but I respect that it was your decision to make.”

“To save you! What are you doing, Alex? Saving the reputations of total strangers?”

“It’s my career, Kara, and it—it gave me purpose when I needed it, okay? You don’t have to understand why I like it, but you have to respect that I chose it.”

Kara didn’t quite look convinced, but she didn’t continue that line of argument either. “Let’s just wait until the morning before we decide for sure who to blame?”

“Fine,” Alex huffed, letting herself be held as she tried to close her eyes and wait for the sleep she suspected wouldn’t come.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

A/N: Today’s chapter is a little on the short side as I’m currently traveling, but I think you’ll enjoy… As I mentioned either in the notes or in response to comments a few chapters back, I’m traveling for the next 2 weeks straight and jumping around time zones, so the updates are not coming on a perfectly regular schedule for that time. There probably will not be a Tuesday chapter this week, as I have no time whatsoever in my schedule to write in the next two days.

Oh and there’s some anxiety/panic in the beginning of today’s chapter, though the rest is a lot closer to fluff than we’ve gotten in a while

The next day, Alex booked five different cheap flights with five different airlines under her name and sent someone from the DEO to tap Dirk’s phones and monitor him while she was in the air. It didn’t stop her from feeling like she couldn’t breathe as she boarded the plane—no matter how many assurances Kara gave her that she’d be monitoring the whole situation and was ready to sweep in and save her a second time—and it didn’t stop her from breaking through the pleather cushion of the seat as her nails bit into it with every slight moment of turbulence, but it was something.

She tried to focus on looking at as much news coverage as she could find about Kara and the almost plane crash the night before, reading reports and statements about what went wrong right alongside speculative pieces about the identity of the newest alien to appear. The soot from the plane’s flaming engines and the mud from the river, Alex was relieved to see, had made Kara nearly unrecognizable. Sure, someone out there might be able to calculate her height if they could figure out exactly how far away she was from different things, but it wasn’t exactly a perfect identifier.

By the time Alex got into an overpriced cab that she already suspected would try to take her some circuitous route the second she named Georgetown as her destination, she felt like every nerve ending had been frayed. She’d survived, but her body didn’t seem to know it yet. As drained as she felt, she already knew she wouldn’t be able to fall asleep when she got back—not yet. She needed more evidence, needed to sweep her home and look for bombs and prowlers, needed to find some reason why Dirk would have used his own company to launch an attack. The cab ride was spent texting directives to trusted DEO employees and making frantic notes to herself for possible avenues of investigation.

When they made it into Georgetown, turning down the sleepy blocks of P Street, quiet in the lull after the rush of morning and early afternoon joggers but before the steady thrum of evening traffic filtering back from the bars and restaurants in Dupont, she directed the driver to drop her off at the street corner, wanting to have the element of surprise if she needed it. As she crept along the sidewalk, she kept her eyes on a dark-colored sedan parked outside her home. The engine was off, and she didn’t see movement inside of it, but she was still a little too far away to be sure. A part of her debated calling Kara, but she didn’t need the woman putting herself in the public eye a second time in as many days, couldn’t bear to shoulder the blame for that unnecessary risk. So with her hands balled up into fists, she moved closer and closer to the car. When the door flung open, Alex jumped into action, feeling her heart pounding in her chest even as her body still knew what to do, slamming her would-be killer into the side of the car, an arm locked around their neck and squeezing
just hard enough to show she meant business.

“Alex,” Maggie gasped.

For a moment, Alex simply froze, her body stuck in the routine it knew while her mind grappled with the sensory input of a familiar voice. “Wait, Maggie?” Alex immediately pulled back, stepping a few paces away and looking beyond mortified when Maggie turned around, her face flushed and her hands rubbing at her neck.

“Ya know, I was sitting here all day trying to make sure you made it back alive, and then I’m the one that almost dies,” Maggie tried joking, but Alex could hear the tightness to her voice, could see the tears shimmering in her eyes.

“Shit, I’m sorry. Really, fuck, I didn’t—that was the last thing I wanted to do. Had I known…”

“Danvers, stop,” Maggie insisted, waving away her concern. “I mean, that was…unpleasant, but I had already seen that it was you in the rearview mirror. Didn’t really think you’d kill me once you realized.”

“No! No, never.”

“See, just fine.”

“But…you’re upset.”

“Ah.” Maggie scuffed her boot against the asphalt of the street and tried to blink back the traitorous tears. “I just, well, I saw the news. And I knew—I knew which flight was yours. I…you’re okay, so it feels—feels wrong for me to dare to claim any level of emotional trauma because, well, you’re fine, and really, you’re the one that should, you know, get to feel things.” Maggie sucked in a shaky breath. “But god, I was fucking scared, Alex. I didn’t—I needed you to be okay. And then some alien hero saved you, and that was amazing, but it didn’t—until she got there…”

“Hey, hey, it’s okay. I’m here. I’m alive,” Alex murmured, stepping forward and placing a tentative hand on Maggie’s shoulder.

“You’re not supposed to be the one comforting me, you asshole,” Maggie sobbed, wrapping her arms tight around Alex and burrowing her head in the crook between her neck and her shoulder.

Alex just let out a watery chuckle, not quite ready to admit that having someone else to comfort, to care for, was the only reason she was still holding it together at the moment. “C’mon, let’s go inside before I attack anyone else.”

Following closely, Maggie helped Alex check the perimeter, scoffing at the surprise in Alex’s voice when she told Maggie she was impressed.

“This is a nice house,” Maggie whispered as they made their way through the rooms, having finally gotten inside.

“Oh, uh, thanks,” Alex murmured, marveling at the odd direction her evening had taken.

Once they finished checking all of the rooms—Maggie had quirked her head to the side but somehow seemed not even remotely surprised at the one full of weapons and gym equipment—Alex brought them back to the living room. “I, um, I’m sorry for, you know, choking you.”

“It is generally important to establish a safe word first.” Maggie tried for teasing again, grinning
when Alex rolled her eyes and cracked a small smile.

“Wait.” Alex furrowed her brow and looked up at Maggie. “How long were you out there?”

“Oh, um, you know a couple hours or so…” The whole day. But Maggie decided Alex didn’t need to know.

“God, I’m sorry, you didn’t have to do that.”

“I wanted—I needed to see you, to see that you were alive, Alex.” She took a deep breath. “I care about you. And you—we still had things to talk about.”

“Oh, uh, right…plus, you know, waffles to eat. Obviously the most important part of the whole thing,” Alex deadpanned.

“I know that now isn’t the right time—”

“I like you,” Alex blurted out, half-overlapping Maggie’s last few words.

“What?” Maggie shook her head, finally registering the words. “Oh, yeah, yeah, I like you too, Danvers. One of many reasons why I sat my ass out in a sort of cold car for so long,” she laughed.

“No—no, you’re not getting it. It’s…right, when I, um, ran out on Saturday…” Alex took a deep breath and stood, pacing the length of her living room.

“Yeah?”

“I didn’t—I didn’t finish talking to you.”

“That’s okay, Alex. Coming out—or whatever you want to call it—it can be really scary.”

“Yeah, definitely not on my list of favorite moments.”

“But, uh, you were saying?” Maggie prompted Alex, forcing herself to lift the corners of her mouth into what she hoped was a supportive, encouraging, totally platonic smile. “Am I gonna get to hear about your mysterious crush?”

“What?”

“Do I get to find out what lucky lady finally made you think back to all those shitty dates with men and realize what was missing?”

“Is it not…do you really not know?”

Thinking hard, Maggie tried to go over anyone Alex had talked about recently. Maybe it was Lucy…if she and Vasquez weren’t exclusive. She had been alone with Alex a lot recently, and Alex often seemed a little…rattled when they were done. “I mean…I think maybe I have a guess.” She hoped she sounded at least intrigued, if not pleased, though if the downturn to Alex’s lips was any indication, she hadn’t done a great job of it.

“And I get it, right, it’s fine that you’re not enthusiastic, or you don’t feel the same way, or whatever. I, um, I understand. And I won’t make things weird at work.”

“What?”

“It’s fine. Um, maybe we just, I should probably try to sleep.”
“Oh, yeah? I guess you’re more of a badass than even I gave you credit for. Here I come bearing black licorice and a bit of whiskey and peanut butter M&Ms only to find out that you’re totally calm, cool, and collected, while I’m the nervous wreck.” Forcing herself to smile, Maggie stood and threw her bag over her shoulder. “If you, uh, change your mind and want company, just let me know. I promise, I can be here quickly.”

“Wait!” Alex called out, blushing at having raised her voice so loud when Maggie hadn’t really gone too far. “I, uh, you’re right. I don’t—I don’t really want to be alone.”

“Well then I’m here for you, Danvers. And if you don’t want to talk about your mystery woman, that’s fine. We can watch shitty television or eat candy or, I don’t know, braid each other’s hair—whatever you want.”

“Mystery woman? What do you mean? You told me you knew.”

“I mean, I could probably guess who she is, but…not like I’m all-knowing.”

“Maggie, it’s you.”

“What?”

“I like you. And I know, I know, I’m a coward for not saying anything at Jack Rose, but—” Alex’s rambling was cut off by a pair of impossibly soft lips pressed against her own. Before she could make the leap between the realization of what had happened and the switch into actively responding to it, they were gone. “What?”

“I like you too, Alex.”

“What?”

“I thought—I thought you were talking about someone else that night. If I’d known…god, I would’ve told you then.”

“You…you like me?”

“Yeah,” Maggie laughed. “For someone so quick to act and react out in the street, you’re a little slow on the uptake here.”

“Oh shut up. I just…this was…I mean, best-case scenario, really. But I don’t normally plan for those—if you start planning, then you start hoping—”

“And it’s so much easier to be okay with something’s not happening if you never really let yourself believe it could?”

Alex tilted her head slightly. “Uh, yeah, exactly.”

“I know a little something about that,” Maggie replied, her lips twisting up into a wry smile.

“So, uh, if you like me…and I like you…maybe we should do that kissing thing again?”

It took every ounce of willpower Maggie possessed to put a hand up against Alex’s chest and stop her as she leaned in.

“Oh. Did I…have I misread something?”

“No!” Maggie rushed to preempt the questioning that she just knew would drive Alex away
otherwise. “No, I…you almost died. And I was so fucking scared for you. And I’m so glad we’ve been honest with each other, but I want us…I want us to have the happiest start in the world. I don’t want to get together just because we were both scared and lonely and upset. You’re new to this, and if we decide to give this—us—a chance, I want to make sure that you’re absolutely certain. And that requires just a little bit of time. Maybe a night’s full sleep?”

Alex sighed, her shoulder slumping but her expression one of understanding instead of self-doubt. “I don’t think that’s gonna happen for a little while.”

“And why’s that?”

“I just…god, I don’t want to drive you off when I’ve just barely—and only maybe—got you in my life, but…I think I know who targeted that plane.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Dirk Armstrong. I mean, surely he paid someone else to do it, but I threatened him and foiled his plans and showed him just a fraction of the droves of blackmail I have on him. And then he’s on the board of that airline’s parent company, and that model of plane just doesn’t have engine failure, and that particular plane had gone through a full inspection just a week earlier and was deemed perfectly fine. And I know I sound crazy, but I just…I feel it in my gut, I just know it,” Alex rushed out.

“Okay.”

“What?”

“Okay.”

“As in…you think I’m as nuts as Kara does?”

“No, as in, give me some files to look into. We’ll get to the root of this, and if the evidence keeps pointing to him, we’ll make sure he pays.”

“You’re…you don’t just think I’m sane, but you’re willing to help?”

“Ride or die, Danvers. No one comes after you and gets away with it.”

Alex tried to tamp down on the weird mix of sensations—the schoolgirl-esque butterflies that had erupted in her stomach and the wave of deep longing for this wonderful, amazing woman. “You, uh, you’re still certain on the no more kissing rule?”

Dragging her lower lip between her teeth, Maggie looked ready to cave until she seemed to snap herself out of it, shaking her head. “One night. One night to make sure you’re sure.”

“Fine,” Alex sighed.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

A little Supercat, a little more Sanvers, and a whole lot of the Danvers sisters

Chapter Notes

Thanks for your patience while I was traveling! We'll be jumping back into the old posting schedule with a longer chapter to make up for my absence. Enjoy!

As much as the team was able to put on a good show for the public, keeping most meetings on the schedule and showing up to all the right events and smiling, waving, taking photos, giving speeches, the sense of unease was palpable. A member of their team had almost died—would have died were it not for some alien intervention that had left the press reeling as they searched for any clues as to the mysterious savior’s identity—and rumors were already swirling about the targets of the attack. And sure, Alex could be a bit prickly as a colleague, and some of the researchers grumbled about her input on their ideas, but it wasn’t as though any of them would want to see her hurt or targeted, least of all dead.

By Tuesday night, everyone was more than ready to go back to DC and try to reclaim some sense of stability. Of course, Kara had flown back twice already to see her sister, making sure to land out in Virginia or Maryland and take the Metro the rest of the way to avoid setting off any radars that could trigger security protocols that she really didn’t need to deal with at the moment, but the visits had been mere minutes—little more than ascertaining that Alex was alive and okay. She was beyond ready to be back for what would be their longest break from extended traveling until the winter holidays—and even then, they had travel on the books to make the right appearances at the right events.

The security lines seemed to last a small eternity, and by the time it was Kara’s turn, she was fairly certain she moved at a pace that was a little too fast for a human as she threw off her coat and shoes and shoved them through the scanner. Getting to find their seats first with priority boarding seemed great until Kara realized that she had little more to do than sit and fidget and look out at the concrete landing strips illuminated in the dark by rows of bright lights while they waited for everyone else to slowly shuffle down the aisles, nudging bags out of the way and muttering an insincere “excuse me” or “sorry” as the etiquette of cramped spaces demanded.

“Are you okay?” Cat murmured, watching as Kara’s fingers tapped relentlessly along the armrest. She was just grateful she’d gotten a chance to wipe them all down with sanitizer before Kara could spend the whole flight drumming her fingers in what Cat could only imagine were vast swaths of invisible germs waiting to compromise the health of her team.

“Fine. Just fine,” Kara answered too quickly.

Trying to find a polite way to bring up what had happened, Cat edged around the question in a way she wouldn’t have bothered for most other people: “Are you…after Alex?”
“No—uh, no, just…anxious to be back in DC, check on her and all.”

“Have you heard from her? Is she…?”

“She’s…okay. Surprisingly okay. Well, she wasn’t—right after, I mean. But it seems like being back in DC has helped a lot,” Kara rambled. She still wasn’t exactly sure what had made the difference for Alex, but between seeing her out of Vegas and checking on her the first time in DC, there had been a vast change. She suspected it had something to do with being back in close proximity to all the resources the DEO had to offer, and she could only hope that Alex wasn’t about to go threaten Dirk again without enough proof, if there even was proof.

“I’m glad to hear that.” Clearing her throat, Cat neatly folded her hands and placed them in her lap. She hated the feeling of being uncertain—it was so rare—but she’d never quite been in a situation where she might have somehow caused the near-death of a lover’s sister, and she found her knowledge of social protocols was rather unsuited to this particular occasion. Between everything that had happened, she and Kara hadn’t had a moment to talk about anything other than the campaign—all too often surrounded by other staffers in their rare moments out of the public eye.

It wasn’t until everyone was busy watching the flight attendants’ safety demonstrations (and the more important announcements about when drinks would be available) that Cat felt Kara’s hand—soft and warm against her own. The gentle pressure as Kara squeezed her fingers lasted barely a moment, but Cat swore she could feel the warmth radiating out from the point of contact long after it ended.

“What, uh, what’s your day look like tomorrow?” Kara whispered.

“Well, I gave all of you the day off, so…I’ll probably work from home, at least until Carter gets back from all his after-school meetings,” Cat admitted.

“I need to go check on Alex, but if you’ll be working…maybe we could do lunch? I could bring my work computer too if you wanted to make it clear that, well, yeah.”

Cat hated herself for the thrill of anticipation that ran through her at the possibility of what sounded almost like an offer for a lunch date. “That sounds good.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes, Kara,” she said with an exaggerated sigh. “You know I only agree to things I want to do.”

“That’s not true. I know for a fact there were some campaign fundraisers you did not want to go to,” Kara pointed out, looking smug at besting Cat.

“Mm, but I got them to open their checkbooks, and that was very much something I wanted.”

“More proof of why you win all those debates, hmm?”

“I can’t help it. I’m just that good.”

Once the plane settled in at cruising altitude, Cat managed to nod off, having been run ragged enough over the last few days to trust that a moment’s rest wouldn’t be the worst thing. For the duration of the flight, Kara took turns watching Cat and the view from the window as they flew over states they’d visited or would be back to see soon enough. Cat snapped back to attention the second they began their descent as the plane wobbled through a few minutes of bad turbulence and the pilot’s voice crackled over the intercom system asking passengers to return to their seats and fasten their seatbelts.
Once they hit 1,500 feet, Cat grabbed Kara’s hand and gripped it tightly until they shuddered their way to a stop and finally made it to the gate. Kara knew better than to call attention to something that might be construed as a weakness, but she’d made herself available during descents ever since a particularly turbulent landing during Cat’s campaign for governor when they’d hit the runway too fast, bouncing back up into the air a few times before settling down again, leaving an ashen-faced Cat clutching at the armrests.

“I’ll see you at the office Thursday morning, bright and early,” Cat barked at her team as they gathered their luggage, pretending not to notice their grateful smiles at the full day off.

“I have your car ready,” Vasquez announced before Kara had a moment to try to talk to Cat alone.

“Perfect, thank you.”

“Night, Cat,” Kara called after her, earning a small wave and, the second Vasquez turned around, a wink in return.

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The next morning, Kara threw on her comfiest sweatshirt, not caring about the dirty looks she’d get for daring to go out in public on a workday looking like a bedraggled college student, and stumbled down the street to pick up enough breakfast for her and Alex, before heading over to Alex’s apartment just a little faster than was probably advisable. But she didn’t want to miss Alex, and she knew how early she tended to go into the office, even on travel days when everyone else would find their way in closer to 9:30 or 10, looking significantly better-rested than they would come the peak of the campaign season.

“Alex!” Kara called out as she unlocked the door and let herself in, kicking off her shoes in the doorway. “Wake up! I come bearing breakfast!”

When there was still no answer, Kara made her way around the house, even checking the weapons room and Alex’s high-tech home office before determining that no, Alex really wasn’t home. As Kara began wrapping up some of the food to leave in Alex’s refrigerator for when she got home from work, she heard the lock turning in the door and happily pulled everything back out, bounding into the living room just in time to see Alex smiling broadly as she pulled Maggie by the hand into the entryway and kissed her soundly. “Are you sure you don’t want to join me?” Alex murmured, pulling her lower lip between her teeth.

“I told you, I want to take things slow—do this right,” Maggie insisted, even as she kissed Alex once more.

“That’s great!” Kara announced loudly. “Really love to hear that you’re respecting my big sister! Also, hello, I’m here, please be aware!”

“Hey?” both women gasped.

“Hey.” Kara waved, looking slightly sheepish. “I, uh, brought breakfast. I didn’t know you’d have company…”

“It, um, it’s new—I wanted to tell you in person,” Alex explained, scuffing the toe of her running shoes against the hardwood floor.

Maggie nodded quickly. “You two should definitely have time together. And I won’t intrude. I’ll see you in the office, okay?”
“Yeah, alright,” Alex replied softly, squeezing Maggie’s hand one last time as she led her to the door.

After a murmured goodbye that Kara purposefully tuned out, Alex shut and locked the door before turning back to Kara, her cheeks a light pink. “Um, yeah, so, right…that happened.”

“And you didn’t tell me?” Kara rushed out, speeding over to Alex and sweeping her up in a hug.

“It happened so fast! And then you were only here for a couple of minutes after it officially happened—I mean, the first time you came here, I was still supposed to be considering it, as though there were any chance in hell I’d ever say no to Maggie.”

“Wait, okay, hold on. Rewind. I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Right.”

“Here, I brought breakfast. You go shower, and I’ll warm everything up.”

A few minutes later, Alex bounded down the stairs, looking more chipper than Kara had seen her since…maybe since she’d gotten the Ducati. “Hey!”

“Hey,” Kara laughed.

“What?”

“You just—you look really happy.”

“Oh, well, uh, yeah. I mean, I sort of am? Is that bad? I almost died a couple of days ago, and I’ve never been happier.”

“C’mon, wouldn’t you start yelling at me about how correlation isn’t causation if I said something like that? I think we both know that the little dimpled researcher who was just kissing you is more likely the cause than your close brush with death.”

Unable to help the smile, Alex nodded enthusiastically. “Yeah…yeah, she really is.”

“So tell me more!” Kara squealed, poking at her sister as she slid one of the muffins down her way.

“Okay, so Saturday I got my new plane back. And that totally sucked.”

“Yeah, I can imagine.”

“So I get a cab back here and have him drop me off around the block.”

“Oh Rao, Alex, seriously—how used to dodging would-be assassins are you?”

“Constant vigilance, that’s all. I let my guard down a little with only working for Cat, and I’ll be better from here on out.”

“I don’t like this.”

“I mean, I don’t much like having a big bull’s-eye on my back either, but I like my job, and I’m good at my job, and I’m gonna keep doing my job.”

“Fine,” Kara huffed, shoving half a double-chocolate muffin into her mouth in one bite. “Go on with the story.”
“Okay, right, I see this car idling in front of my house, and when I get close someone jumps out.”

“Alex!” Kara squeaked, spraying muffin crumbs everywhere. “Why didn’t you call me?”

“I had it handled,” Alex shot back. “Chokehold within a few seconds, even. But, uh, well, it was actually Maggie.”

“You mean to tell me that things started with Maggie because you almost killed her?”

“I let go as soon as I realized who it was.”

“Still!”

“Anyway, apparently she was really scared for me because of the whole almost dying thing, and we talked about it, and she didn’t think I was crazy for thinking it was Dirk. This whole week she’s been helping me build my case—did you know that Dirk is being removed from the board of the airline’s parent company? Apparently they caught wind of some of his less than savory business practices, which, well, they happened to be one or two of the incidents I blackmailed him with.”

“Alex!”

“It wasn’t me! I know as well as anyone that blackmail only works if it’s kept secret.”

“I kind of hate just how well you know the rules of blackmail.”

“Whatever. Point is, he totally had motive for wanting to get back at me and to sabotage the airline, so an attack that looked like engine failure would have been a win-win for him. And he just bought stock in a rival airline,” Alex added, looking beyond triumphant.

“I mean…it’s not as far-fetched as it looked earlier, but it still seems…I don’t know, would someone do that? All over what? Some white collar crime?”

“People like him are used to getting what they want,” Alex shrugged.

“So now what?”

“I don’t know…I’ve got some trusted DEO techs trying to find any proof on Dirk’s computers and phone. If we can get that, we could probably get the police involved. Might not stick, but it could intimidate him enough to keep him from trying again.”

“Might not stick? Alex, he almost killed hundreds of people!”

“Yeah, and half of the evidence that points to him as the culprit wouldn’t be admissible in court. Plus, he’s rich enough to have lawyers for days and maybe even a corrupt cop or two in his back pocket.”

“I don’t like that.”

“Neither do I, but it’s how these things work.” Seeing how upset Kara looked, even with one of her favorite cinnamon chip scones in her hand, Alex nudged her with her shoulder. “Wanna hear more about Maggie?”

“Right! Yes, please spill. Because last I heard you ignored her for days then attacked her.”

“Um, right, yeah…so apparently she thought I had a crush on someone else after I tried to come out to her at Jack Rose.”
“Oh, Alex,” Kara sighed.

“Anyway, there was some confusion, but I finally blurted out that I liked her, and then she kissed me,” Alex gushed, feeling a rush of warmth at the happy noise Kara let out as she jumped on the couch to face Alex fully.

“Tell me more!”

“Then she told me she likes me too and that she would have said something back then if she’d realized, but I think she thought I was talking about Lucy? Anyway, it doesn’t matter because she likes me, she likes me back.”

“Okay, you kissed and then…? I mean, you don’t have to hit me with all the dirty details, but tell me the whole story!”

“Actually she made me wait. No, that sounds bossy. I mean, she wanted it to be on a good night that we got together—not when I almost died and might just be doing it to feel less lonely. So she spent the night—very platonic—and went home the next morning to give me a bit of time alone to think.”

“Is that when I came over?”

“Yeah, for the first time.”

“Right. Makes sense.”

“Obviously I already knew what I wanted, but I gave myself time and did calm down a little from Dirk.”

“You seemed to be doing better,” Kara noted.

“Yeah…I mean, I’ve definitely been really on edge, and I’ve had some, uh, dreams about it and all, but Maggie’s been sleeping over, so when I wake up, she’s right there.”

“That’s really sweet.”

“Yeah…” Alex trailed off, the corners of her mouth twisting up. “Yeah, she really is.”

“So, any fun first dates?”

“We went out to dinner for an official first date that Sunday after I told her I still liked her and still wanted to give us a shot. And then we’ve done little things like holding hands after our runs when we go get coffee or getting lunch together. It’s nice.”

“That’s awesome, Alex.”

Alex nodded eagerly. “She wants to take things slow—do things right, she said—so we’ve just, you know, just kissed mainly. But god, Kara, I like her. Like, I really like her in a way that I just thought wasn’t for me, you know? But it is. With her, it really, really is.”

“I’m so proud of you.”

Picking at the corner of her muffin, Alex shrugged, mumbling, “Thanks,” before directing her attention back to Kara. “Now you’re the next Danvers to get a date. We’ll get you over that crush on Cat in no time.”

“Oh, uh, no…no, it’s okay. With work and everything, things are just gonna be so hectic soon, it
wouldn’t be fair.”

“Are you sure? Because those sound a lot like the excuses I was using before.”

“No, I know, but I’m sure. Really,” Kara insisted, keeping her eyes trained firmly on the few remaining bites of food in front of her instead of daring to look up and meet Alex’s curious gaze.

“If you insist…”

“Yeah, speaking of, I know you have work to do, and I actually promised Cat that I’d get a few things done with her—with work, I mean, work with her, you know.”

“Uh, okay?”

“Yeah, so I should really just—I should head out probably.” Jumping to her feet, Kara quickly popped the last few bites of pastry into her mouth before gathering the trash.

“You know it’s barely 9, right?”

“Yeah!” Kara called from over her shoulder. “I’m so happy for you again! Now go, I won’t keep you from work!”

“Alright… Call if you need anything?”

“With everything going on with Dirk, I should be the one telling you that.”

“It goes both ways. I’m still your big sister.”

Smiling, Kara ducked her head slightly. “Yeah.”

“Now go tend to all of Cat’s needs,” Alex teased.

“What?” Kara squeaked.

“I’m sure she’s in need of some random factoid that only you can get her researchers to produce within the minute,” Alex laughed.

“Oh.” Kara forced out a bark of laugh. “Right, yeah, probably!” After a quick hug goodbye, Kara made her way downstairs, deciding to go for a long walk to try to clear her head before she went back to get her stuff and change for Cat’s.

As she walked, she tried to figure out what her expectations were for lunch with Cat. She wondered if it would still feel as flirty and rife with possibility as their dinner before the debate had. Maybe now that things had…happened, it wouldn’t be quite so charged. She sort of hoped that wasn’t the case.

While she was waiting at a red light, she heard the sound of metal on metal and a sharp cry of pain, looking up to see a car skidding away, leaving a bicyclist sprawled out and bleeding on the side of the street. Without thinking too much, Kara pulled out her phone and called 911, barking out the intersection of the accident as she ducked into an alleyway. Pulling her hood over her head and switching her lead-lined glasses out for a pair of oversized sunglasses, Kara hoped she had enough of a disguise as she took off into the air. Having seen a group of pedestrians run over to take care of the biker, she flew after the silver Mercedes, chasing it down the length of Connecticut Avenue until it finally had to stop for a light behind a row of other cars.

“You!” Kara barked out, striding over to the car and knocking on the window just hard enough that she could hear the glass creak.
The man kept his window up and refused to look at her, so eventually Kara shrugged and simply pulled the door open.

“You can’t do that!”

“You hit a person with your car!”

“You can’t prove that.”

“I saw it happen. The police are coming for you.”

Kara watched everything proceed as if in slow-motion as the light changed to green and the man slammed his foot down on the accelerator, looking smug for only a moment before his expression turned to one of confusion as his car was lifted up instead of moving forward. “What the—?”

“If you won’t cooperate, I’ll have to bring you back,” Kara sighed, hoisting the car up above her head and launching into the air as she brought it back to the scene of the hit-and-attempted-run, where two cop cars were now blocking off traffic.

“That’s him!” one of the pedestrians called out, gesturing at the car that suddenly appeared from the sky. “That’s the guy that hit the biker.”

With a quick nod of her head and a salute to the rather battered but awed-looking bicyclist, Kara flung herself back into the air and flew a couple neighborhoods over, landing in an alleyway and quickly switching out her glasses and pulling her hood off. As she walked around, orienting herself to the new location but staying on high alert, she couldn’t help but notice that she could hear other things—tires squealing and cars crashing into one another, children crying and grown-ups cursing.

It was the sound of a gun trigger that caught her attention and sent her back up in the air, flinging herself directly in the line of fire between a cashier at a small corner store and two men who looked too young to be holding guns, let alone trying to use them. And from there, she couldn’t help but hear all the cries for help she’d let herself ignore for what now felt like much too long. She’d always rationalized her choice as following orders to keep those close to her safe, especially after Jeremiah and all the guilt she still carried over his death. There were other ways of doing good in the world, and, as idealistic as it sounded, she truly believed she’d found her place fighting the good fight by getting the best people into office to make changes that would do the most good for the most people. But now…now she couldn’t help but feel guilty for how many people she’d let suffer until it was her own sister whose life was on the line.

She wasn’t sure how much time had passed when her phone rang, finally grounding her as she sank down in a muddy patch of grass several yards off the path in Rock Creek Park. “Hello?”

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Alex roared.

“Um, what do you mean?”

“What do I mean?” Alex could identify the exact moment Alex’s voice hit the particular pitch that signaled dangerous territory, and she listened to the sound of Alex’s office door slamming shut. “I mean that I see what’s trending on Twitter. I see the photos plastered all over social media. I am watching the goddam news on every fucking channel. And it’s all the same thing, Kara. Do you want to hazard a guess as to what that is?”

“Alex,” Kara sighed. “People were in trouble. People could have died.”

“People do get in trouble. People do die. Every day. It’s a fact of life.”
“People die of heart attacks and cancer and old age. This—these aren’t deaths that should have happened!” Kara cried, hearing her own voice crack, too thick with emotion to try to reason out her position aloud.

“We will talk about this later. But I need you to stop. People are getting pictures of you. This needs to stop right now.”

“You’re not stopping your job,” Kara countered, “even though I don’t like it.”

“Kara, you won’t have a job if you don’t stop. You won’t have a life because you won’t be able to go out into public as Kara Danvers.”

“Kal does it!”

“He’s a journalist, Kara. He’s pretty much a behind-the-scenes kind of guy. You end up on the news and on the front pages of papers. You give the quotes instead of taking them. It’s different.”

“Then I’ll get a mask.”

“Why…look, just…please stop for today? We will talk later. But you’re being rash, and you’re not thinking through what could be the really fucking long-lasting consequences of a string of stupid decisions after stupid decisions.”

“Was it stupid to save you?” Kara shot back.

“You know what, maybe it was! I might be selfish enough to say I’m happy it happened, but the fact that there were some good consequences doesn’t mean it was the right thing to do.”

Alex could hear the choked-back sob before Kara managed to get out: “I need to go.”

“Kara,” Alex pleaded, but the line was already dead.
Chapter Notes

A/N: The second half of this chapter is…perhaps not explicit, but at least mature

It was nearly one by the time Kara dragged herself up the steps to Cat’s front door, having taken the time to sink down under the hot water in her shower and cry as she tried to filter out the sounds of everyone she wasn’t helping, everyone she might have been helping.

“What the hell?” Cat snapped as she pulled open her door.

“I know, I know. I’m sorry I’m late. It was…an emergency.”

“You think I’m mad about the time?” Cat hissed, shuffling Kara inside and slamming the door shut behind her as she gestured at her laptop screen, where a photo slideshow of Kara’s earlier heroics was playing.

“Oh, uh…did you want to try to get a policy position on the newest hero, or make a statement, or…?”

“Kiera,” Cat sneered. “Do you think I’m particularly dense?”

“What? No!”

“Do you think I’m unobservant?”

“No, I never said—”

“Then why in the hell would you think that it might escape my notice that you are running around the streets of Washington DC performing what some locals are calling miracles?” Cat growled, stepping forward menacingly until she was planted directly in front of Kara, one manicured nail pressed into the center of her apparently bulletproof chest.

“I—I’m not—it’s—”

“Save it. Eyes hidden or not, I can still see your face, and I know for a fact that I told you to burn that hideous sweatshirt six or seven years ago.”

“Cat,” Kara sighed.

“So you’re an alien, then?”

Seeing the look in Cat’s eyes that meant there would be no avoiding the conversation, Kara conceded, slowly nodding her head.

“They’re calling you Supergirl.”

“Girl?” Kara scoffed. “I’m in my 30s!”

“Yes, and you’re running around in leggings and a hoodie”—the word seemed to drip with disdain
as it fell from Cat’s lips—“with oversized sunglasses that could have been stolen from Paris Hilton’s rejected wardrobe.”

“I—fine.”

“So is the nickname right? Are you super?” Cat quipped, cutting right to the point.

“What?”

“Are you the counterpart to the Man of Steel?” Cat asked, a glimmer of a challenge in her eyes as she walked a woman who could lift cars and save planes and stop bullets across the entryway until her back hit the wood of the front door with a resounding thump. “Are you faster than a speeding bullet? Leap tall buildings in a single bound?”

“Well, technically I fly, so the leaping is a little…ya know, underwhelming.”

“But you are a Super…would you look at that,” Cat mused.

“I didn’t—I’m not saying that.”

“Mm, so my campaign manager didn’t save her sister from a crashing plane?”

“Uh…”

“My campaign manager didn’t spend her morning off running around in her sweatshirt and sunglasses and stopping petty crime across DC?”

“Is pulling a gun really still allowed to be called petty crime?”

“Are you still pretending like I wouldn’t recognize your face clear as day when I spend all my waking moments with you?”

“Look, it’s not—I just heard people who needed help. And why wouldn’t I help when I could?”

“You may do whatever you want. It’s your life, and I won’t pretend to have a say in it. But if you’re going to run around letting bullets bounce off your chest and hoisting cars into the air like a Gotham vigilante, you’ll need to find a new job to support your nighttime adventures.”

“You can’t do that!”

Snapping her attention back to Kara, one eyebrow arched in challenge as her lip curled back into a sneer, Cat drawled, “Oh really?”

“I’ve never left the campaign when you needed me. You already said it was overnight and on my rare day off.”

“Yes, and how long before people realize who you are behind the sunglasses?”

“Other superheroes have day jobs.”

“Are they campaign managers, Kiera? Do they spend their days in the spotlight?”

“Why does that matter?” Kara huffed, feeling frustration bubble up in her chest again. “They still get their day jobs, and I should too!”

“Do you know what it would mean if it came out that I had someone at my beck and call who could
stop bullets and crush steel and bring the world to its knees if she wanted—if I had that person standing at my right hand at all times like some sort of dictator? Can you not imagine the fallout? People might worship Superman, but they fear him too. And if you’re like him, they’ll feel the same way.” Before Kara could interject, Cat kept going, waving her hand at the screen on her dining room table. “Now put you in something as unprofessional as a hoodie and stick you in a position of power? They’ll crucify you—and me right alongside you.”

“I didn’t…I didn’t mean for that to be what it looked like.”

“Your intentions matter very little here.”

“I don’t—I won’t do that to the campaign. But I also don’t want to say that I’ll never step in to save someone’s life again either.”

“And why is that?”

“In my first interview, do you remember what you asked me?”

“Whether you knew the difference between Rand Paul and Ron Paul?”

“No, I mean, I don’t know, maybe. But you asked me why I wanted to work in a notoriously difficult field for low pay and terrible hours.”

“Ah, yes,” Cat answered, as though she didn’t remember exactly what Kara’s answer had been.

“And I told you it was because I still believed in the political process. My home—uh, I guess I can say it now—my home planet…our politics weren’t quite so democratic. And sometimes things worked, but sometimes things really, really didn’t. And sometimes that meant information was suppressed…like the information that might have saved our planet…and my family.”

“Oh,” Cat let out a quiet gasp.

“But here…things aren’t perfect, but I like to think that you get a chance. You all get to go out there and say your piece and get your ideas out where they need to be. And sometimes those ideas are really truly awful and hurtful to me or to others. But sometimes they push us in the right direction. And I wanted to work with you because I thought I could do some good. Because I believed in what you wanted, in what you were going to fight for, Cat.”

“So why isn’t that enough?”

“Because fighting with you wouldn’t have saved my sister’s life in the moment. Fighting with you might have meant helping to promote gun control laws, but it wasn’t going to save that corner store cashier from the very real guns being pointed at him in the moment. And as much as I might believe in that long-term change, I just…how can I stand there and do nothing when I could do so much?”

“I can’t answer that question for you, Kara. But if you decide that being there at all times for everyone is what’s most important, that needs to be what you do full time.”

Kara looked up at Cat, her blue eyes shimmering with unshed tears. “I can’t have both?”

Swallowing harshly, Cat shook her head. “No.”

“Cat,” Kara pleaded.

“I won’t have you bringing down my campaign, no matter how excellent at your job you may be.”
Past the point of caring, past the point of biting her tongue and stopping herself like she had for so many years, Kara rounded on Cat, channeling all of her frustrations with Alex and Cat and the whole damn system into her next question: “You sure it’s just the heroics that have you worried that I might sink your campaign?”

Indignation flashed in Cat’s eyes, and Kara could see the muscles in her jaw working as she fought to stay in control. “I wouldn’t fire you for something we both wanted,” Cat snapped.

“You already did!”

“Your contract was up! I let you go free so that you could succeed without my interference—something you seemed to understand until a few moments ago.”

“And the second things start again, all the sudden you find another great excuse to get rid of me.”

“It is still my campaign,” Cat growled, her voice dangerously low.

“And I’m still the absolute best person to run it,” Kara shot back, stepping forward but leaving a bit of distance, suddenly aware of the very real power imbalances when it came to their physical presences.

“Really? Because it looks like you’re putting it in jeopardy and contemplating running off at any given moment to save someone’s purse from being snatched.”

“Don’t you dare act like I’ve ever been the one to abandon you. You are one of the few people in my life that has always come first.” Kara gritted her teeth. “Dammit, Cat, I dropped everything to be back at your side, fighting the good fight with you, after six long years of silence from you. Six years!”

“If you didn’t want to be here, then you shouldn’t have come back. The door’s always open.”

“I don’t want to leave!”

“Then stop acting like this isn’t enough.”

“What’s wrong with saying this isn’t enough?” Kara snapped.

“Because it’s all I can do!” Cat let out a bark of mirthless laughter as she gestured around at the room, at the computer and the folders of campaign research and stacks of polling numbers. “It’s all humans can do.”

“But I’m not human! I can do more. I should do more. If I don’t…” Kara trailed off shaking her head. “What would you do if you hadn’t run? Would you have been happy sitting here watching Justin and some xenophobic bigots battling it out to run the country?”

After a moment’s hesitation, Cat shook her head, admitting, “No.”

“So you did as much as you could to change it. You’re still doing as much as you can to change it.” Cat dipped her head in tacit acknowledgement. “And I’m doing the same. Maybe—maybe saving cats from trees and purses from muggers—maybe those aren’t the most important things. But stopping a plane crash? Keeping a train from derailing? I can’t just sit here and let them happen and watch people die and act like I can be okay with myself anymore.”

“So what are you saying?”
“I’m saying that I do need to do more because I can do more. But, Rao, Cat… I don’t want to lose this job either. Because it matters—what you do, it matters in a whole other way. And sure, the job on its own might not be enough, but you—you always have been.”

“Well Kara Danvers was enough for me.”

Kara spluttered as the full force of Cat’s words hit her, leaving her reeling and unsure of how to respond.

Tossing her hair over her shoulder and swallowing down her emotions, tamping down any hint of weakness, any suggestion of unreciprocated feelings, Cat pursed her lips and leveled Kara with a gaze that made lesser beings shrink. “If she’s not enough for you anymore, why don’t you come over here and try to convince me that Supergirl has something better to offer me?”

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“If you’re going to insist on keeping this up, we’ll need to find you a mask,” Cat murmured, her eyes still closed as she relished in the feeling of Kara’s lips trailing across her collarbone.

“And you’re not going to fire me for it?” Kara checked, moving her mouth just a few inches higher as she kissed up Cat’s neck.

After a moment, Cat shook her head. “Not yet. But this will have nothing to do with the campaign just like… well, this,” Cat finished, gesturing at the torn sheets draped over them that did little to keep the scene in the bedroom from looking obscene. She could feel a flush of warmth at the memory of Kara beneath her, Kara’s hands—strong enough to hoist cars and airplanes into the air—curling into cream-colored sheets until they were suddenly ripped to tatters as Kara cried out, her whole body arching up into Cat, her legs wrapped around Cat’s waist, pulling the toy deeper inside of her until she came with a shuddering gasp.

Reluctant to end the moment, Kara curled herself more firmly around Cat. Her fingers, gentle now, ran through soft blonde locks. “Are we going to talk about it… or this?”

Forcing herself to sit up, Cat sighed. “We will. Eventually. But right now I have a teenage son due to arrive in half an hour and need to find an excuse for why half of my home is destroyed.”

“It’s not half of your home… a quarter at most,” Kara joked.

“You’re lucky you nearly made it worth my while,” Cat grumbled, grabbing for a robe as she got up to begin putting things back in some semblance of order.

“Nearly?” Kara squawked.

“Aren’t you the one who wants to be held to a higher standard now, Supergirl? I think you’re lucky I’m giving you ‘nearly.’” Before she’d even finished the last word, Kara had her up in her arms and against the wall. Ignoring the rush of adrenaline and arousal at everything she knew would follow, Cat swatted at Kara’s strong arms. “Down. Unless you’re planning on explaining all of this to Carter.”

“Well then let me show you how useful I can be in other ways.”

Too intrigued to simply say no, Cat watched as Kara disappeared in a blur of motion, barely able to process the speed with which her bedroom was put back together—the tattered sheets swapped out for a fresh pair; the decorative pillows that had been carelessly knocked off the bed as Kara lowered Cat to the mattress put back in their places; the strap-on washed, dried, and hidden back in the
drawer that had made Kara falter for the first time since she’d swept Cat up into her arms and given her the first orgasm of the afternoon before they’d even made it out of the living room.

Once the bedroom was presentable, Cat watched as Kara swept through the hallway, straightening artwork that had been knocked askew—as tended to happen when people were shoved up against walls—and easily lifting the heavy desk that she’d dragged out from its spot in the corner of the secondary home office for Cat to perch on as Kara sank to her knees and showed Cat just how useful certain aspects of being a super-powered alien could really be.

“So…have I proven my usefulness?”

“You’ve proven”—Cat paused, deliberating over her choice in words—“something.”

“Does that mean I get the rest of this half hour?”

“It means you’re allowed to remain here if you wish.”

“And by here you mean…?”

“In my home. For dinner.” After a moment, Cat added, “And on my team. For now.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me yet. If I see one hint of your face clear as day out there saving puppies or purses or whatever it is you think you need to do, that’s it. Three strike rules are for sports and bosses looking to be taken advantage of three whole times before they learn their lesson.”

“Understood.”

“And if it interferes with your work, even the smallest amount…”

“I get it.”

“And since I know I’ll be asked about our newest alien vigilante and would like to have something positive to say to distance myself from people like Lane and Lord, do me a favor and make it easier on me by burning that hideous black hoodie.”

“I think I have just the person in mind… How do you feel about a real costume, Cat?”

“I suppose it gives you an air of normalcy—something people can come to expect and associate with the brand. You could plaster that big S on your chest too.”

“It’s a crest,” Kara huffed.

“Whatever the case may be, the more official you seem, the easier it will be for me to defend you, yes.”

“Now what do you think about a skirt?” Kara teased, biting at her lip. “You did seem to enjoy the sight of my legs today…”

“Yes, and I’ll continue to take that as my personal privilege, not the right of every leering man—”

“Don’t think I’ll have female fans?”

“Oh I’m sure you will,” Cat grumbled.
“Is that jealousy I hear?” Kara teased, smirking gleefully at the stunned look on Cat’s face.

“No. Obviously I have no claims over you whatsoever in this particular context. I’m simply saving you from the potential objectification of the masses if you go running around in some gaudy mini-skirt.”

“Really? Has nothing to do with your wanting to be the only one that might get to see a look like that?”

Cat crossed her arms and cocked her hip. “Nothing at all.”

“You sure? Because I swore there was something you liked about the idea of Supergirl being all yours,” Kara purred, feeling her heart thunder in her chest at the way Cat’s gaze darkened at that word: “Yours.”

Fighting to keep control of herself, Cat cleared her throat and pulled her robe tighter around herself. “My son is on his way home.”

“I have super-speed and super-hearing.”

“Mm just what every woman wants to hear: I’ll be done before you even realized we started!”

Her cheeks flushing a faint shade of pink, Kara pouted. “You know that’s not what I meant.”

“Yes, but it did kill the mood rather effectively, I’d say. Now chop, chop, go find those clothes.” Kara reappeared fully dressed before Cat could even pick out a clean bra to wear. “Well now honestly, that’s just showing off.”
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Little bit of everything here as we move into a new phase in the story: some Sanvers fluff; a bit of Carter, Kara, and Cat; the Danvers sisters; and a check in with Winn. Hope you enjoy! I always love to hear your thoughts (and will finish replying to this weekend's comments after work)!

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Maggie asked, her hand hovering over Alex’s, not sure whether the touch would be welcome.

“Yeah,” Alex murmured, before shaking her head and nodding resolutely. “Yes, I really am. I want to be here with you more than anything.” Sure, she still felt a bit off balance after her fight with Kara, but there had been no more “Supergirl” antics to be seen, so she at least held out hope that Kara was simply off pouting somewhere and would come to her senses soon enough.

“That invested in happy hour?” Maggie teased.

“Well, I did make a point of looking up the best veggie burgers in the city, so I’m pretty invested in your reaction.”

“Mm, I feel like all that effort needs a reward.”

“That so?” Alex flirted, biting her lower lip and inching closer to Maggie.

“You’re killing me, you know that, right? I’m trying to be the perfect gentlegay here, and you’re making it incredibly difficult.”

Straightening up, Alex shot a soft smile in Maggie’s direction. “I’ll stop, promise.”

“I’m not saying you should stop…”

The return of their waiter broke the spell that seemed to have reduced the restaurant to nothing more than the two of them together. “I have one veggie burger.” Maggie raised her hand and thanked him. “And your Merlot.” With a flourish, he placed the beef burger and a drink in front of Alex. “Your burger, and one Dark and Stormy. Enjoy your meal, ladies.”

Clearing her throat, Maggie raised her glass. “To seeing each other every single day since we started dating in true lesbian fashion.”

“To not wanting to have it any other way.”

“Eye contact!” Maggie called out, raising her eyebrows and waiting for Alex to meet her gaze.

“So many rules,” Alex huffed—not that she actually minded, even if her eyes had been a little busy looking at Maggie’s lips. But she still made eye contact before sipping at her drink.

“Better than seven years of bad sex.” Maggie turned to her burger, only looking up at the sound of Alex spluttering into her glass. “Is that, uh, not a superstition you have?”
“I can’t say it is.” With a self-deprecating laugh, Alex shrugged her shoulders. “Though maybe that’s why I’ve had such bad sex for this long.”

This time it was Maggie’s turn to choke and cough a little. “Yeah, well, I, uh…”

“A flustered Maggie Sawyer? I think I could get used to this.”

Groaning, Maggie dropped her head into her hands. “Okay, starting over. How was your chat with Kara?”

Hoping her face didn’t reflect just how conflicted she still felt about the morning, Alex forced herself to look pleased. The last thing she wanted was for Maggie to think that Kara had been anything other than perfectly supportive of their burgeoning relationship. “It was good.”

“She wasn’t too surprised?”

“I mean, she definitely hadn’t expected to find us kissing, but she, er, well, she knew I liked you.”

“That so?” Maggie looked expectantly up at Alex.

Buying her time with a bite of burger, Alex made a noncommittal noise. “It may have been something we talked about.”

“Oh do tell me. Did you gush about me, Danvers?”

“Shut up.”

“Talk about how cute I am?”

“It started out as talking about what a pain in my ass you were,” Alex grumbled, stuffing a few fries into her mouth.

“And gradually you realized those feelings for what they really were”—Maggie paused dramatically—“infatuation.”

“You’re the worst.”

“Actually, I think you really like me.”

“Whatever, you like me too.”

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Across town Kara sat with Carter in the upstairs living room while Cat took a phone call in her office. They’d spent dinner catching up, but only in superficial terms. It was odd, Kara mused, how well they had once known each other. Sure, it had been six years for her and Cat too, but with Carter, she’d missed so very much. He’d grown up from a shy middle-schooler all the way into high school senior submitting his college applications.

Unwilling to go another second without getting to know the older, even more mature version of the young man Cat had once described as “the best thing that’s ever happened to me,” Kara settled in at the other end of the couch from him. “So how was that field trip to New York?”

Carter shrugged. “Fine, I guess.”

“Just fine? I was amazed the first time I went.” She thought back to the trip she’d taken with the
Danvers when Alex got into Yale. She’d been a bit old for some of the more touristy destinations, but they’d indulged her curiosity anyway. Over the course of the weekend they spent there, she took in as much of the information as she could, reading every plaque and sign and guidebook. “Everything seemed so big…and there was so much history.”

“It’s not like DC doesn’t have history.” Carter’s brows furrowed. “Everyone kept acting like we were in this great city, like we’d never seen one before.”

“Ah yeah…New York has a way of making people forget other parts of the country,” Kara conceded with a laugh. The few friends she had from college who had moved there after graduation seemed to get drawn into the city for life.

“It was a little too crowded for me,” Carter admitted after a few minutes.

“All the tall buildings?” The skyscrapers had made Kara feel claustrophobic—a feeling that hadn’t gone away until they were up near the top of the Empire State building and she was able to gulp down what felt like the first breaths of fresh air she’d gotten in a long time.

“And all the people. Everywhere.”

“Sometimes felt like you couldn’t get enough air?”

“Yeah.”

“I get that.” As amazed as she had been, Kara had also been utterly overwhelmed. Were it not for the Danvers’ foresight in booking a hotel outside of the city, Kara doubted she would ever have been able to decompress enough to rest.

“You do?”

“Yeah. Sometimes I think it’d be nice to be able to soar above it all.”

Carter nodded in understanding. “Speaking of, did you see the news about Supergirl?” The way he nearly bounced as he turned to face her suggested that he’d been waiting for this topic to come up for a while, and Kara wondered if he still had the little Superman figurine on his desk.

“Oh. Uh…yeah, um, I caught a little bit of the coverage.” Even as she tried to play it cool, Kara couldn’t help but smile at his infectious enthusiasm.

“Isn’t she so cool?”

Kara’s mouth split into a wide grin. “You think she’s cool?”

“Think so? I know so. Kara, she caught a whole plane! I just know it’s the same person. And then today she saved so many people.”

It was the hope on Carter’s face that filled Kara with resolve about everything she had done. She once more felt the burgeoning certainty that had all but withered and died after the first confrontations with Alex and Cat. “Yeah, she did do something pretty great, didn’t she?”

Cat finally chimed in after watching the two for a moment. “Who did something great?”

“Supergirl!” Carter answered before Kara could try to ease into the conversation.

“And now which one of you thinks she’s so perfect?” Kara tried to hide from Cat’s knowing gaze.
“Mom, come on. Even you have to admit she’s pretty cool.”

Cat let out a noncommital noise as she settled in on the couch between the two of them. “I think it’d be cooler if she thought carefully about the things she did.”

Chancing her luck, Kara nudged Cat’s shoulder with her own. “But isn’t the impulsiveness of saving someone part of the…allure?”

“Perhaps some people feel that way. I think there’s something attractive about control.”

Kara’s eyes widened as her gaze snapped up to Cat’s face, looking for any sign in her unreadable expression to suggest that the double meaning was intentional.

Ignorant of the tension simmering beside him, Carter turned to face his mother and Kara. “Since I’m already done with my project, do you want to play a game or something tonight?”

Cat glanced wistfully at the stack of games on the table. “I should really do work after having the day off.”

“Oh please, you never take the day off.” The knowing look and the way he held himself were all Cat.

Cat couldn’t quite help her thoughts from slipping to her afternoon and the distinctly non-work things that had occupied her time. “I found myself a little distracted with all that Supergirl coverage you apparently loved so much,” she teased, reaching up and ruffling Carter’s hair—a gesture of endearment that remained even after he had grown significantly taller than her.

Kara stood up and inched toward the hallway. “Why don’t I go deal with some of the items on your to-do list. I can get everything ready for you for tomorrow morning so that you can enjoy a night with your son.” Since I ruined your productivity today, she thought but didn’t say.

“Oh. You didn’t want to stay?” Kara hated how disappointed Carter looked, even though the emotion disappeared within a few moments as his expression smoothed into one of understanding and affected teenage apathy.

