yearning to breathe free
by meanstoflourish, softsawyer

Summary

“One year. Red carpets, some dinners, a vacation maybe, and a few kisses—all duly
documented by cameras. People will love you together, they’ll root for you. It’s going to be
amazing."

"You're talking about a lie that-"

"Not a lie, a PR contract. And the best decision for both of your careers right now."

Or

The Sanvers Fake Dating AU
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alea iacta est: the dice is cast

THE AMERICAN DREAM IS ALIVE AND WELL

And Maggie Sawyer is living, breathing proof. By Jessamine Quincy

A second generation American born in a 319 people strong town in the Midwest is making big waves in Hollywood this year. 23-year-old actress Maggie Sawyer is a name to watch out for, on both the small and the big screen.

We loved her character Maya in the hit show Rosewood Street, her first role and big break, and we all collectively gasped with her untimely death on the Season 3 finale. Thankfully, TV shows weren’t enough for Maggie, who made the jump to the silver screen with the acclaimed indie film Your Body, followed by three successive films, one which was nominated for a Golden Globe. The busy lady has just wrapped up production for The Informant, a spy thriller set to premiere next June.

This fall, Sawyer is making her return to the small screen with Nightingale, a revamp of the short lived cult hit Lady Blue. In a modern spin, the title character—renamed Blake Davenport—is not only a badass detective with an attitude, but she’s also a lesbian. Something she shares with Miss Sawyer herself, who has been out-and-proud for the entirety of her career. We’re sure only great things are ahead for this amazing young actress. Nightingale premieres Thursday, October 9th at 9/8c. on ABC.
Body of Medicine star Alex Danvers suddenly leaves mid-season. Was she fired?

The biggest plot twist on this season of Body of Medicine? Alex Danvers, suddenly leaving mid-season statement following the news:

“Alex has chosen to leave the show to pursue other opportunities. We wish her all the best and thank her for the time she spent on the show. It's very unusual for a star to leave a show mid-season especially when the deal runs until 2019. Here at OK! we've reported on Alex Danvers' multiple party frequent clubbing. Do you think her recent behavior led to her exit and for her? Sound off in the comments below!”

March 13, 2017 05:18 EST
Her head is pounding.

Alex opens her eyes against the light streaming in through the blinds, and the glare of the sun only makes her headache worsen and her mood go through the floorboards. Not that she was in a good mood to begin with. She never is on mornings like this, and she’s been having them more and more often.

She groans as she turns in bed, patting the crisp white sheets for her cellphone. Her hand collides with the cool glass surface, and she squints as she lowers the opacity enough for her hungover brain to be able to look at it.

48 new messages. 14 missed calls.

Most of the messages are from J’onn, a few from Kara, one from her mom, and a couple from whoever she went dancing with last night. Friends of friends.

She opens the search engine on her cellphone before opening J’onn’s messages, just to be prepared. After two failed attempts at typing her name, she presses the microphone button.

“Alex Danvers,” she says out loud through a dry throat. She’s too tired to get up and find water.

The articles that pop up are all from at least a week ago. So she didn’t do anything last night that landed her on the front page of a trashy magazine. That’s a win. She lets her cellphone fall from her hand and closes her eyes for a moment. J’onn can wait.

Her head spins for a moment before it all settles. Her eyes throb, and her feet ache from her shoes —heels that she borrowed from Kara and must be somewhere in this hotel room, hopefully—but apart from that she’s not in bad shape. The room reeks of alcohol, true, or maybe it’s her, but she’s grown used to it. And she can just throw away this jacket with the way smoke is clinging to it. She’s fine. She doesn’t deserve a talking to. She knows better than to try and get up right now, though, so she tries to catch another hour or three of sleep before attempting to call her mom and appease J’onn.

She closes her eyes, feeling every place where her clothes are too tight and stiff after the night. She’s too tired to fix any of it right now. Her bra strap digs into the skin of her shoulder, and her mouth tastes bitter, but she can’t be bothered. She just needs to sleep.

She can’t.

Alex frowns against a persistent, annoying thump, the only thing keeping her from sinking into oblivion.

And then she realizes it's someone knocking on the door.

“Alex, open up.”
Fuck.

“Alex, I know you’re in there,” J’onn repeats, and Alex covers her ears, feeling like a child.
“Alex!”

She opens her eyes at once. She knows the difference between an exasperated J’onn—an angry
J’onn who thinks she’s wasting her life—and this. He’s worried, genuinely worried, and she hates
to be the one to put him in this position.

So she stands up on shaky, unstable legs, and makes her way to the door even as the world spins
around her.

She opens the door.

“How did you find me?” She sounds even worse than she feels.

“You’re predictable on your choice of hotel,” J’onn says, even as he looks her up and down, the
familiar, discrete way he’s developed to see if there’s anything wrong with her apart from a
hangover.

She nods in acknowledgement. She’s predictable in a lot of things it seems.

“I paid the janitor to keep him quiet,” he tells her, once he realizes she’s not missing any toes or
bleeding out. “You threw up in the hallway. Really, Alex?”

Well, she didn’t remember that part.

“Good morning to you, too.”

“Nice answer on that last question,” M’gann mentions, and Maggie shakes her head as she climbs
into the car awaiting them at the door. Winn follows after them.

“What kind of question was that?” she asks once M’gann has settled in beside her. The driver takes
off. “You have a bit of a ‘reputation’?”

M’gann shrugs. “You kind of do.”

Maggie rolls her eyes.

“But you gave a great answer,” M’gann tells her. “Funny, charming. It was good. They loved
you.”

Maggie nods, acknowledging that. She’d been slightly nervous beforehand, had thought through
each question carefully before giving an answer. It was a run of the mill interview at the end of the
day, but she hadn’t had a spread like this, and not in a magazine like this, since before The
Informant. It was her first as a proper lead.
“They’ll send me a preview in a few weeks, but I know it went over great. The pictures looked amazing. I loved the outfit.”

Maggie smiles. She, too, had loved the suit, the hat, and the long black coat. She’d felt straight out of a noir film.


Maggie nods, as her assistant begins rattling off where she has to go and at what time. The day is far from over.

She’s used to it by now, the jumping between networks and interviewers, the frantic driving from the chauffeur they’ve appointed to her, and the snacking in between (with whatever Winn hands because she was too busy to find lunch), but it never fails to give her a rush.

“I know you’re a pro at this by now,” M’gann tells her. “But just a reminder: the focus here is teasing your new love interest and getting people excited for the new season. Okay?”

“Drive away the audience and tell them Blake is going undercover as a nun, got it.” She smiles at M’gann shaking her head. The woman is fond of her, Maggie knows it.

“And if they ask about your love life-“

“Swerve like the fucking matrix.”

M’gann smiles.

“Divert. I told them what topics were off limits, but you know how these anchors are, they go off script sometimes. This last interview was tame. Oh. And no swearing. We don’t want another Barbara Walters incident. That’s not the image we’re trying to sell.”

“That was years ago,” Maggie argues. “The one swear word that accidentally slipped out didn’t even make the final cut, and Barbara—she did tell me to call her Barbara after that—thought it was funny.”

“I was there. Her lips faintly turned up.”

“Exactly, she was laughing hysterically on the inside.”

M’gann rolls her eyes, but her fond smile is still present. The car stops in front of the building.

“You’re good?” M’gann asks her.

Maggie nods.

“I wish I could stay, but I know you’ll do great.”

“Thank you.”

M’gann touches her shoulder before she and Winn get out of the car. “Good luck.”

“I’ll walk you to your dressing room,” Winn tells her, as they power walk through the doors of the studio. “I just got the number this morning, little late if you ask me.”

Maggie chuckles. Winn speaks a mile an hour and more than most, but he’s a life saver.
“Hair and makeup will be in to touch you up in fifteen minutes, so you have time to eat something. I called and asked them to have coffee ready, I brought your agave nectar from home. There are pastries too, no sugar, and donuts. I think that’s a cop joke? And then it’s show time.”

Maggie smiles. “Got it.”

The lights never get less blinding, no matter how many times she sits there.

She can barely see the small audience in the studio through the glare, but she can hear the applause when the show goes back on air, and the anchor at her side commands a pleasant smile onto her face before turning towards the camera.

“Thanks Peter. Today I got the better deal since sitting here with me is Nightingale star Maggie Sawyer! Maggie, it is a pleasure to have you.”

She smiles with practiced ease. “The pleasure’s all mine, Sam, thank you for having me.”

The anchor smiles at the nickname, and Maggie returns the gesture. Samantha Parks is a married mother of three, but the woman is always sweet when Maggie visits for an interview; Maggie is not one to turn down the chance to make a beautiful woman smile.

They go through the usual opening banter: how she’s been, where she flew in from (“I’m afraid it was only a car ride today”), and how she’s liking the city. Maggie relaxes as more questions are asked. It’s easy. Like riding a bike.

“Now, Maggie, in your last interview with us you name dropped a few people you’d like to play your upcoming love interest. Alex Danvers was one of those names, and I can’t tell you the kind of buzz that caused on social media. Do you have any more information on that?”

“There’s not much I can say,” she tells her, shrugging. She’s practiced at playing coy, and there are a few half-hearted protests from the audience. “But, I will tell you that we’ve already gotten in contact with a few fantastic actresses, and I’m really excited about starting the casting process and finding my Claire.”

They’ve actually gotten in touch with one actress she knows, or at least, has heard of. The very name she dropped last time she sat here. It was the one question she hadn’t been prepared for, and it had left Maggie scrambling to think—and fantasize—about which actress she’d like to play her future love interest.

Gabriella had been deep into a rewatch of that medical drama, Body of Medicine, and Maggie had joined her. She’d liked one of the actresses. Alex Danvers wasn’t only pretty, like most actresses were, but her intensity when playing Jane Holt was captivating. Maggie had said her name at once and then mentioned a couple other actresses she admired, pipe dreams. Yes, Angelina Jolie. Megan Fox, of course.

She hadn’t realized there would be an actual chance of getting Alex back then.

When Gabriella told her the actress had actually quit the show, she’d been surprised, and even more so when she’d Googled Alex Danvers’ name and read a bit about her. She wasn’t surprised when she’d grown up in showbiz, the daughter of an acclaimed director. More often than not, knowing the right people was what got you good roles, but Maggie thinks Alex Danvers could
have achieved it on talent alone. She’d also read she’d had a somewhat turbulent year before quitting the show, but she stopped short of reading gossip about her. Maggie would want the same respect.

Still, she’d found it the perfect timing to mention her to Anthony as someone she’d like to get on board. Maggie always craved to act with someone who could make her better.

He hadn’t been so enthusiastic.

“Look Maggie, I’m going to be honest. You’re our leading lady, we value your input, always, but...Danvers’ latest project is stumbling out of clubs drunk and mouthing off at paparazzi,” he’d said. “I don’t know if she’s the right fit for this.”

“The paps are trash,” she’d told him. “I don’t think it’s fair to judge her for that when I’d do the same thing. Plus, she’s talented as hell, and I don’t want my acting partner dragging me down. I’m not saying it’s her or nothing, I’m saying I’ve seen her stuff, and I know she’d be good. Watch her audition and you’ll want her too, trust me.”

“That’s a big assumption you’re making Sawyer, that she’ll even want to audition.”

“Like you said, she doesn’t have much else going on,” or so Google had led her to believe. “I think she’ll be there if you ask nicely.” Anthony had looked at her, and hummed, and then left with one of his ‘I’ll see what I can do’.

Part of it had been her wanting to go against him, push for what she wanted so he’d prove just how much he valued her input—and part of it had been genuinely wanting him to give the woman a chance.

She’s glad they got in touch with her.

“In that line of thought,” Samantha’s question swiftly pulls Maggie back to the present. “We’re talking about Blake’s love life. Can we talk about yours? People want to know! You were spotted with singer Cecilia Ivy at 1 OAK last month, is anything still going on there?”

Maggie doesn’t let the easy smile slip from her face.

“Was I?” She laughs. “Man, that was a fun night, I saw Cirque du Soleil for the first time that night. Have you ever seen them?”

“Well, I can’t say that I have-“

“Oh, you need to see a show. It’s such a fun experience and the acrobatics were incredible. After the show, I actually called up one of the Nightingale writers and told them we needed to incorporate more acrobatics in Blake’s action scenes.”

“You did?” Samantha asks. “You already do most of your own stunts, right? You up for that?”

“I am! I love it. I think I’d enjoy being a stuntwoman actually.”

“A woman of many talents. So we can expect some Cirque du Soleil type of stunts in the upcoming season?”

“Yeah,” she says easily, as if said call had ever taken place. “I mean, I’ve seen it once in person, that should be enough for me to master it now. Who needs years of practice, right?”
Samantha laughs, and Maggie sees the camera man giving them the blessed ‘wrap it up’ sign that signals their time is over.

“Well, Maggie it’s been a pleasure as always.” Samantha turns towards the camera. “The second season of Nightingale premieres this fall. Tune in on Thursday, October 11th, at 9/8 central on ABC. Back to you, Peter.”

She can’t breathe for the few seconds it takes her stomach to cramp up, and then she’s expelling the acrid liquid into the toilet bowl.

It’s the part Alex hates the most about throwing up. That choking moment where she can’t breathe or control her body, her entire stomach contracting before making her empty its contents.

She catches her breathe while acid dribbles down her chin and throat, causing a sharp burning sensation. And all the while J’onn’s voice comes in through the door. He hasn’t stopped talking since he got there.

“It’s a great opportunity, Alex. Thanks to Maggie you have a foot in the door already. Nightingale could be the comeback we’ve been waiting for.”

Alex has heard of the show.

She can’t remember if Kara likes it, or if it’s one of those annoying new dramas that for weeks at a time covers the city with publicity, money spent on press that should’ve been spent on making sure the show was decent to begin with, and the name has stuck in her head.

Either way, she knows it, and she knows it’s successful. She knows it’s a damn miracle that she was called for an audition. Her, specifically. The opposite of the past, because these days nobody wants anything to do with her—her last name is still soaring with Kara, but she’s been left behind in the dust after her takeoff.

“I don’t know her,” she tells J’onn, wiping her chin with the back of her hand. She needs a shower. And breakfast. And painkillers. “Why would she tell the producers about me?”

“Maybe she liked one of your projects,” J’onn says off handedly. “Or she’s an angel, making miracles happen.”

Alex snorts. She stands up and stumbles away from the toilet and the penetrating smell of puke.

“I think we’re way past that.”

J’onn knocks on the bathroom door, and Alex flushes the toilet and sits down on the closed lid for good measure before letting him in. He walks in and sits on the edge of the bathtub, folding his large, dark hands over his knees. He looks at home there, as if hotel bathrooms were a normal
Alex almost wishes she hadn’t thrown up the last of the alcohol in her system.

“I think you should do this, Alex,” he tells her, his deep voice bouncing off the bathroom tiles. “I know if you show up to the casting it’s almost a sure thing you’ll get it. It’s a great show, a great role—you said you wanted to work again. Why are you hesitating now?”

She falters.

She hesitates because *Nightingale*—she remembers the show now, clearly, down to the face of the lead—is one of those shows that makes her hair stand on end. That makes her look away.

“Fourth billing, and I could negotiate that after your first season,” J’onn keeps talking. “You’d be the love interest of the lead.”

And that’s the problem. She doesn’t know if she can do that. Kiss a woman, touch her—even if it’s just for the cameras, if it’s just acting. It makes her hands sweat and something in her gut feel cold and heavy just thinking about it.

“I’m going to be honest, Alex,” J’onn tells her. “This could be your last chance.”

Alex thinks of her mom, of the way she presses her lips together and says ‘*Alexandra*’ in that tone of voice every time she sees her; of Kara, and the questions reporters ask about her that her sister doesn’t know how to answer. And of J’onn, who’s worked so hard for her, far more than a manager should, to the point he’s become like family. And he’s still here, fighting for her, even when she’s made it hard on him.

She swallows her uncertainty and nods.

"I'll do it. I'll audition."

J’onn has breakfast sent up to her room, and then he arranges for a car to pick her up and take her home before leaving to make some calls—calls to confirm she’ll audition for a role she isn’t entirely sure she wants. But it’s one she needs.

She uses the ride home to google the show and everything to do with it.

It’s a remake of an old cop show from the 80s, and Alex thinks it’s the type of thing she could get into. A bit of *Castle*, a bit of *Law & Order*. The type of show people binge watch, which would explain how it got popular so fast. She remembers now that it was Kara who wanted to watch an episode with her a few months ago, but she said no to watching it first, and fell asleep before they got to it in her sister’s extensive lineup.

She watches the trailer, finally catching sight of the actress who apparently gave her name to the producers. She pauses the video. So that’s Maggie Sawyer.

She’s...she’s pretty, Alex guesses, but in their line of work that’s a given. She’s different to what Alex expected though. If her years auditioning have taught her anything it’s that it’s unlikely you’ll
be a leading lady if you’re not tall, blue eyed, and blonde—and this woman is nothing like that. The exact opposite, actually. She can’t tell from the scene on her cellphone screen, but the woman looks short, maybe even shorter than Alex. With a compact body and muscle and small—Alex presses play. It’s irrelevant. And Alex doesn’t know her, she’s sure of it now. She’d remember meeting her, no matter how wasted she was.

The trailer runs along and she sees Maggie Sawyer’s character—Blake, the character seems to be called—hit a guy with the butt of her gun, before knocking down a second one. The show seems to be all action, explosions, and funny one liners.

And Blake is gay.

Alex wonders what kind of publicity strategy it is to hook people into a trailer before springing that on them, but it’s very clear from the scene Alex’s eyes are trained on. Blake presses a redheaded woman in a long dress against a wall, and runs her hand up her thigh—Alex jumps when the car comes to a stop.

“Is it here?”

“I-yes. Yeah. How much do I owe you?”

“Car’s already paid, ma’am. Have a nice day.”

Alex puts away her cellphone with red cheeks before getting out of the car.

She doesn’t even think to call her mom.

She walks into her apartment and only eyes her phone—and the messages from her mom—briefly before going to open a window and let some air in.

She knows what J’onn thinks, but there’s still a chance she won’t get the role and it’ll be just another disappointment to tell her mom about. Fleetingly, she considers calling Kara, but she’s still in Vancouver filming, and she doesn’t want to distract her.

So with nothing else to do Alex pulls her laptop out and keeps looking into the show.

A few of the scenes are on YouTube, and Alex disentangles her old earphones as she watches a three car crash unfold on the screen. It’s...exactly the type of show she always wanted to be in. She liked being a doctor in *Body of Medicine* (regardless of how much her mom loved to remind her she dropped out of medical school to be a ‘fake doctor’) but...she always wanted to play a cop. Or an agent. Or a detective.

Walking around with fake guns and doing fight sequences had always seemed exhilarating, and playing a kidnap victim in one of her dad’s films when she was younger was as close as she ever got. Despite her reservations, she’s actually getting excited to audition.

Not just for the possibility of working again, which she’s missed, even if her last few weeks on *Body of Medicine* were a nightmare as everything spiraled out of her hands. But getting to check off a role on her wish list of characters to play. If she remembers J’onn’s words right, the role up for grabs is a detective, fresh out of the academy. The love interest of the lead.
Alex isn’t about to look for more scenes, but she does look into the actress behind them, the woman she may possibly be working with.

Twice in a day, she’s not what she expects.

First of all, she didn’t actually expect her to be, well, gay herself. She’d thought it was just a role, but Maggie Sawyer is...she’s a lesbian. She started modeling age 14 according to the article she clicks on, and there aren’t any big interviews she can find about it, or announcements she made. There’s no ‘Maggie Sawyer Comes Out of the Closet” People.com pieces or dramatic announcements. She seems to just...have always been publicly gay, from that young of an age, and she still made a name for herself.

Alex…doesn’t understand how that could work for her.

Maggie Sawyer’s last few roles have been exclusively gay women, and Alex stops googling so she can actually watch something she’s been on. She picks the first film she can find on Netflix, one called Amazing Grace from a few years ago. It’s a historical drama, and regardless of how much Kara makes fun of her for it, it’s a genre she enjoys.

She starts the movie, and the beginning doesn’t pull any punches. She watches as Maggie’s character’s brother dies and raises her eyebrows at how good the woman is when she cries over his grave. She looks incredibly young too, just barely a teenager, and Alex is surprised to realize she must have been 19 years old when the movie was filmed.

The film switches points of view between Maggie’s character and an older man, a Sergeant, and Alex has to admit that she spends his scenes waiting for hers to be back on the screen.

She watches Maggie’s character, Sofia, put on her brother’s clothes and cut her own hair, and then enlist in the army with her best friend. She gets immersed in the film as she watches them train and then be sent to the frontlines of the civil war. She uses the Sergeant’s parts to get something to snack on while she watches, and returns when she hears her voice come from her laptop.

She frowns as Sofia’s best friend declares his love for her before dying a few scenes later, and finds herself holding her breath as in the end, Sofia chooses between going back to her family—who valued her brother more than her—or leaving with a General Adams who found out her secret and kept it, earlier in the movie.

She leaves with the guy, and Alex doesn’t...get it.

It seems ridiculous to choose a stranger over your family like that, all in the name of ‘love’. Sofia’s mother had already lost one child. It didn’t make sense. And the General was a bland character at best, like Maggie Sawyer’s co-star.

The closing credits find Alex deeply unsatisfied with the ending of the film, but she at least concedes that Maggie is a good actress, and in, what? 4 years? She must have gotten better.

Alex goes even further back and watches a compilation of her scenes from the first show she was on, age 18. It’s called Rosewood Street, and it’s exactly the type of teen show that Kara would love and that makes her roll her eyes, but Maggie almost makes it bearable. She likes her character, Maya, and watches her go through inane high school problems with more interest than she likes to admit. (Alex notes that Maggie is the only person on the show who’s playing her age—she’s always been annoyed at 30-year-old teenagers.)

She’s taken by surprise when Maya is killed right before boarding a plane to her dream college.
(Alex is something in the vicinity of jealous, too, because she’s always wanted to have a death scene.) Maya gurgles out an ‘I love you’ for the guy who cheated on her with her best friend, and then dies, and the video is over.

It’s hard to stop herself from looking further into Maggie Sawyer then. She clicks on an old interview and finds out she loves dogs and her favorite color is pink, reads the last few days worth of her social media accounts, and then finds herself in a forum for her fans.

She knows that people are seldom what they seem to be from online articles and fan encounters, but it’s hard not to get invested as she reads more about this Maggie—it all sounds far too good to be true, so it probably is.

She looks at smiling pictures where she’s not wearing any makeup, her cheek pressed against the fan’s as if they’re old friends—she has a striking smile, framed by deep dimples on both of her cheeks. Alex keeps reading about her, and what people think of her, through page after page of the forum.

She closes her laptop when she becomes increasingly engrossed in two fan’s theories that Maggie is dating singer Cecilia Ivy. Her research is done.

All in all, it doesn’t seem like Maggie Sawyer would be a bad person to work with.

"Maggie! Maggie! Where you going?"

Dealing with the buzz and yells that follow her constantly has become routine, but Maggie still hasn’t mastered the art of turning it into background noise.

She doesn’t hate paparazzi per se—she did have a good few months where she looked at them like vermin after all that happened with Emily—but she doesn’t go out of her way to avoid them. They’re making a living; a slimy, exploitative one, sure, but it’s a job nonetheless. She has a few acquaintances who don’t go out without baseball caps and sunglasses, and simply have yoga class at home to avoid exactly this. Maggie couldn't live like that. (And if she wears baseball caps sometimes it's just because she likes them.)

That doesn’t mean it isn’t annoying to be followed from the door of the Yoga studio to her car by no less than three men carrying cameras, but she tries to put her best—sweaty—self forward.

“Maggie! Where you headed to?”

She plasters a smile on her face. “Off to the studio.”

“Any new projects?”

“I’m a hundred percent focused on Nightingale’s Season 2 right now.”

She’s halfway through the parking lot, and she briefly hopes there are no big sweat stains under her
armpits. She might tell herself she doesn’t care, but deep down she can’t stand to see pictures like that out there, if only because she knows there are people who will use whatever they can to mar her image.

And it’s an image M’gann has put a lot of work into crafting. Maggie has a lot of respect for the woman.

“Maggie, look this way! Big smile!”

She reaches her car and juggles her yoga mat and water bottle to get the door opened to her black jeep. The camera shutters never stop going off.

*If they’re going to stand there the least they could do is help me*, Maggie thinks.

“Maggie, this side! You look beautiful!”

“Seeing as how I just got out of yoga, I’m pretty sure you’re lying, but that’s a nice gesture.” She drops everything on the passenger seat and gets in the car. She rolls the window down. “Have a nice day everybody.”

She rolls the window up, and all but one of the men leave, satisfied with their intrusion in her life. Maggie ignores the guy apparently content with taking photos of her car. It is a nice model, after all.

She takes her cellphone out from her gym bag and checks her messages. Anthony tells her he’ll be in the studio today to oversee the casting—which, okay. That’s strange enough. M’gann wishes her luck on the chemistry reads today, and Maggie thanks her.

Gabriella’s last message to her is ‘at the restaurant’ from last night when Maggie asked her where she was going to spend the following day.

She records a voice note. “Hey, leaving yoga right now. I’m gonna wash this grime off me at home, and then I’m headed to the studio. Talk to you at the restaurant after?”

She’s surprised when Gabriella sees it and then starts recording a message right away. She’s about to start typing ‘don’t text and cook’ when she gets a voice note from her aunt. She presses play.

“Good luck today, kid. I hope you find your lady love!”

Maggie shakes her head, smiling.

Really Intense Pap Douche still in her rearview mirror, she starts the car and heads to the studio, her whole body starting to buzz as she wonders how today will go. *Lady love. As if.*

The car cruises through the calm streets of Los Feliz, and for the first time in her adult life Alex wishes they hadn’t just escaped the nightmare of the LA traffic.
She wants more time to think about her character, needs a few more hours she doesn’t have to calm down the strange, tremulous feeling in her stomach as the driver gets them to the studio. She’s been nervous about auditions before, but never like this. Because never has so much hinged on one single audition going right.

J’onn sits beside her, looking out of the dark tinted windows, and Alex gets the feeling he’s giving her space even as from right next to her.

The first audition was easy, a simple recording—by J’onn—with a short scene where her character introduces herself. She could do it as many times as she wanted, and from the waist down she was still wearing her lazy sweatpants. There’s no second chances here, and the scene isn’t hers alone.

She reads over the description of her character—Claire Lawson, NYPD—one more time.

Claire - FEMALE. 20-30. Between 5’5” and 5’8”. Caucasian.

Claire Lawson is a 24-year old, freshly minted homicide detective. Methodical and detail oriented, Claire is a prodigy, having been fast tracked to the position only 2 years after leaving the Police Academy.

The daughter of two defense attorneys, Claire is as determined as she is sure of what is right and wrong in the world, with little grey in between. Claire is moved by her desire to see justice delivered fairly, and although she hides it from everyone—and sometimes herself—her need to prove herself to her parents.

Although her field experience is limited—the case that got her promoted was her first and only so far—she’s book smart and thinks her intelligence is enough to get by on in the streets of NYC.

When we begin the season, Claire has just been transferred to the 6th precinct in New York City and partnered up with Detective Blake Davenport so she can learn the ropes from one of the best.

It’s not that easy. Claire, ever prim and proper, thinks Blake is rude and too free with the law. But over the course of the season, through their shared experiences on the job, the two grow closer. Claire starts seeing Blake in a new light, and she becomes hopelessly attracted to her training officer.

Alex stops reading.
That’s where the character gets difficult, where stepping into her shoes feels to Alex like a thousand little pins all over her body, the feeling one gets when a limb falls asleep and you try to move it.

It makes her uncomfortable, but she’s not-she’s not homophobic. She hopes it’s not what J’onn thinks, or anyone else for that matter. Not that anyone else knows. Except, what if she gets it? God, what is she going to do during interviews? She doesn’t want to come off as weird, but Alex knows sometimes her poker face is shit. What if they think she hates gay people? The only possible way her career can sink any lower is if the public thinks she’s a bigot.

“Alex. You’re thinking too hard.”

She looks up at J’onn. “Are you a mind reader now?”

“I don’t need to read minds to know there’s a lot on yours. You haven’t stopped frowning since we left your apartment.”

She sighs. She can’t lie to J’onn. But she also can’t talk about this.

“It’s just...everything.” She waves her hand, hoping he lets her off easy. He nods, and not for the first time Alex thanks the heavens she has him.

“I know you’re nervous, Alex, but you’ve done this before. You’ll do great.”

She hasn’t quite done this before, not with a character like this, and not now that she’s just, so confused about so many things...

“Do you really think that?” she asks J’onn.

He puts his hand on her shoulder, and it grounds Alex. “I know that.”

A quick shower and a granola breakfast later, Maggie walks into the room designated to hold the chemistry reads for Claire Lawson. They tell Maggie they’ve narrowed it down to a dozen girls through the audition tapes (Maggie briefly thinks that’s not very narrowed down, but she doesn’t expect any of them to know what a lesbian looks like). Anthony makes sure to tell her the girl she wanted so much is one of them, before heading over to grab a cup of the admittedly good coffee the studio has provided them with.

Maggie gets into place in front of the cameras, gearing up for a long day. She hasn’t been in Blake’s shoes for a while, not since they wrapped up season 1, and it’s like stepping into a warm bath. Any nerves she might have had disappear as she embodies the badass, no-nonsense detective she loves.

She starts at 10 am, and some of the girls are good.

They don’t talk over her in an effort to make the conversation seem more natural, and they give her
the space for the dramatic beats Blake is so fond of.

Some are just painful.

Maggie actually takes a step back when Girl Number 9, a tall blonde, actually gets a bit too far into her personal space.

“Claire would never be that aggressive,” she says out loud. For a moment, she’s wary she’s overstepped since she’s just an actress—the lead actress, yes—but still not anyone with creative control here. But Anthony huffs out a laugh.

“She was projecting,” Lorena, the casting director, says. “That girl’s a stunt double...I actually think I’m going to keep her in mind for fight scenes, but that was all her. She’s aggressive so she makes Claire be aggressive too. She wouldn’t be nearly as physical.”

“Yes, she’d be...intellectually aggressive. Smart without being conceited. Naive without being dumb. I don’t think we’ve seen anyone understand Claire like that just yet,” Bruno, the other producer, replies.

“My main concern is that she have chemistry with Maggie,” Anthony pipes up. “She can understand the character later,” he tells them. “I’m trying to build something here, something people will go crazy over, something that will carry us into a dozen seasons by itself.”

Maggie inwardly cringes at the thought she might be doing this for the next 12 years. She loves Blake, but she loves herself more.

“Well, three girls to go,” Maggie says.

Girl Number 10 is wildly different than Girl Number 9. She’s on the shorter side of what the producers asked for, and her 5’5” to Maggie’s 5’3” means—with the boots she’s wearing—they see eye to eye.

She plays Claire more insecure than anyone else so far. She goes toe to toe with Maggie when the scene calls for it, but then she retreats. Maggie thinks she’s...graceful. Her Claire is delicate.

“She was great,” Bruno says once the woman walks out.

“Did you like her, Maggie?” Lorena Vasquez, patron saint of always wanting to hear her opinion.

“I mean...yeah. Yeah, she was good.”

Lorena nods.

“I don’t know,” Anthony says. “I think there’s something missing. Where’s the fire? The...pizzaz?”

Lorena chuckles. “I think back in the 80s along with that word.”

Maggie has a nice laugh at Anthony’s expense.

Girl Number 11 is another one of the painful ones, and Maggie’s sure she got to this room only
because she’s absolutely, stunningly gorgeous. Big blue eyes, and blonde hair, and she’s...she has it all, yeah. She’s not exactly Maggie’s type, and she’s not one to treat women like a piece of meat, but she’s...hot. The hottest woman that’s walked through the door today. If Maggie had been three years younger she would be blushing through her lines.

But she’s more mature now, and can only be disappointed when her acting falls flat.

Anthony mentions the girl only had one credit under her name but he wanted to give her a chance —of course—and Maggie genuinely hopes she gets better. She already has half the job in the bag, it’ll be much easier for her to get roles than it ever was for Maggie looking the way she does.

Halfway through the chemistry read with Girl Number 11, Maggie begins to accept that Girl Number 10 will be her girl. Her Claire isn’t exactly what she pictured, but she seemed nice. And at least Maggie won’t have to stand on boxes to be on the same level with her as she sometimes has to with James. Her neck will be saved the strain, too, during their future kiss scenes.

Once Girl Number 10 walks out, Maggie realizes she’s forgotten someone. And it’s exactly who she was most excited to do the scene with. In her defense, it’s been at least 6 hours and she’s exhausted.

“One last girl to go, Maggie.”

“Alex Danvers,” she says.

“The one and only,” Anthony sing songs.

Alex sits outside the door.

The audition is underway by the time she arrives, and she sits in the chair vacated by the woman who walked inside. J’onn left her at the door with a ‘Good luck’ and a hug, and Alex has spent the hour since then getting her nerves under control and trying to get in the right mindset to channel Claire.

She does what she’s always done for her characters: draws from her own life.

She thinks about Claire’s need to please her parents. Thinks back to when she was younger and her dad was alive, how she tried her hardest during ballet lessons she never liked so she could show him what she learned when she got home. She eventually accepted she was useless at dancing, but she still remembers wanting to do everything to see him proud of her. Just as painful, she thinks of her mom, who doesn’t even know she’s auditioning just in case she doesn’t get it.

She thinks of Claire wanting to be the best cop she can be and impress Blake while she’s at it. How she craves her approval, but doesn’t want to beg for it. She wants to earn it. How she’d rather fight with her brain than with her fists, even though she’s plenty capable of it.
“Danvers?”

She looks up. She’s thankful she’s the last one so no one bats an eye at her last name.

“You’re up,” the receptionist says.

Alex takes a deep breath and walks in.

When Alex Danvers enters the room, Maggie can immediately feel her presence.

Lorena discreetly raises her eyebrows at her outfit, and Maggie does the same. She’s wearing...jeans. And an olive colored T-shirt. Which isn’t necessarily bad, but after a whole day of women walking in dressed in black pantsuits and an elegant blouse, all certainly aiming for the Claire Lawson look...she’s dressed down. It doesn’t look like she doesn’t care—her hair, just past her shoulders, is neatly combed behind her ears, and her black boots shine under the fluorescent lighting. But she’s not...trying as hard. Maggie is already intrigued.

They meet eyes before Alex is supposed to slate, and Maggie is unexpectedly caught in hers. The intensity and determination shining there is unmistakable. It’s the same intensity that caught her eye when watching *Body of Medicine*. It’s not that she doesn’t care at all. She knows right then and there she made the right call asking Anthony to get her.

Alex deftly shakes hands with both producers and the casting director, and then greets Maggie with a curt nod and a similar handshake. Maggie is slightly taken aback. She’s not...rude, exactly, but she’s serious. Maybe too serious. She doesn’t come off as at all similar to the warm, optimistic Claire they’re looking for.

Maggie is slightly worried for a second. This is the woman she went to bat for, the actress she put a good word in for with her showrunner because she believed in her talent. If Alex is one of the painful ones...Maggie might never live it down. Not to mention the disappointment will do her in.

But then Anthony yells action.

The transformation in Alex is magical, and it’s one of Maggie’s favorite things to witness as an actor. Alex’s eyes brighten, her back straightens, and she throws her shoulders back. They settle into an easy rhythm as Blake and Claire, and Maggie feels the scene she’s done almost a dozen times today is fresh again, new, exciting.

Maggie doesn’t think she’s ever felt this comfortable with an acting partner before. It’s an exhilarating feeling, like seeing snow for the first time when all you’ve ever known is sticky, uncomfortable heat.

“I work best alone,” Maggie says, deepening even further the already low tone she uses for Blake.

“Well, if you’re really the best I’m sure you can be the best alone or with a partner,” Alex returns
They run through the lines, and Maggie has done this enough that at least a small part of her can focus on the reactions around her. She thinks Bruno, Lorena, and even Anthony, might like her just as much as she’s decided she does.

The scene is over, but Maggie doesn’t want it to be.

“It’s a joke Lawson,” she improvises. “Now get up, I have a tour to give you.”

“Oh?” Alex adds, and Maggie looks up. Nobody has improvised today. Nobody has dared to. And Maggie would never advise it, but Alex seems so confident she doesn’t doubt she knows what she’s doing. “Sorry, we don’t have that kind of humor where I’m from.”

“Well, you’re certainly not in Kansas anymore, Toto,” Maggie says.

“Wouldn’t I be Dorothy since I’m human?” Alex asks, the right balance of defiant and naive.

“No. You’re definitely the yapping dog.” Maggie says, and the undertone of laughter in her voice...that’s all her, not Blake.

“Would that make you the Wicked Witch of the West?” Alex asks as she steps forward, her eyebrow raised. Maggie swallows. She’s taken aback. There’s a current in the air, between their characters, and she wonders if this is the chemistry they talk about, the thing that Anthony wanted.

“Most would say so,” she replies, channeling Blake’s loneliness even when she pushes everyone in her life away. “Enough small talk.” She intends to end the scene with that—nobody likes when actresses go off track, and she’d hate for Alex to try and prove herself further by trying to say the last line. Maggie is relieved when Alex takes her guidance with a slight nod.

They work well together.

The room erupts into applause.

It breaks her out of the moment of concentration she’d found herself in, and she takes a self-conscious step back as she realizes how close they’d gotten during the last part, where they went entirely off script. She’s never done that with anyone but James, and that’s just a throwaway one liner here or there. This was...different. Maggie has been in Blake’s shoes for a year, but it was as if Alex was Claire, only one minute in.

“Impressive,” Anthony says. “Thank you for coming, Miss Danvers,” he tells Alex, giving her a smile. Maggie has seldom seen him as excited. “We’ll be in touch.”

Alex looks taken aback at the sudden dismissal, but she nods.

“Thank you,” she tells the room, and then turns to shake Maggie’s hand again. “I-good scene.”

She turns around and leaves. Maggie has little time to think about her awkward parting words because then Lorena is asking her if she’s thinking what everyone else is, Bruno is saying that the chemistry between them was palpable to everyone in the room, and Anthony looks like he’s basically salivating at the thought of Alex being their Claire.

And Maggie...part of her is still living in that moment, caught in Alex’s presence.
Alex can feel she got the role.

She walks out in a daze, surprised that it went as well as it did, and relieved. She feels even better than she did after the first callback for *Body of Medicine*. She delivered every line the way she’d practiced in front of her mirror. And when they improvised...she would’ve never tried to start that, but when Maggie did, all Alex wanted to do was follow along.

She’s never improvised before.

She’s always thought there’s a script for a reason, and her dad had usually been the one writing those scripts, and he was a genius. It’s never been her place to direct where a scene is going. But she felt good improvising today, and she knows it’s only because Maggie made her feel like she could.

She’d be an easy person to work with, acting-wise. Alex can feel that. And she didn’t seem stuck up, so she’s probably nice, too. If she’s half as nice as her fans make her seem she’ll already be the kindest person Alex has ever worked with.

It was perfect, except for one thing.

Near the end there, she’d gotten nervous, and bolted.

‘Good scene’? What the fuck was that?

She didn’t know Maggie enough to be starstruck, and growing up in Malibu—and in the business, most of all—she doesn’t have it in her to be starstruck. So she doesn’t know why her brain short circuited for a second, as people clapped around them and she found herself staring at Maggie Sawyer’s dimpled smile.

The clapping—that was a good one to tell her mom. And J’onn. She could hardly wait to call him and—her phone buzzes.

“J’onn!” she answers. “I was about to call you, I’m just heading outside.”

“I was waiting outside, the place filled up with paps. You’re gonna have to go out through the backdoor.”

“Shit.”

“I’m in the staff parking lot. I brought the car around.”

“Okay, I’ll meet you there.”

Alex turns back and tries to find the right door to exit through as she walks through the long, sterile looking hallways. She asks for directions when her phone buzzes again. J’onn worries when she takes too long sometimes, and Alex knows that’s entirely her fault.

Orange rays hit her face when she opens the heavy metal door labeled ‘EXIT’, the late afternoon
beautiful despite the heavy clouds in the distance.

“Hold the door!”

Alex looks over her shoulder, and Maggie is there. Her stomach jumps. Maggie steps into place behind her, smiling sheepishly.

“Thanks, Hodor.”

Alex stares at her.

“I’m sorry, *Game of Thrones*?” Maggie asks, and Alex briefly thinks she should have taken Kara up on her offer of watching the damn thing last summer. “Nevermind. Thanks again. I keep saying I should exercise with these doors, they’re so heavy -oh,” Maggie’s eyes get lost behind her. “They’re outside.”

Alex looks out the door, and sure enough the paparazzi have made their way around the building, their cameras flashing away. It’s afternoon. Why is that even needed?