“If she wants to stay, why don’t we let Kara be on a team with one of us, that way she can leave whenever she needs to without it ruining the game,” Cat suggested. “I’m sure Kara has some carefully thought out plans for this evening that she needs to attend to as well.”

Not missing the pointed glare, Kara nodded along. “Right, right. But I have time for a few rounds of something! What do you guys like to play?”

Carter gestured at the board games that were left out—the clear favorites whose boxes were well-worn and well-loved, even if nothing that Cat and Carter owned would ever look quite as used as something owned by the Danvers. “What about Risk?”

“Works for me.”

“You won’t hear me complaining.” Looking between the two, Kara asked, “Now whose team am I on tonight?”

“You obviously can’t play with Mom. You two already work together doing this, so it’d be like cheating.”

“Is that your way of saying you want me on your team?”
Carter merely rolled his eyes in a gesture that was so reminiscent of high school Alex that Kara had to stifle a laugh.

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“This is me.” Maggie gestured at the townhome behind her as if Alex hadn’t already been there several times.

“It is.” Alex’s lips twitched, and she stepped a little closer to Maggie’s doorstep.

“Thank you for a wonderful evening. And for walking me home, even though it took you so much farther away from your own house.”

“I asked you out this time, didn’t I?”

“You did,” Maggie conceded with a dip of her head.

“So I had to give you the full Alex Danvers date experience.” Not that she’d really had a good one to draw from, but she’d improvised. And all things considered, she thought it went pretty well—certainly better than any of the real dates had gone.

Barely stifling a smile at Alex’s bravado, Maggie laced her fingers together with Alex’s. “I give it two thumbs up.”

“I think the full date experience needs one more thing, though…” Alex trailed off, biting her lip and inching forward.

Maggie closed the distance, wrapping her arms around Alex’s waist and tugging her closer. The kiss was soft, and Maggie could taste the faint sweetness of the ginger beer and rum from Alex’s drink lingering on her lips. She couldn’t help the small whimper at the feeling of Alex’s warm hands cupping at her jaw and deepening the kiss. A part of her wondered whether she should be trying to stop things before they escalated anymore, but another part of her really couldn’t be bothered at the moment.

“Do you, uh…” Alex pulled back enough to look meaningfully at the front door.

“I would like nothing more, but it’s a weeknight and we both have to be up bright and early to deal with things in the office tomorrow.”

“And you’re still worried that I might go running if we move too fast?”

“I want you to have time to think about things. Now Kara knows, but does anyone else?”

Thinking it over, Alex rubbed at the back of her neck before conceding that no, no one else knew yet.

“I want you to be sure about things. And that doesn’t have to mean telling the whole world, but it might mean telling someone. Or maybe you want to come out to them without talking about me. And you should get to do that all on your own terms, not because I showed up in your life and sped it all up.”

“I want to tell them—I want to tell people about you.”

Maggie couldn’t help the soft smile as she leaned over and kissed Alex’s cheek. “But for now, let’s agree to get a good night’s sleep. And maybe I could cook for you this weekend?”
“Does that mean I might get an invitation into your apartment?” Alex teased.

“If you play your cards right, Danvers, I might just let you through the door.”

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That night, Alex got back to a text from Kara. Barely even taking the time to skim the message, Alex dialed and paced as she waited for Kara to pick up.

“Hey,” Kara answered, sounding more guarded than she usually did.

“Hey. How’s your day been? You ignored a lot of my messages.”

“I know. I was…busy.”

“Doing…?”

Kara flushed a faint shade of pink as she thought about exactly what—or rather, who—she had been doing. “I was considering what you said.”

“Really?”

“Stop sounding so pleased. I’m not about to give up on everything.”

“Kar—”

“No. I’m not a child anymore, and you aren’t exactly being kept any safer by my inaction these days.”

“But still.”

“I’m not going to run around fighting crime in a sweatshirt again—that much I can promise you.”

“That’s a start, I guess.”

“I want a suit. A proper one. Like Kal has.”

“What?” Alex’s voice broke on the question. Of all the things she was expecting, something that would make Kara’s vigilante act more permanent and official was not one of them.

“And one with a mask.”

“People won’t trust you if they can’t see your face.”

“Then not my whole face. Maybe just…my eyes or something.”

“You don’t think people will recognize you?”

“I won’t have my glasses. Part of my face will be covered. And I can pull my hair back or something so it’s not as distinctive. And really, I think people will pay more attention to the costume if we do it right.”

“I’m still not entirely behind this idea. You know that, right?”

“I do.”

“But if you’re doing it anyway, I want you to have a practical costume. One that will help you in a
fight instead of putting you in greater danger.”

“So happy to hear you say that!”

“Oh god, why do I feel as if I’ve just agreed to something I definitely didn’t want to agree to?”

“See I was thinking…I know someone who might be really good at this costume thing. And you also know someone who might be good at this costume thing. And together…”

“Who, Kara?”

“Winn actually does a lot with design and innovative materials in his free time.”

“Winn? As in our numbers guy?”

“Yeah.”

“And you want to not only tell him that you’re an alien but also ask him to design you a suit?”

“Mhmm.”

“Really?”

“Well I don’t want him to be the only one helping.”

“Who else?”

“I said there was also someone you know. I thought maybe J’onn could help…”

Alex let out a sigh of relief. J’onn knew Kara’s secrets. J’onn wasn’t enthusiastic about Kara’s using her powers. J’onn would ensure that any costume would be safe. “I’m sure he could help you. And if you’re going out there, I bet we could use some DEO facilities to help train you too. I get that you’re bulletproof, but it doesn’t mean you can afford to be sloppy either.”

Unable to help the grin, Kara asked: “Does this mean you’re on board?”

“It means I’m willing to help make it as safe as it can be for you. But if Cat finds out…”

“Cat knows,” Kara blurted out. Apparently keeping one secret was okay, but keeping two didn’t agree with her.

“Excuse me?”

“She knows already. She recognized me.”

“I told you people would!”

“Okay, but no! Cat is just, um, very perceptive. From spending so much time with me. Also she knew because you were on that first plane, and most people would have no idea that you were the reason that plane got saved.”

“I don’t like this.”

“Cat doesn’t either.”

“Really?”
“She was pretty annoyed with me too. Said I wasn’t thinking through my actions. Threatened to fire me if I didn’t stop.”

“And yet you’re still going ahead with it?”

“She made me think about why I was doing it. And I guess, well, maybe I don’t need to save every puppy or stop things that the cops and firefighters were already doing a decent job of stopping on their own. But she understood what I meant when I said that I couldn’t sit by and watch, say, a plane crash or a train derail—not when I could be doing something to stop it.”

“I suppose it’s a start. Remind me to buy that woman a fruit basket,” Alex mused.

“Anyway, do you think you could ask J’onn? Maybe we could meet tomorrow to go over some sketches I put together?”

“Are you really committed to telling Winn?”

Kara’s voice was breathy and a bit high-pitched as she responded, and Alex could picture her fiddling with her glasses. “Umm…sort of.”

“What does that mean?”

“I’m sitting on the roof of his apartment building, and he’s on his way up.”

“Kara!”

“What? I told you first, didn’t I?”

“By, like, five minutes!”

“It counts.”

“You know I was out on a date when you messaged me.”

“Oh shoot, you didn’t end it early because of me, did you?”

“Would you feel guilty if I said yes?”

“I’d tell you you’re being dumb.”

“Ugh, you’re the worst.”

“Tomorrow morning you’re telling me all about that date! Winn’s here now. Gotta go!”

“Any chance I could change your mind?” Alex called into the speaker in a last-ditch effort.

“Nope! Bye, Alex.” Hoping that Alex wouldn’t be too mad, Kara hung up and strode across the roof to where Winn was standing by the door they had discovered the week he and James moved into the building. Roof access wasn’t, strictly speaking, allowed, but the signs stating that it was prohibited were damaged enough that they felt comfortable claiming ignorance.

“Why’d you want to meet up here?” Winn asked, clutching his jacket around him. November in DC could still be on the warmer side, but the nights dipped down to temperatures lower than he liked.

“I needed to show you something.”
“Oh?”

A part of Kara wanted to giggle at the mixture of curiosity and cautiousness warring on Winn’s features as he edged closer to the edge of the roof, following Kara.

“Did you watch the news today?”

“Some…”

“I’m not here for Cat,” Kara huffed. “I’m not checking up on you or anything.”

“I did watch a few things. Just not as much as I normally would on a workday.”

“So you saw the town’s newest hero?”

“Oh, yeah, Supergirl is what they’re calling her, right?” Winn asked, as though he hadn’t been obsessively categorizing every documented instance of her powers since he woke up that morning.

“Uh, yeah…maybe that’ll change.”

“She was pretty cool, though. I mean, would’ve been cooler if she had a suit, but…”

“I’m so glad to hear you say that.”

“Really?”

“Remember how I said I had something to show you?”

Winn nodded. He could feel his heart jump into his throat as Kara took a running leap toward the edge of the building, only to watch her soar right back up into the air, her hair whipping around her face. “I’m her.”

“What?”

“That girl on TV? She’s me, Winn! I’m her!”

“Okay, wait, come back down here!”

Kara carefully descended, only disturbing the gravel on the roof a little bit as she landed.

“So you’re Supergirl?”

Kara crinkled her nose. “I’m the person they’ve started calling Supergirl, yes.”

“Oh my god.” Winn began pacing around the roof, the cold now forgotten. “So you’re an alien?”

“I am.”

“I had a crush on an alien.”

“Didn’t you already know about your big crush on Superman?”

“Oh my god. Do you know him?”

After a moment’s consideration about how much to reveal, Kara nodded. “He’s my cousin.”

“The Man of Steel is your cousin.” Winn sunk down to sit on the roof, his eyes wide with wonder. “I
am one degree removed from Superman.”

“You know you’ve got Supergirl standing right here,” Kara grumbled.

“Right! No, that’s amazing. I just…are you going to do this now? I thought you liked working on the campaign.”

“I do! I’m going to do both.”

“With the schedule Cat keeps?”

Kara pushed her glasses up her nose. “I maybe won’t be quite so active as Superman. But I’m still going to be out there for the big stuff—the things where I’m really needed.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah.” After giving Winn a few minutes to adjust, Kara nudged his shoulder. “What do you say to helping to design my suit?”

“Really? You swear you’re not just messing with me?”

“Really.”

And then he was on his feet, racing for the door. “Let me go get my sketchbook!”
“No.”

“But—” Winn began before noticing that Alex’s glare was only growing sterner by the second. “Fine.” With a huff, Winn hung back up the skimpiest of his possible Supergirl suit designs.

“J’onn’s turn.”

“Alex.” Kara nudged her sister. “You said you’d give Winn’s designs a chance.”

“That’s not a superhero suit; it’s…lingerie!” Alex spluttered, gesturing at the gaping middle section that would leave half of her baby sister’s midriff on full display.

“Ms. Danvers.” J’onn cleared his throat and handed over a bag.

Kara accepted it with a quiet, “Thank you,” and sped over to her bathroom to change. A moment later she emerged once more, sporting a rather prominent grimace.

“Perfect.” J’onn nodded his approval as Alex agreed.

“That’s not a costume either! That’s just”—Winn faltered as he tried to find the words—“cargo pants and a polo.”

“Practical. Just like all good outfits should be.”

Winn looked up at J’onn in disbelief. “A costume lends legitimacy to a superhero! Kara can’t go swooping around looking like she was just, I don’t know, out hunting deer in the woods or something.”

“All black would be a poor attempt at camouflage in the woods, Mr. Schott.”

Alex had to bite her lip to keep from snickering at the frustrated expression on Winn’s face.

“Don’t I get a say in this?” Kara finally asked, silencing the room. “I get that it’s…utilitarian. But it’s not aerodynamic. Alex, c’mon, look at these pockets and the thigh holsters. Someone could grab them!” That seemed to catch Alex’s attention. “And Winn’s right about something that looks more like a costume. It’ll make me seem trustworthy.”

After a moment, Alex turned her attention back to Winn. “The next one better not look like it came off the rack at Victoria’s Secret.”

“Deal!” Winn squeaked, handing over the bag with the other two designs to Kara.

Back in her bathroom, Kara pulled the two out. She could already tell which one Alex would veto; nothing about a short skirt seemed like the kind of costume she would approve of.

Figuring her super-speed could be put to good use, though, Kara pulled herself into the costume and snapped a photo, sending it to Cat’s non-work phone through the encrypted chat Winn had set up for all of them after the leaks. She captioned it: “If I keep this, think I can get you from ambivalent to enthusiastic about the new night job?”

Before Alex could start knocking and demanding to know what was taking so long, Kara changed into the next option and pulled her hair back into a low braid. With a deep breath, she pushed open
the door and strode out into the living room. “What do you think?”

“Amazing!” Winn gushed, rushing forward and pinching at different parts of the suit to figure out what alterations might need to be made.

“Better,” Alex admitted. “Little bright for my taste.”

“I modeled it after Superman’s suit.” Winn glared at Alex, waiting to see if she would dare insult Superman.

Alex assessed for a minute longer. “The crest is a bit much.”

“Do you want to out yourself as a relative of Superman?” J’onn asked. “He has his own enemies; you don’t know what they might do to you to get to him.”

“I can handle myself.”

“Perhaps it could be more…subdued?” Alex’s mouth twitched at the bright red and yellow design that covered most of Kara’s upper body.

“What if it was embroidered instead of emblazoned?” Winn suggested, gesturing to the upper right hand side of the suit. He might be willing to make some compromises, but the crest was staying.

Alex tilted her head to the side. “In red only?”

“Sure.”

“That could be better.”

Kara watched as the two of them went back and forth. Alex wanted a much darker shade of blue—nearly black—and Winn finally agreed to something closer to navy than the bright blue he’d used initially. In exchange, Alex relented and let the yellowy gold belt stay, as well as the more practical version of the boots—though she insisted that the DEO test the supposedly flame-retardant polymers Winn was using at higher heats than he could manage in his apartment. J’onn insisted that Winn work on the suit at the DEO, where they had lightweight armor that could be woven into the material of the suit itself—a technology introduced by one of their newer alien recruits. If Kara ever found herself vulnerable, J’onn argued, it could buy her a few precious seconds.

“And then for the finishing touches…” Kara held up a finger as she sped off to her bedroom and returned with a billowing red cape that had been fashioned from one of the blankets Lara and Jor-El had wrapped Kal in when they sent him to Earth.

“No capes,” Alex and J’onn declared in unison.

“Do you know how much cajoling it took for Kal to send this to me?”

“Kara,” Alex sighed, “you said no to cargo pants because the pockets could be grabbed. Do you have any idea how much surface area you’re giving your opponents to work with if you’ve got a cape?”

“But it’s a shield too! It’s bulletproof and fireproof and even waterproof!”

“Wait. That’s bulletproof?” Winn was at Kara’s side in an instant, tugging at the surprisingly thin material and running it through his fingers.

“I get that your cousin wears one, Kara, but it doesn’t make it a smart design choice.” J’onn folded
his arms across his chest, looking every bit the part of the stern father figure.

“But I could use it to protect people!”

Alex tilted her head to the side as she looked at the suit. “What if…what if we could create a few pockets? And one of them could be for your cape. That way you have it when you need it, but it couldn’t be used against you during a fight.”

“Can I wear it as a cape for photos?”

Alex threw her head back and laughed, rolling her eyes at her sister. “Yeah, do whatever you want for the pictures—except, wait, no! Don’t show your face!”

“I thought we had talked about the idea of a mask,” J’onn cut in, looking sternly over at Winn.

“Oh, well, Kara and I agreed that a full mask or a hood could make her seem less trustworthy. So I made this eye mask.” He held up the red mask.

“Did you really etch the House of El crest into the sides?” Alex couldn’t figure out whether she was more impressed or horrified by the amount of time he’d put into a project that was not Cat’s presidential campaign.

“Masks make people nervous,” he replied with a small shrug of his shoulders. “But Superman puts most people at ease.”

“So…are we decided?”

“If you’re still adamant about this plan, I suppose I’m okay with the adjustments Winn’s making to the suit.”

Once it became clear that everyone was as okay with things as they ever would be, Kara sped back to the bathroom and changed out of the suit and back into sweatpants and a t-shirt. After a long end of the week at work and longer conversations with Kal and Alex that morning, she was beyond ready to collapse on the couch and watch some shitty television before she looked over Cat’s talking points for her Monday interviews. Peeking at her phone, Kara noticed a response from Cat: “If you are committed to keeping an identity secret, it is beyond me why you are taking photographic proof that could be used against you.”

Kara sent back a quick: “Sorry…thought you might appreciate it.”

Her mood improved significantly, however, with the next buzz of her phone. “I never said I didn’t appreciate it. I’d appreciate it more in person without a trail of evidence.”

Figuring that was a good reason not to reply with anything more about the kinds of things they might do in person, Kara sent back a simple: “Noted. Will keep that in mind for the future. Have a fun family movie night with Carter and try not to stress about work!”

By the time Kara got back, Winn and J’onn were coordinating times for him to come by the DEO, and Alex was smiling at her phone—talking to Maggie, Kara had to assume.

“Who ya texting?” Kara asked, peering over Alex’s shoulder.

“No one!”

“Oh really? Tell that to the bright pink blush on your cheeks.”
“Maggie’s making me dinner—that’s all.”

Kara only then realized that Alex was dressed a little more nicely than she normally would be on a Saturday afternoon. “Alex! Get out of here then! I don’t want you to be late.”

“You sure you’re all set? You’re not gonna do anything rash while I’m out at dinner?”

“I promise, no fighting until I have a disguise. I’ve got a long night of trashy television and potstickers ahead of me.”

“Alright. Have fun. Call if you need me.”

“I need you to have fun with Maggie.”

Biting back a giddy smile, Alex nodded and let herself be led to the front door.

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Looking anywhere but at the peephole, Alex waited for Maggie to answer the door.

“Hey!” Maggie pulled open the door and motioned for Alex to come inside. “It’s good to see you.” After a moment’s hesitation, she leaned forward and kissed Alex softly.

“You too.” Still a bit dazed, Alex kicked off her shoes in the doorway, leaving them with the small pile of Maggie’s own. “I, uh, brought wine.”

“Perfect. And if you give me one minute…” Maggie trailed off, pulling a pot of something from the stove just seconds before the timer dinged. Standing out of the way, Alex watched as Maggie prepared two plates, setting them at the table before bringing over a small pot of sauce that smelled better than anything Alex could remember ever cooking. “Help yourself! There’s salad there, then the sauce is a homemade marinara. The gnocchi are, unfortunately, not homemade. Well, actually, given how poorly my attempts at making homemade gnocchi have gone in the past, I’d say it’s probably a good thing.”

“It looks amazing.”

Eventually they settled in at the table and Alex found the food tasted as good as it looked and smelled. Over dinner, they talked about everything and nothing, and Alex felt the stress of the past few days dealing with “Supergirl” melting away. Of course, it only exacerbated the pangs of guilt over lying to Maggie about how she spent her day, but something about being around Maggie made everything feel lighter, more doable.

“Did you give any more thought to whether you wanted to tell anyone else?” Maggie asked, affecting an air of nonchalance, even as her fingers tightened around her fork.

“Maggie, I was serious when I said that I was happy with you and all of this. I want people to know, I do.”

“It’s, well, it’s new. I understand that. And I meant it about keeping your own schedule.”

“I’m getting brunch with Lucy tomorrow, so I hope you’re ready for everything that comes with her knowing.”

Maggie paused, her wineglass halfway between the table and her mouth. “Should I expect to get some variation of: ‘Hurt my friend and die,’ from her, then?”
“I… I don’t think so? I can’t guarantee that she won’t, but there’s a chance. I promise to give you fair warning.”

Maggie laughed—loud and light. “Deal.”

“And then, I don’t know, I figure Lucy will tell Vasquez if I don’t see her first.” Maggie inclined her head; that made sense. “Then Winn and James will find out the next time we all go out together—not that I don’t trust them, but we’re not that… I don’t know, it’d feel weird to sit them down and tell them individually. I’d rather just introduce you as my girl—date. Yeah.”

“Your girl date?”

“Well… you are my date. And you are a girl. So why not?”

Biting her lip, Maggie decided not to tease Alex about it yet. “Alright then.”

“What about you? You tell anyone?”

“Uh, a couple of friends from Chicago who I keep in touch with know. But my friends here are pretty much your friends…”

“Oh. Shit, if you wanted to tell someone—”

“Danvers, relax. I’m okay keeping things quiet in the beginning. As much fun as it can be to tell other people, it’s also really nice to enjoy time alone.”

“Yeah… yeah, I get that.”

As they talked, the conversation drifted to the coming weeks. “Got any big Thanksgiving plans?”

“Oh.” Maggie paused, chewing slowly as she seemed to consider her answer. “Not really. It’s, uh, you know, not really a big vegetarian holiday.”

“But the mashed potatoes, Sawyer,” Alex teased, watching as some of the tension eased out of Maggie’s shoulders.

“I’ll be sure to make some. What about you? Guess you can’t really fly all the way home to California.”

“No, but my mom will be coming here actually.”

“You sound… less than enthusiastic.”

“It’s not—no, I don’t—it’ll be good to see her, I’m sure. Plus, I know Kara always misses her.” She didn’t add that she was ignoring a voicemail or two from her mother about Kara’s superhero antics and really didn’t need to deal with that conversation in person.

“I get it. Family can be tough.”

“Yeah.”

“Have you, uh, told your mom…?” She didn’t need to finish her question; they both understood the unspoken end to the sentence.

“Not yet,” Alex admitted, rubbing at the back of her neck and looking down at her empty plate, a few red streaks from the sauce decorating the white china.
“Sorry, I don’t mean to pressure you! You can come out to her or not—I wouldn’t want—just, it’s what you feel comfortable doing.”

“No, I’ll tell her. We just”—Alex hesitated, trying to find the right words—“things between us have always been…complicated.”

“You wanna talk about it?”

“There’s not much to say. She doesn’t really approve of my job—thinks the route Kara took is more respectable. After all, Kara can talk about pretty much anything she does at work. I’m doing things of sometimes dubious legality and manipulating public opinion and a hundred and one other things that she doesn’t think are a good use of my degree.”

“I’m sorry. For what it’s worth, I think what you do matters.”

“Even after our first interaction?”

“We bumped heads at first.” They both chuckled at the understatement. “But I’ve gotten to see how much good you do too. You kept some pretty awful people from ruining Cat’s campaign with dirty tricks. And that—that’s pretty impressive.” After a moment, Maggie looked up, a smirk playing about her lips. “Pretty hot too.”

“Mm, is that so?”

“Definitely.”

And Alex didn’t want to rush things or pressure Maggie or seem like she was anything less than grateful for the dinner, but a part of her was also desperate to see if Maggie might be interested in moving their date to the living room—she wouldn’t push for the bedroom just yet—and showing Alex exactly how hot she thought she was. So lost in her thoughts was Alex that she barely noticed Maggie speaking to her. “Hmm?”

“I asked if you wanted to have dessert now or wait a while.”

“Oh. I don’t think I’m that hungry yet…maybe we hang out for a little while?”

“Yeah, let me clear the dishes quickly, and I can come join you in the living room. I’ve also got some DVDs out there or Netflix already signed in if you want to watch something.”

Alex prayed that anything they put on would be quickly forgotten, but she made a show of looking anyway, eventually picking out some action movie that may or may not have had a real plot other than: shooting, dodging, explosions.

“That your kind of movie, Danvers?”

“It’ll do.”

Biting back a knowing smirk, Maggie nodded along and settled in next to Alex on the couch. After a few minutes of Alex’s inching closer and closer, Maggie lifted her arm and draped it across Alex’s shoulders, smiling when Alex curled herself into Maggie’s side. She should have known the badass political fixer extraordinaire would secretly be into cuddling; after all, she woke up to Alex pressed tightly against her every morning after their “nothing happens” sleepovers to help with the nightmares after the almost crash.

“You know,” Alex began, her voice soft but just loud enough to be heard over the movie, “that night
we went to the movies together—it was the best date that wasn’t actually a date I’d ever been on.”

“Yeah?”

“I know, I know, it’s silly. And I know it wasn’t—”

“Danvers,” Maggie interjected, reaching her free hand across them to find Alex’s. “I was gonna say it was mine too.”

“Oh.”

Maggie pressed a soft kiss to Alex’s forehead. “Guess we’ve been dancing around this for a while, huh?”

“Yes...I don’t—I wasn’t quite ready to admit it at first. But I think a part of me that I shoved down for so long knew a while ago.”

“That so?”

Alex’s cheeks flushed a faint shade of pink as she shrugged. “It was—I thought I could call it friendship. But there was always another undercurrent there too. And I’d felt that before with...there were others. Back in school.” More and more lately, Alex had been thinking about some of the experiences and friendships she’d had over the years, reflecting on what she’d admitted to Kara about Vicki and Naomi and the way she felt about them. “With them, I could ignore it or pretend like it didn’t mean anything. And then, I don’t know, it’d turn into a fight, and eventually we fought so much that we stopped seeing each other. But with you...I didn’t want that to happen.”

“I get that.” Maggie’s thumb traced aimless patterns across Alex’s hand. “I think I never pushed you or asked because, well, I worried that if I did, if I had, you know, asked if there was something more going on, then it might have driven you away. And I didn’t want to imagine my life without you in it—whether it was friendship or more.”

“You’re a smooth talker, Maggie Sawyer,” Alex whispered as she leaned up to press a kiss to the corner of Maggie’s mouth, which soon turned into a kiss on her lips, which soon turned into making out like teenagers as Alex rolled into Maggie and gently pressed them down onto the couch. With Maggie’s mouth hot against her own, teeth nipping at her lower lip and a tongue soothing away the sting, the world slowly slipped away, leaving nothing more than the two of them.

Too concerned about falling off the couch to try to flip Alex over—and, if she were being honest, worried that it might lead to something that they might not be ready for—Maggie tangled one hand in Alex’s hair and used the other to pull her even closer, earning a low moan from Alex that left her whimpering in reply. Kisses grew rougher, movements more desperate as they clutched each other close, hands wandering and bold fingers slipping under hems.

Emboldened by how good everything felt, Alex dropped a hand down to Maggie’s ass, urging her closer as she felt a thigh wrap around her. And god, it had never felt like this—never felt good like this. She’d never craved another person in the way she craved Maggie, never felt like her whole body was on fire in the best of all possible ways. With other people, sometimes there had been something—some craving for intimacy and closeness and connection that was never actually satisfied by her encounters. She’d always been happy enough when they were over, happy enough to send the date or the boyfriend home at the end of the night. But with Maggie, god, they were only making out, and already she was more turned on than she’d ever been. With Maggie, she couldn’t get enough, and she already hated the idea of having to leave at the end of the night.
“Alex,” Maggie gasped out, pulling her mouth back and trying to get some amount of distance to cool down. But Alex took the new angle as an opportunity to trail searing kisses across Maggie’s jaw and down her neck. “Fuck, Alex—Alex, we should, we should take our time.”

“We are taking time,” Alex murmured between teasing nips. “I’m fairly certain it’s been hours.”

Maggie’s laugh was low, her voice still thick with desire. “It’s been a week, Danvers.”

“But how long ago was that movie not-a-date? Because we could totally start counting from there.” Alex interspersed her words with kisses. “Or maybe back when we went running, and I noticed just how good you looked. Or when you hooked up with that random woman, and I had never been quite so jealous and irrationally angry.”

“Oh really?” Maggie grinned up at Alex.

“Shut it.”

“I get it—and, Alex, I want you too, so much. And I don’t think there has to be this much…I don’t know, weird build up around a first time, but”—Maggie paused as Alex pulled herself up to a seated position, looking significantly more disheveled than she had before—“I still want yours to be special. And that means probably not on my couch with background gunfire.”

Alex chuckled, hitting mute on the remote to silence the movie that appeared to be wrapping up already.

“And if you have a little time away from me and decide, nope, I’m totally ready, then I’m ready too, and I’ll still be here. But I want you to have a little time to think too. I’d rather leave you a little unsatisfied tonight than leave you with regrets for a long time.”

“Sounds like the title of some self-help article.” Before Maggie could protest, Alex held up a hand. “But I also get it. And I appreciate it, even if right now I really wish you would stop being such a damn good person.”

“I didn’t say we couldn’t make out more.”

“In that case…”

By the time Alex left, it was nearly 3 in the morning, and her clothes were more rumpled than after spending weeks at the bottom of her hamper, but she swore she’d never been happier in her life.
“Where are you??? I’ve had to give up three tables already, and if they call me a fourth time, I’m taking it, and you can go find your own damn breakfast.” Lucy glared at her phone as it remained infuriatingly silent without an immediate response from Alex full of apologies about a work emergency and a promise that she would be there momentarily.

A few minutes later, Alex rounded the corner looking somewhat worse for wear with her hair rumpled and large sunglasses on. “Alexandra Danvers,” Lucy cackled, looking her up and down, “am I catching you just now getting home?”

“No.” Alex hated how gravelly her voice still sounded, having attempted to sleep a few minutes later than she should have to make up for how late she was up with Maggie the night before.

“Oh my god.”

“What?”

Lucy’s eyes lit up as she pulled Alex’s collar to the side. “That’s a hickey, Alexandra!”

“Shut up!”

“Oh my god, did you get laid last night?”

Alex grimaced and batted away Lucy’s hand. “Can you be a little quieter?”

Looking around, Lucy gestured to the crowds of people, all of whom were too engrossed in conversations or their phones to pay attention to them. “I’m taking that as a confirmation.”

“I didn’t say that!”

“You still haven’t said no!”

“Lucy, party of two?”

Grabbing Alex’s hand, Lucy rushed toward the host’s stand. “Here! She finally showed up.”

They followed the laughing host back to their table, and Alex barely had time to take off her jacket and order water and coffee before Lucy resumed her interrogation. “Where were you last night?”

“I…can we start at the beginning?”

“I would expect nothing less.”

“So…those, uh, those conversations we had? Before the second debate and all?”
“Yeah?” Lucy hadn’t wanted to press Alex on it, especially not after the trip and everything that happened with the plane, so she’d been keeping quiet, no matter how much it killed her to do so.

“There was…some truth, in the things you said. About Maggie’s not being a fluke or whatever.”

Lucy’s voice softened then. “How are you doing with all of that?”

“Uh, actually pretty good? I think in comparison to nearly being killed, it feels a bit easier.”

Lucy chuckled at that. “I’d rather you not have had to almost die to get it, but if that’s what it takes, so be it.”

“No, I, well, I tried to tell Maggie before I left. And I managed to get out that I liked women. But I sort of ran out on her—it’s a long story.”

“Oh, sweetie. Do you need me to play matchmaker? I promise, I’m so good at it!”

“God no.” Their waitress popped by at that moment to deliver their drinks and take their order. As soon a she left, Lucy looked expectantly back at Alex, who laughed and sipped at her water. She felt lighter than she had in years, and she was beyond glad to see that things with Lucy weren’t changing, that she’d just confirmed with her that yes, she liked women, and yes, she liked Maggie, but it didn’t have to make everything different. “When I got back from Vegas after, well, after everything, Maggie was waiting. And with how close I came to dying, I was a little…on edge. But she was great.” Lucy nodded and smiled at Alex, encouraging her to keep going. “Turns out she thought I liked you.”

“Oh, well, that is understandable. I’m very likable.”

“Debatable.”

“Provable.”

“You’re insufferable.”

“Pot, meet kettle. So how did Maggie react to finding out that it was about her?”

“She kissed me.” And Alex couldn’t help but let out a happy noise at the sight of Lucy’s expression: her eyes wide and her mouth open.

“Get it, girl!”

“We, uh, she had me wait for a day to make sure I still wanted her and this and all, and since then we’ve been dating.”

“Alex! That’s amazing. Seriously.”

“Thanks. She’s pretty great.” Alex nearly bounced in her seat as she thought back over the past week.

“Well, okay, sure, that too. But I mean you—you’re amazing. I’m really, really proud of you.”

Blushing, Alex waved away the compliment with a “pssht” noise and a shake of her head.

“No, I’m serious. I know that I pushed hard, but it’s because all of this—it’s really fucking difficult. It’s not easy, and even if it normally feels so much better on the other side, it doesn’t make the process of getting there any easier.”
“Yeah… I do… I know I kind of hated you during some of it, but I do appreciate your help,” Alex admitted, reflecting on the weeks it had taken to get to that point. “At first it was… infuriating.”

“Let’s get to the compliments.”

Chuckling, Alex continued. “As I was saying, you were infuriating at times.” She snorted at Lucy’s small frown. “But you also made me feel like I was normal, like all of this was normal. And that helped a lot more than you’ll ever know.”

“I’m just glad to see you smiling. Because, uh, I don’t know if you know it, but you’ve been grinning like a fool since you said Maggie’s name.”

“Shut up. I’m still intimidating.”

“Little hard to be intimidating when you look so in-lo-ove.”

“Shh!” Alex looked around, half-expecting to find Maggie at the table behind them. “It’s too early to get into that.”

“Fine, fine, hard to be intimidating when you look like you just had the best sex of your life?”

“Luce!” Alex hissed. “It’s not—she wants to take things sort of slow, make sure I’m okay with everything new.”

“Aww, look at her. Will power of a champion, really.” When Alex groaned, Lucy’s gaze flickered up. “Is that… is that Alex Danvers wishing her girlfriend would go ahead and b—”

“Stop!” Alex squeaked. “First of all, we haven’t…I don’t know when she becomes my girlfriend. Second of all, okay, fine, maybe I’m a little, uh, impatient. But it’s just, you know, it’s been a lot of years of assuming that I wasn’t built for certain things. Only now—now it feels like I most definitely am.”

“So she’s a good kisser?”

Figuring it wouldn’t hurt to gush a little, Alex lifted her mug to her lips and nodded before sipping at her coffee.

“And apparently pretty good at leaving hickeys…”

“Okay, I didn’t know about that.” Alex thought back on the night before, remembering the way Maggie’s mouth had worked at her neck and her collarbone. A shiver ran through her, though the spell was quickly broken by the sound of Lucy’s cackling laugh.

“Oh my god, you’re thinking about it now!”

“No!” Alex could feel her cheeks heating up and knew a red flush would be climbing its way up her chest as well.

“The lady doth protest too much, methinks…”

“Shut up. You had pictures of your boobs on your phone.”

“Good one, Danvers,” Lucy deadpanned, rolling her eyes and shaking her hair out of her face.

“How, uh, how are things with Vasquez?”
“They’re really good.”

“Yeah?”

Before Lucy could answer, their waitress returned with their food. They busied themselves with sorting their plates and stealing syrup from a neighboring table before returning to the conversation. “Right, Vasquez. Things are good. I don’t…we still haven’t labeled what we’re doing. But I’m not dating or doing anything with anyone else, and last I heard, she wasn’t either. With all of Cat’s travel, I don’t get to see her as much in person. But we do dinner together when we can, and we go out to eat when we can manage it. Otherwise we’ll take turns cooking. It’s…I don’t know, it’s nice. Little domestic, but I think I might actually enjoy it with her?”

“Wow. Lucy Lane settling down into domesticity.”

“Shut up.”

“I don’t think I ever will.”

“Now which one of us was the insufferable one again…?”

“Still you.”

“Lies. I’m a goddam delight.”

Once their plates had been cleared and the check delivered, Lucy leaned over, looking suddenly serious, and dropped her voice. Alex braced herself, wondering what sordid details Lucy was about to spill that would actually convince her to lower her voice for a change.

“Danvers, real question.”

“Yeah?”

“What the fuck is your sister doing flying around DC and stopping petty theft and car crashes?”

Alex’s phone clattered to the table. “What the fuck? Does everyone know?”

“I hope not! Do you realize the kind of scandal that could create for the campaign?” Lucy hissed, her voice barely audible among the din of the busy restaurant.

Alex fixed Lucy with a withering glare. “It’s my job to know exactly what kind of scandal it would create.”

“Right, right. So what the hell was she thinking? And also, was no one going to tell me that she was an alien?”

“It’s not exactly something she shares regularly,” Alex grumbled. “And how the hell did you figure this out?”

“She borrowed the sunglasses from me! And I can only assume flying into debris and smoke like that, they’re not exactly coming back to me in their like-new condition.”

Alex gritted her teeth. “Look…she’s not going to stop completely, but she’s not going to do that shit again. It’s reserved to preventing major accidents only. She’s already gotten yelled at by both me and Cat.”

“Cat knows?”
“I guess she recognized her.”

“Huh.” Lucy narrowed her eyes in consideration.

“Yeah, so… Kara knows she’ll be out a job if she creates major conflicts of interest. And she’ll be disguised the next time she does it.”

“She’d better be careful.”

“I know. Oh, I know.”

“And also, she owes me some new sunglasses. They were designer.”

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After brunch, Alex sent a text to Kara: “Lucy knows. So you better be thinking of ways to keep things so much more secretive than they have been. Your first strategy: not effective.”

Trying to distract herself, Alex pulled up Maggie’s contact information next: “Lucy knows about us now. Apparently we have to sign some paperwork about dating a coworker because she ‘doesn’t need a second scandal.’” She followed it up with: “Get ready for some teasing, though I think you’re safe from threats.”

Alex’s phone buzzed less than a minute later. “Really? How’d it go?”

“Great! It was nice getting to talk about you :))”

“Totally getting soft on me.”

“You still like me.”

“Of course.”

Alex would forever deny exactly how giddy that response made her, though her response took significantly longer to arrive than the others. “And so if you want to talk about this or whatever with someone, both Lucy and Vasquez know. Or Vasquez will know in about five minutes.”

“That’s very considerate, thanks, Alex.”

“Anytime.”

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On Monday morning, Cat sat in her office with Kara, Lucy, Alex, James, and Winn going over important meetings, interviews, and events for the week, as well as getting updates on polling numbers before her meeting with the researchers.

When Kara finished speaking, Cat pointed her pen in James’ direction. “James, you’re up next.”

“Right. You’ve got interviews with an Iowa morning radio show and The Washington Post. Your op-ed is still good to run in the Times this Sunday, but we’ll want to keep edits going until the last minute so you don’t sound less than informed. And we’ve got the second round of ads rolling out today.”

“And how are the ads doing?”
Winn perked up, passing out a few handouts. “We’re getting pretty decent click-through rates on social media. The television ones seem to be doing well, but these days they don’t get quite the traction they used to.” James nodded along with Winn; from the start, they’d worked together to spearhead a more progressive advertising campaign that drew inspiration from grassroots movements and younger candidates. “The dip in your numbers after the leaks broke has pretty much evened out thanks to the spike in ratings after your debate performance.”

“Justin did get a bit of a bump this weekend thanks to a larger press conference he held down in South Carolina, but it wasn’t the kind of bump it should have been,” James explained, gesturing at the charts Winn had shared.

“And what about Max?” Kara asked, watching as Cat’s eyes trailed along his numbers.

“We’re expecting a pretty large spike this week,” Alex chimed in. “Lord Technologies is launching a new high-speed rail project that he’s promised will bring more jobs to the country and rejuvenate our aging infrastructure.”

“Didn’t he already try this?”

“This time it’s not only California; he’s proposing a rail system that will go all across the country,” Winn answered. He didn’t idolize Max in the same way he once had, but he still respected the man’s creations, even if he disliked his politics.

Cat hummed, scratching a few notes for herself. “Gets away from accusations of coastal elitism. Only a matter of time before he starts pitching it as a revolution for agriculture…”

“And we’ll get back in the news soon too,” Kara chimed in. “The op-ed will do a lot, then we have our trip up through New England where it’s really coming down to you and Justin in a lot of places. Vermont is tipping to Max, but Maine is still possibly up for grabs. Justin’s family has a lot of clout in New York, but you’re not behind by more than a few points in most districts.”

“Before you head up North…” James grimaced, looking down at his notebook and steeling himself before he spoke again. “Thanksgiving is coming up.”

“I’m aware.” Cat pointed at the calendar hanging on the wall. “You all already have the day off unless emergencies arise.”

“No, no, I know that. It’s just…well, one of the things you tend to lose points for is family values,” James hedged.

Scoffing at James’ refusal to come right out and say it, Alex cut in: “You don’t have a husband. You have a kid you don’t drag into the spotlight every second. And you’re not far enough removed from all the rumors about the whole gay thing for them to have been completely forgotten.”

Cat arched an eyebrow at Alex but motioned for her to continue.

“Thanksgiving is a family holiday. No presents, no religion, easy to turn into a big spectacle for political ads and easy positive coverage. Max is out of luck, but he’s a man and can play the tragic orphan card. He’ll be alright. But you know Justin is going to be out there with his big political family and his wife and kids, soaking up all the positive coverage. Stephen will be able to do the same. And that kind of coverage matters to a lot of early state voters.”

“So what are you suggesting? I find myself a husband and a baby and an apron before next week?”

Biting back a smile, Alex shook her head and turned back to James. She did the work of getting Cat
ready to accept a solution; he’d be the one that had the misfortune of pitching it.

“Cat,” James began, testing out the easygoing smile that typically had women falling over themselves to say yes to him. “One of those morning talk shows with all the women on it is collaborating with that mother-daughter cooking show from Food Network—uh Grace and something. They thought perhaps you could guest star on their Thanksgiving episode.”

“Oh…I could do that, I suppose.” She wasn’t a fan of playing up the domesticity angle, but for a holiday when just about everyone would be parading their families in front of the cameras, one short slot wouldn’t be terrible.

“Right, great. So, the special is about family traditions and recipes that have gotten passed down through the generations.”

“Oh, will I need one?”

“You will.”

“Fair enough, I’m sure one of you lot has a grandmother’s pie or something I can borrow.”

“Uh, sure. But the idea of the cooking show is to show how food unites families.” Cat motioned for him to get to his point—and do it faster. “They don’t just want you on the show; they want your mother cooking with you.”

The room fell into silence as Cat took in James’ expression, waiting for some sign that he was joking. When it became clear that he wasn’t, Cat let out a bark of laughter. “You’ve had the displeasure of meeting my mother, haven’t you, Mr. Olsen?”

“I—I have met her.”

“So then you’ll forgive me when I ask you what the fuck you think you’re suggesting.”

“It’s not coming from our team; it’s coming from theirs.”

“Why don’t you go back and ask if I can’t bring Carter on with me instead. Then I can be the doting mother everyone thinks I should be.”

“Well, uh”—James ran his hand over his head—“they’re really focused on mother-daughter relationships.”

“Of course they are.”

“I hate to say it, but it would look good,” Kara added, watching the fleeting look of betrayal appear and disappear.

“And it would go a long way in making you more relatable after everything, even if most of the rumors have calmed down.”

“Why? Because all of the other viewers will be able to watch and nod along in agreement that yes, they too would rather tear out their own hair than spend another minute with their mothers?”

“Couldn’t you manage one hour-long show?”

“I’m not the issue here.”

“What if we bring your mother in for coaching,” Alex suggested. She was met with four incredulous
expressions.

“I think you’re getting in over your head,” Lucy whispered. “You haven’t met her.”

“I’m sure I’ve dealt with worse.”

“If you want to try, be my guest.” Alex’s heart sunk at the amused smirk playing about Cat’s lips but she simply nodded, resolved to her fate. She’d almost been kidnapped and killed; she could deal with a mean old woman.

“What’s next?” Cat snapped. For the next half-hour, they ran through items efficiently until Cat dismissed them all with a wave of her hand. Lucy, however, stayed behind to discuss matters that weren’t for the full team. “Can I help you?”

Swallowing all the warnings about what it meant for Kara to be running around as Supergirl—after all, they’d had a lengthy conversation the night before, and Kara had managed to assuage many of her fears—Lucy cleared her throat. “I wanted to confirm that for workplace relationships, you’re still okay with the standard obligation to disclose and a set of agreements attesting to the fact that the involved parties won’t allow their relationship to affect their work or jeopardize the wellbeing of the campaign and the office environment?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Ah, well, uh…”

“Out with it, Lane,” Cat growled.

“There are two relationships between members of the team. I—I’m sorry, I hadn’t disclosed anything earlier because our jobs are so different that it didn’t occur to me.”

“You’re talking about you and Vasquez, then?”

“What?”

“There is no work-related reason for my legal counsel to spend that much time with the head of security and logistics.”

“Er, right.”

“It never affected your ability to fulfill your duties adequately, so I didn’t say anything.”

“And it won’t.”

“Very well. And the other?” Cat busied herself with her pen and breathed deeply, trying to calm her racing heart. There was no reason that Lucy would know unless…unless Kara had said something without thinking.

“Ah…I don’t know if it’s really public knowledge yet…”

Cat sipped at the remnants of her now-cold latte. “And yet, as the person who employs all of you, I think I should know about something that could put my campaign at risk.”

“Alex and Maggie recently started dating.”

“Really? Glad she’s being honest with herself,” Cat mused under her breath, though Lucy’s half-cough half-laugh suggested she had been loud enough to be heard. “It’s not exactly a subordinate-
supervisor relationship, but Alex does have a degree of control over policy, including the policy shaped by our research team. The final decisions still rest with me, of course, but make sure Ms. Sawyer feels comfortable with all that’s happening.”

Biting back the urge to point out that she was fairly certain Maggie had been hoping this would happen for quite some time now, Lucy nodded.

“Anything else?”

“Not unless there are any more relationships,” Lucy joked, missing the clench to Cat’s jaw.

“That will be all. I have some work to get done before my next meeting.”

“Right, of course. I’ll make sure everyone sits down, and I can get a third party to sit in with Vasquez and me.”

“Very well.”

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That evening, Maggie sat with Vasquez at one of the bars closer to her neighborhood, having asked if she wanted to grab drinks after work.

After a few minutes of catching up, Maggie bumped her beer bottle against Vasquez’s glass. “So…I assume you know about Alex and me?”


“Knock it off,” Maggie laughed. “Lucy found out this weekend, and I know that means you’ve known since Saturday morning.”

“Maybe I know something…”

“Yeah, yeah. To confirm, we’re dating.”

“That’s awesome, really.”

“It is—it really is.” Maggie drummed her fingers against the table. “Okay, look, sorry, I just…I’m still new here. And sometimes I thought about asking you to chat back before I quite had a handle on how Alex was feeling. But then I figured you’re her friends first. But I really appreciated your talking to me when I first started and helping me find some of the more welcoming bars and pointing me in the direction of all the farmers markets. And I know that’s probably just being helpful or whatever, but, I don’t know, I keep telling Alex to talk about this thing with other people, but I’m not really following my own advice, and—”

“Sawyer?” Vasquez interjected, cutting off the rambling.

“Yeah?”

“I’m happy to talk to you.”

“I don’t want you to feel obligated or anything.”

“Okay, Maggie, look. I’m not particularly outgoing. I’m good at my job, and I like Lucy. I get along with the team, and when we’re all out together, I still chime into the conversation when I want to, but I’m not—I’m not Kara. Or Lucy, for that matter.”
“I get that.”

“Yeah. So when you and I grabbed lunch or got drinks during your first month, it wasn’t because I thought I had to. It was because, I don’t know, I thought we might be friends too.”

“That—that’s cool.”

After a moment, Vasquez laughed loudly. “So cool.”

“Shut up,” Maggie grumbled, but she was grateful that the tension seemed to have broken. “I didn’t have a whole lot of friends back at my old job,” she admitted, her voice quiet.

“Yeah?” Vasquez could remember the surprise in Maggie’s voice every time they invited her out with them.

“It was fine when I was away at college and working in Chicago, but coming home—back to Nebraska—it dredged up some old shit. And, I don’t know, I’m not great at the whole trusting people thing.”

“I get that. But people here? They like you. You’re good at your job, and you’re fun to hang out with.”

“Thanks,” Maggie mumbled, busying her fingers with the label on her bottle.

“Wanna know what really solidified your status in the group?”

“What?”

“You’re making Alex happy.”

“I hope so. She’s—she’s pretty amazing.”

“I doubt she’s the only great person in that relationship.”

Maggie shrugged. “I don’t want to fuck things up.”

“I’m sure you won’t.”

“I don’t know about that.”

“You think I know what the hell I’m doing with Lucy?”

Maggie looked up at Vasquez, tilting her head to the side. “You don’t?”

“Fuck no. I—it’s fun. And it started out so casual. But sometimes it feels like we’re in a relationship. And I—well, it’s been a long time since I had a partner. It’s hard with the demands of the job and all. But sometimes I swear it’s what Lucy’s becoming.”

“You two are pretty cute together.”

“But maybe…maybe she’s not into me like that. It might be something that’s easy enough for now. We’re friends and…something more. But it doesn’t have to mean we’re dating or girlfriends or anything else.”

“I don’t know, Vasquez. I’ve seen the way she looks at you. I think she might just like you back.”
“Maybe. Or maybe I’m setting myself up to get hurt by getting invested when she never promised me anything like a relationship. We were pretty clear from the outset that it was not going to become a relationship.”

“Alex was also pretty clear that she was straight when I first started here. Things change.”

Vasquez snorted and nearly choked on her soda. “Kudos to you for being the one that finally dragged her out of the closet and into the light.”

“Apparently your—Lucy had a lot to do with it.”

Vasquez tipped her beer in recognition. “I’d believe it.”

“So…gonna do anything about Lucy?”

“I don’t know. Gonna do anything about all those worries that you’re not right for Alex?”

“It’s not—I don’t think I’m bad for Alex. I’m just constantly second-guessing everything. I’m not good at relationships, you know? And suddenly she’s in one that matters to her, and it’s with me, and that’s a big deal. What if I fuck it all up?”

“That’s a worry in every single relationship. It doesn’t matter how well your last one went; it still ended.”

Maggie paused to consider it. “I guess.”

“From what Lucy tells me, you’re already working pretty hard to do right by Alex.”

“Can I know what she said?”

“I believe there was something about the ‘self-control of a god’ for not ripping Alex’s clothes off yet.”

“I don’t want to rush her!”

“I get it. But I think Alex is also probably old enough to know what she wants and when she wants it. It’s not like you’ve been drunk every date, right?”

“No, we haven’t.”

“Then I think you can probably trust her. She’s stood up to Cat Grant at her worst; I’m fairly certain she can tell her girlfriend if she’s not ready for something.”

“Oh we haven’t, uh, that’s not a word we’ve used yet.”

“Could’ve fooled me,” Vasquez teased, nudging Maggie with her shoulder.

“Yeah, and I might’ve guessed that you and Lucy were the old married couple of the group.”

“Touché.”

“Gonna do something about that?”

“It’s a conversation we’ll have to have, yeah. And you? Gonna stop doubting yourself?”

“In general? Probably not.” Maggie raised her beer in a mock toast. “To family issues!”
“Cheers,” Vasquez replied wryly, raising her glass and clinking it against Maggie’s bottle.

“You too?”

“Dad wasn’t too keen on the gay thing. And then adding the butch side of things to it? Not something he was willing to stomach.”

“Parents really have a knack for screwing over their kids in the name of ‘good family values,’ huh?”

Vasquez sighed and nodded. “Dad or mom for you?”

“Both.”

“Fuck, I’m sorry.”

“Sucks either way. You didn’t deserve losing half a family.”

“You make do. Find your own family.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I had that in Chicago, you know? But then—it’s a long story. I fucked up with someone who mattered there, and I lost so much of that family I had built for myself.”

“That when you moved to Nebraska?”

“Pretty soon afterward, yeah.”

“Just because you fucked up, it doesn’t mean you had to punish yourself.”

“I—it’s not—I didn’t.” Maggie spluttered, wondering how Vasquez had managed to encapsulate in one sentence everything the therapist she’d seen for almost a year never seemed to understand.

“People here—they’re good people. We’re all a little fucked up in our own ways. Hell, I don’t think anyone in our group of friends has the old fashioned mom, dad, two kids family.” Vasquez thought through it. “We’ve got dead dads and absentee parents. Homophobic assholes who might as well be dead for the amount of time they spend in our lives. Pair of orphans. But we’ve got each other.”

“That’s great.”

“I’m including you in that we, Maggie.” Maggie hid her smile behind her beer bottle. “Now, I hear this bar has darts. What do you say?”

“I think I could kick your ass at darts.”

“Friendly wager?”

“Depends on the terms.”

Vasquez’s mouth curled up into a smile. “I win, you stop doubting this thing you’re doing with Alex and go ask her to be your girlfriend.” Seeing Maggie opening her mouth to object, Vasquez shook her head. “Nope, I saw the way your face lit up when I called her your girlfriend. You don’t get to pretend like you don’t want that or tell me it’s too soon. You’re a lesbian. There’s no such thing.”

“Shut up,” Maggie laughed, feeling the tension from talk of families easing out of her frame.

“Alright, if I win—”

“Doubtful.”
“If I win,” Maggie continued, acting like there had been no interruption, “you have to tell Lucy how you feel about her.”

Vasquez paused to consider it, finally extending her hand. “Deal.”
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Happy 25 chapters, and thanks for sticking with me throughout the journey! Please enjoy some Sunday morning smut as we check in with all three of the couples. And I’ll see you back here for Thanksgiving and everything that goes with it next…

For the second Saturday in a row, Alex found herself pacing outside Maggie’s door as she waited for her to answer. Even though nothing had been promised, Maggie’s words about being ready if and when Alex was ready rang in her ears. They’d been the constant refrain all week, echoing in her thoughts during stolen minutes away from the bustle of the campaign and over their dinners out, legs brushing against one another beneath the cover of the table. Each night they spent together ended the same way: lips moving against the other’s, hands slipping under shirts, desperate whimpers barely swallowed, but never more—never the more that Alex craved more than she’d ever believed possible, her whole body humming with want.

“Hey!” Maggie pulled open the door and greeted Alex with a soft kiss. “How was your Saturday?”

Alex tried to think back to her day; it was much more difficult to do when her thoughts all seemed to focus on the woman in front of her. “Uh…okay. Did some errands. Oh god, had a phone call with Cat’s mother.” Alex squeezed her eyes shut and rubbed at her temples at the mere memory of the brief conversation.

“Oh? How’d that go?” Maggie had heard rumors about the older Grant from the staffers who’d been with Cat since her time in California, and none of them sounded positive.

“You know how they were making memes with Cat and Miranda Priestly back when the leaks started?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“Imagine if Miranda Priestly had a love child with the devil himself, and that’s the only person who might be bad enough for the memes with Cat’s mother.”

“That sounds…horrendous.”

“It really is.” Alex let out a huff of air that slowly morphed into a laugh because god, if she couldn’t laugh, the only thing left to do was cry. “I’m supposed to make this woman palatable to mainstream audiences, and the very first thing she did was insult me.”

“Want me to come kick her ass?”

“As chivalrous as the offer is, I think I’d be better served slipping some extra-strength Xanax into her coffee instead.”

“Yikes. Well, I’ve got some wine if you need it, and dinner should be ready in”—Maggie checked the timer—“eleven minutes.”

“Perfect.”
“Hope you don’t mind, I went more casual dining, comfort food for tonight, since I knew you had that call this morning.”

Alex’s heart fluttered at the care in Maggie’s tone, and she wondered how Maggie had picked up on such a small item in her schedule amid all the other details of their busy lives. “Maggie, no matter what you made, I’m sure it’ll be perfect.”

Maggie let out a bark of laughter. “Sorry!” She waved off Alex’s look of concern. “It’s just—if you asked my aunt, she would definitely disagree. I, uh, might have set off both of the fire alarms in her apartment and the one in the hall while baking cookies once…”

Alex leaned in conspiratorially. “Want to know the secret to preventing that?”

“What? Hitting start on your timer?”

“Nope. Throwing out those pesky smoke detectors.” Alex grinned as Maggie’s expression morphed from one of confusion to shock to amusement, finally giving way to an exasperated laugh.

“Let’s focus on avoiding fires in the first place, huh?”

“If you insist,” Alex replied with a dramatic sigh. “Now, tell me how I can help?”

“Well, I made French toast casserole, so if you want to stick with the breakfast for dinner theme, you could help get on either some tea or coffee.”

“On it! Now if you could point me in the direction of your coffee…”

“Day was that long, huh?”

Sucking her lower lip between her teeth, Alex looked up at Maggie. “I thought we might have a long night ahead of us.”

---

Flicking through the news channels, Cat paused at the sight of Kara—Supergirl, she should say—soaring through the sky in a proper costume, mask and all, after stopping a shooting a few states away before it could even begin. She’d been with Cat when the news broke about a shopping center on lockdown, and Cat had barely finished nodding before Kara’s button-up was fluttering to the ground in front of her and the woman herself up and out the door.

Mere minutes after the news broadcast ended, a knocking sounded from the entryway. After a cursory check through the peephole, Cat flung open her front door. “Come in. I was wondering what took so long,” she hummed, gesturing at the new outfit.

“Oh, right, I figured I should go to my place first—get some less conspicuous clothes on and all.” Kara moved to fiddle with the glasses she then realized she’d left at Cat’s.

“How was playing hero?”

“I mean, the situation was awful, you know, but the whole thing was…kind of exhilarating?” Kara paced back and forth across Cat’s living room, missing the look of endearment on Cat’s face before she chased it away. “Like, it could have been such a terrible thing, but I was able to stop it. And that—that’s amazing.”

“Still worth all the risks?”
“That? Yeah, it was.” Kara’s expression brokered no disagreement. “Stopping the minor car accident I flew past might not have been, but to save lives, Cat? It’s always going to be worth it.”

“Very well.”

Kara narrowed her eyes, trying to read Cat’s tone. “Are you…upset?”

“I”—Cat paused to consider it—“I am upset at how calm I feel about all of this.” Kara tilted her head to the side, waiting for Cat to elaborate. “You are putting the campaign at risk and putting yourself at risk, and both of those things should upset me more than they are right now.”

Kara beamed at Cat, and Cat idly wondered how anyone was supposed to resist a look like that one. “I’m working really hard to make sure I’m Supergirl out there and Kara Danvers on the campaign, and I’ve got the whole mask thing to help with the secret identity. Plus, if I’m only responding to major stuff, I’m not like Ka—Superman; I’m not going to be tied to DC like Superman is to Metropolis.” Cat’s sharp gaze was still focused on her from the momentary slip, so Kara cleared her throat and attempted humor. “As far as my own safety, I don’t know if you heard, but I am pretty bulletproof.”

Cat let out a tsk of annoyance. “Bullets aren’t the only things that could put you at risk.”

“I know.” Kara dipped her head. “But they definitely put those innocent people at risk.”

“I get it,” Cat conceded, stepping forward and brushing Kara’s hair back from her face. “And you wouldn’t be my Kara if you didn’t care about all of them.”

“Your Kara?” Kara’s eyes lit up as her gaze jumped to Cat’s face, looking for any signs of regret. “Oh hush.”

Kara nearly squealed at the sight of a faint pink blush staining Cat’s cheeks. “Did Cat Grant accidentally let something slip?”

“Gloating is unattractive.” Cat folded her arms across her chest and rolled her eyes. “Except when you do it?”

“Obviously.”

“But you still want me to be yours?” Kara pushed, stepping into Cat’s space.

“Who knows? Maybe I want Supergirl instead.”

Kara bit back a grin as she tugged down the zipper of her sweatshirt enough to reveal the top of her suit. “Is this doing something for you, Cat?”

“I suppose I can’t deny the…appeal of your little hero routine.”

“If it’s just a game to you,” Kara sighed dramatically, stepping backward and making to leave. But within moments, Cat’s fingers curled around her arms and tugged her back into the living room. With a soft laugh, Kara let herself be dragged backward and into a searing kiss.

---

Vasquez mindlessly traced small circles along the insides of Lucy’s hands as the movie played.
“That feels nice,” Lucy murmured, tilting her head back far enough to press a soft kiss to Vasquez’s jaw. She smiled at the tightening arms around her that held her close.

“All of this feels nice,” Vasquez admitted, trying to remember her conversation with Maggie. Somehow the knowledge that she’d be hurt whether it ended now because Lucy didn’t want any more or later because, well, Lucy had never wanted any more didn’t give her the same amount of self-assurance as it had at the bar when she and Maggie agreed to a draw after too many close games and alternating wins and losses. “I—I like spending time with you like this.”

“Mm, it is nice.” Lucy’s voice was soft in the way Vasquez knew it got when she was relaxed enough to finally turn off the incessant to-do list that almost always seemed to be running through her thoughts. She took pride in just how easily Lucy seemed to shut down that side of herself when they were together.

“I…you, uh, I know that this thing we have was, well, not really something we thought about at first. It just kind of happened once, then it became a thing over time.”

Lucy rolled over, her face now inches from Vasquez’s, and she fumbled with the remote for a moment before pausing the movie. “Yeah? Are you not okay with something?”

“No! Or, well, I guess maybe it’s that I’m more than okay with something?” Vasquez sat up, begrudgingly pulling herself away from the warmth of Lucy’s body that she knew could only ever be a distraction.

“What’s up?”

“I like you, Lucy. And not just in a ‘you’re hot enough to have sex with on a pretty regular basis’ kind of way.” She took a deep breath to steel her nerves. “At first this seemed like a really good idea. We both have busy jobs, and none of my other partners ever seemed to understand that, so it seemed perfect that you got it and were never going to demand more or get angry with me because I had to miss some special gallery opening or a six-month anniversary dinner because I was gone for campaign travel.”

“It’d be pretty hypocritical if I got mad at you for things I constantly have to do.” Lucy tightened her hold on Vasquez’s hand before she could pull away.

“Right. But over the past month or two, it’s sort of felt like…like maybe we were moving toward something more. And I didn’t—I wasn’t expecting it, but I also like where things are headed. And if you don’t”—Vasquez swallowed past the lump in her throat, shoving down the fear that Lucy would tell her she didn’t—“I think maybe we need some time apart.”

Lucy nodded slowly. “To be clear, you mean you like the non-fucking side of things? Like the movies and the dinners and the coffee dates?”

“I like the bluntness too,” Vasquez teased. “Nothing like a woman who speaks her mind.”

“Found the right one, then,” Lucy laughed.

“Well…yeah, I sort of think I did.”

“Here’s the thing…” Vasquez closed her eyes, willing herself to remain stoic in the face the impending breakup. She refused to cede any ground to the hope that clawed at her chest when Lucy’s tone remained playful, her hands still firmly clasped around her own. “I’m not opposed to anything you’re saying, but when a woman tells me she likes me and takes me out on dates for months on end, I expect the acknowledgment to be a little more…grand when it finally happens.”
Lucy’s mouth curved up into a smirk. “So go on, woo me, Vas.”

“Are you serious right now?”

“Dead serious.” Lucy tried to hide her smile, though she suspected she wasn’t entirely successful.

“Lucy Lane, my hot acquaintance with benefits turned friend turned crush, would you do me the honor of actually dating me?”

“I’ll do you one better and be your girlfriend if you take me to bed.”

“That sounds very, very doable,” Vasquez murmured, throwing Lucy over her shoulder and ignoring the squawk of indignation as she marched her over to her bedroom and gently tossed her down to the large mattress. “That’s what you meant, yeah?”

“Shut up and kiss me.”

---

“Thanks again for helping with the dishes.” Maggie handed over the last plate to Alex to dry.

“Least I can do after such a delicious dinner.”

“Sweet-talker,” Maggie shot back.

“Only to the press,” Alex retorted with a laugh.

“So…we’ve got dessert or movies or games. Or we could just talk, or—”

“Maggie,” Alex interjected.

“Yeah?”

“You know I love talking to you, right?” Maggie nodded. “But we got to talk all dinner, just like we talk every night.”

“Right.”

“So right now, I’d really like to kiss you.”

With a small smile, Maggie tugged Alex forward by the belt loops, feeling herself relax into the soft but insistent press of Alex’s lips against her own. She tried not to read anything into the way Alex’s whole body seemed to mold against hers, matching Alex’s movements in kind but letting her dictate the pace. It wasn’t until Alex bent slightly at the knees and scooped her up that Maggie let herself lose control for a moment, moaning loudly and instinctively wrapping her legs around Alex’s waist as her fingers tangled in Alex’s hair.

“Fuck,” Alex breathed out, pulling Maggie tighter against her.

“Guess all those pull ups are good for something, huh?” Maggie teased, taking the opportunity to try to clear her head.

“Thought I caught you watching once or twice,” Alex hummed, using the momentary pause in their making out to trail kisses up and down Maggie’s neck that left her hips rolling into Alex’s abs.

“And here I, uh, here I thought I was being sneaky.” Maggie’s head dropped down to Alex’s
shoulder. She was already struggling to find words, and she wasn’t entirely sure how much longer coherent thought would be possible, so she pulled back as far as she could without letting go of Alex. “Are you still feeling okay with all of this?”

“Yes. So much yes, Maggie.”

“I just… I don’t want you to feel pressured or anything, you know that, right?”

“Maggie,” Alex whined. “Trust me, I get it. I’m also in my 30s, and I know what I want. And right now? Right now I really, really want to sleep with you.” After a second or two of silence, a look of panic flashed across her features, and she added: “If you want that! I don’t want to assume. Just because we’re dating, and I’m newer to this, and you’ve already—”

“Alex, I get it.” Maggie stifled a laugh at the fact that Alex had been attempting to pace in time with her rambling thoughts, even with someone else clinging to her. “But if you want to do more, I do too. And if you change your mind—”

But Alex’s lips were already on hers, tinged with a new desperation as Alex’s tongue flicked across her lips, demanding entrance.

“Bedroom?” Maggie finally managed, pointing at the second door on the left.

With a nod, Alex carried Maggie down the short hallway, nudging the door open with her hip, though she paused when she got to the bed itself, regarding it and looking suddenly uncertain. Maggie slid off Alex’s hip and flicked on the floor lamp. Reaching out for Alex’s hand, Maggie tugged her to the edge of the bed and sat down next to her. “We don’t have to dive right into things. We can go right back to kissing like we do on the couch and see where it leads.”

Alex gave a determined nod and allowed herself to be guided onto the bed and down to the pillows as Maggie’s mouth chased after hers. And then she let herself stop thinking, let herself relax into the feeling of Maggie’s soft lips and the push of her thigh against her and the way it seemed to send a jolt of white-hot heat all through her. With Maggie’s hands caressing her sides, Alex nudged Maggie’s shirt up her torso, revealing expanses of smooth skin and toned abs. She was suddenly struck by the desire to feel them tensing underneath her fingers… maybe even her mouth. As those fantasies swirled through her thoughts, Alex pushed Maggie’s shirt up further, pausing only when a low chuckle broke the sounds of soft whimpers and breathy exhales.

“What?”

“You might want to unbutton the shirt a little first—that’s all.”

Alex’s cheeks flushed with embarrassment, but Maggie was all understanding smiles and encouraging guidance as she brought Alex’s fingers up to the buttons. Alex watched with wide eyes as more and more of Maggie was revealed to her, and she couldn’t help but think about how many years she’d gone thinking that she’d never feel anything more than the most perfunctory sense of accomplishment during sex—like checking an item off of her to-do list, but not even one of the major ones.

Maggie shrugged her shoulders back as Alex pushed the shirt down, leaving it to Maggie to toss it to the floor. Of course, things never went as smoothly in reality as they did in fantasy, and Maggie found one of her wrists caught in the sleeve, forcing her to pause the kissing they had only recently resumed to wrangle her way out of her shirt with a huff of annoyance. But then it was off, and Alex’s hands were all over her, exploring every inch of bared skin with a sense of awe that left Maggie feeling cared for in a way she hadn’t in several years.
“Very impressive,” Maggie murmured against Alex’s lips when Alex managed to undo the clasp of her bra on her first attempt.

“Thanks, been wearing one for about twenty years now,” Alex joked.

“God, way to ramp up the pressure for me now,” Maggie teased, flitting her fingers under the hem of Alex’s sweater. “Think you’d be okay with this coming off?”

Alex nodded eagerly, raising her arms to help expedite the process before looking up to find that Maggie had shrugged her bra the rest of the way off. “You’re so beautiful,” Alex whispered, her gaze so intense Maggie swore she felt it as much as any caress.

“You are too. God, you’re gorgeous,” Maggie murmured, guiding Alex back down to the bed and working her way across Alex’s chest, earning a teasing pat on the back when she undid Alex’s bra in one go—and one-handed no less—before trailing down to her abs and soft skin right above the line of her jeans, then back up again, spurred on by the sound of keening whimpers and breathy sighs.

As she reached Alex’s mouth once more, Maggie felt herself being rolled over, and she smiled in encouragement as Alex made her way down her body, following the same rhythm Maggie had set but lingering when Maggie made her pleasure known.

The kissing was deeper then, tinged with a new intimacy as bare skin pressed against bare skin and they pulled each other close. Maggie’s hips rolled into Alex’s as she slotted a thigh between Alex’s legs. She couldn’t help the cocky smirk when Alex’s hands flew down and grabbed Maggie’s ass at a particularly firm thrust, holding her there and dragging her closer. Alex’s own hips seemed to jump up to meet her without any conscious effort, and she couldn’t be bothered to wonder whether it was acceptable or the “right” thing to do.

“Fuck, Maggie,” Alex gasped. “You feel so good.”

“Do you want your pants off?” Maggie rasped, her breath hot against Alex’s ear.

Alex nodded, tugging at Maggie’s own zipper as well. “Yours too?”

“Yeah.”

After a short-lived attempt at continuing to kiss while wresting each other out of skinny jeans, they broke apart with a laugh. “Yeah, maybe we just”—Maggie tugged at her own jeans, pulling one foot free.

Alex made quick work of her own, kicking off her socks as well, then rolling over to face Maggie. The swoop of nerves at being quite so exposed was tempered at the sight of Maggie up on her knees in front of her. “Wow.”

“Wow yourself, Danvers.” They guided one another back down to the bed, the last of their clothing finally falling away as Maggie’s mouth trailed down the length of Alex’s body. “You still okay?”

“So, so good.” Alex barely recognized her own voice—thick with desire and tinged with a desperation she knew she’d never felt in the bedroom before. And then Maggie’s mouth was on her, and Maggie’s insistence that she speak up and tell her what she did and didn’t like seemed beyond unnecessary because everything Maggie was doing with her mouth and her hands was so much better than anything she’d ever felt. And when she came with a loud gasp, her hands tightening in Maggie’s hair, she didn’t have time to worry about whether she should have been embarrassed about anything before Maggie was holding her close and whispering about how beautiful she looked and how good she tasted and how she’d love to do that again whenever Alex was ready.
“But you—don’t you need, you know, a turn?” Alex mumbled, still feeling dazed and a little too blissed out to care about the phrasing.

“It’s whatever you want, Alex. But you should know that what we just did was fun for me too. And if you prefer certain things to others, I can adjust, and we can go again. How do you feel?”

Alex paused, trying to find words for how she felt. Eventually she settled on one: “Good.”

Maggie grinned, brushing the hair back from Alex’s face and pressing a soft kiss to her cheek. “Excellent.”

“But…if it’s okay with you, I’d like to try to make you feel good too.”

“Yeah? If you want to, I, well, I’m not gonna act like it’s something I don’t want,” Maggie chuckled guiding Alex’s hand down between her legs. “In case it wasn’t obvious how very much I want you…”

“Fuck,” Alex groaned, pulling herself up onto her elbows and throwing a leg over Maggie’s hips. “I don’t—I’m not totally sure of what to do.”

“Well…the things I did to you are generally things I like done to me. But you should only do things you want to do. So if that’s only your hands, that’s cool. And if you want me to touch myself and let you see what I like first, I’m down to do that.”

Alex couldn’t quite swallow the moan at the image of Maggie’s touching herself that was now clouding any semblance of coherent thought, and the glimmer of excitement in Maggie’s eyes suggested that she knew exactly what her words were doing to Alex.

Her voice lower then, Maggie purred, “So what is it you want to do to me, Alex?”

Even without a good answer, Alex let herself act impulsively, leaning forward and kissing Maggie hard as her hands dropped lower and lower. Fingers fumbling, Alex forced herself not to panic at her own inexperience, listening to Maggie’s words of encouragement and following her instructions as she found spots and rhythms that left Maggie nodding fervently when words failed her. And when, with a little bit of help from Maggie’s own hand, Alex finally pushed Maggie over the edge for the first time, she swore she’d never seen anything more beautiful as the moment when all care and concern and coherent thought seemed wiped clean from Maggie’s face, that she’d never felt anything quite so intimate as being held inside Maggie and feeling as she came around her fingers. And god, she wanted to do it over and over and over again.

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Kara’s head dropped down to the pillows as Cat kissed her way back up Kara’s body, a smirk playing about lips that still glistened with the proof of Kara’s arousal. “Nice to see that I can still wear out a superhero,” Cat mused. “Maybe we should feed that rumor to the press—see if it doesn’t stop those pesky stories about how I seem too frail to lead a country.”

“Oh you definitely have stamina in spades,” Kara agreed, pulling Cat up to the pillows and smiling at the sight of her hair fanning out around her like a golden halo. “Should be helpful for this week…”

“Please tell me you’re not about to bring up my mother in bed.”

Kara’s movements faltered for a moment before her fingers resumed their slow path up and down Cat’s arms. “She is showing up in just a few days.”
“Yes, and I’d rather gouge my own eyes out than have to deal with her.”

“Luckily Alex is dealing with prep.” Kara let out a snort of laughter. “Did you hear she told Alex she ‘spoke like an uneducated peasant’ on their phone call today?”

Cat tried to muster some sense of surprise about it, but she found she could only shake her head in annoyance. “Sounds like Mother. What did your sister say to inspire that?”

“I believe she used the word, ‘yeah.’”

“Ah yes, how dare someone speak quickly.”

“And when Alex shot back that she went to Stanford and Yale, she told her that made sense; she seemed like a Harvard reject.”

Her hands covering her face, Cat groaned loudly. “You see what you’re making me deal with, yes?”

“It’ll be thirty minutes where you have to act like you like each other—Lucy’s got everyone involved with filming signing NDAs and such—no leaked behind-the-scenes footage or anything like that.”

“You must be the only one left in the office with any optimism about her arrival.”

“She might be…a bit of a nightmare,” Kara conceded, ignoring all the other mouthed possibilities Cat was offering as substitutes for “nightmare.” “But she’s not the only one that’ll be on that show. And I believe in you more than anyone else, Cat.”

---

Vasquez ran her hands through Lucy’s hair, sighing in contentment as Lucy’s head shifted slightly on her chest and a strong arm pulled her even closer.

“Luce,” Vasquez whispered, trying not to disturb the moment.

“What?”

“Can you pass me my phone?”

“Why?” Lucy whined, doing a surprisingly effective job of becoming dead weight on top of Vasquez.

“I’ve gotta text Maggie.”

“Why?”

Vasquez chuckled. “I can see where you would’ve been a very effective lawyer.” She ignored the sleepy, mumbled, “shut up,” and continued trying to reach for her phone on the bedside table. “She was supposed to ask Alex to be her girlfriend tonight, and I want to know how it went.”

A flash of movement from the sleepy lump on her chest caught Vasquez by surprise. “No you don’t!”

“Lucy, c’mon, I’m still in bed with you; I need to send one text, that’s all.”

Lucy shook her hair out of her face. “Don’t you dare bother them! Alex told me she was shaving her legs and wearing her nicest bra because tonight was supposed to be the night when she finally got to experience the joys of lesbian sex and non-faked orgasms for the first time.”
“I imagine that’s now how Alex phrased it, right?”

“She might’ve been a little more romantic about it, but it all comes down to the same thing: it’s been literal years, and she’s ready to get laid.”

“It’s two in the morning. No way is Maggie’s phone going to be on if they just spent the night together for the first time.”

“Really? Isn’t yours?”

“Well…yeah.”

“And mine sure is. And you know Alex’s is.”

“Ugh fine.”

“Just let them have their night and spend time with your girlfriend, dammit.”

“Well when you put it that way…”

---

“That was…god, that was amazing.”

Maggie smiled at Alex and kissed her softly, tamping down on the heat that still seemed to surge through her body, ignorant of the fact that sunrise was fast approaching. “I bet I can make it even better if you give me a second…”

“Does that mean putting on clothes?”

“It doesn’t have to.”

“Then I’m down.” The second Maggie left the room, Alex dove for her bag, fumbling with her phone for a minute before firing a short text to Kara: “Oh my god. I’m so very gay. How did I ever wait this long to realize it???” She threw her phone back down the second she heard the creak of the floorboard in the hallway outside Maggie’s door.

“I come bearing brownies and water.”

“My hero,” Alex laughed, reaching out for the plate and setting it down on the bed before grabbing her water glass.

“What, uh…what if I was also your girlfriend?”

Alex froze, teeth halfway into a gooey brownie.

“Sorry! If it’s too soon, that’s okay too. I just, if you want to, I’d like to ask you to be my girlfriend.” She cringed at the odd formality of it. “I mean, I’m not seeing anyone else, and it’s cool if you are or want to or—”

Alex cut Maggie off with a messy, chocolatey kiss. “Yes.”

“Yeah?”

“I’d love to be your girlfriend.”
Maggie beamed at Alex. “A toast!” She held up her water glass and waited for Alex to get hers. “To finally figuring out our shit!”
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Happy Thanksgiving in April! Actually...it's more like everything but Thanksgiving, but it was already long and late, so enjoy!
(And for those of you at work, heads up for a bit of smut in the chapter)

Tuesday brought with it a flurry of activity as the office scrambled to prepare for the arrival of Katherine Grant. Cat stalked down the halls, phone in one hand and Montblanc pen ready to point accusingly at anything that still needed fixing in the other. Shirts were tucked in, blazers thrown on, and ties straightened. A researcher with an ink stain marring the front of his pants was sent home, and Kara found two of the younger members of the social media team crying in the bathroom after having had their “inane” tweets torn apart by Cat at the morning meeting.

“Cat,” Kara murmured, intercepting Cat on her way back to the researchers’ cubicles—an area Kara already knew Katherine wouldn’t touch with a ten-foot pole.

“What?” Cat’s bark of a reply was instant as she rounded on Kara.

Steel ing herself, Kara took a deep breath. “I got you a latte. Why don’t you catch up on emails in your office and enjoy a moment of silence before your mother gets here? I’ll take care of making sure everyone is on task.” Before Cat could insist that a break was the last thing she could afford, Kara cut in, “Your latte is the exact temperature you like it…”

“Fine,” Cat huffed. “But if one thing is out of place when I’m done—”

“I know, trust me.”

With Cat gone, Kara hurried from office to office, making sure that everything was in order and that everyone was on top of their to-do lists before the day off on Thursday. Before Kara could even open her mouth when she swung by James’ office, he held up a hand, an easy smile on his face. “Positive holiday posts with inclusive family language are already all queued up for Thursday. We’ve confirmed with everyone at the cooking show, and Lucy’s done the work on all the agreements. We’ve even got the ‘candid’ picture of Cat with Carter on Thanksgiving ready.”

“You’re a lifesaver.”

“Nah.” James shook his head. “I’ve just met Katherine before, and there’s no use in hoping I’ll be able to get much done with her around.”

Kara smiled grimly. “Think she’ll remember me?”

“Maybe not... after all, she did keep calling you ‘the intern.’ Then again, I imagine it’s hard to forget the one employee she couldn’t make cry.”

Kara bit back comments about also being the one employee Cat stepped in to defend; she hadn’t needed her to do it, but she always remembered that moment as a turning point between them. “I guess we’ll find out soon enough!”
“Off the record…how much damage control do you think we’re gonna have to do after this show?”

Kara pushed her glasses up her nose and shrugged. “I’d like to hope for the best, but…even I don’t know about how this will go, even if Cat needs it for the good family-friendly PR.”

“Yeah.” James flipped his monitor around to face Kara. “Have you seen the first few pre-Thanksgiving ads?”

Kara skimmed across the page, taking in the pictures and campaign donation fundraiser emails that all boasted of family values. There was Branch’s extended family photo that, for reasons that escaped Kara, featured a prominent display of hunting rifles, followed by Crane talking about how much she was looking forward to a day off the campaign trail to spend time with her parents, her husband, and her son, and Kara could only imagine the deluge to come on Thursday. “Well, if we can just get Cat and her mom to smile and act like they like each other for a few minutes, we’ll be okay.”

“Good luck.”

Kara hated how utopic her dreams for the bare minimum sounded, but she forced herself to flash James a double thumbs up before heading back down the hallway, ready to deal with the hell that was Katherine Grant’s impending arrival.

“What?” Cat snapped before Kara could even open her mouth.

“ Wanted to see how you were doing, that’s all.”

“How do you think I’m doing, Kiera?”

Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. Kara repeated it to herself like a mantra that she knew would be necessary for the next 24 hours. “What do you need to be prepared?”

“A one way ticket out of here.”

“Cat.” There was a warning in Kara’s voice as she held Cat’s gaze until a shuffling at the door interrupted the moment.

“Mother.” Cat’s smile looked more like a grimace as she took in the sight of Eve already on the verge of tears and Katherine Grant looking disdainfully around the office.

“Kitty, you must get a new driver. This one wouldn’t even get out of the car to get my bags.”

Cat let out a noncommittal noise and made a mental note to give Vasquez a bonus come the holidays. Catching sight of Kara’s gaze and her less-than-subtle gesture between the two of them, Cat stood and strode over to her mother. “Welcome to DC, Mother.”

But when she reached out for the most perfunctory of one-armed hugs, she was quickly rebuffed. “Let’s not get carried away.”

“Right. Of course.” Cat arched an eyebrow in challenge at Kara. How she expected her to play nice with someone quite so intractable was beyond her.

Katherine glanced around the office, taking in the large window and the wall of televisions tuned in to various news stations from the U.S. and abroad. “All these screens. How can you possibly get any work done with so much visual noise assaulting you?”

“Keeping up with all that visual noise is my work, Mother. If I cannot watch the news, I cannot
make informed policy decisions about the news.”

“Call me old-fashioned, but I preferred the golden years of politics—back when there were thoroughly educated men leading this country and debating the proper philosophy for governance instead of this”—Katherine waved her hand at the televisions—“incessant chatter.”

“Ah yes, because they chose to wait two months for news to arrive from the continent.” Kara stifled a laugh, earning a glare from Katherine and a small upturn of the corner of Cat’s mouth.

“They certainly weren’t parading around on silly television shows with Sally and company.”

“Suzie and Hannah,” Kara corrected. “Those are their names—the mother and daughter on the cooking show, I mean.”

“And you are?” Katherine eyed Kara, judgment etched into her features.

“My chief of staff and the woman you’ll be taking orders from today and tomorrow,” Cat chimed in, managing to keep her face a mask of professionalism, even as Kara struggled not to beam. Before Katherine could make a comment Cat already knew she wouldn’t want to hear, she added, “I had my assistant get us reservations at 1789 for dinner with Carter tonight.”

“Oh.” Katherine pursed her lips and pulled her glasses off slowly. “I don’t think I’ll have the time, dear.”

“Really? Because we went over this three times already, and you swore 8 o’clock tonight worked for your schedule.”

“It’s a last minute change of plans. You see, my good friend Toni…Morrison,” she added, looking over her glasses at Kara, “is having a little after-hours event at the Library of Congress—just her and a few of the recent Booker Prize winners.”

“Well, I could have Eve call 1789 to see if they can push our reservation back until after the event.”

“Oh dear.” Katherine grimaced, and Kara could hear Cat’s teeth grinding from across the room. “Toni wanted to keep this an intimate gathering of close friends…”

“You know I cancelled an interview with a national newspaper for this dinner, right?”

“Kitty.” The edge of exasperation in her voice made Kara’s fists curl up in anger; she could imagine Cat as a young woman dealing with that combination of pity and disappointment and condescension time and time again, and all she wanted to do was step in between them and stand up for Cat. “I get that you’re big in the news these days, though after dragging the family name through the mud like that…dragging your father’s name through the mud like that…I had really hoped you might stop this nonsense. But what could you possibly have to talk about with a group of Nobel Laureates?”

“I should be able to get that interview back on your schedule, Ms. Grant,” Kara announced, her voice faltering only slightly when two sets of eyes flashed in her direction with an intensity she’d rarely seen mirrored outside of life-or-death situations.

“No, I’ve already gotten security cleared for Carter and me.”

“I’ll tell Eve to switch the reservation to two then.”

“No, no.” Cat’s attention appeared to have returned to the computer she’d flipped open, but Kara could hear the uptick in her heart rate. “You’ll join us. Unless…unless you made other plans?” When
Kara began insisting it was really okay at the same time Katherine scoffed and asked what her daughter was possibly thinking of doing, bringing lowly staff members out to such upscale restaurants, Cat held up a silencing hand. “Mother, you remember last time, don’t you? You do not get to speak poorly of my very excellent staff. And Kara, if you have other plans, that’s fine. But if you do not, Carter would love to see you again.”

Kara recognized the end of a conversation when she saw it, so she nodded and spun on her heels. When she reached the doorway, she bit back a smirk. “I’ll tell Alex that Katherine is ready for her interview prep now.”

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“No,” Alex snapped, throwing her notebook down in frustration after what she would have sworn was the hundredth terrible answer in a row despite coaching on all of them. “You do not get out in front of the cameras and tell the world you’d prefer Justin Kennedy to be the next president.”

“You told me to speak from the heart.”

“Because I was under the mistaken impression that you had one!”

“Perhaps someone should never have insisted I be a part of this ludicrous publicity stunt in the first place.”

“Is it really so ludicrous of an idea that you might support your daughter?”

“This is much more than support,” Katherine sighed, regarding Alex as though she were a bit slow.

“Look,” Alex growled, standing up to tower over the already diminutive woman. “I don’t want to be here doing this any more than you do. But you’re going on national television tomorrow morning, and I won’t let you go out there and ruin a campaign your daughter and her team have worked so hard to build. So you’re going to sit down and shut up and do as you’re told.”

“I don’t have to subject myself to this abuse.”

Before Katherine could leave, Alex cut in front of her. “No you don’t.”

“Let me leave this instant.”

“I will let you leave on one condition: tomorrow morning you promise to smile and act friendly towards Cat and not once suggest that she would be anything less than stellar as president or that any of her opponents would be better qualified for office.”

“You know I’m doing this without pay or thanks.”

“Just like all of the other candidates’ families. We haven’t dragged you out or paraded you around on a regular basis like some of them have. We are asking for one event for a holiday.” Alex paced along the wall with the door before turning back to Catherine. “And if you won’t do it out of the goodness of your heart…I may have two tickets for a performance of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Hamlet that I know for a fact you weren’t able to get before they sold out.”

“How—”

“It’s better not to ask.”

“So this is how my daughter gets supporters? Throwing money and bribes at them?”
“As a matter of face they’re the ones trying to throw money and presents at her, but they do that weird thing where they actually listen to what she has to say first.” Katherine didn’t relent in the slightest, still regarding Alex warily. It wasn’t often that someone with so little personal cause for provocation subjected her to that level of vitriol. “And if you don’t want to cooperate for half an hour with the woman who is better qualified and prepared than any other candidate in this race, then perhaps I should call Toni myself—oh, that’s right, I have that personal number too”—Alex pulled out her phone and flashed the contact information she’d managed to procure in a matter of minutes at Katherine—“and let her know about some of those less-than-literary books you’ve purchased, downloaded, and read straight through on your Kindle despite an avowed love of print.”

“Are you trying to blackmail me?”

“No. I’m holding you to a promise you made and setting up incentive structures to help ensure the fulfillment of said promise.”

“Fine,” Katherine huffed, grabbing her bag and tossing her scarf over her shoulder as she stood.

“So great working with you!” Alex called after her, torn between the impulses to collapse until she could find a bottle of scotch or to cackle in victory at the sight of Katherine’s retreating form.

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“Now tell us, how many generations has this pie recipe been in the family?” Suzie asked, smiling much too broadly for the early hour at Cat and Katherine.

“Oh, what would you say, Mom?” Cat looked up at her mother and hoped no one else could hear the condescension in her tone. “Maybe four generations?”

“I suppose that sounds correct.”

“Now has it always been chocolate pecan pie, or did it start out as regular pecan pie when someone with a bigger sweet tooth got ahold of it?” Hannah asked, a laugh to her tone that Cat found she could barely stomach, let alone return in kind.

“The sweet tooth must have been generations ago. My daughter and I are not particularly fond of sweet things.” She eyed the bottle of corn syrup with suspicion.

Hannah and Suzie exchanged a look of confusion before rolling on with the questions, chattering away between steps in the recipe as both mother-daughter pairs used their own sets of ingredients to prepare a pie.

Offstage, Kara watched on as Katherine, without ever speaking poorly of Cat in explicit terms, refused to say a single positive word about her candidacy or, Kara noted, the recipe she’d let them borrow from Eliza. Though, she reasoned, they managed to secure proof of their blood relation with the mirrored curl of their lips as they were forced to measure out the sticky corn syrup. She had to hand it to Alex, it was all better than she had expected, and with a few good interviews in the next week, they’d be able to overcome the somewhat stiff version of Cat viewers would be treated to that morning. As she took notes for herself, the word “Supergirl” caught her attention.

“I think we’ve seen her handling herself with care,” Cat cut in, already distinguishing herself from Max Lord, who had been one of the first ones out there insisting that America was better off without alien inhabitants acting as its purported saviors. She didn’t even want to think about the comments made by Crane and Lane… “Max Lord has criticized her, saying that, like Superman, she’ll leave communities defenseless, too used to her intervention to protect themselves, though I’d challenge him
to go to Metropolis and spend time in the community. I’ve been there, and I’ve met with community leaders and firefighters and EMTs and law enforcement officials, and defenseless is the very last word I’d used to describe them.”

“Here, here!” Suzie held up a small cup of the bourbon she was mixing into her bowl in a toast.

“But so far Supergirl has carefully chosen when to intervene. She prevents the tragedies we wouldn’t have been able to stop otherwise.”

“And every so often she saves the occasional cat stuck in a tree,” Hannah cut in, using her phone to pull up two photos of Supergirl floating down clutching scared cats—one of which looked less than friendly—and project them onto the screen affixed to the wall behind the work stations.

“Right,” Cat conceded, with a dip of her head. “I don’t think we should censure immigrants from other planets for using their abilities to better their communities. In fact, I think we owe them a debt of gratitude.”

“So interesting, isn’t it?” Katherine mused, and Kara could hear Cat’s sharp intake of breath. “A woman hero. I don’t know, I can’t help but feel safer in Metropolis than in these East coast cities Supergirl apparently protects. Call me old-fashioned, but I still prefer—”

“Oh, Mother,” Cat interjected with a breathy laugh that she hoped the audience wouldn’t be able to tell was fake. “You’re hardly the only one with a bit of a crush on the Man of Steel.”

And even though she was subjected to a glare from her mother, Cat smiled as her words had the intended effect, leading Suzie and Hannah to gush about Superman’s “dreamy” blue eyes and his deep voice and big arms. Even if she was forced to endure more of the mindless chatter than she would have liked, it was worth it to keep her mother from making some retrograde comment for which she would inevitably have to answer.

As they gushed, Cat returned her attention to the pie she and her mother were supposed to be making, noting how far behind they had fallen compared to Suzie and Hannah and resolving to make up the difference.

Eventually, with both pies ready for the oven—Suzie and Hannah’s looking significantly better, though Cat excused her poor performance with a sincere-sounding comment about needing to spend more time with her mother to get back in sync, as though they’d ever been—the show cut for its long break, giving the pies time to bake and be touched up and made as camera-ready as their bakers.

“Hair and makeup are ready if you need!” one of the producers called, and both Suzie and Hannah walked back to their usual spots, while Katherine high-tailed it back to the green room she’d demanded for her personal use, stocked with Perrier and the most recent issues of The New Yorker “for rereading.”

Kara intercepted Cat before she could make it more than a few steps off the stage. “You’re doing great! Almost done!”

“I need a drink.”

“Oh, okay, well, um, it’s 9 in the morning, so maybe we wait til after filming? Just in case someone breaks an NDA?” Kara continued walking backwards as Cat stalked further and further away from the stage and her mother to the dressing room she’d specifically requested on the opposite side of the studio.

“Wouldn’t it be better for someone to think I might have taken a little sip of the baking bourbon just
like dear Suzie than to watch me push my mother into the oven like the evil witch she is?”

“You’re not even baking gingerbread,” Kara huffed, a teasing tone to her voice that did little to cheer the other woman.

Cat’s shoulders finally lost the smallest amount of tension when she got into her own room and shut the door behind her. “Could there be an emergency? What if there was…a small fire in my office?”

“C’mon, Cat. You don’t run from anything.”

“It’s not running.” Cat let out a noise of frustration and crossed her arms over her chest. “It’s simply saving my energy for the things in life I have even the smallest chance of enjoying.”

“Well, you have fifteen whole minutes to relax, then you’ve only got ten more minutes to film. Barely half an hour: totally doable. You’ve stomached whole evenings with Max.”

“And yet, this seems distinctly worse.”

Kara shifted tactics, spinning around and grinning at Cat. “Do you remember what you told me after the whole incident with your mother back during your run for governor?”

“That she should be sent packing?”

“Perhaps…but you told me I couldn’t be angry at work.”

“Ah.” Cat inclined her head, the memories flooding back.

“And then you told me I needed to find a release for that pent-up anger.” Kara took a few steps forward until she was mere inches away from Cat. “It might not be boxing, but I think I could help with another kind of release…”

“Kara.” It was meant to be a warning, but it came out breathy, full of want and desperation.

“We don’t have much time,” Kara whispered, sweeping Cat’s hair away from her neck and pressing soft kisses there, cognizant of everything that a high-definition camera would catch. “Do you want this?”

“We shouldn’t…”

“If it means you’re not going to snap on camera, I really think we should.”

Cat thought Kara’s voice like that, all low and gravelly and much too close to her ear, should be made illegal as an unfair means of persuasion. “My hair and makeup had better stay pristine.”

“Deal.”

And then soft hands were sliding up the hem of Cat’s dress, a thigh pushing between her legs, and heated caresses leaving her dizzy with want. Cat watched with lust-darkened eyes as Kara’s lips curled around her fingers and her tongue darted out to wet them before they were back between her legs, pushing the last thin layer between them to the side, and sliding up and around her clit. The pace was maddeningly slow, but nothing Cat did changed the rhythm Kara had set. Cat’s whole body hummed with need, and her hips bucked involuntarily into Kara’s hand.

“Just fuck me already,” Cat finally growled, the last word morphing into a needy whimper as Kara’s fingers found her wet and ready. She couldn’t help but think that if the world could bottle this moment, they might finally achieve world peace. There might not be a pill for anger, but with two
fingers curling deep inside her and soft lips hot against her neck and jaw, she thought there might, at
the very least, be a viable cure for it after all.

“Quiet,” Kara murmured, as Cat’s head dropped back against the wall and she threw one leg up
around Kara’s waist, barely stifling a moan at the new angle. Biting down hard on a shoulder she
already knew would never show a mark, Cat came, her whole body shuddering even as Kara’s free
arm held her steady.

“Fuck.” Cat watched as Kara sucked her fingers into her mouth and wondered how she’d gone so
very long acting as though this—this beautiful, brilliant woman in front of her and everything they
had—wasn’t something she wanted.

“Think you’re ready for the rest of the show?”

“It’s certainly as relaxed as I’ll ever be without the help of a pot brownie. Though if you have one of
those…I wouldn’t say no.”

“Sadly I think this will have to do.”

Cat nodded, pushing herself up off the wall and straightening out her clothing before checking her
appearance in the mirror. She wondered if she smelled like sex. She certainly looked a little blissed
out for someone who’d nearly stormed off set in her hurry to get away from her mother.

Kara grabbed her hand on her way to the door. “You’ll be great out there.”

“That really wasn’t so bad,” Maggie murmured, nuzzling into Alex’s neck.

“It was fine.”

Maggie pulled herself back to look at Alex, tilting her head to the side. “Why do you sound so upset
about that?”

“I’m…no, it’s good that it was, at its worst, awkward. I, well, if it had gone poorly, though, I might
have had a good scandal as an excuse to be at work most of tomorrow.”

“And not have to talk to your mother,” Maggie finished Alex’s thought.

“But you’re already important to me, Maggie, and I don’t want you or anyone else to think I’m
hiding you.” With a resolute nod, Alex stood up and strode over to the door.

“Uh, Alex?” Maggie called out, jogging over to meet her. “What’s going on? Did I say something?”

“No. Or, it’s—you’re so understanding, do you realize that? Not everyone would be okay with
pretending to be a friend to the adult baby gay inching out of the closet this late in life.”
“Alex, there’s no one right time to figure things out, and there’s no one right time to tell people.”

“But that’s why I need to do it.”

“I don’t…”

“It’s hard to explain, but”—Alex paused, one hand coming up to push the hair back from her face—“I spent so much time being afraid—afraid of what it would mean for me to be anything other than straight, afraid of what it would mean for me to have feelings for another woman, afraid, god, fucking terrified, of what it might mean to act on them. But doing those things with you? It’s still a little scary, but in the exhilarating kind of way, you know?” Alex’s mouth twitched up into a small smile as she paced in front of the door. “Like…when I was little, I went to some leadership camp.”

“Of course,” Maggie murmured, chuckling at the playful shove she got in response.

“We had to do this zipline through a forest, and I thought it would be really cool, but then I got up there, and it was so high off the ground, and the little carbineer on your chest is pulling you forward off the ledge because of all the tension in this skinny little string-looking thing that’s now the only thing keeping you from dying. And then they look at you and tell you to jump, even though every fucking instinct toward self-preservation is screaming at you to keep your little feet planted on that goddam ledge.” Alex spun around to Maggie, both hands out in front of her and her mouth open in a wide smile. “But then you step off that ledge, and it’s amazing, you know? In the way that kind of makes your heart jump up into your throat.”

“Yeah, I get that.”

“And that—with you, every step of the way has felt like that—like there’s this big theoretically scary thing that I have to do, like admit that I’m…that I’m gay.” Maggie’s head whipped back to look at Alex—at Alex who had never said that before, at least not in front of her. “Or tell this gorgeous, accomplished, brilliant woman that I like her.” Maggie reached out and tangled her fingers with Alex’s. “But at the end of the day I know I made the right choice because I’m happy and my heart might still be hammering in my chest, but at least I feel alive, you know? Like…I’m living the kind of life that’s worth living because it’s me and it’s real.”

“Alex.” And Maggie couldn’t even mind the way her voice cracked its way through the two short syllables. Then Alex’s lips were on hers, and she could feel wet tears on her cheeks but had no idea who they belonged to.

“Stupid holidays,” Alex muttered, finally forcing herself to pull back. She wiped at her cheeks with her sleeve. “Making everything all dramatic and unnecessarily emotional.”

“Not if you’re Cat’s mom.” Maggie snorted and shook her head. “God you’d think she might be half-robot for the amount of warmth there.”

“Yeah…at least Cat perked up for the second half of the show. You barely even notice how quiet Katherine is next to her.”

“Great PR.”

“Great PR that we’ll never, ever do again.”

“That bad?”

“I had to pull out the big guns.”
“The Hamlet tickets?”

Alex nodded, a grim smile on her lips. “At least it’s over. And only one more day of family before this is all over.”

“I hope things go well with your mom.”

“Yeah…me too.”

“And if they don’t, you know where to find me.”

“Actually…do you think you would want to stay here?”

“Are you sure?”

“I promise I won’t be long.”

“Yeah…yeah, okay.”

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It took until Alex’s fifth loop around the block for her to gather the courage and turn off the sidewalk up the path to Kara’s apartment building, then another loop around the floor below Kara’s for her to make it to Kara’s actual apartment.

Eliza swung open the door when she knocked. “Alex, dear, I wasn’t expecting to see you tonight.”

“I…yeah, I managed to get off work early.” She followed her mom back to the living room and sat down on the couch.

“Well that’s wonderful. It looks like they’ve been running you ragged.” She gestured at the puffiness around Alex’s eyes, and Alex bit her tongue.

“Here I thought you’d be so happy that I’ve settled down with a respectable campaign,” she muttered.

“Alexandra…”

“No—it’s nothing. That’s not actually why I’m here.”

“Did you need Kara? She went flying off in that costume of hers.” Alex gritted her teeth and dug her nails into her palms as she waited for the lecture. “Whose idea was that?”

“She’s an adult, Mom. She can make her own decisions.”

“She can…but who put it into her head that she should start swooping around in a mask?”

“I don’t know, maybe her cousin! Or maybe it was rescuing her sister—did she tell you that I was on that plane?” Alex hated how out of control she always felt with her mom, like the anger inside her was always one wrong word away from bubbling up and out of control. “Or would you rather Kara have let the plane crash so that she never got those silly ideas?”

Eliza gasped, reaching out with one arm before thinking better of it, leaving it draped awkwardly between them over the back of the couch. “I have never wanted to see either of you in harm’s way. I wish you would understand that—when I say I worry about your sister flinging herself in front of speeding trains or you running around blackmailing dangerous people with too much money and
power, I wish you would listen to my reasons.”

“But it’s always been more than that. You’ve always wanted me to do the kind of job that you can
tell your friends about and be proud of because”—Alex’s voice broke and she choked back a sob
—“because I’ve never been enough.”

“It’s only because I’ve always known just how much more you could do, how much you were
able of doing.”

“Maybe, but you don’t—you don’t know what that’s done to me.”

“So tell me, dear. I’m listening. Because I have only ever wanted the best for you—for you to
become the best you could be.”

“Don’t you hear that?” Alex gestured wildly, feeling as futile with her words as her actions. “You
always need me to become the best, however you define it. And maybe I was strong enough to say
that when it came to my work, I was doing something that mattered, I had enough people around me
who were willing to say that I was doing something that mattered. But with other things? God, with
other things…” Alex shook her head.

“What do you mean?”

“I…I always felt like I needed to be perfect—the perfect grades, the perfect job, the perfect life. But
there were parts of my life that never felt right. And I pushed—god, I pushed for so long trying to
make them fit the way I thought they needed to.”

“Is this about your work?”

“No, Mom, no. I—I met someone.”

“Oh?”

“And for once, it didn’t feel like I was forcing myself to feel the bare minimum. I was excited and
happy about it. And I…we’re dating now, and I’m so much happier than I’ve ever been. And I feel
more myself now, you know? But it’s—it took me a really long time…to let myself be okay with it.
But I want to let myself be happy. And I—I’d like for you to meet—but it’s, it’s not as simple.” Alex
tried to regulate her breathing, tried to slow her heart rate and blink away the tears that felt much too
close to the surface.

Eliza instinctually reached out her hand to Alex, smiling when she took it. “Why…why is it so hard
for you to tell me about her?”

Alex’s eyes flashed up.

“You knew?”

“Does that matter? What really matters is that you’ve found her now, and you’re happy. And I want
—I need you to know how much I love you.” Alex swallowed harshly and wiped away the tears
now falling feely. “And maybe I haven’t always done the best job of showing it—and I can work on
that, even if I might not be perfect—but this, this being yourself? You could never disappoint me
there.”
“Yeah?” Alex hated how scared she sounded.

“Yes, really.” Eliza stepped away and returned a few seconds later with a box of tissues. “Do you want to tell me about her?”

“She’s—she’s really great,” Alex managed before pausing to blow her nose. “Maggie. She works with me—she does research, and she’s so smart. And she’s just beautiful. So beautiful.”

“And does she treat you well?”

“So well.”

“Will I be meeting her tomorrow?”

Alex nodded.

“Good. I feel like I need to give a hug to anyone who’s made my daughter feel this cared for when I…haven’t done enough.” She forced herself to smile, but Alex could see the pained expression behind it.

“It’s not—I’m not saying—”

“No, I…I understand. Just because I know that I love you and want the best for you doesn’t always mean I have shown it in the best of ways. And I’m sorry. I never—I could feel you pulling away over the years, but it always felt like no matter what I did, I only pushed you further away from me.”

“I—I’m here now. And even though the campaign is about to kick into high gear, maybe we could try to, I don’t know”—Alex shrugged—“have a weekly phone call or something?”

“I’d like that very much.”

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By the time Alex got back to her house, she was exhausted, and she knew she looked a bit of a mess, but she felt as though a weight had been lifted from her chest. Maggie met her in the entryway. “Oh, hon, what happened?”

“What?” Alex grunted as she was swept into a hug that rivaled Kara’s in its strength. “Oh! Oh, no, good tears! They’re good tears.”

“What?”

“Hold on.” Alex ran to the kitchen, grabbed the box of Oreos that Kara kept there, and ushered Maggie into the living room. Sitting together on the couch, Alex talked about how it had gone, skipping over some details while talking at length about others. By the time she finished, tears shone in Maggie’s eyes.

“I’m really, really happy for you.”

“Thank you. I—you helped me to get here, and I really appreciate it. As good with it as everyone I’ve told ended up being, it was scary, and you made it feel like something conquerable.”

“You deserve to be happy, Danvers. You deserve all the love and support you’re getting.”

“I mean, everyone deserves that. Some people just haven’t figured it out yet.”
Maggie nodded but fixated on the Oreo in her hands, twisting the cookie off of the cream and then putting it back together again.

“Maggie?”

“Hmm?”

“Did I say something wrong?”

“No…no, I just…it’s nothing.”

“Okay…” Alex still looked concerned, but she didn’t press Maggie on it.

After a few minutes of silence, Maggie turned to face Alex. “I just…I didn’t want to push you to tell your mom because, well, mine didn’t take it so well.”

“Oh, Maggie, I’m so sorry. I didn’t—I’ve been talking for such a long time, and I didn’t even think to ask, and—”

“No, Danvers, really. You’re okay.”

“Are you?”

“I’m…it’s been a long time. It’s nothing that still stings. Holidays aren’t the best, but you get through it with friends and the family you create for yourself.”

“Wait…your mom doesn’t even invite you back for the holidays?”

Maggie let out a bark of mirthless laughter. “Alex, I haven’t seen my parents since I was 14.” It was blunt, and Alex looked shocked and appalled and furious all at once, but it was the only way Maggie knew she could get through the story without crying—and even then, it was 50/50. “There was a girl, and I gave her a valentine asking her to the dance, and I didn’t think much of it. But then I got home, and my father had packed my suitcase and took me to live with my aunt. That’s the last I saw them.”

Alex opened and closed her mouth for a minute, ready to get angry and yell on Maggie’s behalf or to apologize for all the shitty cards life had handed Maggie, but eventually she shook her head and reached a hand out. “Well, it’s not much, but you’ve got a family with us now whenever you want it.”

And Maggie could have cringed a little bit if Alex had looked at her with pity or forced a smile at Alex’s anger or shrugged at the indignation with no real target, but that—that wholesale acceptance, that invitation to have the one thing she’d never really found again—that broke her apart. But Alex was there with open arms and Oreos and tissues, and Maggie found that even though it wasn’t the cold, emotionless retelling of the story she’d wanted, with Alex at her side, she found she didn’t mind it as much.

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“Kara and your mom are gonna be here any second now,” Maggie mumbled, though she made no move to actually stop Alex as she trailed searing kisses up and down her neck.