“Your car here?” Maggie asks, and Alex nods. She catches sight of J’onn, and begins walking towards her ride. The yelling begins soon after.

"Alex! Maggie! Look over here! Alex!"

It’s enough to sour her mood after the triumph she felt inside. “Alex,” she mutters. “Alex. They don’t know me.”

“Alex! This way, gorgeous!”

A step away from the car, a different voice calls out to her.

“See you around, Danvers!” Maggie smiles. “Hopefully.”

“She means to say something along the lines of ‘you too’ but that, whatever that was, comes out instead. Nobody’s called her by her last name since she was in middle school.

“Well,” Maggie’s smile is full of teasing, Alex doesn’t have to know her to realize. “I don’t know you.,” she repeats Alex’s previous words back to her. “Yet.” Maggie’s handwave drips with charm as she gets into her car. Alex isn’t quite sure how that’s even possible.

She gets into her own ride, and J’onn greets her with a smile.

“It went well, I hope?”

She looks at Maggie’s car pulling out of the parking spot and into the street, swiftly avoiding the paparazzi.

“You have no idea.”
“Did you see it?!?”

“I’m about to,” Maggie tells Gabriella, smiling at how, regardless of how many magazine covers she has or interviews she does, her aunt is never any less excited.

“Well, hurry.”

Maggie laughs as she puts her phone on speaker and sets it down on the arm of the couch. She folds her legs underneath her while she grabs the issue of *The Hollywood Reporter*. She’s not on the cover, but the 6 page spread inside is the stuff of dreams.

She reads over the first paragraphs, the usual fluff about her origins—Gabriella had helpfully supplied the information about where her family had come from—and then stops as she comes across a quote from her aunt.

“‘Maggie was always the brightest little star’,” she reads out loud. “‘Perhaps not the most coordinated, but she was always excited to perform.’” Maggie chuckles. “Gabriella, when did they ask you this?”

“M’gann gave them my number, they called a couple of days after the photoshoot.”

“And you didn’t say anything,” she mentions, amused.

“I wanted you to read it first. How was that for my first printed interview?”

Maggie laughs, and reads the line again.

“Not very coordinated, Gabriella?” Maggie shakes her head. It’s exactly the type of thing her aunt would say to a publication asking about her childhood. “You never even saw me perform.”

“Please, Giorgia sent me pictures of you playing the star of the tree in first grade,” Gabriella tells her. “I remember because it was my first semester of college, and I almost jumped on a plane back to Nebraska to see it with my own eyes.”

Maggie’s smile slips off her face at the mention of her mother, but there’s no one around to see it.

“Have you-uh, have you talked to her recently?”

“Not since last Christmas, as usual,” Gabriella tells her.

“Oh.”

“I wouldn’t talk to her behind your back, Maggie, you know that.”

“I do.” She knows Gabriella is in her corner, that she always has been. “She’s still your sister though.”

“She’s nothing to me,” Gabriella says fiercely, “neither of them are.” Gabriella takes a breath. “Let’s talk about something else. How about the casting, how did that go?”

Maggie is thankful for her aunt every day, but especially in moments like this.

“I’m pretty sure she’s gonna get it.”
“Alex Danvers?”

“The one and only. I’ve never seen Anthony so excited about anything.” Maggie had been pretty excited too, truth be told. It wasn’t often she felt such a connection with someone on the first audition. They just clicked together as actresses.

“They all really liked her.”

“Did you?”

“She’s a good actress. Great, even,” Maggie tells her, honestly. “I think she’d be a good scene partner.”

“She a good person?” Gabriella asks, and from the sounds of it she’s gotten up to do something.

“Hard to tell from a 10 minute cold read.”

“Right. But that’s important. I can’t imagine having to work with someone—and kiss them—if I couldn’t stand them. And if you don’t like her then I’m gonna be the one getting an earful and you can get unbearable.”

Maggie laughs. “Are you kidding me?”

Gabriella doesn’t answer, and Maggie hears a discussion going on in the background.

“Huh-I have to go sweetheart, something’s up in the kitchen. I’ll call you later, okay?”

Maggie tries to shake off the disappointment. Her aunt is busy running an entire restaurant; she should let her work.

“Okay, bye. Love you.”

“Love you.”

The call disconnects.

Maggie sits back, finishes reading the article, and then puts the magazine away after taking a look at the pictures. She’s not a fan of looking at herself on screen, but it’s different with photos. She looks good in these.

She looks around her house, the open area of the living room somehow seeming bigger and emptier without Gabriella filling the silence with her chatter. Her aunt has her own apartment close to La Nuvola Bianca, but she spends so much time here it’s as if Maggie never moved out. She likes it that way. This place is too big for only her.

She has nothing to do but wait—Gabriella promised they’d go shopping for winter clothes tomorrow—so she resolves to get the small things out of the way. She signs off on the monthly donation she makes to Hope For Paws, the animal rescue organization she stumbled upon during one of her morning jogs. She’s reading the newsletter they send to all donors and volunteers when a photo slips out. It’s an adorable German Shepard, his tongue lolling out as he seems to smile for the camera. She turns the photo over, “Thanks to your generous donation Miss Sawyer, Lucky here was able to successfully have his leg amputated. And he was adopted earlier this week!” Maggie keeps the picture.

She approves a payment to Nebraska Smiles, the children’s orthodontics clinic near Blue Springs
whose name she’s become familiar with. She sends a message to M’gann, thanking her for her praise regarding the article, and once all of that is done it’s only been an hour of her time.

She orders some takeout from La Nuvola Bianca, and Esteban on the phone recognizes her voice. If she can’t have her aunt at least she’ll have her amazing food. She resolves to take a bath while she waits for dinner to arrive.

She puts her hair up and steps into the warm, soapy water, feeling her muscles relax. She lets her head slip back and stares up at the light fixture, her eyes roving over the glass. Her bathroom is larger than Gabriella’s living room in her old apartment, where she spent the first few months after she moved in with her, sleeping on the pull out couch until her aunt could get her a bed. It’s certainly bigger than the room they shared until she was eighteen.

Sometimes Maggie can’t believe she’s here.

Which is why she feels so selfish when, looking around, she doesn’t like her life when she’s alone.

It’s this side of lonely.
Born in Blue Springs, Missouri, this 23-year-old actress is making a name for herself in Hollywood.

Her mother hails from Apulia, a region bordering the Adriatic Sea and her father from Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. Sawyer herself perpetually feels the pull of her Italian roots, even with such origins. Sawyer grew up in her hometown until she was a teenager.

From a young age, she showed a love for the arts, making the most out of the resources available at the local Boys & Girls Club. “My aunt, Georgia, always said I was her brightest little star,” her aunt, Georgia, says. “Perhaps not the most coordinated, but I was always excited to perform.”

At age 14, she moved to Los Angeles behind and moving in with her mother to pursue her career in the arts. Modeling jobs, which then turned into television commercials. Shortly after, she booked a regular role as Maya Esposito on the hit television series *Rosewood*.

It was the big break she’d been waiting for.
Her success only continued, as she ensemble *Your Body*, where she her portrayal of a young girl living pial. Sawyer’s performance proved to be more than a teen drama, another amazing streak by starring in a film as diverse as Sawyer is talented.

Historical drama *Amazing Grace* played a teenage girl masquerading as a soldier in the coming-of-age film *Glo* for its beautiful cinematography and the use of the stumbling leap from high school to college.

And last but not least, Golden Globe nominated *Crush*, based on a poem collection of the same name *Richard Siken*. Sawyer played the daughter of the lead character, and although she wasn’t around for most of the film, her performance was lauded by critics and there were even rumblings of award nominations. Sawyer followed this triumph with her first lead role in a film, the name of *The Informant*, set to be released.

Last fall, Sawyer made her triumphant small screen debut in *Nightingale*, a period piece *Lady Blue*, where she plays Davenport. A detour from her previous role as sweet best friend, the understand troubled young girl, Sawyer plays the role of a tough, gritty NYPD homicide detective.

Sawyer seems to have the Midas touch, turning every role into a success.
When J’onn shows up to her apartment three days later to tell her they’ve offered her the part, Alex isn’t surprised.

The first thing she feels is relief.

She got it. She’s going to be working again. She’ll be able to tell her mom she has a job, and Kara will be able to give a clear answer when reporters ask her about her sister’s future projects. She’s relieved.
She hugs J’onn, who pats her back fondly.

“They actually called me last night, but I didn’t listen to the message until this morning. They chose fast,” he tells her, not giving Alex enough time to overthink this and feel the nerves simmering just below the surface. He pulls away. “Of course they did,” he says, and he looks so proud Alex feels her throat get tight.

“Do you have it?” she asks, realizing that they left J’onn a message.

“A—”

“I want to hear it!” she pleads. “If you have it.” She feels like bouncing on her toes, ecstatic as she is. It’s a job. A great one.

J’onn grimaces.

“What’s wrong?” Alex deflates slightly.

Her mind runs a mile a minute, conjuring up scenario after scenario where there’s conditions to her working, or a caveat. It was all too good to be true.

“Nothing, Alex. It’s just, the showrunner, King...he’s not really...”

Alex gives him a look.

“What did he say about me? I want to hear.”

J’onn sighs. He must have known it would only make her more determined to listen to whatever it is he was sent. He could’ve just said he deleted the message, but J’onn doesn’t lie to her, and for that she’s thankful. He’s never treated her with kid gloves.

J’onn puts his phone on speaker a minute later.

Alex almost wishes he hadn’t.

“At the beginning I was skeptical,” Anthony King says. “I mean, it’s Alex Danvers—we were all a bit skeptical.” Alex cringes at the way he says her name. When did she become that actress? The trainwreck recognizable by her name as someone to avoid? “But! She won us over. We’re so excited to welcome her to the Nightingale family if she accepts.”

She can’t get one good thing. Even when telling her manager she got a role she wanted, they find a way to drag her through the mud.

“He’s a moron,” J’onn tells her.

“He’s my new boss,” she states.

“Don’t pay attention to—”

Alex shakes her head.

“And he’s honest, too. Alex Danvers, who would want to work with her? Can she even work anymore?” Her voice sounds as low as she feels.

“Stop that,” J’onn tells her. “You got the job.”
Somehow it doesn’t sound as sweet as it did ten minutes ago.

“So...” J’onn trails off.

“So what?”

J’onn gives her a patient smile. “Are you in?”

“I think it’s obvious I need it, and it’s a miracle I even got it.”

She’s going to take it because she has to, there’s no other way around it. She wants it, too, but it’s so much harder to admit that when the showrunner himself was surprised that she was good.

“I still want to know what you think.”

“Yes,” Alex tells him. “I need it,” she repeats, and the excitement bubbling up in her stomach is only slightly dampened by the thought that they expected her to be a failure and she surprised them. If she was younger, she’d walk away from this so easily, her pride bigger than her reason. She can’t afford to be that girl anymore.

“Congratulations,” J’onn tells her, and Alex has it in her to smile.

God, she needs to tell her mom.

“Everything okay?”

“Yeah, I just haven’t had breakfast yet.” She walks to her kitchen. “And I need to talk to my mother.”

“Oh.”

Alex gives him a look. “Would it be too much to ask you to do it for me?”

She’s a mess, she knows she is, but J’onn has never judged her. He gets it, she knows, and he understands why, maybe more than even her mom or Kara. They’re the same, deep down.

“Of course. I’ll call King and then Eliza.” He grabs a banana from her breakfast island. “Eat something.”

She has a bowl of cereal while J’onn makes all the necessary calls. She watches him turn his charisma on as he talks to producer after producer, and makes arrangements to meet them over everything from her paychecks to her relocation to New York. Alex has no idea how he does it.

He leaves her mom for last, and she’s sorry she finished her measly breakfast because now she has nothing to keep her occupied and ignorant of the conversation going on three feet away from her.

J’onn sounds happy for her when he tells her mom she has a new role, and Alex wishes she could see her mom’s expression. Find out whether she’d be happy too, or weary of what she’ll do to ruin it.

“She’s busy right now, on the phone. You know how it is, Eliza. But she’s excited.”

J’onn throws a look her way, and Alex looks out the window. He doesn’t like lying, and she hates that she makes him do it. She walks past him on the way to her room, and hears something that sounds like “Thank you, J’onn. For everything.” coming from the phone.
“It was all Alex,” he says.

She takes a shower while he talks to some other people, and once she comes out everything’s ready for her to sign.

It’s all done in one morning.

She’s looking forward to a celebratory drink later in the evening, maybe even calling some of the girls from last time, when J’onn’s phone starts ringing, and even he looks surprised at who it is when he answers.

J’onn hands her the phone.

“It’s for you,” he tells her. “Maggie.”

Alex’s heart thuds in her chest, hard. She clears her throat before taking the phone.

“Hello?”

“Danvers,” Maggie greets, and Alex feels a smile play on her lips when the other woman uses the name from the parking lot. “I just wanted to call to congratulate you on getting the role.”

“Thank you,” Alex tells her.

“We’re gonna have a lot of fun on set. You’re going to love the crew,” Maggie says. “I don’t have much time right now, but I just wanted to let you know I’m excited to have you on board. I’m really glad you’re my Claire.”

Alex swallows. She definitely doesn’t fixate on the possessive pronoun.

“Yeah, me...me too.”

“I have to go now. Bye, Danvers.”

“Goodbye, Sawyer.”

Maggie gratefully accepts the glass of wine her aunt hands her, and she hums when the first drop of red touches her tongue. It’s the good stuff from the restaurant.

“Do you like the girl?” Gabriella asks as she sits on the other end of the couch, pulling Maggie’s feet into her lap.

“I don’t know her,” she tells her aunt. “But she seemed nice enough.” She thinks about it while she lets the heady taste of wine slide down her throat. “Actually, no, she didn’t. She seemed really uptight. Not while she acted, she was great then. Really great. But just...every other moment.”
Maggie isn’t trying to judge the woman. It was a big audition. She must have been nervous. Maggie was so nervous when she went in for her first in-person audition for Blake she was sure it showed and she’d never get a callback.

“Well, her acting is what matters, isn’t it?” Gabriella asks. “And hey, a few weeks with you and she’ll loosen up, you have that effect on people.”

“Mhm, and you’re not biased at all right?”

“I am biased, but I’m also right,” she says, and Maggie smiles. Having dinner and a drink with her aunt was exactly what she needed to finish off a crazy week. She’s going to miss this while she’s in New York filming season 2. She’s never spent more than three weeks without seeing her aunt since she was 14 years old, it’s going to be a change for sure.

“You should bring her by for dinner sometime,” Gabriella tells her. “I’ll make my gorgonzola gnocchi. The LA Times—”

“Proclaimed it was ‘mouth wateringly sumptuous as it melted in your mouth’,” Maggie finishes for her, smiling. “I know, zia,” she tells her, using the Italian word that feels more like a pet name than simply ‘aunt’ in another language. “You keep telling everyone.”

“Because they did!” she says, shaking her hand.

Maggie laughs. “Oh my god, you’re literally the Italian meme right now.”

“The what?”

“You know,” she mimics the hand gesture, “this is how Italians talk.”

“Kid, you’re really perpetuating Italian stereotypes now, and I am not a fan.”

“It’s a meme, Gabriella.” Maggie laughs, folding her legs beneath herself.

“You know I’m too old for that.”

Maggie shakes her head, as she reaches for the bottle of wine to top off both of their glasses.

“You’re thirty-five, not eighty-five.” Maggie doesn’t point out how she doesn’t even look 30, let alone her actual age.

“In this town, I’m practically ancient,” Gabriella points out. Maggie can’t argue with that, but Hollywood can’t be trusted when it comes to aging.

“You’re not actually worried about being old, are you? Because you don’t look your age, and even if you did, everything you’ve accomplished these past years should be something to be proud of.”

Gabriella gives her a fond look, and Maggie feels like a kid all over again, like she did when she was in 9th grade, and she’d clean their tiny apartment so Gabriella wouldn’t have to when she came home from work. That look that tells her Gabriella loves her, more than her own mother ever did.

“Plus, just like fine wine, you’re getting better with age,” she tells her with a light smirk.

“Just for that comment you get some of the leftover tiramisu I brought home, you little charmer.”

Maggie is out of the seat before she even finishes the sentence.
Alex enjoys the moment before a little too much.

The low hum of conversation and the sound of cutlery are the only background noise accompanying her announcement, and she enjoys it for a minute—the feeling of being on top of the world—before finally coming out and saying it.

“They called me yesterday, I got it.”

“Oh, Alex! I’m so happy for you!” If Kara’s squeal wasn’t enough for the entire restaurant to look at them, the way she jumps out of her seat and hugs Alex definitely is. Alex doesn’t get what’s the point of wearing glasses so people don’t immediately recognize her, if she’s going to draw attention to herself like this.

But deep down, she’s glad. It’s been a long time since she’s felt celebrated like this.

“Eliza! Oh my God!” Kara turns toward their mom. “Wait, why aren’t you surprised?”

“J’onn called me yesterday—”

“You knew?!”

“I knew, I wanted Alex to be the one to tell you.”

“Oh, I’m so happy for you!” Kara repeats, and gives Alex another crushing hug before she returns to her seat. Alex feels a weird twinge in her face, before she realizes it’s her cheeks, hurting from smiling so much.

“It’s so good to see you like this, Alex,” her mom says. “You look so…” she searches for words, and Alex just hopes they aren’t ‘less tired than usual’. “Healthy,” she settles with. “And happy. I like it. I feel like I haven’t seen you in ages.”

“Yeah,” Kara agrees quietly. “You didn’t come to our dinner last month.”

“Yes, well, I was rehearsing and stuff. I’m sorry.” She wasn’t rehearsing. She doesn’t quite remember what she was doing, but she’s sure it involves nothing she’d want her mother or her little sister to see.

“No, it’s okay, Alex, I know now that you were busy,” Kara says. “And I’ve been busy too. It’s just-we cancelled this year’s summer trip and I, I don’t know.” Kara starts picking at her napkin. “I don’t like not seeing you.”

Guilt seeps into Alex, slow and painful like poison.

“You knew about the audition a month ago?” her mom asks, drawing her attention. “Alex, you should’ve told us.”
“I wanted it to be surprise, mom,” she lies.

“Well, it definitely was,” she says with a smile. “Congratulations.”

Her mom leans over the table to press a kiss to Alex’s cheek, and she wishes she wasn’t surprised by the easy affection, she wishes she didn’t realize how much she craves it.

Still, disappointment spreads across her chest when she doesn’t hear the words she was expecting. Wishing for. The ‘I’m proud of you’ doesn’t come.

“When do you start filming?” Kara asks.

“The last week of July,” she tells her. “But I have to move earlier, makeup and wardrobe tests are all in Manhattan too.”

“It’s in New York? Alex, you should’ve started with that,” Eliza admonishes.

“I didn't think it mattered.” *Didn’t think you cared*, she wants to say, but she’s not 16 anymore, and she doesn't fling her words about as carelessly. Her mom cares. Just not as much as she would if it was Kara moving across the country.

Then, she’d probably go too.

Alex hadn’t even made sure if J’onn had told her or not.

“One of my daughters is moving to the other side of the country, of course it matters!”

“Oh, I love New York,” Kara says. “I'm going to visit you when I finish filming! Have you looked at apartments yet?”

“J’onn is handling that, I think production is going to set us up.”

“I just realized you’re going to be there in December,” her mom says, spooning sugar into her tea. “You’re going to love the snow in Central Park! It’s beautiful there that time of year.”

Alex doesn’t mention how she’s already dreading the cold, because her mom skipped the talking to for forgetting to tell her she was moving.

“Oh girls, what if we go for New Years to watch the ball drop?” her mom asks suddenly. “Your father and I did that before Alex was born.”

“Yes!” Kara’s answer is immediate, and Alex thinks her sister hasn’t changed her reactions since she was 11 years old. “Alex, what do you think?”

"Sure."

“The only thing is it gets so crowded,” her mom mentions. “Kara, maybe you could get one of your friends to seat us backstage?”

“I thought you liked a normal life,” Alex mentions.

“You know what, you’re right. We’re going to freeze our butts off like everyone else.”

Kara laughs. Alex can’t help but chuckle at her mom’s use of the word butt.

“We could go before we head up to Aspen,” Kara mentions. “Alex, you would’ve loved it last
year."

It’s extremely doubtful, considering she’s found as many excuses to avoid the trip as possible since she was old enough to avoid it, but for the sake of brunch she doesn’t mention anything.

“That’s a great idea honey. It won’t make up for our summer vacation, but almost.”

Their food arrives shortly after that, and Alex thinks that no, a trip to see a fucking ball drop in freezing weather while packed in by people on all sides and then a weekend in the slopes that she’ll find a way to avoid won’t makeup for the one vacation of the year she actually looks forward to.

They usually go somewhere warm, Italy one year, Mexico the other. They went to Panama one year, when she was seventeen and her dad was still alive, and they scuba dived in both oceans on the same day. Their summer vacations are one of the few traditions her dad started that they haven’t lost, and Alex has tried not to miss them.

Except this year Kara had a movie to work on, and that took precedence.

Alex reaches for the mimosa she ordered and takes a long drink, enjoying the slightly acidic taste going down her throat.

"So is Claire gay?"

She coughs, the drink going down the wrong path. She looks up at Kara’s interested face. She doesn’t dare look at her mom.

“She's, um. Yeah. Yes, she's-she's going to be Blake’s love interest, of course.”

Kara shrugs. “I mean she could’ve been bisexual, I don’t know."

“What do you know about that?” Alex snaps. Kara gives her a strange look.

“I mean...Michelle is bi, you know that, right?” She says, mentioning one of her little model friends. “And Paulo is gay. He’s done our hair since forever!”

Kara pops a fry into her mouth, and Alex resents her ability to eat whatever she wants without putting on weight. She has to start training for Nightingale, soon, and she’s already dreading the limitations to her diet.

“Michelle actually loves Nightingale,” Kara says, still chewing. “I watched it with her when you said no. Imagine! if you’d watched it with me now you’d be part of a show you liked.”

“Who said I’d like it?” Alex asks her.

“Alex,” Kara whispers, and Alex frowns. Who’s listening? “You kind of have to like it, you're a part of it now.”

She bristles up at that, and she’s not sure why. (Except she is, she knows, but she can’t spell it out in the middle of the day, during lunch with her mother and sister and closest friend, not even inside her own head.)

“Kara!” her mom chips in. “Why don’t you tell your sister what you told me last night?”

A smile spreads across her sister’s face as she starts telling her about an audition her manager
heard of, and Alex is equal parts relieved and upset she’s been swiftly removed from the spotlight.

“It’s not a sure thing yet, but he thinks I might get to audition.” Kara giggles. “Captain Marvel, Alex.”

The name of the superhero leaves her lips with something akin to reverence, and Alex wishes she wasn’t trapped inside her own head, imagining everyone around her talking about Kara in that tone of voice for the next few years if she gets the role.

“Your sister could be an Avenger, Alex. Isn’t that wonderful?”

“Yeah,” she says, before downing the rest of her mimosa in one large gulp. She signals for the waitress to bring her another one.

“Having fun, are we?” Her mom asks, in that particular tone of voice of hers, and it makes Alex want to order a bottle of bourbon and drink it straight from the tumbler, or get up and fucking leave.

“Well, we’re celebrating two things today!” She exclaims, surprised at how easy it is to let the dam open and her bitterness out. “I got a role, and Kara might get an audition for a role. Absolutely the same.”

“Oh, Alex,” Kara says, extending her hand above the table, but Alex moves away before her sister can touch her. “I’m happy for you! Mom’s happy too, it’s not like-”

She hates the pity in her voice. How she’s so clearly trying to placate her, the stupid girl with her ridiculous hurt feelings.

“I haven’t said anything,” she tells them. “I’m happy for you. I hope you get it.”

Kara looks away, and their mom gets that look of disappointment Alex has been waiting for since she sat down.

“This would be a very important role for your sister,” her mom says.”

“Never said it wasn’t,” Alex points out and grabs her mimosa straight out of the waitress’s hands when she comes around. “Cheers!” She tells the table, before taking a long drink.

“Alexandra,” her mom says, tense, beneath her breath. “I can’t deal with you when you get like this.”

“Like what?” Alex asks. “We’re celebrating, aren’t we?”

She can’t have one thing. One single fucking thing. One moment where she’s enough and her mom is happy for her, with her. She was stupid to agree to this lunch.

“I’m going to the bathroom,” her mom tells her. “Will you please mature while I’m gone?”

“Alex…” Kara gives her that look, the one that inevitably makes her feel guilty, and she stares at her plate, her sad egg whites and bacon going cold.

"Don’t.”

“Fine,” Kara says. “Have you met Maggie yet?” her sister asks, picking up the conversation as though nothing had happened. “I mean, I know you said you did the chemistry read, but I mean like met, met.”
“No, we haven’t really talked. She did call me to congratulate me after I got it though.”

“She did?” Kara looks excited, almost...jealous, and Alex relishes it for the second it lasts. “She always seems so nice.”

“She’s...fine. Like I said, we haven’t really talked.”

Something lights up behind Kara’s eyes.

“Oh my god, can you get Michelle an autograph? She saw Maggie at New York Fashion Week last year but she was too scared to go up to her, and she beats herself up over it every time she gets drunk,” Kara tells her, speaking a hundred miles per hour. “She’s like, literally in love with her. Maggie’s a lesbian icon or something—I’d score some major best friend points if I got her an autograph. Or a shout out on her twitter! Her birthday is coming up, can you-”

"No."

“Alex!”

“I mean it Kara, this is a job, it’s not you being ten years old and dad bringing you to set so you could ride The Rock’s shoulders.”

Kara smiles faintly. “I loved that day.”

Alex shouldn’t have mentioned anything. She should’ve just embarrassed herself and gotten her sister the damn autograph. She’s used to getting her way, in any case.

“You don’t talk about him anymore,” Kara mentions, and Alex looks away, past the white fence beside her into the street.

"Tell mom I had to go."

“Alex, no.” Kara’s hand is tight on her wrist. “Sit down. Please? For me?” Alex looks toward her sister, who’s giving her the eyes that always made both of her parents bend to her will, and everyone she ever meets, too. “We won’t talk about it anymore. In fact, I won’t talk at all if you don’t want me to. Today is your day. We’ll play the donkey game, remember? Like when we were little.”

Kara mimics a zipper closing across her mouth.

Alex chuckles, and the tight band around her lungs begins to disappear.

She remembers being 16 years old, and having a chatterbox for a little sister. Kara got ahold of English faster than most kids her age, but she still had a heavy accent back then. Her tutor told her talking would help, and her parents had taken that to mean Alex had to be who she talked to, all day long, about whatever crossed her mind, and she should be the one to correct her pronunciation too.

So she came up with a game where the next person to speak in the room would be a donkey. She always won.

“I only came up with that game to get you to shut up.” She laughs, and Kara joins her.

Alex sees her mom come back from the bathroom, and the smile slips from her lips.

“Alex,” Kara says quietly, her hand over hers. “Mom loves you, she just worries. Cut her some
slack, please?” Kara squeezes her hand. “Let’s just have a nice brunch, I missed this.”

Alex takes a deep breath, and nods.

Kara has assistant pick her and mom up, and Alex hugs them both goodbye and watches them get on the car. She knows they both mean well, she does, but, she's always left feeling exhausted after spending time with them. She sighs as she makes her way to the parking lot, pulling out her phone to check it, a faint breeze hitting her face.

She has a text from J’onn.

She frowns.

She isn't sure how she feels about the woman—her future co-star, she guesses—having the power to call her, but she can't think about it too much because her car arrives shortly after.

She settles in the backseat for the drive home. She hates the traffic in LA. It's probably the thing she misses the most about Malibu. She misses her bike, too, and she can’t wait until her timeout is done and she can get back on her Ducati. She's fantasizing about cruising the highway, comfortably seated on her motorcycle's leather seats, when her phone rings with an incoming call from an unknown number.
"Hello?"

"Hi," Maggie Sawyer's voice greets her. "It's Maggie. Your agent gave me your phone."

"Yeah, I know. Um, hi."

"I was calling to invite you to get drinks and apps with me in a couple of days, if you're free."

"I-sure. When?"

"This Saturday. Place is La Nuvola Bianca, I'm not sure if you've heard of it, it's on Olive street."

"Yeah, sure," she says, aware she has no clue of the place. She doesn't want to seem clueless in front of her—or over the phone.

"Great," Maggie says. "I'll see you at 5. I'm looking forward to it."

Alex hears the call disconnect, and sighs. She's not a fan of the plan, but she guesses she has to, since they'll be working together for the foreseeable future.

She gets home that afternoon, and there's a packet on her coffee table.

She's not surprised, since J'onn has a key (and isn't that something, how her agent has a key to her place but her mother doesn't). J'onn does more parenting than her mother, anyways. When she opens it, she finds a script. The script for Nightingale's first episode of season 2. She thumbs through the pages, and it's strange, opening a script for the first time in so many months. She feels strangely homesick all of a sudden.

If she closes her eyes and really focuses, she's almost back in her childhood home in Malibu, opening her first script, her dad's name on it. She can almost imagine the sounds of the ocean three steps from the front door and the sound of her dad writing in his studio, while she studies with the single-minded concentration of a kid who doesn't know there's things more important than starring in a movie.

Alex opens her eyes.

She's not there anymore, but the weight of the script in her hands reminds her of it so keenly she almost loses her breath. It's been a while.

She cracks the script straight down the middle, right around where her character first appears. She grabs the yellow highlighter and black pen suspiciously placed on her coffee table as well (J'onn, again). She has to get to work. The new city in a few weeks, the new character, and the set awaiting her all feel like something she's been waiting for without knowing she needed it.

It feels like a new beginning.
FADE IN:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY
Establishing.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. 6TH PRECINCT - CAPTAIN ELLIS' OFFICE - DAY
Blake shoots daggers at Captain Ellis.

The door to his office opens, and in walks CLAIRE LAWSON, 24 year old prodigy, newly minted detective and terminally positive.

CLAIRE
You must be Detective Davenport.

A beat. She's standing in front of the woman she read so much about. Slightly starstruck. She offers to shake her hand, then:

CLAIRE
Hi, I'm Claire Lawson, your new
partner, it's a pleasure to meet you.

Blake absorbs the information, and then turns towards Captain Ellis, ignoring Claire's outstretched hand.

BLAKE
My new... partner?
(Beat)
She's a rookie.

ELLIS
Claire Lawson. She graduated the
academy two years ago, actually.
Got fast tracked to detective a
couple months ago because of her
work in the Monty case.

BLAKE
Well, isn't that something.

ELLIS
Now she's here to learn from the
best, you.

Blake stares at him, disbelieving. In the best of cases, she's a
babysitter. In the worst of cases she's the one being babysat.

ELLIS
I think some company will do you
good.

Chapter End Notes

In December 2016, I (softsawyer) came up with this simple idea...and then
anddirtyrain volunteered to write it...and it all snowballed from there. It turned into
this detailed, expansive universe that we've had a lot of fun creating, and we hope you
all enjoy it too!
We pretty much have the entire story outlined and will be updating on Mondays around 8 PM ET (yes the same time Supergirl airs). We're both available if you want to discuss the fic, anddirtyrain is on tumblr with the same username, and I'm on twitter @circledflight. We also track the #SanversFakeDatingAU tag on twitter so feel free to add anything there as well.

Drop us a comment and/or kudos if you liked it! (We'll love to read your thoughts in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!
Chapter 2

*A fronte praecipitium a tergo lupi*: a precipice in front, wolves behind

YASS THATS MY BABY AND IM SO PROUD OF HER. 2018 IS GONNA BE HER YEAR 😢

TVLine.com @TVLine

Exclusive: #Nightingale casts Body of Medicine star Alex Danvers as Claire Lawson tvline.com/2018/06/12/nig...
liz @flwrpower

I liked alex danvers in that old movie family issues it’s gonna be great to see her in my new lesbian otp

6/12/18, 6:00 PM

Emily S @holtzmanily · 5m
she got fired from her last show for partying too hard & ended my otp, good fucking luck buddy

jess @gloryhaze

so a woman who physically assaults paparazzi, insults her fans, and stumbles drunk into a fucking starbucks is joining my fav show?

6/12/18, 5:55 PM

The 6th. @captainellis · 14m
The only thing she should be joining is AA or rehab

maggie is a LESBIAN thank you for your time
@lesbianmaggie

Idk who Alex Danvers is but I’m always excited to see Maggie kissing women on my screen sign me tf up
She can’t stop reading them.

Tweet after tweet after tweet of people reacting to the news of her casting.

It didn’t take long for Anthony King and the rest of the higher ups at ABC to announce her casting after she had accepted it, and barely 2 months after J’onn presented her with the possibility, the world knows she’s a part of the show. Some of the reaction is good, some of it the opposite. She’s trying to keep track of it, to measure the negativity and the positivity on a scale, and see which one comes out on top. Get a feel of how much she’s hated.

Her dad always said measuring her worth based on what she read about herself from people who’d never met her was ridiculous, but Alex can’t help it, and her dad isn’t here to teach her better. So she keeps reading.

alex danvers is a hot mess but owner of my entire ass maggie said she wanted her and i trust her judgment, so im giving her a chance
Well, that’s not so bad.

Alex exits the app momentarily to check on her Uber, and when she sees he’s less than 2 minutes away, she shakes herself out of her pity party to go down the stairs.

Uber. Fucking Uber. She has to take Uber.

God, she misses her car. Losing her license is probably the thing she regrets the most, right after getting booted from *Body of Medicine*. The tiny Nissan that picks her up is so sad she almost considers skipping the meeting out of respect for herself, but she told Maggie she’d be there, and she can’t afford to have her future co-star disliking her from the start. She’s actually desperate to leave a good impression.

If things go well, and she needs them to, she could be on the show for a good number of seasons. She spends the entire ride to the restaurant trying to put her best self forward, and clear her head, and remember how to be polite. But try as she might she can’t make her teeth unclench when she thinks about every message she read this afternoon alone.

By the time the car stops outside a restaurant with large glass walls, a sign reading ‘La Nuvola Bianca’ outside, she’s still simmering with annoyance.

She enters the huge crystal double doors, and as soon as she gives the hostess her name she’s ushered inside. She follows the hostess, as they weave through the white tables and people and climb the spiral staircase onto the second floor. She looks around. She researched the place before coming, just like she’d looked into Maggie. It doesn’t look the same and Alex is willing to bet it’s because night hasn’t fallen yet. This city has a way of changing completely as soon as the sun slips away, for good and bad.

She thinks the restaurant might look as magical as it did in the photos she saw of it during the evening, when the seemingly thousands of strings of lights scattered through the space are turned on. Even in the daylight, though, it still retains its elegance somehow, instead of looking like a hipster joint trying too hard to appeal to millennials. She thinks she might have liked to dine here some time—if that was a thing she did. It isn’t.

She follows the hostess through a second set of double doors into another dining room, even more elegant than the space below. Lights span across the uncovered wooden roof arches that make up the ceiling, and there’s a view of the city outside the floor-to-roof windows. Alex suddenly feels incredibly out of place in her jeans, shirt, and boots. Her jacket is probably her mother’s or Kara’s, the nicest thing she could find in her closet. Her favorite clothes are back home in Malibu, and she’s avoided getting them back in the hopes of avoiding a lecture. Plus she’s thrown away a nice leather jacket or three because they smelled like smoke or were covered in puke.

She’s glad the second floor is deserted, and that Maggie invited her at this hour.

She’d never admit to it, but she feels slightly intimidated. Not by Maggie, exactly, but by everything this job entails. The show already has one successful season under its belt and diehard fans, and Maggie has a movie with a $30 million dollar budget (Alex had indeed done her research) out in theaters next week. Maggie’s last movie was a success, if she’s to believe media sites there’s talk of her being nominated for an Oscar, despite how many girls she’s photographed with, the press still loves her. Girls. Plural. Because Maggie Sawyer is gay and proud and loud about it, and she’s still so successful...not to mention, young. God, she’s Kara’s age.
Alex hates feeling out of place, hates the vulnerability that comes with feeling like you’re at a disadvantage.

The tweets and articles in reaction to her casting serve as confirmation to the nagging feeling in the back of her mind. That she’s in over her head. That people will hate her next to Maggie. That her name and reputation are too low to be salvageable.

Alex wishes she didn’t feel so on edge and filled with doubt mere minutes before meeting Maggie.

She catches sight of her sitting at the bar, and all her wishes go out the window. The hostess leaves. Alex feels better when she sees Maggie isn’t wearing anything fancier than she is, a pair of jeans and a black sweater, a leather jacket hanging over the back of her chair. Maybe she’s not here to be judged, Alex thinks.

She takes a deep breath and makes her way to the bar.

“Hi, Maggie,” she says, hoping it’s not too casual. The woman in question looks up, and a smile spreads across her face—dimples popping out—as she stands up to greet her.

“Danvers!” Maggie leans forward to kiss her cheek in greeting, and Alex is dumbfounded. Maggie acts like they’re old friends. “Was traffic too bad?”

Alex shakes her head. She’s not about to say she had to take a fucking Uber.

“This is…” Alex looks around. “A nice place. I looked it up on yelp, nothing but rave reviews.”

“Don’t let the owner hear that, I’ll never hear the end of it.”

“Your aunt,” Alex mentions. “She’s the owner, right?”

“Did your research, huh?” Maggie asks. “I like a woman who comes prepared.”

Alex tries not to shudder at Maggie’s words, like a fucking weirdo.

“I...like to know the people I’ll be working with.”

“Well, feel free to ask me any other questions you have, Danvers.” She smiles and spreads her hands, “That is the point of this meeting: getting to know each other.” Maggie sits, and signals for Alex to do the same beside her. She follows suit.

“Is it?” She asks, hoping she doesn’t sound as skeptical as she feels.

“Yeah. I mean, we kind of are going to spend almost every waking moment together in a few weeks.”

“Right.” Alex, laughs, slightly forced. The thought of it sends an uncomfortable hot flash through her body. She hates navigating uncharted waters. “But, well, I know about you.”

“You do?” Maggie raises an eyebrow. “Well, let’s hear it.”

Alex’s competitive streak flares up, with something as simple as this. She can’t help it.

“You came to LA at fourteen to pursue modeling. Your first big role was on Rosewood Street,” she lists. “After you left that, you went on to star in three other movies. Your favorite animal is dogs.
Your favorite color is pink. Did I miss anything?"

Maggie smiles.

“You got one thing wrong, my favorite color is magenta.”

Alex rolls her eyes. “Pink, like I said.”

Maggie gives her a look, before shaking her head and smiling again, the dimples appearing.

“If this is the level of preparation you have for a friendly get together, I can’t imagine how great you’ll be when we’re on set.”

Alex’s mood quickly sours.

She’s heard those words before, and it ended with her getting fired. The memory spears through her mind fast and angry, and it erases all traces of comfort she’d begun to feel. Maggie isn’t her friend. She’s her co-worker, and Alex’s reputation precedes her.

“Why?” She asks. “Have you heard...something about me being difficult on set?”

“Huh? No, I was just-“

“Because it’s not true,” she tells her, lightning fast. “I’m always professional. I wasn’t for a while but I’m trying to be now, she thinks. “You don’t need to worry.”

“I didn’t think I did, but thanks for the reassurance,” Maggie tells her, giving her an odd look, and Alex feels her cheeks warm. “So, drinks, what’ll you have?”

“Scotch. neat.”

“A woman with taste, nice.” Maggie motions for the bartender, who walks straight to them with nobody on this floor to attend. “I’ll have a Manhattan and the lady will ha-“

“Scotch.”

It’s a reflex. She doesn’t like it when whoever she’s with orders for her. Besides, it’s a date thing, and she’s not on a date with Maggie.

“Right,” Maggie says. She nods at the bartender, who sets out to get their drinks ready.

Meanwhile, Alex shifts uncomfortably on her stool, eyes glued to the bar counter. She’s worried now, Maggie’s previous words brought everything from her time in Body of Medicine back, and she can’t help but be filled with dread when she thinks about Maggie doing her research on her, just like Alex did with her, and finding out...everything about her. Maybe if she had known who Alex was she wouldn't have put in a good word for her. Alex isn’t sure why she did, and by this point she’s too afraid to ask.

She decides to bite the bullet on at least one of those.

“So.. you must have done some research too, right?” She asks Maggie, her mind already running a mile a minute and thinking of all the trashy articles she’s starred in, all the shots of her wasted and with her makeup smudged. “Googled my name, found...things.”

“Sure I did,” Maggie says, and Alex resists the urge to close her eyes against whatever her next words will be. She just hopes Maggie won’t ask her if it’s true she had a threesome with Dave
Franco and his brother. It’s the latest ridiculous rumor her name has been a part of and all because she was photographed with them at a bar. But people will believe anything they read about her it seems.