“Have time,” Alex managed before pushing Maggie’s shirt up and over her head, tossing it to the floor to join her own.
Maggie wanted to disagree, but she could feel how close she already was from the pressure of Alex’s thigh and the pure thrill of being there, of being with Alex, whose fingers were suddenly fumbling with the zipper of her jeans. “You don’t have to.”

“I want to.” And Maggie couldn’t really say no to that logic, so she let her head fall back to the pillow as Alex angled her hand down and beneath the waistband to Maggie’s jeans.

“You feel good.” Alex beamed, and Maggie couldn’t help but think that Alex more than made up for her inexperience with sheer enthusiasm.

A knock sounded from downstairs.

“Danvers,” Maggie hissed, pushing her hand back.

“What?”

“Someone’s here.”

“Too early.”

“Alex,” Maggie half-groaned, half-moaned as Alex’s fingers continued their ministrations.

“Alex!” Lucy’s voice echoed up the stairs. “Your sister let us in!”

“I’m going to kill her.”

“Wait til after the holidays at least.”

Alex ran a hand through her hair and pulled her sweater on before hurrying down the stairs to meet their guests, giving Maggie a few extra moments to compose herself. “You’re early.”

Lucy gave her a knowing smirk as she looked her up and down. “Happy Thanksgiving to you too.”

“Someone want to help me get this stuff into the kitchen?” Kara asked from behind arms loaded high with food.

“I got it.” Alex took the lightest few items from the top of the pile, sticking her tongue out at Kara as they wandered down the hallway and got all of the food spread out on the counter.

“Eliza’s down at the car with Winn. They were waiting because I still need to”—Kara peered around and lowered her voice—“cook the turkey where no one can see it.”

“Got it. I’ll go distract Lucy and Vasquez so you can do your thing.”

“Thanks!” Kara bounded back outside, while Alex made her way back to Lucy and Vasquez, who were then joined by Maggie.

“So,” Lucy drawled, “how’s your morning been? Have you even left bed?”

“Shut up,” Alex grumbled. “We were just getting ready upstairs, that’s all.”

“Yeah, okay,” Lucy snorted. “Oh and Alex?” Alex arched an eyebrow at Lucy. “Your sweater’s on inside out.” She cackled while Alex flushed a brilliant shade of red. “So I guess that means Maggie finally—”

Alex pressed her hand against Lucy’s mouth, only pulling back with a screeched, “Eww!” when
Lucy licked her palm.

Lucy shrugged, a teasing smirk on her lips. “Vas doesn’t mind.”

“Well that’s great for your—for Vasquez.”

“You can call her my girlfriend.” Alex noticed Maggie and Vasquez bumping their fists together out of the corner of her eye. “And I hear the same can be said for you too?”

Smiling once more and looking the slightest bit bashful, Alex rubbed at the back of her neck. “Yeah.”

“So,” Lucy whispered conspiratorially, “that happen before or after—?”

“No ya don’t!” Vasquez called out, sweeping Lucy into her arms and out of the room. “We’ll be in the kitchen actually helping!”

“Ready for the madness?”

Maggie grinned back at Alex. “Ready as I’ll ever be.”
Thanksgiving Interlude

Chapter Summary

I hadn't actually planned to include Thanksgiving, but since a few people asked about it, here's a shorter interlude with a few Thanksgiving scenes (including a smutty one) to tide you over before this week’s update.

Chapter Notes

A/N: It will be clear as we go, but as a heads up, we’ll be jumping through time much more quickly over the next chapter or two. I’ve been keeping things at a pretty slow pace to get a thorough introduction to characters/plots/relationships, but I figure we don’t need every second of the politics (much as I may have been immersed in that world for a few years, the play-by-play for all of it is unnecessary).

“Hi, Mom!” Alex noted that for once, the enthusiasm wasn’t faked. Even if things weren’t perfect or even close to it, last night felt like closure in some way, or perhaps a new beginning.

“Happy Thanksgiving, Alex. The house looks very nice.”

“Thanks. Mom, uh, this is Maggie, my—my girlfriend.”

Maggie forced a confident smile and stepped forward, hand outstretched. “Dr. Danvers, it’s so nice to meet you.”

“Don’t worry, I took care of making sure it was friends and family Thanksgiving years ago,” Winn interjected with a laugh, taking the bag of pies from Eliza.

“You’re family too, Winn,” Kara yelled from the kitchen.

Turning back to Maggie, Eliza gestured at the couch in the living room. As they walked, she mentioned, “I hear you're a researcher on the campaign.”

“I am, yes, I work on civil rights issues.” Maggie took a deep breath, hoping she could sound less like someone interviewing for a job.

“That sounds like important work.”

“Thanks. I, uh, I like to think it is. And it’s really wonderful getting to see Cat take such progressive stances on issues like alien rights.” Eliza hummed and Maggie hoped she hadn’t accidentally brought up a divisive issue. “I just, I mean, it’s really great to see candidates invested in the research and...
coming to well-informed policies instead of only sticking with things that poll best.”

“I don’t think Cat’s ever been too concerned with saying only the things that will make everyone smile and agree with her.” Eliza chuckled and shook her head. “Then again, I don’t think either of my daughters would have been too invested in working for her if she were.”

“That is…probably true.” Maggie looked up and found Alex peering anxiously over at them. The second they made eye contact, Alex spun around and busied herself with a basket of rolls that were already fine. “You raised two truly amazing women.”

“Well, I think a thank you is in order to you too… I’ve never seen Alex quite so happy as she is with you.”

Maggie could feel her cheeks warming at the kind words and searched out Alex’s gaze, only to find the woman still pretending to be busy in the kitchen. “I—I’m just glad she’s happy.”

“I am too.”

“Food is ready!” Kara bellowed from the kitchen, carrying the large turkey out to the dining room table as everyone scurried to their places, having learned long ago not to keep Kara waiting when it came to food. Maggie followed Eliza and found Alex patting the seat next to her, a glass of red wine already at Maggie’s place. After a quick head count, Kara gestured to Eliza. “A toast?”

“I think perhaps I should defer the proper toast to my daughters—to Alex for hosting us all in her lovely home, or Kara for doing most of the work in preparing this meal. But here’s to being surrounded by family, friends, and loved ones this afternoon.”

In true Danvers family Thanksgiving tradition, Kara stood next, holding her glass aloft. “To having almost the whole gang here!”

“I could always FaceTime James in,” Winn offered.

Lucy laughed and plucked Winn’s phone from his hands. “Leave your best friend to his family for a day.”

“In any case”—Kara cleared her throat and glared at Winn and Lucy, who were battling for control of the phone—“I’m grateful for everyone in my life who has helped me through some big decisions and changes these past few months.”

Alex arched an eyebrow at Kara, hoping she wouldn’t say enough to out herself as Supergirl to the whole room, before standing herself. “And I’m grateful for friends who, sometimes more bluntly than I would have hoped, have helped me to feel a lot more like myself these days.”

When everyone turned to Maggie, she cast a panicked glance in Alex’s direction, only to be nudged up and out of her seat. “I, uh, I’m thankful for Alex”—she squeezed her hand—“for letting me be a part of her family’s tradition and making me feel so welcome and cared for these past few weeks.”

“Wait…” Winn pointed at their joined hands, then looked between them. “Are you two… Is this why Alex has been so nice at work?”

Vasquez grabbed Lucy’s hand under the table before she could make any inappropriate comments, and Kara snorted loudly.

“We are.” Alex squeezed Maggie’s hand. “With the campaign at full-force ahead, we haven’t gotten a chance to go out with the whole group, but we’ve been dating for a little while now.”
“Well then I am thankful for proof that enemies to lovers romcom plots really do come true.” Winn faked a tear and held his glass high, ignoring Alex’s death-glare.

“I’m also thankful to be included in this makeshift family,” Vasquez chimed in. “And for people like Lucy in my life.

“Them too?” Winn hissed, getting an amused chuckle and nod from Maggie in return.

Lucy stood next. “Here’s to the last day off we’ll have for ages!”

“Here, here!” came a chorus of voices, followed by the clinking of silverware against plates and serving dishes as they all dug in.

For a while, conversation was reduced to little more than compliments about the various dishes and general pleasantries. As first servings rolled into second and wine glasses were refilled, the atmosphere shifted to a more relaxed mood. “So, Kara,” Lucy drawled, a teasing smirk playing on her lips, “how’s the big crush going?”

Kara’s cheeks blushed pink as every set of eyes flashed to her. “Fine, Lucy. How’s your girlfriend? Get all that HR paperwork sorted?”

“Right away. And she’s pretty great, though I think we already all knew that.”

“You like someone, sweetie?” Eliza asked, scooping a second helping of mashed potatoes onto her plate. “Why didn’t you mention it yesterday? I never would have tried to set you up had I known.”

“Oh, you should probably still try. Kara’s crush is a little…unavailable.” Alex stuck her tongue out at Kara from behind her wine glass, while Kara lowered her glasses and narrowed her eyes in a threat they both already knew would never amount to anything.

Eliza patted Kara’s hand. “No one could be too good for my Kara. Who is this person?”

“Yeah,” Winn interjected, looking somewhat put out at being the only one not in the know for the third time that afternoon. “Who are they?”

Maggie nudged Winn with her shoulder and leaned over to whisper in his ear. “I don’t know either.” He looked satisfied by that knowledge.

“It’s no one. Can we all just drop it?”

Catching sight of the tension in Kara’s shoulders, Alex jumped back into the conversation. “In more important news, did you see Max Lord’s latest stunt?”

“Oh god, what now?” Maggie groaned, while Kara mouthed a silent, “Thank you,” in Alex’s direction.

“Bringing up his parents’ death to talk about how government organizations have been managed so poorly and tout himself as the only person smart enough to fix it all.”

“Really? Using his dead parents like that?” Kara wrinkled her nose in disgust. No matter how many years she spent in the world of politics, she never quite got used to certain things.

“Still better than Justin’s family photo with all the generation of politicians.” Alex passed her phone down the table, watching as everyone groaned in turn.

Maggie zoomed in and squinted at the pixelated image. “Is that baby wearing a 2056 onesie?”
Winn shook his head. “First year he’ll be eligible to run, I guess.”

“Fuckin dynasties,” Lucy muttered, craning her head over Vasquez’s shoulder.

“Whiter than an L.L. Bean ad,” Vasquez added with a loud laugh.

As the group flipped through more photos and tweets, Kara searched for Cat to see what kinds of comments she was getting, only to be disgusted a article on some ultra-conservative blog about how Cat’s “sad” two-person Thanksgiving photo was proof of what a—oh, Kara thought, they definitely weren’t allowed to say that word—Cat was driving everyone out of her life. They’d proceeded to run through her exes and dug up photos of their new girlfriends and wives to show how much better they’d done, and all of it made Kara wish she could publish a rebuttal pointing out that actually Cat had the better new girlfriend anyway. Hell, Cat got to sleep with Supergirl.

After a few more rounds of “which ad is the worst,” they brought out the chocolate pecan pie that would forever be known as a Grant family tradition, along with a pumpkin pie to appease Alex, a batch of cookies Maggie baked, and a tray of brownies from Lucy and Vasquez that they swore had been heavier before they handed it off to Kara.

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“How was talking to my mother?” Alex asked as she let herself be dragged over to the couch after finally shepherding the last of their guests out the front door.

“Completely fine.”

“Really?”

“Yeah…she was really nice to me, and then she came up and found me later to tell me that we made a very cute couple.”

“Well that’s just a fact.”

“Mm, I’d have to agree.” Maggie pressed a soft kiss to Alex’s lips.

“Best couple, for sure.”

Maggie pulled back, tilting her head to the side. “Speaking of…who’s Kara’s big crush on? If you can say,” she rushed to add.

“Oh, I think she just didn’t want Mom to know—not like it’s a huge secret if Lucy has confirmation.” Alex laughed and rolled her eyes; it was a testament to the seriousness of the issue that Lucy hadn’t said a word about Alex’s big gay awakening to anyone, but something as trivial as an unrequited crush was basic break room fodder. “She’s apparently had a big crush on Cat ever since working for her.”

“Oh.” Maggie thought back through their interactions. “And didn’t you say Cat’s bi?”

“Well, yeah, but it’s not like it means anything.”

“No, I know, but it makes her, you know, available in a way. Like, it’s a lot easier to get rid of a straight girl crush because you can be sad but content in the knowledge that she was never an option. It’s harder when she could like you back.”

“And that’s why you were fine until you thought I came out for Lucy?”
“I was still fine then!”

Alex snorted at the look of indignation. “You weren’t happy about it, though.”

“I would have been if I had a couple weeks to get used to the idea.”

“But then we’d have such a torrid love triangle with Vasquez—so much drama in the office.”

“Ah yes, I forgot that I was the crush of convenience.” Maggie flung her hand dramatically up to her chest. “And that’s all I’ll ever be!”

“You’re such a dork.”

“Is that why I was only ever the second choice?” Maggie bit her lip to keep from laughing as Alex fixed her with a stern look.

“Would I have begged my second choice to take me to bed?”

“I don’t think you begged, but if you want to start…”

“I believe we had started something…”

Before Maggie could ask if Alex wanted to head back upstairs, Alex had swung one of her legs over Maggie’s lap, straddling her and drawing her into a heated kiss.

“Best Thanksgiving ever,” Maggie murmured between kisses, and Alex found she had to agree. No fighting. No emergencies. No family drama. Just good food and better company and world’s best girlfriend sticking around at the end of the night.

Before long, their kisses grew messier, Alex’s hips rocking forward into Maggie’s and her fingers tangling in Maggie’s hair. Alex wondered when she had become the kind of person who was only one kiss, one lingering touch, away from throwing off her clothing and pinning her girlfriend to the couch. Then again, she hadn’t ever been the type to have a girlfriend before either, so perhaps she shouldn’t be surprised. Her body seemed to pulse in time with her racing heart, and she could focus on little more than the woman beneath her and the feel of her soft skin or the tug of her teeth along her lower lip or the soft moans and sighs filling the air around them.

As reluctant as she was to stop anything, Alex finally pulled back long enough to tug off their shirts, unhooking her own bra to expedite the process while Maggie did the same. Maggie whimpered as Alex’s lips dropped lower, peppering her chest with teasing nips and soothing caresses. She wondered how she had possibly gotten so lucky as to be the woman Alex chose, how she had ended up surrounded by family and friends and people who genuinely seemed to care about her. But then Alex’s fingers were on the button to her jeans, and Alex was slipping off the couch and kneeling between her legs, and all rational thought deserted her.

“You don’t have to,” Maggie mumbled, even as her hips bucked up beneath Alex’s hands.

“I want to. God I want to so much.” With that, Maggie raised her hips, helping Alex to push her pants down and over her ankles and letting out a keening whine when Alex’s lips ghosted over the front of her underwear, her breath hot and teasing before she pulled back away to kiss up and down Maggie’s inner thighs, putting her through an exquisite kind of torture. Finally Alex’s fingers were curling under her waistband and pulling away the last layer between them.

Maggie’s head hit the back of the couch with the first swipe of Alex’s tongue, and her hands fist ed in Alex’s hair at the feeling of strong fingers curling inside her and seeking out the spots she had come
to learn made Maggie’s hips jump and her thighs press tightly around Alex’s head.

Maggie came with a gasp, finally dropping back to the couch with a shaky exhale. But Alex merely slowed her pace, never fully stopping, and when Maggie glanced up again, her question died on her lips at the sight of Alex looking up at her, eyes dark with lust. She pulled back just long enough to press wet kisses along the insides of Maggie’s thighs at the same time as she began thrusting into her once more with her hand. “If you want, I thought I could repay you for Tuesday night…”

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With the night off from regular work, Kara flew from city to city, patrolling the roads, dragging drunk drivers off to the shoulder, and breaking up brawls in lines for Black Friday deals.

She flew high into the air at the feeling of her phone buzzing in its special pocket. She grinned at the sight of Cat’s name, wondering if was a response to the Happy Thanksgiving text she’d sent earlier in the day. “See you’ve been busy tonight. Thanksgiving end early?”

“Eliza had to catch a flight back tonight. How was your day?”

“Got to spend a whole day with Carter with zero work interruptions, so it was almost perfect.”

“I’m glad to hear it.”

“Mm and yours?”

“Good. No family fights to speak of. Everyone will be reporting to duty without massive hangovers tomorrow.”

“I would expect nothing else. I’ll see you all bright and early tomorrow morning ready to work.”

Kara chuckled. She could just see Cat sitting in that big bed of hers, pillows propped behind her, glasses on, and phone held up in front of her, tsking at the idea that any of her staff would let petty family drama come before their work after she’d managed to stay professional through a full day with Katherine. Figuring she’d been out as Supergirl for long enough, Kara tucked her phone into her suit for the flight back to DC. Once she was in the comfort of her own apartment, she typed out a few drafts of the same message, finally settling on: “I’m thankful to have you back in my life this year, Cat.”
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Note there are some NSFW scenes here. Heads up on some power play, though it's consensual

After Thanksgiving, the team threw themselves back into the campaign with a renewed vigor. The field of candidates seemed to shrink with every day, and soon enough, Cat found herself confronted with only three opponents and two viable threats: Stephen Branch, Max Lord, and Justin Kennedy. At every debate, she appeared to trounce them, yet with every visit and interview, she found herself confronted with questions they were never asked—questions about her son, her family, or lack thereof, her fitness for office, her health. It didn’t matter that both of Lane's daughters had publicly backed Cat; she was the one who devastated marriages and ruined families. It didn’t matter that she had only taken one half of a day off the campaign trail while Kennedy had spent three full days in bed with the flu; she was the one who apparently “concerned” voters, and it was only the memory of Kara’s hand reaching out and squeezing her thigh to ground her during a particularly infuriating interview that kept her from snapping each time reporters repeated the same questions over and over again.

The team spent all of December traipsing around the primary battleground states. Cat’s days were filled with long town hall meetings and rousing stump speeches and increasingly contentious interviews, and her nights spent with Kara in hotel room beds, alternating between debate prep and sex that should have exhausted her but only served to leave her feeling invigorated and years younger.

The lead-up to the holidays gave her a chance to back away from the hard-hitting candidate of the debates and soften her image—a phrase that continued to make her cringe—as she volunteered at youth shelters, wrote donation checks at various balls and galas for charities, and gave quotes to the press about looking forward to time away from the campaign trail to be at home with her son. It didn’t matter that she was looking forward to time with Carter—at least the time he wouldn’t be spending with his father—the fact that she had to say it or be branded a shrew when her competitors were lauded for the simple fact of acknowledging their own families grated at her. But Christmas and family obligations gave her a good excuse to go back to California, a state that should have been an obvious primary victory for her but now seemed split between her and Max. Kara leveraged all the connections she had forged during years spent doing favors to ensure Cat favorable front-page coverage for her speeches, while Alex worked magic they knew better than to ask about to arrange for a paper that had already endorsed Kennedy to print an exposé about Lord Technologies on the day Max arrived back in National City, leaving him scrambling to work in platform lines while fielding accusatory questions about why the jobs he had promised would materialize were exported out to countries with cheaper labor and laxer labor laws.

On New Year’s Eve, after an ill-fated venture down the hotel hallway to see if Alex, Maggie, Lucy, and Vasquez wanted to watch the ball drop together, Kara hurried back to her room, plugging her ears and pushing her glasses further up her nose to ensure the lowest possibility of seeing or hearing things she decidedly did not want to see or hear. For a few minutes she contemplated going out to find Winn and James at the club they’d braved for the evening, but the idea of being in crowds that large with loud music blasting and too many people perpetually stepping into her space made Kara’s
skin crawl in anticipation. With Cat out at some black-tie gala and no desire to sit quite so close to Alex’s hotel room for another minute, Kara switched into her super suit and went flying out into the cool night air.

For a few minutes, Kara closed her eyes, hovering high in the air above the city and letting the soft breeze from the ocean blow across her skin. She inhaled deeply, catching hints of the salty sea air and…burnt metal? Scanning the city, Kara caught sight of smoke wafting up from Lord Technologies. Without giving it a second thought, she jolted into action, soaring through the air until the smoke engulfed her as she ducked down through it, bursting into the labs where bright red flames licked up and around racks of vials and rows of expensive computer monitors.

“Is anyone in here?” Kara yelled, her voice taking on the low, authoritative tone it did when she went out as Supergirl.

A choked-out cough was her only answer, and Kara strode through the crimson flames, blowing them out as she went, until she made it to the very back room where Max himself was huddled with four other scientists in lab coats—two of whom appeared to have already passed out from oxygen deprivation. She ignored the rage she felt bubbling up inside her at the sight of Max looking far too indifferent to the plight of his employees, and strode forward to check pulses and figure out what was needed most urgently. With a press to her earpiece, Kara called for ambulances to meet them out front, then gathered the two unconscious scientists in her arms to drag them out of the burning building and over to safety before returning for the others. Once the EMTs had gotten the last of their patients, Kara gave a small salute and took off into the darkness.

Back in the hotel, Kara took a long shower that would have scalded skin more sensitive than hers, yet she swore her own body felt hotter than any of the water streaming down around her. It was as though she could feel something coursing through her—hot and unrelenting—and by the time she stepped out of the shower she knew she needed to see Cat, needed to see her then and there, galas be damned.

As she sent a message to Cat letting her know that she had something urgent, Kara slipped into a tight black dress she’d brought with her in case they had all done something for New Year’s Eve—not that any of the other women had apparently given any consideration to her plans, she thought with a pang of annoyance.

“Is everything okay?” read Cat’s message back to her, and Kara pocketed her phone. Cat would find out soon enough. With a final check of her appearance in the bathroom mirror and a self-satisfied nod, Kara took off through her hotel window and over to the country club where one of the campaign’s most generous donors was hosting his annual New Year’s bash. She did little more than bat her eyes and lean forward an inch too far before the security guard’s policies and “strict orders” grew lax. He earned a condescending half-smile for his troubles.

“Kara?” Cat gasped as Kara’s arm snaked around her waist. “What’s wrong?”

“I need you,” Kara whispered.

“What’s the emergency?”

Kara arched an eyebrow at Cat. “That is the emergency. I need you.”

With a huff, Cat folded her arms across her chest. “For what purposes? You know this is an important event for the donors.”

“Yes…” Kara drawled, slowly backing Cat up until they were in the catering hallway. She didn’t
miss the way Cat’s eyes darted around the corridor, checking their surroundings as though she might stop Kara, even though her pupils were already dilated and her breathing shallow. “But I think we both know there are places you’d rather be.”

“Be that as it may, I have to be here. Now if you’ll excuse me—”

“No,” Kara took a step forward into Cat’s space. Her tone softened slightly when she spoke again. “There are hundreds of reasons why your campaign manager could need you at the last minute—not least of which is the fact that Max Lord almost just died.”

“What?”

“Oh, don’t sound so upset. Supergirl was there to save him, and the fire has already been put out courtesy of, once again, Supergirl. Not that he’ll ever thank her.”

Kara watched the shifting emotions flicker across Cat’s features until they settled on something that looked like resolution. “He’s alive?”

“Unfortunately.”

Cat’s eyebrows furrowed together, but she forced away the expression. “Then I suppose I won’t be missed too much…”

“Good.” And with that, Kara was shepherding Cat out through the party with murmured apologies that came so much smoother than her usual fibbing.

It wasn’t until they were outside that Cat had the chance to take in Kara’s appearance. Unconsciously, she licked her lips, heated gaze roving up and down the small dress to long legs and heels that left her towering over Cat. “Where to?”

Before Cat could even process the change, Kara had Cat in her arms and up in the air.

“Where—?”

“Shh,” Kara hushed her, cradling Cat to her chest with a grip that veered on the edge of too tight and seemed to scream to the whole world that Cat belonged to her and her alone.

When Kara’s feet touched down once more, they were forty stories up in the air, looking out over the city from the private CatCo balcony Cat had once called her own. Anticipating the question, Kara shook her head. “It’s empty. Anyone stuck working tonight is working from home—I already checked.”

“You really have thought of everything, haven’t you?” Cat murmured, her words turning into a soft gasp as Kara’s teeth found the spot on her neck that never failed to leave her in need of more.

“You’d do better not to underestimate me.”

Before Cat could formulate a response, Kara’s lips came up to find hers with bruising force behind them, teetering on the edge between pain and pleasure. Cat could feel strong fingers gripping her hips until one hand came up to palm roughly at her breasts through the fabric of her dress, wrinkling Oscar de la Renta like it didn’t cost a small fortune. Yet she couldn’t find it within herself to complain—not when she could feel her nipples hardening beneath Kara’s touch, the small strip of lace between her legs that could barely be classified as a thong already slick with proof of how very much she wanted Kara, needed her.
“Turn around.” Kara’s voice was low and commanding, and when Cat hesitated, she found herself being forcibly spun around and her hands brought down to grip at the balcony railing. “Look out at all of them—look down at your city.”

“It’s not mine—not anymore,” Cat admitted with a small shake of her head as she tried to rid herself of the pangs of nostalgia for a simpler time.

“Isn’t it still your name on the building?”

“Yes, but—”

“And are you not doing everything you can to make sure they show up for you at the polls?”

“I am…”

“Then accept it as yours, Cat.” Cat let her head drop back to Kara’s shoulders as her dress was roughly pushed up and over her hips and her underwear nudged down her legs until it fell to the ground around her heels. “And you”—Kara’s fingers slipped between Cat’s soaked folds until she had two buried deep inside her—“are mine.”

“Fuck,” Cat gasped, her fingers clawing at the railing in front of her. It shouldn’t have done anything to her—never had before—but she could feel herself getting impossibly wetter at the words, could feel her walls clenching around Kara’s fingers and drawing them in deeper with every thrust, and she knew that a large part of it was due to the thrill that swept through her at those growled words she’d never expected.

As Kara’s fingers corkscrewed inside her, Cat couldn’t help the loud, low moans that spilled from her lips into the empty vastness of the night. She pushed back harder, desperate for more of Kara, ready to take whatever she had to offer.

As her muscles began drawing taut, her back arching and her grip on the railing tightening, Kara’s fingers suddenly disappeared. Stumbling forward, Cat rounded on Kara the second she could find her bearings. The accusations died in her throat at the sight of Kara’s mouth wrapped around her fingers, her eyes tracing a lewd path up Cat’s body and her mouth curled into a wicked smirk. Eventually Cat managed to get her lungs and mouth and brain to work in tandem. “What the fuck was that?”

“What?”

“The little game you’re playing.”

“Here’s the thing, Cat,” Kara sneered, pacing across the balcony in time with her words. “I waited years for you to call me back. So why should I let you have what you want when you want it?”

“I—I thought we’d gone over this, cleared the air.”

“For you.” Cat looked at Kara with a question in her eyes. “You said what you needed to say, and in your world, that’s always been enough. But the fact remains: you made me wait. For years.”

After a moment, Cat ducked her head. “I’m still sorry for hurting you, even if I’m not sorry about how it turned out in the end.”

“Well if waiting went so well for you, maybe I should try it.”

“Don’t you dare,” Cat growled punctuating her words with small steps that brought her right into
Kara’s orbit.

“Then convince me you need it.”

“What?”

“You heard me.” Kara’s shoulders straightened as she stood a little taller, looking down on Cat. “I want the Queen of All Media, the next President of the United States to beg for what she wants.”

Cat huffed, and Kara glared, unrelenting. With effort, Cat ignored the pull of arousal, the wetness she could feel drying on her inner thighs, the emptiness inside her demanding to be filled.

“Then I guess I’ll leave.”

As Kara stepped backwards, Cat’s jaw clenched and her eyes flashed with an implicit challenge. Kara held Cat’s gaze until a soft moan broke the silence and drew Kara’s attention down to the movement of Cat’s own fingers circling her clit. In an instant, Kara’s hand was wrapped around Cat’s forearm, stilling her with a commanding, “Mine.”

“Then take it, Supergirl.”

“Beg for it.”

Cat refused to give in, and she smirked in triumph as Kara’s fingers began a journey up her inner thighs once more. But the caresses were soft, continually stopping just shy of what she needed, and Kara only seemed to grow more and more pleased with each frustrated, needy whimper.

“You could have what you want in an instant…all you have to do is what you should have done years ago.”

It wasn’t until the third barely-there brush over her clit that left her teetering on the edge that Cat relented, letting out a shuddering exhale with a desperate, “Please,” close behind. And then she found herself being turned once more to the railing, her dress rucked all the way up as she was bent forward, and three fingers filling her with a delicious stretch as Kara’s fingers thrust and bent and turned in just the right ways until she came with a long, wailing cry, unheard by a city that didn’t know to listen for it.

Kara had Cat in her arms before she could even think about trusting her legs to carry her weight, and she lost herself in Kara’s bruising kisses until she felt the ground give way beneath them.

“You should really be getting back to that party before anyone starts asking questions,” Kara offered by way of explanation as she dropped back down to the ground in the quiet staff-only parking lot behind the country club.

“Right.” Cat swore she heard a low laugh as she walked back around to the entrance on shaky legs, already formulating answers to imagined questions about where she had been and what she thought of the fire at Lord Technologies.

Kara took off for the hotel once more, switching into her suit yet again when she found she couldn’t quiet her racing thoughts, couldn’t soothe the constant thrum of emotions bubbling just beneath the surface.

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“Fuck,” Alex gasped as her fingers carded through Maggie’s hair, holding her steady as her hips
bucked up into her mouth and choked out whimpers filled the room until she came with a gasp. “C’mere,” she murmured, crooking her finger forward, unwilling to call it for the night even though the little hotel clock already read 3:15.

“You’re okay.” Maggie smiled softly as she pressed wet kisses to Alex's abs.

“Want to.” Alex tugged Maggie up, pulling her even further than Maggie had expected, not stopping until Maggie’s legs were on either side of her shoulders. “Can I?”

Maggie sunk her teeth into her lower lip, willing her body not to betray her. “Alex, you don’t have to do that.”

“I want to,” Alex repeated. “Just a little tired—that’s all. But I want to taste you again.”

With a little push from Alex’s hands on her ass, Maggie let herself give in, shuffling the rest of the way up the mattress and ignoring the sudden sound of the television as her knee found the remote they’d thought went missing hours ago. Her fingers wrapped around the headboard as Alex’s tongue flicked between her folds, drawing a low moan from deep inside her.

“Could California be seeing snow this week? And has Supergirl gone bad? Next up when we return.”

Alex nearly threw Maggie off her in her haste to see the screen, ignoring the yelps of protest. “What the hell? If you didn’t want to, you could have just said something.”

“Shut up.” Alex’s eyes were fixated on the screen and the grainy video footage of what looked an awful lot like Supergirl slamming her fist into the face of someone who looked far too human for that amount of force.

“What the fuck?”

“Supergirl—look.”

Maggie looked up as they flashed to a commercial break and shrugged. “It’ll come back soon.”

But Alex’s firm hand kept her from getting close a second time. “No, Maggie, no. This is important!”

Alex fumbled in the heap of her clothing on the floor for her phone, scrolling through a litany of emails, missed calls, and messages. There was one from Kara asking about her plans for the night, followed by a text asking her to keep it down from a few hours later that made Alex’s cheeks flush a deep shade of red. But then there was nothing until a chain of messages from Cat. “Have you seen your sister?” was followed an hour later by, “Turn on the news now. It’s about Supergirl.” The latest was sent only a few minutes earlier. “On my way over.”

“Get dressed.” Alex’s voice was commanding, and Maggie, while confused, rushed to comply.

The knock sounded sooner than Alex would have liked—before the news had even come back—and she answered the door in hastily pulled on sweatpants and a button up, while Maggie pulled one of the free hotel room robes tight around her just in time for Cat to sweep into the room.

“Uh, Cat?”

“I assume neither of you is aware of what’s been going on outside this room for the past several hours?”
Alex could feel the warm flush of embarrassment creeping all the way up her chest as she shook her head.

“I need to speak to Alex alone.”

“I—” Maggie looked between the two of them, noting Alex’s refusal to make eye contact, the way she fumbled with the phone in her hands. “Fine.” With as much dignity as she could manage in nothing more than a small terrycloth robe, Maggie carefully lowered herself down to grab her pile of clothes, praying that her own room key was buried in some pocket, and let herself out without a glance back.

“Something is wrong with Kara.”

The news came back on then, and Alex sank down to the mattress in stunned silence as she watched videos of her sister leaving assailants close to dead in back alleys, their noses and mouths dripping with blood and wrists and arms twisted and broken.

“Early reports suggest that Supergirl has appointed herself a kind of vigilante protector of aliens tonight,” the newscaster announced. “In at least three separate occasions, police officers were called about disturbances and drunken brawls between National Cit'sy residents and aliens.” The reel of cell phone camera footage was followed by interviews with bystanders who were quick to denounce Supergirl, along with one perfunctory interview with an alien who tried to defend her, explaining that they’d been targeted all evening, subjected to a greater degree of scrutiny and violence since the latest round of primary debates when Lane, Crane, and Lord had all come out in staunch opposition to alien rights.

“What’s going on with her?” Cat asked, muting the news as soon as it flashed back to a question about the possibility of a wintry mix coming to National City.

“I—I don’t know. She was fine earlier today.”

“She was different by this evening.”

“Did you see her?”

“I—she came by with news about Max Lord.” Alex tilted her head to the side. “Good lord, it’s like you forgot that you have a real job to do that isn’t scr—”

“Cat. We had a day off.”

Cat rolled her eyes. “Lord Technologies caught fire, and our friend in blue and red swooped in to save the day. She rescued Max and a few of his scientists.”

“Oh my god.”

“After that she seemed...off. I went and looked, and he’s already telling the press that they would have been fine without Supergirl, that she caused millions of dollars’ worth of damage because of the way she put out the fire and crashed through the ceiling.”

“Ah yes, how dare she save his life?” Alex deadpanned, gritting her teeth together.

“But I don’t—that wouldn’t be enough to make her do this, would it?”

“I don’t think so...” But still, Alex had her phone out within seconds, calling Kara and waiting as it rang through to voicemail. “Hey, Kara, it’s me, Alex. Can you give me a call when you get this? Or
better yet, just come over.”

Cat tried next, once more getting voicemail. “It’s Cat. You’re needed back at the campaign. Now.”

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By morning, the news was awash with coverage of Supergirl’s “reign of terror,” as Max had dubbed it, calling her, and all aliens, a “menace to society.” The early morning talk shows were quick to play clip after clip of Cat’s unwavering support for Supergirl and aliens in general, and Cat had no doubt that she had Max’s campaign to thank for that as he was thrust into the position of the only wise Democratic candidate with enough foresight to see beyond the flashy tricks and fancy costumes to the real threats that lurked behind them.

A cold rush of air from the window was all the warning Cat had before Kara was before her in full Supergirl attire.

“Where the hell have you been all night?”

“Don’t,” Kara snapped. “It was my day off, and you don’t get to dictate what I do then.”

“I might not get to dictate what you do in your free time, but you know damn well that I have reason to be invested in what you do as Supergirl. I have staked my professional career on supporting you.”

“Real people have dark sides, Cat. Look at you. You are arrogant and self-serving and still think you deserve to be in charge. I thought you of all people would understand.”

Cat swallowed harshly. “Do what you want as Kara Danvers, but superheroes don’t get to be real people. They get to be the ones we look up to, the ones who inspire us and save us.”

“And who’s that ‘us,’ Kitty?” The name fell from Kara’s tongue with a level of venom that shocked Cat. “Because I was still out there saving people last night—only this time I saved the aliens.”

“But you didn’t just save them,” Cat yelled, feeling herself prickle at the nickname that dredged up too many memories of holidays with her mother. “You nearly killed their attackers.”

“And they would have killed people just like me! Only if they did, who would have cared? Who would have said a goddam thing?”

“Kara.” Cat took a deep breath, her features softening as she reached out a hand. “People do care—it’s why your sister and I have been so worried.”

“Oh I can imagine. The two people who fought tooth and nail to keep me from being Supergirl, to keep me from owning my powers. I’m sure you two were falling over yourselves to think of all the ways you could use this to try to box me back up into weak, unassuming Kara Danvers.”

“It’s not like that,” Cat insisted with a firm shake of her head, but Kara was already gone.

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Alex paced the hotel room, trying to beat back the throbbing pain in her head as she scrolled through emails and op-eds while the news anchors droned on in the background.

“Alex, please,” Maggie pleaded. “Talk to me? Let me help.”

“It’s not—this doesn’t concern you, Maggie.”
"I care about alien rights! I work on them too! If the campaign is going to be putting out a statement, I deserve a say in it."

"This is above your level, okay? Leave it to me…and Cat."

"Don't shut me out."

Alex held up a hand as her phone buzzed with an incoming call from an unknown number, ignoring Maggie's glare as she picked up. "Hello?"

"Alex Danvers?"

"And you are?"

"My name is Lena Luthor. I think I have information you might find useful."

"About what?"

"Supergirl. But it would be better to speak in person."

"Why would you call me about Supergirl?" Maggie's eyes flashed up to Alex's face at the look of sheer panic that flashed across her features.

"I know about the DEO—know that they employ a large number of aliens. I've heard rumors that Supergirl has passed through those doors too, and word on the street is, you're the closest one to her."

"Where are we meeting?"

"L-Corp. My office. No wires."

"I'll see you in an hour." Alex hung up her phone with a shuddering exhale.

"What's going on?"

"Nothing." Seeing the disbelieving look, Alex shrugged in a display of affected nonchalance. "Some news about Supergirl."

"Look, I get that Cat has supported her from the start, and that's a mess you might need to clean up, but why are you so upset about this?"

"Any kind of scandal is a big fucking deal. Supergirl is out there acting…beyond different. She's nearly killing people, and you know she'll never come back from it if she does."

"She's her own person, Alex," Maggie assured Alex, her tone soft.

"Not like this! This isn't her! And I can't—I won't let her do this to herself." Alex had her back toward Maggie, leaning over her suitcase as she tore through it, looking for whatever she needed for the meeting.

"Oh." It was barely a gasp, but Alex wheeled around.

"What?"

"That's why you care so much."
“What?”

“Supergirl…she’s your sister.”

“What? I don’t—that’s impossible.”

“No…no, it’s really not.” Maggie walked slowly along the edge of the bed. “You almost die, and suddenly this superhero we’ve never even glimpsed before saves a plane in the middle of nowhere. You freak out when Supergirl shows up again on the news for the first time, and start having hushed conversations on the phone when you think I can’t hear you. You and Kara act distant all week until suddenly Supergirl comes out with some fancy suit saving people all along the Northeast. And now…now Supergirl is acting differently, and Kara is nowhere to be found, and you and Cat are inseparable. Because you both know it’s Kara out there.”

“I—you can’t—”

“I would never say anything, Alex.”

“It wasn’t my secret to tell.”

“I know. I don’t…I won’t pretend that I like being left in the dark, but it’s Kara’s choice about whether or not to tell people, and it wouldn’t be fair to expect you to out her to me like that.”

“What did I do to deserve you?”

Maggie forced herself to smile. “I think that thing you did with your tongue last night…”

“Shut up,” Alex laughed, and even with the weight of the world pressing down all around her, she let herself enjoy one moment’s happiness with Maggie before she slipped the mask of cool confidence back down for her meeting with Lena.

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“I recognize this—this behavior.” Lena gestured at the screen behind her where stills of Supergirl’s latest fights were displayed in high resolution. “Sudden outbursts of anger. Change in personality. Seems like nothing is thought through; everything is impulsive.”

“What are you saying?”

“I assume you know about my brother.”

Alex nodded. Everyone did.

“When he was sentenced, I inherited the family business, as it were. Obviously it’s changed over the years, but when I first began I went through all the projects he had in development—both those that were public and those that were…less so.”

“And?”

“Well, we all knew that he was manufacturing synthetic materials to exploit Superman’s few vulnerabilities, but he was also using similar elements to try to design a material that would make Superman himself the villain—make him act on all his worst impulses if he were exposed to it.”

Alex’s eyes flashed with anger as she glared at Lena. “How did it get to my—to Supergirl?”

“I trashed the project. It had never been finished anyway—some flaw in the composition of the
material made it highly unstable, liable to combust.”

Alex’s fingers curled into fists, her nails leaving crescent-shaped cuts along her palms. “So it might, say, catch fire?”

“There’s a high probability. Like I said, I had the prototypes destroyed when I took over, so I wouldn’t know with certainty.”

“So then what? You think your brother is doing this?”

Lena shook her head, her fingers tapping along her desk. “No…I’ve checked that he still hasn’t been allowed a single visitor.

“Then how did this get out?”

“I have to assume someone was working with Lex back in the day—someone who has bided their time over the years.”

Alex nearly knocked her chair over in her rush to stand up. “I need to go.”

“Wait!”

“What?”

“I’ve been working since early this morning with my partner Sam. We might have something that would reverse the effects of this…this red Kryptonite, as Lex called it.”

“Why are you doing this?” Alex’s words dripped with suspicion.

“I watched what Lex did to himself…to us…to the country. I don’t need to see that happen again when so much progress has been made since then. And I won’t watch another life be destroyed because of his work.”

“So what are you proposing?”

“Supergirl will need to be sprayed with what the antidote, which means she’ll need to get close enough to someone to be in distance.”

“I can do that.”

Lena arched an eyebrow but didn’t question it. “As for the bad publicity, well, I trust you know as well as I do just how important it is to get out early with a new narrative.”

“Of course.”

“I’ll take care of it.”

“Excuse me?”

“I said I would take care of it.”

“Why?”

“Is it not enough to want the world to trust someone who’s never done anything of her own volition to lose it?”
“It’s gotta be more than that.”

One corner of Lena’s mouth curled up slightly. “The more I distance myself from Lex, the better my company will do.” Alex continued to glare. “And if there’s one thing I want more than anything, it’s to bring down whichever bastards were there helping make Lex into the monster he became.”

“You have a deal, Ms. Luthor.”
Chapter 29

Alex stared at her phone, trying to will away the creeping pangs of guilt and fear at Kara’s words. “You wanted me to hide and deny who I really was. Why would I come running to you now that I’m finally free?”

“You okay?” Maggie’s voice was soft, but it startled Alex.

“Oh, uh, yeah. Fine. Totally fine.”

“Alex…”

“She’s not coming.”

“We’ll get your sister back, I promise.” Maggie looped an arm around Alex’s waist and pulled her close, watching as her expression shifted from hurt and betrayal to resolution in the span of mere minutes.

“She might not want to talk to me right now, but maybe there’s still a part of her that would show up for work.” Maggie nodded, not adding that Kara’s big crush, rather than her work ethic, might be the thing that made Cat the more enticing option. “I’m calling Cat now.”

Within half an hour, Cat had texted Kara telling her she needed her to come up to her room, while Alex waited just outside the door—a situation that left Cat’s heart racing. She found herself praying for Kara to be angry, hoping she would do little more than insult her or yell at her, maybe even bring up the whole wrong name thing or the crispy lettuce wraps and perfectly hot lattes she demanded over the years.

As it turned out, she had little time to worry; within seconds of Kara’s arrival, Alex had swept in with something like a miniature bazooka in her hands and sprayed Kara with a foul-smelling mist. The last thing Cat saw before Kara collapsed was a look of betrayal flashing in those blue eyes. And then she was on the floor.

“Kara!”

“Move back,” Alex barked, sounding more like a military officer than anything else. Cat complied, and within seconds, Alex had Kara in her arms and out the door, insisting that she had a few “specialists” who would ensure that Kara was okay.

And so Cat found herself with no campaign manager, no political consultant, and no information for hours on end. She tried a supervised visit to the gym for a long run. She tried a scalding shower. She even tried napping—something she decidedly did not do. But nothing could keep her mind from the racing questions about what was going on with Kara, where they had taken her, whether she would ever recover from this—not just physically but emotionally. She knew Kara, the kind of woman she was, and to see coverage of herself nearly killing so many people—not quite innocent ones, but people nonetheless—Cat wasn’t sure she would be able to don the costume again.

A subdued Kara reappeared at the staff briefing the next day, and Cat couldn’t help but notice the four pens in a row that Kara broke as staffer after staffer repeated to Cat that she needed to come out against Supergirl if she wanted to salvage her image, salvage any sense of her as a public figure with an ounce of wisdom.

“You should.” Kara’s voice was rough, like she’d been up all night crying. “She doesn’t deserve
your support anymore.”

Cat could hear the sound of her own heartbeat thundering in her ears, and her gaze darted along the table at the faces of everyone waiting to hear her response. For once in her life, she didn’t know what to say, didn’t have twelve points already lined up and ready to fire off.

Alex saved her from having to come up with one. “I’d hold off.”

“Why?” Kara spat back with a level of venom that Cat hadn’t heard outside of her time under the influence of whatever drug it was that had caused the behavior in the first place.

Alex’s tone was measured, but it brokered no disagreement. “Because I have arranged a few media appearances that should happen before Cat says anything about it.” Alex raised her eyebrows and shot Kara a pointed look that told Cat she definitely wasn’t privy to the entirety of those conversations.

“Cat’s losing credibility with every hour that goes by without saying something.”

“Kara.”

Cat cleared her throat, unwilling to cede control of the whole meeting now that half of her staffers were more taken by the sister drama than the issue at hand. “Alex, you’ll see me after the meeting to explain your plan. For now, we can still seize on the momentum of all the bad publicity Max has gotten since the exposé and the fire.” Cat swore she saw something like rage flicker across Alex’s features before they were smoothed back down.

Maggie chimed in then. “He’s trying to spin the fire into something that will win him points with the anti-Supergirl angle, but I, uh, heard rumors he might have been using unsafe chemicals, and to keep his team working in hazardous conditions without any contingency plan…”

“I have to go.” Alex threw her notebook in her bag and raced out the door, phone already in hand.

By the time Maggie found Alex back in her room, having been sent by Cat to bring Alex back for their meeting, she was already halfway through a conversation. “This is Max! He doesn’t just forget things.” A beat. “It was intentional. He fucking lured her there,” Alex hissed. “I’ll have my people try to hack the security feeds… I’d bet good money things like smoke detectors were disconnected.”

“Alex,” Maggie murmured.

“I have to go. No, just…you keep it up on your end. Talk to you later.”

“What’s going on?”

“Nothing.”

“Alex…”

“Look, it’s better if you don’t know—safer this way.”

“Cat wants to know when you’re getting back to her.”

“Tell her that there’s going to be a press conference about Supergirl tomorrow. She needs to wait until that has ended and then give people a few hours to respond.”

“I’m not your assistant. You know that, right?” Maggie grumbled.
At that, Alex finally glanced up from her phone. “Sorry. I just—I don’t—I need Kara and Cat both to survive this.”

“I get it. Just, you know, a please would be appreciated.”

Abashed, Alex looked at Maggie through long eyelashes. “What if I offered a please, a preemptive thank you, and a promise for one very long night spent making it up to you when this is all over?”

Maggie pretended to contemplate the options, rubbing at her chin until her mouth split into a wide grin. “I think I can agree to those terms.”

“In that case, would you please tell Cat what’s going on? I have a few calls to make, then I’ll be out in meetings all day, but I’ll keep her updated if there’s anything that she needs to know. For now, though, it’s better that she’s in the dark.”

“I’m sure she’ll love that…”

“Thank you, dear!” Alex called at Maggie’s retreating form.

With a heavy sigh, Maggie forced herself down the hallway and toward the elevators, already bracing herself to deal with the brunt of Cat’s annoyance at not having a better update. She watched as the floors ticked by and couldn’t help but wonder how the number 13 had acquired enough power as to dictate numbering systems. By the time she made it back to the level with the conference room they’d booked, she decided that Alex owed her more than a night for her troubles. With a quick nod to Vasquez, who had relaxed from her usual ramrod straight posture to lean against the wall by the door, Maggie slipped inside.

“Maggie!” Cat announced, and Maggie’s eyes caught the flutter of movement as Kara dropped Cat’s hands and nearly tipped her chair over in her haste to distance herself. Kara’s cheeks were streaked with tears, and Maggie couldn’t help but notice the smudge of berry-colored lipstick on her cheek.

Trying to keep her expression neutral, Maggie cleared her throat. “Alex, uh, she wanted me to let you know that she has a meeting all afternoon, but she’ll keep you updated. She asked that you wait until after the press conference that’s being convened tomorrow to make your announcement.”

“Very well. Tell her any additional updates must come from her and only from her.”

“Right. Got it. Um, if there’s nothing else?”

Cat dismissed her with a flick of her wrist, but before Maggie had made it even a few feet out the door, Kara was at her side, redirecting her into another room that was blessedly empty. Though, Maggie reasoned, it probably wasn’t luck and more that x-ray vision she heard Supergirl had. For a moment her thoughts strayed to a certain drawer in her apartment, and she felt blood rush to her cheeks until she remembered that Kara had only been over to her place once or twice, and for now, that particular drawer hadn’t yet migrated to Alex’s.

“Look, uh, about what you saw, it was—it was nothing.”

Maggie held up her hands. “I never said it was something.”

“I know. It’s just, you know, I wouldn’t want you to get the wrong idea or anything.”

“I’m sure you’re dealing with a lot right now after”—Maggie considered her words, finally opting for vagueness, figuring Alex would have filled Kara in overnight—“everything.”
“Right. And I—I appreciate your not saying anything. I’m sorry I didn’t—”

“No need for apologies,” Maggie interjected. “I get it. It’s about safety and protecting yourself.”

“Yeah. But still.” Kara shrugged, her eyes flitting between her shoes and her hands and the wall behind Maggie. “Thank you.”

“Of course.” As Kara turned to leave, Maggie reached out a hand. “You, uh, you’ve got a little lipstick on your cheek.”

“Oh! Guess I was, you know, little rushed getting ready this morning.”

“I don’t think that line’s gonna fly with the press, so just…for both of your sakes, be careful.”

“Maggie.” Kara’s voice cracked, and Maggie watched as the woman who could fly and lift planes and stop bullets folded in on herself, all the defenses she had built up so high crumbling around her.

“Hey, hey, it’s okay,” Maggie assured her, letting instinct prevail over awkwardness as she opened her arms and wrapped them around Kara, feeling sobs wrack through her powerful body.

“Please, please don’t tell Alex.”

Maggie took a deep breath and tried to remember that Alex had kept something from her at Kara’s behest. Sure, they weren’t quite the same thing, and she didn’t really have the same relationship with Kara that Alex did, but it had to count for something. “It’s not my place to say.”

“I just—she won’t—she’ll think I’m being stupid,” Kara hiccupped between soft sobs.

Maggie bit her tongue and didn’t point out that Vasquez wasn’t stopping people from their own team, that anyone from the campaign could have caught them in the conference room, and that it was, in fact, rather ill-advised.

“I’m not stupid.” The fierceness in Kara’s expression suggested that Maggie wasn’t quite as subtle in her looks as she had hoped.

“You…” Maggie trailed off, wondering why she was even doing it. “You look like you could use someone to talk to, if you ever want or need someone who already knows or whatever…I’m around.”

“You’d do that?”

“I think you need it.”

Neither of them pointed out that it wasn’t quite an answer, just like neither of them said anything when Kara followed Maggie and traipsed down to her room, slipping in behind her after sending a quick message on her phone—to Cat, Maggie had to assume.

“So…um, do you want a snack or something?”

“I’m okay.”

“Okay.”

They stood in silence for several long minutes until Maggie kicked off her shoes and plopped down on the bed that had gone untouched and unused the whole trip, patting the spot next to her. After a moment’s hesitation, Kara followed.
“You’re um…you’re not scared to be next to me after—after, you know, are you? If you are, I get it.”

“That what had you crying in the conference room with Cat?”

Kara nodded.

“I’m not scared. First of all, you weren’t yourself, and your sister is going to make sure the person who did this to you can never do it again. Second”—Maggie held up a second finger—“you’re still the Kara Danvers who’s been nice to me since day one. Don’t know if you recall, but, uh, your sister and I didn’t exactly get off on the right foot.”

“Understatement,” Kara snorted.

“Point is, I don’t scare easy. And yeah, what you did—it’s not really in keeping with the whole Super brand thing, but you were still standing up for people. You were still protecting others, making sure that they were safe.”

“Yeah, but at someone else’s expense.”

Maggie shrugged. “I’m not saying what you did was good. I’m just pointing out that you didn’t go attacking random people with no cause. Even with some drug that was supposed to turn you into a villain…you were still a hero to some people who never thought they’d have one.”

Kara turned away from Maggie to wipe roughly at her eyes before shifting her attention back to her.

“You’re pretty good at this thing, you know?”

“Yeah…yeah, I’ve learned a few things over the years.”

“I’m glad Alex has you.”

Maggie shrugged away the compliment. “Much as I appreciate the kind words, I don’t want you to deflect if you need to talk about your own, uh, relationship stuff.”

“It’s…complicated.”

“Yeah,” Maggie sighed. “Yeah, I imagine it is.”

“She’s amazing, you know?”

“She is pretty impressive.”

“And I get that she can be hard to work with, but there’s this side of her—like…like when she’s passionate about something, she throws herself into it—no hesitation. But she can be quiet and caring with Carter, even if she’s not into pitching that as her image to the press. Rao, she’s brilliant too.”

Maggie bit back a smile at the way Kara seemed to be losing herself in her words. “And she cares—like, she actually cares about people, even when she wants us to think she doesn’t. Right, she’s probably not the person you want taking care of you if you have the flu unless you’re Carter, but she genuinely wants to make things better for people.”

“You know”—Maggie nudged Kara’s shoulder with her own—“I did join her presidential campaign team for a reason.”