“Well, Alex Danvers, age twenty-six,” Maggie lists, “best known for her role on the hit medical drama *Body of Medicine* as Jane Holt: accomplished heart surgeon and one half of the popular ship Holtzman.”

Alex winces.

She could live the rest of her life without hearing that portmanteau and it wouldn't be long enough.

Maggie continues, “Daughter of Jeremiah Danvers, the famous director.”

“Late,” she tells her. “The late Jeremiah Danvers. They always mention that.”

Before her name or after, she’s never seen a single article about herself that didn't mention her dad, that didn't remind her he was gone.

“I’m-I’m sorry. I didn't mean to-”

“It’s fine. It was a long time ago.” The bartender hands Alex her drink, and Alex is thankful for the respite. It never gets better, talking about him, but most days she can get through a short conversation without feeling like she wants to run away. Not today. Kara’s words from last week still rattle her, even if it was nothing but the reminder of a happy memory.

Most days it hurts too much that he’s gone. Some days Alex is glad that he can’t see her like this.

She takes a sip of her scotch. It’s good. Maggie’s aunt must have good taste.

“Um, what about your parents?” She asks, diverting the conversation. “I didn’t read anything about them on wikipedia. It must have been hard to move out so young.” Alex tries to be sympathetic, to act like a fucking human being.

Maggie shrugs.

“Not really, I had my aunt.”

Maggie’s drink arrives.

“Thanks Esteban,” she turns toward Alex. “He makes the best peach mojitos, you should try one before you leave.”

Esteban nods at her, and gives her a small smile as he retreats to start serving the few people who’ve started walking in.

“So! What did you think about the character when you first heard of her?” Maggie asks. “You walked out and the producers went crazy.”

The swift change of topic almost gives her whiplash, but she’s thankful—and that’s saying a lot, considering how she’s not entirely comfortable with Claire Lawson yet.

“I thought she was great,” she tells Maggie, before taking a sip of her drink.

Maggie is still looking at her, waiting for an elaboration Alex supposes. She stays quiet. She doesn't know what’s is and isn't appropriate to say, and either way—her characters are such a
private thing for Alex.

The way she pours so much of herself into them and into her understanding of what makes them tick feels far too intimate for a conversation with a woman she just met in the middle of a deserted restaurant.

“Right,” Maggie says. “So you said traffic was okay?”

Maggie casts a forlorn glance towards the old woman in the corner engaging in lively conversation with her husband who—oh god, her husband is asleep. An old woman talking to her sleeping husband is having more fun than they are.

Maggie’s had her fair share of awkward moments in Hollywood, but she’s always managed. She became withdrawn, after everything that happened with her parents. Gone was the little girl who’d loved reading her assignments in front of the class and reciting poems first when the teacher asked for volunteers. She’d made it through the rest of 8th grade keeping her head down, trying to disappear. After Elisa— that changed again. And if her former best friend taught her anything, apart from keeping women at arm’s length, it was that charm went a long way and Maggie would do right to use it.

So she did. And a shy kid faking bravado as she talked to strangers in the hopes of furthering her career, turned into pure confidence as she learned how to use her words and smile to improve any situation. Elisa had known that trick at age 14. For Maggie, as sheltered and innocent as she’d been, it had taken her a little longer, but she finally got a hang of it.

It wasn’t helping her now.

Alex...She looks over at her again, and the woman is staring at her drink as if it’s the most fascinating thing she’s ever seen. She’d thought after the way they’d clicked during the audition that it’d be easy sailing from there, but...it’s not. It’s awkward and stilted, and it’s the type of conversation that Maggie would have exited from with an excuse at least 15 minutes ago. But she can’t. Alex is her co-star now, her Claire, and they don’t have to be friends (like Maggie had imagined they would be, truth be told) but she does need to talk to the woman. Have a degree of...trust between the two of them, if the relationship and chemistry they’re going to be building on screen is to be believed.

But she realizes getting Alex to open up is going to be a challenge. Maggie can feel how resistant the woman is to talk about anything more personal than the weather. Her optimism going into this casual meeting (meant to simply get to know each other) was a bit misplaced.

She doesn’t know Alex well enough to gauge whether her reticence is normal for her or triggered by Maggie’s presence, but neither option is particularly appealing given the long, regular hours she’ll know they’ll be spending together.

She sighs.
Alex looks up. She gives Maggie a tense smile, and takes a breath before talking.

“So...Detective Blake Davenport? Who came up with that name?” Alex snorts, and it sounds forced, like she’s trying too hard to be funny. Maggie’s been there, but like 10 years ago. “Sounds like they read one too many harlequin novels.”

Maggie cringes, but she tries not to take it personally.

“I...actually had some input,” she tells her.

“Oh.”

They hadn’t been set on a name for her character when she signed on, all they had was her last name, and they even toyed with the idea of using her own given name for her. Maggie wouldn’t punis; anyone, not even a fictional character, with the name Margaret, so she flat out refused. But she’d always liked Blake. She had a friend in first grade named Blake, and though she moved away midway through the school year, Maggie still remembers. She thinks it sounds strong.

“I didn’t mean-”

“I think I’m gonna go check on our dessert,” she says, not in the mood to listen to Alex stumble through another round of awkward apologies.

She walks in through the kitchen double doors, and a chorus of “Hey, Maggie” and “Hi, Mags” greet her, along with the back of a blonde head pointedly turned away from her. Darla is still mad at her, then.

Maggie sighs.

“What’s got you in that mood?” Gabriella asks, coming out of the freezer with mirror bags of clams. “We ran out of the fresh stuff,” she says, by way of explanation. “Why does your face look like you just smelled the fresh stuff?”

“Alex is....” She throws her hands up, unable to explain the past hour of her time.

Gabriella gives her a look. “I see.”

She hands the bag to Mario, one of the cooks, and pulls Maggie aside.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s awkward. Everything is so awkward. I thought we’d get along because something just...clicked, when we did the chemistry read, but she’s just so...”

“Maybe she’s nervous,” Gabriella suggest. “A little starstruck, even.”

Maggie snorts, “I don’t think she’s ever seen a single thing I’ve been in.”

Gabriella opens her mouth, but she’s interrupted by Darla, who deliberately ignores Maggie as she talks to her aunt.

“Miss Rossi, table 7 says the steak is under cooked.”

Gabriella rolls her eyes. “That’s because they asked for it rare.” She sighs. “Bring it back. Helen-”

“I’m on it!” the other cook exclaims.
“Good.”

Maggie watches her aunt flawlessly run the kitchen, and wishes she could have that sort of ease handling a conversation with Alex Danvers.

“Look, kid, maybe it’s gonna take her some time to warm up to you. You’re like that too.”

“What if she never does?” Maggie asks, picking at the corner of the sink. “I’m moving to the other side of the country, alone. She’s gonna be the person I spend most of my time with.”

Maggie hasn’t given much thought to just how real that was until now.

She’s never been without Gabriella before, not for such a long amount of time. Rosewood Street filmed in LA, and so did Nightingale’s first season. All her films have been short shoots, and when they weren’t Gabriella was there. She’s having a hard time thinking about being alone in such a huge city, and maybe that’s why she’s been so intense about getting to know Alex. She wants the set in New York to feel like home, and the woman is currently a stranger.

“Maggie…”

“I just can’t get a read on her. Sometimes she’s fine, sometimes she’s downright…acidic.”

Gabriella smiles.

“Want a little extra creme on your tiramisu to counteract her?”

Maggie forces a smile, “Funny.”

“I think you coming into my kitchen to escape your future co-star is hilarious, actually.”

Maggie gives her a look. Gabriella turns around and grabs two small crystal cups with perfect chocolate squares in them, and neatly drizzles them with her special coffee-caramel sauce. Maggie’s mouth waters.

She extends a finger to swipe a little taste, but Gabriella slaps her hand away.

“I’ll bring it out in a few minutes,” she tells her, smiling as though she knows the delicious smell of coffee has made her forget her previous comment.

“Go,” Gabriella tells her, pointing her finger at her. “Out of my kitchen. Play nice.”

Maggie walks out of the kitchen and back to the bar.

“I’m sorry if I offended you,” Alex says, as soon as Maggie sits down.

“No, no. it’s fine,” she says. “You don’t need -you don’t have to pretend to like everything about the show. I like honesty.”

There were a few things Maggie didn’t like either, in the first few episodes. MInor things that she had no control over because she wasn’t writing the storylines. Nothing is perfect. And she does enjoy honesty.
“I’ve...never actually seen the show,” Alex says.

Maggie raises her eyebrows. “That’s...really honest.”

Alex blushes.

“I’m sorry, I’m just. I’m-”

“Defensive,” Maggie finishes for her. It’s not the ‘playing nice’ her aunt told her to do, but sometimes a direct approach works better. “And a little tense. And that’s okay. Look Danvers, I didn’t invite you here to...size you up, or anything like that. I want us to be friends.”

If she wants honesty from Alex, she can be honest too.

“Me too,” Alex says softly, and Maggie gets the feeling this is the first time this evening she’s seeing the real Alex Danvers.

“I’ve been where you are, you know?” She’s been asking Alex questions, trying to get to know her, and she realizes she hasn’t reciprocated too much. “I was the new kid, too,” she explains. “My first show, Rosewood Street?”

Alex nods.

“I did see your scenes in that one,” Alex tells her, with a small smile.

“Ah. How I died was absolute bullshit, right?”

Alex laughs, honestly laughs for the first time, and Maggie feels they’re on the right track.

“Yeah,” Alex admits.

“Right. So, I came in during the second season like you.” Maggie remembers how nervous she’d been the night before, how Gabriella had talked and talked until she fell asleep, because she couldn’t manage it. “Everyone’s at least five years older than me. They’ve all been friends for a year, and they’ve all had other gigs when this was my first real acting job.” She’d been so green, back then, so naive. She hadn’t even finished high school yet. “It was awkward, I’m not gonna lie. It took a while before I felt like part of the group. And then two years later I got killed off, but that’s another story. The point is, I don’t want you to go through that. I love working with the people on set, we all get along, we go out for drinks on the weekends. It’s not all work.” Maggie meets Alex’s eyes. “You’re a part of that now. If you want to be?”

Alex keeps her eyes trained on her, and Maggie knows her words weren’t wasted.

“I do,” she says. “My previous show, I...it wasn’t so much like that. I mean -we got along fine,” she’s quick to say. “It’s just…”

Maggie’s been there, trying to figure out whether you can be honest about someone or you have to pretend that everything was great just in case they’re friends of friends. Hollywood can be such a clubhouse.

Alex finally shrugs, wearing an embarrassed smile. “I don’t know why I’m telling you this.”

“Well, I did just lay out my heart for you, Danvers. You’re returning the favor,” she jokes. “It’s what friends do.” Alex smiles at that, and Maggie pats herself on the back. Maybe it won’t be as hard as she thought. “Plus, our characters are gonna get together at some point. It’ll be so much
“easier if we’re friends.”

Alex’s shoulders tense up at that, and Maggie hopes the feeling swirling uncomfortably in her stomach goes away. She hopes Alex isn’t weird about it. It’s not the first time she’s played a gay woman, and her co-stars have always been straight, but it’s never been a problem.

“So...we good?” She asks.

“We’re good.” Alex nods.

“And that’s our dessert,” Maggie says, eyeing her aunt walking toward their table with their perfectly timed tiramisu plates.

“Maggie!” She greets, as if they hadn’t seen each other minutes ago, and leans over to kiss both her cheeks. God, her theatrics.

“Eavesdropper,” Maggie whispers before her aunt pulls away.

“Alex, this is my aunt, Gabriella,” Maggie introduces them.

“Nice to meet you,” Alex tells her shaking her hand. Gabriella shakes it, eyeing her.

“The pleasure is all mine, I was a huge fan of you from your time on Body of Medicine .”

“Thank you,” Alex says, and Gabriella nods before she’s called away to the kitchen.

“Your aunt seems nice,” Alex says, once she’s out of view.

“She is,” Maggie tells her, though it’s an understatement. She picks up her spoon and finally tastes the tiramisu she never tires of. “So, as I was saying.” She swallows. “‘Dawson’. Did you know they gave us a name already? Anthony is really excited about the whole thing.”

She’s not trying to test her, she definitely isn't.

“I was, too,” she confirms. “When he told me I was getting a long term love interest. It's something you don't see often.”

“No?”

Maggie will never blame anyone for being ignorant, but she can’t help thinking that it's obvious.

“Not really,” she tells Alex. “It’s rare enough she’s the lead and she’s gay. And Blake had a couple of hookups in season 1 but nothing serious. They’re giving her the epic love story all straight characters get now.” Maggie cringes. “No offense, by the way.”

“None taken,” Alex tells her. “I...I agree.”

Maggie smiles. Alex looks honest.

Maggie grabs the cup holding the last of her tiramisu, and raises it up high, signaling a toast. Alex follows suit.

“To giving people some much needed representation on screen,” she says.

“To new friends.”
They clink their dessert cups together, the clear sound resonating through the room with an air of hopefulness.

They end on a better note than they started.

Alex’s flight lands in New York City at 6:08 pm.

Her left ear is still clogged, hurting with the change in pressure, and she just -ugh, she hates flying. She stands up as soon as she can, stretching her legs. First class has a lot more room than flying coach (and Alex can only remember having to go through that particular nightmare once before), but it’s still not enough room. She always feels tight and uncomfortable after exiting a plane, and she walks through the terminal with her mood through the floor.

She finally exits the airport, and thankfully finds the man holding up a sign with ‘Danvers’ on it without much trouble. There are no paps that she can see. She’s not as fun to photograph when she’s sober apparently. She didn’t enjoy any of the complimentary tiny liquor bottles on the plane, they might as well not show up.

She gets in the black SUV and settles in while the driver handles her one bag. J’onn took care of sending most everything else to her new apartment—including her favorite bottle of scotch—and Alex only has a few of her old winter coats from high school, back when she still let her parents drag her to Aspen each winter (it might still technically be summer, but she’s not taking any chances), in her carry on.

She hates the drive between JFK to the city, and she dozes on and off in the car while they move. It seems like very little time has passed when the driver clears his throat and announces they’ve arrived; Alex thanks heaven for small mercies. The car leaves her in a tall, white bricked building in Greenwich Village, the place production is setting them up in during filming.

Alex checks her phone while in the elevator. J’onn tells her he’ll be visiting her tomorrow. Her mom apologizes that she’s not there, she’d already promised to be with Kara on her last week on set in Vancouver.

Alex presses the power button and the screen goes dark. It’s not disappointment she swallows, it’s acceptance, but it tastes just as bitter.

The apartment has an open floor plan, and Alex likes it. She steps through the door, dragging her luggage after her, and takes in the space. A living room spreads out to her left, with a chimney and a set of couches. A door she assumes to be the bathroom is the only room in the place, apart from the closet to her right. A kitchen on the far right, and a few steps above the rest of the apartment, her bedroom. Which consists of a bed, a bedside table, and not much else.

She guesses she could make an effort to turn this place into an actual home for the next few months. She sits down on the couch, and turns on the TV. It can wait.
“This is my job now..”

No way.

“And I’m going to do it.”

Maggie’s voice blares from the TV, as pictures of flying cars and fiery explosions litter the screen.

“The Informant, out in theaters this weekend.”

Alex falls back against the couch, and turns off the TV. Well, at least her co-worker will be having a nice weekend.

Alex reaches for her luggage.

Not too late for her to have one as well.

“Maggie, over here!”

She smiles, sightly dazzled by the dozens upon dozens of flashes.

“Maggie!”

She tries to turn to wherever her name is called, a smile on her lips. It’s not forced in the least.

Gabriella is waiting for her inside, her director, Lizzie, is answering questions ahead of her, and Maggie’s name is on the lips of every reporter in front of the red carpet.

She’d worked her ass off to be here, for almost an entire decade.

Even if she didn’t know it when she started, this is where she always wanted to end up.

A banner with her face on it falls from the building at her right, and she might have been called a star many times before, but she hadn’t felt like it, not really. She’d felt like a little girl from Nebraska playing a part, smiling for the cameras and pretending like it didn’t hurt her still to be unwanted. Or like a moderately successful woman fighting tooth and nail to be better, to prove to herself—and her family—that she was worth something.

But now…

Maggie feels like a star.

She laughs so hard her stomach hurts.
She can’t quite remember at what, and she’s slightly tipsy off the champagne that has been flowing freely all night, but it doesn’t matter.

“We’re here, miss,” the driver says, and Gabriella elbows her.

“Thank-thank you,” Maggie tells him, and picks up her heels from the floor of the limousine. Her aunt follows suit.

They stumble the few steps to the door of her house, and she opens the door on the first try.

She’s drunk off happiness more than anything.

J’onn arrives at her apartment on Sunday.

He brings her a plant as her housewarming present (which she knows will end up dying from neglect, but she appreciates the gesture), and Alex is too happy to see him to say anything about him not bringing her a more fitting present like a bottle of wine. J’onn has few flaws, but one of them is listening to her mother’s concerns too much.

He helps her settle in.

She unpacks the few cardboard boxes he had shipped here, and once the bed has her favorite bed sheets on and her netflix account is logged in, she feels a bit more at home.

She’s found her new plant a spot on fireplace mantel when J’onn starts to talk.

“So, are you ready?”

“To keep a plant alive?” She asks, wondering if the heat will be bad for it. Plants like heat, don’t they? Or is that just sun?

“It’s a plastic plant, Alex.”

“Oh.”

“I’m talking about the helicopter ride. You must be excited. And the interview next week.”

“What?”

He gives her a look. “I take it you didn’t read the email I sent you.”

“I’m sorry. I was busy last night, the flight was-”

“I sent it three days ago, Alex.”

She cringes.
“I’m not your father, I’m not trying to scold you. But you have to—”

“I know. It just slipped my mind. What...what interview? And did you say helicopter?”

J’onn gives her a small, practiced patient smile.

“The network is paying for you and the rest of the cast to go on a helicopter ride over New York City. Sort of a welcome to the city. You technically don’t have to go, but it’ll be good for you, and you can officially meet the rest of the cast before you have to be on set.”

“Oh, okay. And the interview?”

“Run of the mill, in and out. Week before you start filming. It’s not live, so don’t worry. But it’s your first TV interview for Claire Lawson and with Maggie, so we want it to go well.”

“Maggie, too?”

“Yes. The world’s first look at you two together. I got an email from Anthony King. Apparently, you two are called ‘Dawson’ now.”

Alex rolls her eyes.

“I’m starting to hate that word.”

J’onn laughs, and pats her back.

“Come on, it’ll be your first TV appearance in over a year. We gotta prepare for it.”

“Back at it, are we?”

“Indeed, and we’re lucky to be.” J’onn sits on her couch, and Alex think of how lucky she is he’s here. "I’ve already sent what you’re willing to answer, and they won’t mention anything about the incident with the paps, they won’t bring up any rumors. And no talk about Lord or anyone else you’ve dated or rumored to have dated.”

Alex sighs. At least that’s one less thing to worry about.

“And...they won’t ask about your dad, either.”

Alex looks up at him. “Thank you.”

She can see it in his eyes, how he almost says something like “I miss him too”, but J’onn keeps it to himself. He’s careful with her that way, and she’d be angry if she couldn’t recognize that sometimes she needs it.

J’onn nods.

“You’ll do great, Alex.”
“Where are we going?” Maggie asks.

“You’ll see.”

They weave through the crowded streets of Lower Manhattan, Maggie following Gabriella’s footsteps as she’s the only one who seems to know where they’re going. They’d taken a break from unpacking her new loft to find something to eat. They’d been just a little hungover at the airport earlier that morning, before the sun had even come up, and Maggie had slept for most of the 5 hour flight to New York City.

She wanted to get everything ready this weekend, before Gabriella has to go back to work on Monday, La Nuvola Bianca needing her to run smoothly.

They’re a few blocks south of Washington Square Park when she begins to doubt her aunt’s intentions of getting them lunch. Finally, they come to a stop on the corner of a street in Nolita, and Gabriella slings her arm around Maggie’s shoulder, turning her to face the building.

“What do you see?”

Maggie ponders her aunt’s question.

“An empty building,” she answers truthfully.

Gabriella gives her a smile that all but confirms she’s hiding something.

“Actually...that’s my empty building. Well, half the bottom floor. And what you’re looking at is La Nuvola Bianca, New York City.”

Maggie turns around.

“Gabriella. You didn’t.”

“You really thought I was gonna let you move out here alone, for months? Not that it’s because of that,” she waves it away. “This is just good business-”

Maggie is hugging her, as tight as she can, before the last word is out of her mouth.

Gabriella laughs and holds her back.

They sit in the floor of the empty room, enjoying kebabs and nachos slathered in cheese. Maggie’s eyes had zeroed in on a food truck called “The Vegan Bandwagon”, parked on the corner of the street, and Gabriella had followed in her hurried footsteps.

“I can’t believe this tastes good,” Gabriella tells her, dipping one of the falafel crumble nachos in the vegan cheese.

“What do you have against vegan food?” Maggie asks.

“Nothing! But I’m Italian and a chef, we use real cheese.”

Maggie laughs, and takes a bite of the grilled artichoke in her veggie kebab.
She’s still processing the fact that Gabriella is going to be with her in New York, and it has her more than a little euphoric.

“This place is far smaller than the one in LA,” Gabriella points out as Maggie looks around from her place on the cold tiles. “But it’ll do.”

“I like it,” Maggie tells her. The large windows lets in the light, and it must have been a tavern before, because a large bar of deep red wood dominates the far right side of the space. Maggie could see herself bringing a date here. “Could be cozy. You should get a pool table.”

“It’s a restaurant, Maggie,” Gabriella tells her, chuckling. “New York,” she sighs. “I think even the fucking rats have to pay rent.”

Maggie snorts.

“You use that language In front of your niece?”

“I cursed in front of you when you were a kid and you turned out just fine, piccola.”

“That stopped being cute after I turned twelve.”


Maggie throws a nacho at her, and the orange triangle bounces against her sweater. She laughs, feeling like a kid again. She’s always been thankful for the ridiculous age difference between them, but the fact her aunt is barely eleven years older than her is never as clear as when Gabriella takes a cherry tomato from her kebab and flings it at Maggie.

She catches it.

“Ha!” She pops it into her mouth, enjoying the way it explodes in acidic flavor.

Gabriella shakes her head. Then she looks up and around, seemingly taking in the space around them.

“You know, I saw a couple places before, but I loved it here. ‘North of Little Italy’. I wish my mother had the foresight of moving here when they left Italy instead of settling in the asscrack of nowhere.”

“Hear, hear,” Maggie says, raising her bottle of water for Gabriella to toast with her can of coke.

“Life. C’est la vie.”

“Since when do you know French?”

“I’m a chef, i have to know French.” Maggie gives her a look. “Okay, I have like twenty percent on Duolingo, I mean I have to do something when you’re filming.”

“How about work ?”

“I’m the boss, it’s almost too easy these days. Which is why I needed this. Not just to keep me busy by the way, but to expand our brand too.”

“Your brand,” Maggie corrects her. Gabriella looks almost guilty.

“Actually, you’ll be getting a notification soon, I want this to be in your name too.”
“Gabriella!”

“Margaret!”

“That’s low,” Maggie tells her. “I bought that first place for you,” she tells her. She and Gabriella don’t fight over many things, but who owns La Nuvola Bianca is the one discussion that’s never finished.

“It’s even named after you,” Gabriella insists.

“It isn’t-”

“After you favorite piece, then,” Gabriella corrects.

Maggie smiles. “Nuvole Bianche, Ludovico Einaudi.”

“Does that song still make you cry?” Gabriella asks.

“No,” Maggie denies, though it’s very much not true. Gabriella taps her leg and gives her a knowing, teasing smile, and Maggie sticks her tongue out at her before she keeps eating. Maggie enjoys her food quietly for a while, and then she looks up at her aunt.

“Zia?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m really glad you’re coming with me.”
SOARING NIGHTINGALE

With its sophomore season premiering this fall, the ABC hit show reaches new heights. By Erika Dorn

Nightingale, Lascinia megarhynchos. A bird associated with the beautiful, usually nocturnal song of the male courting its mate. More recently, the word brings up a different association: a hit television show. In the spring of 2017, ABC started promotion for its big new show—a modern remake of the short-lived 80s show Lady Blue—dubbed Nightingale.

The show gained some attention due to who was cast to play the titular character. Maggie Sawyer, fresh off the success of the Golden Globe nominated film Crush and the foremost actress on everybody’s tongue in Hollywood as someone to watch out for. The momentum for the show only snowballed when it was revealed Maggie’s character, Blake Davenport, would also be a lesbian.

By the time the show premiered in fall 2017, the expectations loomed upon it were great. We all wondered whether it—whether Maggie Sawyer’s name—could live up to the pressure. And did she ever. The show was an immediate success. The talk of the town, as was its leading lady.

Nightingale was what we needed in a time where TV had become predictable and bogged down by cliches: action, drama, humor, and heart, all exemplified in its talented leading lady and a diverse cast that truly redefined the criminal procedure genre.

Now the show is headed into its second season, and after the great first season, expectations are higher than ever for Maggie Sawyer and for her new leading lady Alex Davers.

Alex Davers’ name was first floated around as an option for Blake’s new love interest when Sawyer herself ranted dropped her in an interview as someone she’d like to play opposite to. From that point on, the internet swirled with rumors of who would ultimately end up being cast, and finally—this past July—Alex Davers was confirmed to play Claire Lawson.

Entertainment Weekly scored the pair’s first photo shoot and interview together—along with an exclusive first peek at Nightingale season 2.
I arrived at noon and was able to witness the two at work. They have an easy chemistry, clear to anyone with working eyes. Maggie is the more open of the two, always laughing, her charming dimples on full display, but Alex has her own charm too. She’s more serious, but her intensity during the shoot shows why she was called an actress with talent and dedication beyond her years on Body of Medicine.

On camera, they are a beautiful and imposing pair. When the shutter stops clicking, I hear Maggie tease Alex over her impending haircut to play Claire Lawson, and Alex gives back as good as she gets. The chemistry the show is counting on? It’s there in spades.

The photographer ends the shoot and the two return to their designated makeup stations. Maggie greets the passing crew with enthusiastic high fives and shouts of “Good job!” which the crew returns in full. Alex nods at the crew and personally thanks the photographer for her work, the lingering smile on her face displaying her satisfaction at a job well done.

I had the opportunity to sit down and talk with the two women afterward.

Entertainment Weekly: Nightingale is an established popular show now, and instead of sticking with the same formula, you’re changing it up with the addition of a new long term love interest for Blake. Maggie, did you know this is where the show was going?

Maggie Sawyer: At the beginning, Anthony King [Nightingale showrunner] discussed with me about potentially adding a serious love interest for Blake, but I didn’t know when it would happen. When I got the news it would be this season, I was thrilled. I’m so excited for everybody to see how Blake grows because of her relationship with Claire. And I’m also excited to get to work with this fantastic woman [she points toward Alex] now.
Alex has never understood the fascination with New York City. The starry eyed look people get in their eyes when they breathe out the words ‘New York City’ in a reverent tone, as if it’s the answer to all their problems. She starts to see the appeal a bit more now, looking down from the helicopter window as it travels above the city. The sun casts the buildings in a warm glow, making the towering skyscrapers gleam. It’s the kind of scene you usually only see in movies. New York.

She closes her eyes, and for a moment, she’s back in her living room watching Sunday morning
cartoons as her parents cook breakfast in the kitchen, the faint strains of Frank Sinatra’s “New York, New York” floating into the room. If she really concentrates she can hear her mom singing along to the song and her dad joining in with his off key warbling. Her mom had always loved the city. She never talks about her modeling days, but Alex knows she spent a lot of time in the city during that time. And when she married her dad they lived in New York, before moving to Malibu to raise Alex in a quieter place.

She’s broken out of her reverie by a particularly loud exhale from Maggie.

Jesus. She sounds like she’s practicing one of those breathing techniques taught in Lamaze classes. She opens her eyes and sees Maggie to her left, eyes tightly closed. She’s...tense. Well. That’s a first, she thinks.

Maggie has been easy going and confident since the moment she met her. Always ready with a quick smile and joke, while Alex is still trying to process the situation. It’s almost satisfying to realize she’s just a normal woman, who can get scared in helicopters like everyone else. Almost. She feels bad for reveling in Maggie’s obvious current discomfort. God, she’s such an asshole.

She tentatively reaches out to touch Maggie’s arm, “Don’t like flying?”

Maggie opens her eyes, “It’s the height I don’t like.” She grimaces. “I’m fine with flying in planes because you get so high up you’re in the clouds. It’s so far removed from the ground, but in a helicopter…”

“You can see everything,” Alex finishes for her and Maggie gives her a short nod in confirmation. They truly can, down to the tiny cars and the people walking below.

“My aunt says my fear of heights is because I’m so short,” Maggie jokes, or tries to. She forces a chuckle. “Since I’m-” the helicopter tilts, and Maggie gasps. “I’m used to being close to the ground.” Maggie lets out a weak chuckle and rests her head on the back of the seat.

The rays of sunlight coming through the window turn her hair into fire, reflecting off her eyelashes when she closes her eyes again. Alex briefly thinks it’s not fair that someone looks so beautiful while they’re afraid—and she then tries hard not to think that. Maggie is beautiful, yes, and Alex is just...jealous. That’s why she notices. She wishes she was that pretty.

She shrugs. “You’re afraid of heights, that’s normal.”

“It’s irrational,” Maggie says.

“It’s very rational. You could die.” The helicopter lurches forward after the words leave her mouth, and along with the swoop in her stomach, she feels like shit. Maggie goes pale.

Alex shifts marginally closer to her. “Wanna know a secret?” she asks, feeling like she owes Maggie something. She lowers her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. “I’m afraid of lions. Now that’s an irrational fear,” she scoffs.

Maggie looks up, “Lions, Danvers?”

“Yep,” Alex nods her head vigorously. “I had a bad experience as a child—it’s a long story. I hated zoos as a kid.”

“That’s a good fear to have,” Maggie tells her, smiling and scrunching her nose up at Alex. She doesn’t seem as concerned about the height below, and Alex pats herself on the back. “You’re never going to meet a lion in real life.”
Alex closes her eyes in shame.

“I...I’ve never watched *The Lion King.***”

Maggie’s laugh is audible through the whole helicopter. They’re sitting up front, with the pilot at Maggie’s side, but Alex is sure even in the back the rest of the cast heard her.

“Oh c’mon, you’re kidding!” Maggie laughs again. “It’s an animated lion.”

Alex lets herself dissolve into giggles

“It still roars, okay?”

Maggie looks at her, a mischievous glint in her eyes. “I guess that means *Madagascar* is out of the question too.”

“A movie about animals escaping New York’s Central Park Zoo?” Alex huffs. “Yeah, good luck ever trying to get me to watch that.”

Maggie is about to respond when the helicopter suddenly jolts and dips down sharply. Alex feels her stomach fly up like she’s on a rollercoaster for the second time.

“Looks like a brief patch of turbulence ladies,” the pilot informs them, as if they can’t tell already.

Maggie’s eyes are clenched shut and her knuckles white as she grips her armrest.

Before Alex can even think her action through, she reaches out and grabs Maggie’s hand.

Maggie’s eyes fly open at that, and she flicks her eyes down to their hands before looking up at Alex’s face. She’s surprised. Alex can’t tell if it’s a good or bad surprised—it’s not like they’re friends, is it? And friends don’t even hold hands, do they? She moves to take her hand away, but Maggie tightens her grip.

“Thanks, Danvers.”

The turbulence lasts for a few minutes, and Maggie holds her hand throughout every jolt and lurching turn.

Alex tries not to think about it.

“Make sure to duck your head when getting out,” the pilot informs them. “It’s been a pleasure flying you two.”

Maggie gives him a tense smile.

“Have a nice day,” Alex tells him, because it doesn’t seem like Maggie is going to.

A car is waiting for them as they leave the helicopter pad, and Alex starts moving to get into it before Maggie speaks.

“Hey, how about we just walk back to the building? It’s such a beautiful day and,” she checks her phone briefly, “google maps says it’s just 20 minutes away.”
Alex smiles involuntarily. “Sure, I could stretch my legs.”

The rest of the cast and crew head to a bar to celebrate, but Alex admits she’s not feeling it. Maggie’s idea sounds more appealing, even if Alex isn’t a fan of walking among throngs of people.

The sun is just setting as they walk back to their apartments.

Their shadows merge along the sidewalk, and Alex remembers her appreciation for shadows and reflections and light. She had a short lived stint as an amateur photographer back in middle school—swiftly abandoned when she realized she had no talent for it—but she’d always been interested in playing with dark and light. How things could seem to be something they’re not.

Looking at the ground, she and Maggie seem to be one.

Besides the ever present stench of New York City, the walk is nice. It’s a nice moment, walking to her new home with her new co-star about to start shooting her new project. Her mom should see her now.

Alex is pulled out of her thoughts by a sudden hand on her arm.

“Danvers, hold on!” Maggie exclaims, eyes darting back and forth. She cranes her neck like she’s looking for something. Alex whips her head around too, thinking maybe Maggie spotted some paparazzi? They’re barely a block from the apartment.

Maggie pauses, and Alex holds her breath.

“No lions, we’re safe,” she says, and then keeps walking. She smirks at Alex over her shoulder.

Alex is torn between the swift feeling of mortification blooming in her chest and the warmth spreading across her body. Maggie’s teasing her, like Kara does, like friends do. She knows they discussed wanting to be friends back at La Nuvola Bianca, but she’s barely hung out with Maggie since, and never outside of work. Discussing something vs actually living it out is quite different.

Friends. Such a simple word, but it’s been a foreign concept for Alex most of her life. She learned at an early age that most people only wanted to befriend her because of who her dad was. It was difficult to sparse out other kids’ intentions, so she just didn’t bother trying to interact with them at all. Then Kara came along, and her life wasn’t her own anymore. And then her dad.... And then a whole load of shit.

Alex hasn’t had a lot of time to make friends.

She hurries until she falls into step again with Maggie, and playfully nudges her shoulder, feeling like a child. “If there was a lion loose, I wouldn’t be the one in danger.”

“Why’s that? You do track in high school?”

“Nope. I’m not that great of a runner actually. But to survive a lion you don’t need to be the fastest person, you just have to not be the slowest.” Alex feels a smirk forming on her own face. “And well…” She makes it a point to look Maggie up and down. “Short legs…” she trails off, humming innocently.

Maggie barks out a laugh. “I should have seen that one coming.” She steps in Alex’s pathway and pivots to face her. “Care to test that theory?”

“Hypothesis,” Alex blurts before she can stop herself. “If it’s not proven then it’s a hypothesis, not
a theory.”

“Nerd,” Maggie scoffs warmly, bouncing back on her heels before breaking out into a run.

*What the fuck.*

She looks at Alex over her shoulder as she calls out. “What? I’m testing the hypothesis.” She puts an extra emphasis on the last word.

“How old are you?! This is -this is ridiculous,” Alex sputters out.

“Catch me if you can, daddy long legs!” she hears from the increasingly smaller figure in front of her. Alex can’t believe she’s doing this, but she feels her legs start picking up speed and soon she’s flat out running after Maggie.

Another late night talk show, another interviewer. Maggie is used to it, but she’s not sure Alex is.

In the grand scheme of things, she knows that Alex grew up in this business, and she probably has more experience than Maggie dealing with all this, but it doesn’t...show. Production sits them next to each other on the same long couch, and Maggie can feel how tense Alex is beside her.

She’s gauged so far that she’s a woman who likes her personal space, and this feels like the first mistake already. The lights are bright and hot, and where Maggie feels her nerves settle into something manageable under the pressure, out of the corner of her eye Alex only seems to get tenser.

She glances toward her, noting her back is ramrod straight in her seat.

“Hey,” Maggie touches her arm and smiles. Her skin is so cold. “It’ll be fine,” she tries to soothe her. “We’re in this together.”

Alex gives her a pained smile in response.

The show starts, and the host—Jack Connell—introduces them with the usual small talk. Maggie handles the greetings for both of them, hoping Alex will loosen up as the interview continues.

"A lot of things have changed from season 1,” Jack says. “The show moved production to New York, there's the Claire Lawson character coming in...a lot of changes. How are you liking the city?”

“I love it,” Maggie says honestly. “I love the energy here, the people. ABC actually treated the both of us to a helicopter ride over the city, and it was like nothing I’ve seen before. And I actually can't wait for winter, I’d love to see some snow on the ground in central park.”

“And you, Alex?”
“I’m not-not as much a fan of the cold. You know, having to wrap up in a million layers and looking like a marshmallow. It’s not my thing.”

Maggie cringes.

“Well, she grew up in Malibu!” Maggie says, inviting Jack to laugh with her. “Don’t worry Danvers,” she mock whispers. “I’ll make a snow-lover out of you yet.”

“You guys look great together. Can I just say that?” Jack says, and Maggie plays it coy when the audience whoops and claps, playfully knocking her elbow against Alex’s arm. “Are Blake and Claire similar? Do they get along right off the bat or are there some issues there?”

“Well, when we start the season it’s only been a few weeks since the Doderick case was closed,” she explains, immediately feeling the rest of her nerves settle as she talks about the stories she loves and knows by heart. “And Blake...she’s on desk duty, she’s still dealing with the aftermath of shooting this man, there’s a lot on her plate. She is in this place where she feels like her life is stuck...and then Claire walks in and breathes new air into everything.” Maggie lays her hands in her lap, aware—as Gabriella teases her about—that she inherited her proclivity to talk with her hands when she gets excited about a topic.

“It doesn’t come without complications, though. They’re really similar in a lot of ways, but also polar opposites in others. You’ll have to watch to find out, but there is a really great conflict there. Nothing like me and Alex,” she says, remembering to push her ‘friendship’ with her. M’gann had briefly reminded her this would be their first interview together, and she should make it count. “We just clicked,” she says.

Maggie looks at Alex, smiling, and although she’s slightly more relaxed than before, she doesn’t look comfortable at all. The smile is a little awkward, actually. Maggie briefly hopes everyone in the front row has glaucoma.

"We can see that,” Jack says. “And how was the casting process with Miss Danvers? It was just a few months ago you said her name when asked about possible actresses you’d like acting opposite you. How did that factor in?”

“Well, I did tell my producer about her. I’ve always wanted the best for Nightingale, and I really thought the best would be an actress as talented as her.” She turns to smile at Alex and Alex is caught off guard. Maggie can see it. She’s not playing anything up for the cameras this time, she means it. “I loved her work in Body of Medicine, and once I heard she was available I kind of pushed our showrunner, Anthony, a little, to get her to audition.”

Maggie turns to look at Alex, her smile genuine, nothing like the wide one she plasters on for interviews or photoshoots. She’s not pretending and she wants Alex to know.

“When she walked in, I knew she was my Claire.”
Alex’s brain short circuits at Maggie’s smile.

For a minute she forgets it’s all an act for the cameras, that Maggie likes her this much. That she thinks this highly of her. (Or maybe she does, but Alex doesn’t think much of herself these days, it’s hard to think Maggie would.)

“And I think we can all see you were right, Maggie. Now, Alex, what can you tell us about your character, Claire Lawson? She’s the new crayon in the box! What do you think she brings to the show?”

Alex swallows saliva. She feels like a fish out of water. Maggie has them eating out of her hands and all Alex’s hands are doing is sweating like crazy.

“Claire is a rookie cop—I mean detective, sorry.” She coughs out a chuckle and prays it doesn’t come off as deranged. “She’s fresh from the academy…and she uh-brings some levity and heart to the show it didn’t have in season 1. And kind of building off of what Maggie said, Claire is a good uh, what’s the word I’m thinking of…” She laughs awkwardly. “It’s that thing you put over food when you package it or put it in the oven…”

“Foil?” Maggie offers helpfully.

“Yeah. That. Claire is a good foil to Blake. I’m excited for you all to see her.”

Alex can’t tell who is more relieved when the interview ends, her or Jack.

She’s quick to step down off the stage, and the staff guy can’t get her microphone unclipped from her uncomfortable, tight dress fast enough. She’s itching to go back to her dressing room, take the stupid thing off, and get home—but a hand on her arm stops her.

“Hey, all good?” Maggie asks.

“Yes, I’m fine,” Alex answers. Maggie’s taken off her heels, and Alex has to look down to meet her eyes. She never realized how short the other woman was, because she’s always the one filling the room.

“Look, don’t beat yourself up over this. You were nervous, it happens.”

Alex closes her eyes. So she wasn’t the only one to notice she was fucking on edge the entire time.

"It wasn't live," Maggie continues. "They'll edit it and make it look good."

Alex shakes her head. “He probably thinks I’m an idiot.”

“Who? Jack? He won’t remember either of our names by tomorrow morning. Don’t worry about it, Danvers.”

“Easy for you to say. How did I forget the word foil?”

“Hey. You were good out there, okay?”

“Thanks for lying.”

Maggie smiles.