“Right.” Kara’s cheeks flushed a faint shade of pink. “But this—this was all years ago that I started realizing these things about her. Back when she was running for governor.”
“And then, what? Being back with her brought it all up again and then something happened?”

Kara ducked her head and chewed at her lower lip.

“Oh.” Maggie took a deep breath. “Is this not new?”

“It… it was one time then.”

“And were you… were you okay with it? I have to ask,” she added.

“I was the one that started it,” Kara admitted. “Cat won the election, and we’d had this big party—neither of us were drunk, though. She was too busy accepting congratulations, and I, well, nothing on this planet gets me drunk.” Maggie filed that information away for later, wondering if they might need to make a trip back to some of the mixed-species bars she’d gotten to know over the years from dating aliens and looking for spaces where they could both feel safe. “It was after everyone had left, and we were up in her office, and I kissed her.”

“And then…?”

“Things were, um, you know…” Kara trailed off, gesturing meaninglessly with her hands. “But someone came back up, we heard a noise, and she sent me home. Then—then she didn’t invite me to stay on and work for her.”

“Shit.”

“Right?” Kara let out a humorless laugh. “We’ve talked about it a lot since then. Basically back then I was her assistant, even though by the end I was doing a lot more than that. She thought I deserved to go work somewhere better where people wouldn’t always know me as Cat’s assistant, where I could grow without being tied to her.”

“Still, it must have hurt.”

“Oh, it did. For years I hated her for it, even though… even though I never got over her either.”

“That long?” Maggie shifted to face Kara head-on.

“I tried dating here and there, you know. I thought about seeing if James would want to try again, but that felt like using him. I went out on dates with guys I met online and stuff, but nothing ever clicked. No one made me feel the way she had.” Maggie nodded and motioned for Kara to continue. “Anyway, I got a new job—a better job—and worked my way up in Washington. And… in the end, Cat had been right.”

“Sure she’d love to hear you say that.”

“Oh she does,” Kara said with a laugh. “But then I came back, and things were a little, I don’t know, intense. But it sort of felt like maybe it was over—like we’d cleared the air so that we could both move on. Only then feelings that had always been there but had sort of dulled over the years came roaring back, and next thing I know we’re up in her hotel room and then”—Kara gestured around them—“here we are.”

“Wow.”

“Yep.” Kara pursed her lips and pulled at the sleeves of her sweater.

“Does Alex know about the kiss from all those years ago?”
“No! No, I don’t think she’d have ever believed it wasn’t Cat taking advantage of me or something, especially since—well, after, I wasn’t totally in the best place for a little while.”

“Understandable.”

“And now…I told Alex about the crush, but she sort of laughed and said she felt bad for me because it was so impossible—the idea that anything might happen. And now it’s her job to keep there from being big scandals, and here I am, the biggest freaking scandal ever just waiting to blow up in Cat’s face.”

“I don’t really have good advice. I mean, I guess, could you end it for a little while?” Kara looked distraught, and Maggie scrambled for a way to diffuse the tension. “What? The, uh, the sex that good?”

Kara let out an indignant squeak and crossed her arms over her chest. “I…” But as waves of memories rushed over her, the show of moral outrage gave way into something more like embarrassment as Kara shoved her glasses up her nose. “Okay, fine, but that’s not the point!”

“Are you two…dating?”

“I mean, we do a lot of meals together with work, and I hang out with her and Carter on the weekends, and sometimes we don’t even—nothing really happens sometimes, but it’s still the best part of my day.”

“Oh wow, okay.” Maggie slowly bobbed her head up and down as she tried to think of what to say. “That’s—you’re in pretty deep, huh?”

“I…I think I love her, Maggie.”

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“Ma’am, you can’t go down that hall!” The security guard’s voice boomed through the cavernous lobby of Lord Technologies.

“FBI.” Alex flashed a fake badge” We’re here to investigate the reports of possible sabotage that resulted in the fire.”

“Oh.” The guard looked over his shoulder and, spotting no one else there to ask or corroborate the story thanks to a few “emergencies” called in by various DEO agents that required their immediate attention, he shuffled forward and glanced at the badge.

With a pitying smile in his direction, Alex inched the forged badge back. “Perhaps I should speak to your supervisor…they would have known about the investigation.”

“No, no, now I remember. Right, you, uh, right this way, ma’am. Er, agent.” The security guard led them toward a hallway and gestured to a door at the far end of the hall to their right.

The second they were out of earshot, Lena turned to Alex. “You’re FBI?”

Alex folded up her badge and tucked it into her back pocket. “What’s important for you to remember is that I could be.”

As soon as Alex received confirmation that the hallway’s security cameras were looping from one of the DEO’s more tech-oriented aliens who had agreed to help off the books in exchange for a pair of Hamilton tickets, she motioned for Lena to follow her.
Once they made it into the half-charred lab, Alex got to work snapping photos while Lena pulled out a kit from her bag and began swabbing various surfaces to test for the chemicals she knew had been in Lex’s original designs, then bagged up some of the charcoal to test for any other accelerants back at L-Corp.

Before they could make it any further, a yell startled them. “You’re not supposed to be back here!”

“Like I said, we’re here investigating claims.”

“I checked in with Mr. Lord. He said he didn’t make any reports.”

One side of Alex’s mouth curled upwards. “No one said he was the one making accusations.” In a flurry of movement that Lena could barely follow, Alex swung forward and knocked the guard unconscious before dragging Lena out of the lab and back down the path they had taken. “Hurry, he’ll have backup on the way.”

They didn’t stop when they got to the parking lot, and Alex sped them a few miles out before looping back to the shopping center where they’d left Lena’s car.

“You’ll call me if you get any positive results?”

Lena nodded, patting the bag full of samples. “And you’ll let me know if you can trace any of those recent investors into Lord Tech?”

“Or the campaign,” Alex muttered.

“Right. Well, tomorrow we’re going live regardless.”

“I’ll be watching.”

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As the minutes until the press conference ticked by, the team grew increasingly agitated. Alex paced, sending rapid-fire text messages to Lena requesting updates. Kara drummed her fingers against the table until it began cracking beneath the incessant pressure, then dropped back down next to Cat leaving enough space to appear appropriate. Cat sat in complete silence, her knuckles white from the tight grip on her phone and her eyes focused on the screen without watching it. Maggie picked at a loose thread in the stuffed chair and tried to pretend like she didn’t know exactly what was going on between Cat and Kara. Part of her wished she had stayed with the rest of the researchers to watch it down in the conference room, or even over in James’ hotel room with him and Winn—anything to escape the tension.

When the cameras swept over the pavilion behind L-Corp, they all froze.

The opening pleasantries seemed to drag on, even though they couldn’t have lasted for more than a few sentences before Lena was looking down and swallowing heavily—the perfect television-ready segue. “I think I speak for all of us when I say that it hurts to see a hero fall from grace. It hurts when the people we’ve come to look up to, to trust, fall from the pedestals we’ve built for them.” A murmur of assent rippled through the gathered crowds. “For many of you, these past few days have seemed to be about the fall of Supergirl. But for me, this experience of seeing a personal hero fall is nothing new.” She took a sip of water before continuing. “The whole world seemed to watch as my brother Lex slipped further and further away from the man he once was, the man I thought I knew him to be. I don’t bring him up only to make a comparison, though. I bring him up because we need to talk about Lex when we talk about what happened to Supergirl.”
“What…?” Cat trailed off, unsure of what to think, though Alex was still nodding along at the screen.

“When coverage first began breaking, I recognized the effects of a synthetic compound Lex engineered in the final months before he was captured by the authorities. This compound was designed to turn heroes into villains, to bring out the absolute worst impulses there are. But when the antidote was administered, I had the joy of watching Supergirl return.” Cat glanced over at Kara, who gave the slightest shake of her head. “And after testing residue from Supergirl’s known whereabouts, I have been able to confirm that she was exposed to this chemical, that someone out there who helped to make my brother into the man he became is back at it again.” Even with the mics trained firmly on Lena, the gasp from the crowd made it through the television speakers. “It might hurt to watch our heroes fall, but it hurts me even more knowing that Supergirl didn’t have a choice. I will be working closely with the authorities for as long as it takes to track down the person responsible, the kind of person that would drug someone as good-hearted and kind enough as Supergirl. I will ensure that justice is served and see to it that Lex’s inventions stay in the past where they belong.”

What began as a smattering of applause slowly built up into a cheer, and while the crowd clapped, Lena motioned to someone off-camera. A long line of individuals traipsed up the stairs and onto the stage, forming a half-circle behind Lena.

“These are just a few of the many people Supergirl saved during the months she’s been working to keep us safe. These are just a few of the lives that have been allowed to continue because we had aliens like Supergirl here to intervene when our own technology wasn’t enough.”

Cat longed to reach out to Kara at the sight of tears streaming down her cheeks, but she clasped her hands together in her lap instead.

“I would hope that our politicians could see the good that our fellow citizens have done. I would hope that they could respect and honor that difference, instead of using it as an excuse for bullying and bigotry. I want someone who will honor President Marsdin’s legacy of progress and acceptance. And for that reason, I am publicly announcing my support for Cat Grant, a candidate who has been unequivocal in her support of alien rights and non-discrimination policies. Thank you.”

Cat turned to Alex. “Did you know that was coming?”

“Most of it. One or two parts were still moving until a few minutes ago.”

“I…” Cat seemed to fumble over her words for a moment as she processed the good being done not only for her campaign, but for Supergirl, for Kara. “Well done.” Alex nodded, the full meaning of Cat’s words left unspoken.

“Thank you,” Kara whispered, tears slowly drying on her cheeks as she looked at the screen, cameras still panning over the crowds gathered, the people whose faces she still recognized from the plane or accidents or fires.

Alex squeezed Kara’s hand. “Always.”
“Cat!” Not caring about how rare it was that Cat actually managed to fall asleep on a flight, Kara tapped on her shoulder.

“This had better be damn important.” A bleary-eyed Cat straightened in her seat, glancing out the window to see if perhaps the plane was going down and Kara needed to make a quick exit as Supergirl.

“You’ll want to see it before we land.”

“Very well.” Before Cat could reach for her glasses, Kara had them in front of her, along with some news article pulled up on her phone. Cat read the headline three times before she believed it.

Mistaking Cat’s silence for a lack of excitement, Kara pressed. “I know it’s not a formal endorsement, but still…Cat, this is huge.”

“Yes, I’m aware.” She blinked once more at the story in front of her. “Pres. Marsdin on Supergirl and Presidential Politics: ‘I’m glad to see we still have politicians with faith in our heroes.’” It wasn’t a headline Cat would have let see the light of day, but to garner the implicit support of the sitting president before the primaries was almost unheard of, and the fact that it came right alongside a wave of restored faith in Supergirl thanks to Lena Luthor’s good will tour only made it better. “Well this…this will play well.”

“I’m not saying you should start calling the victories, but it’s kinda nice to know that the freakin president likes you best.”

Cat felt her breath catch in her throat slightly at a few of the memories of their days at Radcliffe together, but she shoved that thought down; Olivia supported her because she was the best candidate, not for any other reason. And besides, Justin had his old boys network with plenty of governors and senators shoving each other out of the way to be the first to throw their support to him and garner favor with his family and his financial backers.

Cat tuned back in to find Kara brainstorming about ways to seize on the momentum, already drafting countless emails to James, who had been sent back to DC with Alex and most of the researchers to finalize the plans for their media push in the weeks leading up to the first few primaries.

Kara furrowed her brow, concern etched in her features. “Are you feeling okay?”

“Fine—just fine.”

“Are you, um, is it about any of the…” Kara gestured between them. “I know we didn’t get a ton of time to talk.” In fact, it had been well over a week, and they still hadn’t talked about certain things—a fact that was starting to eat away at Kara.

Cat gave Kara a sharp glare. “When we’re settled in at the hotel tonight we can discuss the issues.”

“Right.” Kara sank back into her seat and chewed on the inside of her cheek. They had talked about the things Kara said and did while under the influence of whatever drug that was, and Cat had seemed to understand, to assure Kara that nothing had been unwanted and that the criticisms, while painful to hear, had not been earth-shattering. But there was the whole matter of Maggie’s interruption that had gone undiscussed. Each time they were alone together, Kara felt the weight of it hanging over them. Cat barely came near her, even to look at articles or documents, and she hadn’t
kissed her since the chaste peck on the cheek she got after she broke down in the conference room.

At first she’d tried to believe it was simply nerves—anxiety about the fast-approaching primaries and the increasingly virulent attack ads and the months of travel they had ahead of them with only a few days when she’d be able to see Carter—but as time wore on, Kara suspected she was a bigger part of the problem than she’d wanted to believe.

“Good work with spinning all of this.”

Kara shrugged, not feeling up to the unearned praise. “This one was all Alex.”

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“Coffee.” Maggie deposited a large mug in front of Alex, but pulled it back a few inches when she reached for it. “Only if you eat the sandwich too.”

“Yeah…yeah, fine.” Alex made a grab behind her for the offered food, but with her attention still trained on the screens in front of her, she missed entirely, swiping at the front of Maggie’s shirt.

“Ya know, normally I prefer a girl to look at me when she gropes me.”

Alex rubbed at the back of her neck as she spun her chair around. “Sorry. I’m just—”

“Working. I know.” Maggie looked around at the cavernous basement rooms of the DEO that had become Alex’s second home since they returned from California. Between long phone calls with Lena and even longer days and nights spent following money trails and working with trusted DEO agents to try to hack into security feeds and track chemical signatures, it felt like they hadn’t seen each other in ages.

“Right.”

“But working doesn’t have to mean starvation and total sleep deprivation.”

“I know, but”—Alex cast a glance around the room and lowered her voice even more—“I think we’re finally getting somewhere.”

“Want to talk it out with me?”

“It’s not—it’s nothing solid yet, but Lena thinks she found someone who would have had access to all of Lex’s old research, who was even there for some of the trials.”

“Wait, it’s not Max?”

With a large bite of sandwich in her mouth, Alex made do with a shake of her head.

“I thought that’s what you had said earlier.”

“That’s what I thought at first,” Alex mumbled from behind her hand, pulling it back only once she had swallowed down the too large bite. “And there is definitely proof that he had the chemicals needed to make this…this red kryptonite in his lab and that he had disabled smoke detectors in the room where all of it was—basically making it impossible for the firefighters to get there on time and ensuring Supergirl would have to intervene.”

“Okay…but how did he know about this fake kryptonite thing if he wasn’t working with Lex?”

“He was fed the information.”
“And you know by whom?”

“Lena thinks she does. And, well, it lines up.”

“Can you tell me? If not, I get it.”

“No, it’s not that. I—of course I trust you. I don’t want to keep things from you. Not again.”

Guilt churned in Maggie’s stomach, but she forced herself to smile when Alex pulled a chair over for her and began whispering as she went through the stack of files on the desk.

“I don’t know how much of Lex’s trial you watched, but there was one person who seemed devastated—not because of how much he had changed or how many people he hurt, but because he was being put in jail.”

Maggie tried to think back; it had been years ago, and even though she’d watched the trials—along with what felt like every other person in the country—she couldn’t recall specific people.

“She Lillian Luthor. His mother.”

“Shit. But would she…?”

“Lena thinks so. And she’s got money hidden everywhere, Mags. I’m talking buy-your-own-island levels of money.”

“Wow.”

“Right? And, well, for Lena the idea that Lillian fed all those plans and information to Max seems to be bad enough. And it is bad! But I think…I think it’s more than just trying to get Max to make this drug. That whole family is smart—brilliant, even. If she’s after something, it’s a long game.”

“I’m guessing you have suspicions?”

“I’m just saying, I think she has more to gain by buying the next president than by making Supergirl look bad.”

“Do you mean Max?”

“Look, Dirk is a cowardly little man. He and Cat never really lined up on policies too much, but he never had the backbone to challenge her before.”

“But his nephew got fired.”

“Eh.” Alex shrugged her shoulders. “Long term, that’s not a big deal.” She sifted through the stack of files and pulled out a few, lining them up in front of her and pulling out a few of the financial statements she’d managed to procure. “But suddenly he’s got more money than he ever gave to Cat just lying around ready to bankroll some new candidate who shouldn’t really have had a shot—not up against a legacy like Kennedy and a pretty successful former governor like Cat.”

“So what are you saying?”

“I don’t—I’m not sure exactly. Not yet. But I know if I keep digging eventually I’ll get something.”

“I get it, I do. But time away from work is important too, Alex.”

“I’ll get to bed at a normal hour tonight, I promise.”
“Okay…” Maggie laced her fingers together and tried to figure out how to articulate her concerns without making Alex feel guilty. “I…we haven’t really, you know, seen each other…not since New Year’s Eve.”

“What do you mean? We see each other every day.”

Maggie pinched at the bridge of her nose. “That’s not really what I meant. I’m talking about the two of us.”

“Oh. Oh!”

“And it’s not like you owe me anything or we have to spend time together, but, you know, I kind of miss my girlfriend.”

“Fuck, I—I’m not—this is still kind of new to me, the whole balancing thing.”

“No, I get it! Trust me. It’s just been a while, that’s all. Maybe we could do dinner this week?”

“Oh god, and I had even promised to make all this up to you back then.”

“Really, it’s okay. We both knew what was coming this time of year. And”—Maggie chuckled darkly as she gestured at the stacks of files and the large monitors—“some of this we could never have predicted.”

“Okay, tomorrow night: you and me. No phones or computers. Dinner at my place—I’ll take care of everything.”

“I think that sounds wonderful.” Maggie punctuated her words with soft kisses, finally pulling back with a squeeze of Alex’s hand.

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“Oh.” Kara swallowed down the wave of nausea that hit her.

“I’m not saying it’s your fault.” Kara stumbled back another step. “This isn’t a choice I take lightly or even one enjoy making. But I think we both know it has to be made.” Cat’s fingers trembled ever so slightly as she gripped at the edge of the bureau in her hotel room, her head bowed so she didn’t have to see the pained look she just knew would be reflected back at her in Kara’s eyes.

“Right, yeah, of course.”

“Kara,” Cat sighed. “If you were working for someone else—anyone else—and you found out that in the midst of the biggest election of their life, they were screwing one of their staffers, what would you do?”

Kara winced at Cat’s phrasing, but she schooled her features into a mask of professionalism, as though it didn’t feel like her whole world was being ripped out from under her when apparently all Cat was giving up was sex—some tawdry, illicit, campaign-ending affair. “I don’t know. It would depend on the circumstances.”

“Bullshit.” Cat finally spun around at that. “You would quit if they didn’t end it. No one wants to throw away their life for someone who can’t keep it in their pants.” Her voice dripped with venom, and Kara shrank back.

“What if…what if it wasn’t just about sex?”
Kara could see the muscles working in Cat’s jaw, but after a few moments of uncertainty, her expression hardened once more. “Then they ended up in the wrong career.”

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Kara spent the rest of the night in her hotel room wishing she could explain even a word of it to Alex and let her big sister hold her and tell her it would all be okay. After an hour or two, Kara pulled out her phone and texted Maggie. “Are you awake?”

The response was almost instant. “Yeah. Everything ok? I’m at home, but I can be in the office in 30.”

“No! No, um…I just thought you should know that the thing that you knew about? It’s over.”

The three bubbles appeared and disappeared and reappeared again several times until Kara’s phone vibrated with an incoming call. “Hello?” She hoped she didn’t sound like she’d spent the past hour crying.

“Hey.” Maggie’s voice was soft, and even though she wasn’t Alex, Kara couldn’t help but feel comforted. “How are you?”

“Honestly? Not so good, Maggie.”

“I’m guessing it wasn’t a mutual decision, huh?”

Kara sniffed and shook her head. “I…part of me thinks maybe she didn’t want to either. But she—she said it was best for the campaign.”

Maggie was quiet for a long time, and Kara feared she had lost her until she heard the sigh. “I think we both know there’s some reason in there. But, Kara, did she say it could never happen?”

“No.”

“What about her feelings? Did she say anything about them?”

“Not really. I don’t know, something about it being the wrong career for love.”

Maggie chuckled. “It can be a little brutal, I suppose. But, Kara, this might be a good thing. It might not feel like it, but it means Cat doesn’t want to keep you hidden or something like that.”

“Maybe…”

“You gonna be okay tonight?”

“Yeah. I just…I wanted someone I could talk to, and, well, you’re kind of the only one.”

“See—the way things were now, they weren’t sustainable. Could you really have gone forever without talking to your sister about this?”

Kara considered it, finally conceding, “No, probably not.”

“And you were the first to say that Alex would not have gotten behind what was going on, especially not when it was all hush-hush.”

“I know.”
“So maybe long run, if you’re ever going to try again, this might be a good thing.”

“Why do you have to be so rational about it?” Kara whined.

“Because it’s what you need to hear right now.”

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It wasn’t until they were in Wisconsin for the final debate before the Iowa caucuses that Cat’s resolve nearly broke. With less than two weeks between the debate and the first night of the primaries, everyone was on edge. Her researchers were all throwing out different angles and policies she “needed” to emphasize that night, each of them convinced that their issue would be the determining factor for an early win in the primary season. Her publicity team wanted sound bites and social media-ready photographs that dragged her away from debate prep. Winn asked to go over polling data he’d aggregated from all the previous debates to talk about where she fell short compared to other candidates. And all Cat wanted was to send them back to their rooms so that she could take a few goddam minutes to herself before she had to go smile and act gracious on live television in front of three men who’d seized upon every moment of weakness she had and tried to tear her down time and time again.

“Everyone out!” Kara yelled over the incessant chatter.

The shocked silence lasted for a few moments until they were all calling out questions to Kara instead of Cat.

“Unless it is something you have not already said, it can wait until after the debate.” Kara’s voice was firm, more Supergirl than Kara Danvers, and slowly but surely the staffers began trickling out of the meeting space attached to Cat’s hotel room until the only other people left were Alex and Winn.

“I still have those numbers you requested.” Winn slipped the hard copy of the file in front of Cat and backed away until he received the nod dismissing him.

“I’m letting you know there will be two new attack ads against Kennedy and Lord that run tonight.” Cat arched an eyebrow at Alex. “Did I authorize them?”

“Not from us. From a super PAC.”

“Not that we have any communication with them, right?”

“Of course not. Lucy would never let that happen. I simply heard rumors and managed to find a few people I knew from television who were…persuaded to confirm those rumors.”

“I see. Any idea about the substance?”

Alex shrugged. “Obviously, since I’ve talked to no one, I can’t know with certainty, but I’d hazard a guess that Lord’s business dealings could come under closer scrutiny in the wake of that big exposé and the lab fire. And Kennedy’s family network, useful as it might be for pulling in money and support, has always been a liability if you know where to start pulling away the nice veneer.”

Cat hummed. “Anything else?”

“That’s all.”

“Very well.”
And with that, the room descended into silence as Cat sank down to the chair at the head of the table. Kara was by her side with an advil and a glass of water before she could even ask. “God, I don’t deserve you.”

“You pay me,” Kara teased, though it lacked its normal levity.

“Mm I pay a lot of people. You’re the one that always knows what I need to do my best. You’re the one that actually makes it happen.”

Kara’s fingers skimmed over Cat’s shoulder, leaving a burning trail even through the silk blouse, and the air between them seemed to crackle with possibility. “I told you from the start I would do what it took to get you where you need to be.”

“You’ve always gone above and beyond.” Kara’s heart thundered at the breathy quality Cat’s voice had taken on.

“Is there…is there anything else you need to get ready?”

Cat’s eyes were dark with lust by the time she turned around to face Kara. “You—you should go.”

It took every ounce of self-control Kara had to pry herself away, to make herself leave the side of the woman she knew now, more than ever, she had fallen in love with. Every step back to her room echoed with the sounds of Cat’s ragged breathing. She fumbled with her room key at the sound of clothing being shuffled off and fingers sliding through slick heat. She dug her nails into her thighs to keep from slipping back into Cat’s room to help at the frustrated sighs and needy whimpers that she couldn’t make herself stop hearing. Her fingers splintered the wood of her nightstand at the sound of Cat’s low groan of satisfaction, and Kara fell back against the mattress breathing just as heavily as if she’d been the one coming hard.

When she came back to get Cat later that evening for the debate, she could barely hold eye contact, and the faint pink blush on Cat’s cheeks suggested she realized just how well that super-hearing worked. But then Alex and James and Winn were pouring into the room, and Cat snapped to attention. It was her last chance to speak to a national audience before Iowa, and dammit, she wasn’t about to waste that opportunity.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Very nsfw start to the chapter!

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hey! I super appreciate the engagement with the story in the comments and in messages/asks on Tumblr, but just as a note, realistic as it might be to many of the nuances of political and campaign life, it’s also still fiction. In this universe, the 2016 election was won by a woman (Olivia Marsdin) and one who championed rights of immigrants from everywhere, including other planets. So not everything is going to read like it would in the current political climate. Also, uh, I really adore the optimism about the ethics of politics, but as someone who spent several years working on the Hill in between school and a return to academia...there are a whole lot of elected officials and candidates sleeping with/dating staffers. Some pay for it (Edwards, Clinton to an extent), but there are plenty where it’s just one of those open secrets in DC but they vote for the right things and have backing by the right people. All of which is to say...we’re *not* going full Shondaland Scandal-level drama with a married president fathering children with his wife and sleeping with a fixer on the side, but a little drama in fiction isn’t the worst thing.
Anyway, hope you enjoy!

“Are you sure?” Maggie asked, her voice slightly breathless as Alex’s fingers stroked up and across her ribs, then came to rest below her breasts, her thumb teasing at Maggie’s nipples until they hardened under her soft touch.

“I trust you.” Alex hoped Maggie couldn’t hear the nervous tremor to her voice. “Please.”

Maggie couldn’t quite help the way her hips jerked forward into Alex’s at that before she rolled over and off the bed, pulling open the lower drawer in her nightstand and motioning for Alex to come join her. “Do you have any thoughts about what you’re interested in trying?”

Perched on the edge of the bed, Alex peered over at the contents of the drawer and tried to appear calm, like the idea of Maggie using any of the wide variety of colorful silicone toys spread out in front of her didn’t make her heart rate skyrocket or send a jolt of heat straight between her legs. “I don’t, um—do you...?”

“Oh, shit, I’m sorry. I just assumed you knew—”

“No, no!” The last thing Alex wanted was for Maggie to think she was completely naïve about everything. “I, you know, came across most of these...things in my, uh, research.”

Maggie’s lips curved up into a teasing grin. “Oh yeah? You want to tell me what you were researching?” Alex’s cheeks flushed a deep shade of red, and Maggie chuckled. “Is this my
confirmation that the great Alex Danvers watched porn?”

“I did no such thing!” Alex crossed her arms over her chest, and Maggie fought to keep her gaze up on Alex’s face, resisting the temptation to appreciate the way her posture accentuated her cleavage, though maybe if she just… A huff of annoyance broke Maggie out of her trance. “It might have popped up, but that doesn’t mean I watched it.”

“Okay, and that’s fine. You know I wasn’t judging you, right?”

Wide-eyed, Alex looked up at Maggie. “Does that mean…uh, do you?”

Maggie shrugged and pulled herself back up onto the bed. “Not often.” After a beat she added, “Not recently. But you know how busy life in politics can get. I endured quite a few years of chronic singledom.”

“Right. Yeah, right, of course.”

“You okay?”

“And did you want to wear it or me?”

Alex spluttered, nearly throwing the toy at Maggie in her haste to answer. “You! I don’t—I wouldn’t know how to, you know.”

“Okay. That’s good with me, but if one day you want to try…”

“Okay.” But Maggie didn’t immediately put the harness on, instead hanging it off the edge of the nightstand and guiding Alex back down to the mattress.

“Did you—”

“In a few minutes. Foreplay still matters.”

Alex bit at her lower lip and nodded. “Right.”

But soon all embarrassment was washed away as Maggie’s lips found hers once more, easing her back into a rhythm she’d grown to love. She lost herself in the feel of Maggie’s tongue slipping between her lips, the weight of Maggie’s hips rolling into hers, the press of Maggie’s bare chest against her own. She let out a strangled moan as Maggie’s hand moved between their bodies, finding her wet and ready.
“Please,” Alex gasped as Maggie teased at her entrance—not enough, not nearly enough.

That was all it took for Maggie to pull herself up onto her knees and slide one finger inside, then a second when Alex’s hand grabbed at her wrist, pulling her in harder and deeper.

For a moment Alex wondered if she should be embarrassed about how quickly she could feel herself hurtling toward the edge, her thighs tensing and her walls clenching around Maggie’s fingers. But then Maggie’s soft, rasping voice was breaking through the fog. “Come for me.” And with one last thrust of Maggie’s fingers, Alex let herself give in, collapsing back down to the mattress with a breathy exhale as Maggie eased her down.

“I’m gonna go get ready, okay?”

Alex let out a hum of contentment as her eyes fluttered shut.

By the time Maggie got back, she found Alex asleep, her chest rising and falling in a slow, steady rhythm. Figuring it was needed after all the late nights at the DEO, Maggie slipped out of the harness and flicked off the lights before climbing into bed and curling herself around Alex.

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Alex pushed herself further back into Maggie as she felt Maggie’s arms tighten around her before freezing at the sight of the bright purple toy standing straight up on the nightstand. “I fell asleep on you, didn’t I?”

“Little bit.”

“Oh god…I feel like such a stereotypical straight dude right now. I came and passed out, and then you didn’t get to—”

“Danvers, you’re good.” Maggie pressed a kiss to the back of Alex’s neck. “I promise, I always have fun when I’m with you.” Her lips trailed down Alex’s neck, and Alex could feel heat already swirling low in her abdomen as her back arched into Maggie. She let out a gasp as Maggie’s hands found her chest, and she dropped one of her own hands back to Maggie’s ass, encouraging her to grind into her. “Fuck.”

“I…I should get back to the DEO.”

“You’ve been there everyday,” Maggie murmured, her voice muffled by Alex’s soft skin.

“It’s just, I’m so close—so close.” Alex explanation turned into a gasp as Maggie’s finger slid down her stomach, coming to rest in the short curls but stopping just shy of where Alex wanted her.

“Can’t it wait just a little longer?”

The low rumble of Maggie’s words against her skin was enough to have Alex spinning around in her arms, throwing a leg over Maggie’s hips, and grinding closer.

“Do you still want to try?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” Maggie pulled back. “I’m just gonna, you know, brush my teeth really fast and get ready.”

Within a few minutes, they were back in the bedroom, and Alex couldn’t decide how to react to the sight of her girlfriend with a brand new purple appendage jutting out from her hips, bouncing slightly
as she walked across the room.

“You can laugh, Danvers. Not everything has to be serious.”

“I mean…the leather is hot.” Alex’s gaze roved across the strips of leather holding everything together on Maggie’s hips, and her breath caught in her throat when Maggie turned enough to let her see her ass framed by it. “Fuck.”

“Oh I’m not questioning how good I look.” One corner of Maggie’s mouth curled up into a cocky smirk. “I’m just saying…I’ve got something brand new and electric purple. Sex is allowed to be a little silly too.”

“I just, I don’t want you to think that I’m laughing at you.”

“You’re good, Alex. I promise. You’re really, really perfect.”

“Shut up. Am not.”

Maggie grinned as she stepped forward, catching Alex’s hips between her hands and peppering her with kisses. “You’re pretty great.”

“So are you.”

“Well duh,” Maggie teased, stepping closer to kiss Alex more firmly.

“Hey!” Alex yelped as something cold and hard jabbed at her. “Oh.” And then she was snorting with laughter, dropping back down to the bed. Maggie followed closely behind, guiding her up to the pillows, even as her low laughter echoed through the bedroom.

“See. Fun is good. You can leave the serious sexy stuff for when I have you coming underneath me.”

Alex pulled her lower lip between her teeth and arched an eyebrow in challenge. “Yeah?”

“Oh definitely.” As Maggie reached over for the lube, she turned back, looking suddenly serious. “And if you don’t like it, we stop. You know that, yeah?”

“Yeah.” Alex dragged Maggie down for a long kiss. “You really are amazing, Maggie.”

“Yeah, well…”

“No, I’m serious. I—you’ve made all of this feel”—Alex flicked her hand aimlessly in the air, searching for words—“like it’s easy. With you everything…makes sense.”

“I feel the same way about you,” Maggie whispered.

“I just”—Alex took a deep breath and let out a shuddering exhale—“I love you.”

There was a moment of silence, and Maggie could feel her arms trembling slightly as she held herself up over Alex, the lube still clutched in one hand. “I—”

“You don’t have to feel obligated to say it too!” Alex squirmed underneath Maggie until Maggie dropped back to her heels, grabbing for Alex’s hand.

“I—I didn’t totally expect this to be the moment I said it.” A pink blush crept up Alex’s chest, and she crinkled her nose. “But I love you too, Alex.”
“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

And then suddenly they were kissing, and Alex let herself get lost in the sensation until her hips were bucking desperately up into Maggie’s. “I need you inside me.”

“What…?”

“This—this is good.” Alex fumbled with the lube in Maggie’s hand, pulling back from her lips only to glance down long enough to coat the dildo in what was probably more than enough if the copious wetness, sticky along her inner thighs, was any indication.

Maggie whimpered as Alex pushed the base up against her, then pulled back slightly before slowly sliding inside Alex, watching her face for any signs of discomfort.

“You’re good.” Alex assured her, tilting her hips up slightly, and biting her lower lip at the new angle. As Maggie built to a rhythm, rolling her hips forward, Alex’s hips canted up to meet her of their own accord. And she wasn’t sure if it was the fact that Maggie’s arms were both free to wrap around her and hold her close, her lips hot against Alex’s, or if it was the confirmation that Maggie loved her too, but warmth seemed to suffuse her chest at the sense of intimacy between them.

“What do you need?” Maggie dragged Alex’s lower lip between her teeth, and Alex’s breathy moans were the only reason she didn’t point out that Maggie wasn’t exactly giving her the time to answer.

“I don’t…deeper, maybe?”

Maggie nodded and reached up, slipping a pillow beneath Alex’s hips and encouraging her to wrap her legs around Maggie’s waist. When Maggie thrust forward again, Alex groaned, her short nails digging into Maggie’s hips. “Good—good. Keep going.”

Maggie let herself get lost in the feeling of Alex all around her: Alex’s heels digging into her back, Alex’s hands wrapped around her waist, Alex’s mouth hot against her neck. And then Alex was tensing and clutching her even closer, her hips stuttering until she came with a sharp cry.

As soon as Alex could string together a few words in a semi-coherent sentence, she blinked open her eyes and trailed a hand down Maggie’s chest. “We…we are definitely doing that again.”

---

The moment Cat got into the backseat of Vasquez’s waiting SUV in Concord, she let herself slump down into the seat. It had been a grueling week of travel as they did another sweep through the early southern states before flying up to New England to hit hard in and around New Hampshire in advance of their early primary election. And then, without a moment’s rest, they were off to Iowa for a final two days of stumping and rallying support for the caucuses that made Cat want to tear out her hair.

It didn’t help that she hadn’t been sleeping well. Without the familiarity of home and her routine with Carter, she’d grown to rely on the stress relief Kara provided. And in her weaker moments she could admit that it was so much more than the sex that she craved. There were the conversations—long rambling discussions as they imagined a world where she’d already won, a world where she might be free to roam about the White House and pretend to like bowling for Carter and sit behind that famous desk in the Oval Office as she worked on putting in place all those policies she’d spent months hammering out in grueling debates with teams of researchers. Of course, some of those
discussions, especially those that centered on her at that big wooden desk, often did lead into sex, and Cat was human enough to admit that she missed that too, missed the taste of Kara’s lips, the feel of Kara’s fingers, even the way that Kara curled around her at night, her body slightly warmer than a human’s, which suited Cat perfectly on those cold winter nights spent in the Midwest or the Northeast.

“Ma’am?”

“Hmm?” Cat forced herself to sit up straighter.

“Letting you know that we should be at the airport in about 45 minutes.”

“Got it.” And then it was right back into the seat for mental preparation and wondering how Kara was doing on the regular campaign bus.

---

Kara itched to go talk to Cat, to grab her and drag her to the side and show her the breaking news headlines. But these days she wasn’t sure if she was allowed to do so, wasn’t sure whether she should hand off her phone to James now that he was in Iowa too and let him do the honors. In the end she showed the news to James first, and he told her to grab Cat and meet him outside in the car the moment the Q&A ended at the Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

As the applause sounded, Kara rushed into the wings to grab Cat, motioning for her to follow.

“Kara,” Cat huffed. “I’m planning to get a bit more face time in with the very important constituents.” The last few words were nearly growled out.

“Trust me, you’ll want to see this first before you start fielding questions from people who have seen the news.”

That was enough to intrigue Cat, and she followed Kara outside to the waiting SUV, where James was already perched in the backseat, laptop on one side of him and tablet in his hands.

“Are you—?” Kara began, and James was already nodding. “Research team?”

“On it.”

“Is Winn—”

“Running the poll numbers for different kinds of statements.”

“Good.”

“Is someone going to fill me in on what is happening?” Cat snapped. Her patience, already wearing thin from lack of sleep, neared its breaking point.

“News just broke.” Kara offered her phone to Cat.

“Not Quite the Nanny… Fitness trainer comes forward with shocking allegations about her relationship with presidential hopeful Justin Kennedy.”

Cat thrust the phone back at Kara. “This isn’t news. This is…tawdry gossip at best.”

James shook his head, spinning his computer around. “Vox, AP, WaPo—they’ve all picked up on it. The Daily Planet claims to have gotten the woman to speak on the record.”
“And Kennedy?” Cat and Kara both turned to James.

“Still silent, and it broke over an hour ago less than 48 hours before the first primary.”

Cat whistled; silence on an issue like that might be acceptable months or maybe even weeks out, but this close…this close it seemed like confirmation.

A phone rang out in the silence. “Oh, it’s Alex.” Kara held up a hand as she answered. After a few minutes of terse questioning, she hung up. “Apparently it’s true.”

“Damn.”

“No.” Kara shook her head, pinching at the bridge of her nose. “That’s not the big news.”

Cat arched an eyebrow, motioning for her to continue.

“Apparently the story came from Max’s campaign—one of Alex’s sources swears to it.”

After a moment’s stunned silence, Cat let out a loud exhale. “So that’s the kind of campaign he’s running.”

“When he’s bankrolled by the man who tried to sink your campaign with blackmail, are you really surprised?”

Cat glared at Kara for a long minute before relenting with a shake of her head. “Do we think I’ve had my time in the spotlight, or should we be ready for a new personal attack tomorrow?”

“The smarter move would be to sink Kennedy first, then come for you,” James answered. “Make it clear that Kennedy can’t stand up to the scrutiny in these early primaries. He and Branch drop out. Then he saves whatever he has on Cat until it’s late enough that he looks legitimate as the next Democratic candidate.”

“Well fuck.”
Cat, Alex, James, and Kara sat in silence as Justin Kennedy stood stock still in the face of cameras flashing all around him, his face a touch paler than it usually was and his composure rattled in a way that would have pleased Cat under different circumstances. Cat knew his suit’s particular shade of navy would must been tested with too many focus groups to even imagine. She wondered whether anyone on her staff would have thought it worthwhile to try to salvage her own campaign if she’d been the one caught—and she didn’t even have a wife and young children at home. Kennedy’s wife stood beside him, soft pearls wrapped around her neck and her hand clutched tightly in his, only stepping back when he cleared his throat and pulled the microphone toward him.

“Good afternoon to the good people of Iowa and of the United States. I speak to you today as a humbled man.”

Cat could feel her eyebrows rise. She’d never expected him to admit to anything.

“I imagine most of you have seen the rumors and heard the coverage.”

That was putting it lightly, Cat thought. Some of the articles had been nearly pornographic in their reporting—more TMZ than NYT.

“While I cannot deny these accusations, the…indiscretions”—Cat caught the way Justin’s wife’s posture stiffened—“are now many, many years in the past. I was a different man back then, and I have been granted a second chance thanks to the forgiveness of Allison, my wife.”

“Do you think Allison really knew?” Kara whispered, gesturing at the perfectly coiffed blonde woman standing by his side, her face betraying no emotions.

Cat shook her head.

“With the loving support of my wife, of my family, and of my pastor, I have found my way back, and I have fought to serve my country to the best of my abilities in Congress. And I ask that you look to my record, look to the man you have seen me be these past few years, when you head to the polls. With the strength of my family and God, I know I can earn your trust once more. I will keep fighting for you, for this office, and for this great country of ours. Thank you.”

Amidst a flurry of shutters and yelled out questions, a team of security guards swept Justin and Allison off the stage into the wings, while his chief of staff remained, fielding questions and answering most with a scripted: “We ask that you respect the privacy of Representative Kennedy and his family at this time.”

The room remained eerily quiet even after James clicked off the television.

After what felt like minutes, Alex broke the silence. “Well that won’t play well in Iowa.”

“No…no, it will not.”

James pulled himself up out of his chair, nodding more to himself than to anyone else. “We need to get you back out for the last few hours of campaigning before the caucuses.”

“Right.”

Every car ride between caucus sites and rallies and speeches was spent listening to coverage about
Justin and the affair, and Cat could feel guilt churning low in her stomach even though she knew there was no reason for it. She hadn’t leaked the story. She hadn’t even given any comments on it. Yes, she’d also slept with someone she employed, but she was never cheating on a spouse, didn’t have two young children at home waiting for her and a third on the way at the time. But still, the guilt refused to dissipate.

---

“Chin up, Cat,” Kara whispered as she guided her through the door into the ballroom in the Hotel Fort Des Moines for the final Caucus Night rally, where she’d be as the results began pouring in.

Cat nodded stiffly, forcing herself to smile as they made it through security to the waiting crowds. And then she was off and mingling and thanking the volunteers and the donors alike.

Across the room, Alex found Maggie, squeezing her hand and forgetting about some of her nerves at the sight of Maggie looking absolutely stunning in a black dress and heels, her hair pulled back from her face, leaving her neck on full display.

“How you feeling?”

Alex shrugged. “It’s up to the voters now, but I’m definitely feeling better than I would if I were working for Kennedy.”

With a grimace, Maggie raised an imaginary glass. “Cheers.”

---

As the night rolled on, Alex stayed glued to the television screen, unwilling to deal with the slight fuzziness of the projected C-SPAN display on the far wall.

“How’s it going?” Kara asked, slipping Alex a glass of whiskey. For once, she was more than willing to let Alex indulge, almost hoping it would dull some of the anxiety she could feel radiating off her sister in waves.

“Only 37% reporting so far,” Alex muttered quickly, as though worried that another second of sound would cause her to miss some vital point.

“Who’s—”

“Shh!” Alex hushed Kara, shoving the untouched plate of appetizers from the table beside her into Kara’s hands and shooing her away.

Kara finally settled herself in the crowds with James, pretending like she wasn’t watching Cat’s every move, watching the practiced ease with which she mingled with big donors and voters just coming in from the caucuses.

The speakers crackled with the sound of the reporters. “Steve, reports have been coming in quickly tonight! And by all accounts voter turnout has been high. We have 79% of precincts reporting now.”

Kara watched as a map appeared on screen with the various counties lit up and percentages steadily changing with each new reported result.

“We’re seeing what might be a sweeping victory for Lane who was, moments ago, reported to have 62.1% of the votes. Crane is in a somewhat distant second at 33.8% of the votes, though some of the counties where she campaigned the hardest remain undecided as of yet. Karnowsky and Edge both
trail far behind.”

Kara listened as people around her talked about having heard rumors about Karnowsky’s decision to withdraw from the race that evening. In all fairness, no one had expected him to last this long anyway.

By the time Kara tuned back in to the broadcast, they were interviewing voters from Carroll, Iowa, which was the only precinct that had been called for Branch thus far, though he’d been a much closer second in a few counties than expected, thanks in large part, Kara assumed, to the massive drop off in support for Kennedy in a state where he’d rested his candidacy on being the "family values” candidate of the Democrats.

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Alex started slightly at the feeling of another body beside her. “What do you think my odds are?”

Turning slowly to face Cat, Alex gestured at the screen. “I’m not big on betting, but I’d be willing to put money on your first-place finish tonight, Cat.” It wasn’t a landslide, but with over 90% of the precincts reporting, Cat clocked in with 36.2% of the votes, while Max and Justin trailed behind her with 30.9% and 28.9% respectively, and Branch managed a somewhat respectable 4% fourth-place finish for someone who’d barely registered on polls in the lead up to the primaries.

“Not just tonight. Long term.”

“I think…I think this might blow over for Kennedy eventually, but he’ll take losses in these early states, especially out in more socially conservative areas he thought would be easy victories.”

“And Max?”

“He is”—Alex paused to consider her words—“unpredictable.”

“That’s what I feared.”

They stood quietly together and watched as the networks began calling the final results and announcing predicted state delegate allocations.

As Cat and Sam Lane’s photos appeared side-by-side as the first-place winners, Alex nudged Cat. “I think that your cue to go give a rousing speech for the cameras.”

With a curt nod, Cat plucked a new glass of champagne off a passing waiter’s tray and strode up to the front of the room where James was organizing the waiting cameras and reporters.

The second the red lights blinked on, Cat was on too, a bright smile lighting up her features, a weightlessness to her movements, and a heady mix of optimism and well-deserved pride in her voice. “Thank you, Iowa!” And then she was off, expressing gratitude and praising the hardworking citizens of Iowa and already charting out next steps for the days ahead.

---

New Hampshire sped by in a haze of too little sleep and too much campaigning, but Cat took her second-place finish behind Max with a smile, knowing she hadn’t quite held a chance next to Max and his libertarian ideology, especially not after her remarks about gun control in the wake of another would-be shooting that was prevented only through Supergirl’s timely intervention. Justin eked out another third place finish, and Branch conceded defeat, formally withdrawing a few days after the New Hampshire primaries while Cat’s team swept through as many of the upcoming Super Tuesday
states as they could before they had to fly back to Nevada once more.

---

“You’re okay.” Maggie’s grip was solid, her voice grounding, and yet Alex’s hands still trembled despite her best efforts. “I’m here. Kara is here. You’re okay.”

“You can’t know that.” Alex gritted her teeth as her gaze flickered toward the window, watching the plane approach the same mountainous wilderness that should have been—would have been her graveyard.

“We have Kara here.” Alex fingernails dug painfully into Maggie’s palm. “They’re not going to try the same thing twice. It would be too risky.” Maggie watched as Alex’s shoulders relaxed incrementally. “Soon enough you’re going to put away the bastards who did this.”

“Maybe.”

“I’ve seen your basement, Danvers. You’ve got more proof than a police station evidence locker.”

Alex merely shrugged.

“What do you need from me? What’s going to help you right here, right now?”

“I don’t—I don’t know,” Alex managed through her clenched jaw. “It’s fine. I’m fine. I’m being stupid.”

“You’re not being stupid, Alex. You’re not. Nothing about you is stupid, and you’re allowed to have feelings. You’re allowed to be scared, even if you don’t think it’s rational or whatever.”

Alex swallowed and drummed the fingers of her free hand against the armrest. She flinched when another passenger walked down the aisle, the fabric of his pants brushing against her skin.

Maggie’s voice snapped Alex out of her thoughts. “Did you know I’ve never been to Vegas?”

“What?” Alex scrunched her eyebrows together and looked at Maggie, her expression curious.

“Never been. I had a friend from college who had her bachelorette party there, but it was during campaign season. And you know how that gets. Never made it out.”

“Oh. It’s…not that great.”

“Maybe not. But still, it’s in all the movies. Do you think we could teach Winn to count cards?”

“Winn?” Alex huffed. “Why not me?”

“You offering?”

“I’m just saying, I’m as capable as Winn is.”

“Of course. I just…well, I had a very particular image of you strolling around the floor looking sharp as hell in a tailored black suit… I’d put on some clingy dress, and we could pretend like we were strangers meeting for the first time.” Alex swore all the moisture in her mouth had disappeared, and when her skin prickled this time, it wasn't the panic doing it. “You’d come find me at the bar after kicking everyone’s ass at poker, and you’d say something cheesy, like how a pretty lady should never have to pay for her own drinks—not when you had the money of all those sleazy guys to spend. And what better way to spend it than by picking up the one woman they could never have?”
“I…”

“Or maybe you want to pull an Ocean’s whatever it would be. We could take down the whole place and walk out looking stunning. You’re so brilliant, I bet no one would ever be the wiser.”

Alex snorted.

“Or we could merge lesbian and straight stereotypes and go full U-Haul by getting trashed and waking up married the next morning.”

Maggie continued proposing increasingly ridiculous plans for their Vegas trip until Alex’s grip on her hand had loosened and she was actually laughing—more at Maggie than with Maggie, but she’d take it. And then they were descending, and Alex looked shocked at the realization that they had made it all the way to the outskirts of Las Vegas without her panic skyrocketing to the levels it had on her way out of town the last time.

“You, Maggie Sawyer, are amazing.”

“You deserve it,” Maggie whispered, pressing a soft kiss to Alex’s lips before settling back into her seat for the landing.

A few rows up, tucked behind a curtain in the front of first class with the latest polling numbers spread out in front of them, Kara inched her hand closer to Cat’s on the armrest. Cat resisted until the plane dipped a little too much for her liking, and then her fingers were wrapping around Kara’s and squeezing as tightly as she wanted, knowing no broken skin or bruises would be left as evidence of her moment of weakness.

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“And Cat Grant manages to scrape by with a razor-thin victory in Nevada, pulling a wide enough margin of support in Clark County to win her 15 of the state’s 35 pledged delegates. After a late-in-the-game start, Lord only garnered 9 delegates, while Kennedy pulled in 11, showing that this race isn’t over yet.”

Kara watched from the side as Cat strode out onto the stage to thunderous applause from her supporters and basked in the glow of the euphoric mood that seemed to have taken over the team in the aftermath of her second first-place finish. Of course they all knew it was nowhere near over. They all understood that Max had more schemes up his sleeve and that Dirk and Lillian would stop at nothing. But for the night, they let themselves enjoy the feeling of victory, let themselves believe for a moment that it might really be this easy, that they might slide in on a wave of public support that could sweep Cat all the way to the White House.

By the time Cat made it back to her room that night, she found a note on her pillow instructing her to look inside the room’s mini fridge. Trusting that the security guards who had been stationed outside her room all night had done their job (or that Kara would be fast enough if she screamed), Cat let her curiosity take over as she pulled open the fridge door. Inside were the standard mini bar offerings, along with an unmarked white paper bag. She pulled it open and found two to-go containers of some chocolatey dessert, along with a note:

Dear Cat,

Congratulations! I’m so very proud of you. I always knew you would do extraordinary things, and these past few weeks have shown me how very right I was. I happened to be…in the area, and remembered how much you liked that chocolate mousse I got you back before a certain fire alarm
tried to ruin the evening. Not that it was...whatever, you get what I’m saying.

You deserve a bit of a reward after the long days, and even though it’s not as good as getting to see Carter, I thought something to indulge that secret sweet tooth of yours might be enough.

-K

Both containers still in hand. Cat paced around her hotel room, finally striding decisively into the hallway, past Vasquez, and down two doors to Kara’s, the mousse she’d stuffed back into the bag in one hand and a bundle of random campaign documents in the other. She wrapped sharply on the door once, then twice for good measure.

“Hello?” Kara stifled a yawn in her elbow at the sight of Cat in front of her. Her makeup and hair were still perfect from her victory speech, though she’d switched into sweatpants that made Kara long for the lazy mornings they’d once spent in bed together.

“Invite me in?”

“Oh, uh, right, let me just”—Kara gestured around the room, throwing clothing haphazardly into her suitcase and attempting to stuff a large pizza box into the tiny hotel room trashcan.

“It’s fine. I’ve already seen the mess. You’re not fooling anyone.”

“Right…”

“You brought me mousse.” There was no question there, and the bag was rather clear evidence.

“I did.”

“You went to Alabama for me.”

“You remembered.” Kara’s words were even less of a question than Cat’s had been.

“Obviously. But why?”

“You seemed to enjoy it then.” The little moan of enjoyment Cat had let out as her tongue flicked almost obscenely over the tip of her spoon played in Kara’s memory. “I thought you could use something to celebrate tonight, and I knew you were too nervous to eat while the results were coming in, then you were courting donors for the rest of the night.”

“Well that’s”—Cat paused, twirling one hand in the air, heedless of the way the bag swung about—“considerate of you. Suppose I shouldn’t be surprised, though.”

“I’m happy to help, Cat. Always have been.”

“Not as much these past few weeks.” Cat’s voice was steady, but Kara could hear the slight uptick in her heart rate.

“I—I have continued to do my job. I’ve made sure everything has gone according to plan.”

“I’m not questioning your work, Kara. Nothing could ever call your well-deserved place on this team into question. You’re the same exceptional campaign manager I knew you would be when I hired you.”

“So then what do you mean?”
Cat shook her head. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Say it, Cat. Tell me that you’re upset that I haven’t been there all the time, all those extra times I used to be. What is it you miss? The stress relief? The extra attention?”

Cat glared at Kara, shoving the bag of desserts against her chest. “How dare you insinuate that I was using you like that?”

“Cat!” Kara let out a bark of incredulous laughter. “You—you are the one that told me feelings and love and intimacy had no place in politics. You’re the one that made it clear that I was the stupid staffer who’d gone and messed it all up a second time by letting myself believe there might be more there than…than sex.”

Cat’s gaze fell to the wall somewhere an inch or two to the right of Kara’s face. “I may have… underestimated my feelings.”

“What does that mean?” Having an inkling meant little when what Kara needed were clear statements and cold facts.