“My pleasure.” Alex can’t help but roll her eyes. “Look, we’re gonna have a bunch of these in the years to come, you can’t go quitting on me now. We’ve just started,” Maggie tells her.
“Sorry you had to carry the whole interview,” she tells Maggie.

“Don’t worry, I do my push ups,” Maggie jokes, showing Alex an admittedly impressive bicep.

Maggie surprises her next by giving her a quick hug.

“We can do this, Danvers,” she tells her before pulling away, off to her dressing room.

Alex nods, even though Maggie can’t see.

She hopes they can.

Alex has always loved wardrobe and makeup tests.

Getting to transform herself into a different person is one of the best parts of the job, but she doesn’t particularly enjoy it this time. She has to cut her hair.

She’d known it was part of the deal pretty much since the start, since they were sure of what look they wanted Claire Lawson to have, and Alex had talked to the writers and heard all about how Claire is practical and how her short, severe haircut reflects how uncompromising she is as a person, but she’s still...nervous.

The woman standing behind her can certainly tell.

“You’ll look great, sweetheart,” she says, before draping black plastic around her shoulders, and Alex takes a deep breath. Kara asked her to record her change of look, but she’s not doing that.

She doesn’t even love her hair that much, but it...it’s her. She’s not sure what to think of having short hair for the foreseeable future. (Not to mention, short hair...her character...Alex knows it’s a lesbian thing. And plenty of straight women have short hair, she assumes, but she’s getting her hair cut specifically because her character isn’t and Alex -she’s not entirely on board with it yet.)

“Oh, Maggie!” Alex jumps with the woman’s words. Could she put the scissors down at least?

“We were just about to start with your girl’s makeover,” she tells Maggie, who’s just popped her head inside the makeup trailer.

Why does she have to call her ‘her girl’?

“Oh. Don’t kill me, Danvers, but I wanted to see.” Maggie steps inside. “Why that face?”

Alex looks at herself in the mirror. She consciously relaxes her brow.

She meets Maggie’s eyes in the mirror.

Maggie gives her a dimpled smile, and then Alex feels her hand on her shoulder, comforting, squeezing.
“Your hair is gorgeous,” Maggie tells her, her fingers in Alex’s waist length curls. She shivers. “But I trust this woman with my life, she’ll make it even better.”

Alex takes a breath.

“Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it, Danvers. I’ve been where you are.”

Maggie winks, and Alex knows she didn’t imagine the callback to their previous conversation at La Nuvola Bianca.

She smiles at her. Maybe they can be friends -maybe they already are.

Alex spends the entire ride home that afternoon running her fingers through her hair.

She’s always surprised when it stops just at her jaw. It’s going to take a while to get used to, but she doesn’t look bad. It actually...looks kind of good, cool.

She sent a picture to Kara, and her sister immediately got back to her with a single word in all caps. Badass.

She starts to believe it.

Her phone rings just before she opens the door to her apartment, and she answers immediately when she sees it’s J’onn.

“Hi? I’m just getting home.”

“Sorry to bother you, but my flight just landed. King flew me in, and he wants us and Maggie to meet at ABC Studios.”

“Right now?” Alex asks, frowning. “I just got back from set. I had a wardrobe test today.”

“Right. How did your haircut go?”

Alex smiles.

“Good. I...think I might like it.”

“That’s the spirit. Get a car to the studio, will you?”

“Got it,” she tells him, locking her apartment again. Her current clothes will have to do. “What is this about?” Alex asks J’onn. “I don’t think I’ve forgotten anymore emails.”

“You haven’t. I have no idea what this is about either.”
Alex walks into the meeting blind.

They both do. Maggie is already there when she arrives, with a woman by her side that J’onn tells her is her manager.

“Ladies, thank you for coming,” Anthony King says as he walks in. “Mr. J’onzz, we haven’t officially met.”

They shake hands, and Alex takes a seat next to Maggie at the long round table. They share a look, and for the first time Maggie looks as lost as she is. She shrugs, and Alex mimics her. They smile.

Anthony stands at the front of the room.

“I’m sorry about the rush, but the sooner the better. I have...a proposition for you.”

Alex frowns.

“Listen,” King says. “What would shake up our current fanbase and maybe even bring in new fans?” Alex tries to catch J’on’s eyes, but he’s not looking at her. He, too, is frowning. “What would bring us press, drama, fans going crazy?”

Alex is lost.

“A relationship. But not between Lawson and Davenport, no, we already have that. But hear this: between the women that play them.”

She doesn’t know what that means.

She hears Maggie’s manager already protesting, and J’onn starts talking, but Alex is still struggling to understand. The words sound like white noise.

“It would be the perfect way to generate buzz for the show!” Anthony says, speaking over them all. “We’re confident Dawson will be a hit. But a relationship between Maggie and Alex will make it even better! The reaction after Alex’s casting announcement alone gave us an indication of what this could do for the show.”

Oh. Alex knows what he’s implying now. That she pretend to date—pretend to be…

“And then when your EW article came out,” he says, speaking directly to Alex. “The sheer number of hits broke their website in half. This is what we want. If we use this-”

“What are you saying?” Maggie asks, the first words she’s uttered so far, and Alex whips her head to look at her. She feels her voice come back to her.

“One year. Red carpets, some dinners, a vacation maybe, and a few kisses—all duly documented by cameras. People will love you together, they’ll root for you. It’s going to be amazing.”

“You’re…” Alex speaks up. “You’re talking about a lie that-”

"Not a lie, a PR contract. And the best decision for both of your careers right now."
“I have...a proposition for you.”

Maggie narrows her eyes.

She’s dealt with Anthony for over a year now, since the moment she walked into her first audition for Blake Davenport, but she’s never quite sure what’s going to come out of his mouth. M’gann is just as lost as she is, and that unsettles her. Even when he ‘forgot’ to inform Maggie of something, her manager was always up to speed. Alex and the man by her side, she assumes that’s the J’onn Alex has mentioned, don’t seem to be any better off than them. What is Anthony up to?


Maggie is more wary than ever.

“A relationship,” he says, as though it was obvious. “But not between Lawson and Davenport, no, we already have that.”

Maggie feels something heavy drop in her stomach, and it keeps sinking with every second that passes. She already knows what his next words are.

“But hear this: between the women that play them.”

Maggie sees Alex tense up at her side, and M’gann is already opening her mouth to protest. Maggie herself feels just as shocked as if she hadn’t known this was what he was aiming for. It’s classical Anthony. She should’ve seen it coming when he called a meeting like this -but how could she?

“It would be the perfect way to generate buzz for the show!” Anthony says, disregarding M’gann and J’onn’s words. “We’re confident Dawson will be a hit. But a relationship between Maggie and Alex will make it even better! The reaction after Alex’s casting announcement alone gave us an indication of what this could do for the show.” He turns toward Alex. “And then when your EW article came out, the sheer number of hits broke their website in half. This is what we want. If we use this-”

“What are you saying?” Maggie asks. He hasn’t put it into words yet, hasn’t presented them with a perfectly packaged reality like she knows he’s already planned to. Ever the businessman, he wouldn’t have sprung this on them without making it seem as profitable for the show—and for
“One year,” Anthony states finally. “Red carpets, some dinners, a vacation maybe, and a few kisses—all duly documented by cameras. People will love you together, they’ll root for you. It’s going to be amazing."

"You're…" Alex speaks up, and Maggie turns to look at her. “You’re talking about a lie that-

"Not a lie, a PR contract. And the best decision for both of your careers right now."

“-could ruin my career!” Alex exclaims, and Maggie flinches.

She can’t dwell on it, but something deep inside her chest recoils at Alex’s words. Does she really feel dating Maggie would ruin her career? Because she’s a woman? Maggie shakes her head, focusing on the matter at hand.

“The show did fine last season,” she argues. “It’s going to do fine now.”

Anthony looks at her for the first time, as if finally acknowledging she’s half of the plan he wants to set into motion.

“Yes, but is fine enough?” He asks her, condescendingly. “Maggie, sweetheart, Under Fire is about to premiere, and I’ve been spending every waking moment thinking about how to stay number one.”

She should’ve expected him to get like this. Under Fire was ABC’s new baby this year, and of course Anthony would have felt threatened when Nightingale lost its brand new shine. But she didn’t expect this.

“I’m gonna be honest,” he continues. “I thought Claire Lawson would do it, but bringing in a new actress isn’t going to cut it, especially considering her reputation.”

“Watch it.” The response is automatic. She can’t help feeling protective of Alex.

“We deal in honesty here,” he keeps talking, ignoring her protest. “You were the one who wanted Alex Danvers in the first place, this is the baggage we have to deal with since her reputation isn’t going to give us a boost."

“King…” Alex’s agent speaks up, and Anthony has the good sense to stop his tirade. Even if it might have been true, and whatever she had felt when Alex had so vehemently expressed her disgust at his idea, he’s being an asshole.

“I’m telling you both, this could be a great thing. Not just for the show, but for the two of you.”

Maggie feels bewildered, and one look at Alex’s pale face lets her know so does she.

The fucking irony of Anthony even mentioning honesty when what he’s proposing is the exact opposite.

“There’s the matter of my client’s sexuality,” Alex’s agent speaks up, and -of course. Alex is straight. She hadn’t given the woman’s public image a second thought, but of course. What the fuck is Anthony trying to pull?

“Are you asking her to…what? Come out as-”

“We’re not asking her to explicitly say anything about her sexuality—we just want her to date
Maggie.

Maggie blinks. It’s barely been five minutes since he started talking and she has no idea how the conversation got to this place.

“Everyone knows Margaret is gay,” Anthony says. “When someone asks your girl about what she’s into, she doesn’t address it. After the contract runs its course it’ll blow over, she won’t have to talk about it again.” Anthony shrugs. “The public has a very short memory span.”

Maggie stares at him.

It cannot possibly be that simple to play with people’s lives the way he’s trying to. Also she’s annoyed at his full use of her name. Asshole.

“Look, I’ll leave you all to think about it, consider it, sleep on it.” Anthony offers them a smile while he picks up his jacket. “And I hope you’ll be able to give me an answer by Sunday.”

The sound of Maggie’s heels on the linoleum floors is audible to everyone in their vicinity, but no one gets in her way.

M’gann trails after her, and Maggie has her aunt on the phone before she even makes it into the closest empty room she can find.

“This is ridiculous,” she tells Gabriella, putting her on speaker. “Everything I’ve worked for, and he thinks I need to -what? Date someone?! As if my acting wasn’t enough? Since when am I not enough as an actress? The show’s season finale had more viewers than the first episode! How often does that happen?!?”

“Maggie, I don’t understand,” Gabriella says.

M’gann takes her phone, and Maggie sits down while her manager puts her aunt up to speed.

She doesn’t hear what M’gann tells Gabriella from the other side of the room, but she can’t imagine how she’d phrase it without it not sounding absolutely bonkers.

A few moments later, M’gann walks over to where she’s sitting, placing the phone at the head of the conference table.

“Maggie? M’gann just told me what Anthony suggested. How’re you holding up?”

“I had to sit there, listening to my boss go ‘She’s a girl who likes girls, that’s fashionable now! Let’s do it!’” Maggie throws her hands up in disgust. “How do you think I’m holding up?” She asks, immediately feeling guilty. She takes a deep breath. “Can you see how that’s bullshit? This isn't right.”

Maggie sinks into her chair, finally getting a second to process what Anthony offered.

A year of pretending to date Alex for the paparazzi, in the hopes of promoting the show, of bringing in buzz. It’s not...it’s never been how she’s wanted to do this. She’s worked her ass off for years, kept her eyes on the prize like she was a fucking race horse. There were so many offers, so many shortcuts for good roles and for good press. Hollywood is a cesspool, and there were plenty
of moments as a model where someone whispered if she’d just sleep with this person she’d get a better contract, or if she’d just hang out with this other person and call some paps she could be on the front page of whatever magazine for a day.

She never took up those offers; she kept her head down and worked hard, determined not to let the business change her. She’d seen what it had done to other actors. To her first real friend.

It was never how she wanted to play this.

She looks up, and M’gann is quiet, her thumb touching her lips. She bites her nail, something she only does when she’s nervous, or thinking too hard, or about to tell Maggie she just got her an audition for a lead role.

Maggie eyes her carefully.

“M’gann.”

The woman looks up. She doesn’t look as angry for her sake as Maggie had expected, and she begins to feel wary all over again.

“Anthony...he’s callous and insensitive, but...” M’gann snaps out of her contemplation and holds Maggie’s eyes, “he’s not...entirely wrong about this.”

Betrayal stings. M’gann had believed in her since she’d started acting, and this feels like the exact opposite. She hopes her tone isn’t too accusatory as her next words come out.

“You like his idea?”

"Like is a bit strong, Maggie." M'gann sighs. "And don't look at me like that, I'm on your side."

Maggie stands up and starts pacing the length of the room.

She thought M’gann would back her up, like she’d always done with Anthony, with all of the producers back from day one when she was nothing but a high school student with big dreams and not much else. But she isn’t. And she could admit that challenging her might be part of why she’s such a good manager, but it’s not what Maggie wants right now. Frustration makes her feel trapped, her clothes too tight.

It’s silent for a few moments, before she stops abruptly to stand in front of M’gann.

“Then why did you look like you would have suggested this, and he just beat you to it?”

“I wouldn't have,” M’gann tells her, and Maggie believes her. “But the offer is on the table now, and I can't ignore-“

“M’gann!”

“I can't ignore that it would look good for you.”

“What’s going on?” Gabriella asks over the phone. M’gann sits down and looks at the chair in front of her until Maggie does too.

M’gann grabs the phone.

“I don’t think Anthony was too off base with his suggestion,” M’gann tells Gabriella, and her aunt is quiet for a moment.
“Maggie, what do you think?” she asks. Maggie wishes her aunt was here.

“I think it’s bullshit,” she says again. M’gann sighs.

“From a business point of view...Yes, Alex Danvers doesn't have the best reputation, but her getting on the straight and narrow after meeting you looks good for you both.” She rolls her chair closer to Maggie, resting her forearms on her legs so she can catch Maggie’s downward gaze. “Not to mention the girl has pedigree. Her father was an Oscar nominee, I’ve heard her sister is on the shortlist for a Marvel movie. She’d look good on your arm.”

Maggie leans back and crosses her arms, rolling her eyes while she’s at it. Her face is sour. “So arm candy with good connections?”

M’gann ignores her eye roll and continues arguing her point. “Award season is coming up. You took Gabriella last year, and it worked, but we can’t play the family angle much longer. If King is right in one thing it’s that the public has a short attention span.”

“I can't just,” she vaguely waves her arm in the air before releasing it to hit the conference table with a loud thunk, “pretend to be with her for a year for a couple of nights in front of the cameras. Right? That’s insane.” She's grasping at straws here, she knows how a successful PR agreement goes. It’s worked for her before. But she doesn’t want to be that woman again.

“You’re not looking at the big picture,” M’gann tells her. “Having a steady girlfriend would work for you, not just for award season. Solid date for the Golden Globes, the Oscars, sure. But you’d also get the conversation back on you, and clean up that bad girl image while you're at it. It may have done you good when you were on Rosewood Street, but this isn't the Teen Choice Awards anymore. We’re in the big leagues now.”

She trusts M’gann, she has since she was a kid. They’ve been working together since Maggie was 17, and the woman has yet to steer her wrong. That’s why it’s so hard to keep resisting what she’s saying.

At her core, it feels wrong to pretend to be with someone. But her career and what she’s built comes first. This is part of the cost of maintaining and reaching even higher levels of success in Hollywood. It’s something she accepted long ago, but it still rubs her the wrong way. She pushes the discomfort to the back of her mind and focuses back on M’gann.

“We both know the Academy voters can be pretty conservative and don’t even watch all the movies they’re voting on. A lot of them base it off name recognition, which you’ve got now, and reputation. Voting for a nice young woman in a steady relationship is more appealing than voting for a player.”

“We don’t even know if I’ll be nominated,” Maggie reminds her. Some of the early reviews of The Informant had declared her role put her in the running for next year, but she knows there’s still half the year left, and anything can happen from now until then.

“You're right, but doing this certainly won’t hurt your chances. The movie’s doing well, better than we imagined.”

She reaches over to grasp Maggie’s shoulder. “This could be it, your big moment.”

Maggie musters up a faint smile at that. They’ve talked about this—this new level of her career with the box office hit and awards on the horizon—forever. During long car rides to and from different sets and meetings Maggie, usually drowsy, can remember telling M’gann her big—bigger
than her childhood self could ever imagine—dreams, her hopes. She knows M’gann has a point, and she knows she’s looking out for her best interests as always. She can feel herself teetering over the edge on this decision, but she just needs one more person to help her over.

“Gabriella?”

“I’ll support whatever you choose, kid,” her aunt says.

She bites her lip, her eyes trained on the table.

She’s not seeing anyone right now.

Her last quasi relationship had been with Darla, and that fizzled out as quickly as it had started. Her long hours kept them apart, and it had felt weird, wrong to Maggie somehow, Darla’s offer to stop working if Maggie would only take care of her. It left a bad taste in her mouth, and they stopped sleeping together after that. That was 3 months ago. And sure, she went on a date or two, but they never amounted to anything.

A PR relationship...wouldn't affect her life.

She still is slightly reluctant, which M’gann notices if her next words are anything to go by.

“It wouldn't be the first time,” M’gann gently reminds her.

Maggie flinches.

“That’s low,” she tells M’gann. “And Emily was different, you know it.”

“Let’s not bring Emily into this,” Gabriella says, ever her defender. “It was a long time ago, and it's over now. Let's focus on the present.”

“I am,” M’gann says. “This could be good for Maggie.”

“I’m not the only person involved here,” Maggie says, and to her own ears it sounds a lot like a decision has been made. She hates herself a little for letting herself be convinced so easily.

“What are you saying?” M’gann asks.

Maggie sighs.

She doesn't know what she’s getting herself into, and she doesn't know what to think of Alex now...her ‘a lie that could ruin my career’ still floats in her mind, and Maggie doesn't know which outcome she’d be more bothered by. Alex thinking it’s terrible to have to pretend to be gay, or Alex having the lack of morals to do it, even if it was good for the show. She remembers M’gann’s words about Alex getting on the straight and narrow after meeting her.

Would Alex pretend to be gay if it would help her career?

For a moment, Maggie is 14 years old again, naive and vulnerable, and she hates it. More than anything, Maggie hates Anthony for putting them in this position.

“If Alex says yes —then I will, too.”
Alex paces the room.

“It’s...definitely out there.”

“Out there?!” she stops, and stares at him, running her fingers through her now short hair. “He wants me to fake a relationship with someone! With a woman!”

“Never been my favorite way to fabricate good press, but...He has a point, that it would draw more press to the show and to the both of you,” J’onn concedes, and Alex huffs, resuming her pacing.

“But it’d be worse for me.” She states.

“What do you mean?”

“If people thought I was...dating Maggie.” The words make her shudder. “If they thought I was...gay. Won't that be worse press for me?”

J’onn puts his elbows on the table, as he thinks through his answer.

“It’d be bad only for the people who actually think it’s a bad thing,” he tells her, spreading his hands. “Even if a few people spin it in a negative way, and they will, they’ll be the minority. They’ll be shunned. Not a single respectable magazine—and neither would the lesser ones, actually—paint two women dating as bad solely because they’re two women. They’d lose readers. It’d be almost as bad as coming out in support of President Pence. It’s not socially acceptable anymore.”

“But they’d be thinking it,” she says.

“I don't know what they’d be thinking,” J’onn tells her. “But from a PR point of view it would bring you more good than bad press.”

Alex sits down. It feels like the walls are closing in on her.

“How?” she asks. She’s been trying to dig herself out of the hole she’s been in since she was fired from *Body of Medicine*, but it’s felt almost like digging a hole in the sand, never getting very far because the borders keep collapsing in on her.

“It’d be another way to get your face out there,” J’onn says. “In a positive light. King said it’d be a year long thing, which if we consider doing it, we could change, of course, but the public likes stability, rooting for relationships.” J’onn makes a pause. "Don't you think we should call your mo-" A single look from kills the idea. J'onn sighs and keeps talking. "Fine. I think it *would* help clean up the party girl image you’ve had for the past couple of years. I'm not saying it wouldn't be a scandal at first, but when that died down...”

“You think it's a good idea,” Alex says quietly.

“I think Maggie is a well liked, well known actress, with a supportive, massive fanbase. She’s the current sweetheart of critics. And you could benefit greatly from being seen with her, but I'm not trying to convince you,” J’onn promises. “That could be as friends, or simply as coworkers, you being on the show is good press as it is.”
Alex nods.

“I’ll tell them whatever you want me to, you don’t have to do this. You don’t even have to consider it.”

Alex takes a deep breath.

“Do you think I should?”

She doesn’t want to. God she doesn’t want to. The sole thought of people seeing her that way, with a woman, with Maggie, fills her with dread and a paralyzing terror that trickles down to her bones. But she trusts J’onn. And she doesn’t want to always be in this hole.

“I think you should do whatever feels right.”

Alex nods.

The thing is, she doesn’t remember what ‘right’ feels like anymore.

“What am I going to tell my mom? And Kara?”

“Your mom likes to pretend she didn’t, but she worked in Hollywood too. She’ll understand. So will your sister. After all, isn’t that how she met that boyfriend of hers?”

Alex thinks about Mon-el, Kara’s ridiculous boyfriend and co-star. The producers wanted them to date while they promoted their movie, but by the time they presented the idea they’d already started dating for real.

“That’s different,” Alex tells J’onn. Kara isn’t pretending, regardless of how much Alex wishes she was. And Kara has nothing to hide.

“Alex…” J’onn’s voice is impossibly soft, and Alex meets his eyes. “The fact that Maggie is a woman...I understand why it’d be uncomfortable for you.”

"Of -of course," she stutters. "Because I'd be pretending to be-"

"Or because you wouldn't be," J'onn says.

Alex looks up at him, tears thick in her throat, climbing to her eyes. She shakes her head.

How did they get here?

“I thought about it a few times, getting you a contract with some nice, up and coming actor. Someone who would help clean up your image, spin it in the right direction again. Maybe even someone who could get you roles -but there’s a reason I never even thought about saying it out loud.”

Alex swallows, hard. The thought of having to ‘be’ with some faceless man for the cameras, while technically not any different than her work in Body of Medicine or any of her other movies, still feels...wrong. Thinking about holding hands, or kissing him...she’s uncomfortable at a visceral level, and she can’t think about why. She won’t let herself. But it seems J’onn already has.

He faces her and grabs her hands between his. Alex avoids his eyes.

“There’s nothing wrong with being who you are,” he tells her softly. A tear falls from her eye, rolling down her cheek. “And if you do choose to go ahead with this contract then I’m sorry it will
be the way it gets out there. So you don't have to do it. You should have the freedom to wait until you're ready, whenever that is.”

Alex feels as brittle as glass.

All the negotiations she had with herself, all the excuses she gave in the privacy of her own head...

“You know,” she says, achingly vulnerable and slightly awed.

“Of course I know, I know you. I love you like a daughter, Alex.”

“I... I’ve never ...” Why is it so hard to get the words out of her throat? Why can’t she accept it to herself? “I can’t talk about this, I can’t-”

“You don’t have to, Alex.”

She nods, and J’onn releases her hands just in time for her finger to catch the tears that keep falling. She takes a stuttering breath, trying to reign everything in.

“If you think it’ll help...” Alex shrugs, shaking her head. “I’m tired of disappointing my mom,” she tells him. “I’m sick of being the worst part of my family-”

“A mess. I’m a mess, and I know it, and I’m tired of it. I’m tired of everybody knowing and of them waiting for me to screw up again so it can be on their front page. I don’t want that to be me, not anymore.”

She looks up at J’onn, and he’s staring back at her with nothing but kindness in his eyes.

She’s exhausted, sick of the drop in her stomach every time she sees a new article with her name in the title, fucking done with being a stain on her family’s name, on her father’s memory. Kara is out there proving to the world what a great father he was, and Alex can’t get through a photo album without reaching for a drink as a way to numb herself from the pain. To escape her memories and her mother’s expectations and the pressure of the public watching her every move and waiting for her to prove just how much of a fuck up she is.

She’s done with it. And if this...agreement is the way out of her spiral—the light at the end of the seemingly never-ending tunnel—then she doesn’t need to like it, she only needs to do it. For herself, and for everyone who still expects her to succeed; more importantly, for the few people who believe she still can.

One of which is sitting across from her.

“I’ll do it,” Alex says. “I’ll do what King is asking, I just hope it works.”

“Are you sure?” J’onn asks. Alex nods shakily.

“I’m sure.”

It’s done, and it takes some pressure off her shoulders, while simultaneously putting on a thousand times more.

“Alex?”

She looks up at J’onn.
“You’re an amazing woman,” he tells her. “Just the way you are.”

A sob leaves her lips, and then her arms are around the man who’s almost like a father to her.

They give King an answer later that afternoon.

Once she’s alone in her apartment, she slowly makes her way to the bathroom and splashes water on her face, the coolness of it helping her to regain her bearings. She grips the sink counter and looks up at her reflection in the mirror. Her face is blotchy, her eyes red from crying. God, she can’t remember the last time she cried like this—maybe when she got the news *Body of Medicine* fired her. Alex’s disappointment had cut through her like a serrated knife back then, and she hadn’t even bothered trying to stop the ugly, gasping tears from falling.

This time around, she notes, the cause of her tears isn’t bad. It’s progress, actually. But she recognizes now the same feeling she had then.

Fear.

She’s scared of what’s to come, scared of the truths about herself she may be forced to confront. This is uncharted territory for Alex, and she’s never liked the unknown.

Only an hour later J’onn calls her, to let her know Maggie has accepted as well.

Gabriella’s hands are stained red, beet red to be specific.

Maggie watches from her place on the couch as her aunt chops up the vegetables to add to the sizzling skillet on the stove. The low hum of the television accompanies the rhythmic beat of the knife hitting the cutting board, and Maggie has to sit up straight to avoid dozing off. Maggie had volunteered to help Gabriella move into her new apartment in NYC, and her aunt had insisted she make her a meal in return. Beet rice stir fry, with diced cauliflower in place of a more usual ingredient like beef.

Gabriella never liked the dish—she still claims cauliflower is sick broccoli—but she knows it’s one of Maggie’s favorites. It became a staple of their kitchen when she was younger, and Gabriella had been determined to feed her the recommended amount of vegetable servings for a child her age.

Maggie smiles faintly. Nearly 10 years of feeding her and her aunt hasn’t tired of it yet.

“You sure you don’t need any help?” Maggie asks. “I feel bad sitting here doing nothing.”

Gabriella looks up from her chopping to scoff, “I wouldn’t call unpacking all my boxes doing
“Psh.” She waves off her aunt’s comment. “The moving guys I paid did most of it.”

Her aunt lets out a low whistle, “Look at you all fancy with your grunt money.”

Maggie chuckles. “Grunt money?”

“Yeah, money used to pay grunt men to do the dirty work.”

“YOU make it sound like I’m putting out hits.”

“Well, I don't know everything you do in your free time,” Gabriella says, picking up the chopping board and throwing the beets in the pan. “Speaking of free time...you just signed away most of yours for a year.”

Maggie sighs as she falls back on the couch. She should’ve expected it, they hadn’t really had a long conversation about the contract, not with the move and the new restaurant and filming starting in a few days.

“Smooth transition,” she tells her.

“Thanks, I try,” Gabriella says. “So? Are you sure about it?”

“About?” she plays dumb, fiddling with the couch seams to buy herself some time.

“Alex.” She turns back around to face Maggie, leaning against the kitchen island. “This entire relationship that I don't get.”

Direct and blunt as always, that's her aunt.

“There’s not much to understand,” Maggie tells her. “It would look good for both of us, and the show, if people thought we were together.” She shrugs. “So we’re going to pretend to be together for a year.”

“Simple, huh?” Gabriella raises an eyebrow. Maggie shrugs again. It’s not her first rodeo, but she’s thankful her aunt isn’t comparing what happened with Emily to this.

“What if you meet someone else?” Gabriella asks. “What are you going to do then?”

Maggie shrugs for a third time. It’s really becoming a summary of how she feels.

“It's not like my love life is this amazing oasis you know.”

Her aunt gives her a look.

“Really? Do you remember Darla? Because she’s just a joy to work with these days,” she says, turning to check on the food. “By the way, can you stop sleeping with my employees?”

“Gabriella,” she hisses.

“What? You're an adult now.”

“You raised me. Isn't it weird for you?” Maggie knows their age difference isn’t that large, and Gabriella has felt more like a sister than an aunt at times, but still. It’s definitely weird for Maggie.
“Believe me, finding you with that girl in our bedroom your junior year was way more uncomfortable than talking about it.”

Maggie visibly cringes. “Will you ever let me forget that?” Even thinking about that incident brings up a faint feeling of mortification in her.

Gabriella gives her a look, “Stop derailing the conversation.”

“Fine.” She sighs. “I guess I won’t meet anyone for a year then. Or if I do I’ll keep it super private, I don’t know. I’m focused on the show either way, I don’t have time for a relationship.”

Even when she _was_ in relationships, they never lasted long anyways. She didn’t spend enough time with her girlfriend, she was work obsessed, she cared more about her job than them, she had a long list of various reasons women have given as they broke up with her. The thing is, some of their comments, while not pleasant to hear, were true. She _is_ dedicated to her career, above all else. Plus she’s young, she has plenty of time to find a girlfriend, especially when her time to succeed in ageist Hollywood dwindles with each passing year. 25 is the new 30 these days.

Her aunt’s voice snaps her out of her thoughts. “That sounds like an excuse.”

Maggie scoffs, “What do you have to say for yourself?”

Her aunt has only had a handful of short term relationships that Maggie knows of. When she was a teenager she knows Gabriella didn’t have any time for her own personal life what with raising her and working full time. (And she still feels guilty about that, despite her aunt’s many reassurances not to.)

“I had a kid to raise and then I had another kid to raise. And now I have another one in New York.”

She rolls her eyes fondly. Gabriella has a penchant for calling La Nuvola Bianca her child, and Maggie never thought she’d have it in her to be jealous of a building but, here she is.

“Your restaurants don’t count as children.”

“Your job doesn’t count as a relationship.”

Maggie gives her a look. Gabriella narrows her eyes.

“Truce?” Her aunt asks, tilting her head in a conciliatory fashion. Maggie nods with a smile. Gabriella shakes her head with a small chuckle as she sits down next to her on the couch.

“What am I gonna do with you, kid?” She sighs, before turning towards Maggie. “You know, when you started modeling...this isn't the life I wanted for you. Those idiots chasing you with their cameras...and now you having to pretend to be in love with someone.”

Maggie looks up at her.

She knows her aunt feel responsible somehow, for the things she’s had to deal with in the industry, but she shouldn’t. Maggie chose this career, and she stuck with it even after she realized the full ugly underbelly of Hollywood. It’s been her choice all along, and she’s been lucky her aunt has supported her.

“It's nothing compared to what we have thanks to all this.” She remembers sharing a room with her aunt all through high school, and having to walk home when she ran out of bus fare 2 days short of the end of the month. “I would’ve had to lug your boxes up here by myself without all this. I can
take it. Plus, it was my choice,” she reminds her.

“And you’re still okay with it?” She asks, eyes tinged with worry.

“Yeah,” she tells her, certain. “Alex isn’t...she’s not a bad person.” Maggie trusts her gut about people, and Alex isn’t bad. Then again, there are very few people Maggie considers to be truly bad. Not even her parents make that cut. “Plus, I’m gonna keep working with her on the show even after this PR thing is over, so -we just won’t make it a big deal.”

“Right.”

“Right.”

The atmosphere in the room is awkward. So fucking awkward.

Alex had been nervous in a way she thought she was over when Maggie texted her to meet in this place, and it hadn’t worn off with every step she took. (One thing she loves about New York City, and it’s a short list, is that with enough time and stamina you can get anywhere by walking. As someone without a license and who hates traffic -it’s perfect.)

Alex takes a sip of the water bottle Maggie had provided, telling her that the plumbing wasn’t fixed yet. She swallows the water, and it goes down faster than she’d hoped. Maggie is quiet, which is a change. Alex quickly runs through the past few days in her mind to remember if she said anything stupid to Maggie that would make her mad at her. She can’t remember anything—maybe Maggie’s just tired. Alex certainly is. Moving took more out of her than she’d expected, and she’s been furiously working on the script for the show. Maybe Maggie is the same.

Her eyes wander around the partially finished room before settling on the woman currently occupying her thoughts, the woman she’s agreed to fake date for an entire year. J’onn hasn’t received any details yet of what she’ll have to do with Maggie, but she knows she’s going to have to kiss her at some point. On screen and off screen. Alex thinks about it. From a purely biological standpoint, it shouldn’t be...too unpleasant. Maggie’s lips look plump and soft, the kind of lips casting agents love. Alex herself has been guilty of using lip-plumping gloss before an audition, to try and get lips like that. But Maggie’s are natural, effortless. Right now, her lips are pursed. Her tongue darts out, a quick pink flash, as she licks her lips and emits a small sigh. There’s a light sheen to them now because of the action, and the light reflects off of -Alex stops herself.

She’s being fucking creepy.

She quickly turns her gaze downward to her lap, hands fidgeting. Maggie didn’t seem to notice Alex’s study of her, and that gives her some peace of mind. She chances a look up, and Maggie is staring out the window, her position shifting her hair off her neck. Alex can see the line of her jaw now and the soft expanse of skin now exposed at the juncture where her neck meets her collarbone. Her skin looks smooth and flawless, even her face. Whenever they’ve met she’s been bare faced, and it makes her look so young Alex forgets they’re nearly the same age. She wonders if there’s a
reason Maggie wears little to no makeup in her everyday attire—it’s an unusual trait for any celebrity. But it’s not like she needs it, she’s just as gorgeous without it as with it. If Alex squints she can see a brief smattering of freckles sprinkled across her face, and down her chest-

“My aunt bought this place so she’d have an excuse to be in New York,” Maggie says, looking around the space.

Alex is shaken out of her thoughts.

“To be with you?” She asks, blinking. Her heart is pounding and she doesn’t want to think about why.

“Yeah, of course.”

That might have been obvious, Alex guesses, but not to her.

Her mom couldn’t even manage to see her off at the airport, let alone come with her to help her settle in the city. She certainly wouldn’t leave the warmth and comfort of Malibu for this, and Alex can’t blame her. (Her brain helpfully reminds her her mom was willing to leave it to accompany Kara, and that New York City isn’t even as cold as fucking Vancouver….she sighs.)

And this is only Maggie’s aunt, who knows what her actual mother would do for her. She’s lucky.

“Right.” She tries for a smile. “I like...I like the place. It’s going to be great, when it’s finished.”

Maggie nods. “Thanks.”

Alex’s words from last week still ring in her ears, ‘A lie that could ruin my career.’

M’gann suggested she talk with Alex about what they were accepting to do, but Maggie would’ve done so regardless of her suggestion. This is a year long agreement, and they’re in it together. But she can’t stop thinking about what she said when they first found out.

It’s true that Anthony sprung this on them, but Maggie has found that people's first reactions are usually their most honest ones.

‘A lie that could ruin my career.’ Maggie stares at her distorted reflection in her water glass. She’s aware they’ve been sitting in silence for 15 minutes, but she’s not in the mood to try and keep the conversation going like she has in the past, because apparently Alex Danvers has very little in the way of social skills. How she ever got as far as she did is a wonder to Maggie. No, that’s not true. She can guess how, her father was a famous director, she was born with one foot in the door. She was born with a silver spoon in her mouth and probably had a golden cradle to go with it. Becoming a successful actress must have been easy —she stops her train of thought there.

She’s not being fair. She doesn’t know what her life was really like, and she knows a different
burden comes with having family in the business. But she can’t help but feel hurt by her words. Alex probably doesn’t even remember them, but Maggie has always had a visceral gut reaction to anyone who wasn’t okay with her sexuality, or thought less of it in general. She’s not sure if that’s Alex. She mentally shakes herself and tries to put her personal distaste about the situation behind her.

This is for her career, she can be professional.

She opens her mouth to speak, but Alex beats her to the punch.

“You wanted to talk about...?”

Maggie clears her throat. “The contract. So...you’re okay with it?”

Alex shrugs dismissively. “It’s a good way to get positive press for us both, and to promote the show too.”

Well. Her words don’t do anything to soothe the heavy weight in her chest. At least she doesn’t sound disgusted, Maggie guesses, but she doesn’t know if the clinical, practical coldness she’s met with is any better. Would it really be that easy for her to pretend to like women? To lie to everyone? Maybe Alex isn’t the person she thought she was.

“Um...What does your aunt think of this?” Alex asks. “Your parents?”

“My aunt doesn’t understand it, but she’ll support anything I’m okay with and that helps my career,” she tells her. “And I’m okay with this. I thought about it, about what it might mean for my personal life and my free time, but I am.”

Alex nods.

“I don’t know what to tell my family. It's embarrassing.”

Maggie bristles up.

“To pretend to be with a woman?”

Alex chokes on air. “No. No, no, no, absolutely not. I’m not —well, that’s just not it.” She trails off and gives Maggie an awkward smile. The woman doth protest too much, Maggie thinks.

“It’s just...to have to pretend to date someone to...” Alex waves her hand. “I think my manager called it ‘clean up my act.’” Alex huffs out an uncomfortable laugh. “It doesn’t feel good, that’s all. And it’s made me think of how I let my reputation get so bad in the first place but, but you don’t need to hear that.”

Maggie nods. “Sounds like we both have concerns about it.”

Alex looks at her.

“And yet we’re doing it, aren’t we?”

Maggie doesn’t know if Alex is hoping for her to say yes or no.

“We are,” she admits. “It’s...Anthony is convinced it’s going to be great for the show.”

“And the show is the most important thing, isn’t it?”
Maggie nods. “It is. For me, it is.”

“For me, too,” Alex is quick to say. “I know I haven’t even filmed yet but I’m thankful that I get to be Claire.”

Maggie looks at her, quietly assessing if she’s being honest. She hopes so.

But either way, she feels a wedge opening between the two of them, a chasm growing with every second they get closer to signing away a year of their lives for a lie—no matter how beneficial. Faking something was never going to be a conducive way to grow a real friendship.

She picks up her glass of water, and raises it towards Alex.

“To Nightingale,” she toasts. Alex raises her own bottle and softly knocks it with hers.

“To Nightingale.”

Alex wonders about which jeans to set away for the following morning, before remembering that it doesn’t matter much. As soon as she gets to set Hair and Makeup will take hold of her, and then she’ll be sent straight to Wardrobe.

It’s just, she wants to seem professional. There were some days in Body of Medicine when the only way she made it in time to set was going still wearing her cocktail dress from the night before and going barefoot, because she couldn’t handle the heels anymore, and she’s trying her hardest to forget that woman. The woman who slinked into her trailer at 5 AM and got out half an hour later, trying to pretend like she’d spent the night at home and not on one of her so-called-friend’s couches.

She settles on a pair of loose jeans and a t-shirt Kara bought her.

She’s too wired to sleep thinking about going back to work in the morning, so she decides to clean the apartment. It’s gotten surprisingly dirty for the short amount of time she’s been here, and Alex makes a promise to herself to stop abusing Uber Eats and actually going to a grocery store to buy food. There’s got to be some youtube tutorial she can follow. J’onn already bought her cutlery and ceramic plates.

She’s removing a package of Lays from the table when she notices a brown package that she doesn’t remember putting there.

It’s addressed to her, and she opens it quickly. Inside, she finds a copy of the July edition of Entertainment Weekly. She opens it, quickly finding the interview and photoshoot she did with Maggie. It’s not...ideal. She looks good in some pictures, but...ugh.

She dials J’onn’s number.
“Did you see the spread?” she asks.

“I did,” he tells her. “What do you think?”

“Who am I kicking?” she asks, sitting down on her couch. It’s the least of her problems, but she still has some pride left in her.

J’onn laughs. “That’s a great picture.”

“Maggie is there looking classy and I’m acting like a fucking weirdo,” she grumbles. And J’onn only chuckles again.

“The pictures are great,” he tells her. “Trust the photographer’s vision.”

Alex did that, back on the old mansion they were shooting at. And look where it got her.

“And the interviewer! The questions she asked...she might as well have called me Blake’s sidekick —”

“Alex—”

"I mean, that's all that I am, really-"

“It was a great interview, Alex,” J’onn cuts her off. And Alex takes a deep breath. J’onn is too polite for his own good, but he has certain tells, and cutting her off is one of them. He probably thinks Alex is being inconsiderate. And she probably is, considering three months ago not a single reputable magazine would have wanted to run a 6-page spread on her, unless it was to announce she was going to rehab. “I’ve got two magazines lined up, both wanting interviews with you.”

Alex picks at the threads on the couch.