“I miss you at dinner. I miss knowing you’d stop by to say hello to Carter at the end of our Skype calls, always knowing to wait until the very end so that you wouldn’t take up our precious little time together. I miss the way every morning seemed a little brighter, a little more full of potential, when I woke up next to you.” Cat took a deep, steadying breath and forced herself to meet Kara’s eyes. “I miss you, Kara. Not as my campaign manager but as the person…the person I’d come to care for quite deeply.”

They stood for a long moment, both of them regarding the other, neither willing to take a step forward and off the precipice that would lead them once more into the great unknown, even as they suspected there was something worth the risk on the other side.

Finally Cat cleared her throat. “You got two orders of mousse.”

“Oh…in case you, I don’t know, wanted a second.”

“Take one.”

“What?”

“One of them is yours—we always knew one would be yours.”
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Hey all, thanks so much for the comments! I am coming back to reply to them, but my fiancée is moving halfway across the country in a few days, so things have been a little hectic this month. I really do love getting to hear from you, though!

Oh and note that there’s a short NSFW scene in this chapter

After a clear victory in South Carolina, Cat’s team rolled into the first Super Tuesday feeling more confident than ever. Even Alex had let herself celebrate, coasting on the high of watching Cat’s delegate count rise and the mounting evidence against Dirk, Max, and Lillian pile up. She’d barely stayed through the end of Cat’s victory speech thanking the voters before grabbing a bottle of champagne, taking Maggie by the hand, and dragging her back up to her hotel room to celebrate a little longer.

Even with the build-up of good publicity and well-earned confidence, by the time East Coast voting was ending on Tuesday evening, the whole team seemed jittery with nervous anticipation. Thus far, Cat’s lead had held strong throughout the South, though some states they’d written off as easy victories for other campaigns—Massachusetts would go to Kennedy with his family legacy in their local politics, while the libertarian-leaning Vermont, like New Hampshire had before, would fall handily to Lord.

It was the states where questions still remained that had them all on edge. There was Texas, which came with enough delegates to potentially tip the scales heavily in one direction. Or Virginia, where Kennedy had polled well thanks to family ties, but Cat was able to leverage local DC connections to nearly hold her own. Then Colorado had been Cat’s but now seemed ready to push Lord as far ahead as they could.

And of course the morning reports that rolled in from Alex and Kara each day with numbers from Winn’s latest polls did little to calm the nerves.

On the night of the elections, the team members all found their particular means of coping. James mingled and smiled easily and tried to project enough confidence to convince even himself that everything would be fine. Winn sat at the bar and paired his drinks with his polling data, taking solace in the numbers that hadn’t yet failed him—at least not too much. The people behind the numbers, on the other hand…they were what left him pushing his glass back toward the bartender throughout the night, muttering about “error bars” under his breath until the bartender learned not to bother responding at all.

Cat let Carter ground her. Even though it might have been the better political play to spend one last day in Texas, she’d chosen to come back to Virginia to have her son by her side for what could well be the most important night in determining how far she made it in the race. She fussed over him and tried not to get overly emotional at the sight of how grown up he looked in a suit, his growth spurt having left him nearly a head taller than Cat, though still as lean and lanky as ever. Kara kept close to both of them, always ready to intervene should members of the press that had been admitted into the event begin hounding Carter about anything he didn’t feel comfortable answering.
Alex, on the other hand, couldn’t bear another second with the room full of supporters who only wanted to see smiling faces and hear easygoing assurances. The donor team could deal with them. She needed space.

After stopping at the bar for a refill, Alex took off for the conference room that stood removed from the glitzy publicity of the ballroom, making a mental note to thank Kara for thinking far enough ahead to book plenty of private meeting space for the team.

After giving Alex a few minutes alone, Maggie excused herself from a conversation with an older couple and wandered down the hallway until she found the right conference room. She watched in silence as Alex paced up and down the length of the table, mumbling under her breath about all of the states to be decided that evening. Maggie could just barely make out the numbers of pledged delegates to be assigned, and, knowing Alex, she could bet that her mental calculations were shifting with each new breaking news alert.

“Alex, breathe,” Maggie instructed, finally stepping forward and placing a warm hand on top of Alex’s.

Alex shot Maggie an incredulous look, stunned enough to stop pacing. “This is the biggest night of the campaign. Realistically we’ll know which two of the three are moving forward from here on out.”

“I get it. I do. But, Alex, there’s nothing we can do now. The votes have been cast. Caucuses attended. Absentee ballots mailed in. Now we just wait.”

“In what world is that comforting?”

Maggie had to crack a smile at that. “For better or for worse, it’s in the hands of the voters now. All we can do is trust that the work we’ve put in will be enough.”

“I hate every second of this.”

“Well…we already know Cat got the most votes in American Samoa.”

“Earning all of four fucking delegates,” Alex groused.

“It’s still a win.”

Alex shrugged and turned back to resume her pacing along the back wall of the conference room, sending a distracted wave in Maggie’s direction as if to dismiss her.

“Nope. I’m not leaving you like this.”

Crossing her arms over her chest, Alex fixed Maggie with a hard glare. “What? You’re going to drag me back to the party?”

Maggie shook her head and kicked the door shut before slowly advancing toward Alex. “No…I think there are better ways to keep you distracted.”

“Maggie.” It was meant as a warning, but it came out as a low whine.

“Alex.”

“We shouldn’t.”

“I think you need it.”
“Maggie.”

Maggie tangled her fingers together with Alex’s, tugging her toward the door. “Just tell me to stop…”

But then Alex’s fingers were wrapping around the back of Maggie’s neck, careful even then to avoid Maggie’s styled up-do, already thinking about hiding the proof of what they were about to spend the beginning of an important election night doing.

“Back against the door. Hold it closed.” Maggie’s voice was low and commanding, and it sent a jolt of heat through Alex. “Give me this.”

Alex handed over her drink but kept her phone clutched in her right hand. “I need it.”

“What if something happens?”

“How long do you plan on taking?” Maggie traced her fingertips along the waistband of Alex’s dress pants. Her lips curled into a smirk at the shiver that ran through Alex’s whole body.

Alex’s cheeks flushed a light shade of pink, but she remained resolute. “I’ll only look if it goes off.”

Maggie rolled her eyes, but muttered a, “Fine,” as she dropped her lips to Alex’s neck, keeping away from the pristine starched white collar even though a small part of her longed to leave a hint of lipstick there, just enough to make it abundantly clear to every person in that room that she was the one Alex came with and the one she’d be leaving with at the end of the night.

Aware that they didn’t have much time, Maggie trailed her fingers down the front of Alex’s shirt, then unfastened her pants and pushed them down over her hips. At the sight of Maggie’s dropping to her knees, Alex whimpered, her head falling back against the door with a dull thud. Not taking the time to do any more than push aside the thin layer of lace that separated her from Alex, Maggie nudged Alex’s thighs apart and licked a long, torturously slow path up the length of her sex. She kept the pace steady and measured until she could feel Alex’s hips bucking into her mouth, the fingers of Alex’s free hand scrabbling at her shoulder as she fought the urge to tangle them in Maggie’s hair and pull her closer, demanding more. And as much as Maggie wanted to make Alex wait—just a little longer—she decided to be generous, dipping her tongue between Alex’s folds before trailing it back up and around her clit.

“Maggie,” Alex gasped, the name falling like a breathless prayer from her lips. And with Maggie’s lips wrapped around her clit, she was so close, almost there, could feel her thighs tensing and her legs trembling with the effort of staying upright in heels.

A loud beeping alert sounded from her phone.

She startled to attention. “Fuck.”

“Alex!”

“Hold on.” Alex pulled back slightly as she brought the phone up to her face, blinking as she adjusted to the brightness.

“This had better be damn important.”

“Cat took first in Georgia.”
“I”—Maggie paused, tilting her head to the side, her lips glistening in the glow of the phone and the dim fluorescent lights overhead—“fine, I suppose that’s important enough.”

The phone chimed a second time.

“They called Vermont for Max.”

“We already knew it would happen. Don’t let it be a mood-killer. C’mon…you were so close.”

Alex pulled her lower lip between her teeth and looked ready to insist that she needed to get back on her phone this second, but when Maggie ducked her head forward and pressed a teasing kiss to the soft, damp curls, Alex was a goner.

“Fast,” Alex nearly growled, though it broke off into a series of choked-back moans as Maggie complied. And soon Maggie’s strong hands were the only reason Alex was still standing as her orgasm crashed over her, leaving her whole body trembling.

“Now wasn’t that better than pacing and talking to yourself?” Maggie asked as she blotted at her chin and lips with one of the hotel’s complimentary tissues.

Ducking her head, Alex nodded. “I really do need to go now, though.”

“I know, I know. I’ll just have to take care of myself…”

“Wait, without me?”

Maggie laughed loudly at the hurt expression on Alex’s face. “I’m kidding! I mean, sometimes, yeah, of course. But not tonight. I’m coming back out to mingle and talk Cat up to the donors, don’t worry.”

“I… You, uh… That a regular thing?” And this time Alex didn’t look hurt. No, her cheeks were flushed an even darker shade of red than they were earlier, and she looked at Maggie with a heady mix of amazement and arousal.

“Sometimes. Depends on how busy you are. You’ve spent a lot of long, late nights at the DEO leaving me to fend for myself lately.” Alex gulped. “Luckily I still have so much in my night stand.”

“I…”

“You should probably get back.”

Alex nodded slowly, as though she couldn’t quite remember how to get her body to move properly. “Right. Yes. Work.”

“Atta girl.” Maggie snorted at the glare cast her way, simply motioning to the door and following Alex back down to the ballroom.

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Cat could hear the camera shutters and see the flashes, but she was too damn happy to shoo them away from a private moment with her son that she knew would be used to tout some sentimental angle she’d never push voluntarily. She’d just about swept the southern states, pulling in clear first place finishes in Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama. She’d managed to nudge Kennedy out of first in Virginia and held onto second-place in Massachusetts. Oklahoma fell to Kennedy, while Max managed to take Minnesota after a long campaign trip there in the final days, promising to
bring back blue-collar jobs through a push for more large-scale American infrastructure projects. There were still two states left to be announced, but news channels were already calling the night a clear victory for Cat; even in the states she’d lost, save for Oklahoma, she’d managed to claim a respectable second-place finish.

Yet as joyful as the mood in the room was, not even the most ardent of supporters were ready to call it yet, and they all continued to wait as the Texas votes were tallied. With high voter turnout and long lines at many of the city polling locations, everything was delayed coming in, and news outlets were reporting that the Democratic race was still too close to call without more information. They announced the results of the race earlier for Republicans, though; Lane had swept through the state, claiming nearly 70% of the vote.

The results from Colorado’s Democratic caucuses ended up coming in first: another first-place finish for Max. But Cat could spare twenty-odd delegates. She didn’t want to think about seeing a hundred-odd delegates go to one of her competitors.

“No matter what happens in Texas, you’re still in this race. Got it?” Kara whispered, her voice firm and full of admiration.

“I know.” After a minute Cat added, “But a win would be quite the fu—Carter!” Cat beamed as Carter returned with a plate piled high with desserts.

“Ooh, good call! Gotta get in there while people are still too nervous to eat.” And then Kara was off, and Cat was left rolling her eyes at no one in particular.

The minutes dragged on at an interminably slow pace, and Cat refused to listen to the “early reports.” She’d trust something once the older Danvers sister trusted it, and so far she was still clutching a glass and glaring at the television on over the bar, though Cat could admit she looked less stressed than she had earlier in the evening.

The moment Alex perked up, Kara was at Cat’s side, turning the volume up high on the television once more. “This just in: AP is reporting that they’re calling the Texas primaries for the Grant campaign with nearly 41% of the votes, making her the clear frontrunner after tonight’s contests.”

Swept up into hugs by Carter and Kara, Cat could barely even process any additional news by the time the reporter was announcing that Kennedy appeared to have eked out a second-place finish for himself over Lord. What mattered was that she wasn’t falling behind. She was actually edging ahead—and enough delegates ahead that major news stations were calling her a frontrunner. Sure, it put a target on her back, but dammit, she’d take it any day if it meant feeling this good.

As the night dragged on with champagne toast after champagne toast, Cat sent Carter home with Vasquez, too wary to trust even her 18-year-old with anyone but the head of her security detail. Once Carter left, Cat smiled and thanked the donors and the supporters and the volunteers who all wanted to congratulate her. She even managed to stomach a few bites after food, her gut no longer churning with anxiety about the night ahead.

And through it all, she had Kara at her side. Kara, who had made everything possible. Kara, who never once stopped believing in her. Kara, who had kept them on schedule and shuffled her from city to city, always knowing exactly where she needed to be and what she needed to say and who she needed to meet with and what she needed to be told right before she walked through any given doorway in order to make the best possible impression.

It was after 2 in the morning by the time the room began emptying out, tipsy supporters stumbling out the doors and into waiting cabs or up to pre-booked hotel rooms. The members of Cat’s team
who hadn’t yet disappeared for the night were instituting a formal last call at the bar and toasting
themselves, their boss, and all the states they’d won with shot glasses of hard liquor that even she
couldn’t begrudge them.

“Let’s get you back to DC,” Kara murmured, placing a strong hand on the small of Cat’s back and
guiding her toward the hallway. “God knows you won’t even take the morning off tomorrow.”

“Why would I? We need to seize on this momentum.”

Kara chuckled and shook her head. “Only you, Cat. Only you.”

“You’ll still be there first. You’re always exactly where I need you.”

Something dangerous flashed in Cat’s eyes, and Kara felt Cat turning away from her hand before she
could quite register where she was going.

But then they were in the empty bathroom they’d cordoned off for the night for Cat and senior staff
only, and Cat’s fingers were hot at the buttons of Kara’s shirt, and Kara felt the low whine bubble up
in her chest before she could swallow it.

“Wait,” Kara panted, slowing Cat’s hands and taking a half-step backward—all she could manage
when her body seemed to be screaming at her to sweep Cat into her arms and remind her of
everything she’d been missing.

“It’s not just for…that.” Cat took a deep, steadying breath. “These weeks, even when everything was
going according to schedule, I could tell that something was off.” Kara opened her mouth to object
that she had still been doing her job perfectly, but Cat silenced her with a wave of her hand.
“Because of me. I wasn’t honest the other night. Or at least not completely. I admitted that I had
feelings for you, but it’s more than that. Kara… Kara, I love you.”

And that was it. That was enough. That was more than Kara had ever dreamed of hearing. And in an
instant she had tugged Cat into her chest and kissed her so thoroughly that everything that had come
before felt suddenly trivial, like it meant nothing compared to this one moment.

“Not here. I want this—I want you to know that I mean it,” Cat whispered, pushing Kara back just
enough to be able to think almost coherently.

“Tomorrow? Sober. In the daylight. Let me bring dinner to you?”

Cat let herself smile. “Why, Ms. Danvers, are you trying to court me?”

“Is it working?”

“Mm, I think it could be.”

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That night Cat fell asleep mere minutes after her head hit the pillow and slept soundly for the first
time since the primaries had begun.

She woke to a special delivery of a plain yellow envelope. Inside was a series of two grainy photos
of her and Kara from the staff-only bathroom the night before: one of them kissing and one with
Cat’s hand trailing down Kara’s shirt. And Cat was barely captured in profile, could possibly claim
some level of plausible deniability for herself, but there it was—that telltale blue suit peaking out
from beneath a striped blouse.
Consumed as she was with anxiety and anger and self-loathing—a hatred burning so hot she could almost feel it searing her from the inside—Cat almost didn’t notice the other items in the envelope. A burner phone sat on top of a note: “Your time has come. Follow our instructions or face the press.”

And Cat wasn’t one to back down, had never been the type to shy from a fight, but this was no longer about her or even her and Kara. Now it was about an icon and an idol. Now it was about Kara’s ability to live freely and openly as Kara Danvers. Now it was a threat that would bring down so much more than her candidacy. And that…well there was only ever one way that was going to end.
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

The angst ya knew was coming (aka: shit has officially hit the fan...)

The email was brief: “Call a press conference for this afternoon.” Cat ignored the replies from James and Jasmine about prepared remarks. She sent Alex’s calls to voicemail. She watched the messages from Kara stack up without opening a single one. But most of all, she ignored the instructions waiting for her on the burner phone—ignored the orders meant to slowly and quietly sink a campaign until she was left as what? Some pale imitation of the woman she’d been? Some second-choice, second-rate pick for vice president? She wouldn’t be blackmailed, and even if it meant blowing up her own campaign, she’d rather do it on her own terms than have anyone else dictate her future for her.

She managed to hold off the impending storm of emotions until after sending a yawning Carter off to school. But then there was nothing holding her back, nothing saving her from the rage—the rage at the impotence of her own rage, the fact that no matter what she did, no matter who or what she destroyed, she was still losing.

A run on the treadmill at a pace fast enough to bother her knees did little more than leave bitter tears mixing with sweat. A shower hot enough to scald left her skin red and raw but did nothing to dissipate the burning anger that still coursed through her. A glass of bourbon at an hour even her Wall Street friends would deem early did little to dull the self-loathing that churned in her gut. When she emptied the glass she was tempted to hurl it to the ground, if only to watch something other than her own campaign shatter, but she knew it would do little more than leave her with a mess to clean up. Another one.

Kara managed to wait until 10 before she showed up at Cat’s apartment, worried about the woman, even if anyone else would have claimed the right to a morning off. She knocked insistently at the front door until a version of Cat she’d never seen before pulled it open, wincing at the noise.

“What?”

“I…are you okay? Do you need Advil?"

“I’m not hungover.” Her voice was raspy, and she looked…Kara hesitated to say defeated, but she certainly looked more worn out than even her mother’s visits left her.

“Food, then? Or are you finally taking a day off?"

Cat closed her eyes and tried to do the “breathe slowly, in through the nose, out through the mouth,” for the full ten beats her therapist had told her would help. It did not. “I’m fine.”

“What about the press conference? Do you need help preparing remarks? We have all the official counts from last night’s primaries ready to go.”

“Kara!” Cat finally snapped. “Stop! Stop trying.”

“I…I don’t understand.”
“I need to be alone.”

“So I, uh, should I meet you at the press conference, then we’ll do dinner?”

Cat couldn’t help the bark of mirthless laughter at the sheer idiocy of last night’s naïve optimism. “There is no dinner. I never should have allowed myself that…lapse in judgment.”

“Cat. No…no, that’s not…you said…”

“Forget what I said.”

“Cat, I can’t just forget that you told me you lo—”

“You will if you know what’s best for you.”

“Did something happen?”

Yes, Cat thought, my entire world came crashing down around me because I was stupid enough to put your life and identity in jeopardy. Instead she smoothed her features over into an expression of cool indifference. “I saw reason.”

For a moment it looked as though Kara might laugh, but when Cat’s expression remained unchanging, Kara’s face fell. She left without a word, but Cat could see tears shining in those bright blue eyes before they were gone in a blur of movement. She couldn’t tell if it was some misuse of super-speed or the alcohol on an empty stomach, but she realized she didn’t exactly have the energy to care either.

---

At three o’clock, Cat met her confused team in the large formal conference room of one of her campaign’s biggest corporate donors dressed in an all-black suit, her makeup done and hair styled flawlessly, looking exactly the part they all expected her to play.

“Cat,” Alex pleaded, trying to grab her on her way into the room of waiting reporters, donors, and supporters—none of them knowing exactly what to expect.

“No.”

“We need to—”

“No.” After a moment’s hesitation, Cat added, “Tell them no comment.”

And then she was striding forward, leaving her team to scurry in and fall in step as though they had even the slightest idea of what was to come.

Cat ignored the congratulations being shouted her way, ignored the burn of anger and frustration and bitter regret. Instead, she stood at the head of the table until silence fell.

“After last night, I’m sure you suspect you know what I’ll be saying today.” There were murmured sounds of assent and jovial smiles and a smattering of polite applause. “Unfortunately that is not why I’m here today.” Cat glimpsed twin expressions of shock and panic on the faces of the Danvers sisters. “As much as I have appreciated your support and enthusiasm—and believe me, I have. You are the ones who made this experience possible, who inspired me to get out there day in and day out. I will be suspending my campaign for the time being.”

A hush fell over the room, quieting even the rowdiest and most boisterous of her supporters.
After a moment of stunned silence, the room filled once more with shouts and questions and pleas to stay in the race. But Cat was already making her way off the stage and out to her waiting car, directing a few members of her team to stay behind and field questions, even if it just meant giving them vague pleasantries and the always frustrating reply of: “She has no comment at this time,” which was all the more frustrating because she did have a comment. Dammit, she was Cat Grant; she had a thousand-and-one perfectly worded comments. But each one of them would mean putting Kara in danger, so she kept quiet—a sacrifice she would willingly make again and again.

---

Cat managed to hold it together through the end of the week, feeding lines to James about needing “time for an urgent family matter” that did little to quiet the press but bought her time without her own team’s scrutiny for a precious few days. But when Carter left for some extravagant, international vacation his father had insisted on taking him on for spring break, Cat let herself break.

For the first time since the campaign had begun, she turned off her cellphone. She disconnected her computer and silenced her landline. She ripped the color-coded wires out of the back of her cable box. She drew the blackout curtains across all of her bedroom windows and shoved the clock under her bed and let herself lose any and all sense of how much time had elapsed as she sat, staring mindlessly ahead of her, back pressed up against the bedframe, fingers absently tracing along the small hairline fracture that ran along the frame where Kara’s iron grip had begun to splinter the sturdy wood.

---

Cat found out it was Monday when Kara showed up at her door, demanding to know what was going on. She wasn’t as easy to send away a second time, and Cat found herself forced backward as Kara stormed through the first floor, her glasses pulled away from her face as she scanned the house.

“I don’t get it,” Kara finally sighed, rubbing at her forehead.

It was then that Cat noticed the barely perceptible purple bags under Kara’s eyes. She wondered if she had slept even a minute. Surely it took more than a few late nights to do that to a superhero.

Kara continued to look expectantly at Cat, who remained silent.

“No one is here! No one is holding you hostage. No one has bombs rigged up to explode if you leave.” Cat scoffed, and Kara glared. “The Cat Grant I know—she wouldn’t do this. She wouldn’t leave this race to two barely competent men.”

Cat simply stared ahead.

“You look awful.”

Cat pursed her lips, and for a moment Kara thrilled at the thought that there was still something of the old Cat in her. But then her shoulders slumped in on themselves, and she was back to the shell of the woman she’d once known.

“Have you eaten?”

Cat tried to think back, finally shrugging. Surely at some point she had. At least when Carter was around. She remembered cooking. Some of it had to have made it into her mouth too.

“Is this about us?” Kara’s forehead crinkled as her expression fell. “Did you panic about the whole idea of…of dating me?”
Cat sneered. “Do you really think you’re so special that you could end something I’ve been working towards my entire life?” Kara shrunk back, as Cat advanced forward. “Do you think that you mean that much that I would throw it all away?” She did, of course, but Cat knew better than to think Kara would ever let herself believe it.

“That’s not—”

“If all you’ve come here to do is try to blame yourself and tell me I look like shit, go home, Kiera. You’re not helping.”

“I…just eat, Cat. Eat and stop drinking—I can smell it on you."

“It’s none of your business.”

“It is actually. You hired me to manage your campaign. And you might have hit pause on it or something, but you didn’t withdraw your name. There are elections tonight. Do you even remember?” Cat didn’t answer. “We’re out there fighting and trying to keep your…whatever the hell this stunt is from sinking your campaign.”

“What’s the use?”

“The use?” Kara’s hands curled up into fists as she spat Cat’s words back at her. “You were winning, Cat! You were so close. And then what? Because the Cat I know doesn’t do scared. She doesn’t panic. But that’s exactly what this looks like. Because you can tell the press that it’s a family emergency all you want, but I know better. I know that Carter is off seeing Europe with his father, and the last time you talked to your mother was the week of Thanksgiving.”

“Just leave.”

---

After the night’s primaries ended, Kara-as-Supergirl got in touch with one of the aliens Maggie had interviewed for research about interplanetary immigrant rights—some bartender who catered to off-worlders. Something strong enough to get a Kryptonian drunk in exchange for enough money to buy her silence, to ensure that no rumors would get out about Supergirl drinking when the people were only now forgetting about her stint under synthetic kryptonite.

Kara showed up at Cat’s house at 2 in the morning, bottle tucked into her bag and her thoughts whirring with sentences that no longer fit together in the way they once had. Her feet felt heavy, like maybe the planet’s gravity was finally strong enough to ground her, and she found them criss-crossing into their own path as she navigated the city sidewalks. Her fingers seemed thicker than usual, having lost all sense of dexterity, and glasses or not, the display on her phone swam before her eyes, flickering in and out of existence as she saw through it, then looked at it, unable to exert the control she’d once had over her powers.

She didn’t even think to chastise Cat for answering the door in the middle of the night with no weapon or phone in hand, only a resigned expression on her face.

“The hell, Cat?” Kara slurred, stumbling forward.

“Get in. We don’t need to have you caught ag—just come in.”

Kara swung herself through the doorway with one hand braced on the frame, pulling away a sliver of wood when her grip finally loosened. It clattered to the floor.
“The hell?” Kara repeated, leaning heavily against the now-closed door.

“You’re drunk.”

“And you’re not?”

Cat thought about it. She’d had a couple glasses of something strong, but she didn’t feel drunk. She barely felt anything. She craved numbness, not the wild swing of emotions that came with too much to drink, and this in-between state was as close as she’d gotten to something approaching nothingness. Finally she shrugged her shoulders.

“You won Louisiana. Do you even know?”

She did not.

“Lost in Kansas and Nebraska. By a lot. Probably because, oh, I don’t know, you didn’t show at any of the scheduled meetings this week.”

Cat nodded slowly. “Makes sense.”

“No. No, it doesn’t! Why are you doing this?”

“Personal reasons.”

“Cat!” Kara’s voice echoed around them even after she’d closed her mouth, her hands balled into shaking fists and her whole body tensed.

Cat realized she’d never seen Kara yell—not like this. She’d seen the cool, controlled condescension of her under the sway of the drugs, but this was entirely new. But still, she didn’t reply.

“Answer me! Why are you doing this?”

“You couldn’t possibly understand.” Cat was proud of how steady her voice managed to be.

“You know what? Fuck you, Cat.” The curses—Cat had to assume by the tone they were curses—that fell from Kara’s lips as she stumbled toward the door were no longer in English, but the ferocity behind them was clear. Kara slammed the door behind her, and Cat watched as another sliver of wood fell from the frame.

---

Alex stormed through the front door of Cat’s house on Wednesday morning. Cat wondered idly whether the two of them had a storage locker full of doors to replace all the ones they surely broke.

“Get your ass up.”

Cat had been planning on standing to even the ground, but decided against it once it came as an order. “What are you doing in my house?”

“Trying to figure out what the fuck you’re doing to your campaign!” Alex roared.

“What right do you have to ask? It is, as you say, my campaign.”

“And you’ve got a massive team of people committed to you, wondering if they’re still employed, if they have any kind of future.”
“I’m happy to rip up your contract, send you running back to the DEO. It wasn’t like you were that enthusiastic about tying yourself down to one project anyway.”

“You made me want to be here! Do you not get it? Do you really not fucking understand that you convinced people? You made them believe in you and what you stood for, and they left stable jobs and moved across states all to work for you.”

“They’ll find new jobs. I’ll make calls.”

“I have a baby sister who’s inconsolable sleeping in my guest bedroom. You swore to her it wouldn’t all end the same way a second time.”

That caught Cat’s attention and she turned to face Alex head on, trying to gauge how much Alex knew.

“You’re hurting her, and you don’t even care. You’re just as cold and callous and mean as everyone ever—”

“Don’t you ever”—Cat stood as she growled out the word—“speak about things you couldn’t possibly hope to understand.”

“Then make me understand!”

Cat froze for a moment before stalking down to her home office where she had locked away the envelope that ruined everything in a lead-lined safe. Alex was hot on her heels, holding up a device she recognized from when they’d scanned the whole office for bugs and any sort of listening devices.

“You want to know so badly? Here.” Cat thrust the pictures into Alex’s hands.

Alex squinted at the grainy image. “I…” Alex paused, taking a deep breath and looking up to the ceiling. “Tell me that’s a woman who looks an awful lot like you, Cat. Tell me you’re not that stupid. Tell me you’re not taking advantage of my sister like that.” Alex’s words had built to a crescendo, and by the end she was nearly screaming.

“So then you’re taking advantage of one of the researchers who is, technically speaking, your subordinate?”

“That’s different,” Alex spat back, her lip curling into a sneer. “I love her.”

Cat arched an eyebrow at Alex, her posture defiant.

“Cat.”

“None of it matters.”

Forcing down the emotions roiling just beneath the surface, Alex crossed her arms. “Okay, but we can still play this as…as a coincidence or a set up. There’s not enough of your face to even run this through facial recognition software.”

“Look at the next picture, Alex.”

Alex flipped to the next one, her eyes tracking every detail until they caught on Kara’s chest where that damn crest peeked out from beneath a shirt that was far too unbuttoned for her liking.

“Don’t ever accuse me of not caring for her. Aside from Carter she is the only person I would ever
“I don’t…” Alex gritted her teeth together, finally looking through the other contents of the envelope. Cat watched as Alex’s whole demeanor changed, her gaze hardening and her posture stiffening until she was the reserved DEO agent she’d met during their first interview. “I’ll see what I can pull. Nothing is over yet.”

“Alex.”

“Lena and I have nearly enough evidence to sink Max’s campaign. We’ve got him tied to Lillian Luthor and enough money coming from sources dirty enough to make even staunch Republicans hesitate. If we can trace this back to him…”

Cat stamped down on the slightest flutter of hope she could feel deep in her chest. “Then what?”

“Then you let me do my job. Just like I always have.” Alex shook her head. “You think you’re the first person caught screwing someone on tape?”

“We’re not even—”

“You’re telling me that this kiss is the only thing to have happened between you two?”

“No,” Cat admitted.

“Tell me, Cat. How long? Was this going on back when you swore to me there was nothing else that could come out to hurt your campaign?”

Cat shook her head. “Not…really.” Alex arched an eyebrow until Cat sighed. “We kissed the night I was elected as governor.”

“Cat!”

“Nothing more happened for years—nothing had happened again when you asked me.”

Alex barely managed to get out her next question between clenched teeth. “When?”

“Nevada.”

Alex closed her eyes. “Fine.”

“So what?”

“You will shower and stop drinking and start eating—seriously, you look emaciated. I’m having Vasquez bring you food. You will not contact anyone other than me, nor will you use any device that does not have the software Winn installed on it. You will wait here and give me 48 hours to see what I can come up with. On Friday, we will have a plan.”

Cat watched as Alex marched back up the stairs before chasing after her. “Wait!”

“What?” Alex growled.

“She can’t know.”

Alex narrowed her eyes.

“She can’t know that’s why. She’d never…just don’t tell her why.”
The shift in Alex’s demeanor was nearly imperceptible, but Cat could see the slight softening of her features. Finally, she dipped her head in acknowledgment.

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Alex barely paused to lock the front door before thundering into the living room and pointing an accusing finger at Kara. “You!”

“What?”

“You lied to me! For months! For years!”

Kara blanched, pulling the fleece blanket tighter around her. “Alex.”

“Cat is”—Alex paused, remembering Cat’s final plea—“Cat is being blackmailed, and you didn’t think to mention that you could have ended up being the reason why?”

“Alex, please,” Kara begged. “Not now.”

“Alex!” Maggie’s voice startled Alex enough for her to pause, looking up to see Maggie standing a few feet away from the couch where Kara had taken up residence. She walked forward until she was standing directly behind Kara.

“This doesn’t concern you, Maggie.”

“Alex, this isn’t the right time.” Maggie’s voice was clear, and Alex caught the flicker of movement as Kara squeezed Maggie’s fingers ever so briefly.

“You knew.”

“Alex, I—”

“Alex, she—”

“You knew.”

“It wasn’t my—”

“I asked her not to—”

“Get out.” Alex’s voice was cold and quiet, measured in a way that disguised the depth of betrayal and rage simmering just beneath the surface.

“Alex.”

“Both of you! Get out of my house!”
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

Alright, this fic has now been drafted through to the end (which also means that now I get to go catch up on *reading* fics I've fallen behind on)! We're getting close, though I haven't decided where all the chapter breaks are to put a final number yet... But thanks to everyone for coming along for the ride and leaving comments along the way!

Friday afternoon found Alex in Cat’s kitchen once more, standing across from the woman herself and clutching a to-go cup of coffee that Cat had to assume, by the bags under Alex’s eyes, was the only reason she was still upright.

All the same, Cat managed as much snark as she could muster as she folded her arms over her chest and asked: “So what's this magic plan?”

“We leak it ourselves.”

Cat scoffed, but when Alex’s expression didn’t change, she fixed Alex with a stern glare. “Not those photos we don’t.”

“No…not all of them,” Alex conceded with a dip of her head. “We leak the first one. It’s the one they think is the most incriminating because it actually shows you”—she gestured uselessly with her hand, trying not to dwell on the image—“in the act, as it were.”

Cat looked down at the image Alex had placed on her counter. “But the suit is hidden.”

“Correct.”

“How do we know they won’t leak the others? How do we know they don’t know what’s visible in them?”

“If they knew, they would be blackmailing Kara. We saw it as something other than an undershirt with a logo because we knew to look for it. And yeah, with enough time and enough media scrutiny, I bet someone else would realize it too. But for now? They haven’t. And we act before they have enough time to figure it out.”

“And how do we know that they’re not just…biding their time?”

“Because I was able to track down who took them, and she isn’t the kind to sit on something like that.”

“How do you know? Who is it?”

“Leslie Willis. Ring any bells?”

Fighting to steady her breath, Cat placed a hand on her countertop, ignoring the way it trembled with the force of her suppressed rage. She could feel anger bubbling just beneath the surface, rippling like some kind of toxic undercurrent that might at least give her enough momentum to carry her back into the race. “You mean the woman I pulled out of some gutter and put on the air in National City?”
“Mm, that’s the one. But remember how Dirk moved to a new media company after leaving CatCo’s board?”

“Was ousted is more like it,” Cat grumbled.

“Right, well, it would seem Leslie just got a very nice job offer from that other company with a signing bonus that would impress professional athletes.”

“That fucking—”

“Cat.” Alex slapped her notebook against the marble counter, drawing Cat’s attention back up to her. “Not the point. We have her on camera sneaking into and out of the hotel bathroom with a backpack, then doing it again the next morning. I had a, uh, friend check her Amazon account, and she had ordered a few remote cameras that match the kind of grainy resolution we see in these photos.”

“So then get Lucy and have her taken in or served!” Cat felt herself spiraling, but she couldn’t quite manage to reign it back in on time. She might have overlooked several personal failings when it came to Leslie over her years at CatCo, but she never expected this…this betrayal.

“Remember how we couldn’t get the leaked emails back into Pandora’s Box, even though we certainly didn’t give anyone permission to hack into our system to steal them?” Cat could already tell where it was going, and she nodded along with Alex as she answered her own half-rhetorical question: “Same thing here.”

“So then what? We simply let them win?”

“No. We call a press conference, and on Monday morning you come out and you tell the entire goddam world that you fell in love.” Cat scoffed and rolled her eyes, but Alex pressed on without acknowledging it. “People don’t like scandals, but dammit, Cat, they’ll fall over themselves for a good love story. And this is it. This is the progress narrative.” Alex began pacing around the kitchen, painting a rosy picture that didn’t quite jive with her jaded expression. “You grew up not realizing that certain things were possible, living in a world where the only path that seemed open to you as a viable possibility was settling down, marrying a man, and having kids.”

“And the fact that I have already been with other women?”

“Irrelevant. You’ve never had a significant relationship with one, have you?”

“No.”

“Nothing has ever been documented as such, has it?”

“No.”

“Exactly. You watched as this”—Alex glanced up, her gaze focused on the wall behind Cat’s head as she searched for words—“this great country of ours marched forward. You get some quotes from the history of the gay rights movement. You bring up the moderate groups most palatable to people—you know, HRC, ACLU, the like.” Alex could see Cat already thinking through her contacts at those organizations, already planning on how it might be done. “You talk about shattering glass ceilings with CatCo and fighting to be the second female president. You talk about wanting to set an example, to show people what’s possible the way you wished someone would have done for you. And then you come out, but you don’t make it about a label. Don’t make it about sex. Make it about love—this one person who inspired you. Make it about the next step forward.”

It would certainly lose Cat a few voters, but for the most part, she’d only isolate the ones already
campaigning hard against her. Cat felt her mind kicking into overdrive, racing with phrases that she knew would play well with crowds. But in a moment it all came crashing back down, and she spun to face Alex. “What about the fact that the woman in those pictures works for me?”

“Funny thing, Cat. Because I went and spoke to Lucy about how that might work.” Cat could feel her jaw clenching. “And you know what she told me?”

“I think you want to be the one to tell me, so why don’t you get to it already?”

“She told me that Kara had a different contract than most employees. She doesn’t report directly to you, nor can she be fired by you alone.”

“Hmm, would you look at that.”

“You can feign surprise all you want, but Lucy still has your handwritten note specifying which portions of the original contract to change.”

“Before you say anything: I wasn’t expecting anything to happen. I merely wanted to ensure that there were contingency plans in place if anything were to…cloud my judgment.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m not saying—” Cat narrowed her eyes as Alex’s words hit her. “Wait. What?”

“I am not…pleased about what is going on between the two of you, nor am I even close to happy to hear that you kissed her all those years ago. But”—Alex held up a placating hand—“I appreciate that you cared enough about her to set up legal protections well before Nevada happened. And I…thank you for caring enough about her to sacrifice everything for a secret that you could never have planned for.”

“I…” Cat opened and closed her mouth, finally settling on two syllables they both knew meant more than words could convey. “Of course.”

Within moments they were back to their brisk, businesslike tone. “I’ve drafted remarks for Monday, though I’m sure you’ll want to rewrite some of it yourself. I found reporters who have been most friendly to LGBTQ rights and out public figures in the past who we can invite in for press coverage. And, if you agree, I’ll brief Kara.”

“What does she know?”

“She knows you were being blackmailed, though she doesn’t know with what. She knows that I know about you two, though she doesn’t yet know I’ve seen…visual confirmation.”

“But she will come Monday.”

“She will. Though she still won’t need to know that you did it to protect her, well, her other identity unless you choose to tell her.”

Cat drummed her fingers against the countertop, finally giving a decisive nod. “I should be the one to tell her.”

“I—”

“She deserves to know and to hear it from me.” Cat’s gaze dropped to the countertop. “I may owe her an apology.”
Maggie didn’t dare approach Alex at work, knowing better than to try to mix personal and professional—especially after where it had gotten Cat and Kara—but by the weekend she was done waiting. On Saturday, Maggie showed up at Alex’s house, pounding on her front door until she was sure one of the rich, old Georgetowners would call the police on her.

Finally it swung open. “What?”

“We need to talk.”

“Oh now you can do that? Because before it sure seemed like maybe you forgot how to go about it.”

“Alex, let me inside.”

Alex wrapped her arms around her chest and held her position in the doorway, and for the first time Maggie noticed how exhausted she looked, the weariness that seemed to have crept deep into her bones. But it was more than that. There was a defensiveness to her posture that Maggie hadn’t seen since they’d gotten together, and Alex’s eyes were rimmed in red.

“Let me in, Alex. I want to talk. Please?”

After a long moment, Alex relented, stepping back just enough to let Maggie through before shutting the door behind them.

“How are you?”

Alex snorted and shook her head. “Oh, I don’t know, Maggie. Why don’t you tell me how it feels to be lied to again and again by everyone close to you?”

“Alex,” Maggie sighed. “It wasn’t my secret to tell, and you know it. You know what that’s like—you did it to me too.”

“This isn’t the same thing as her secret identity!” Alex roared. “That was life or death! That—that is something I was taught my entire fucking life to protect and take to my grave.” Alex let out a shuddering exhale and forced down thoughts of her father, forced down old creeping feelings of self-loathing and memories of phone calls in the middle of the night about disappearances and presumptions of death and calling off a search. She glared at Maggie. “Don’t you dare try to compare the two. No one raised you telling you that you were only good insofar as you made sure no one found out that some random fucking woman was banging the almost president!”

“Maybe not,” Maggie spat back, “but I had a whole lot of time on my own to learn what it was like to have people judge you based on nothing more than who you loved. And when Kara told me? God, Alex.” Maggie shook her head, rubbing at her eyes with the heel of her hand. Too many sleepless nights made it feel like she was rubbing them with sandpaper. “When she told me, she looked like the same scared kid I was, and you can be pissed all you want, but I wasn’t about to be the person that fucked her over.”

“I—it’s not—I’m not just anyone, Maggie.” Alex’s voice cracked and she swallowed harshly and tried to blink back the tears she could feel welling in her eyes. “I’m your girlfriend, the woman you love. You’re supposed to trust me.”

“She asked me not to say anything, Alex.”

“And what did you think was going to happen with that? Did you think it was just going to work out
for them? That they were going to ride off into the sunset together?” Pushing down the hurt, Alex’s tone turned venomous as she thought back to how close Kara had come to losing everything, how close they’d all been to flaming out alongside a sunken campaign. “Were you really so naïve as to think that two powerful women could simply get away with it?”

“Fuck you, Alex. Don’t pull the bullshit naïve optimism card again. You know better this time.”

Maggie stalked across the apartment, putting distance between her and Alex. “You wanna know why I didn’t feel the need to tell you?” Alex continued to glare. “Because I was the one there for her when it fell apart. I was the one she asked for, knowing I wouldn’t yell at her and judge her for what had happened. I found out right as it all went to shit, and for all I knew? For all I knew? That was it. The end.”

“Clearly that didn’t last,” Alex huffed, turning away to hide the shaky breath that rattled in her chest as Maggie’s words hit her. Because Kara didn’t trust her. Kara didn’t want her there. And Maggie… Maggie agreed with her.

“No, I guess it didn’t. But—”

“I think you should leave.” Alex’s voice was quiet but brokered no disagreement.

“Alex.”

“I need you to leave.”

Maggie’s breath caught in her throat as Alex turned back to face her, tears streaming openly down her cheeks, and her hands, balled up into fists, trembling at her side. “Alex, no, I—”

“Maggie.”

“Fine.”

Maggie heard Alex crumble against the door the moment it shut behind her, and it took every ounce of self-restraint to keep walking in the other direction, to leave Alex behind—broken and hurt.

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Cat couldn’t fight the sense of déjà vu as Kara stood in her doorway, looking wary and angry in equal measure. “Come in?” She hated the way her voice wavered, hated that it had somehow been easier to explain everything to Carter, to watch as the last vestiges of his faith in political ethics shattered under the weight of the second intrusion into her privacy. But with Kara—with Kara it felt like the faith being lost was in Cat herself, and that was the one thing she couldn’t stomach.

“Why? Need to tell me again about how you saw reason and realized someone like you could never be with someone like me?”

“Kara, please.”

“Five minutes, Cat. You get five minutes.”

“Fine.” Cat fought her instinct to push back against someone else making demands on her. “I panicked.”

“Clearly.”

“Kara, if you’re only giving me a few minutes, I demand to have them all myself.”
“Fine.”

“I—the morning after I told you… That morning I woke up to a special delivery. Photos taken without my knowledge and a phone for receiving orders about how I would sink my own campaign.” Cat snuck a glance at Kara, finding her arms still clasped firmly over her chest but her shoulders slumping slightly, as if the fight was beginning to drain out of her. “If…had the blackmail been about me and only about me, it would have been one thing. But it was not.”

Kara nodded, hundreds of thoughts swirling through her mind.

“What exactly did Alex tell you about all of this?”

“So I’m allowed to speak now?”

Cat fixed Kara with a stern glare.

“Just that you were being blackmailed. She thought they might find out about”—Kara gestured between the two of them, blinking back emotion over what might have been—“you know, us.”

“Right. Well, the truth is that they already had.”

Kara’s head snapped up at that, and her hands were grasping at the buttons of her shirt before she realized there was no “super” way to fix this problem. “I…”

“The point is that they had photos. Some slimy TMZ-wannabe sneaking remote-operated cameras where they didn’t belong at the Super Tuesday watch party.”

Kara swallowed heavily and tried to shake the feeling of paranoia creeping over her, but she was left feeling dirty, her skin itching with the weight of unwanted attention. “I didn’t…”

“I know. I asked Alex not to tell you.”

“Why? Why tell my sister but not me? I should have been the first person you told. This—this was all about me!”

“It’s not your job,” Cat bit back. “You manage my campaign. Alex deals with scandals. The fact of your…familial relation concerns me little.”

“Cat!”

Cat arched a perfectly sculpted eyebrow back at her.

“You pushed me away.” Kara shook her head, tears glistening in her eyes. “You told me all those things, told me you loved me, told me you wanted to give us a real shot, then you pushed me away without a moment’s consideration. You couldn’t even do me the courtesy of being honest.” Kara pushed down the guilt she could feel bubbling up over memories of the hurt expression in Alex’s eyes when she realized that Kara had been lying to her for months; she could deal with that later.

“What would telling you have done? It wouldn’t have made either of us feel better, nor would it have fixed the problem.”

“Cat…it’s what…it’s what partners do. You don’t get to decide these things for me.”

Cat gritted her teeth, knowing that throwing out the full truth would only hurt Kara further. Because it was one thing to ask Kara to stand in the spotlight in the midst of what could have been painted as a torrid affair. It was quite another to ask her to give up her entire life, the sense of normalcy
and human achievement she’d worked so hard to claim over the years. “I am being honest now,” Cat finally managed.

Kara wrapped her arms tighter around her. “So what—what happens now?”

“Alex and I have been developing a plan. On Monday afternoon, we call a press conference and release one of the photos ourselves. I speak on record about attempts to blackmail me, but confirm that I’m not the kind of woman who backs down in the face of cowards who would seek to threaten the integrity of the democratic process—you get what I’m saying.” Cat shrugged as though the whole prospect didn’t terrify her a little.

“And the photo?”

“Is about love, not sex. I fell in love with the kind, caring woman I’ve had by my side throughout the whole process and dared to hope for something more. And while I’m fully committed to giving all of my time and attention to the campaign and the job, I felt the need to address this and be honest to inspire others, shatter glass closets, all of that.”

“And what am I here?”

“What do you mean?”

“You tell me you love me—tell me you want this to be real. Then you tell me that you learned to see reason, which apparently means never loving me or trying to make things work. And now? Now you’re gonna stand up and tell everyone that you love me?”

“It’s the truth.”

“Maybe the truth isn’t enough.”

“Enough for what?”

“For me, Cat! Rao, for someone as smart as I know you are, you can be so impossibly dense. I told you from the start that I wasn’t going to let you dictate what was best for me or decide what I should want. And now you’d have me do what? Pretend like the past few months never happened? Hold your hand and settle down into some imagined future First Lady role?”

Cat hated the way her heart fluttered at the thought of a future like that with Kara at her side. “I’m not saying anything of the sort. I’m telling the press that I fell in love, not you. One photographed kiss does not a relationship make. We focus on our jobs. We focus on the campaign. We focus on winning.”

“Do you hear yourself?” Kara asked, a bark of incredulous laughter escaping before she could tamp down on it. “I can’t…I don’t even know how to feel after freaking months of you pulling me in and pushing me away whenever you feel like it. You’re telling me you love me, but why now? Because it’s convenient? Because love sells a scandal as something other than an affair?”

“No—that’s not…” Cat groaned, rubbing at her temples in a last-ditch attempt to stave off her impending migraine. “I don’t get to do things just because they’re true or they feel right. My role is too public to be swayed by something as fickle as feelings.” She pivoted slightly, pulling out her phone and skimming over Alex’s texts as she ignored the sting of unshed tears she could feel prickling at her eyes. With a flick of her wrist in Kara’s direction, she sighed audibly. “If you don’t want to be a part of this, I’ll talk to Alex—see if there’s some other way.”

“No, I—I don’t care about that part.” Kara could feel her voice rising right along with her anger, and
she stormed the few steps over to Cat to pluck the phone out of her hand and place it face-down on the counter. “Or, fine, okay, I do, but you seem to think that I’m mad because my face and name will be out there. And that’s not it.” Kara began pacing, clenching her hands into fists then stretching out her fingers as she walked. Suddenly she spun to face Cat. “Why did you tell me you loved me?”

“Because, despite knowing what was prudent and what was possible, I fell in love with you. And I do—I love you.”

“But that’s how it happened, not why you told me. Why tell me? Why tell me after all that time spent pushing me far away?”

“I—I thought I could protect us both by pushing you away the first time. You have to admit, especially now, I was right. Imagine if they’d gotten proof of more than a kiss?” Kara didn’t deign to give any sign of agreement. “But I…I had underestimated just how much I’d come to crave the things you brought to my life, the way I felt in those quiet moments tucked away with you.” Cat’s eyes fluttered shut as she thought back to the nights together, her back pressed into Kara’s chest with Kara’s strong arms holding her close, or the early mornings when Kara would show up with the papers and two lattes and Cat let herself imagine a future with such domestic scenes. “I have Carter as the one permanent fixture in my life, but I’ve never had someone like you—one who grounds me and drives me to be better in equal measure. And as hard as I tried to keep my distance, I found I missed you. I thought you deserved to know, especially if we were to begin anything anew.”

Kara fought to hold on to the anger, even as she could feel it receded slightly in the face of Cat’s words. “You say all those things, but you still pushed me away the first chance you got. Three times now, Cat!”

“I did it to protect you.”

“You don’t get to make those decisions for me.” The rush of memories crashed over her—the early years with the Danvers when she was told to keep her head down, never be exceptional, never be noticed; the first time she was sent packing after the governor election in California; the way Kal-El, Alex, and Cat had all rushed to try to shove her back in the closet after she saved Alex’s plane.

“I was—”

“No! Because every time it’s like you’re trying to hurt me, to remind me of all the reasons why it could never be. And, fine, maybe it’s to push me away hard enough that I won’t try to change your mind, but that doesn’t make it okay. It doesn’t make it okay how…how mean you were to me in the process.” Kara held up a hand to stop Cat from replying. “And you still—still—haven’t apologized.”

“I did!” She’d told Alex she needed to apologize. She’d spoken to Carter about how remorseful she was for the way she treated Kara. She’d invited her over for that purpose. Surely she had.

“No! You told me why you did it. Maybe there was some implication that it was wrong, if justified. But you won’t even say sorry.”

“I—I’m sorry.”

“Maybe it’s too late, Cat. Maybe it’s always been too late for us.”

Swallowing past the lump in her throat, Cat forced herself to keep breathing, to stay quiet while Kara was still pacing, still speaking, still saying things that she knew she’d hear haunting her dreams for weeks, if not longer.

“I don’t care what you say in the press conference. Just make sure I’m still employable at the end of
it, and don’t ever quit the race without talking to us again.”

Cat watched in silence as Kara let herself out. She forced herself to send an email to Alex confirming that they were on for Monday. She even managed to get all the way upstairs and into a scalding shower before she broke, letting the water rinse away any proof of her distress.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

Bit of Cat and the team, followed by lots of the Danvers sisters as the process of climbing up and out of the angsty trenches begins

Cat stood once more with the same stylist who had been brought in before her debate appearances, taking at the comments about what colors might make her seem “promiscuous” and the exact point on her legs where a dress went from “slutty” to “professional,” then down to “dowdy.” Of course, it had been decided that it needed to be a dress, needed to be something to show the world that she was still feminine, as though somehow her attraction to a woman might make her less of one. She scoffed and crossed her arms through the entirety of it, her mood not improved in the slightest by the hangover that left her head throbbing and her mouth dry.

In her misery, Cat couldn’t quite keep herself from drifting back in time, nostalgia tugging at her emotions. She remembered her first night with Kara, the way it had all begun with that little flag pin, Kara’s deft fingers affixing it to her lapel. This time Kara didn’t come anywhere near her. No, Kara stood several feet away being fitted in a tailored navy pantsuit with heels high enough to make even a Kryptonian wobble and wince. Her objections to being forced under the woman’s scrutiny and dressed up in something five times as expensive as her usual attire had all been shut down within moments by a stylist contracted to secrecy and deprived of any electronic devices until after the press conferences ended. “The cameras will be on you before you know it. You’re as much a part of this as she is.”

“Sorry.” Cat had mouthed at Kara, swallowing harshly when she was met with nothing but stony silence in response.

The only thing Cat felt halfway okay about was her speech. She’d spent all afternoon with Alex and James weaving in the phrases that had polled best with Winn’s test groups, and even if Kara didn’t want to hear it, Cat knew she’d been more honest in writing than she had for most of her relationship with the woman—too scared of the possible fallout from exposure then to realize that there might be a very different set of consequences waiting for her.

She barely heard Alex and James’s last minute reminders to her before she was being led toward the podium they’d set up. And then it was just her and the cameras. The shutters and flashes faded into the background, all of it slipping away into white noise as she settled into her role.

“Thank you all for coming out here today.” And then she was off.

Kara watched from the back of the room, and Alex came to join her a minute or two into the prepared remarks.

“How you holding up?” Alex whispered.

“Fine.”

“Kara.”
“I can’t—not here, Alex.”

Alex nodded, knowing she’d have her chance to talk to Kara after the speech ended. A team of security was ready to keep the office guarded for Cat, show that it was back to business as usual, but they’d agreed that Kara would take the rest of the afternoon off, camping out in Alex’s house, which was easier to secure than Kara’s studio apartment. Cat seemed to understand when Alex asked for the afternoon off as well, and she wasn’t about to deny Kara the one comfort still in her power to bestow.