“I bet they’ll ask Maggie what it feels like to work with a loser,” she mumbles under her breath.

“They asked for you only, actually,” J’onn tells her, thankfully ignoring her foray into being 12 years old again. “I told you this would be a good move for you.”

Alex sighs.

She knows J’onn is right, and she's being idiotic, but she's not used to...this. For all the faults Body of Medicine's writing team had, at least her character was consistently written to have her own story lines, to be the center of her own story. Claire Lawson is...a love interest. And sure, she'll have an episode or three focused on just her, but she's a supporting character in Blake's story. Alex is an afterthought to Maggie's moment in the limelight.

“I know you don’t like this, but it’ll be worth it in the long run,” J’onn tells her gently. “Just hang in there.”

Alex gets the feeling he isn’t talking about the photoshoot any longer.

“Ohkay,” she says quietly. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“Goodbye, Alex -wait, one last thing! Check your email. Anthony sent us some information about the contract.”

Alex swallows.
Suddenly, worrying about her first day back on set is so much more manageable than this. She
opens her email account on her cellphone, guessing that she can’t pretend it isn’t happening as long
as she doesn’t read it.

She’s in for a long day tomorrow, and a long year, period.

Anthony King
To: Alex & 3 more...

PROJECT GOLD/PLATINUM
DETAILS
July 21, 2018 at 7:28 AM

Good morning ladies and gentleman!

Exciting news, I’ve got my lawyer drawing up a very mutually beneficial contract for our agreement. Been thinking of calling it project gold or maybe project platinum? Just so we can discuss it in public if needed without the sheeple knowing.

But anyways, the paper contract should be arriving at Maggie and Alex’s apartments in a few days. It’ll fully outline the finer points of the agreement including the timeline, appearances, and yada,
yada, yada.

In the meantime, I’d suggest Maggie and Alex get a headstart on building the relationship. A picture or two here and there on social media, super easy to do. And if fans are on set make sure to act happy and friendly with each other.

This is gonna be GREAT for us, my gut never lies.

King

“Action!”

Blake has always loved late night stakeouts in the police car—making her an oddity amongst her fellow detectives—but she hates them with company.

The moonlight weakly filters through the darkly tinted car windows as Blake keeps her eyes glued toward the warehouse their suspect should be entering, assuming he shows up.

The car starts shaking.

Blake startles, the movement shaking her out of her concentration, until she realizes the cause.

It’s Claire, bouncing her left leg like the fucking energizer bunny. Too lazy to actually say something (and not wanting Claire to think she’s trying to initiate a conversation), she settles for
glaring at the offending limb.

“Sorry, I fidget when I’m bored,” Claire says. She stops, but Blake notices she starts tapping her fingers against her leg. “It’s a bad habit of mine. I’m convinced I have restless leg syndrome, but I haven’t gotten an official diagnosis of it yet.”

“Mhm.” Blake hopes her non response will stop any forthcoming words coming from Claire.

It does not.

“So your source, how reliable is he?”

It’s not that Claire doesn’t trust Blake, it just that she’s gotten the impression she doesn’t always mix with...the most reliable crowd. And she really doesn’t want to sit in complete uncomfortable silence waiting for someone who might not even show. Of course she doesn’t voice that to her partner, however, she’s not stupid. And Blake glares at her enough as it is.

“I don’t mind waiting, but wasn’t the guy supposed to show up 15 minutes ago?”

“He’s good, our guy will show up, just wait.” He might not, Blake knows, but she doesn’t want to give this rookie the satisfaction of telling her that. “It’s not like criminals are known for their punctuality anyways.”

“Except for some serial killers, you know, as part of their pattern,” Claire pipes in. “At the academy we read about one guy who always killed his victims at 6:66 pm. He was a big Satan worshiper. Pretty interesting case actually.”

Blake casts her eyes upwards. “I’m on the edge of my seat in fasc-“ Wait. She shifts her body away from the window to face Claire. “Did he kill his victims on February 30th too?”

Claire hums and smiles, “Just seeing if you were paying attention.”

Blake grunts and turns back to the window. Claire meanwhile continues speaking, obviously uncaring of whether her partner is responsive or not.

“The Satan worshiper part was false too, we didn’t specifically study serial killers at the academy—as I’m sure you’re aware—but I looked into it myself. I figured I should prepare myself for when I became a detective.”

Blake is mildly surprised at Claire’s unwavering voice upon declaring her belief she would inevitably end up here, as a detective, as if it was her destiny.

“Sorry to disappoint,” Blake cracks her fingers and blinks furiously to dispel the dry stinging of her eyes, “but the percentage of serial killer cases that comes across our desks is pretty low, single digits.”

She shouldn’t be surprised Claire is so confident. The girl is clearly determined and smart. She knows she shouldn’t underestimate her just because she skipped a couple of years on her way to becoming detective.

Blake knows from experience underestimation can get you killed.

“I know, but you also had that Peter Doderick case,” Claire pauses to think, her nose scrunching up. “Three months ago?”
She cautiously looks over at Blake to gauge her reaction. She knows the case by heart and followed it closely after seeing the news report of a grizzly mother-child double murder. The brutality and sickness of Doderick and the skilled work of the investigative team—headed by one NYPD Detective Blake Davenport—on the case was a mimic of the mystery novels she grew up reading, down to the messy, bloody end, with Doderick dying at the hands of the woman sitting beside her.

Blake gives up the pretense of watching for their suspect. She’s starting to think Claire’s doubts about him not showing were, unfortunately, true. She turns her full attention to Claire.

“You’re terrible at this. I shudder to think of watching you trying to get information out of a suspect.”

“I-I do fine thank you very much,” Claire huffs out, crossing her arms. She should’ve known she couldn’t pull one over the steely Blake Davenport, she’s not known as the best detective in the 6th for nothing. It was stupid to even try and now she’s been caught in the act and is left feeling foolish—something she positively hates. She was top of her class since kindergarten. She’s always been as close to perfect as she can get. With the type of parents she had, she had to be.

What she’s feeling now isn’t far off from what she felt growing up, when she’d confidently spout out an interesting fact (found the night before solely to impress her parents) and seconds later be informed by them that she was wrong, and if she wasn’t absolutely sure she knew she was right she shouldn’t bother speaking at all—that one day it would get her in trouble.

She hates it.

“If you’re done sulking, I could tell you what you did wrong.” Blake is smiling now, her first of the night. “Your body language gave you away. You try too hard to be nonchalant, and you slightly raise your right eyebrow when lying. That’s a pretty obvious tell you should work on.”

It’s really quite amusing to see Claire’s reaction to her words—she’s an expressive person, another thing she should work on—and Blake can tell she’s not one to take criticism, even constructive criticism, well. She might as well have some more fun with her.

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“Also I talked to your last superior officer while you were at lunch, and when I introduced myself he mentioned your obsession, his words not mine, with the Doderick case.”

Claire whips her head around. “So that’s how you knew I was fishing for information, not because of my,” she exaggerates the words, “body language.”

“Nah, I would’ve deduced it either way, it is my jo-“ she suddenly goes quiet, her entire body stilling. Claire’s mouth moves to start speaking, but a finger is slapped across it. She follows Blake’s small head jerk toward the warehouse and sees a figure hurriedly walking toward it.

After the man is almost inside the building, Blake slowly removes her thumb from Claire’s mouth, and opens her door, indicating for Claire to follow.

“Cut!”
Alex walks back to her trailer after briefly saying goodbye to the director.

Maggie stayed by his side, animatedly talking to him about who knows what. They must have known each other from the first season, Alex doesn’t know. What she does know is she wasn’t invited to stick around. She is very much the new kid here, and she feels it.

She only really saw Maggie during their scene, since she started her day earlier and Alex spent a good while in makeup, so she doesn’t really...know anyone. And knowing people isn’t her forte when she’s sober.

And she’s really sober, she can feel that, too.

She can’t wait to get home and run herself a bath and drink a good glass of scotch. Her first day didn’t go badly, the opposite of it, really. She had the one scene with Maggie, and they only did it maybe a dozen times even with the angle changes. It’s nothing like the hours she used to pull before, but it’s been a while since she’s worked. She’d almost forgotten how it felt.

She remembered it at once when the director yelled ‘Action’, and then she wasn’t Alex anymore but Claire. Getting into character always came easily to her.

It felt like walking inside her childhood home and seeing everything was still where she’d left it. Alex knows J’onn made the right call encouraging her to be here, even with the...complications. (She tried very hard not to think about her and Maggie’s ‘relationship’, and the ‘timeline’ their teams had come up with for them to act out.) She loves being on set again. She’s missed it. And she’s aware it’s her fault she didn’t do it for so long, but she doesn’t feel as raw as she did back then. Alex isn’t about to ruin this.

She hadn’t realized how much she needed to work to feel grounded until today. Going to the table read had been fine, and the wardrobe tests, makeup...it was what she knew and like riding a bike, impossible to forget.

Even cutting her hair so short for the role had been almost...freeing.

But being on set and feeling the blood rush through her veins as she waited for the director to yell ‘Action’. J’onn was right, Alex needs this. And so far she’s done a good job.

Her only moment of trepidation had been when Maggie laid her thumb across her mouth, and Alex couldn’t be faulted for that. It’s just nobody has...touched her in awhile. J’onn had hugged a couple of days ago, and her mom when she last visited, but Alex isn’t...she’s not close to people. It startled her enough the first time Maggie laid her thumb over her lips that she stumbled over her line and the director had to yell cut.

She got used to it after the third time, and she barely registered it by the last time they re-did the take, but it had only brought to the forefront of Alex’s mind how...alone she is. Her so called friends are a shit show even worse than she is, she hasn’t kept in touch with anyone from Body of Medicine apart from flimsy likes on twitter, and even her own sister was shining too brightly to be concerned with her.

It’s not about sex, she’s long accepted she’s not...built for that, she hasn’t found the right guy yet, but it puts everything in perspective when she thinks about the makeup lady this morning and Maggie being the only people to touch her face this year, and it’s fucking July.
She’s almost at her trailer when she passes Maggie’s, and her door is open wide, even as Alex tries not to shiver from the chill of a late New York City evening.

She seemed too normal for an actress, of course she’d be insane.

Alex can’t not peek inside—it’s Maggie’s own fault, really, for not closing her door—and she sees Maggie is on her cell phone, apparently talking to someone. Alex doesn’t want to intrude, her mind immediately jumping to her talking to a girlfriend or someone like that, and she starts to walk away.

She definitely doesn’t need to hear that.

“Alex, wait!” Maggie calls out, after noticing her figure outside her trailer. Maggie looks up, and sees Alex has turned back.

“And speaking of the devil…” She catches Alex’s eye over her cellphone, and sees her shaking her head a second too late because she’s already turned the camera on her. Alex plasters a painful looking smile on her face.

“Hey,” she mutters, waving her hand to the camera.

Maggie quickly turns her cellphone back around.

“We’re all tired here after a long day,” she says, trying to excuse Alex’s behavior—or lack thereof. “We’ve been working really hard to bring you all the best episodes we can. All we do here is for you guys.”

She smiles, and watches as heart after heart flutters upwards in her screen. Messages go by almost too fast for her to keep up. Most of them ask for only one thing though: to get Alex on camera again. Bring Alex into the live stream, tell Alex this or that. But a quick look at her co-star lets her know Alex is certainly not up for it.

“I loved chatting with you guys, but I have to go,” she says, and she’s immediately flooded with messages of protest. “Alex and I are actually gearing up to film later,” she lies. “Day’s not over yet! I have to -I have to go, I’m sorry. I’ll talk to you guys soon! Bye! Love you.” She blows a kiss to the camera. “Bye, bye, bye, bye!” she repeats quickly as she closes the app.

She looks up at Alex, still awkwardly standing outside her trailer.

“Look alive, Danvers.”

Alex gives her a look.

“Following the ‘suggestions’?” Alex asks—though it sounds like an accusation to Maggie. She lets it go.

“Kind of,” she replies, shrugging. She probably would’ve invited Alex into her livestream even if
she wasn’t supposed to be her future fake girlfriend. Maybe. That smile was pretty painful looking.
“I would’ve done this anyway. Talking to the fans is the best part of this whole thing.”

The grimace that shows on Alex’s face tells Maggie that she doesn’t share the sentiment.

“Don’t like fans?” she asks, slightly disappointed.

She knows she doesn’t know Alex yet, but everything she seems to find out about her leaves her feeling dejected. Maggie loves what she does, she’d do it even if everyone hated her, but the best part of her day really is reading the sweet messages the fans send her, looking at the pictures of people who swear she’s changed their lives.

Maggie doesn’t understand how someone doesn’t appreciate that.

“It’s not that,” Alex says. “It’s just...it can get intense.”

The woman looks slightly uncomfortable, as she always tends to do, Maggie’s figured out, and she nods.

“It can,” she admits. It’s never all fun and games. There are creepy fans, because there are creepy people, and then there are the really terrible moments where someone says they’re going to hurt herself if she doesn’t pay attention to them on social media. She had a hard time with that when she started, but M’gann coached her through it like she did with so many other things, and those instances are few and far between anyways. The sweet kids and the moms on Facebook far outnumber the people sending her mindless hate or begging for nudes.

She tries not to judge Alex too harshly. Maybe she hasn’t had it like Maggie has.

She grew up in the business, Maggie remembers, her dad was Jeremiah Danvers. His films were before her time, she didn’t get a lot of time to go the movie theater in the middle of Nowhere, Nebraska, but it can’t have been easy for Alex as a kid.

“And yet you still like...all this,” Alex says.

"You just gotta know how to handle them, I guess. Most people mean well. And," she shrugs, "it can be fun too."

Alex looks doubtful. Maggie smiles.

“I’ll show you.” She brings her cell phone back to life.

“Let’s take a selfie?”

Alex stares at Maggie’s cellphone as though it could actually burn her.

“I don’t bite,” Maggie tells her patting the seat beside her, and Alex sits down, feeling her face heat
up. This is Kara’s thing. It’s not her thing. She used to have her assistant for this, to keep her social media accounts active, but ever since she quit Alex doesn’t think she’s taken a single picture. What’s the point of documenting her life falling apart?

She should see about hiring someone again.

Maggie sidles up to her, their thighs touching, and then she throws her arm around Alex and squishes herself against her, her soft cheek against Alex’s own. Everything she’d been thinking about not being touched goes up in flames in her brain. The woman at her side definitely isn’t shy.

It takes Maggie telling her to smile for the camera for Alex to shake the surprise off and do it.

She’s so close to Maggie. She wishes it didn’t make her as uncomfortable as it does, but she feels pins and needles all over her skin. She’s careful not to touch her, her hands firmly on top of her own thighs, but that’s not enough for her not to feel like she’s drowning in Maggie. She hates it. She can feel the heat radiating off her skin and smell her perfume. Or is that her lip gloss? Is that what her lips—

“All done.” Maggie scoots away, and Alex feels the chill on her side. But that’s just because her nutcase of a co-star has her door open. “This one looks good. You approve?”

The makeup trailer must have some good stuff, because Alex doesn’t look nearly as tired as she feels.

"Yeah."

“No...a caption,” Maggie says. She types away on her cellphone, and though she knows there’s only two years between them, Alex certainly feels like the oldest person in the room. She doesn’t understand Maggie’s love for interacting with all those people.

Her dislike of her love interest on Body of Medicine—a bland man who acted as well as a sack of manure—was only rivaled by her dislike of their fans. An alarming number of them wanted the two of them to hook up in real life—shipped them, it was called—even though the actor was happily married with two kids. She had to stop including him in set pictures for fear of the fans spamming her comments with their delusions.

She only had a taste of it when they announced her casting, but it feels different with Maggie already. They’re actually trying to get people to ship them now, for one thing. Which bothers her too, in a different way. Back in Body of Medicine she was just trying to do her job, and more often than not it felt like people only cared about her or her acting in the context of who her character—and her—were dating. She doesn’t want this to be the same, but it’s going to be, it’s what she signed up for and she knows it.

“A few hearts...And those are part of Anthony’s ‘suggestions’ as you so aptly called them.” Maggie holds up her phone for her to see. “All good?”

Alex nods. Maggie presses the share button.

Alex springs out of the couch as soon as it’s done.

“I should go. I think makeup wants me. I mean, wardrobe. For me to return this.”

Maggie eyes her in a way Alex isn’t sure she likes.

“Sure. See you around, Danvers.”
Maggie watches as Alex leaves her trailer like there’s a fire under her ass.

She assumed from their previous talk that Alex was okay with their PR deal—enthusiastic about it, actually—but her behavior now causes a seed of doubt to grow in Maggie’s mind. If she’s being honest with herself, she knows the doubt was there even before this.

Alex isn’t comfortable around her.

It’s been obvious since day one—though there was that moment after the helicopter ride where she thought she’d gotten through, that they’d gotten over whatever initial awkwardness they’d had and gotten well on their way to becoming friends...but that was before everything. Before the contract and Anthony’s suggestions and the reality of what they’ll be acting out for the world to see in a few weeks time.

She can’t quiet the whisper in her mind saying Alex is uncomfortable because she doesn’t like women who like other women.

It’s not that Alex has been overtly homophobic at all, but she’s spent enough time in Hollywood - hell, she’s lived long enough to know most individuals display their dislike of gay people in more subtle ways. The way people’s smiles turn brittle when she informs them that no she isn’t scouting the room for men because she’s a lesbian. The quick shift in conversation that always comes after that. Because sure, people are fine with her sexuality just so long as they’re not confronted with it and can continue living in their ignorant, heterosexual bubble.

Alex could very well be one of those people. And she is the woman she’s agreed to pretend to date for a whole year. Great.

She wonders if Alex would’ve acted the same when Blake and Claire got closer, or if she would’ve been okay with it as long as it was fictional.

Maggie sighs.

Maybe she’s judging Alex too harshly. She could just be uncomfortable because she’s a straight woman pretending to be gay for her career. That option is marginally better, barely.

What a fucking joke.

If someone had told her 5 years ago a straight actress would be pretending to be gay to help her career, and not the other way around, she would’ve laughed them out of the room. It could almost be a twisted display of how their society has progressed, she thinks darkly. Almost.

It isn’t fair.

Here is this privileged straight girl with a bad record trying to clean up her act by using her to pretend she’s gay or bisexual or whatever—Anthony didn’t go over the finite details in that regard,
he told them Alex would never label herself so it didn’t matter—for the cameras.

It took years for Maggie to be taken seriously as a lesbian actress. For people to look past her sexuality and see her talent and hard work. She had to put up with the thinly veiled bigotry from people in the industry, the inane questions about what it’s like to be a lesbian, and the people who expected her to educate them on all LGBT issues as if she was the spokesperson for a whole community of people.

On top of all that, she had to carefully self monitor her behavior for fear that a screw up could negatively affect any other gay actor trying to make it because some people would paint an entire minority with the same brush stroke.

She put up with a lot of shit to be where she is now. And Alex is just pretending to like women, to like her, for a contract.

It makes her skin crawl.

Maggie knows she signed the contract too, and any moral high ground she has is practically non existent.

But at least she’s not pretending to be someone she’s not.

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It’s cool and dark in her trailer, the only light visible coming through from the cracks of the window blinds.

Alex idly watches the interplay between the light and darkness from her prone position on the couch. She’d wanted to take a short nap, since the driver J’onn arranged is supposed to pick her up in an hour. It had seemed like a solid plan.

If only her brain would let her.

It’s just. *Fuck.* Why does being around Maggie turn her into such an idiot? And based off the departing look the woman gave her, she’d noticed it, too. How...weird Alex had been in her trailer. She didn’t mean to act that way, but it seemed to be a side effect of being close to the woman, and thinking about all the scenes they had yet to act out together—both in front of the camera and in their lives.

She pulls out her cellphone to distract her from her thoughts. There’s a message from J’onn from a couple of hours ago, wishing her good luck on her first day, and she answers him with a quick thanks. There’s a few other messages, but she doesn’t have their numbers saved, so she blocks them, one by one.

When she’s done, she notices she has a voicemail from Kara.

“Hey Alex!” Alex winces at Kara’s perky, loud ‘it’s morning!’ voice and turns her volume down.
“Congratulations on your first day of filming! I hope you’re having fun. I’m so excited for you, oh my gosh, this is like, amazing. It’s your first day of filming, and it’s almost my last day of filming. Ugh, it was so hot today you wouldn’t believe it. I had to get my makeup retouched every 30 minutes because I was sweating it off! Other than that though, my week has been pretty great. Mon-El and I went to the art museum close by and he held the door open for me on the way in.” Her voice get dreamy, and Alex frowns. “He’s such a gentleman. And then the next day production got a free ice cream truck on set and...“

Alex listens to her sister drag on about how Mon-El brought her ice cream without her asking, and she wonders why her sister’s standards are on the floor. Not like she was a great example when they were growing up, Alex has often been accused of having unrealistically high standards, but at least it’s better than getting excited over ice cream, and a free one at that.

“Anyway, I hope you call me soon! I love you! Bye!”

She’s about to put away her phone when a new text comes in. It’s her mom. Better late than never, Alex guesses, frowning, and gears up to see whatever she wrote.

She reads the first text, and the frown dissipates. Alex smiles. She feels as pleased as she did back in school, when her main concern was getting her parents to be proud of her. Her smile disappears as one last text comes in, however.
She closes the app.

She wishes she could blame her mother for the way her mood drops, but deep down she knows she deserves the reminder. If she hadn’t gotten fired from *Body of Medicine*, her mom wouldn’t feel like she needs reminders to keep her shit together.

Alex sighs as she sits up.

If she was honest with herself, it went back much further. She was losing it when she was in college. She’d thought it would stop after she returned to acting, after she started doing what she really wanted to, but it hadn’t. It’d only slowed down.

*On Body of Medicine* ... She was fine that first season. She really was. And it didn't matter much during breaks. But things got worse. Everything with her mom, everything about her dad, things with Kara, and...what she hates thinking about, but now has to every single day. She couldn't handle it.
Can she even handle this?

Thankfully, a knock on her trailer door with a “your car is here, miss Danvers” accompanying it stops her inner spiral. So much for her nap. Her body protests as she gets up from the couch and stretches, back cracking ominously.

She’s exhausted, but in a good way. In a ‘I’ve done something productive and it tired me out’ way. These past few years she’s grown accustomed to a different kind of exhaustion, the one caused by too many late nights out and excessive alcohol. Today is a nice change.

She’s making her way to the parking lot when she sees Maggie strolling her way, wearing a jacket Alex knows is the wrong side of a thousand dollars worth of leather. She had considered buying it online herself the other day, and had quickly given up on it. Her inheritance wasn’t going to last forever.

Maggie has her headphones in, looking at her phone while she walks, and Alex isn’t sure whether she should greet her or just stay quiet. She settles for giving her a faint half wave. A perfectly polite, non verbal, casual acknowledgment she sees her. She’s not sure if Maggie notices, until a second later when the woman looks up. She stares at Alex for a second, before acknowledging her with a short, curt nod. She turns toward a bike -and of course, the Triumph Bonneville T100 she was admiring earlier had to be Maggie Sawyer’s ride.

Thank fuck she’s not taking Uber anymore. She couldn’t handle the embarrassment of a fucking mini sedan pulling up alongside Maggie’s motorcycle.

If she only had her Ducati, which she knows for a fact is bigger and simply better than a Triumph, it’d be different, but alas.

Her driver pulls in a few moments after Maggie leaves. She settles into the back seat before the driver even has time to get out and open the door for her.

Maggie’s behavior in the parking lot took her aback. Maybe it was just in her head, but Maggie had been...cold. She probably was tired after a long day, but Alex can’t shake the feeling that she did something wrong to deserve that look. Maggie has been nothing but friendly since they met, even though, Alex will admit, she hasn’t reciprocated. Had she already screwed up another relationship in her life? And she wasn’t even drunk. It’s only been a couple of months since she’s known her too, and within that time they’d only talked a few times, Jesus.

She can’t afford to have the star of the show and her soon-to-be fake...dating partner—she can't even think the G word—hate her. That’s not acceptable, but she can fix this, and she will. She’ll be professional and friendly all the time. Well, maybe not friendly all the time—Alex still hasn’t gotten the hang of talking to people without the influence of controlled substances—but definitely professional.

She needs this job. It’s quite literally her last chance to pull herself out of the abyss she's fallen in, and she can’t mess it up. So she’ll go to the cast parties, interact with fans on twitter (she makes a mental note to hire a new social media person ASAP), and post her own selfies and maybe even do that live streaming thing Maggie was doing on the Instagram.

Starting right now.

She grabs her cellphone and takes Claire’s NYPD badge from her pocket, which she only realized she accidentally kept after she was in the parking lot.
Maggie was right about one thing, this is part of the job.

It might not be the best part for her, but if she wants to get back to where she was it’s as much a requirement as showing up on time and memorizing her lines. She snaps a photo.

She can handle this, of course she can.

She expects it all weekend.

She doesn’t have plans, and Gabriella is spending the weekend at the restaurant’s new location,
overseeing them taking down a wall to open up more space, so she has nothing to do but stay home and wait.

Maggie remembers back when there was no regular mail on Sunday, but she thinks even if it had been Christmas and the Apocalypse on the same day, Anthony would still have found a way to get the contract to her.

She tries yoga, and when her mind wanders too much for her to focus on her breathing, she gives up and puts on something mind numbing on Netflix while she makes dinner. The contract and Alex aren’t the only things on her mind.

She’s been here before.

It doesn’t bring her good memories.

She’d been young and dumb and made a really idiotic mistake, and in the world of Hollywood and public image a PR contract concerning her romantic relationship had been the only way to get out of it. It’s different now. She has a choice. And she’s choosing to put herself through it all over again, for much longer than last time.

She wonders if it’s right. What happened with Emily wasn’t, but in this case, Alex is okay with it. Enthusiastic even. And they won’t be hurting anyone. But...just the thought of Alex pretending to like women for the cameras, and using her to fix her image—whether it helps her career and show or not—still makes her uneasy.

But then she can’t worry about it anymore, because someone knocks on her door a quarter to 5, and her copy of the contract is here, waiting for her signature.

She signs it before she can spend more time ruminating over it.

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It arrives early Sunday morning.

Alex got a heads up from J’onn the day before, telling her that he received it Saturday night back in LA, and it should be getting to her soon, but he refuses Alex’s request to take a picture of it and send it to her. Something about it not being safe.

Alex wonders if he’s simply testing her patience.

But it does arrive, after all, and she munches on a piece of reheated pizza—taking sips of coffee in between—while she reads it. It makes everything more solid, more real. She leaves her coffee on the table when she gets a call from her landline, and it’s a voice she doesn’t expect to hear—that she’s never heard before, actually.

“Miss Danvers?”
“Yes, this is she.”

“This is your landlord. A Miss Kara Danvers is requesting to park in your space.”

Alex swallows. Kara is supposed to be in Canada.

She clears her throat.

“Yes. She’s my sister.”

“I’ll send her up, then,” the man on the phone says, and Alex closes the call before he’s even done talking. She looks around her apartment, and only spots two bottles of beer and a empty can of Pringles, and she’s quick to grab those and throw them away. Two bottles is hardly reason for an intervention, but Kara talks to their mother more than Alex would like her to.

The only thing out of place in the spotless apartment is her lunch, and the contract currently open on her coffee table. She sits down, intent on hiding it until she can tell Kara about it—she’s been dreading the conversation ever since she agreed to this, and putting it off, too—and finds the third page has been stained with the bottom of her coffee cup. Fuck. She tries to dab it dry with her sweater, but the white paper is marred by the brown of her cappuccino.

And Kara is coming up.

Alex thought she had more time.

She swears to God she hears the elevator stop on her floor, and she can’t wonder too much about it because then there’s an energetic rapping on her door. She shoves the contract behind a cushion. She straightens up and takes a breath before she goes to answer it.

Her sister’s bright face fills the doorway.

“Alex!”

“Hey! What are you doing here?”

“What am I doing here? I came to visit you, silly.” Kara hugs her. Alex returns it with a tight squeeze for a few seconds before she maneuvers out of it. She stares at Kara in the doorway, and Kara stares back at her.

“I’m- I’m sorry. Come in.” She grabs Kara’s yellow duffel bag, and leads the way inside. “I thought...I thought you were filming,” she mentions, as nonchalantly as she can.

“I was. I am,” Kara says, looking around her apartment. “My last day is on Tuesday. But I’m waiting for Mon-El to be done so we’re going back to LA on Friday.”

“Right. How’s that going?” she asks.

“Good! Better than ever. He’s a real gentleman.” Kara beams.

Alex keeps her thoughts to herself. She’s only met the guy twice, and only once when he was officially Kara’s boyfriend. She doesn’t really like him. Then again, she hardly thinks there’s anyone good enough for Kara. Her sister is too naive and trusting for her own good.

“So! What have you been up to?” Kara asks, plopping down on her couch. “You have a fireplace! I love this place already.”
Alex smiles. She wore an expression not unlike this one when Alex first gave her a tour of their childhood home, and opened the door to their backyard—the spiraling beaches of Malibu.

“Nothing much.” She shrugs. "Just some wardrobe tests, a few scenes and stuff. You know.”

“Right. So what have you filmed so far? Anything good?”

“Just some stuff at the precinct.”

Kara gives her a look, the same look she gave her when they were younger and she’d just gotten into a fight with Vicky, or had been hiding something from their mother.

“Is something wrong, Alex?” Kara asks, and Alex winces. She’d been expecting those types of questions, but not so soon.

“I have work tomorrow, you know,” she says, hoping to stave it off. “I can’t hang out all day with you.”

“I know, silly. I can drop you off on my way to the airport, my flight leaves in the morning.”

Alex looks at her sister, her bright hair and even sunnier disposition almost seeming out of place in the apartment. They'd given her hair yet more highlights for this film, and she’d gone from the dark blonde, almost brown hair she’d had when they were younger, to the kind of blonde Alex rolled her eyes at. At least she could pull it off. Alex had tried, and she hadn't been able to.

“So you made it all this way, for one day?”


Alex looks at the floor, guilt spreading through her. She should've been happier to see her.

“Oh, come here!” Kara exclaims. "Get in here." And then her arms are around Alex and she’s crushing her with one of her bear hugs. Alex breathes in the comfort, she and Kara have their differences, but they’re sisters, and she appreciates her support, even if she doesn't know what's wrong yet. Even in her worst moments as a teenager, when she wished they'd never adopted her, Alex had always known this was a feeling you couldn't replicate.

“Now...will you tell me what’s going on?” Kara asks.

Alex sighs.

“Anthony King...” she mentions the name she’s come to dislike. “My new boss.”

“Right...?”

“He wants me to sign a PR contract.”

“Well that’s standard, isn't it?” Kara asks. “Do you have to be super active on Instagram? I can see why you’d hate that.”

“Not just a PR contract, a PR relationship...contract.”

"Oh.” Kara says. “...with who?”

Alex swallows down the turmoil making a wreck of her stomach, and keeps her eyes trained on the coffee table, too much of a coward to face Kara’s reaction.
“Maggie.”

Kara bursts out laughing. Alex looks up only to meet her sister’s face, head thrown back and eyes closed as she laughs. Her stomach sinks.

Her sister looks at her, and the mirth goes out of her.

“Wait, you’re serious?”

Alex nods.

“Oh my God, Alex...I’m sorry, I….but you’re not gay!” She flinches. “Why would he want you to pretend -and what does Maggie think? Are you doing it? And J’onn!”

“One thing at a time, okay?” She asks, and Kara nods, sidling up to Alex, their knees bumping together on the couch. “Um...King thinks it’s going to help the show stay number one on the network. And J’onn thinks it’s going to look good for me to…” She clears her throat. “To date Maggie. That it’s going to bring in good press. And Maggie is okay with whatever helps the show.”

“You sound like...like you’re doing it.” Kara frowns.

Alex nods. “I am.”

“Why didn’t you tell me before?” Kara asks, her voice hurt. “We could’ve talked before you chose. I mean…”

“You were away, filming,” Alex tells her. “And I didn’t wanna bother you with my stuff.”

“You’re my sister, Alex!” Kara admonishes. “And this is...this is huge.”

Alex nods. She thinks she hasn’t fully grasped just how huge it is until now, as she tells her sister. Everyone is going to believe what they’re selling. The second cousins she never talks to, her friends from middle school, her fucking college professors.

“I know,” she says, and she hates the way her voice goes thin, like she’s a step away from tears. It’s ridiculous.

“Isn’t it weird, for you?” Kara asks. “That she’s a girl. I mean, everyone’s going to think you like girls now.”

Alex winces, as a weight drops in her stomach.

“J’onn said it’s worth it.” She sighs. “Do you think it’s crazy?”

Kara bites her lip. “I mean...No. Mon-el and I would’ve done it if we hadn’t started dating for real. It was going to look good for when we tried to promote the movie. People do it all the time.”

“And that’s crazy,” Alex points out. Kara shrugs. Alex thinks it’s funny, in a way. How she’d been the one to grow up in showbiz, to have been raised by a film director, and yet she’d never quite grasped how to handle the business. Kara...Kara was a natural, even if she’d only been with them for much less time.

“It’s just too bad she’s not a guy,” Kara says. Alex swallows, her throat feeling dry. Almost like it’s closing up. “I mean, you could’ve been like me and Mon-El.”
“Right,” Alex says. Her stomach roils. There aren’t enough words in the world to explain how much she doesn’t want to be with someone like him. Kara gives her a look.

“When are you going to tell mom?”

Alex groans. She lets her head fall back against the couch, and Kara pokes her on the side.

“She’s going to be upset you didn’t tell her sooner.”

“Can you?”

“Can I, what?”

Alex sits up. “Can you tell her?”

“Alex…”

“Be a good sister.”

Kara narrows her eyes. “That’s a low blow.”

“I could just have J’onn tell her, but I’d prefer it if it was you.”

“She should hear about this from you,” Kara insists, and Alex shakes her head. “Or you could not tell her,” Kara suggests. “And let her think you’re dating Maggie.” Kara snorts as she chuckles, but all Alex can muster is a small, uncomfortable laugh.

“I was actually, uh…reading the contract, before you showed up.”

“Oh my gosh, show me!” Kara exclaims, and Alex files away her request, intent on getting her to agree before she boards her plane back to Vancouver tomorrow. She’s not avoiding her mother. She’s…delegating.

After all, she’s a busy woman these days.

She sits down with the contract next to Kara, and they read it all over again together. Her sister graciously doesn’t mention the coffee stain. Alex gets to really think about the terms these time, as she and Kara discuss them out loud, and it sounds both more intimidating and less scary than before.

Alex has always been a logical person. Things lose their power over her once they’re laid out in the open and explained with clinical accuracy.

She can’t talk about the relationship with anyone not in her inner circle, not that she’d want to in the first place. Pretending to date someone is mortifying and that’s saying a lot when she was photographed drunk at a Starbucks once. She has to be photographed on dates with Maggie, she has to—ugh—use social media. All in all, it doesn’t seem as bad as she thought it might.

There’s only one thing she doesn’t get - why Maggie’s parents aren’t mentioned in the contract.
The sun is bright and high up in the sky the following morning

She says goodbye to Kara at the door of the studio with a hug, and kisses on both cheeks. Kara
laughs, saying she is French after all, and they part ways with a smile—and the understanding that
Kara will do Alex a solid and tell their mother about the contract, and prep her for Alex to talk to.

She wishes the thought of talking to her mom about the contract was all that has her nervous this
morning, but she can’t stop thinking about a particular point of their contract she noticed yesterday,
specifically, who was missing from it.

If Maggie’s parents can’t know about them—will they think she’s dating Alex for real? What if
they visit set? What is she supposed to do then, pretend she’s actually with her? Kiss her in front of
them? It’s one thing to act in front of cameras, and even in front of paparazzi, but quite another to
lie to people to their face.

Why wouldn’t Maggie include her parents? Alex briefly runs over options while she walks to craft
services. Maybe they’re old and senile, and they might tell people if they knew. Fuck, that’s even
worse. Alex can’t lie to old people.

She catches sight of Maggie sitting in one of the white plastic picnic tables under the tent, a bowl
of what looks like salad in front of her.

Alex takes a breath and marches her way.

“Maggie,” she says.

“Alcott,” Maggie greets her. Alex frowns. She thinks the last time she heard that name she must
have been 12.

“Were you snooping around on my Wikipedia page?” She asks Maggie as she sits down across
from her. Maggie snorts.

“No, did you forget I signed a legal contract that you were a part of?”

Alex sighs.

“It was after Mary Louise Alcott,” she tells Maggie, coming clean about the reason for one of her
awful middle names. “My mom’s a fan.”

Maggie smiles, and the dimples Alex hasn’t seen in days make an appearance.

“That’s cute, Danvers,” she says. “What’s the Irene for?”

Alex internally groans.

“Irene Curie. Died of radiation poisoning,” she says. Kara is so thankful their mother didn’t get to
name her. “Any other questions?” she asks Maggie.

Maggie raises her hands, palms up. Alex doesn’t believe for a second she comes in peace.

“What’s the Ellen for?” Alex retaliates, remembering Maggie’s middle name.

Maggie chuckles. “Nothing, my parents just had bad taste.”

Alex laughs. It’s such a Maggie answer -and isn’t that something, that she’s known her for just
enough to be able to deduce what she’d say.
She quickly remembers the task at hand and becomes serious once again.

“I, uh...I actually wanted to ask you something. About the contract.” Maggie looks up at her. “I noticed only Gabriella was mentioned from your family. Do your parents... I guess what I’m asking is: are your parents not gonna be in the loop? Are they going to think our...that we-?”

“Of course they’re gonna be in the loop, Danvers,” she says flippantly, and Alex heaves out a sigh. “They just -they live in rural Nebraska. It doesn’t matter if they’re in the contract or not.”

“Oh.” She breathes easier, and suddenly feels dumb. Of course her parents are going to know. Plus, Maggie’s worked with Anthony for years, of course she gets to avoid bothering her parents with non-disclosure agreements. “Right. Okay. Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.”

The sign each other’s copies of the contract later that day, at the New York office of King’s attorney. And all that’s left for Alex to do is wait for it to go into effect.
Performance Relationship Agreement

THIS PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP AGREEMENT is made on July 27th, 2018 and between Margaret Ellen Sawyer, Alexandra Irène Alcott Valois Danvers, and King Productions.

Explanatory Statement

The parties of Margaret Ellen Sawyer and Alexandra Irène Alcott Valois Danvers (identified as Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers hereafter) agree to enter into a performance relationship managed by King Productions, which will have control over all aspects of the performance relationship (identified as Relationship hereafter). The Relationship shall be understood by all parties as romantic in nature.

NOW THEREFORE, in consideration of their mutual promises, covenants, and agreements, and the Explanatory Statement, the parties hereto do hereby promise, covenant and agree as follows:

Section 2. Term

2.1 The Relationship shall commence upon the date of October 11, 2018 and terminate on October 11, 2019. No allowances will be accepted to delay the termination of the Relationship.

Section 3. Purpose

3.1 The purpose of the Relationship is to promote the ABC Television Show Nightingale (2017) and the careers of Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers.

Section 4. Management of the Relationship

4.1 All decisions respecting the management, operation, and control of the Relationship will be made by King Productions. King Productions has the full responsibility of semenating the promotion of the Relationship to the public through various forms of media.
Section 5. Conduct during the Relationship

5.1 The parties of Maggie Sawyer, Alex Danvers, and King Productions shall devote much of their respective time as is reasonably necessary for maintenance of the Relationship. A significant amount of time promoting the Relationship during Award Season (understood to be between September to March) is expected from all parties.

5.2 Neither Maggie Sawyer or Alex Danvers shall be allowed to:
   1. Be seen in a public location with any person not included in the Relationship, what could be interpreted as a romantic manner.
   2. Share any verbal or photographic content on social media, printed media, with individuals not in the Relationship that might be construed to be romantic in nature.
   3. Partake in a verbal and/or physical conflict with multiple eyewitnesses present.

5.3 Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers are required to engage in the following activities:
   1. Attend at least four casual events at public establishments every month. Casual defined as any event not involving a red carpet. Two of these events must take place at an establishment that serves food and drink. The remaining two events may be chosen by Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers. However, all events must be approved by King Productions.
   2. Publish at least two posts each, per month, on their respective social media accounts (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) about each other. The choice of the content displayed in the posts is left to the discretion of Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers but they are expected to publish content in accordance to the nature of the Relationship.
   3. Attend at least six formal public appearances—this is defined as prestigious events with red carpets and photographers such as award shows. The formal public appearances may take place at any time from the start to the end of the Relationship.
   4. Participate in a one week joint summer vacation in 2019 of which the location and exact time will be selected by King Productions.
Section 6. Remuneration

6.1 Maggie Sawyer, Alex Danvers, and King Productions will not be monetarily reimbursed for their participation in the Relationship.