Alex focused back in on Cat again, listening as she spoke about fear and bravery, about learning not to treat her identity as a woman or as a single mother as a liability, but instead to embrace them, to use those experiences to bring a new voice into politics. Alex even found herself smiling as Cat built to the crescendo of her speech. The rah-rah attitude about “love wins” might be acting, but damn, it was Oscar-worthy.

Alex’s head jolted up as she listened to a line that hadn’t been in the original version about asking that the press respect Kara’s right to privacy, but Cat quickly segued back into the planned remarks, affirming her commitment to her job and the race above all else. There were a few more lines about her platform, about a renewed commitment to diversity and equal rights for all that drew applause from the friendly audience. And then she was bringing it home with some inspirational lines that had polled best of all with their test groups, talking about what it meant not to give in to fear, what it might have meant for her to have a public figure affirm that loving another woman or another man wasn’t something shameful to be turned into blackmail, but something to be celebrated like the other kinds of diversity she sought to bring to the White House if elected.

James swooped in to call on a handful of reporters lucky enough to be able to get their questions answered from Cat herself. Even with their pre-vetted press pool, one hostile question still made it through, though Cat handled it well, refusing to cave and apologize but also giving slightly more context as to why she had taken a few days away from the campaign—and coming off as rather considerate to Kara in the process. Of course, that question drew the attention back to Kara, and Alex stepped in front of her the moment the first reporter caught sight of her.

“Questions are to be directed to me,” Cat snapped. “I am the candidate running for office. Your questions, comments, and criticisms have always been about me and to me, and this will be no different.”

A few questions later, James gave Alex the signal that they were heading into the last answer before wrapping things up. Alex nudged Kara, and they slipped out as quietly as they could, attracting only the attention of the one or two reporters still determined to keep an eye out on the “love interest.”

The moment they were safely in a DEO-issued black SUV, Alex called over to Vasquez, ensuring that she and her teams were ready to move the moment Cat was done.

“Yes, ma’am. Teams are in position.”

“Perfect.”

Once the call ended, silence descended. And it lasted in a way it never had between them.

Alex drummed her fingers against the wheel as they sat in the inexplicably consistent midday DC traffic.

“What do you say to stopping at T Sweet’s?” Alex asked, unwilling to tolerate the uncomfortable silence any longer.
“Why?”

“I…ice cream’s always been our comfort food after break ups. And”—Alex shrugged, her gaze darting out the driver’s side window—“you look like maybe you could use it.” After a moment she added. “And I could, um, I could really use it too.”

“Alex,” Kara gasped. “No! No, please tell me you didn’t break up with Maggie because of this!”

Alex shook her head, blinking back stubborn tears. “No, but, um, we’re…things aren’t going so well right now. And I—I could really use my sister. And I think”—Alex gulped down air and swiped at her eyes with the sleeve of her blazer—“I miss being there for you.”

Alex was too nervous to look over as they sat quietly, the line of cars unmoving.

A sniffle finally broke the silence, and Alex jerked her head up to look over at her sister. “Are you—?”

“Fine, fine,” Kara insisted, searching the glove compartment for tissues or a napkin or anything, only to find that the DEO apparently kept their vehicles free of basic necessities. And it wasn’t like she could—or would—wipe her nose on a suit that cost as much as this one did.

“I’m sorry.”

“No, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have lied to you. I…I told you about the crush, but I was worried that if you knew that it had turned into more you’d tell me to stop things. You’d tell me I was only going to get hurt, or you’d go threaten Cat.” Kara let out a watery chuckle at that. “And I can’t imagine that going well.”

Alex hummed. “Probably not. But she’s little; I bet I can take her.”

“She’s surprisingly strong.”

“Ew.”

“Not like that!”

It was Alex’s turn to laugh then.

“I just…I wanted it to be mine for a little while. And then a little while turned into a sort of long while. And then there was no good time to say anything, and I was still pretty convinced you’d tell me I needed to end things before something…well, something like this happened.”

“I probably would have,” Alex admitted.

“Then Maggie found out, and she sort of gave me the concerned big sister speech.”

“Really?”

Kara lifted her head, taking a moment before the question hit her. “What? Yeah.” Kara shook her head. “But then it ended, and it seemed so pointless to tell you then even if all I wanted was to show up at your house in ratty old sweatpants with a gallon of ice cream and a stack of DVDs and let my big sister tell me it was all going to be okay.”

“Oh, Kara.” Figuring the traffic wasn’t going anywhere—not when she could see the start of a motorcade finally making its way over one of the cross streets—Alex took her hands off the wheel and leaned over, pulling Kara into as tight of a hug as she could manage at the awkward angle. “I’m
sorry. I—I didn’t make you feel like I was someone you could talk to. But you have to know, no matter how much I might have…disapproved or worried or threatened to yell at Cat, I would never, never turn you away. You’re my little sister.” Her voice broke on the last two words, and then Kara was crying in earnest. “Stop! You’re gonna make me tear up, and J’onn keeps the cars spotless.”

“Spotless cars can still have tissues,” Kara grumbled, snuffling loudly.

“We’ll be home soon.”

Sure enough, with the motorcade through, traffic began to inch forward once more, and it wasn’t long before a cab was cutting in front of Alex at a speed much too fast for the still-clearing congestion. “Fuck you!” Alex yelled out the window, revving the engine and pulling back just in time to keep from tapping his back bumper.

“Alex!”

“You know I hate the cabs in this city.”

“They’re not that bad.”

“One clipped the back wheel of your bike!”

“It’s not like I got hurt.”

“Because you can’t get hurt!”

Kara waved off Alex’s concern, sinking back into her seat. After a minute she perked up. “So…does the offer for ice cream still stand?”

“I’ll drop you off at the house then go get it so you’re not out in public—not today, okay?”

“Fine.” Kara traced along the seams of the leather seat with her finger, not looking up, even when she cleared her throat to speak again. “Um, Alex?”

“Hmm?”

“Are you mad?”

“I…no. I—I’m a little sad. Sad that I didn’t make you feel like you could talk to me. Sad that Maggie agreed with you. Sad that Cat cares enough about you that I can’t even threaten to make her disappear for having hurt you.”

“Doesn’t feel like she cares.”

“How, uh, how did things go with her?”

“She didn’t even apologize, Alex!” Kara’s voice rose in pitch. “She brings me over and tells me she’s gonna make this big speech about falling in love even though barely a few days ago she’s telling me that she didn’t mean to tell me she loved me and that it could never work and that she’s too smart or reasonable or whatever to do something so stupid as love me.”

Alex’s grip on the wheel tightened, and she tried to mediate her anger with the memory of Cat’s sadness, the way she had announced the end of her campaign, of her life’s dream, with such finality simply because it would have put Kara’s identity at risk. “Are you sure that’s what she meant?”
“Are you taking her side?”

“No! I’m not…I don’t even want there to be sides. I just want my sister to be happy.”

“Yeah, well, it’s not gonna be with Cat.”

Alex nodded. “Okay.”

“I mean, I’ll work on the campaign til it’s over, and I’ll say nice things to the press if I have to, but I’m not—I’m not giving her a third chance.”

Alex waited for a few moments, finally asking, “Do you want to talk about it more?”

“Not today.”

“Okay. Then we’ll do ice cream and movies and pizza and pretend like it’s just the two of us—nothing more.”

“You know we’re both still gonna be tied to our phones.”

Alex’s mouth curled up into a wry smile. “Yeah…that’s probably true.”

They pulled up in front of Alex’s house then, and Alex checked in with the two security guards posted there before shuffling Kara inside and doing a sweep for herself, never quite trusting that they had been thorough enough. “Okay, I’m going to get us ice cream. You pick whatever you want to watch, okay? Tonight’s about you.”

“But what about…I mean, did you want to talk about Maggie?”

Alex’s head drooped. “I don’t—it’s just—I love her, Kara. You know? I love her so much. But she kept things from me, and maybe I can get over that, but then…then every time I see her it reminds me of how things between us broke down. Of how”—Alex took a shuddering inhale—“how I couldn’t be there for you when you needed me, how I wasn’t the person you trusted.”

“No! It’s not that at all.” Kara took Alex’s hand in her own. “Maggie…it wasn’t like I chose to tell her. She saw me holding Cat’s hand, Alex. And I probably could have lied to her, and maybe she would have believed it, but it was just…it was this weight that had been sitting on my chest for so long, and even though I didn’t choose for Maggie to be the one who knew first, she was. And I didn’t want her to tell you because, I mean, I love you, but what if you shot the messenger?”

“I’d never pull a gun on a messenger.”

Kara rolled her eyes and shoved at Alex’s shoulder. “You know what I mean.” Alex dipped her head in tacit acknowledgment. “I didn’t want to be the reason why things between you two got weird. I mean…I guess I am anyway.”

“No, it’s not—I just needed some time. And now…I don’t know. I don’t know how to try to make things right again—not when I’m still hurt too.”

Kara traipsed into the living room and threw herself down onto the couch. “When did relationships get to be so hard?”

“I don’t know. Maybe when we started dating people we actually gave a shit about?”

“Ugh. It sucks. Remind me not to do it again.”
“This? Coming from the woman who has every word to every romantic comedy memorized?”

“Not every movie, Alex.”

“But are you really telling me you wouldn’t do it all over again with Cat if you had the chance?”

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but are you…are you encouraging me here?”


“Oh my god, you are! Little Ms. Love-is-a-lie suddenly thinks it’s worth fighting for!”

“Whatever. I just…Maggie makes”—Alex grimaced at the memory of where they were at the present moment—“made…makes, I don’t know. She makes me happy, okay? Happier than I ever thought I would be, than I ever though I deserved to be.”

“That’s so sweet.”

“Shut up.”

“It is, though. And we’re gonna make things right between you two.”

“Please don’t.”

“Why not?”

“Do you want me to start trying to Parent Trap you with Cat?”

Kara snorted. “Can you even imagine? She’d definitely be the Elizabeth James character.” She settled further into the couch, pulling off the blazer and draping it over one of the arms. “I just…I don’t…she admits to loving me when it’s convenient, you know? She was so ashamed about me, she was ready to drop out of the race until you went and convinced her not to.”

Alex narrowed her eyes at that, climbing over Kara to sit next to her on the couch. “Is that what she told you?”

“She didn’t have to, Alex.”

“Look.” Alex took a deep breath and glanced up at the ceiling. “I don’t like the idea of you sleeping with Cat Grant. You are my baby sister, and I will always worry about you, no matter who you’re seeing. And Cat…Cat can be ruthless when it comes to getting things done. But”—Alex held up a hand—“she also…I don’t know what she told you exactly, but she cares for you. Very deeply. And I’m not necessarily encouraging it, but I think…I think you should at least hear her out.”
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

Note the NSFW ending!

“Cat Grant Comes Out to Cheers and Jeers”

“Grant Campaign: Coming Out and Back”

“Tell Us Something We Don’t Know: Cat Grant and the Glass Closet”

“Candidate and Campaign Manager to Lesbian Lovers: How a Scandal Rocked the Grant Campaign”

“Can She Keep It in Her Pants? The Left’s Sex Scandal Problem”

“An Ally from the Start, and Now, an Out Member of the Community”

Cat thumbed through the headlines James had set out for her at a meeting with all her top-level staffers—James, Kara, Alex, Winn, and Lucy for good measure. “Did half of these people even listen to my damn speech?” Even the few laudatory ones seemed to think she’d declared herself a lesbian overnight.

“It’s better than it could have been,” James insisted, his low, calming voice almost infuriating now in its insistence that things were okay, weren’t so bad as they seemed.

“Is it? Because even some of the left isn’t so sure about me now.” Cat thrust a few op-eds from left-leaning commentators forward, pointing at descriptions of her as “unfit for office” and “dealing with too much to handle the presidency,” as though she hadn’t learned to balance hundreds of commitments all at once years ago.

Kara shrugged. “Some of the left wasn’t so sure about you before either. You were winning primaries, but never with 100% of the vote.”

Cat ground her teeth together and inhaled deeply through her nose. “This is more negative publicity than I wanted.”

“It’ll blow over.” Alex’s voice was so self-assured that it was almost convincing.

Of course, Cat Grant wasn’t a woman easily convinced. “How do you know?”

“News about Justin’s affair was quieting down until he came back under fire with you.”

“Until—key word,” Cat spat out.

“People like the outrage, but it’s unsustainable.” The words were about the campaign, but Alex couldn’t help but feel the weight of their truth. All the anger and rage and frustration and betrayal had simmered down, burning themselves out into something more like…like hurt and sadness and, god, loneliness. How she missed Maggie. Sure, things with Kara were better. They’d talked. And then
talked some more. And talked just a little longer for good measure. But they were used to the ups and downs, the rough patches when they took turns letting each other down and forging ahead once more. But she didn’t know how to do that with Maggie, didn’t know how to bridge that divide and reach out and demand apologies even as she gave them freely in turn. She didn’t know how say I’m sorry for lashing out at the same time as she said But I need honesty and trust in a relationship. In her dating life before there had never been an I love you, and now trying to finagle an I love you with an I was hurt by you seemed like an impossible burden.

Unwilling to concede the point quite so easily, Cat listened as Winn rattled off polling numbers, listened as James pitched a series of interviews with friendly publications, listened as Kara went over the newest itinerary point by point. They sat and went through the primary numbers. She’d managed to pull through by small margins in Mississippi, North Carolina, and Illinois thanks to heavy campaigning earlier in the season. She’d lost a fair amount of pledged delegates they’d been counting on in Michigan to Max, who had also taken most of the votes in Maine, while Justin had managed to sweep through Ohio and claim large sections of Florida.

What was important next, though, was reestablishing herself as a serious contender, one who wasn’t about to drop back out of the race. Kara passed out a schedule of travel, already vetted with security, to hit all the upcoming states, focusing on the ones where Cat had the best chances of claiming a sizeable number of votes. They wouldn’t waste whole days’ worth of time on states where she’d claim maybe 5 of the 16 available pledged delegates. The important thing, Alex insisted, was optics. Cat needed a few good elections where she could blow the competition out of the water, show everyone that she wasn’t going anywhere.

After reviewing the game plan for Arizona and Washington—the two soonest elections with the highest number of available delegates and the best polling in favor of Cat—Kara excused herself, ducking out for a whole afternoon of phone calls with the campaign offices in all the states with upcoming primaries.

James left not too soon afterward with suggestions from Cat and Alex about the order in which to try for different journalists and publications, plus a list of organizations that had seemed ready to come out and publically back Cat earlier in the season and that they hoped might still do the same. Winn followed closely behind with notes for the researchers.

Alex drummed her fingers against her thigh and peered up at Lucy, hoping she would get the message. When she didn’t, Alex cleared her throat. “Lucy, I need to speak to Cat alone.”

Lucy arched an eyebrow at Alex, a question and a warning in her eyes. She had seen some of the anger redirect itself when Alex found out about Kara’s special contract, but she really didn’t need to deal with the legal headache of a high-ranking contractor on staff threatening her boss.

Alex gave a small shake of her head that seemed to appease Lucy somewhat. “I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

“Fine.” Lucy took her time, organizing her papers and slipping them into her binder before finally rising from her chair and strolling to the door. Once she was gone, Alex shut and locked the door behind her, drawing her chair closer to Cat’s desk.

Cat assessed Alex over the last dregs of her once-hot latte. “Are you going to be the one person out of all of them who’s actually honest with me about my odds?”

“Better. I’m going to make those overly optimistic predictions come true.”

“Those are some big promises.”
“Lena and I have enough to sink Max’s campaign.” After a moment, Alex shrugged and added, almost as an afterthought, “And possibly send him to prison.”

“Is that so?”

“I can’t tell you all of the details.”

“Of course you can’t.” Cat sighed, glancing around her office and looking for something, anything, that might ease the strain she could feel building in the back of her neck and the hinge of her jaw.

“It’s not what you’re thinking.”

“And what would that be?”

“You think I’ve done something illegal and know that telling you would implicate you.”

“And?” Cat arched an eyebrow and steepled her hands on the desk in front of her, daring Alex to contradict her.

“And you’re wrong.” Alex almost grinned at the snarl Cat just barely bit back. She’d take that anger over the broken woman she found slumped over the counter in her own kitchen any day. “I can’t tell you because Lena was serious about cooperating with law enforcement back around the, uh, drugged Supergirl incident, and she’s been working with one of the three-letter organizations that has been building a case against Max and Lillian Luthor for longer than even we suspected them.”

“Oh?”

“After the President’s Alien Amnesty Act passed, there were certain…groups that were dismantled. Not everyone was pleased with the changes, and it seems not every group shuttered its windows when it was supposed to.”

“What does this mean for me?”

“It means you need to pull out big, impressive victories over the next few weeks so that when the hammer falls on Max in April, Justin doesn’t look like the next best choice for his supporters. Remember how we thought Max would bide his time with any dirt he had on you? Same thing here. We need to relegitimize you as a candidate before we shrink the pool again. So what do you say?”

“You mean am I ready to go out and work my ass off for the one thing I’ve been working toward my entire life? Am I ready to look at Max’s smarmy little grin everyday and take satisfaction in knowing that in a matter of weeks he won’t have a single thing left to smile about?”

A wicked smirk pulled up the corners of Alex’s mouth. “Something like that.”

For the first time since she’d returned, Cat smiled—a real, genuine smile—settling back into her chair and taking in a deep breath. “Oh, if you thought you saw me motivated before…just you wait.”

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Feeling energized by the sense that things were finally clicking back into place, pieces slipping back where they belonged, everything lining up to position Cat for a climb to the top—an arduous one, yes, but a doable one too—Alex strode down the hallway to where the researchers sat, pacing along the hallway until Winn finished his meeting with them. The moment the door cracked open, Alex pulled it the rest of the way, sweeping past Winn and through the rows of bustling staffers flitting in and out of cubicles until she found Maggie’s desk.
Maggie looked…gaunt. Stacks of paper were piled high around her computer, and a few too many mostly empty mugs were scattered around her working space. Dark circles curled under her eyes, and the button up she wore was wrinkled, the tip of the right side of her collar folded in on itself.

“Uh, Maggie?” Alex could feel her heart thundering in her chest, and she struggled to get her breath to come normally. She wondered why she thought that coming out and asking Maggie on a date would be the hardest things she ever did. They felt like child’s play compared to this.

“Alex?” Maggie’s eyes darted around, as if looking for Kara or Cat or some other reason why Alex would be there.

“I just, um”—Alex swallowed heavily, thinking back to how well Maggie had taken care of her when she was stressed—“I was thinking about getting lunch and wanted to see if you’d like anything. My treat. I, uh, I guess you probably have too much work to do to go out, but I could, uh, there’s that vegan place up in Columbia Heights—I could go get you that macaroni and cheese you like, maybe?”

Alex dared to let herself hope when Maggie’s eyes softened, the wariness slowly seeping out of her frame. “You don’t have to.”

“No! I, um, I want to.”

“I know it’s out of the way, Alex.”

“But I, uh…I’m totally craving their fake chicken, so…it’s for me, really.”

Maggie’s mouth curled up into a smile, and Alex felt her heart pounding for a different reason when she caught sight of Maggie’s dimples for the first time in far too long. “That so, Danvers?”

“Totally,” Alex lied.

“Well in that case, I really can’t say no…”

“It would be silly to when I’m totally already going regardless of what your answer is.”

“Would you judge me if I also asked you to get me one of the chocolate cream milkshakes? I mean, I don’t need one if it’s too much to carry or whatever.”

“No! You deserve everything.” Alex cleared her throat, her gaze falling to a rather fascinating piece of lint that had gotten caught on the corner of Maggie’s cubicle wall.

“Let’s start with the milkshake, then, yeah?”

“Um, yeah. Yeah, sounds good.”

---

They’d both been too busy to eat together at lunch, but Maggie had agreed to come over for dinner, looking hopeful at the offer. Which was precisely how Alex found herself fretting over too many pots and pans in the kitchen as if figuring out what food to cook would somehow make the problem disappear.

Maggie knocked on the door before Alex was even close to ready.

“Hey.” Maggie waved, barely a curl of her hand, before stuffing it back in her pocket and shuffling in the doorway to a place that had, until so recently, felt like a second home. Every inch reminded
her of too many things. Hell, even the door itself brought back memories of her own bare ass pressed to the cool wood, her winter running tights shuffled down to her ankles and Alex on her knees between Maggie’s legs, too impatient to make it even an inch further into the house.

Maggie’s gaze swept over to the living room where they’d curled up and watched movies and confessed that they liked each other and kissed for the very first time. She tried not to think about the way she’d watched Alex’s face harden in anger there when the news first broke or, more recently, how she’d seen Alex crumple under the weight of betrayal and hurt, her back turned to Maggie, wanting little more than to hide it all from her.

There was the table where they’d shared meals and the stairs where Maggie had tripped and nearly sprained her ankle after getting distracted by the sight of Alex’s hips swaying in front of her. And she knew that just up those stairs was the bedroom—the bed where she and Alex had spent nights and early mornings and the rare afternoon away from the office learning the curves and planes of each other’s body, discovering the taste and feel of someone new, finding the rhythms that came naturally and the little things that left the other gasping and crying out.

“I, um, dinner isn’t quite ready. Or, well, some of it is,” Alex hedged, gesturing over at the kitchen and the overworked stove.

Maggie bit back the teasing retort about how many people that much food could feed. “Thanks. Do you need any help?”

“No, no. But come in! I, uh, I can get you some of the stuff that is done now…if you’re hungry?”

“Sure.” Maggie kicked off her shoes and hung her coat, following Alex into the kitchen. “It all looks great.”

Alex shrugged. “It’s fine. I don’t know. I think maybe the garlic bread is a little burnt, and I might have added too much of something to the sauce, and—”

“Alex,” Maggie interrupted. “Look, I…you could have put a bag of pretzels and hummus out, and I’d still tell you it was great. I’ve just”—Maggie swallowed, her eyes rolling up as she tried to keep her emotions at bay—“I’ve missed you, Danvers.”

“God, I’ve missed you so much, Maggie.” It felt like letting out the last bit of air that she didn’t know had been trapped in her lungs, like something stale and old that had been caught up inside of her was finally released. “I just…it was hard, and I just wanted to be with you and tell you about it, but you were…well, you were part of it. And I was hurt, but I still—you were still—I didn’t want to not be with you even when I wanted to yell at you.”

Maggie chuckled softly. “Yeah…yeah, I get that.” Sipping at the water Alex had put out for her, Maggie stepped toward the counter, leaning one hip against it as she considered her words. “Because, right? Part of me wanted to yell at you for judging me for something you’d done yourself. But part of me got that it wasn’t the same—wasn’t remotely the same. It was why I hadn’t wanted to keep the secret in the first place.”

“Kara mentioned that,” Alex whispered. “When we, um, talked.”

“And so I was angry at you for not listening to me, but I was angry at myself too...also sort of for not listening to me, but there’s really no good way to express that or whatever. And then even with the anger, I also just wanted to scoop you up and hold you and promise you that I would never, ever knowingly be the one to make you look that hurt again.”
“I know—I know that it wasn’t on purpose. And god”—Alex shook her head, pushing her hair back with both hands—“I knew it, but it was…I couldn’t really deal with you until I’d talked to Kara, and then that took time, and everything kept piling up, you know? And I wanted to apologize. Or, no, I still do. Because I am sorry for letting my anger at…at Kara and Cat and the whole fucking situation get mixed up with my anger at you. Because I get that you were trying to help Kara, and that means a lot to me.”

Maggie lifted one shoulder, her gaze dropping slightly.

“No, it means a lot. Kara…she deserves good people in her life.”

“So do you, Alex.”

It was Alex’s turn to shrug then. “I don’t…I’d like to think I’m working to deserve people like you and Kara. Because life without you—sorry, I don’t mean…it’s not like I can’t live without you or anything like that. But things are better with you. I—I love you, you know? And I didn’t think it would matter much outside of us, but it does. It was like…like you disappeared from my life, and suddenly other little things felt wrong. Like my bed felt too big and empty, and I ordered too much food, and I didn’t have any reason to come home from work at a reasonable hour.”

“I get that,” Maggie whispered. “I wish you hadn’t pushed me away.” She held up a hand before Alex could explain. “I get why it happened, but in the future, I want to talk, okay? Maybe not right away—not always—but sooner than this.”

“I can’t promise I’m always going to be good at the talking parts.”

The corner of Maggie’s mouth quirked up into a smile. “What matters is that you’re trying.”

Alex stepped forward then, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears and her hands outstretched. “Maybe…maybe I might be better at actions?”

Maggie clasped Alex’s hands in her own, pulling her forward a little more roughly than she normally would, feeling Alex whimper as she crashed their lips together.

And then it was teeth and tongues and desperation.

One of them managed to turn off the burners and the oven, insisting that dinner could be reheated.

Their shirts and socks were left strewn across the kitchen floor, and one bra ended up hooked over the banister as they fumbled their way up the stairs, pants unbuttoned and hanging open as fingers hooked under waistbands and groped clumsily at exposed skin that felt almost new again.

Pants and underwear were shoved down in one desperate go, falling in piles in the doorway to the bedroom before they were collapsing into the bed, grabbing at expanses of hot skin, muscles tensing and contracting as they pulled each other closer, drew each other in tighter, rocked together until their thighs were slick with sweat and arousal, their backs littered with red stripes, their lips kiss-swollen and tender.

They’d both shuddered through some form of release—their groans almost guttural as their hips stuttered forward—before Alex was dragging Maggie with her to the edge of the bed, unwilling to lose the feeling of her for even a second, and pulling out the small, lead-lined box of things that had migrated to her house when they started spending more nights there.

“I”—Alex took a deep breath, her mind still reeling and dizzy with want—“wear this for me?”
Maggie accepted the proffered harness, wriggling into it and pulling the buckles into place after Alex handed over the ridged purple toy.

“I just—hold me?”

Maggie nodded, settling back on her heels as Alex straddled her lips, kissing her—long and slow and full of all the words she couldn’t say.

A bit of lube and a moment of awkward fumbling later, and Alex was sinking low, bracing herself as she lowered herself further and further down until she could feel the cool press of the harness and the heated contrast of Maggie’s skin against her.

Maggie’s fingers curled around Alex’s ass, tucked under the backs of her thighs, as she gently rocked forward, helping to draw Alex in closer on each small thrust.

Alex leaned her forehead forward, resting it against Maggie’s as she let her hips roll into a rhythm, whimpering at every well-angled drag of the strap on inside of her, groaning at the feeling of Maggie’s strong arms wrapped around her.

And it was I’m sorry and I love you and I need you and Show me you still love me all wrapped in one.

And when Maggie murmured, “I love you,” against Alex’s lips, Alex let herself believe it, let it warm her, let that heat and love spread through her until every inch of her felt filled with it. And then Maggie’s hands were drawing her in closer and Alex’s world shrank to her and Maggie and the melding and merging of their bodies as she crested up and over the wave, crashing down as everything else slipped away, secure in the knowledge that Maggie was there to hold her.

By the time she came back to, there were wet tracks streaked down her cheeks, and Maggie’s thumb was slowly, gently brushing the last tears away. “You’re good,” Maggie whispered. “I’ve got you.”

“You always do.”

Maggie shrugged, a wistful smile playing about her lips. “Not always. But for you I promise I’m learning.”

And that was enough, that was more than Alex had ever dared to hope for out of a partner, and she told Maggie as much, wiping away stubborn tears that kept appearing as she trailed searing kisses down the column of Maggie’s neck and over her collarbones and across her chest. The harness fell to the floor by the time Alex made it to Maggie’s thighs, and then Alex lost herself entirely to sensation, sinking into the heat and intensity of all that Maggie could give her, of all that she could give in return.

Half of dinner was inedible by the time they made it back downstairs.
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

I played a bit with form here, and we've got some alternating POVs between Cat and Kara. Hopefully you enjoy! We've got a few chapters left until this fic is through...

The days blurred together in a haze of travel and stump speeches and rallies. Kara was fairly certain if she needed as much sleep as a normal person, she’d have collapsed by then, and the fact that Cat, Alex, and James were keeping up with it all by mainlining caffeine never ceased to amaze her. The questions about Cat’s “new” “lesbian” identity cropped up at every event, but the public gradually grew less interested as no new information surfaced and Cat provided the same generic responses each time.

At some point, Kara realized she’d stopped keeping track of time by date, instead losing herself to the rhythms of a kind of geographic calendar. With every slow descent out of the air came a new voter base to woo.

**Tempe, Arizona:**

Two members of the Hispanic Caucus who had pledged support for Cat early on in the race and who hadn’t withdrawn it, even during her leave of absence, joined the team on their journey around Maricopa County. James ran into hurdle after hurdle in his attempts to rally support among some of the more moderate papers—concern about Cat’s “scandals” still running high—though Alex pulled in favors for positive coverage in the lead up to the primary.

At the end of their second night there, Cat pulled Kara aside. “Honest answer. How’s it looking?”

Kara shrugged. “Not great. But not terrible. I think you’ll still beat Max and Justin, but not by as much as it should have been.”

With a slow nod of her head, Cat sank down into the leather seat by her hotel room desk. “Thanks.”

“IT’s what you pay me for.”

Kara watched Cat’s face close off as she dismissed Kara with a flick of her wrist. A part of Kara almost wanted to stay, to insist that Cat lay it all out—whatever it was that had Alex nudging Kara back toward her for some reason—but she was tired of being lied to and pushed away and fed half-truths for her “protection” or whatever bullshit reasons people told her after the fact. So she left, the door clicking shut and locked behind her.

**Boise, Idaho:**

They barely spent a full workday in Idaho, dominated as the coverage already was by polls predicting Max’s landslide victory, his smarmy face plastered all over billboards and television ads. Cat swore she could feel her stomach churning with every glimpse of him. She hated knowing that she’d ever dated the man, even if it hadn’t lasted. It was one thing when she thought the worst part of him was his libertarian ideology. It was quite another to find out that he’d take money from people who tried to kill her consultant, drug her girlfriend—no, no, not that, certainly not that anymore—
manager, and sink her campaign with tawdry gossip. And all for what? For enough cash to bankroll a campaign that would land him in the White House with his hands tied by all the dirty funders who’d gotten him there?

She and Justin crossed paths in Boise and Idaho Falls for their single day there, both of them apparently sticking to the “cut your losses” philosophy and leaving the state to Max.

On the plane ride to Utah for a few stops before they circled back to Arizona for the results watch party, Kara nudged Cat softly during takeoff—the first voluntary physical contact they’d had since… just since.

“I still believe in this campaign,” Kara whispered.

“No,” Kara acknowledged with a dip of her head, “not here. But we’ve got a whole lot of states left, and, well, they’d be crazy not to see that you’re the best person in the field.”

And it wasn’t much—certainly not the kind of effusive praise Cat had soaked up earlier, not the indulgent fantasies of life in and after the White House they’d once shared over their more leisurely moments in bed together—but Cat felt like maybe it was a start. It wasn’t quite, “I forgive you,” but it lacked the overt hostility of before, and the acute hurt she’d once seen glimmering back at her from those big blue eyes had receded into a kind of wistful sadness that twisted her heart without making it feel like it would shatter.

**Salt Lake City, Utah:**

It was, by far, the friendliest reception Cat had gotten in the state. The crowds of conservative protesters they’d seen in Provo were noticeably absent, and Kara watched as some of the tension eased from Cat’s small frame during a well-attended rally. It didn’t mean she’d win the caucuses—not by a long shot—but Kara dared to hope there might be some showing for her, enough to bolster hope and keep them afloat as they trudged through the next few days of campaigning in unfriendly states.

Over the course of their first day in Utah, Kara couldn’t help but notice the distinct lack of enthusiasm among some segments of the team. And sure, okay, maybe she was a little to blame. She certainly wasn’t bounding onto the bus with free trays of cookies and boxes of coffee and every bit of optimism she could muster for Cat and her campaign. But surely other people could shoulder that burden.

The unwillingness to throw herself wholeheartedly into the campaign for a second time ate away at Kara, nagging at the back of her thoughts all day and leaving her frustrated with herself and Cat and everything that had led them there. Not even a long shower and a flight to California to help deal with a fire could soothe her mind.

Unable to sleep that first night, Kara wandered down the hallway to Alex’s room. She tried to figure out how she felt, her mood vacillating with every step. Because on the one hand, she was still angry, so angry, at Cat for the back-and-forth and the lying and the “I love you” that always seemed to come on the heels of an “I’m sorry.” But Cat had just about taken off the head of the one reporter who tried to corner Kara at a recent rally, and Cat hadn’t backed off from the line about her feelings for Kara, even as she talked about them as unrequited, even as she took heat for it and fell in the polls and watched as the empire she’d built around her was disregarded in favor of tabloid fodder that seemed so beneath her, so beneath everything she was doing, could be doing.
Kara knocked lightly against the door. “Alex,” she whispered, her voice low enough not to disturb the adjoining rooms. She knocked again, tapping her foot as she waited.

After several long seconds, Alex cracked the door, the chain still keeping it from opening all the way. “What do you need?” Alex whispered back, pulling a fluffy white towel more firmly around herself.

“Oh. Were you showering?”

“Yeah.”

“Let me in, I’ll yell through the curtain.”

“No—I—Kara,” Alex huffed. “Can it wait?”

“I want to talk about…you know.”

“Right now?”

“I’ve been giving a lot of thought to everything you said, and I’m trying to figure out how I feel, and —”

“Hold on.”

“What?”

“Just…I’m gonna unlock the door, but count to 30 before you actually come barging in, okay?”

“Oh my god, I can just close my eyes, Alex.”

“Kara,” Alex whined, stretching out her name. “Either give me 30 seconds or come back in half an hour.”

“Fine.”

Kara slumped against the hallway as the door clicked shut. She listened as the chain lock slid open, counting down the seconds until she heard the shower curtain open and close again. Only that sound never came.

“Maggie,” Alex whispered. “I have to go. Kara’s here.”

“Seriously? You were so close.”

“Stop! I—it’s—she’s finally ready to talk about Cat, and I…I should be a good big sister.”

“Could’ve been a good big sister two minutes from now…”

“If anyone should be annoyed by this, it’s me. Now I need to go and figure out how to act like I wasn’t just fuc—”

“I’ll come back!” Kara yelled from the door, bolting down the hallway until she made it to her room, fumbling with the magnetic keycard until the lock finally beeped open. She turned on the television, flipping through the channels until she found some action movie with loud gunshots and explosions and enough visual stimulation to keep her brain far, far away from whatever other kind of… stimulation had been happening down the hallway.
Ten minutes later, a soft knock sounded at her door. “Kara?”

After a moment’s hesitation, Kara dragged herself up and pulled open the door. “Yeah?”

“I, um”—Alex swallowed, her gaze trained firmly on the wall behind Kara’s head and her entire chest and face flushed a deep shade of red—“I take it you did not wait 30 seconds to listen.”

“I did not,” Kara admitted.

“Right.”

“Yep.”

They fell into an uneasy silence until Alex cleared her throat and forced herself to talk. “I, um, did you still want to talk?”

Figuring she could get over the awkwardness of it all for the chance at some advice from one of the only people who already knew everything, Kara stepped aside, ushering Alex in. “I already checked for any bugs or cameras.”

“Good. Glad you’re being cautious.”

Kara waited for the second half of the sentence, some reminder about how she hadn’t done that before and look where it got her, but it never came. “Um, yeah.”

“So…you said you had some feelings?”

“I have a lot of feelings, Alex,” Kara whined, flinging herself dramatically onto the bed. That finally drew a laugh from Alex.

“I bet you do. Want to tell me about any of them?”

“I don’t know. I just…I still like her. Rao, I still love her, even. But I also kind of hate her. But no, that’s not even true anymore.” Kara groaned, craning her head back to look at the water stain decorating her ceiling. “I’m, like, mad, but not as mad as I was. But I should be more mad. Or maybe not. I don’t know. She’s standing up for me, and it’s kind of really sweet, you know? Because I have super powers, and she’s this tiny little woman getting in between me and reporters.” Alex snorted at the image. “But none of it takes away everything that happened before.”

“That’s true.” Alex pulled one leg underneath herself as she perched on the corner of the bed. “And how do you feel about that?”

“Remember how we used to watch Sex and the City?”

Alex cocked her head to the side at the odd segue. “Yeah, and sometimes Mom would join, and it was the most awkward thing ever.”

“Not more awkward than what I just had to hear,” Kara grumbled, earning a shove that she barely felt.

“Do you have a point?”

“Do you remember what Eliza used to say about all the people who’d go back to cheating partners or boyfriends who didn’t make them happy before?”

“Um, sort of? I think I’ve tried to repress all memories of watching that show with Mom ever since
we all had to sit in silence while Samantha tried out being a lesbian.”

“Oh…that’s fair. But she used to talk about how much she pitied them for not being able to see that they were setting themselves up to get hurt. And I—I don’t want to be one of them, Alex. I don’t want to be the dumb girl that goes crawling back to the woman that broke my heart again and again.”

“I get it. And I don’t want to push you back into the arms of someone only to see you get hurt. But”—Alex hesitated, finally flopping down on her back next to Kara—“maybe it’s different. You know, the guys on the show—well, some of the girls too—they were all kind of shit people. And Cat…she’s got flaws. She’s got a lot of flaws.”

“Be nice.” No matter how upset she was with Cat, the warning in Kara's voice was clear.

“I’m trying.”

“Fine.”

Alex glared at Kara until she was sure she would be quiet. “But I don’t think those flaws make her a shit person. I think they make her human.”

“What’s the difference?”

“I don’t know exactly, but I have to believe there are times we hurt each other without it being about who we are as people. Like, Maggie and I didn’t hurt each other because we’re secretly terrible. We did it because there were situations that were bigger than us and had all these repercussions and roots or something that we couldn’t see in the moment. And I think…I think maybe a national political campaign is big enough to be that kind of situation.”

“So I’m supposed to let it all go?”

Alex rolled over, propping herself up on her elbows and meeting Kara's gaze with one finger pointed at her. “I definitely didn’t say that.”

“Then what?”

“I don’t know. Only you can decide the what. But if Cat means as much to you as it sounds like she does, I think you owe it to yourself to hear her out, figure out if there’s some way you two can move past it without acting like it never happened.”

They fell into a contemplative silence then until Kara nudged Alex. “That’s not bad advice.”

The corners of Alex’s mouth tugged up into a smile. “I have my moments.” After a few seconds she added, “And Maggie probably helps.”

“Yeah, she’s good for you.”

“She is,” Alex whispered.

**Seattle, Washington:**

They spent days on end hitting the pavement all across Washington. After a decent showing in the polls in Arizona and even Utah, the papers had started lending Cat’s campaign a bit more credibility, though Max’s sweeping victory in Idaho picked up more coverage than anything else from the night. But Washington was a place they could win and win big. And James, Kara, and Alex were convinced they could spin it into a headline story big enough to secure Cat a few endorsements that
would reestablish her credibility.

The long days spent in cars and buses reminded Cat of the early weeks out on the road, back when she and Kara danced around one another, the attraction and emotions building and evolving into something far more than either of them had ever expected.

On their third night in Washington, Kara dropped by with updated numbers from Winn. “We’re looking good here.”

“Still dismal in Hawaii and Alaska?”

“We kind of knew we weren’t gonna win them anyway, and it’s not like they’ve got enough delegates up for grabs to justify a trip out there.”

Cat nodded. She wondered if Kara was also thinking about one of the few mornings they’d managed to claim together with Kara sneaking out through Cat’s window, then coming back from her room and knocking at Cat’s door as if they hadn’t spent every minute of the night before wrapped around each other. In front of a map of the United States with various electoral numbers scratched out across it, they’d talked about all the places they’d been, the ones they still wanted to see. Kara had wrapped her arms around Cat’s waist, pressing soft kisses to the back of her neck and up her jaw. “I want to go to Hawaii with you. I want to stand out on the sand with the waves crashing down in front of us and finally give you a few moments of peace.”

The faint whispers and earnest promises had devolved into kissing soon enough, which ended once Cat started interspersing dirty talk with questions about their strategy for the Pacific Northwest.

And even though Cat knew they’d never have that moment on the beach, she’d let the fantasy of it sustain her through some of the more stressful moments. But there they were, letting one of their few opportunities fly by. No hope of votes. No possibility for quiet moments. No “them” to imagine.

“You’re doing something good here,” Kara whispered, dragging Cat back into the present again.

“We’ll see.”

“No, I mean it. Even if you lose, you’re still doing something good.”

“You’re working on the campaign, Kara. You have to say that to justify your career.”

“Cat,” Kara snapped.

Cat dragged her eyes up at that, meeting the surprisingly steely gaze.

“You...a lot of outside factors came together to make your speech happen, and I wish it didn’t have to happen the way it did or for the reasons it did, but it—and you—you’re doing a lot of good.” Cat moved to shrug off the compliment, but Kara persisted. “You talked about wishing you had someone out and proud of who they were when you were a kid. And you—you are that person, Cat. For someone out there, you’re doing that every day when you don’t deny the accusations or refuse to answer questions from reporters. And that—that inspires me, Cat. Despite all of it, you still inspire me.”

Too afraid of what might fall from her lips if she left them open for any longer than they needed to be, Cat kept her response to two short words. “Thank you.”

**Milwaukee, Wisconsin:**
Sweeping in, still riding the high of a clear victory in Washington, Kara swore she saw some of the old momentum emerging, the team moving together like she hadn’t seen since before everything fell to pieces. And she didn’t know if it was the surge of hope from the wins and the ensuing coverage, or if it was the endorsement of some of the biggest labor unions in Wisconsin, or if maybe it were simply a few days out in the sun after the rainy nights spent in Washington, but Kara felt lighter again, like maybe all of this was possible.

It was after a particularly successful rally that Kara found herself pacing her hotel room, finally giving in and striding down the hallway to Cat’s room. She ignored the questioning smile she got from Vasquez as she knocked at the door, her foot tapping in time with her heart as she waited for Cat to answer.

“Do you need something?”

“Yeah,” Kara nodded, ducking inside, clutching stacks of paper and campaign maps and test group polling that, sure, fine, she did want to get to, but they could wait. “How do I know this won’t happen again?”

Cat’s brow furrowed in confusion. “What?”

“You said it was true that you loved me. But the… the regret and the pushing me away. How do I know you won’t do that the second things get scary or big or move too fast or don’t go the way you expected them to?”

Cat’s forehead crinkled even more as she tried to process the words coming at her at a rapid pace. “I…I can’t promise never to overreact. I can’t promise that the campaign or the job or Carter will never come first. I can’t even promise that I’m always going to be patient or know what to say or when to say it.” Kara swallowed heavily, already turning on her heels when Cat’s voice—softer this time—brought her back into the room. “But I promise that I want to try, even when I don’t know how to do it. I promise that even when I’m at my worst, I respect you and the work you do—in both your day and your night jobs.” Kara ducked her head; she hadn’t realized Cat would still be following the minor heroics around the country, especially not when her life was as hectic as it was. “And… for what it’s worth, I promise that I really do love you. Even when it’s not been prudent or rational or a good idea, I’ve loved you, Kara.” Cat took a deep breath and reached out for Kara’s hands. “If I’m going to be honest, I can’t promise that you and you alone are enough for me because I want to do more, just like you couldn’t be happy with only your day job.” Kara pulled her lower lip between her teeth at the memory of the fight and all that had followed. “But if you give me the chance, I promise that I want to try to figure out how those pieces that make up ‘enough’ for me can work together.”

Kara took a few deep breaths, willing her racing thoughts to slow. “No more making decisions for me.”

“No more.”

“And you don’t get to try to hurt me to push me away and protect me.”

“I shouldn’t have done it then.”

Kara nodded slowly, the walls she had built up around her heart slowly crumbling. “This means no more secrets.”

She watched as Cat tensed somewhat before finally nodding.
“I’m not ready to say yes yet. And I don’t—I want you to actually think about all this, about what it means.”

Cat’s jaw clenched, but then she inclined her head slightly. “Okay.”

“Two weeks.”

“What?”

“For two weeks I want us to wait and think about it—both of us.”

“And then what? We mail each other a little notecard where we check off whether we agree to the terms of service?”

The snark couldn’t stay gone forever, and Kara’s mouth twisted up into a small smile despite her best efforts. “No…” Figuring it was all in with her plan or not at all, Kara pulled herself up to her full height, letting her spine straighten and her shoulders broaden the way they did as Supergirl. “We’ll be in New York then. If you want to…not forget, but forgive, forgive and hit restart and try this thing again, meet me on the Brooklyn Bridge after the primary.”

Cat scoffed. “Sex and the City, really? You didn’t want to go back a little further in time to something a bit more classic? Maybe Sleepless in Seattle?”

“You want to try to get into the Empire State Building without attracting notice?” Kara asked, a glint of a challenge shimmering in her eyes.

“Fine. Brooklyn Bridge.”

“And if you don’t show, I’ll understand.”

“And you?”

“I’ll think seriously and make my decision too.”

New York, New York:

A loss in Wyoming followed on the heels of a close win in Wisconsin, and Cat and Justin were vying for the New York votes, with Justin sweeping through Albany and leaving Cat New York City. But by the time polls were closing for the primary, Cat could think of little more than Kara’s offer. They’d spent the past two weeks dancing around one another, working almost as well as they once had, even as unvoiced tensions simmered between them.

Much of the team had come up to New York for the final days of campaigning as they prepared to set off all around New England and the Mid-Atlantic, and Cat couldn’t help but feel a sense of déjà vu, like they were back in the early days, fighting tooth and nail to stay alive and hold their own but enjoying every second of it.

Of course, it helped that Alex had whispered to Cat that federal agents were closing in on Max, Lillian, and Dirk and that the news would likely break over the next several days. It helped even more that James and Kara had secured endorsements from organizations like the HRC in advance of the New York primary, with even more tentative endorsements waiting for her, contingent upon a solid performance in the next couple of contests.

Cat watched on the screen as reporters gave live updates on the results slowly rolling in from across the state, sipping at a glass of something much harder than the champagne the other attendees were
sipping. Her heart skipped a beat as she watched Max's team steal a few of the upstate counties they had all assumed would go to Justin, leaving him neck-in-neck with Cat.

Soon enough, the breaking news alert was scrolling along the bottom of the screen: "Kennedy and Lord split votes. Grant campaign secures 50.3% of the vote."

Cat beamed as she strode onstage to thank her supporters, pulling out a few cards with prepared remarks as she waved at everyone. But even in the midst of all of that celebration, Cat’s heart still thundered at the one question left in the air.

The nervous anticipation lingered all evening, until the very last of her supporters dragged themselves back into the city streets to hail cabs or stumble down into the subway. Cat soon followed behind them.

“You’ll say nothing,” she murmured to Vasquez, directing her to the car and then over to the Brooklyn Bridge.

She was met with a knowing grin. “Of course, ma’am. Don’t even know what there would be to say.”

Rolling her eyes, Cat sunk low in the backseat, pulling on the oversized I ♥ NYC hoodie she’d had one of the interns pick up from a street vendor, then slipping into worn sneakers. She felt a bit like a teenager sneaking out on a date, only this time she was stripping away all the ornamentation and fancy clothing, ready to meet Kara with little more than herself to give.

“I’ll be waiting, ma’am,” Vasquez said, pulling off to the side of the road as close as she could get to the walkway.

Cat took a deep breath to steel her nerves before pulling herself out of the car, tucking her hair beneath her hood, and traipsing up onto the bridge. As she walked, she pulled the sweatshirt tighter around herself, trying to keep out the chill that even late April could still bring. Every few steps, she checked her phone, wondering if she had left too early, maybe lingered too late.

A few runners and stragglers from the bars and parties made their way alongside her, but they paid her little mind, too caught up in their own lives to pay attention to some tourist out at night. She thought she might be able to get used to the anonymity of it all. Maybe in another life…

Her gaze began darting around as she reached the middle of the bridge. She saw no signs of Kara striding forward or waiting, her long blonde hair thrown over one of her shoulders. But Cat wouldn’t break—not there. No, she would remember what she still had, all that could still be in the career that had sustained her and given her purpose when few other things in life had. And that would be enough again. It had to be.

As she turned around to head back down the bridge to Vasquez’s waiting car and the questions she knew the woman would never ask, her breath caught in her throat. Because there was the flash of blonde hair tucked beneath the hood of a similarly gaudy sweatshirt, the familiar figure following several yards behind her. And then Kara was jogging, and Cat didn’t run for anyone, but her feet didn’t seem to remember that fact because they were moving anyway, carrying her as fast as they could to Kara.

“You came,” Cat breathed out.

Kara’s lips curled up into a smile, tears shimmering at the corners of her eyes. “There isn’t a world where I didn’t.”
And Cat wasn’t one for clichés. She didn’t like romcoms or sappy movies. She never saw fireworks when she kissed people, and she knew better than to mistake nerves for butterflies. But when Kara swept Cat up in her strong arms and kissed her with soft, slightly chapped lips, she thought maybe she knew what the sonnets and the cheesy songs and the self-indulgent movies were all about.
“White working class, but not far west enough to be so conservative that we can’t win here,” Kara whispered before hopping out of the SUV and shepherding Cat over to the Coatesville Area Senior High School where she was hosting an evening rally that they hoped would continue to cement Cat as the best candidate for workers’ rights. The exposé on Lord Technology’s employment practices had helped to discredit him, but Justin and Cat were still neck-in-neck, with Justin edging Cat out among the white working class and Cat taking a clear lead among non-white voters, though a string of pitches to important unions had helped to begin shifting the tide in her favor.

Once Cat had gotten set up with the mic and her security team, Kara moved to the wings, finding Alex and James huddled there, heads bowed and expressions serious. “You guys okay?”

“Max,” Alex mouthed.

“Today?” Kara whispered.

“Now.”

It was the most distracted Kara had ever been during one of Cat’s speeches—and that included all the times she’d fought to keep her eyes on Cat’s face instead of her ass and her attention on the words instead of the memories of all that they had done mere hours earlier.

The breaking news alert came 20 minutes in, and Kara watched the surge of excitement ripple through the contingent of reporters in the crowd.

“Should we get word to Cat?” Kara asked.

Alex shook her head and grabbed Kara's wrist to hold her back. “No, it’s for the best that her surprise be genuine. We don’t want the voters to think she had anything to do with it, any knowledge about it—this is all about distancing.”

James gave a nod of acknowledgment, clutching the prepared statements he and Alex had drafted. Once Cat got through this round of questioning and had a chance to speak with her team, they’d be ready to go with a coherent statement for the press.

Of course, the very first question yelled at Cat before the applause had even stopped was about Max’s arrest.

“Excuse me?” Cat narrowed her eyes at the reporter. There hadn’t been plans to take questions, but James was striding across the floor and motioning to reporters as though they were going to acknowledge them and their questions.

“Max Lord was taken into custody during your speech,” the reporter called out. “Do you have any comment?”
“I have to say, I don’t know what this is about yet. Like you said, it happened during the speech and, well, I might be an exceptional multitasker, but generally I try to avoid being on my phone while stumping,” Cat joked, earning a bit of laughter.

A middle-aged woman from the Times that Cat recognized stood, brandishing her tablet. “Early reports suggest he’s been tied to the attack on Supergirl.”

Another writer who identified himself as being from Politico, even though he looked about 18, yelled out, “They say he’s also being brought in on bribery charges.”

The first reporter, who had maneuvered his way closer to the front held up another headline—not that Cat could see it from where she was—before turning it back to himself and reading out, “Dirk Armstrong was also taken in, and Lillian Luthor has been brought in for questioning. Armstrong used to be one of your biggest donors, did he not?”

Cat nodded slowly. “He did. Over the past year or two, however, it became increasingly evident that our political goals and our personal ethics no longer aligned. He wanted me to switch my positions on certain issues, but I made it clear that no amount of donations would lead me to change my platform. I’m running on this platform because I believe in it, because I think it’s what is best for the American people, and I won’t sell you out for the highest bidder.”

“What about the accusations about Max and the drugging of Supergirl?” the woman from the Times called out, watching out of the corner of her eye as James began guiding Cat away from the podium, unwilling to miss an opportunity to try to get an early statement.

“I know that Lena Luthor was working with authorities, and I supported that decision. I believe justice needs to be served—not just for those who have been here their whole lives, but for those immigrants and refugees who have chosen to call this great country of ours home.” A small smile pulled at the corners of Cat’s mouth. “It’s been no secret that I have supported Supergirl from the start. She’s saved thousands, if not more, already, and she embodies the compassion, bravery, and heart that we strive for in our best moments. I will wait until I have more information to make a formal statement, but for now I will say that she gives me hope for our future, and I am happy to see law enforcement agencies ensuring justice for our fellow citizens from beyond the stars.”

James shepherded Cat off the stage then, and the security teams took over in escorting her to the idling SUV, where Alex and Kara were already waiting. The four of them spent the entire ride back to the hotel going over everything they knew with certainty thus far, as well as any speculation that had arisen since news first broke. The meeting continued right up into Cat’s hotel room after a thorough sweep for bugs and cameras, and it didn’t end until late in the evening once they had confirmed the Grant campaign’s formal statements, communicated them to the staff, and gotten them out to a few of the more prominent news sources who had asked for a comment, along with agreeing to one interview the next morning before they settled in for the second-to-last Super Tuesday of the primary season.

It was nearly 11 before James, Kara, and Alex left, though Kara returned mere minutes later clutching two bags that smelled of grease and cheese and fat and all the things Cat secretly craved more than anything in that moment.