6.2 King Productions will pay for all expenses generated by the activities listed in Section 5: 5.3.

Section 7. Knowledge of the Relationship

7.1 Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers may only divulge the true nature of their Relationship to M’gann Farai Morzz, J’onn Hank Jonzz, Eliza Emilie Valois Danvers, Kara Zorelle Valois Danvers, Gabriella Pia Caivano Rossi, and Winn Timothy Schott.

7.2 All parties listed in Section 7, 7.1 along with King Productions are required to sign a non-disclosure agreement regarding the Relationship.

7.3 It is understood by Maggie Sawyer, Alex Danvers, and King Productions that the cast and crew of the ABC TV show Nightingale (2017) may learn of the true nature of their Relationship due to their shared workplace. However, Nightingale cast and crew are bound by a non-disclosure agreement regarding any activities that occur on the Nightingale set, and the Relationship shall be considered an extension of that agreement. As such, Nightingale cast and crew are not required to sign a specific non-disclosure agreement regarding the Relationship. If any member of the cast and/or crew were to disclose the true nature of the Relationship to the public, they would face the consequences established in their original non-disclosure agreement regarding Nightingale.

Section 8. Penalties

8.1 In the event that Maggie Sawyer or Alex Danvers violate any parts of the contract from Section 1 to Section 7, King Productions has the right to charge the offending party a reasonable financial fee to be determined by King Productions. King Productions will also be allowed to take legal action against the party that breaches the contract.

The Performance Relationship Agreement between Maggie Sawyer, Alex Danvers, and King Productions shall become effective October 11, 2018, and shall remain in full force and effect through October 11, 2019.
I HAVE READ THIS AGREEMENT CAREFULLY AND CONSENT TO ALL OF
PROVISIONS CONTAINED ABOVE.

27-7-2018
Dated

Alex Danvers
Signature

Alexandra Irène Alcott Valois Danvers
Printed Name

27-7-2018
Dated

Maggie Sawyer
Signature

Margaret Ellen Sawyer
Printed Name

FOR AND ON BEHALF OF KING
PRODUCTIONS:

27-7-2028
Dated

Anthony King
Signature of Authorized Individual

ANTHONY TOBIAS KING
Printed Name

PRESIDENT OF KING PRODUCTIONS LLC
Title
The opening instrumentals of Belinda Carlisle’s “Heaven is a Place on Earth” drift through the apartment.

Maggie groans. Her alarm clock reads 4:45 AM, and though she knows she’s supposed to get up, she hits the snooze button.

Fifteen minutes later it goes off again, and she drags her eyelids open and lays in bed for a few seconds before flinging the sheets off to begin her day. A quick fifteen minute shower and she’s in her kitchen eating a double toasted dry sesame seed bagel while drinking her coffee, sweetened with agave nectar, and checking her phone. By 6 AM, she’s driving to set with NPR as her morning companion.

As she arrives on set, she hears a chorus of greetings from a variety of crew members. At 6:30, she’s in hair and makeup listening to the latest gossip from Louise and Mary.

Settling back into the rhythm of filming is easy, besides the change in her sleeping schedule—her body hasn’t quite adapted to the 5 AM wake up calls yet, but she knows by next week that’ll change too.

She loves being on set, she loves the crew and cast, she loves shedding her own skin for 8 or 10 hours a day. And her scenes with Alex are...fun. Going toe to toe with an actress as talented as she leaves her feeling energized after every scene together. They elevate each other’s acting.

Alex is the best scene partner she could’ve asked for. When they’re inhabiting Blake and Claire everything’s amazing -it’s the other moments that are the problem.

First there was the trailer incident, as Maggie had dubbed it in her head, with Alex’s awkward scramble to escape from her after a fucking selfie. Then, her horrified look when she thought Maggie’s parents would think they were dating for real. Then there was the craft services moment when Maggie, standing behind Alex, had leaned over her shoulder to reach for some hummus and Alex jumped like she’d been burned. That move certainly didn’t help Maggie quell her misgivings about Alex.

By the time Friday rolls around, Maggie has her own personal collection of uncomfortable situations with Alex Danvers. But it’s Friday, and she made it through the first week of filming. That deserves a celebration.

Anthony might think it does, too, because a few minutes after midday she gets a message from him, informing her that he’s throwing the cast and crew a party in his New York apartment. Maggie didn’t know he had a New York apartment.

Either way, she’s invited, and so is the rest of the cast—including Alex. Maggie’s been wary of going to producers’ homes in the past, but this is certainly the first time it’s because she’s wondering what she’ll be asked to do with a woman. Anthony seems to love his plan, and Maggie wonders if he’ll just ask them to pose for the camera so he can leak the pictures to the press
himself.

Maggie rolls her eyes as she grabs the few pieces of clothing she left over her trailer during the week, so she can take them home later that day.

It’s been a while since she’s gotten this self-pitying about herself.

Her last scene of the day with James drags along.

She doesn’t really know the guy, and the fact they haven’t really talked since she joined the show means the time in between shooting is immensely awkward. For being the child of a former model and a film director, Alex wasn’t much of a social butterfly. She’d always found it hard to relate to people her own age, and while she might have blamed it on the nature of her father’s work when she was younger, she thinks even if he’d been something as inane as a teacher or a doctor, it would have been the same for her.

Alex has never clicked with people, has never been able to make friends as easily as her sister. She thought that had started to change, with Maggie. After a somewhat awkward beginning, she’d really begun to feel like they were...on the same wavelength. She can’t remember the last time someone who wasn’t Kara teased her like she did, or the last time she laughed as genuinely as when Maggie challenged her to a race out of nowhere. She thinks the answer might be never. That’s never happened before, or at least not since High School.

Her scenes with Maggie always go by quickly. It’s just easy acting with her. It’s comfortable—for now that is, they haven’t shot any...intimate scenes yet. But Alex will cross that bridge when she gets to it.

Her point is, it’s been years since she’s had a good friend. And she’d thought Maggie might be it, for a fleeting moment. But ever since they agreed on the contract things are slightly weird between them. Maggie isn’t as friendly as before, and Alex...she can’t sit still near Maggie, and she doesn’t quite understand why.

James walks back to his first mark, as they get ready to shoot the scene again. He gives Alex a polite smile before getting in character, and she returns what she hopes is a pleasant smile as well. She makes a mental note to talk to him, at some point. He seems kind.

They start the scene.

Claire asks Captain Ellis if Blake is the right choice to train her, given that she seems to hate Claire so much, and gets rebuffed. They argue for a few moments, before Claire sucks it up, thanks her superior officer, and stomps out of the room. She’s supposed to call out for Blake outside of the camera, but of course, Maggie isn’t here. Alex can’t help but think if she were, it would have been easier to film.
The director yells the final cut and her week is over.

By the time Maggie arrives, the party is in full swing.

Cary, one of their lighting guys, is playing the white baby grand piano in the corner, and at least two people have turned Anthony’s massive living room into a dance floor, as they sway to the music. Of course, Anthony, who can’t play anything besides other people, has an ostentatious piano in his apartment. Maggie inwardly rolls her eyes, or maybe not, given the amused look James gives her from across the room.

“Maggie,” James greets her with a bear hug—he is the only person besides Gabriella she allows it from, and she thinks he knows it. “Fashionably late, that’s unusual for you.” He pulls away and grabs a drink from the passing waiter and hands it to Maggie.

“Thanks.” She takes a sip. At least she can always count on great champagne. “Traffic held me up,” she explains. “I got stuck between two semi trucks for a good stretch which also didn’t help.”

“Well, your lovely leading lady,” Maggie scoffs at his exaggeration of the word lovely, “has been here for 20 minutes and the only conversation she’s partook in is with that ficus plant.”

She raises an eyebrow. “What am I, the Alex Danvers’ whisperer?”

James mirrors her face. “You spend the most time with her and seem to be the only person she’ll interact with. We had a scene together today, and I tried striking up conversation in between takes. I got one syllable responses in return.” He brings up his index finger to emphasize his point.

She bats away his finger.

“She’s not the best at small talk. I’m sure she’ll come around. She doesn’t have any problem with you that I know of.” She does seem to have one with me though, Maggie thinks as she takes a sip of her champagne.

“Yeah well -“ James doesn’t get to finish his sentence as Cary starts up a chant for James to sing and play them something on the piano.

“Sorry, Maggie, the fans want me.” He shrugs unapologetically.

She chuckles. “I’m ready to be wowed James.”

She looks over at Alex now that her attention is free. She doesn’t seem to be enjoying the party, or the people. Her mouth tightens as she hears Alex snap at the poor waiter who almost spilled his drink tray in her lap.

“Will you look where you’re going? Jesus Christ!”

Maggie can still vividly remember back when she was working catering gigs—in between
modeling and pursuing acting seriously—having to put up with shitty guests who cussed her out for accidentally dropping a plate. People who didn’t even care to think that she might have been on her feet for hours by that point and was fucking tired, dead on her feet.

She was thinking of striking up conversation with Alex, but she doesn't feel like it anymore.

She goes to find something to eat.


The last notes of "Piano Man" peter out from the piano, and Alex claps along with the rest of the guests.

A tried and true song, maybe a little cliche, but James did a good job of it.

And considering he’s her co-worker and she hasn’t really made any effort to get to know him, Alex thinks there’s no better time the present, and she better let him know.

“You were really good,” she says, as he gets up from the piano. “I’m- I’m Alex. I know we’ve been introduced before it’s just... We haven’t really...talked.”

James smiles, amused. At least someone’s having fun.

“James Olsen, at your service,” he says, taking her hand and shaking it. “How are you liking the party?”

“It’s great!” She answers, her tone of voice climbing a few decibels. “It’s really good.” She looks past him into the distance, as James nods and then stares at the floor. Honesty can't possibly be worse than this, Alex decides. “I don’t know anyone, it’s weird,” she tells him, getting off her chest.

James laughs. Alex joins him.

“Come on,” he invites her. “Let me introduce you to some of the crew.”

He precedes to lead her around the room, providing a running commentary on the different people he introduces her too. When King said everyone was invited, it was true, and his large apartment is filled with at least 50 people, everyone who was on set on Friday and managed to come. She gets officially introduced to the women that did her makeup and hair for an hour each day since she started, and she’s mortified she didn’t properly introduce herself back then. Everybody is nice to her, though, really nice. It’s a good atmosphere.

James is midway through another introduction when he’s called away by someone else. He leaves Alex after a quick hug—which she was not expecting— but it’s not bad. She thinks maybe Maggie won’t be the only friend she hopefully makes on this show.
She turns around to look for the drinks and bumps into someone.

“Sorry, I was just going to -”

The man cuts her off. “No need to apologize! You were just the person I was looking to talk to, actually.” He offers her what Alex assumes he thinks is a charming smile, it is not.

“Name is Michael Obeng,” he says, grabbing Alex’s hand and bringing it up to his lips to kiss. “I’m a friend of Anthony’s,” he explains. “We’re collaborating on King Production’s latest film. And you’re Alex Danvers.”

He certainly doesn’t let her get a word in. He towers over her, and doesn’t seem to know the definition of personal space. Alex suddenly wishes she’d worn a looser, longer dress. She feels exposed in this. His hands are clammy, she notes, and she wants nothing more than to rip hers out of his. And then maybe walk over to the open bar to grab a drink just so she can splash it in his face, but J’onn wouldn’t like that.

He’s been subtly emphasizing over the past few weeks Alex needs to be nicer—his exact words were more diplomatic, but she knows what he meant.

She plasters a fake smile on her face. “Pleasure to meet you.”

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Maggie likes a good scotch.

Even now, where she’s supposed to enjoy sweet fruity drinks because the occasion calls for it, or some more of Anthony’s expensive champagne, she waits at the bar for the two fingers of scotch she’s asked for. If she’s here she might as well sample Anthony’s personal collection.

She’s taking a sip of the earthy, strong drink when she hears a loud bark of laughter from the corner of the bar. She turns to see who it is and her gaze lands on a guy who looks like he walked out of a bad 80s romcom—and Alex.

Alex is with him. And she’s talking, maybe laughing. She can’t see her face from here, but she can see their bodies are angled toward each other with little room in between.

The sight makes Maggie inexplicably annoyed. She doesn’t care, not really, Alex can talk with whoever she likes. But they are going to be each other’s ball and chain soon; and Maggie refuses to be the only one putting in any effort to sell the relationship.

She tries to ignore them and enjoy her drink, but she can’t not-notice the downright cackles the man, who Maggie doesn’t recognize, is letting out. It must be one of Anthony’s friends, she guesses. She’s already met all three of the new writers they’re bringing in for this season. The man laughs yet again—is Alex a comedian now?

Maggie doesn’t want to, but she decides she needs to walk over there.
“Hi,” she says, as she cuts in, and it takes a moment for the guy to turn around and acknowledge her. “I’m Maggie, I don’t think we’ve met.”

“Of course, Michael Obeng,” he says roughly, and shakes her hand, once.

“Michael,” she smiles pleasantly. “Do you mind if I get my leading lady for a couple of minutes?” She asks, overly sweet, and he gives her a distasteful look even as he nods, and tells Alex he’ll be at the piano.

“Thank you,” Alex says. “He was-”

“You signed a contract,” Maggie is quick to say. “And I know it hasn’t gone into effect yet, but we have two months before our public romantic lives aren’t ours.”

“You think - you think that was romantic?!”

“I’m just reminding you,” Maggie tells her. She hates the way it feels so satisfying to tell her off, to let her know for once that she can’t just do whatever she wants with no consequences. Maggie isn’t a busboy she can reprimand, and she’s certainly not someone who’s going to be impressed by her last name.

“We have a deal, and we can’t have you compromising it.”

. .

Alex splutters.

“I wasn’t...I want compromising anything.” Maggie looks mad at her for some reason, and Alex thinks no matter what she does, even if she explains that she wasn't flirting or some shit ’til she is blue in the face, Maggie won't believe her.

So she reverts to what she knows best.

“You're the one with a reputation,” she tells Maggie. “I think I should be the one worried.” Maggie looks taken aback, and Alex keeps plowing on. “You should focus on keeping up your own end of the bargain.”

“That’s-”

“You know you can’t sleep with anyone else while we’re ‘together’ either right? It’d be too risky. I’ve read all the articles about you. The press catches one girl walking out of your apartment and this whole thing is done,” Maggie actually takes a step back, and Alex looks around, to see if anyone’s noticed.

“Thanks for the concern,” Maggie’s voice drips with sarcasm when she speaks. “But I think I can handle it.”

“Well, I don't know. After all, I don't know you, do I, Sawyer?”

Maggie’s stricken face is the last thing she sees before the woman turns around and walks away.
Maggie climbs the elevator up to her loft, a faint headache starting to pound between her eyes.

Gabriella is waiting for her back at her apartment, and her aunt shoots her a look as soon as she comes in, heels dangling from her fingers. She’d taken them off in the car, too tired to deal with aching feet on top of everything else.


A grunt is her only answer. She drops her shoes somewhere at the bottom of the stairs, and drags herself into the large open kitchen to poor herself a glass of water. She drinks it slowly, hoping it will cleanse her from the champagne that’s already souring in her stomach.

She comes up for air when she’s done.

“What are you thinking?” Gabriella asks.

Maggie sighs.

“That this is going to be the longest year of my life.”

We hope you enjoyed this chapter! The story is finally picking up, and we’d love to hear what you think. Leave us a comment below! Or you can find anddiirtyrain as anddiirtyrain on tumblr, and softsawyer on twitter @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We’d love to talk to you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!
We hope you like it! It's a bit earlier today so you can enjoy Alex proving she's not over Maggie in tonight's episode. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Culpa est mea: the fault is mine

Nightingale stars hit the red carpet at ABC’s Summer Bash

By Ann Porter

ABC’s summer bash was full of stars promoting their upcoming seasons, including the Nightingale cast—along with newest addition Alex Danvers. The cast gave a sneak peak of what’s to come READ MORE

Maggie drives to work in silence that morning.
Her mind buzzes too much to add more noise to it. She wants the stillness, the peace. She doesn’t want to keep running over her argument with Alex last week—something that seems to happen every time she has even a minute of free time. She certainly doesn’t want to dwell on the hollow feeling she gets in her chest whenever she thinks of the words Alex threw at her.

The words—and the intent behind them—are hardly new. Although most people aren’t brave enough to say them to her face so bluntly.

But she’s read variations of what Alex had said plenty of times online. M’gann eventually trained her out of doing that, googling her name, but the temptation still strikes her every now and then. She has Winn for that now though, and she’s noticed on days she’s feeling down—so down others can see it—he’ll text her nice comments people have made about her recently. Tweets, a line from an article, meaningless things in the whole of the picture, but they still make Maggie smile. And then she feels stupid for relying on the public for a pick me up. She knows the general public is fickle, and as such should never be the source of a person’s happiness. She’s seen what happens to people who tie their happiness to what the press thinks of them, and it never turns out well.

She could still really use a pick me up right now though.

Maggie sighs.

The sun is just beginning to rise when she arrives on set. She turns her car off and sits in silence for a few moments, trying to clear her mind and enjoy the first rays of sunshine slipping through the clouds.

Today is a new day.

It’s the first day since Alex joined the show that Maggie is shooting alone—well, without her Claire at least. Today will mostly be solo Blake scenes and a few scenes with James and Stefan, another detective on the show. It’ll be a welcome change from the tension between her and Alex this past week. (She sighs again at that. It’s not what she wanted to feel about her Claire.)

Maggie takes a deep breath and exits her Jeep—the crisp morning air is energizing as she walks to hair and makeup. She loves New York City, the people, the cuisine, the electric feel of the city that never sleeps. She loves that she can go to a sandwich shop at 3 AM and stop by for ice cream after that. And God, she loves the weather. It’s definitely a nice change from the lulling, constant heat of LA.

It never snows in LA, and she’s missed the snow. She can’t wait for winter to come.

She walks into hair and makeup in a considerably better mood than she was a just a few moments ago. Mary and Louise greet her with double cheek kisses and hugs. They’ve been working with her since Crush, and she struck up a good camaraderie with them over many early mornings just like this one. She was the youngest actor on set, and the two of them took her under their wing. She never forgot that, and when she’d been cast as Blake, she mentioned them to Anthony as potential people to hire on set.

Seeing them first thing in the morning on her first day on set had been beyond comforting.

“Maggie, honey, it’s really not fair you look this beautiful this early in the morning without a lick of makeup on your face,” Mary titters as she leads Maggie to the makeup chair.

Maggie laughs her off, “My eye bags beg to differ.”

She relaxes to the hum of their chatter while they work on her, transforming her from Maggie
Sawyer, small town girl with a big dream (or so the papers kept writing), to Blake Davenport, professional badass (or so Maggie thought of her).

The conversation lulls for a beat before Louise speaks up.

“So. Alex Danvers...”

“Mhm?” She isn’t sure whether Louise’s words are a question or a statement.

She goes over Maggie’s face with a brush, setting in the foundation with powder. They keep telling her she doesn’t need it, but the makeup needs to last.

“How do you like her?” She asks. “We heard from the girls who do her hair and makeup she’s barely spoken to them since she got here.”

Mary shakes her head disapprovingly. “I’ve been in the business for a longtime, and I know the way an actress treats the little people on set says a lot about their character.”

“She’s not a bad person from what I can tell,” Maggie shrugs, wondering why her need to defend Alex Danvers is automatic. It’s not like she’s feeling particularly charitable to her at the moment, but she’s not...She doesn’t hate her or anything. And she knows how quickly gossip can spread on this set, Alex doesn’t need that kind of rumor spreading around so early into her time on the show.

Louise tilts her chin up towards the light to get a better angle of her face. “Well, honey, if you say so.”

“But if you ever have any problems with her,” Mary jumps in, “just let us know okay. We’re always here to vent.”

Maggie stifles a smiles at that. Mary and Louise are loyal and genuinely nice, which can be hard to find in this job.

“I hope I’ll never have to take you up on that offer,” she says. “But thanks.”

She knows it wouldn't be wise to let that kind of information out on set anyways. Gabriella will be the only set of ears privy to her complaints if there are any more.

Her first scene of the day is an action filled one, her favorite kind.

She can’t keep the smile off her face in between takes, and her happiness seems to be infectious. The whole cast and crew laugh between scenes. It’s fun. She’s missed this feeling, and it’s only later on that day she realizes she hasn’t felt this way on set since before her and Alex fought.

It’s been tense on set the past week, and she hates it. She knows she should be the bigger person, let it slide and reach out to Alex, but it feels like she’s been the only one making an effort out of the two of them. She invited Alex to La Nuvola Bianca to talk twice, she tried to coax her out of her shell and make her feel welcomed and comfortable. Alex has been the passive one in their relationship, and Maggie, a bit childishly, she knows, wants Alex to be the one to initiate the next move. The ball is in her court.
Thankfully their tension hasn’t encroached on their acting together. If it reaches that point, Maggie knows she’ll have to put aside her pride and fix it. She won’t do anything to jeopardize the show. She’s made it a point to know and talk with the entire crew. She knows Jeff the cameraman and has seen the worn out pictures he carries of his kids—one who passed away four months ago. She attended the funeral. She talks regularly with Gabriel, one of the assisting light technicians, who likes to practice his English with her.

_Nightingale_ employs hundreds of people, from everyone on set down to the prop makers. This is their source of income. And she’s the leading lady, at the end of the day the responsibility to carry the show forward rests on her. There’s the writers, producers, and her fellow actors, of course, but it’s her face on the billboards out there, and it’s her getting most of the screen time. She always wanted a show, and she has it now. She can’t afford to let anyone down.

The day passes quickly, and before she knows it the sun has dipped below the horizon.

“Hey,” James’ voice at her side shakes her out of her thoughts. Theirs are the last scenes of the day, and they stand by the craft service truck while waiting for the set to be ready for them.

“I’m sorry I haven’t gotten a chance to ask you about this yet—we’ve been so busy—but that party at King’s place...” He trails off and looks at her kindly.

Maggie freezes. She’s pretty sure she knows where this is going, but she remains nonchalant even as her stomach sours.

“What about it?”

“At the end, I saw you and Alex...,” Maggie can tell he’s clearly trying to phrase it in a diplomatic way. He’s nice like that. “I saw you leave early, and Alex left soon after you.” He finishes with a sympathetic grimace.

“Oh. You saw that?” Fuck, does that mean other people saw it too? Stupid, stupid, stupid. They were in a public place, she should’ve known better. She should’ve- “Everyone was pretty drunk by that time, I think I’m the only one who noticed.” He reassures her quickly. “And I didn’t hear anything, I just saw you looked upset as you left and wanted to check up on you. So here I am, checking up on you.” He smiles.

Maggie returns the smile in full and gives him a quick, impulsive side hug. “I’m good James, thanks for caring.”

She steps away, wondering how she’s going to tell him about the PR contract, and when. She hasn’t really mentioned it to anyone on set, and she thinks about him, about Mary and Louise, about Gabriel, all her friends who’ll find out she’s okay with being a liar, unless she lets them think she’s in a relationship with Alex. Neither option is optimal.

She bids James goodbye at the end of their scene, and walks quickly back to the parking lot. The day flew by, but her body still felt it. She just wants to get home and-

“Yo! Boss lady.”

Maggie looks up.

Winn. A day early, and standing by her car wrapped in a ridiculously puffy jacket, certainly too hot for the current mild weather.
“Can you let me in?” He jerks his head towards her car. “It’s kinda chilly out here.” Maggie shakes her head. How he’s going to survive winter if he’s dying in late summer is a mystery to her.

“It’s like 60 degrees, Winn,” she says, opening the doors of the jeep.

“It was 89 degrees in L.A.” Winn raises his hands as if they're a weight balance. "89 degrees," he lifts his right hand. "60 degrees." He lets his left hand fall. "That’s a lot of degrees of difference for a simple California kid."

Maggie chuckles. But she turns down the air conditioning a bit in deference to him.

“You weren’t supposed to arrive until tomorrow.” She mentions as she starts the car.

“I caught an early flight in to surprise you on set and drive you back, but..."

“You’re not driving my car Winn,” she scoffs.

He shrugs his shoulders, “It was worth a try. So,” he turns towards her as she starts up the car and pulls out of the parking lot, “a lot has happened since you got here.”

She sighs, the contract. She had M’gann relay the information to him, and he’ll be signing his non disclosure agreement tomorrow. Which would all be great, if Winn didn’t feel the need to talk about things.

“Yes, there was a big thing that happened recently which I know you’re aware of,” she says, leaving the studio behind.

“I loved one of her dad’s films you know,” he mentions. “I didn’t, however, know much about her before you made it necessary for me to dig into her.”

“Winn,” she pleads. “Please tell me you didn’t do anything...illegal while digging?”

He gasps in mock outrage. “Me? Never! Perish the thought!”

Maggie rolls her eyes, and stifles a chuckle. He can be such a dramatic Broadway nerd.

“But she has had some...” He winces. “Questionable moments. Plural. She’s had numerous ones actually.”

She cuts him off before he can continue. “I’m not going to judge her for what happened in the past.”

She doesn’t know where the fiery desire to defend the woman comes from, especially after everything she said at Anthony’s party, but here she is.

“I don’t need to know any of that stuff okay? I did some of my own research too, and I purposely avoided those articles.”

“Yeah! Sure! Of course!” Winn says. “I’m not trying to play judge, jury, and executioner here either, but this is the woman you’ll be in a fake relationship with for a year. I just wanted to make sure she wasn’t a—” He gestures wildly for a second. “Serial killer.”

Maggie can’t help the smile that creeps up her face. “I don’t think actress is the best profession for a murderous psychopath. Too much exposure.”

“Or it could be the perfect front!” He argues.
Maggie snorts. “You’re being ridiculous. You know that, right?”

Winn smiles sheepishly. “I know, but-” He shoots her finger guns and a wink. “Made you smile.”

That elicits a gentle smile out of her. She reaches across the gear shift to lightly touch his arm.

“I’m glad you made it early, Winn.”

He spends the rest of the ride back to her apartment reading aloud tweets reacting to her first week back on set.

Incessant ringing wakes her up.

Alex rolls around in bed and grabs her cell phone from her bedside table, where it’s plugged into the charger. She checks who’s calling, and through thick eyes and the thicker haze of sleep she sees the smiling face of her sister.

“Kara?”

“Hi! Why do you sound like that? Were you dozing on set?”

“I’m not filming today,” she says, dragging a hand down her face. She sits up, and brushes her hair away from her face. If there’s one thing she likes about her newly short hair, it’s how easy it is to maintain. She no longer wakes up with a tangle of waves every morning.

“Oh, sorry” Kara giggles. Alex loves her sister, but sometimes she really hates her. “Well, now that you’re awake I just wanted to tell you that Mon-El and I are at the airport, our flight leaves at 9 so we should be flying into LA right before noon. We’re going up to mom’s.”

“That’s great, Kara.”

Alex doesn’t understand what she has to do with Kara’s relationship milestones, but she’s glad at least one of them is having them, she guesses.

“I’ll make sure to mention the contract.”

Alex wakes up at once.

Of course. Fuck.

Through the layers of slumber she managed to forget about the contract that’s going to be ruling over her life for the next year.

“Okay.”

When Anthony’s lawyer had asked about her mother’s and sister’s non disclosure agreements,
Alex had only been able to provide Kara’s, but she’d been given time, since the contract hadn’t gone into effect yet.

Alex almost wants to wait until the day before it’s due to get her mother to sign.

“Right. Thank you.”

“So…”

“So what, Kara?”

“Can you come?”

Alex falls back into bed.

“I’m bus-“

“You just said you're not working today! And we’ll have all weekend. Please, it’ll be a family affair. And you can get to know Mon-El better.”

If Kara thinks that’s going to sweeten the deal, she can't be more mistaken.

Alex sighs.

“Okay, how about this. You fly in tomorrow morning. I talk to her today. I’ll help her dust the house or something, she’ll be ready for you on Saturday.”

“She has someone for that,” Alex points out.

“Alex,” Kara whines. “I haven't seen you in ages. I got a single day with you a week ago, and before that it was a single brunch. Please. I need my sister back. And I know mom misses you too. She asks about you, but it's not like we talk as much as we used to.”

Because back then they used to live under the same roof, and their father was alive, and Alex wasn't the picture you’d see in the dictionary under ‘hot mess’.

But Kara’s guilt tripping works, even if Alex knows that’s exactly what it is.

She sighs again.

“Fine. I’ll fly in tomorrow morning.”

Kara squeals on the other side of the line.

“Our plane is boarding, I have to go. Love you! Bye!”

“Love you.”

Alex closes the call, and rubs the space between her eyes, wondering what she just got herself into.

She doesn't sleep easy that night. She actually spends it all tossing and turning, and she finally
wakes at 4 and decides to pack her bag all over again just to give herself something to do, before she calls a cab to take her to JFK.

She takes her time going through the gates, a beanie and dark glasses on just in case anybody is a *Body of Medicine* fan, but nobody approaches her. She boards early, thank god for first class, and she’s asleep before the plane takes off.

Alex missed the feel of LA.

It’s not just the weather, though she welcomes the significantly warmer, fresher air as soon as she walks out of the airport, but the difference in everything else. It’s sunny, for a change, and she can actually feel the sun since she’s not being swallowed by skyscrapers in every direction.

She hired a car service to take her up to Malibu a second after they landed, and she doesn’t even mind when it’s 10 minutes late. She’s missed home.

It’s just an hour to her mother’s, so she couldn’t sleep in the car even if she wanted to, but either way, the anxious feeling climbing its way up her throat wouldn't have let her.

The traffic in LA is...the traffic in LA. There are cars crawling along every expanse of the interstate until they leave the city, and then the ride to Malibu is easy as they cruise down the winding roads of her childhood. She texts Kara to tell her she’s on her way, but her sister doesn’t read the message right away. She’s probably busy with her boyfriend.

People with surfboards become more common the closer they get to the beach, and Alex hopes her board is still in the basement of the house. It’s been a while. Maybe she could go out tomorrow and try to catch some waves. It’s the middle of summer, so the beach will probably be more crowded than usual, but she’d like it.

Before she knows it, the car is pulling into the gated community she gave for an address, and she has to pull out her ID to get them access inside.

She has the car drop her off a house before her own, just in case, and then she shoulders her duffle bag as she walks the few steps to the entrance of their property. She presses the intercom.

“Mom? It’s Alex.”

Not a second later the door swings open, and it’s not her mother but her sister, as energetic as always.

“Alex!” She throws her arms around her, and Alex stumbles back with the force of her embrace. Alex closes her eyes. Maybe she should start coming home more often. After all, no one in the world thinks better of her than Kara does.

“Alex!” A second voice says, and Alex frowns. Kara takes a step back and then Alex is engulfed in different, considerably larger arms. Mon-El steps away before Alex has a chance to protest.

“Is that okay?” he asks. “I mean, I’m part of the family now, right?”

Alex tries not to grimace.

She’s saved from answering when her mom walks out, her steps as measured as they always seem to be, a gentle smile on her face.

“Oh, Alex,” she steps forward to hug her, and Alex returns the embrace. Her mom leans down to
her ear, and whispers under her breath. “We’ll talk later about what Kara told me, okay?”

She nods.

Her mom steps back and touches her fingers to Alex’s short hair.

Alex braces for her comment.

“I like it,” she says. “It suits you.”

Alex breathes out. “Thank you.”

Her mom smiles.

“Okay, kids, let’s go back inside.” She closes the threshold into the front garden. There are a few more rose bushes than Alex remembers, but the house looks the same from this distance. “Mon-El! Will you be a darling and help Alex with her bag?”

“Of course!” he says, and grabs the bag from her arm before making his way back inside the property. Only Kara remains by her side.

“We’re gonna have an amazing weekend,” Kara tells her, before intertwining her arm with Alex’s and dragging her inside.

They had just finished lunch when she arrived, so Alex makes herself a salad and settles down at the breakfast island to eat it while her mom tidies up the dining room. She looks around the home she grew up in, and it surprises her how little has changed. The same board games they played when she was little are still stacked up on the built in shelf to her right, the same light fixtures hang from the beams in the ceiling, and if she looks up, the same sky looks down at her from the skylight. There’s only one thing missing.

Her mom suggests she take a nap if she’s tired from her flight, and though she slept for the entirety she’s quick to agree. It puts off the conversation she’s dreading to have.

She climbs the large, white wooden staircase onto the second floor of the house, running her hand over the banister as she walks to the back of the top floor. She enters the door on the left and drops her duffel bag by the door—and then falls face-first onto her bed.

She rolls around and stares up at the slanted white ceiling.

She had glow in the dark stars up there until she was 10, and she’d only switched them because her dad had promised he’d get her something even better. One afternoon, a couple of days after she’d removed the plastic stars and planets, she had arrived home to find a couple of her dad’s friends, buckets of paint coming in and out of her room.

She’d been anxious to see the finished job, but when her dad finally allowed her inside, there was absolutely nothing on the ceiling. It was as white as usual, and her parents had enjoyed her confusion only for a few minutes before they turned off the light, and then the space completely transformed. A galaxy spreading out beyond mountains and pines covered the entirety of her ceiling, a swirling supernova of shooting stars and her own, private version of the northern lights. It’s still there, she knows. Her mom would never paint over it.

She’s pretty sure everything else is still in its place, even inside the large built-in wardrobe that covers the wall in front of her bed. There’s a small spot in the middle where her flat screen tv rests, and her old DVDs and records are still on the shelves above. God, she’d missed her room. There
were far too many good memories stored here, and none of the bad ones. She’d even, pragmatically decided, to lose her virginity somewhere else in case it didn’t go well and it was a memory she didn’t want associated with the space. She’d made the right call there.

She still remembers when they’d first brought Kara home, and how the little girl hadn’t been able to spend the entire night in her room without getting spooked. Their house was larger than the apartment she’d lived in in France, and she wasn’t used to how silent it could get at night, apart from the rolling of the waves and the howling of the wind.

Kara’s bedroom looked out onto the hills, and the girl had used the excuse that she liked to see the ocean as she fell asleep to spend more time in the armchair in Alex’s room. She’d fallen asleep there more than once. Finally, Alex had asked them to bring a twin bed into her bedroom, so she could share it with Kara. She’d been 14, and not very keen to share her space, but she’d felt bad for her. The proud smile Alex’s parents gave her for her idea had made it all worth it. The arrangement had lasted for almost a year, until her sister settled in, learned the new language, and developed a sense of privacy, but Alex still remembers what it was like to fall asleep talking to someone else, even if that someone had a thick accent and wanted to talk about nothing but Hannah Montana.

Those were simpler days, she thinks, and marvels at how she could consider it simple that her parents had decided to adopt an orphan on the spot. In hindsight, it had been the best decision they could’ve made. They gave Alex a sister.

She didn’t think she was tired, but she falls asleep soon after, her shoes still on and her mind wandering through her childhood memories.

Maggie’s Saturday morning starts with rapid fire knocking on her bedroom door. She already knows who it is without hearing his voice. Only one person knocks with that much energy on a weekend morning.

“Oh, sleeping beauty.” Winn’s sing song voice comes through the door. “I come bearing the liquid of the gods!”

She groans as she slides out of bed. A quick glance at the clock tells her it’s a quarter till 9. She opens the door and is greeted by Winn’s beatific smile and the smell of a chai vanilla earl grey tea. She grabs the drink from him before walking out and motioning for him to follow her.

“Damn, this place looks even nicer in the morning.” He spins around while trailing after Maggie. “And man, the decor is amazing, props to whoever picked it out. My room looked like a hotel. A fancy hotel. Kinda minimalist but I dig it.”

“I’ll be sure to give the landlord your compliments,” she says dryly. It is a great place though, and Maggie takes it in as she walks down the stairs to the first floor, where the kitchen and living room lay, in opposing corners of the the immense open space. She loves the view of the city she gets from the half a dozen floor-to-roof windows spanning the wall in front of her, directly in front of
the door. It’s the first thing you see when you enter, and she’s sure whoever built this had it in mind.

“That’s a hell of a view,” Winn says.

Maggie hums in agreement. She sinks into the leather couch and kicks her feet up on the glass coffee table. “So, what’s on the agenda today, Robin?”

He rolls his eyes. “How can I be your Robin when you don’t even have a batmobile.”

“Hey, that can easily be bought.” She smirks.

“Okay, if that ever happens you need to let me drive it, please. It’s what I deserve after being bullied throughout high school for being a comic geek.” Winn sets down his own drink and pulls open the laptop already set out on her coffee table. “So in terms of actual things to do today, you’re free. But next week, you’ve got a Z100 interview to promote the show on Wednesday at eleven AM and then a puppy charity with the rest of the cast on Sunday which starts at eight AM.”

Maggie perks up at the mention of puppies, before remembering the rest of the cast will be going as well, which now includes Alex Danvers. She doesn’t feel as excited anymore, faced with more of the tense words and uncomfortable silences. You’re the one with a reputation. Maggie rubs the space between her eyes, as Alex’s words begin to circle her mind again. I’ve read all the articles about you. The press catches one girl walking out of your apartment and this whole thing is done.

“What’s the charity called?” She asks Winn, hoping for a distraction. “And what exactly does it entail, do we know?”

Winn scrolls for a few seconds before finding the email containing the event information.

“‘Woof for Joy’ is a non-profit charity sponsored by Purina,” Winn reads out loud. “Started three years ago with its homebase in New York City, it provides money to local dog shelters in the area and works with them to relocate abandoned dogs to new homes,” he rattles off from the email. He looks up at Maggie. “In the past they’ve had their guests play games like trivia, spin the wheel, charades—stuff like that—so I’m guessing you’ll do the same.”

Maggie nods. She begins to yawn, a side effect of the early wake up call, but Winn’s voice snaps her out of it.

“Also!” He claps his hands together enthusiastically and wiggles his eyebrows. “I put together a little something in preparation for the coming year.”

That wakes Maggie up fully.

She glances at him warily. “You didn’t do anything stupid or over the top, did you?”

“Well, if you call spending the morning making a list of potential fake date ideas for you and Alex then...yes.” He winces apologetically.

She doesn’t even want to think about that now given the state of her relationship, or rather lack of, with Alex. It’s looming closer and closer though, and she can feel the walls slowly closing in on her. An entire year. Fuck. She drops her head on the back of her couch and groans.

“So...I take it you’re not in the mood to hear them and also I should probably leave?”

Maggie looks at him. He’s bouncing his right leg, and his face has that nervous but hopeful
expression that means he probably did spend the whole morning putting this together and he’d actually like her to see it.

Maggie musters up a smile. “Hit me with them.” She really is too soft of a boss.

“That’s the spirit!” He claps her on the back and proceeds to open a a color coded excel document which she can see is titled “Potential Dates for HMFIC & AD.” Winn is about to begin speaking before she cuts him off.

“HMFIC? What does that mean?” She can guess what AD stands for, but she’s curious what exactly he’s calling her.

“Head motherfucker in charge,” he nods toward her, “you.”

Maggie only laughs and shakes her head.

“Okay, so the list. We’ve got rock climbing at Brooklyn Boulders—we could rent out the whole place for that if needed. You could also go to Chelsea Piers for laser tag and/or bowling, lunch at ABC Kitchen, dinner at Balthazar, Central Park picnic, Empire State…”

He rattles on in this manner for a good 15 minutes, and Maggie is only mildly surprised at how many dates he’s thought up. Winn is nothing if not thorough in his work.

He looks at her expectantly as he lists his final idea. “Thoughts, critiques, suggestions?”

“First thought,” she raises her index finger, “you’re a damn good assistant Winn Schott. Second thought, laser tag is a must. Third thought, I’m hungry. What’s the best place for brunch close by?”

Alex wakes up to the sounds of laughter coming from downstairs.

She rubs her neck as she sits up, tight from falling asleep without a pillow, and looks at the time. She slept for nearly two hours. They seem to be having a great time downstairs, so she decides to take a shower and wash the flight off of her. She feels this layer of grime every time she steps out of a plane, of the recycled air and the uncomfortable pressure, that she can’t quite explain.

She shudders, and enters the door to the right of her bed.

Her bathroom is larger than the one in her apartment in LA, but she’s currently not a fan of the mirrors that cover all four walls inside the space. The thought of a shower changes into a bath when she lays eyes on the bathtub, and she wonders if her stuff is still here, and still usable. She opens one of the cabinets beneath the sink and looks through the few makeup items she’s left behind here through the years. She closes it and opens the one next to it, but it holds only towels. She’s surprised her mom keeps her bathroom stocked when she hardly ever visits anymore.

She opens one of the drawers and finally finds a bottle of bath oil. Lavender. She reads the bottle as
she takes off her shoes. *Highly Therapeutic bath made with sake, Japanese rice wine, and pure medicinal lavender essential oil.* Nice. She has no memory of buying it but she doesn’t think it can go bad, and it definitely sounds like something she needs.