“Figured since we skipped dinner, you could use a cheeseburger.”

“You’re an angel.”

“Mm, actually I’m just a superhero,” Kara whispered before leaning over and pressing a soft kiss to Cat’s lips. She let out a contented sigh, a soft smile pulling at the corners of her mouth. “We’ve not
been doing nearly enough of that.”

Cat huffed and crossed her arms. “Not all of us are aliens that can run from meetings to rallies to interviews without a minute of sleep in between.”

“Oh yes, what was it you said you needed? All four hours?”

Unwilling to let the teasing smirk stand unchallenged for another minute, Cat leaned forward, kissing Kara a little harder, fisting Kara’s shirt in her hands, and pulling Kara’s lower lip between her teeth before finally pushing her back into her seat. The dazed blinking was much better, Cat decided, and she settled back into her own seat with the burger.

“How are you feeling about tomorrow?” Kara asked between large mouthfuls of her own bacon burger.

Over a mouthful of burger, Cat paused to consider it. “I suppose we’ve managed a few wins in big states. I think it would have been better if we’d made it through tomorrow first, but we’ll make do. We always do.”

“Yeah…I think we’ll be okay, though. Plus, nice to see him behind bars, isn’t it?”

“Oh, you don’t know the start of it.” Cat’s eyes fluttered shut as she thought about all the petty bullshit she’d endured, the months of Max’s commentary about her unfitness for office or her naïveté for trusting Supergirl. “Don’t get me wrong, I’m sure he’ll make bail just fine, but perhaps it will be enough to keep him from parading around for the cameras for a little while.”

“With the amount of evidence Alex has against him, I think he’ll be back behind bars soon enough.”

“We can only hope.”

They both let their thoughts wander as they ate in companionable silence, startling only at the sound of Kara’s phone blaring with the special ringtone she’d given to only a small handful of people. “It’s Alex,” Kara mouthed at Cat, before clicking to answer the call. “What’s up?”

Cat watched as Kara’s cheeks flushed a light shade of pink. “Oh, er, yeah. I’m not there. I’m down, um, down in Cat’s room.” Cat thought it was unfair just how attractive Kara looked with her lower lip pulled between her teeth and her nose scrunched up. “No! Not you know. We’re having dinner, Alex.” Oh. “Sure, yeah, I’ll meet you at the door.”

Cat tilted her head to the side as Kara pulled herself up and out of the chair, but she only had to wait a few seconds for her answer. Kara had the door open before the first knock could even sound, and Alex strolled in, balancing her laptop on one arm and a pizza on the other. It seemed unfair the sheer amount of takeout those two consumed without gaining a pound, Cat thought.

“Slice of pizza for some of those fries.” Alex gestured at the brown paper bag sitting on Cat’s coffee table, steam still curling out of it.

Kara contemplated, pulling her glasses down and peering into the box before nodding. “I get the piece with the bubble, though.”

“Fine.”

A moment later, both of the Danvers sisters were sitting in her hotel room, though Cat was still unclear about why. “Does someone want to fill me in here?”
“I was going to wait for James—one of my contacts at the Times sent me a message letting me know that more news about Max would be going live tonight.”

“This late?”

Alex shrugged. “They don’t want to get scooped, even if they’ve already missed the nightly news cycle.”

“That big?”

Another knock, and Kara was up again to let James inside, murmuring a few quick sentences to catch him up on what Alex had said so far.

“The Times will be reporting that money from the Lord campaign was used to hire Leslie Willis to take pictures of Cat and Kara.”

“Is that even true?” Cat asked, one eyebrow arched, and Kara felt herself fall a little more in love with Cat at the knowledge that a strong sense of journalistic integrity superseded her desire to see some sort of personal justice delivered.

Alex shrugged. “Sort of? Apparently that signing bonus Dirk’s newly acquired media company gave to Leslie came from Dirk himself, who had been hired as a political consultant by Max for exactly that amount of money—paid for by campaign funds.”

“That’s not the same,” Cat pointed out.

“Still looks bad.”

“Obviously, but it’s on Dirk more than it’s on Max. And it brings me back into the limelight.”

“As a victim more than a perpetrator, though. And even still, it’s another thing he’s being tied to, and the more things that get associated with his name, the harder it’ll be for him to ever regain credibility, even if he manages to wriggle out of some of the charges.”

James leaned back on the sofa, folding his hands and bringing them up to his mouth. “Twenty bucks says Lillian walks free, Max pleads low, and Dirk gets shafted.”

“Not gonna find me betting against you,” Alex said.

“Me either,” Kara chimed in.

They all turned to Cat. “What? I’m keeping my hands clean.”

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After the morning’s interview, the following day was spent making appearances across Pennsylvania before ending up back in Philadelphia for a watch party with the city’s mayor and his biggest donors. News channels flitted between coverage of the polling data and updates about the Lord campaign’s downfall. Of course, the right-leaning channels had taken the opportunity to bash the Democrats for failing to produce a single presidential candidate whose campaign wasn’t mired in scandal, failing to acknowledge the differences between the three instances that made one rather unique (and far worse).

Rhode Island came in first for Justin, though Cat took Delaware barely half an hour later. Max crept up in Connecticut, though it went to Justin in the end, while Cat easily swept through Maryland,
having spent plenty of time there throughout the early months of the campaign when she was in DC as much as she was on the road. Cat drew Kara into a tight hug when Maryland was announced, making sure to hold her until the Inquirer’s photograph had snapped a shot, then letting herself be led to the back corner of the room.

“You sure about that?” Kara murmured from behind a glass of champagne, though she couldn’t deny the way her heart swelled at the feeling of being out and open with Cat, even if it was something as small as a congratulatory embrace.

“I told you, I’m not going to make us hide a second time.”

“But right now? When things are still so…” Kara trailed off, gesturing around them.

“You mean right now, when everyone is still so consumed with Max’s arrest to guarantee that unless I drop to my knees and make you come in the middle of this party, we won’t make it anywhere near the front page?”

Kara spluttered on a sip of bubbly champagne, while Cat simply smirked at her, waiting until the coughing subsided.

“Any more concerns?”

“No,” Kara squeaked. “That’s definitely, um, good thinking.”

They waited and waited for Pennsylvania, watching as Max still managed to claim a few areas where he’d campaigned on the promise of bringing back factory jobs that Cat knew would never have materialized had he won. Justin managed to land Harrisburg thanks to family connections, though Cat pulled in large numbers in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. The suburbs and rural counties teetered back and forth all evening until they finally called it for Cat, with a solid 59% of the vote.

On her way up to say a few words, Cat squeezed Kara’s hand and smiled for the press.

Kara found she was much too concerned with everything she hoped would follow to listen to what Cat said, though Alex assured her later that Cat worked in everything they needed her to say.

Once the party had dispersed and Cat had given a rousing speech to everyone from the campaign team who had come out, Kara tugged on Cat’s hand. “Upstairs. Now.”

She just barely caught Alex’s pained groan of, “No, don’t need to know, don’t need to know,” as she let a laughing Maggie guide her back to the bar before they could pack everything away.

Kara kept her distance from Cat for the entire elevator ride, not trusting herself to keep them off the front page if she let herself get too close.

A thorough sweep of Cat’s room was the last step before Kara had Cat in her arms, one hand tangled in her hair and the other supporting her lower back as she drew her close. Kara let her lips and tongue and teeth voice the desperate pleas that would have taken too long to voice aloud.

Still panting from the searing kiss, Cat pulled back a few inches. “I—I’m trying to do this right. Treat you right.”

“I think we can treat each other right this way,” Kara murmured, pressing soft kisses to the corner of Cat’s mouth.

“Date you first, I mean,” Cat managed between kisses. “Dinner and movies and all the little romcom
moments you want.”

“I want you, Cat.” Kara pulled back then, tangling her fingers with Cat’s. “I wanted to know that you wanted me—not just for sex or behind closed doors or whatever, but that you wanted to make this work. And you do, I know that now.”

“Are you sure?”

“Let me show you how much it meant that you wanted to hold my hand and hold me on camera tonight, okay?”

And with Kara’s lips tickling the shell of her ear, Cat didn’t really know how she could say no. Instead, she let Kara sweep her up into her arms, wrapping her legs around Kara's waist and guiding her back to the bedroom. She let Kara take her time, let Kara strip away her blazer, then fine silk, the skirt, the lace, until no layers were left between them.

She let Kara guide her to the pillows and worship every inch of skin, claiming her jaw and neck and chest with her mouth and tongue before finally settling in between Cat's legs. And there was none of the rushed urgency of before. No choked back moans and watched clocks and nervous anticipation. Instead Kara took her time, losing herself in the feel of being surrounded by Cat, of being exactly where she wanted to be. As Cat's hips bucked up into her mouth, Kara reached up and twined the fingers of her free hand with Cat's, feeling Cat's grip tighten as she finally fell over the edge, coming with a breathy gasp.

Cat drew Kara back up to the pillows then, tasting herself on Kara's lips until she couldn't bear to wait another minute to return the favor.

At the end of the night, Cat lifted the sheets and patted the spot next to her, smiling at the confused look she got in return. “We’re not hiding anymore, darling.”
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

Note the NSFW start, followed by a much more family-friendly second half

The Wednesday morning staff meeting was much cheerier than it had been in ages—Max had made bail, but was staying behind a wall of lawyers and far away from the press; Justin’s team had already come out to publicly distance themselves from Max; and Cat had performed well in the previous day’s primaries and seemed poised to continue in that direction, especially with the field narrowed to two candidates and some sure-bet states still to come. The social media and publicity teams were nearly vibrating with all the positive energy and press they had gotten from the night before. The researchers were energized, ready with facts and figures on the few issues where voters still seemed uncertain about Cat. And the core staffers worked in an easy rhythm, the disjointedness and tenseness of the weeks before falling away.

“You did that,” Maggie murmured, squeezing Alex’s hand. Alex’s gaze roaming across the room, finding smiling faces—even from those who hadn’t yet gotten their turn to run out to the coffee shop in the lobby. “You made all of this happen, babe.”

Alex wrinkled her nose at the sight of Cat smirking at her little sister, who she had seen strolling out of Cat’s room that morning in what Alex knew was most definitely not her shirt. “And if I only want credit for part of it?”

A low chuckle met her question. “She’s happy. They both are.” Alex dipped her head in acknowledgment. “Besides,” Maggie drawled, “I’m sure Kara would feel similarly if she knew exactly what I did to make you forget what was happening down the hall last night.”

Alex clamped one hand over Maggie’s mouth to keep her from saying another word, though she couldn’t stop the shudder that ran through her at the memory.

“Oh, did you not like it?” Maggie arched her eyebrows—the picture of innocence to anyone who didn’t know better. “Here I was, planning to offer to do it again before you fly down to Indiana, but if you don’t want me to…”

“Shut up and meet me upstairs in 30, Sawyer.”

“Roger that.” With a wink and a two-fingered salute, Maggie was off.

Alex spent the next half-hour working—or trying to work—with Kara and James to prep Cat for her post-Super Tuesday interviews, though with how distracted she was, she found herself immensely grateful that James took point. As he spoke, she wondered if Maggie had gone upstairs yet. While her thoughts wandered to all the possibilities of what Maggie might be doing upstairs, James brought in Winn to give Cat guidance on the language about Max, Dirk, and Lillian that was polling best with undecided voters. And of course Alex knew it was all important, though she’d also learned that Cat’s years in journalism had provided her with a rather keen sense of intuition about these things, but no matter the gravity of it all, she couldn’t stop her thoughts from slipping back to the night before and everything she knew was waiting for her in the hotel room.
“I need bleach for my brain. Make me forget,” Alex had whined as she and Maggie slipped past Cat and Kara to the bar. Alex rubbed at her ears as if doing so might somehow erase the memory of Kara’s propositioning Cat.

“I’ll give you a choice: you can order the row of shots I see you eyeing, and I’ll bring you water and Advil tonight and coffee tomorrow morning, or…” Maggie’s mouth curled up into a smirk, and Alex motioned for her to continue. “Or you can follow me upstairs and trust that I’ll be the only thing you’re thinking about for the night.” Maggie’s eyes sparkled with mischief, and Alex felt a rush of heat coursing through her veins.

In the end, it hadn’t even been a question; Alex was grabbing Maggie’s hand and dragging her to the elevators before she’d even finished her offer. Her lips were hot against Maggie’s before the door to the elevator had even shut. Maggie’s hands were under Alex’s shirt before they’d even gotten to their floor. The walk down the hallway felt excruciatingly long, but eventually they fumbled their way into Maggie’s room, crashing into the door as it slammed shut beneath their combined weight.

“God, you’re so hot when you’re in work mode.” Maggie’s mouth alternated between whispered words and searing kisses trailed down the column of Alex’s neck that left her hips bucking into Maggie’s. “So fucking sexy—all competent and powerful and brilliant.”

“Maggie,” Alex whined as Maggie’s fingers found their way beneath the waistband of her pants.

“Do you want to know what I want tonight? Do you want to know what I’ve been thinking about while you were gone and I had nothing but my own hands and the toys?”

“Tell me.” It was early for the pleading—whimpering, really—but Alex couldn’t bring herself to care.

“I think I want to see you, my beautiful, competent girlfriend, on your knees.”

Alex was on the ground in an instant, deft fingers already working at the button to Maggie’s pants as her teeth and tongue scraped along the strip of newly exposed skin just south of Maggie’s bellybutton.

Maggie couldn’t hold back the groan even as she shook her head and put a hand on Alex’s shoulder. “I meant—”

“Is that…” Alex’s fingers traced along the O-ring of one of their harnesses. Currents of heady arousal coursed through her veins, turning her blood to fire as it licked through her body. She pulled her lower lip between her teeth as her fingers continued their slow exploration, pulling little whimpers from Maggie and making her hips stutter. When Alex spoke again, her voice was raspy, thick with need. “Have you been wearing this all night?”

Maggie swallowed heavily as she nodded. “When I said I wanted you on your knees…”

“Oh! Oh.” Alex’s breath caught in her throat.

“Only if you want to!”

“Go put it on. Now,” Alex ordered, and Maggie jumped into action, rummaging through her suitcase until she found what she needed.

While Maggie was getting ready, Alex’s thoughts wandered. “How’d you get that on the plane?”
Maggie paused, and Alex swore she saw a flush of red staining her tan skin. “Er, well, there aren’t any rules against it, and you just hope for a TSA agent that isn’t gonna be a dick about it.” She chuckled at her own inadvertent pun.

“But you have to stand there while they scan your suitcase and, you know, see it?”

“Mhmm.” Maggie strode across the room, a new purple appendage protruding from between her toned legs. “But it was all worth it to see the look on your face when you found the harness on underneath the suit.”

“It’s just hot knowing you were all”—Alex floundered for words, gesturing wildly with her hands—“ready for action.”

“Mm, well if you like that, there might be something even more fun we could try after the campaign ends.”

Alex huffed, folding her arms across her chest. “Why do I have to wait?”

“Because I’m not sitting down with our boss and your little sister and explaining what exactly we were doing if someone from the press recognizes you and takes a picture of us.”

Alex let out a dramatic sigh. “Fine, fine.”

All traces of earlier pouting soon disappeared under the warm press of Maggie’s mouth against Alex’s. Her lips parted easily, and she moaned as Maggie’s teeth scraped along her lower lip. Their remaining clothing fell to the floor over the course of their slow migration to the bed, and by the time Alex’s head met the pillows, she was already halfway gone. She had meant to wait, to force herself to hold on, but then Maggie’s tongue was hot between her legs and Maggie’s voice was thick as honey, telling her to “let go, let me take care of you,” and Alex felt herself fall apart for the first time that night.

From there, Alex let Maggie guide her to her knees and press hot kisses all along her shoulders and back and work her up with her fingers until Alex was reduced to incoherence, babbling out a string of desperate pleas, begging for more of Maggie inside her until she finally obliged.

Alex dropped to her forearms when Maggie entered her. She let out a guttural moan once Maggie finally began thrusting into her. She nearly whitened out from the rush of pleasure as Maggie brought her fingers around to Alex’s clit.

Later on, she couldn’t say with certainty if she had been loud or quiet; all she knew was that she had felt so safe with Maggie’s strong hands wrapped around her hips that the rest of the world had simply…slipped away. And before she knew it, she was collapsing into the mattress in a boneless heap as Maggie pushed her over the edge once more.

The next time Alex had opened her eyes was the following morning. A sheet had been pulled up over her shoulders, and Maggie was curled around her back, an arm slung protectively across her waist.

“...”

“You need to stay awake this time,” Maggie murmured as she draped herself across Alex’s back.

“Don’t wanna.”

“You’ve got a plane to catch.”
Alex turned her head to the side, craning her neck as far as she could to try to see Maggie. “Come with me?”

“I think I just did.”

A light pink flush crept up Alex’s cheeks, and she squirmed beneath Maggie, gasping as the movement jostled the toy still buried inside her.

“We might have time for one more round…”

Alex’s back arched and her hips bucked into the mattress involuntarily.

“Should I take that as a yes?”

“I, um”—the blush staining Alex’s cheeks deepened as her gaze fell to the pillows—“I was sort of wondering…”

“Yeah?” Maggie’s voice softened as she carefully maneuvered back and away, pulling off the harness before coming back up to spoon Alex.

“I don’t know.”

“You know you can tell me anything, right?”

“I just—I thought—maybe, um, I was curious about what it’s like on…that end.”

“Oh.”

Alex burrowed her face in the pillows, her voice muffled as she shook her head. “It’s stupid. Ignore me.”

Before Alex could shut down completely, Maggie rolled over top of her, pulling a low oof from Alex as Maggie nuzzled into her side, forcing Alex to look up at her. “It’s not stupid. We talked about it when we first tried, yeah?”

“Kind of.”

“I’ve certainly thought about it.”

Alex blinked slowly, and Maggie thought the comparison to a deer caught in the headlights was rather apt. “Really?”

“Definitely.”

“In, like…a good way?”

The corner of Maggie’s mouth pulled up into a smirk, and she pressed a teasing kiss to Alex’s jaw. “A very, very good way.”

That seemed to be enough to convince Alex, whose hand tightened against the small of Maggie’s back. She cleared her throat, her fingers dipping lower before skimming back up Maggie’s sides. “Is that, um, something you maybe want to try?”

“It is.” Maggie’s breath caught at the way Alex’s expression shifted, her eyes darkening and her lips parting. Maggie was on her back in an instant, Alex’s thigh slotted between her own and Alex’s hips rolling against hers as open-mouthed kisses were pressed down her throat. “But,” Maggie managed
in a shaky voice, “not today.”

“Oh!” Alex nearly bounced off the bed in her hurry to get off of Maggie.

“Not because I don’t want it.” Maggie reached out a hand and drew Alex back up the bed. “But I want us to be able to take our time.” Alex nodded in understanding. “And, uh”—Maggie let out a low laugh, gesturing at the toy and harness on the nightstand—“that one is definitely not fitting inside of me.”

Alex’s cheeks burned as she swallowed hard. “Right, right.”

“But,” Maggie continued, trailing her fingers through Alex’s hair, “I will be counting down the days until we can finally try.”

“Really?”

“Mm, definitely.”

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“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Kara tugged at the hem of her sweater. Even though she knew she couldn’t sweat, she felt like maybe somehow the universe was making that afternoon an exception.

Cat leveled Kara with a hard stare. “Have you ever known me to half-ass anything?”

“No,” Kara conceded, “but I don’t—you can still take your time, you know?”

“Carter is the most important person in my life. He already knows that I’m bisexual. He knows that I have feelings for you and that we did, at one point, act on them. If we’re not going to hide from the press, I need to be honest with my son from the start.”

“But do you think…will he be okay with it?”

“He likes you.”

“As the lady that comes over and plays video games and Settlers of Catan with him, not as the woman, you know”—Kara spluttered as she gestured between them—“banging his mom.”

The cough from the front seat reminded Kara of Vasquez’s presence, and she squeezed her eyes shut, knowing she’d get an earful from Lucy about that later. It wasn’t that they had been trying to keep it from the rest of the staff—in fact, they’d been rather clear about not hiding this time—but it was one thing to know it might be happening and quite another to have confirmation about all the dirty details.

“Oddly enough, that’s not how I was planning on phrasing it.” Cat rolled her eyes at the indignant little huff Kara let out. “You will still be the person who comes over and plays video games and Settlers of Catan with us—if you wish. But instead of being my campaign manager or staffer who’s taking a short break from work, behind the doors of our home, you can just be Kara, the woman I love.”

“And you don’t think he’ll mind that part?”

Cat shook her head, a small smile grace her lips as she reached out a hand and tucked Kara’s hair behind her ear. “The most upset he was with all of it was when he thought I was going to let a bunch
of bullies and blackmailers win.”

Kara nodded slowly. “Knew there was a reason I liked him.”

“Mm, yes, well, he is my son.”

After a few minutes of silence, Cat turned her attention back to her phone, figuring she could use the rest of their drive from Philadelphia back down to DC to catch up on a few emails, and Kara soon sank into the familiar routine alongside her.

Of course, her anxiety spiked back up through the roof the second Vasquez announced that they would be arriving in five minutes, and it took the firm grip of Cat’s hand in her own to ground her once more.

“It will be fine.” And it shouldn’t have been that simple, but Cat’s tone brokered no disagreement, and Kara found herself nodding right along with her.

Kara moved to drop Cat’s hand when they got out of the car, but Cat simply held on more tightly as they strode up the front stairs and made their way past the stationed security guards and into the house. “Carter,” Cat called out. “I’m home!”

They heard loud footfalls clattering down the stairs before a mop of curly hair poked around the corner. “I really think you should think about letting me stay home alone overnight. I’ve been home alone since school let out today, and it’s not like”—Carter glanced up then, noticing Kara standing beside his mom—“oh, hey, Kara.”

Kara raised her hand and gave a small wave. “Hi, Carter.”

“We’ve talked about this, Carter. You are 17 years old. Maybe you could stay alone for a single night, but certainly not for the full weeks while I’m out campaigning.”

Carter stuffed his hands in his pockets, his mouth twisting. “You know I’ll be alone in college next year, right?”

“We’ll talk about this later.”

“Okay.”

Kara couldn’t help but smile, marveling at how polite he was even in his disappointment. She thought back to the way Alex used to storm out of the house, slamming doors behind her after the screaming fights with Eliza, or the way she had complained endlessly in haughty tones about not needing to sit through yet another one of this planet’s primitive math lessons.

Cat stepped forward, pulling Carter into a hug, then rummaging in the fridge for a bottle of sparkling water. “I thought we could talk—maybe up in the living room.”

Carter nodded and shuffled up the stairs, and Cat and Kara followed behind a few minutes later, three glasses of water in hand.

Once they got upstairs, Cat cleared her throat and folded her hands together in her lap. “You remember what I talked to you about when I took a few days off the campaign?”

“Yeah.”

“Carter.” Cat’s tone was sharp, and she shot him a pointed look.
“Yes, sorry.”

“Well, Kara and I have been talking a lot.”

Carter’s gaze flitted between the two of them. “And now you’re trying to date again?”

Kara spluttered, while Cat simply nodded. “We are. And I wanted to tell you in person so that you had the chance to talk to us together and voice any concerns or questions you might have.”

He shrugged. “You seem happy.”

“I am.”

Kara cut in then. “And your mom also makes me very happy, but I want you to be happy too.”

“Kara, I’m 17.” Kara bit back a smile at how very Cat-like he sounded in his exasperation. “My dad has a new girlfriend every other month. I think my mom is allowed one too. Besides, I’ll be leaving next year, and I think she might get kind of lonely here without me.”

“Fingers crossed she’ll be in a different, even bigger house then.”

“No matter where I am and where you are, I will still expect regular visits, young man.”

“Yes, Mom,” Carter sighed, though the shy smile undercut the bored teenager act.

“Speaking of college...I heard you got into some pretty awesome places!”

Carter let out a little noise of agreement, his cheeks flushing a faint shade of pink as he ducked his head down.

“When do you have to decide by?”

“This Friday.”

“Oh wow, that’s so soon!” Kara gushed. “Do you have any ideas?”

Cat fought her instincts and stayed silent. She’d worked hard to keep her opinions to herself over the past couple of months, wanting Carter to choose the school that was best for him, regardless of her own personal thoughts on the matter.

“I, uh”—Carter glanced up at Cat, who nodded for him to continue—“I think I’m going to Williams.”

“Yeah?”

His throat bobbing as he swallowed, Carter nodded. “I was pretty set on Stanford at first, but I think I want to be a little closer to home. And Williams actually does a lot with the sciences, but the classes are smaller—like the tutorials in England.” Kara bit back a smile, remembering the morning Cat admitted how scared she was that she might lose Carter to Europe after he had started asking about Oxford and Cambridge. When Kara tuned back in, Carter sounded more self-assured as he listed all the things he liked most about the school, and when she glanced at Cat, she found the woman beaming at her son.

“We’ll have to get you a winter coat for those New England winters, huh?” Kara teased.

“Yeah, well, I mean…what do you think, Mom?”
Cat felt her heart thud in her chest at the hint of the shy, quiet little boy she’d once had to coax out of the backseat of her car for his first day of school as he clung to her hand and sniffled, a few tears sliding down his cheeks, still round with the baby fat that hadn’t yet disappeared. Leaning forward, she brushed his hair out of his eyes, pressing a kiss to his forehead. “I think it sounds like you’ve given it a lot of thought, and I’m so, so proud of you.” She swallowed heavily and blinked back tears. “And yes, we will most definitely get you a winter coat. And boots and blankets and hats and a good wool scarf and—”

“I get it, Mom,” Carter sighed, though he let out a quiet laugh at the stern glare he got in return.

They spent the next couple of hours talking about Carter’s plans for graduation and the party that would follow out at his dad’s house in Bethesda, then he pulled out a list of all the places he was most excited about seeing when he joined them on the campaign trail for the last couple of weeks before they broke for the Democratic National Convention. At some point Kara convinced Cat to let them order takeout instead of cooking, and they ate it upstairs over a few rounds of Settlers of Catan that Kara promised she’d be back to finish when they returned to DC for their primaries—“I couldn’t exactly miss the chance to vote for your mom, now could I?”

By the time they had to leave again to drop Carter off with his father and head to the airport to catch their flight to Indianapolis, Kara couldn’t stop her thoughts from straying to the future she so desperately wanted to have with Cat—from the big moments like Carter’s high school and college graduations, to the quiet ones, like holding Cat’s hand when they got back from dropping him off at school to a newly empty house. And she knew they were barely getting things off the ground for a second time, knew it was too early, was probably preemptive, but, Rao, she wanted it all with Cat. And when their eyes locked on their way out the front door to the waiting car, she swore she saw a glimmer of something similar in Cat’s expression.
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

Pretty Cat and Supercat focused chapter as we get through some plot points in this second-to-last chapter! And heads up on a couple nsfw paragraphs

Everyone was grateful for the relatively low stress of May with its comparatively light travel schedule and the less frequent election nights. Before they’d gotten halfway through the month, Miranda Crane had conceded defeat, leaving Lane as the presumptive Republican nominee and reinvigorating Cat’s support for alien rights in the face of his staunch opposition. As the primaries passed and Cat and Justin met for one last debate, Cat slowly pulled ahead, garnering more and more endorsements from senators and governors and a few of the bigger papers that hadn’t yet come out in one direction.

It seemed like every other day brought with it new piece of evidence about the crimes of Max and everyone he had surrounded himself with, and Cat had a sneaking suspicion that Alex was involved in drawing out the discovery, ensuring that he looked guiltier and guiltier with every passing day.

First it had been a rumor tying Dirk and the launch of Max’s candidacy to the hacking of the Grant campaign emails. Then it was a series of articles by Lois about the less-than-ethical experiments Max was running behind closed doors at Lord Technologies. At least weekly there were new factoids about questionable funders and misused money. The only person who seemed to sidestep the blame at every turn was Lillian Luthor, even when her own daughter came out and publicly accused her of playing a leading role in the drugging of Supergirl. But even if she did manage to keep her hands clean, Max was going down, and for the race, that was what mattered most.

Each night when she got back to her hotel, Alex watched the coverage tearing Max apart while Skyping with Maggie, grinning every time Maggie reminded her that she had done that, helped bring about justice without even resorting to backroom dealings—at least, not entirely.

The one night they’d been together for the coverage, which had included a segment about Dirk that laid bare a few of the things Alex had dug up but never used after the original email hack, Maggie had pouted. “I think you look happier about watching the news than you did seeing me for the first time in a week.”

“Well…you’re not being arrested after nearly killing me.”

“Yeah,” Maggie hedged, “but that sort of proves my point. You should definitely look happier about seeing your girlfriend’s beautiful face.” She fluttered her eyelashes and nudged Alex’s nose with her own.

“I promise you make me happier than even his imprisonment ever will.”

“And if I say I don’t believe you?”

A smirk pulled up one side of Alex’s mouth. “Should I turn off the news and show you exactly how happy I am to see you?”
Maggie tugged on Alex’s boxer shorts as she threw a leg over Maggie’s waist. “I think that’s only fair, Danvers.”

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After an early sweep through half of the final Super Tuesday states, Cat flew back to DC the last weekend in May for Carter’s graduation—an event Kara had insisted on attending both to support Cat and Carter and to provide protection if it came down to it. Despite a few lingering worries about drawing attention from Carter on his big day, Cat was hardly the only person to arrive with a security detail, and families were too focused on their children to pay her any mind. Besides, seated in a crowd with two foreign ambassadors, several elected officials, the head of the Council on Foreign Relations, and the heir to a well-known billionaire philanthropist, she hardly stood out.

With the small class sizes, it was only a matter of minutes until they had reached the G’s, and when Carter’s name was read aloud, both Cat and Kara cheered loudly, much to his embarrassment. Kara insisted on spending the whole ride out to Bethesda for the graduation party taking selfies with Carter in the backseat and applying hundreds of different animal-themed filters to commemorate the solemn occasion. At the party, for the most part the guests behaved, and Cat silenced her ex-husband’s questions about the suitability of Kara as a romantic partner with a glare that Kara had seen reduce men less accustomed to it to tears on more than one occasion.

That night, Kara beamed at a text from Carter telling her she got him the coolest gift—hands down.

“What’d you get him?” Cat asked, peering at the message as Kara dropped her phone to the bed and wrapped her arms around Cat, peppering her shoulders and collarbones with soft kisses.

“Mm, not much. A Williams sweatshirt. A bag of his favorite candy. An autographed picture of Supergirl. A coffee mug.”

“Kara!” Cat pulled off her glasses, rubbing at her eyes as she set them down on the nightstand. Her big blue eyes open wide, tossing her blond hair over her shoulder, Kara looked the picture of innocence. “What?”

“Did you really autograph a photo of yourself and give it to my son?”

Kara’s mouth twitched as she bit back a laugh. “I’m his favorite superhero.”

Cat merely rolled her eyes in response. “Don’t let it go to your head.”

“Mm, never,” Kara hummed as she leaned over Cat, pressing soft kisses to the corners of her mouth until she stopped grumbling about the late hour, tugging Kara down and kissing her soundly.

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Kennedy conceded defeat on the last Super Tuesday once the two largest states went to Cat, and within a few days, he came out to publicly throw his support behind Cat. The final few primaries sailed by with little of the stress to which the team had grown accustomed over the long months of campaigning. Even though Cat made stops in each of the final battlegrounds, she also spent more time away from formal events, visiting local tourist destinations and restaurants Kara had a knack for choosing with Carter as they enjoyed the last few moments of relative peace before the storm of the presidential election hit.

Of course, Cat spoke with locals wherever she went and made appearances at the most important events, giving interviews and updating her social media presence enough to make it clear that she
was still following current events and speaking out about how she would lead the country if elected. But James assured her that the quiet days with Carter were good, family-friendly publicity anyway. It didn’t escape Cat’s notice, however, that a fair number of right-leaning publications took the opportunity to criticize her parenting each time she was seen out with both Carter and Kara, insinuating that she should have let her son stay with her father because god only knows he was better off with a single man and his fling of the month than with the mother who had, until this campaign season, been his primary parent and done everything she could to give him the life she wanted him to have and help make the country a better place for him to live in. Kara never let Cat sit with those too long, though, closing out of tabs and shredding newspapers and, on one memorable occasion, using her heat vision to incinerate a particularly odious column. Each time, she kissed Cat’s temples and held her close and promised her that she was a better mom than any of them would ever hope to be.

In the run up to the Democratic National Convention, a slew of think pieces cropped up, questioning whether Cat would choose Justin as her running mate to secure his voter bases. Alex scoffed each time she saw them, nudging her file of research across the table to anyone on the team with high enough clearance who dared to question the choice.

Of course, he was far from the only possible nominee with a thick file marked with a big red X. At a certain point, even Kara had started to believe that there might not be any politicians without something that could be used against them—or at least none of the ones who met Cat’s list of criteria.

Some were minor—a DUI in their youth or a late-in-the-game change of heart on LGBTQ rights—while others nearly vibrated with their potential for a storm that would bring the whole campaign crashing down around them—a congressmen who not-so-secretly slept with a significant number of his aides; a former governor whose relatives had all benefited from the infrastructure contracts handed out under his tenure; a senator who could have been perfect if it weren’t for the fact that his children wouldn’t stop posting horribly offensive memes all across Twitter.

Eventually, after weeks of thorough vetting for any potential scandals, they landed on George Baldwin, an established senator from Michigan who they hoped would help pull in votes from across the Midwest. Cat was less certain about some of his more centrist political beliefs, but she was committed to running on a ticket that reflected the country’s diversity. And even though the polling numbers were pitiful when it came to trying to bring in another LGBTQ candidate or even a second woman, Baldwin, an older African American man who spoke openly of his family’s blue collar roots and the struggles he had to overcome at each step along the way, polled well, especially paired with Cat, who was, in way ways, a neat complement to him. Alex found no skeletons in his closet, and after a few meetings between George and Cat—first to see if they could work together on a personal level, then to figure out if they could agree on a political platform—Cat formally announced him as her running mate a week before the Convention.

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Cat spent the night before the final day of the Convention pacing her room alone, Carter having gone back to spend time with his father instead of having to sit in a hotel room for long days while Cat attended all the events. Somehow the knowledge that she was the nominee, that there should be no issues, that she had practiced her speech and vetted it with dozens of people, did little to soothe her nerves, and she had no distractions left to occupy her thoughts. No Carter to lead around the country, trying to instill as many important life lessons as she could before her baby headed to college. No staffers to meet with after she had dismissed them all early that afternoon, instructing them to enjoy a night out in Opal City and a rare break before they all had to throw themselves back into the campaign with renewed vigor for the run up to November. No Kara to help her push away the nagging worries with her lips and tongue, busy as Supergirl was helping Superman to evacuate the
areas being ravaged by deadly wildfires up and down the West coast.

When Kara got back late that night, her suit reeking of smoke and her face streaked with ash and dirt, she found Cat awake, propped up on the pillows, the glow of her tablet bathing her face in a soft blue light. “What are you still doing up?”

Cat let out a noncommittal noise, her eyes skimming across the article.

Hovering above the bed, Kara peered at the tablet, nearly growling when she realized it was a piece by a well-known liberal Twitter commentator about how, in his words, the Democratic Party had “fucked itself” by choosing Cat. He cited polls that Kara knew were out of date, selectively pulling quotes and stats as he trotted out worn arguments about Cat’s unfitness and her scandal-ridden campaign that he argued could only lend credibility to the Republicans.

“Don’t read that. He doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

“The”—Cat scrolled down, squinting slightly—“5,782 people who have already retweeted it would seem to disagree with you.”

“Is this what you’ve been doing all night?”

The fact that Cat kept quiet was all the answer Kara needed. “Get up. No, we’re putting that away for the night.”

“What if something happens?”

“If something bad enough to require your attention after 2 in the morning happens, I guarantee you Alex will be barreling through this door before you can even unlock it—super strength or no.”

Cat’s eyes glinted with a hint of laughter, though Kara could see the furrow in her brow, the way her mouth was still pinched tight.

“Give me one second, okay?”

Cat nodded—what else could she do? And in a flash, Kara was gone, her suit stuffed into its bag in the closet and the water in the shower running. A minute or two later, Kara emerged in one of the terrycloth hotel robes Cat wouldn’t touch, the soot gone from her face and her skin smelling faintly of the coconut body wash she’d picked up the day before. Cat’s gaze darted down the length of the stunning woman standing before her. “I suppose you do know how to cheer a woman up…”

“You’re coming with me.”

Cat’s eyebrows furrowed. “I know we’re not all that traditional, but we do have a perfectly nice bed right here.”

But Kara simply shook her head, holding out her hand until, with a long-suffering sigh, Cat took it and let herself be led into the bathroom. “I thought we could take a bath together. You look like you could use some relaxing.”

“I don’t—”

“Come on,” Kara pleaded, shooting Cat those damn puppy dog eyes that managed to accomplish things others could only dream of. “I even bleached the bathtub when we got here just in case.”

“Well when you’ve been that considerate…”
Kara beamed, spinning around and turning on the faucet to fill the bath before returning her attention to Cat. Lifting her arms up and over Cat’s head to pull her in close, Kara let her lips find Cat’s. It was soft and gentle, Kara’s warm hands slipping up to the back of Cat’s neck and carding through her hair.

“I”—a kiss to Cat’s jaw—“am so”—Cat’s shirt up and over her head—“proud”—heated kisses trailing down Cat’s sternum—“of you.”

A voice in the back of Cat’s head still protested that she didn’t deserve that yet—not before the race ended—but Kara’s soft murmurs drowned it out, and Cat let herself be lifted up to perch on the counter after Kara tugged down the tattered sweatpants she had pulled on in a moment of loneliness when she needed something comfortable, something that reminded her of the lazy Sunday mornings she hoped she might one day get with Kara at her side.

Kara flitted over to turn off the water before returning to Cat, sinking to her knees, and pressing soft kisses up and down her thighs until she could feel the tension in Cat’s muscles easing. “Let me make you feel good.”

And even though Cat knew it wouldn’t last—not on a night like that one when she’d let the voices that sounded suspiciously like her mother’s play on repeat, telling her over and over again that she wasn’t worth it, was selfish, always screwing up things for everyone around her with no hope of succeeding—she couldn’t say no to the loving expression on Kara’s face.

Kara took her time, kissing all the way from Cat’s ankles up to her hipbones and across her abdomen before finally spreading Cat’s legs and hooking them over her shoulder, her mouth hovering right above where Cat wanted her.

Cat let out a soft sigh at the first stroke of Kara’s tongue, her hips jumping at the first pass over her clit, her head falling back to the mirror at the feeling of one then two of Kara’s fingers slipping inside of her.

Kara moaned, the taste of Cat flooding her senses. Her free hand clutched at Cat’s hip, her thumb rubbing soft circles across the jut of bone there. Feeling Cat’s muscles tensing, her thighs wrapping more tightly around Kara and holding her close, Kara pulled back an inch or two, murmuring, “Let go, Cat,” before ducking her head forward once more.

A rush of heat coursed through Cat, her arms trembling as she fought to keep herself upright, wave after wave of pleasure crashing over, her mind going blissfully blank.

She was wrapped up in Kara’s arms before she even had to think about standing up on shaky legs, being held aloft as Kara used a bit of heat vision to warm the cooling water, then slowly lowered down into it, settling between Kara’s legs and letting her head drop to Kara’s shoulder.

They sat in silence for a long while, Kara’s strong arms wrapped around Cat’s torso, her mouth whispering words in a language Cat didn’t understand, though she swore she felt the meaning of the words somewhere deep inside of her.

“What if they’re right?” Cat whispered, her voice low enough that Kara wouldn’t have been able to parse out the words if not for her enhanced hearing.

“Right about?”

“Me.”

“When have you ever let someone else dictate how you’re seen?” Kara shifted slightly to better see
Cat’s face. “Why is this going to be the one instance you let them tell you that you aren’t enough?”

“It wouldn’t be the only instance.” Cat blinked back emotion. “I let them take Adam. I let myself be convinced that I couldn’t give him the life he deserved.” She shuddered. “And now I’m going to let my family be dragged through this hell again. I’m going to get you dragged through all of that. And all for what?”

“For a chance to make this country better, Cat.” Kara squeezed her a little tighter. “We’re all standing here next to you because we believe in you.”

“But what if all those commenters are right to be worried? Kara,” Cat huffed. “I’m an unmarried woman with a younger girlfriend who goes on and on about alien rights, running with a Black man in a year when a xenophobic bigot easily swept through the Republican primaries.”

“Would you rather have chosen some half-conservative white congressman as your running mate?”

“What? No. I—I want a ticket that looks like this country.”

“Would you have scaled back your support of alien rights? I mean, you wouldn’t have gotten nearly so many attacks from Max and the right if you had.”

Cat let out an indignant huff. “Of course not. You are a citizen, same as I am, and you deserve all the rights and respect we do, no matter what you look like or whether or not you can go out and save the world and rescue falling planes.”

“What about me? Would it be easier if I weren’t here as your girlfriend?”

Cat spun around then, shaking her head and curling her hand around Kara’s jaw. “I told you, I’m not hiding anymore. I am proud of you and us and this relationship. I am proud of being an out bisexual politician, regardless of the headlines I have to put up with.”

“Exactly. This campaign—it’s authentic. This is the campaign you, Cat Grant, want to be running because it’s true and it matters.” Cat’s mouth twitched, her thumb stroking across Kara’s cheek. “Maybe the country isn’t ready for it. Maybe the backlash against President Marsdin that Lane seems to be stirring up really is strong enough that the country won’t be ready for another liberal, pro-alien rights woman as president.” Cat closed her eyes and ducked her head. “But that’s on them, not you. Because I know you, and I know that you are going to run the best damn campaign you can. And most importantly”—Kara tilted Cat’s head up, holding her gaze—“you’re going to do it honestly.”

“And if I lose?”

“If you lose, we’ll stay home in sweatpants and watch shitty movies and eat chocolate mousse until we feel ready to go out there and kick ass and take names and remind them of exactly what they missed out on—at least for the next four years.”

Cat’s mouth quirked up into a small smile. “How did I get so lucky?”

“I could ask myself the same thing.” Kara pressed a soft, lingering kiss to Cat’s lips. “But through it all, I’m going to be by your side. And no matter what happens, I am so, so proud of you.”
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

November 2024

“And CNN can now project that former Governor Catherine Grant will become the President Elect of the United States. By our estimates, she now has more than enough votes to become the 47th president, the country’s second female president, and the first out LGBTQ president. Folks, this is a historic moment.”

The rest of the commentator’s words were drowned out in a roar of cheering as Cat strode out on stage in front of a room packed full of her supporters. Miniature American flags waved in outstretched hands. Red, white, and blue balloons bobbed through the air above them and fell, scattering across the stage. And rainbow confetti—the one “fun” choice Cat had allowed Kara—floated down from the ceiling. Cat kept one hand on Carter’s arm, her other hand clutching in Kara’s, her fingers trembling slightly, still not quite sure whether she could believe the results. After all, it had only been four years ago when she had walked out on stage to give a rather different speech after a long night of contested results and too-close-to-call-it-yet moments that finally ended after 4 in the morning with a slightly uncertain calling of the election for General Lane.

“It’s real,” Kara murmured, and Cat squeezed her hand just a little harder at the reminder that Kara had always been the one to know exactly what she needed to hear. With a quick peck for Kara and a tight hug for Carter, Cat strode forward to the podium, waving at the crowds and calling out her thanks until the tumultuous applause finally died down. She smiled as it quieted, adjusting the microphone and glancing down at the speech she had prepared, hoping but not quite believing she would have reason for it this time.

“Thank you!” Cat shook her head the slightest amount, still wondering if perhaps it was all some dream she would wake up from, finding the election night still to come. “Thank you all for your support and your donations and your hours and hours of tireless campaigning. And now—now we’re here.”

Kara threw an arm around Carter’s shoulders as they watched and listened from the wings, cheering and laughing and clapping at the lines they had listened to Cat practice the night before. “She’s pretty great, huh?” Kara whispered, earning a low chuckle from Carter.

“Think I can get off work tomorrow since my mom’s president and all?”

Kara shrugged her shoulders. “I’m calling off work tomorrow with a case of First-Lady-itis.”

With a snort, Carter shook his head. “You’re the boss. Of course you can call out.”

Not that Kara took off many days. Or any days, really. After the last campaign ended, she had turned down several offers to return to the Senate as a chief of staff or to manage another campaign. The work with Cat had been enjoyable and meaningful, but after watching and living through the dirty smear campaigns and invasive personal attacks, Kara decided she needed to step back and return to the kind of work that had inspired her to turn to politics in the first place. After a year as a senior researcher at one of DC’s progressive think tanks, Kara had applied for grants and gotten seed money from L-Corp’s philanthropic arm to found an NGO dedicated to advancing alien rights and promoting interspecies dialogue—something she saw an increasingly urgent need for in the face of
the Lane administration’s attempts to roll back protective measures like the Alien Amnesty Act. But now the country seemed ready to arc back toward justice, and Kara knew, no matter how late they were out that night, she would head into the office for at least an hour or two the next day to be sure they had put out a statement about Cat’s victory.

By the time Cat finished with the speech and started working her way through seemingly countless interviews with the press, most people finally headed home, leaving the large venue quiet after a night of nervous chatter and raucous applause. At a certain point, Carter snuck in for a hug and yet another congratulations while Cat was between interviews, excusing himself to get a nap in before he had to fly back to the West coast.

James likewise caught an early flight back to California after Cat sent him off with a teasing admonishment to “keep my legacy alive, Jimmy.” Even with assurances that he had CatCo’s best reporters on it and had vetted the proofs of the front page himself, James still ended up heading back out, sighing about how the work of a CEO was never done.

Around the time the sun was beginning to rise, bathing the city in a soft pink light, Kara found a very drunk Alex and an only marginally more sober Maggie making out behind the bar and celebrating the return of a liberal to the White House. After taking a few photos for posterity’s sake, Kara shuffled them outside and instructed two of the hired security guards to take them back to their house, leaving them both with stern reminders to drink plenty of water.

“Can you take us to Shake Shack?” Alex slurred as she flopped into the back seat behind Maggie. “They got great fries. Maggie likes fries. Didja know that? Veg’arians can have fries at burger places.”

“We’ll get you fries at some point today,” Kara promised as she shut the door behind Alex, rolling her eyes as Maggie dropped her head into Alex’s lap, already half asleep.

While Kara waited for Cat to finish her final interviews, she scrolled through her texts and emails, smiling at all the happy messages waiting for her from Eliza, who promised that she had been watching live from the Grant campaign headquarters in California, and Winn, who included several photos of Americans following the coverage in Germany with the caption: “SO PROUD OF YOU!! Time to go: they’re buying shots. Gonna be so hungover for day 3 of the conference…”

Kara’s phone rang with a call from Lucy and Vasquez as Cat sat down with the last of the interviews that Jasmine had arranged. With a little wave to Cat, Kara gestured at her phone and the back corner of the room before wandering away from the cameras to take it. As she slid her finger across the screen, she couldn’t help the excited squeal. “Good news?”

“Double good news!” Vasquez cheered. “Don’t think we didn’t watch the coverage just because we couldn’t be there in person.”

“Little asshole had to choose the most inconvenient time to arrive,” Lucy grumbled in the background, earning a loud bark of laughter from Vasquez.

“Don’t mind her. She’s still a little grumpy from the 18 hours of labor.”

“A little grumpy?” Kara had to hold the phone away from her face as Lucy yelled. “You try shoving a 7-pound lump out of your—”

“Congratulations!” Kara cut in.

“Thank you!” they both called back, and Kara had to chuckle at the dramatic shift in tone.
“Got a name?”

“Nope.”

“He’s baby X for now.”

“And he’s really fucking cute.”

“Okay, well, he’s kinda weird-looking, but they promise that he’ll be looking a little less alien in a couple of days. No offense, Kara.”

“None taken. I guess.”

“He’s so little. Did you know how little they are?”

“But he’s got, like, these itty-bitty fingernails and everything. Like…he’s a full human, only miniature.”

“But with big blue eyes. I don’t think they’ll stay blue, but they’re beautiful for now.”

“And so much hair. I kinda hope it falls out…might be nice to start again without a big shaggy mop of it.”

“They said it would.”

Kara snorted at the back-and-forth, wondering how long the two of them had been awake at that point. “I think Cat’s wrapping up, so I should probably go, but congratulations again!”

“Congrats to Cat too!” Vasquez cheered.

“Yes! About damn time.”

“Hopefully we’ll make it out to see the baby in the next couple of days, if you don’t mind a big team of security stalking out the perimeter of your house.”

“Go for it. And you know, if they want to take out the trash or pick up some diapers while they’re at it, I hear we’re gonna want all the extra help we can get.”

“Well I’m sure baby X’s godmothers will be more than happy to babysit once they’ve recovered from their collective hangover from hell,” Kara snickered.

“That bad?”

“Oh, I took pictures. Don’t worry.”

Lucy let out a little hum. “Can always count on you for that.”

“I think I might save these ones for the next big birthday party, though…” Kara grinned at the thought of the sheer number of humiliating photos she had saved up for that moment. “Anyway, I’ll let you go, but have a safe trip home from the hospital and give baby X a kiss for me okay?”

“Of course!”

Once Kara hung up, she ambled back over to where Cat was gathering her things and stretching after too many hours spent standing in heels. Throwing Cat’s bag over her shoulder, Kara extended her free hand. “Can I take you home, President Grant?”
December 2024

“God, accounting for a security detail for the president-elect is such a pain in the ass,” Alex grumbled as she pulled out the pegs of the seating chart for what felt like the hundredth time.

Maggie laughed as she wrapped her arms around Alex’s waist and pressed a kiss to her shoulder. “Still better than accounting for the security detail of the actual president, isn’t it?”

“Oh yes, because bumping up the timeline for the wedding by four months was so much easier.”

“You’re the one who insisted on having Kara as your maid of honor, and you can’t just not invite her wife.”

“We should have gotten married before them.”

“Please, you had so much fun giving Kara shit for U-Hauling with Cat after only a year. You wouldn’t have given that up for a slightly easier go of it ourselves.”

Alex let out a long sigh. “Maybe not.” After a moment she added, “But I still think Kara should be doing some of this work.”

“Well then tell her so over dinner.”

“Oh yeah, let’s think about how that’ll go. Hey, Kara? Be a dear. In between running an organization and preparing to move into the White House and making decisions about the inauguration and the ball, could you also figure out this seating chart?”

“You forgot to add in that we could really use the extra time for ourselves since your fiancée is kind of irresistible.”

“Mm yes. That too.” Alex’s eyes fluttered shut as Maggie kissed her softly, their hands twining together.

A knock at the door interrupted them. “Coming,” Alex called out, squeezing Maggie’s hand one last time before making her way over to the front door. She swung it open to reveal Lucy and Vasquez, both of them looking a little worn for wear. Lucy had a diaper bag slung over her shoulder, and Vasquez held an infant carseat in one hand, a bottle of wine in the other.

“Hey! Come in, come in, it’s so good to see you.”

They followed Alex inside, waving at Maggie as she rounded the corner. As Vasquez set the carseat on the ground, Lucy grimaced at the sound of a little whimper.

Alex leaned forward, unbuckling the straps and lifting the baby up, settling him into the crook of her elbow as she cooed at him. “Oh, come here, little Alex. Your godmother’s got you.”

Lucy pursed her lips and glared. “It’s A.J.”

“Mm, but I believe one of those names could be shortened to Alex. And really, I’m still so flattered that you named your son after me.”

Vasquez’s lips twitched as Lucy groaned. “It was a family name.”
“Say whatever you want to, Luce, but me and little Alex are always gonna know the truth.”

Lucy raised her eyebrows at Maggie. “She’s insufferable, you know that, right?”

“Considering we’re getting married in a couple weeks, I think I know that by now.” Maggie raised herself up to her tip-toes to kiss away the crinkle in Alex’s forehead. “But I love you more than anything.”

“Yeah, yeah. You’re lucky I’m holding a baby.”

“And you’re welcome to borrow him anytime you want.”

Vasquez shook her head. “She says that now, but she’s secretly a big softie with him at home.”

Before Lucy could respond, the sound of several SUVs pulling up drew their attention outside.

“Cat’s here!” Alex called out. “Maggie, can you deal with the security team?”

Eventually Cat and Kara made it inside, and after a round of passing A.J. around to everyone, Lucy got him to fall asleep in his carseat in time for dinner. When she got back, Vasquez patted the seat next to her, throwing her arm around Lucy’s shoulders and kissing her temple.

Alex raised her glass in the air. “A toast to little Alex!”

“Also known as A.J.,” Maggie chimed in, winking at Vasquez across the table as they clinked their glasses.

“And to the soon-to-be-married couple for hosting us tonight,” Cat added, earning another round of clinking glasses.

“And, excuse me, let’s not fucking forget,” Lucy cut in, “to the next President of the United States of America.”

“Cheers!” the table chorused.

“Here’s to an overdue victory!”

“And eight long years in the White House!”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to everyone who followed along with this story and left comments along the way! I’ve so appreciated your support, especially since this was the first multichapter work I’ve written for Supercat. Once the packing/moving is over, I’ve got a few more fic ideas in the works, but for now, I’m around on Twitter @sapphicscholar and Tumblr @sapphicscholarwrites

End Notes
I always love to hear your thoughts! I'm over on Tumblr @sapphicscholarwrites too if you ever want to chat.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!