She takes her clothes off as she walks around her bathroom, and it’s definitely a change. Her bathroom back in LA is large enough for its purpose, but her bathroom here is an actual place to relax in. She takes a quick, hot shower beforehand, to wash off people’s coughs and everything her skin touched while on the plain, and then she runs the bath while she pours in a good amount of the bath oils. She sits back and relaxes while the tub fills. She only wishes she had a good glass of wine to go with it.

Two knocks on the door distract her.

“Alex?” her mom’s voice calls out. “Are you awake, sweetie?”

“Yes! I’m in the bathroom!”

“Oh. Okay.”

“I’m just taking a bath, washing off the flight.”

“Of course. Kara was wondering if you might join us downstairs. When you’re done. We’re playing cards.”

Alex sighs.

“Yeah, sure.”

“Okay. Have a nice bath! I bought you some bath oils from this little shop in Vancouver. I got us all a few things while Kara was working. Did you find them?”

“Yes, mom. Thanks.”

“Okay.”

She hears the door close behind her.

She walks down the stairs an hour later, feeling marginally more relaxed.

Her mom already knows about the contract, and the whole PR relationship, and she’s not acting any differently that Alex can tell so maybe it’ll be alright. Maybe she won’t be disappointed in her, or ashamed that she’s marring her dad’s memory. Alex doubts it but she can hope.

She ends up joining in on the last round of UNO, and she gets the sneaking suspicion Kara kept the game going for as long as she did only to give Alex time to join. Her mom and Mon-El, of course, probably just went along with whatever she wanted. Kara has that effect on people.

Afterward, her mom insists on cooking, and when she declines their help, Kara decides to give Mon-El a tour of the house. Left alone, Alex disappears out the back door.
The warm breeze greets her as she steps into their backyard.

Half of it is the tiled deck she ran around when she was little, and not allowed to go to the beach by herself, and the other half is home to the pool where she learned to swim. The oval pool is covered now, and Alex takes the path beside it, following the stones until the end of the backyard, where they give out into the beach.

The sun is starting to descend in the sky, and the clouds are set alight in hues of orange, yellow, and red.

Alex has missed home. She has the beach in LA, and she might even have a view like this, if she looks for it, but it’s not the same, not really. She’d almost forgotten how peaceful the beach can be after hours. In LA, there’s always someone around, but here... Alex almost feels like she’s the last person on earth, standing in front of the neverending ocean. She doesn't want to forget the image. She suddenly takes out her cellphone and snaps a photograph. She doesn't have any of their old photo albums with her in LA, she doesn't have any pictures with her actually, save for a few framed pictures that now reside in her New York City apartment.

In a spur of the moment decision, she decides to post it on Instagram-J’onn told her she needs to post more often again, and this is as good as anything. Soon enough she’ll be posting about Maggie.

She posts it and puts her cellphone away.

The sound of steps behind her distracts her from the view, and she turns around to see her mom walking towards her. Alex swallows. She couldn't have put off the conversation forever.

“Do you remember how we used to sit out here and watch the stars come out after dinner?”

She wasn’t expecting her mom to start off with that and she’s wary as she responds, “Yes, I remember. we did it before Kara came. Dad would quiz me on the different constellations.”

“We used to be close back then, didn’t we?” she asks, melancholy in her voice. But Alex hears deeper than that. “What happened?” Her mom asks. She lets out a deep sigh and turns to face Alex, eyes gleaming with a familiar look of disappointment.

“These days you’re signing life altering contracts that include both your sister and me without even asking us, without even asking for my advice on whether you should do it at all.”

And there it is, the reaction from her mother she’s been dreading.

“I’m sorry I didn’t call, but I made the decision so quickly...It was a shock to me, and my head was all -”

“Didn’t call? We should’ve been there, Alexandra!” Her mom takes a deep breath, the way she did when Alex was a kid and she didn’t want to yell because Kara would overhear. She sits down on one of the plastic lounge chairs to their right. “Sit,” she orders. Alex takes a shaky breath and sits down on the chair beside her.

“Fine. Let’s say you’re an adult, you don’t need my advice. But not letting me know? Alex, my name is on that contract, I have to sign a non-disclosure agreement, and I didn’t know until after it was done!”

Alex winces, and keeps her eyes trained on the sand.
“Your sister had to tell me because she says you were too busy. You didn’t even think to call? Or
ask me to come? We could’ve talked about this. We could’ve sat down with J’onn and, I don’t
know. Figured it out.” Alex finally looks up at her, and it’s a terrible decision. She doesn’t think
she can take the weight of the disappointment in her mother’s gaze. “This was a huge decision and
you made it by yourself.”

“I know.” Her voice grows thinner by the second. “And mom, I’m sorry.”

“I guess I should’ve expected this,” she says. “You stopped listening to me after Stanford. And
look at everything that’s happened since! And now this, with this girl...”

“Is that why you’re mad?” She asks, shaking inside with the question. “Are you embarrassed?
Because everyone’s going to think that I...”

“Am I embarrassed people will think you’re gay? No. Of course not, Alex. I don’t care about that.
What I am...upset, about, is that you did this without us.” She huffs out a breath. “And resorting to
a PR relationship? That’s not how we do things in this family.”

She can feel her eyes burn, and she prays to whatever deity out there that she doesn’t start crying
like a child.

Of course it’s not what they do, Alex thinks. Her dad was born to farmers in Kansas and he became
the fourth youngest person ever to win an Oscar for Best Director at age 34. Alex was 9, and she
still remembers the night he and her mom came back home with the award, after skipping several
parties so they could celebrate with her. Her little sister is 22, and she’s starred in more projects
than Alex has, and is in the middle of the audition process to play a goddamned superhero. Her
mom was a successful model, and she quit only to literally save people’s lives with her research as
a doctor.

And what has Alex accomplished?

“But it’s done now.” Her mom sighs. “This Maggie girl, I want to meet her. I actually saw her new
movie in Vancouver with Kara, you know? It was great. She’s a real rising star.”

Alex hears an unspoken part to her mom’s sentence: “And you’re not.” Even if her mom didn’t
mean it that way, it’s what she hears. That Alex is a white dwarf, suffocating in her own black
hole. She’s clinging onto Maggie’s coattails in the hopes she’ll save her. She’s pathetic.

She refocuses on the first part of her mother’s sentence. She wants to meet Maggie.

She doesn’t know why the thought makes her feel jittery.

“Okay,” she says. “I’ll see to that.”

“And I want a copy of the contract,” her mom demands. “No producer is going to take advantage
of a child of mine.”

She nods, swallowing thickly.

It should feel like protection, but what it feels like is her mother thinking she’s too fucking stupid
to be trusted with signing a contract by herself. She knows what she signed, and she knows all the
ways it can go wrong. But like her mom said, it’s done now.

“Oh, Alexandra.” Her mom sighs, and then stands up. “Look, dinner’s almost ready. Can you come
in and help your sister and her boyfriend set the table?”
She nods, her eyes steady on the waves as she tries to stave off tears.

“We can still have a good weekend,” her mom says, and then heads back to the house without a glance back. Alex watches her go and then turns back to the ocean.

Alex stays rooted in her position. The sea is choppy tonight, and it matches the feelings swirling in her chest. She closes her eyes. A stray tear slips out of her eye and makes its slow progression down her face. The salt when it hits her lips reminds her of the ocean, of evenings spent surfing with her parents.

She wishes she could go back to those days.
The apartment is quiet except for the sound of a pen and the click of a keyboard.

Maggie has never much liked this part of being an adult, doing her taxes and signing off on checks—hell, paying rent. It was easier when she was younger and she could just hand Gabriella whatever money she made from a shoot and let her aunt handle the lease and the landlord and everything else. Now, well, Winn helps her a lot, and she has significantly more assets than she did as a 15-year-old, but it’s not any less boring.

She rents her apartment in LA because she’d really thought she’d be moving more often when she first moved in, but it’s been almost three years now, and she wonders whether she should just bite the bullet and buy it. Even if she does end up moving out, it would be a good investment, right?

She hums as she signs off on her next three months of rent. It’s an amazing feeling, that much is true.

Gabriella keeps typing away at her laptop, no doubt setting up interviews for the people she’s going to be hiring to work at La Nuvola Bianca NYC, and Maggie moves onto the next bill in her to-do stack.

The pleasant, satisfied feeling leaves her chest as she reads the top of the invoice.

A blue, stylized smiley face beams up at her in the logo next to the name of the clinic: Nebraska Smiles. She sighs.

“Everything okay there?” Gabriella asks suddenly, and Maggie looks up. “You didn’t go broke, did ya? ‘Cause I’m willing to lend you some cash, but I charge a pretty steep interest rate.”

Maggie shakes her head. For once, she’s not in the mood for Gabriella’s jokes.

“Maggie...are you okay?”

“Yeah. Yes, it’s just...” She nods towards the piece of paper in her hand. “Braces payment. Comes every month and yet I’m always caught off guard.”

Gabriella gives her a look, a familiar one since the call almost 3 years ago.

“She should be getting them removed soon, right? Or is she going to need more treatment?”

Maggie shrugs. “Not like we talk. Not like he tells me.”

She grabs her checkbook and rips out a page, quickly filling out the information and then signing the piece of paper. She encloses it in the envelope and makes a mental note to ask Winn to drop it off at the post office before he returns to LA, if he has time.

“Maggie...”

She doesn’t need to look in a mirror to know a sour expression has taken over her face. She’s just so frustrated.

“This is how it is, Gabriella,” she tells her aunt, before she starts arguing in favor of things that cannot happen. “I’ve made my peace with it.”

“It’s not how it has to be,” she says. “Look, one day Frank-”
“I don’t want to argue with you,” she says, cutting her off. She really has no right interfering with their lives.

Gabriella purses her lips.

“Fine.” Gabriella pushes her laptop away, and looks up at Maggie. “It seems like we’ve hardly talked this week though, arguing or otherwise.”

Maggie shrugs.

“You’ve been busy with the restaurant,” she says quietly, hearing it for what it is. An excuse.

“And you’ve been busy ignoring Alex and closing yourself off like a little clam,” Gabriella says.

Maggie smiles faintly.

It’s not like her aunt to let her get away with her bullshit, be it her current problems or sneaking cigarettes when she was 14.

“You have been pretty busy, though,” Maggie insists. “I’m not making that up.”

Gabriella points a finger at her. “Touché.”

Maggie’s cell phone buzzes, saving her from a conversation about why exactly she’s been avoiding conversations. She grabs it from the table and sees a notification that Alex Danvers has posted a new picture on Instagram.

She followed the woman on social media as soon as she was confirmed to be Claire, like she’d done with all her castmates before her, but now Maggie sort of wishes she hadn’t. She’s still upset, against her better judgment, and she doesn’t want reminders right now.

But curiosity gets the better of her and she opens the app.

It’s a simple picture of the ocean, the sun setting and reflecting on the waves. The caption is short. *Home.*

“Who is it?” Gabriella asks, but Maggie becomes absorbed in the comments of the picture that’s just been posted. She recognizes one. User Karazdanvers, who by the looks of it is the official account of Alex’s sister. She doesn’t think a fan would reply with ‘missed hanging out with you, so good to be home’. Maggie clicks on her profile.

“Maggie?”

It’s pure curiosity that spurs her action, she thinks, as she looks at Alex’s sister’s pictures. There’s a recent multiple picture post and the first photo features Alex, a big smile on her face as she squeezes close to her sister.

Maggie frowns. It seems unfair, somehow, that Alex seems to not have a care in the world, that she can go through life telling people whatever she wants, and yelling at busboys that make simple mistakes, with no repercussions. Then again, that’s how privileged people act. And from the look of what seems to be their childhood home, Alex—and her sister, and her whole family—are as privileged as they come.

She swipes to see the rest of the pictures, and in the other Kara is with an older blonde woman—her mother, Maggie assumes—in front of what seems to be a kitchen, imposing brick exhaust hood
and all.

She swipes again, and finds Kara with a man who she assumes to be the boyfriend. She knows Alex doesn’t have a brother. They stand behind a dining room table, what seems to be the living room behind them. Maggie thinks she can see the ocean outside the window on the far left.

“Wow.” Gabriella whistles. “Now, that’s a house.”

Maggie scoffs. It certainly is, and it’s not fair.

A large brick fireplace dominates the living room wall, a painting above the mantle no doubt filled with Alex’s multiple achievements. She’s pretty sure Alex mentioned she did Ballet as a little kid, and Maggie thinks of course she did, she probably did gymnastics as well, and little league, and everything else parents can afford to enroll you in when they’re brimming with money.

It’s definitely the ocean outside the window, she can see it clearly now. And she’s not jealous, not now, but maybe her childhood self is, just a little. Nebraska was a triple landlocked state.

She couldn’t have dreamed of a house as amazing as this as a kid.

“Earth to Maggie?”

She looks up at her aunt. “Huh?”

“You blanked out on me for a bit there.”

“Sorry.” She shakes her head. “I’m just- I’m mad.”

Gabriella hums. “Is it still about what she said to you at the party, or did she do something else?”

“Still about that,” she says quietly.

She can’t help it, the way she keeps thinking about it, just like she couldn't help the way the initial words wormed their way into her chest until it felt like her heart was hurting. It should be nothing, it should have slid right off her, but she didn’t expect it from Alex. And she’s not a fan of the slut shaming either.

Gabriella sits down by her side, and Maggie meets her eyes.

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

Maggie nods.

“Do you...do you think I have a bad reputation?” M’gann had told her she was currently a media darling, that the critics had loved her last film, and she’d seen it herself. That 94% score on Rotten Tomatoes had felt like a win against all the men yelling about how terrible her movie would be (for being centered on a woman, and a gay woman at that) and how they didn’t want a liberal agenda shoved down their throats. But the general public loved it. And Maggie knows she shouldn’t base her sense of worth on something as inane as that, and she doesn’t, but it's comforting all the same.

Still, she knows she has somewhat of a reputation. After Emily, the cheating rumors, and her relationships afterward...she’d never thought much about it, but Alex has made her.

Gabriella starts shaking her head, but Maggie insists.
“Or that it’s true that I’ve, I don’t know, been with too many women or-”

“Maggie,” her aunt calls her attention. “You deserve for an amazing girl to love you. And nobody can fault you for looking for that. Fake girlfriend or not.”

karazdanvers It’s good to be home! I’ve been away for too long. #HomeIsWhereTheHeartIs
Alex watches as the puppies are prepped for the next part of the event, decked out in bandanas and cute collars.

Alex smiles faintly. She’d always wanted a dog. Her mom hadn’t been so supportive, even though they had plenty of space, because she swore it would be too much work for Alex, too much responsibility. And the following year she’d given her a sister to watch over 24/7, because that certainly wasn’t.

She should get a dog. There must be a breed that doesn’t require too much attention, and that can stay behind while she’s working. Small, too, so she can take it in planes. And that doesn’t make much noise. Fuck, what she wants is a plant. Or a rock.

Still, it might be nice to have someone excited for her to come home each day.

Especially since no one seems too happy to see her these days.

Maggie stands at the other side of the room, talking animatedly to James and one of the woman in charge of the charity. She can’t hear their conversation, but Maggie must have said something funny judging by the peals of laughter she hears from James and the woman. Maggie smiles, that brilliant smile with the dimples that Alex hasn’t been privy to in a long while.

They already posed for a few pictures, and James stood between them in each one. When the photographer asked for a picture of the both of them, Maggie stuck a puppy between them, which they held up together.

The atmosphere is just as tense as it was last week, the only difference is that J’onn wasn’t there then. He’s here now, and Alex can feel his eyes on her.

“Spit it out,” she says, not taking her eyes away from the people walking around the small studio. A puppy pees and a young woman is quick to scoop him up while another cleans up the mess. She grimaces at the smell of urine.

“What’s going on between you and Maggie?” J’onn asks, without looking at her, and the way he stares straight ahead, a pleasant smile on his face, is almost laughable. Alex wishes this was a laughing matter.

“She’s mad at me,” she says.

“I can tell. I think we all can. But why?”

Could they all tell? Maggie is being...colder than usual, she supposes, but not glaringly so. Alex realizes suddenly they haven’t really talked at all and Maggie talks to everyone. Maybe they can tell.

“We, uh...we had a fight?”

“Is that a question or are you telling me?”

“I don't know.” She turns toward him, finally. “Look, she came over to me at King’s party and started accusing me of flirting with some guy and putting our contract in jeopardy.”
“But you weren’t. Right?”

“Of course not!” she says, suddenly feeling embarrassed by the vehemence she says it with.

“Okay. We can’t have people finding out the whole thing is faked. The negative press would bury us alive.”

“I know.”

“So, she got mad because she thought you were putting the contract in jeopardy. Okay, so set her straight.”

“I don’t think that’s why she’s mad.”

J’onn turns toward her, eyeing her carefully.

“I might have said some things….I was mad, okay, and I didn’t-”

“What did you say to her?” he asks, and Alex feels as though she’s getting scolded for not playing nice.

“I just told her I’d read some things in the press, and that maybe I should be the one worried. Just that.”

J’onn’s eyes widen. “Just that.” He blows out a breath. “Alex…it’s been two weeks on the job. A job you got an audition for mostly because Maggie suggested your name to the producers. You can’t be burning bridges with her-“

“I'm not! I want to fix this!”

A lighting guy looks over at her outburst, and she slinks back until her back hits the wall.

J’onn gives her a look.

“Then do it.”

He steps away to join the others, and Alex feels almost jealous when Maggie smiles at him and lets him easily join the conversation. She’s almost mad at J’onn, too, for seemingly jumping ship to her side. Almost. Because she knows she’s at fault, too.

She hasn’t had time to think about feeling guilty, what with filming and then going back home, but the familiar emotion begins to creep up in her chest, greeting her like an old friend. She read those things about Maggie late at night, the day before she was due on set, and she’d really tried to keep them out of mind.

Maybe Maggie spends her weekends slutting it up or maybe she doesn’t. It’s none of Alex’s business either way. She shouldn’t have brought it up.

Then again, Maggie shouldn’t have accused her of flirting with that man.

Either way, she’s tired of the polite glances and tense silences. She wants to fix it. ‘Do it,’ J’onn had said.

How was she supposed to go about that?
Maggie loves dogs.

She’s always loved dogs.

Her family had them while she was growing up, and she remembers faintly the last dog they had. She’d never really thought about it, but she thinks the cost of feeding a dog was replaced with the cost of notebooks and crayons, so they never replaced the last dog they had, a big loving mutt that died of old age when she was 7 years old. Chester, was his name. And Maggie had never been his favorite, but she’d loved to pet him and the poor old thing put up with it.

She keeps holding one of the puppies long after the mandatory photoshoot is over, enjoying the way the little thing licks her fingers and enthusiastically wags his tail.

God, she should get a dog.

A big dog she can invite to sleep at her feet during winter and that she’d enjoy brushing down each afternoon. She wouldn’t have to try very hard to convince Winn to take care of him when she’s busy, but Maggie knows it’s not possible, at least not right now.

If she’s not filming she’s travelling to promote what she’s filmed, and she has that vacation with Alex next year, and a couple of festivals to attend in Europe thanks to *The Informant*. She doesn’t have room in her life right now for an overeager puppy.

The squirming little thing held against her chest has made her think about it at least six times since he was put in her arms, though.

She talks to James and Brenda, one of the directors of Woof for Joy, while they get the set ready for the games and trivia. Maggie has heard the other director is bringing her baby son to participate as well, along with the puppies, and she’s not sure how she feels about that.

Soon enough they call them to set, and she, James, and Alex are locked inside a pen with half a dozen hyperactive puppies and a chubby 8 month old.

It’s more fun than she thought it would be.

She forces herself to forget her reservations towards Alex in front of the camera, and after trying to answer a few of the trivia questions while the puppies distract her, it almost doesn’t feel like she’s faking it. The baby apparently picks Alex as his favorite, and she has a real, honest belly laugh when Alex tries to pick him up only for him to wiggle and fall out of her hands.

He lands on his diaper clad butt over her thighs, giggling, but Alex’s eyes are downright comical they’re so wide and terrified. The baby’s mother chuckles.

“They’re harder than they look,” she promises, and everyone laughs. Alex joins in, her cheeks red.

Maggie picks the baby boy up from under his armpits and hoists him up to her side. She rubs his back in a practiced circular motion with one hand while he comfortably sits on her other arm,
against her chest, and Maggie feels like it’s a personal win when he lets his head fall against her shoulder.

His mom steps in to take him, and then they have only puppies around them as they stand up to spin the roulette behind them. The hour is up before she knows it, and they answer just a few questions live on periscope before it’s over. She makes sure to say only nice things about Alex, knowing that soon enough she’ll be her girlfriend to the world, and then they’re free to go.

Or so she thinks.

Her phone rings as they’re saying goodbye to the crew and the Woof for Joy directors, and it’s a name she knows better than to make wait.

Anthony.

“Hello?”

“Maggie, hi. Are you done with the dog thing?”

“Huh, yes. We were just walking out.”

“Great! There’s a car waiting for you and Alex outside, you’re having breakfast together. My treat. Enjoy!” He closes the call without as much as saying goodbye.

Maggie sighs.

The contract doesn’t start for another month but Anthony is starting with his promotion now. And Maggie knows he’s like this, but she wishes he wasn’t just for this morning. She finishes saying her goodbyes, and then walks outside into the blinding midday sun.

Alex comes out after her, and Maggie stops her with a wave.

“Danvers. We have-”

“King just called,” she says, and gets into the black car ahead of them.

Maggie hopes at least the food is good.

Breakfast sucks.

Alex has never heard of a ‘burrata’ before, and she’s glad, because she’s not a fan of the cheesy monstrosity. Not only that, but it’s tense, and it’s not conducive for the strange italian food to make its way down her throat.

It’s as tense and uncomfortable as it was on set, but they had a lot to do there. It was easy to ignore Maggie before, but now it’s not. It’s actually painfully obvious how quiet they are, both wishing
they were anywhere else, she’s sure.

She knows that’s partly a result of her words at the party, so she takes a deep breath and goes for it.

“I...”

Maggie looks up, and raises an eyebrow as if to ask if Alex really is talking, but Alex ignores it and the trepidation it causes in her. She can at least say her piece.

“I’m sorry about what I said at the party,” she says simply.

“Are you?” Maggie asks.

Alex gives her a look. “I am. But you were in the wrong too,” she’s quick to add. Maggie rolls her eyes. “I wasn’t flirting with that guy. I can barely remember his name.”

That hasn’t stopped her from doing more than flirting in the past, but Alex doesn’t dwell on it now.

“I was just talking, I was trying to be nice. Everyone just keeps telling me to be nice, and the one time I am you come over and treat me like I was giving him a lapdance.” She shudders at the thought. “I wasn’t flirting,” she repeats. “He was a bit of an asshole, actually, with no concept of personal space.”

Maggie’s expression softens.

“You...you weren’t encouraging him?”

“No,” Alex says firmly. “I was fucking annoyed, but I had to be nice, and that’s why I got so mad when you came over and gave me the fifth degree over it. That’s why I said...” She doesn't think it'd be wise to mention it again. “The things I said. I’m sorry about them. I don’t really think that of you. I was just...” She shrugs, and hopes her apology doesn’t sound as half assed to Maggie as it does to her own ears.

Maggie nods.

She feels...ashamed? Or embarrassed?

She begins to see the night of the party in a new light, and she feels suddenly guilty for automatically thinking the worst of Alex. She was already annoyed at her for what she’d seen before, it’d been a step from there for her to assume she was already doing something to put their contract in jeopardy.

She looks at the scene with different eyes, and she feels even guiltier because she’s been there, not quite knowing how to deflect insistent men, and not quite sure if she could be aggressive considering who they were. She’s still hurt over Alex’s words, but she realizes she pulled the trigger first.
Maybe she was too harsh on Alex….maybe.

“I hear you,” she tells her. “And I’m...Im sorry, for assuming. You didn’t deserve what I said.”

Alex nods, lapping up the apology like one of the overeager puppies they spent the morning with.

“You too. I’m sorry- I’m really sorry.”

Maggie nods. “There’s just one thing,” she mentions, because while Alex might be capable of apologizing to her, that tells nothing to Maggie about what she’s like with other people. And she’s seen how that is firsthand already. It’s part of the reason she was so hard on her. “One of the busboys, at Anthony’s party. He almost spilled something on you and you were…”

Maggie makes a motion with her hands. She doesn’t want to say ‘an asshole’.

She sees when realization dawns over Alex, and she’s at least glad to see she looks ashamed.

“I...I was nervous;” she stutters. “Really nervous. And I’m not the nicest person to strangers, I know I should work on that.” Alex sighs. She seems as honest as she did at the beginning, before the contract, back when they’d raced to their apartment building. “I can apologize, if you can give me his number.”

Surprise pleasantly courses through her.

“You’d do that?” she asks.

“Of course,” Alex says. “I always do what I say will.”

And there’s the serious, determined woman she’d met at the best chemistry read Maggie’s ever had. She stifles a small smile. Could it really be as easy as a misunderstanding fixed over great Burrata and spelt bread?

Alex gives her a small, cautious smile, and Maggie thinks maybe she didn’t do a good enough job of hiding hers.

She takes a bite of her food, enjoy the creaminess spreading through her tongue, and gives further thought to Alex’s initial words.

“You don't have to, by the way,” she says, swallowing and dabbing her lips with a napkin. “Go along with some guy because you think you have to be polite,” she clarifies. “If he’s being a dick he’s a dick, no matter who he is. And in a place like that...I know Anthony, and I know how to handle his friends. You can look for me. I’ll get you out of it.”

“No yelling this time?”

Maggie gives her a small smile.

“No yelling this time.”

Alex goes back to her plate of food, and Maggie asks for two Bloody Mary’s for the both of them. If they’re here, they might as well make the most of Anthony’s money and sample the drinks. Alex brightens up when the tall glasses get to the table, and Maggie chuckles. It almost feels like she’s having breakfast with a friend.

They’re over what happened at the party, but that doesn’t mean the way Alex tenses up whenever she stands too close will be over, or the way she seems to be so uncomfortable at times with
anything regarding, well. Maggie being gay? Her character being gay? Gayness? She’s not sure.

And they’ve still agreed to pretend to date each other for a year, and that’s not even close to being over.

One battle at a time.

They leave the restaurant half an hour later, Maggie finally taking pity on Alex and using what little Italian she knows to order her something good, greasy, and bacon loaded from the menu. (She doesn’t understand elegant restaurant’s need to have the menu in a language most tourists who walk in can’t speak, but she supposes that adds to the appeal. Visit Italy without visiting Italy.)

They get in the car, and she’s thankful it’s just a short ride to their apartment building.

She gets a text from Anthony halfway there.
Maggie sighs with the dawning realization that she’s signed up for a year of this. She hopes M’gann is right and it’s worth it.

She takes a picture with their cheeks pressed together, and uploads it to her Instagram Stories.

They’re a block away from their street when Maggie realizes that Alex is still staring at her cellphone.

“Everything okay?” She asks.

Alex looks up.

“Huh? Yeah. yes. It’s just...How is it so easy for you?”

“What?”
“To pretend. To...lie to people. And about something like this.”

Because she’s done it before, Maggie’s mind supplies, and she hates it. It’s not true that it’s because of that, or at least she doesn’t want to think it is. Emily...those were different circumstances, and Maggie isn’t proud of them. This thing with Alex is different, because she and Alex have nothing together, and they never will.

She and Emily were in love.

She doesn’t like the suggestion that this is easy for her.

“That’s pretty rich coming from someone whose job it is to pretend for the cameras, Danvers.”

Alex adamantly shakes her head.

“Acting is different,” she says. “This isn’t acting.”

She isn’t combative but looks genuinely lost, and Maggie softens against her better judgement. She doesn’t know how to feel about the woman at her side faking her entire sexuality for the cameras, but it’s not like Maggie hasn’t done her fair share of questionable things. She decides just not to think about it. There’s too much at stake, and she and Alex are at the center of it all. The show, the PR contract. They’re better working together than being divided.

“It is acting,” she argues. “It’s part of the job.”

Their car stops in front of their apartment building, and Maggie touches Alex’s arm before she gets out.

“Look, I’m sorry you have to act like you like women—like you like me, but it’ll be over before you know it.”
The rest of August goes by in a blur, along with half of September, and before Alex knows it it’s been a month and a half since she first arrived on set.
The date jumps out at her, she’s not quite sure why, and it circles her mind during the one scene she has that morning, playing opposite an extra. It’s an interrogation scene, where she’s supposed to play the good cop, understanding and stern—but not mean—even in the face of the Pg-13 insults the perp throws at her. Alex wouldn’t be like that in real life, she knows. Not for the first time she’s just a tad jealous of Maggie, and how her character is tougher and smarter than her own. What’s the point of treating criminals nicely? The scene is easy, and soon enough she’s done. Alex quickly makes plans to take a nap in her trailer until later that afternoon, when she’s supposed to film outside, with James, and her march back to Alex Danvers’ headquarters is only halted by a few of the wardrobe girls, one who carries a cupcake with a candle on it.

Alex suddenly, wildly, thinks it’s for her, as if anyone celebrates a month-and-a-half anniversaries. But then she sees them go into the trailer beside her own—Maggie’s trailer—and Alex is suddenly hit with it. September 14th. It’s Maggie’s birthday.

It’s the first thing she read about the woman on her Wikipedia page—for someone who prides herself on her good memory, who used to say she had a photographic memory when she was younger—she’s embarrassed she didn’t know. She’s even more embarrassed she saw her this morning and only waved from afar before going into hair and makeup, because that probably means Maggie knows she didn’t know. And shouldn’t she have?

Alex and Maggie are friendlier now—they talk in between takes again and Maggie smiles at her more, the dimples almost always present. The rest of the cast and crew, perhaps taking a cue from their leading lady Alex thinks, have welcomed her more too and she’s made an effort to return their kindness. She engages in small talk with her hair and makeup women, and she actually tries to make conversation and be friendly with everyone she comes across. She introduces herself to the different directors that pass through, learning their names and swapping set stories. It’s not her, and sometimes it’s hard, but she’s trying, which is what J’onn would tell her is all that matters.

She’s slowly integrating herself into the Nightingale family, but she didn’t know it was the ‘big, special day’ as Kara would say, of the most important person on set. She feels a twinge of guilt, and that feeling only grows as she hears loud singing and shouts of ‘happy birthday’ coming from Maggie’s trailer.

She pulls out her phone as she walks toward her own trailer. She can fix this minor misstep.

She convinces, after some very choice words and an assurance of a very large tip, an Uber driver to get her a book from Barnes and Noble, anything positive sounding, while she uses her lunch break to quickly buy a birthday card.

There’s a little gift shop a short ways from set she walks to. She immediately makes her way to the back of the store, keeping her head down and hoping no one notices her, and grabs the first generic birthday card she sees. It’s a cream white card with a simple red balloon on the front and a “Happy Birthday” inside. She thinks it’ll do, but then her eye catches another card next to it, one with a group of puppies on it. She smiles as she remembers how much Maggie seemed to like those puppies at the charity event last Sunday.

She grabs the puppy card and checks out.
The director has just yelled cut on the final scene of the day when Alex sees what appears to be the whole crew wheeling a massive two tier cake towards them and singing happy birthday. The cake is covered in fondant created to look like the midnight blue Nightingale title cover and there’s a fondant gun and badge on top. Maggie lets out a delighted laugh and rushes towards the group of people.

Everyone breaks out into applause when the song is over, and Maggie blows out the candle, a big purple, sparkling 24.

“Thank you, you guys. You shouldn’t have.” Maggie hugs a few of the crew, the dimples seemingly permanently etched into her cheeks. “You really shouldn’t have. But listen up! You gave me cake, I have booze. Birthday party at my apartment tonight! I’ll have my assistant send you the address. Bring a friend!”

Everyone claps again, and Alex thinks that no matter how much she tries, she'll never be on Maggie's level.

Her arms itch when thinking about everything her sister could move in her apartment when she visits, she would never have so many people over, and certainly not people she doesn't know that well.

Alex hangs back, letting Maggie and the crew talk for a few moments. She's all smiles and has a distinct glow about her that Alex thinks makes her look different, younger, even as she's aging another year today.

When Maggie's left alone for a second, Alex sees her opening, and comes up to her.

“Happy birthday,” she tells her, and Maggie surprises her by stepping forward and wrapping her in a hug. Alex returns it, dazzled, and realizes with a start how Maggie is so...small. Her waist is tiny as Alex wraps her arms around her, squeezing gently, and even in her heels Alex is taller. Maggie smells like something sweet, but dark, and Alex can't quite put her finger on it. Cherries and spice? Currant?

“Thanks, Danvers.”

"No problem." She breathes out.

She steps away, and Alex dumbly hands her the card and the book—which she stuck a small ribbon on.

“That for me?” Maggie smiles. Alex hopes she appreciates the book; it's a dumb, cheesy hardcover with glossy pages full of loving messages for every day of the year. Maggie looks up at her.

“Thank you. You shouldn't have.”

Alex waves it away.

“It’s no problem,” she repeats.

“Are you going to come to the birthday party tonight?” Maggie asks, and Alex stutters.

“I...I cant. I’m sorry, my sister is visiting and-”

“Of course.” Maggie gives her a smile. “It’s your sister.”
Guilt flares up in Alex, and she hopes there’s no way Maggie can find out that Kara is not actually visiting her. If only her sister can refrain from being seen out and about with her boyfriend on the other side of the country, that’d be fantastic.

“I hope you have fun,” she adds, sincere.


Alex nods. Crisis averted.

Maggie can barely hear herself over the noise of the party.

Her apartment is filled to the brim with people, and plastic cutlery litters every available surface space. Half of the food is gone already—Gabriella must be pleased her food was such a hit—and the drinks are flowing. She briefly hopes no one throws up in her bathroom, or worse yet, doesn’t make it to her bathroom in time.

But with all her reservations—it’s a damn good party.

James calls people to play beer pong on her dining room table, and enlists Maggie to be on his team. Winn, surprisingly volunteers to go against them first, and—with the help of Gabriel—wins the first round.

Maggie steps out after her fourth red-solo cup’s worth of beer, just in time to open the door for her manager.

“M’gann!” She throws her arms around the woman, aided by the alcohol, and M’gann hugs her back. “I thought you were in L.A. this whole week!”

“Had to see my favorite actress on her birthday. I’m not staying long, I actually had a couple of things to oversee here.” She eyes Maggie’s hand. “Take it easy okay?” She whispers. “Or don’t. Just don't let it get to social media. Not the image we’re trying to sell.”

“Gotcha,” Maggie says. “So I should take down the photo of me doing body shots off the stripper that came by earlier?”

M’gann pats her arm. “Never change, Maggie.”

M’gann stays for half an hour, but it’s enough for Maggie to get her to play beer pong with them. She’s on her team, and when they go up against James she beats him easily. Somehow—though Maggie suspects it has something to do with how much she’s drunk—she can’t beat James’ partner.

She drinks, and performs even worse next round, in which M’gann also fails.

When she loses, Maggie stops the teasing that follows when M’gann says she doesn't drink. She
knows her story, as well as she knows her own, and M’gann has been clean for far too many years to break her streak over an idiotic game of beer pong. Not that Maggie thought she would have.

She knows M’gann’s will is made of steel.

It’s past 3 when everyone leaves.

Gabriella is putting away leftovers, never one to let food go to waste, while Maggie walks around the large apartment with a trash bag in her hands, picking up plastic cup after plastic cup. It’s slightly cold, and she closes one of the floor-to-roof windows that someone must have opened to have a smoke. Moonlight streams through them all, the orb brilliantly white high in the sky.

It’s so nice and quiet and calm she almost forgets it’s been 10 years.

She’d been ignoring the anniversary, since she has so many of them. The anniversary of the last Christmas she spent at home with her parents, the last time she saw her friends, the anniversary of the day they left her at the airport with a one way ticket to LA and to Gabriella, her dad not even looking backwards. Or today, the anniversary of the last birthday she celebrated with them. she'd turned 14 years old on a Sunday, and she still remembers every gift she got. A page ripped out of a coloring book, a Toblerone bar of chocolate that lasted her a week, a necklace. Roy, her best friend at the time, had saved from his allowance and gone all the way to Omaha to get the thing. Her dad had given her the necklace, simple and silver, and Maggie never asked, but she knew how much effort it must have taken him, how many extra shifts.

He'd ripped it off her neck not 2 months later.

Maggie swallows, but it does nothing to dispel the way her throat has grown tight.

Gabriella steps up behind her.

"You noticed how long it's been?" Her aunt asks gently. Maggie nods. "Oh, piccola-"

She shakes off Gabriella's hand. "I'm okay," she's quick to say. "It's whatever."

"It's a decade," Gabriella says.

Maggie shrugs. "I'm fine. I'm- I'm going to get some sleep, okay? I'm beat. do you need more help-"

"I got it," Gabriella says, grabbing the trash bag from her hand. "Get some sleep."

Maggie nods, and climbs the stairs two at a time up to her room. She hates that Gabriella sees her go, because Maggie doesn't want her to think she hasn't done an amazing job the past 10 years. She raised her, in all the ways that count, and it feels unfair that she feels so much pain simply because it's been 10 years since the last birthday she spent with her family. Before everything changed.

She was lost afterward, and broken. And now...she has a job she loves, and friends, and an apartment that’s 5 times the size of the house she grew up in.

It doesn't make sense that it hurts so much.

And yet Maggie still cries into her pillow that night, newly 24 years old but still feeling like a little
When she gets home that afternoon, Alex decides that since she already lied to Maggie she might as well make it worth something. She decides to call her sister.

She and Kara used to talk, a lot, back when she first left for college, and then on that first year on *Body of Medicine*. Her sister had been one of the few people to support her decision to leave college and pursue acting again seriously, and Alex hadn’t forgotten. She’d just gotten too distracted by her own shit to be a good sister.

She texts Kara about it, and then boots up her laptop and opens the seldom used Skype app. Her sister’s face appears only a few moments later, her hair messy and a face mask painting her cheeks and forehead white.

“Hi!” Kara exclaims.


“I am! Hang on- Mon-El! Can you get me a hair tie?” Kara yells off screen. “It’s Alex,” she answers to a question she doesn’t hear. “Thanks.” Kara beams, once more on screen, and then Mon-El steps in behind her.

“I got it, babe,” he says, before grabbing Kara’s hair and pinning it up, finally tying it into a lopsided ponytail. Her sister doesn’t seem to mind as she turns to give him a peck on the lips, a big smile on her face. Alex looks at the exchange with a frown. She’s happy for her sister, Kara certainly looks happy for herself at least. But she doesn’t understand it. She’s never felt that comfortable with someone. And she’d definitely never let anyone touch her hair like that.

"So..." she says, once Mon-El is finally out of sight. "What were you so happy about?"

Kara almost looks like she's vibrating.

"I got it! I got the audition!"

Something sinks in Alex's stomach, but she pushes through it and smiles.

"Captain Marvel?" she asks.

"Yes!" Kara squeals, and it distorts the laptop microphone with the force of it. her eyes crinkle with her happiness, and Alex feels like the worst person on the planet because although she's happy, part of her really is, the bigger part feels yet again like Kara is overshadowing her. Like it doesn't even matter what she's trying to do with *Nightingale*. Kara has already one upped her without trying. What's the point of finally getting to play a cop when her sister is going to be a goddamn superhero.

"I'm really happy for you," she tells her. "You deserve it."
And that's the worst part, the part that makes Alex such a fucking asshole. Kara does deserve it. She's worked hard for every role, and she's a genuinely good, kind person, and she deserves everything good coming her way. Alex just wishes that maybe, she did too.

"Wait- have you told mom?" Her mom hadn't called her with the news, and Alex thinks it something she could have done, especially after the mess that was their talk last month.

"Of course not, silly! I wanted you to know first."

Alex smiles, tears thick in her throat.

"I have to go," she tells her sister suddenly. "But I'm so, so happy for you. We'll talk soon okay."

"Okay!"

Mon-El suddenly steps into the frame, his arms around Kara's waist as he blows a raspberry onto her cheek.

"No, ew!" she complains, but he does it again. Alex doesn't think Kara notices when she ends the call.

The Uber gets there faster than she expects, and soon enough she's outside the closest bar to her apartment building she could find.

Nobody knows her here, and J'onn certainly hasn't bribed this particular bartender to cut her off early, so she keeps the shots coming until the overwhelming feeling of not being enough fades along with the ability to taste what's she's drinking.

Five drinks in, and it starts to feel like she can be just like Kara and touch the stars.

Chapter End Notes

We’d love to hear what you think about the chapter! Leave us a comment below! Or you can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meantoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We'd love to talk to you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

*Fama nihil est celerius*: nothing is swifter than rumor
‘Nightingale’ cast teases badass premiere - Tribec TV Festival

By Gregg Williams

September 20, 2018 6:15pm

*Nightingale* is back, and it’s making a big splash. The cast wasted no time at Thursday panel at the Tribeca TV Festival to tease the second season. The panel, which included Maggie Sawyer, James Olsen, newcomer Alex Danvers, and showrunner/executive producer Anthony King, offered a few spoilers about the upcoming episodes. As previously reported, the show is adding a big new character to the show, played by *Body of M*cine alum and daughter of late famed director Jeremiah Danvers, Alex Danvers. Dan will be stepping into the shoes of Claire Lawson, Blake Davenport’s new rookie detective partner. The show has preemptively dubbed their ship name ‘Dawson,’ and the producers are hoping for the duo started back in July with a joint Entertainment Weekly spread.

The addition of a long-term love interest for Blake is a new direction for the show, star Maggie Sawyer enthusiastically lauded at Thursday’s panel, “I’m so excited toće some much needed representation to a sorely underrepresented community. And I hope that we can change people lives, in the smallest or biggest way, with our story.”

Moreover, showrunner King promised the audience ‘Dawson’ wouldn’t be another toxic relationship, “We’re truly invested in fleshing out how they develop from reluctant partners to close...friends [laughs] over the course of the season.”

For viewers of the show who came for its signature action and humor, the cast were quick to assure that the show will retain its high-packed adrenaline filled energy, but now some heart involved too. In fact, King also revealed (maybe jokingly, maybe not) that an upcoming episode will find Blake and Claire doing their best Bonnie and Clyde impressions.

*Nightingale* returns Thursday, October 11 at 9/8c pm on ABC.
Maggie’s dining room table is pristine except for the clean, white stack of paper stapled together resting in the center.

The contract.

Maggie knows it’s just paper, but it’s almost foreboding to even look at. She can feel October 11th creeping up on her, like the long shadows that seemingly stalk her when she comes home after a long day. It’s almost ridiculous to Maggie, that’s she’s so nervous about this. She should be fine, things like this are common in the business. She’d even reassured Alex that it was just another part of the job.

But...it’s a whole year.

A whole year under Anthony’s thumb, carrying out his orders like a lap dog. She’s been under his command to an extent until now, what with being the lead of his ‘baby’ as he called Nightingale. But this, him encroaching on her personal life and dictating where exactly she should be seen having dinner with Alex, when she should post photos with her, where she should kiss her so the paps can get pictures...it’s another level. And she’d be lying if she said she was comfortable with it. She’s glad. She thinks if she was it would be a sign she’s become the kind of person she doesn’t want to be.

The other extreme isn’t ideal, either. She knows Alex was initially very reticent about the contract, but then her later blase acceptance of it at the newest branch of La Nuvola Bianca didn’t sit right with Maggie either. She suspects it was a front, no person could make such a jarring 180 degree turn, and she’s afraid she’ll be left to carry the weight of the arrangement when Alex inevitably spooks and pulls away. She and Alex are friendlier now, but she can tell the woman is still uneasy around her.

The click of a door opening disrupts Maggie’s stare off with the contract.

“Sorry about that,” M’gann slips her phone back into her pocket. “Producers are always unnecessarily long winded.”

Maggie casts her eyes up to her. “Bea?”

M’gann nods.

“She wanted to go over some of the finer scheduling details.” She smiles good naturedly. “You know how thorough she is. She says hello too, by the way.”

Bea Bastow. The producer of Maggie’s next project come June. She’s excited for it. It was down to her and another actress for the lead role, and after a long process she finally got the call. The proper celebrating had gotten lost between her starting the chemistry reads for Claire and the whirlwind that followed—Gabriella and her had only celebrated with Korean BBQ delivered to her apartment and reruns of Law and Order—but Maggie’s still delighted about the new movie.

The film is a comedy, it’s going to be a nice change from her recent action projects. Not that she
doesn’t love those too, but she wants to do every genre—action, drama, comedy, romantic, coming of age, thriller, fantasy…She wants it all. Maybe that desire is silly, akin to a child wanting to play with all the toys in the box, but she can’t help it. And she’s not sorry for it either. She’s ambitious, and that’s not a bad thing—though society still deems it is when it comes from a woman. Maggie knows that well enough.

She looks at the contract again. This could -no, this will help her. M’gann believes it, and Maggie trusts her. Nowadays she’s starting to believe it too. If there’s any hope for it to work, she has to have faith it’ll help her. Faith. She mentally scoffs.

If only her mother could see her heathen of a daughter now, resting her career on faith.

She shrugs M’gann’s words off. “Mildred and I were having a grand old time together.”

“I know I’m going to regret this, but who is Mildred?” M’gann settles into the seat on her left and opens her laptop.

Maggie nods towards the stack of paper. “I’ve decided to name her Mildred. I read once on the inside of a bottle cap that the way to overcome trepidation is to name it. Hence,” she waves towards the center of the table with a flourish, “Mildred.”

“Well.” She raises an eyebrow. “We’ve got about three weeks until Mildred goes into effect.”

“I remember, as if Anthony could let me forget.” Maggie rolls her eyes. “He’s been demanding we increase our social media interactions and sent me a text earlier of suggested body language toward Alex. I’m assuming Alex received the same text.”

The text was, quite frankly, ridiculous, even by his standards. He’d used the sunglasses smiley face emoji as bullet points in his excessively detailed list. ‘Touch her arm when you talk to her, smile at everything she says, crank those heart eyes up to one hundred.’ He’s acting like Maggie doesn’t know how to be a human being in a relationship or flirt with someone. She sighs inwardly thinking about putting up with his micromanaging not only on the show but now also in her personal life.

M’gann clears her throat. “Like I said, in this area, the man’s an expert.”

Maggie cuts her off by shoving her phone in her face, the text message visible for M’gann to see. She quickly scans over it and winces.

“Okay, so he’s over the top, but we knew that from your first audition for Blake. It is best to build up the relationship slowly to make it look as natural as possible though.” She takes a sip of her coffee and reaches for the contract to open it, flipping through the pages. “And social media and body language is a big part of that. It’ll be the perfect made-for-TV friends to lovers trope everyone loves.”

“The perfect made-for-TV story right down to the fact that it’s all fake,” sarcasm is etched into Maggie’s entire body.

“It’s not fake,” M’gann smirks teasingly. “It’s a form of performance art, didn’t you read the title?”

Maggie outright snorts at that, “That is by far the classiest way I’ve seen someone label a PR relationship.”

M’gann shrugs. “You can’t dock his lawyer on style points,” she says. “On the subject of style, you’ve looked up the restaurant he wants as your first date right?”
“Of course. Well, Winn did.” He sent her a detailed report of it complete with yelp reviews and suggested dishes to order. “But I know of it. It’s a fancy place. A known romantic restaurant in the city too.” La Grenouille is its name. It’s actually a great choice for the first date, classy and with a facade of privacy, but still in front of the eyes of lots of people, with smartphones ready to whip out.

“Yes, and we need to go over what you’ll wear. You and Alex can coordinate colors or Winn can schedule a stylist to work with.” M’gann looks up briefly from whatever she’s doing on her laptop—Maggie still marvels at the woman’s ability to multitask, she really is one of the best in the business. Maggie is lucky M’gann is with her.

“Seriously? I don’t remember giving up my right to dress myself for an entire year too.” She grabs the contract from M’gann’s side and flips through it, just to check.

M’gann stops her moving hand. “You didn’t, but this is the first date, and I want to make sure it’s picture perfect.”

“It’d be nice if the other party cared as much as you do.” Maggie checks her phone again. Alex and J’onn are 17 minutes late. Alex lives in the same apartment building as her—all of the Nightingale cast does—and she’s late.

M’gann confirmed to her she’d set up this meeting for 10 AM in her apartment, and she’d texted Alex at 10:10 asking if she was on her way. She’s still waiting for a response.

“It certainly would be, but we have to work with what we have.” M’gann is already dialing her phone. “I’ll ask J’onn his ETA.”

“I might as well just take the damn elevator down to her floor and see if she’s there myself,” Maggie grumbles.

Alex greedily extends her hand somewhere towards her right, where she can smell the glorious bitter twang of coffee.

Her eyes are still closed after an unfortunate incident moments before involving the sun and opening her eyes. J’onn is saying something, but he sounds like one of the adults in those Charlie Brown cartoons that Kara insisted she watch with her every Sunday as kids. It’s just a drone of unintelligible sound, until she can feel the heat off the coffee on her skin. Her fumbling hands find the mug, and she drags it toward her. Finally, the first drop of hot, strong coffee hits her tongue, and Alex closes her eyes. She relishes the burn of the liquid going down her throat, waking her up. It helps clear some of the fog in her head, although it’s still throbbing. She doesn’t know what to do about that apart from calling up the Guinness World Record to tell them she has the fucking worst recorded headache in human history thus far.

She’s finishing the last dredges of her coffee when J’onn’s voice finally breaks through into her consciousness.
“Alex! Have you been listening to anything I’ve said in the past ten minutes?” His tone is exasperated, and he eyes her as though considering whether it’s worth repeating himself or not. Alex blearily wonders if this will finally be his breaking point—the moment he realizes she’s not worth the trouble and leaves. This latest incident hardly registers as one of her worst, but she was supposed to be over this. She’s got a great new role on a hit show. She hasn’t been photographed drunk or at a club since May. She’s been doing well, but she slipped up last night. Everything with Kara...if there was ever a topic that would drive her back to her old habits, that would be it.

She finally drags her eyelids open to look at J’onn, covering her eyes from the sun. It takes a few moments for her eyes to adjust, but when they do she realizes the room is dark. J’onn must have closed the blinds.

J’onn’s gaze is solemn, and disappointed.

A familiar pang of guilt lances through her, greeting her like an old friend.

“You were lucky no one saw you. Alex. I thought...” he sighs and shakes his head, breaking eye contact with her. “I thought this would change.”

“It will. It is.” She sits up from her slumped position at the table. Her head is still aching—and she feels slightly nauseous, but she ignores her discomfort and focuses on J’onn. “I’m sorry.” She imbues as much sincerity as she can in those two words.

J’onn looks back at her. His face softens. “It’s okay Alex.” He reaches across the table to place a comforting, warm hand on her forearm. “People slip up. I’m sorry if I was too harsh, but I was worried. You weren’t answering your phone, and my mind went to the worst case scenario. But I shouldn’t have been so quick to judge. You’ve been doing well these past months, remarkably well. I’m really proud of you, Alex.”

Her tongue is so dry it’s painful. Her head is still a fuzzy, aching mess. And her limbs feel slightly deadened, but none of that can stop the smile from spreading across her face or the blaze of warmth taking residence in her chest. It’s validating to have her...progress confirmed by someone else, someone she trusts and values too.

“Thank you, for everything.” Her hungover brain can’t think of words sufficient enough to show her appreciation of J’onn and his constant support of her so she’ll settle with a simple statement until her neurons fall back in line.

He smiles again. “How about you clean up and then we’ll head over to Maggie’s?”

Maggie’s? What -Oh. She forgot. Fuck, she forgot. She has a meeting with Maggie and her manager this morning to go over the contract. J’onn had emailed her. She scrambles up from her seat and rushes to the bathroom, tripping and cursing as she does. “I’ll be ready in ten,” she calls out, accidentally slamming the bathroom door behind her in her rush.

She takes a quick shower, flinching when it’s too fast for the water to get warm, and then dresses even faster. J’onn is waiting for as she hurries out of the bathroom.

“M’gann just called, we’re a bit late.”

“How late?” She winces.

“Around twenty minutes late.” He grabs his jacket from her couch and starts walking to the door. “You ready to go?”
“Yeah, just gimme a second.” She rushes to the kitchen to grab a glass of water and fumbles with the lid of an aspirin bottle, finally popping it off to so she can swallow two of the pills. She knocks back the entire glass of water just for good measure, and then they’re hurrying out the door to the elevator.

Alex tries to get her bearings in the elevator ride up to the top floor, but her head still hurts, and now she’s slightly dizzy too.

She really should’ve stopped drinking by drink number 7. She shouldn’t have even went out last night, but what’s done is done. She squares her shoulders and inhales deeply.

The loud ding of the elevator doors opening makes Alex grimace, but she strides forward confidently. And then stops in the middle of the hallway. She realizes she doesn’t know which apartment is Maggie’s. J’onn chuckles as he comes behind her and leads the way to the door at the end of the hallway.

J’onn only knocks twice before the door swings open and Maggie’s face greets her—her silhouette outlined by the blinding sun coming through the floor to ceiling windows she can see behind Maggie. Alex takes an involuntary step back.

“Hey,” Maggie steps closer to her with a concerned expression. “Are you okay?”

Maggie stares at Alex, the pained look on her face making her stop everything for a second.

She steps closer towards her to get a better look at her face. Her eyes are bloodshot, and she can smell a faint whiff of alcohol off of her. The strong stuff, too. Her movements are sluggish as she brings her forearm up to cover her eyes.

“Could you pull the blinds closed on your windows? The light…” she trails off with a vague wave of her arm. Maggie frowns.

She’s clearly hungover. Hungover and 20 minutes late. Maggie resists the urge to roll her eyes as she turns to draw the blinds, motioning for Alex and J’onn to follow her into the apartment. And to think for a moment she’d been worried about Alex’s well being. The woman clearly had that under control.

“Sorry we’re late.” J’onn nods at her and M’gann, and Maggie nods before turning around and making a beeline for the table. The sooner she’s done with this meeting, the better.

M’gann smiles, her lips pressed together and thin in obvious discomfort.

“It’s fine, let’s just not make a habit of it?”

“Of course not,” he reassures and takes a seat opposite her.

Alex slowly trails after J’onn and sits next to him.
It’s hardly an ideal start to the meeting, and Maggie hopes Alex’s behavior won’t be common during the contract. Unbidden, flashes of article headlines she’d glanced at during her initial ‘Alex Danvers’ search spring to mind. She knows she’s had a past with partying and drinking, but she assumed she was over it—or at least had it under control. It wasn’t her business, and so long as it didn’t interfere with the show, she didn’t care. That was her initial thought when she’d learned of Alex’s past, but that was before the contract. Now it does matter. Drunk people have loose lips, and loose lips sink ships. She’s not sure her career could survive the blow back of an exposed PR relationship, and she doesn’t want to find out.

Maggie snaps herself out of it. She’s been shooting with Alex for two months now, and the woman has always showed up to set on time, ready to work hard. She’s been nothing but professional (albeit awkward) even during that brief period after the party. She’s overthinking this—and being a tad judgmental. God. The contract already has her paranoid and jumping to the worst thoughts. She runs a hand down her face before turning to face the others.

“Anybody want something to drink before we start? Water? Coffee…”

“Uh -I’ll have some water please,” Alex says, her tone sheepish and eyes apologetic. Is she remorseful? Apologizing subtlety for being late and not sober? Maggie’s not sure, but she breathes in and exhales slowly.

“Sure thing, Danvers.”

Today’s priority is preparing for October, it's the entire purpose of this meeting, and being that she’s half of the people involved, she can’t afford to get mad at the other party. There isn’t any room for shaky assumptions and irritable behavior.

As soon as she slides back into the seat next to M’gann—handing a glass of water do a very grateful Alex—M’gann stands up and begins speaking, taking control of the room as she’s wont to do.

“King wants your first public appearance as a couple the night after the season two premiere. He’s already set up a reservation at nice, upscale restaurant, La Grenouille, in the area.” She looks at everyone in the room to receive affirmation of her words. “Good. We’re all on the same page. I was just mentioning to Maggie earlier about your wardrobe for the night, Alex.”

Alex straightens up, “Oh, I was just gonna pull something out of my closest, a nice dress.”

Maggie adds her voice to the discussion. “M’gann wants us color coordinated, and Anthony probably does too.”

“So we have to be dressed by other people too?” Alex’s eyebrows rise.

“I’m assuming it’s just for the first date,” J’onn glances at M’gann. “Right?”

She nods. “But, of course, it’ll always be a more pleasing image if your date outfits compliment each other. I’d suggest you two consult wardrobe before each public appearance.”

J’onn picks up where she left off. “Now onto the actual details of the date. You’ve both done a good enough job setting the scene so to speak, with social media.”

“So the dinner should be easy work,” M’gann pipes in. “The seed is already there.”

“That’s true,” J’onn says, agreeing with M’gann, and Maggie eyes them carefully. It’s not often M’gann so readily agrees with anyone, especially those not in “her” corner. “You’ll be
photographed during dinner, but you're both used to that.” He turns towards Alex, “And don’t worry, they’re not going to get close to you, Alex. I know how much you hate that.”

“Just lean close to each other, hold hands. Laugh and smile a lot. That type of thing. I don't need to coach you on dating do I?”

“No, ma’am,” Maggie tells her.

M’gann smiles at that. “You don’t have to worry about getting photographed kissing or anything like that yet. That’s not our game - or Anthony’s.”

Yet. It’s too early for a kiss, but Maggie knows Anthony, and she knows it’ll happen soon enough. She’s not sure how to feel about that, kissing Alex Danvers.

She hadn’t thought much about it beyond a general thing that would happen in the far, far future. But now that future isn’t far at all. Maggie suddenly hopes Alex isn’t a bad kisser. That would suck—and not in a good way. Then again, their kisses shouldn’t need to go beyond pecks, so she should be fine regardless. She can’t help but wonder if Alex will be fine with it, though. She still tenses up, slightly, whenever Maggie gets too close to her when they’re not on camera as Blake and Claire, and Maggie doesn’t now if Alex is that remarkably good of an actress or she’s just uncomfortable around her for reasons she doesn’t want to think about.

The woman in question currently stares wide eyed between J’onn and M’gann.

It looks like Alex is having her very own ‘fuck, this is really happening and soon too’ moment she had earlier, and Maggie is glad. At least she’s not alone on that part. Alex suddenly reminds her of the wild rabbits that had made their home in her backyard when she was a child. She’d had a favorite one, with a brown tail and a ring around its eye, and she’d called it Floppy without ever getting to pet the thing.

One time, when she came home from school, she’d found him munching on one of her mom’s favorite flower bushes, and she hadn’t shooed him away like she was supposed to because she’d been enthralled with his fast, repetitive movements, and how cute the small creature had been. When the rabbit had turned around, he’d shot her a single look from his brown eyes and then he was gone.

Alex reminds her of that rabbit now, with the way her leg bounces up and down, constantly. It shakes the table. Maggie wonders if Alex, too, will take one look at her and bolt now.

J’onn’s words, thankfully, distract her from that thought. “Yes. We had a nice long talk the other week and we’re looking out for you girls, okay? Alex?”

“Got it.” She nods hard. “Good. Yes.”

And if Maggie had thought before that Alex was a little too on board with such an outlandish plan, it goes out the window as she notes the woman is truly nervous. Whether those nerves are because people will think she’s gay, or just the pressure before the first act starts, Maggie isn't sure, but it's there, she can see it clear as day.

“Okay,” she tells Jonn.

“Yeah, it'll be great,” Alex says.

Maggie has a sneaking suspicion Alex doesn’t believe that, but her future self can deal with that.
Nightingale finally returned last night after—what felt like to us—a long summer hiatus. Season one wrapped up with everybody's favorite lesbian badass, Blake Davenport, killing the big bad, Peter Doderick, in an epic shootout. And, in the final moments of one episode, we all held our breath when Captain Ellis told Blake maybe a partner would her good.

"The After of Before" picks up only a few weeks after the shootout. We were worried Blake might face some sort of criminal charges because of killing Doderick, but fear not, our leather detective is still free; she's just been regulated to desk duty as punishment for the incident. In a hilarious opening montage, we watch Blake steadily becoming more annoyed at seeing the other detectives going out in the field while she stuck at her desk. Maggie Sawyer’s comedic abilities are impeccable as always.

Only a few moments later, we were treated to the long awaited introduction of Claire Lawson, played by Alex Danvers—the former Body of Medicine star, daughter of late famous director Jeremiah Danvers, and older sister of up-and-coming Kara Danvers.
Claire is a rookie detective fast tracked to the position after her work in solving a big case, and she’s here to be trained by Blake, much to Blake’s displeasure. The sparks between the two are palpable, and all of the credit is due to Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers’ own fire hot chemistry.

Most of the episode rightly focuses on introducing the audience to their dynamic, firing with a tour of the precinct, a fun scene at the shooting range where we see Claire, while a bit chatty and bright eyed, can definitely hold her own with a gun, and ends with the two on a classic late night stakeout.

Blake gets a tip off from one of her sources that someone linked to Doderick is stirring up trouble at the docks, and sets off alone to investigate, only to be ambushed by Claire who asks where she’s going. Blake, unable to shake her off, lets her tag along. While two are talking (and we were treated to more of their delicious dynamic), they see the suspect. Blake immediately gets out of the car to apprehend him, as does Claire. They give chase to the man after he spots them and runs. They corner him, and Blake whips out her gun (and we all collectively swooned at her hotness) and shoots off a warning shot, much to Claire’s chagrin. However, the man ultimately escapes via an impressive parkour run over a barbed fence.

Overall, a thoroughly enjoyable episode. Nightingale maintained the humor, good storytelling, and action that made it such a hit during its first season, and it finally adds a long term romance for Blake—something fans have been clamoring for. We’re excited to see season two unfold (looks like the Doderick storyline isn’t over just yet!) and to see Blake and Claire’s, already dubbed “Dawson” by the show and fans, relationship progress. It looks like we’re not the only ones excited either as the season premiere captured a 3.5 in the 18-49 demo and 6.8 million total viewers.

Tell us your thoughts about this episode in the comments. Did you enjoy Blake and Claire’s dynamic? Are you excited to see what comes next?

The next episode airs on Thursday, October 18th at 9/8c on ABC.

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Nervous. Shaky. Unprepared. That’s what Alex sees staring back at her in the mirror.

She lets out a shuddering breath and closes her eyes, breathing in through her nose. Her stomach is churning, and her entire body is practically vibrating with unease. She’s not ready for this. Fuck.
Her date - her dinner with Maggie has been eating away at her for the past two weeks. Alex had tried to ignore it, but that proved difficult when she spent almost every day with Maggie filming. And in between takes. And then that one time when they saw each other downstairs as they picked up their mail.

Anthony’s increased hovering over them (metaphorically and sometimes physically, too) had also been a glaring reminder. He’d taken to sending them excited tweets and emails, and even J’onn and M’gann, Maggie’s manager, had been their best business selves at their last meeting. The only who seemingly couldn’t step in line as easily as everyone else to make this work was...Alex.

She’d lost too many nights of sleep consumed by panic over what should be a simple dinner. Except that it isn’t. This is the start of their...relationship, their lie. After this, there’s no going back. And, people will start thinking that...she is gay. Or whatever else. That she likes women. They’ll think she likes this woman, in particular. Those thoughts make her heart beat even faster, and she has to clench her first to stop the slight tremble of her hand. Her skin prickles, and she feels her stomach churn.

She dresses quickly and returns to the bathroom to touch up her makeup. Anthony had offered her a makeup artist to help her prepare for the dinner, but she’d quickly shot him down. She grew up in the business, she could at least apply her own makeup for something simple like this.

She spends the car ride to the restaurant going over potential conversation topics for the dinner. Dogs, the weather, how the food is, holiday plans, the news. She supposes they don't really have to talk. It’s not an actual date, after all, and it’s only pictures they’ll be taking, the paparazzi won't care what they talk about. And she hardly thinks the people around them will listen in. But it feels like a disservice to the friendship that she’s trying to build with Maggie to just sit there for two hours and do nothing. And it could possibly be a disservice to this fake relationship she's also trying to build if it doesn't look as real as possible.

Alex's stomach flutters with nerves, and suddenly she's 7 years old standing behind the curtain at her dance recital, realizing she forgot all her choreography.

Maggie watches Alex as she stiffly sits in her chair, picking at her napkin.

Maggie wasn’t much better, the limited topics of conversation drying up not 10 minutes since they sat down, but at least she was acting like she was having a good time. Alex on the other hand, looked like she didn't want to be there in the least.

“Danvers?” she asks softly, and Alex looks up, her big brown eyes zoning in on Maggie. “Loosen up.” She whispers. Alex splutters, flustered, and Maggie thinks it’s really too easy to get a reaction like that out of her.

She puts her right arm on top of the table.

“Look,” she says, extending it to touch Alex. “This is...” Maggie drags a finger over the other
woman’s palm, watching as it breaks out in goosebumps. She then covers her hand with her own. Maggie can feel the camera on them almost like a 6th sense. “... just another form of acting.” Alex gulps.

Maggie glances at her face, and Alex returns her gaze. She looks like a deer in the headlights, if not more frightened than dazzled, and Maggie suddenly feels guilty for teasing her like this. She can’t go all in, not without Alex’s consent. She pulls her hand away.

“You can even think of it as super method acting for the show if it’ll make this easier,” she suggests.

“Noted,” Alex says darkly, somehow looking less nervous now that Maggie is not holding her hand.

When they order, Alex asks for wine, which they promptly serve them and which Alex promptly drinks. She takes a big gulp of the heady red wine while the waiter is filling Maggie’s glass, and then asks the waiter to refill hers right away.

Maggie is impressed, because Alex can certainly hold her alcohol, but she still feels bad that it’s needed at all. Plus, Maggie Sawyer simply isn’t a lousy date.

“Hey,” she catches Alex’s attention. “Are you okay, Danvers?”

Alex rolls her eyes, but Maggie touches her hand—genuine now—to let her know she’s serious.

“I know this is...different for you, but you’re not alone in this,” she reminds her. Alex’s eyes catch her own, and Maggie knows she commands her full attention. “We’re in this together, remember?” She smiles reassuringly and gently squeezes the hand placed on Alex’s.

Alex doesn’t move away.

In fact, she takes a deep breath and nods, and then she’s all in too, laughing brightly at her few jokes, and discreetly fixing her hair so it will look good in the pictures. They look like the picture perfect image of an incredible first date, and Maggie knows then that Anthony was right. People will love this, they’ll love them.

The tension bleeds out from Alex’s shoulders, and then it’s even easier to pretend like this is real, like they’re just two co-stars on a date after a successful first episode back. Maggie hasn’t actually gotten to see the newest episode, which she likes to do every week, but she has high hopes. Either way, she already knows they kept with the ratings, barely losing any viewers from the season one finale. It’s a feat that she’s proud of, and it makes it all feel worth it.

And as for Alex...part of those hopes rest solely on her.

She’d read a review or two, and people were intrigued by Claire Lawson, and fascinated with Alex’s performance; Maggie can’t wait to see if that wonder transforms into genuine love for Claire. If Alex’s character is well received, Maggie gets the feeling the show will start climbing to new heights.

“I’d like to propose a toast,” she says, and Alex meets her eyes, perhaps gauging whether she’s serious or it’s just a show for the cameras. “I mean it,” she clarifies in a quieter voice. Alex nods, her lips smiling around her fork as she eats a bit of dessert.

Maggie grabs her glass of wine.
“To the first episode of *Nightingale* season two,” she says, lifting her glass, and Alex joins her.

“Cheers,” she says, taking a sip of her wine, and Maggie mimics her. Out of the corner of her eyes, she can no longer notice the paparazzi Anthony called, they're probably satisfied with the pictures they got by now.

“Well...that wasn't so bad.”
Alex has developed something of a gut reaction to the site TMZ.

Even the logo itself makes her stomach churn a little, but she doesn’t blame herself for her vicious response. They’re monsters, and Alex hates them. Dumber people will say they’re just doing their job, but being dedicated to intrude in people lives and keep bored assholes aware of their every move and every mistake…She hates it.
She frowns as she reads the article about the date with Maggie. Her eyes rove over every sentence, but after she finishes reading it once, twice, she can't find anything glaringly wrong. She hates the unintended—or knowing them, perfectly intended pun—about her clothes, but everything else seems innocent enough.

Not like the other headlines she read before clicking on the one Anthony sent. Googling herself was a hard to break habit, and Alex’s hands trembled as she read line after line of “Will Alex Danvers be the next actress to come out of the closet?” and “The Sawyer effect: yet another actress falls into Maggie’s trap.” Most of them mention her father in the fucking title. The TMZ one doesn’t, and Alex is thankful.

Her cellphone rings on her bedside table, and Alex grabs onto her laptop with one hand while she reaches over to answer it. It’s J’onn.

“Good morning, Alex,” he greets her. “Did you read it?”

“More sober than usual,” she grumbles, and J’onn chuckles. Alex isn’t offended, if only because she knows J’onn isn’t laughing at her. “Funny,” she says dryly. “It’s not even a good pun! Maggie’s outfit was more suited for a funeral than mine anyways.”

“Last night was a success,” J’onn tells her, and Alex recognizes yet again the way he has to direct her pointless self deprecation into a useful conversation. “I’m proud of you.”

“For pretending to date someone?” she asks. She’s never one to turn down praise, but it feels undeserved this time.

“Not exactly,” J’onn answers. “For everything you’ve accomplished the last couple of months. I didn’t get a chance to call you two days ago, but I watched the episode live, and you were amazing.”

“I had like two lines,” she says, even as she feels her cheeks heat up. It always matters more when he says it, or when her mother does, or when Kara tells her she admires her—which doesn't happen that often anymore. She could win an Oscar one day, and it wouldn’t come close to the feeling she gets when her mom tells her she’s proud of her, that she’s her supergirl.

She can’t remember the last time that happened.

“You were amazing,” J’onn repeats, and Alex starts to believe it.


Maggie walks to the makeup trailer in high spirits that day.

The pictures had the effect they expected, or so M’gann had said, and even though Maggie didn’t fully agree with the nature of a PR relationship, she always appreciated a job well done. She’s slightly worried, however, about what the reaction will be on set, even though she had Winn call a few people he’s friendly with on set and let them know the truth, so they could spread it around
without Maggie having to do it herself. Her assistant is gold.

She’s about to turn the corner to the makeup trailer when she hears Mary and Louise speaking in hushed tones, and after a lifetime of hearing her family speak about money in that tone, she hangs back and listens in.

“She’s such a pretty girl...I don’t know why she needs to do that.” Mary’s voice sounds conflicted, and Maggie doesn't need to guess as to the nature of their conversation.

“Well, you know how stars are. Maybe she thinks they can be the gay Brad and Angelina,” Louise answers. Maggie bristles at her comment about stars.

“I love Maggie, but she’s no Angelina Jolie. There’s no need for this. It’s so...dishonest,” Mary says.

“Hear, hear.”

Maggie swallows her disappointment.

Just because she’s friendly with some people on set doesn't mean they're her friends, and this is proof. She made a choice a long time ago to trust Gabriella and to an extent M'gann, and that was the right choice. She can’t forget that.

“Morning!” she says, louder than usual when she turns the corner.

Mary and Louise look chagrined, and Maggie is at least thankful that they’re not perfect actresses or she’d start doubting every conversation they’ve ever had.

“Hello, sweetie,” Louise greets here. “Ready to put on some makeup on that face of yours? Not that you need it.”

Maggie nods, and sits down on the chair.

Maggie navigates twitter, replying to a couple of fans and liking tweets from many others. M’gann put a cap on the amount of fans she could retweet and reply to so she wouldn't clog her twitter feed, and it’s hard sometimes not to answer to everyone asking for a happy birthday or a country shout out.

“Maggie!” she looks up to meet Natalie’s eyes, one of the new boom mic girls they hired for the new season. She's nice.

“Hey, how’s it going?”

“They have beer at the craft service truck,” she tells her. “Just so you know.”

Maggie nods, “Thanks.”

When she looks up, Alex is staring at her.

Maggie chuckles, "They sure know how to have fun."

“I bet,” Alex says.
“Reminds me of college,” Maggie says.

“You went to college?”

Maggie tries not to take her disbelieving tone to heart.

“Yeah, Danvers. I did finish through online classes when filming picked up, but I lived in the dorms, showered in the gross communal showers, ate shitty cafeteria food. Had quiet sex under a blanket—the whole nine yards, including three kegs of beer. Hence…” she waves to the path where Natalie has disappeared through.

“What was your major?” Alex asks.

Maggie smiles.

“I was a double major. Plant Biology and Psychology.”

Alex snorts. “Really?”

“What?” She asks with a raised eyebrow.

“You wanted to be a plant shrink, Sawyer?”

The joke is just funny enough for Maggie not to take offense, and she feels laughter bubbling up in her, and moments later Alex joins in. Her education is important to her, mostly because she was able to get it while working 12 hour days on Rosewood Street. Her mother never went to college, and her grandmother didn't finish school. Maggie is proud of her college degree.

“Is that what all the bonsai are about?” Alex smirks.

“Huh?”

“The bonsai all over your apartment. I think you had like four when I was there.”

Maggie smiles again, more softly now. Her aunt had come home one day with a bonsai, a gift from a coworker. And Maggie had taken it upon herself to care for it. She loved the art of it, and that even in LA she could have a beautiful piece of nature in her home. They were nothing like the big, looming trees in Nebraska that she would picnic under during hazy, hot summer days, but they evoked the same feeling in her. Peace and quiet. An overflowing sense of contentment.

She shrugs noncommittally, “Yeah, I like them.”

Alex looks mischievous. “Because they’re small like you? Or because since they’re small they make you feel bigger.”

Maggie gasps. She elbows Alex gently, and the other woman laughs.

Maggie smiles looking at her. She looks...happier, freer somehow. The lines in her forehead she’s become used to have all but disappeared, and she looks far more like Claire Lawson than the Alex Danvers she’s come to know, at least since the contract started.

“Someone is in a good mood,” she points out, hoping she's not overstepping any boundaries.

Alex looks up at her. She shrugs.

“I don't know, I mean. We did a good job last night,” she says.
Maggie meets her eyes.

“That we did.”

“That! Talent!” someone yells on set, and then Maggie and Alex are getting called to film.

The show must go on.

Maggie watches idly as the cool autumn wind swirls up the multicolored leaves blanketing the ground.

Fall has always been her favorite season, there's something poetic about the transition from the vibrant colors and noises of summer to the cold, white stillness of winter. Fall is the in between, and Maggie herself has often felt stuck in that place—warring between the tug of her past and the pull of the future. Floating between that scared 14 year old girl and the person she wants to be today.

She sighs as another soft wind blows and the lighting guys assemble another light.

This is what happens when she's stuck waiting in between sets. Her thoughts veer dangerously close towards introspection and most times she doesn't like what she finds.

She pulls her phone out of her back pocket to distract herself with Twitter. Some more pictures of Alex and her looking cozy on set had been released, and she might as well measure the reaction. She sees a lot of all caps gibberish screaming, which is good. (Her aunt had seen one of those types of tweets one day, looking over her shoulder, and she was forced to explain the way people her age communicated online now. Gabriella was befuddled to say the least.) Her eyes are skimming quickly through the excited tweets, and she feels a smile involuntarily spread across her face—some of her fans are so ridiculous.

She's mere seconds away from closing the app when another tweet catches her eye, the first negative one she's seen, and her smile wanes.

Alex’s Angel 💖
@BodyOfAlex

@maggiesawyer it’s fine that you’re gay, but please do not force your gayness on Alex. She looked very uncomfortable in those photos of you two
Her first reaction is annoyance, but then, she pauses, the fan's words taking root in her brain. It's in that moment that Alex walks up, her booted footsteps heavy on the concrete.

"What's up?" She moves to lean over Maggie's shoulder to see what she's looking at, but Maggie quickly turns to face her—hiding the tweet in the process. She's not sure she wants Alex to see it. She doesn't know what her reaction will be. It's just a stupid tweet, anyways. Honestly any opinion from a person who puts an emoji heart in their twitter name can't be trusted.

"Nothing. Nothing is up, or down." She laughs weakly.

Alex simply raises her eyebrows as she sips her coffee, and Maggie cringes inwardly at the sudden role reversal: Alex calm and collected while Maggie is the one acting jumpy and awkward. It's not like her.

"It's nothing. Just..." she shows her the tweet in a split second decision, and Alex's eyes take a second to scan over it before she frowns.

Alex gently lowers Maggie's arm holding the phone, her gaze solemn. "Just like God doesn’t claim all his children, I don’t claim all of my fans."

Maggie can't stop the smile overtaking her face.

She tilts her head, "Okay, weirdo."

It is an odd comment, but she's touched all the same. Her late night shoot today doesn't seem that bad anymore either. After all—she looks over at Alex, sipping her coffee and half hardheartedly kicking up some leaves on the ground—she won't be alone.

The dim light in the trailer makes Alex want to close her eyes and sleep even more, but she knows spending the night in her trailer is not an option.

Her couch looks awfully comfy though...She shakes her head, trying to stay awake, and makes a mental note to ask someone to put better lighting in here.

Maggie has great lighting in her trailer. It’s probably why the woman always looks flawless. She doesn’t even know why she’s suddenly thinking of Maggie, but it’s happening more and more lately. It might just be because of all the time they're spending together now, only natural, but it still unsettles her.

Alex moves to gather her belongings and head home when she hears a knock on her trailer door. She frowns, trying to remember if she accidentally stole a set prop again. She doesn’t want people thinking she’s a kleptomaniac.

Maggie’s voice comes through the door before she can check her jacket pockets, “Danvers, you still in there?”
She quickly opens the door and leans against the doorway, aiming for casual, “Yeah, what’s up? Or down?”

“Humph,” she smirks and then looks down, hands stuffed in her jacket pockets. She looks almost bashful, which is a first. “I was just wondering, about that tweet…”

Maggie frowns, then sighs. Alex isn’t used to seeing her like this.

“What’s wrong?” she asks softly.

Maggie looks up at her.

“I’m not...I haven’t made you uncomfortable, have I Al- Danvers?”

Alex is taken aback by the question. If anything, she's the one who’s done most of the being rude between the two of them. But she was under the impression that things were good between them now, great even. What could Maggie have possibly done to make her uncomfortable?

"You mentioned that tweet...is it that asshole tweet from earlier? Cause Maggie, I really am sorry one of my supposed fans would-”

“No, it’s not that,” Maggie interrupts her. "I just wanted to make sure...I know we’re supposed to act one way on screen and off screen and I’d hate it if I crossed any lines and made you feel-”

Alex cuts her off, as realization dawns on her. “You’ve never made me uncomfortable.”

It's about the contract, of course it is. And she's telling the truth.

(She ignores how just being close to Maggie makes her feel unsettled, because that’s not Maggie’s fault, Alex hasn't pinned down exactly what or who to blame, but like in most things, she's landing on herself. She's just a fucking weirdo.)

“Are you sure?” Maggie asks, tilting her head to the side, her eyes the softest Alex has ever seen them. (She didn't know eyes could be soft, but they can.)

“I promise. Really.” Alex smiles, the exhaustion from the day falling away as she seeks to convince Maggie.

Maggie returns her smile and looks back to her usual self. “Okay, Danvers.” She nods and takes a step back. “See you tomorrow.”

Alex nods. “Tomorrow.” And a hundred tomorrows afterwards.

Somehow, somewhere along the way, that stopped being such a daunting thought.

Chapter End Notes

And so the PR relationship finally begins and Maggie and Alex go on their first “date”...We'd love to hear your thoughts about the chapter! Leave us a comment below! Or you can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meanstoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We'd love to talk to
you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Parva scintilla saepe magnum flamam excitat*: the small sparkle often initiates a large flame.

---

caitlyn
@dawsonlgbt

lets be real tho, Alex is straight. I know we’re hoping for something else but this was clearly just two friends having fun on Halloween. Don’t read so much into it.

---

maggie is a LESBIAN thank you for your time
@lesbianmaggie

if you’re not seeing the clear homoerotic references to orange is the new black idk what to tell you
@ Alex

Hello? Are you a lesbian?

@drama queen 🔥
@magpiesxwyers

you dont go to a halloween party in a matching COUPLE’S costume if you're not a COUPLE
Alex shivers even in her thick sweater and walks to turn her electric fireplace up. Winter is coming.

The phrase makes her smile. Maggie’s been saying it since the year rolled around to November, and Alex knows from Kara that it’s another *Game of Thrones* reference. Maggie and her are cut from the same nerd cloth.

She can’t believe how quickly October passed. After that first dinner, time seemed to be set on fast forward—the days blurred by in a whirlwind of sets, bright lights, and Maggie. Always Maggie. They’ve been spending more and more time together now that the contract has started, and Alex finds she doesn’t mind. Initially she’d worried that they’d tire of one other after spending so much time together on set and off, but their contract assignments haven’t been that long, not since the dinner at La Grenouille and the Halloween party.
Alex has never been much of a fan of celebrating Halloween—she can’t remember dressing up unironically past the age of 10—but with the contract, she hadn’t had a choice. Anthony had chosen their Halloween costumes, insisting it was his right as this counted as one of their required public events, and he chose the cliche cop and prisoner couples costume. Everyone had assumed Alex would be the prisoner (which she was a tad disgruntled by) and she’d reluctantly acquiesced, trying to keep her dislike of the idea off her face. She must not have done it well enough though because seconds later Maggie had suggested Alex dress up as the cop and she’d be the prisoner. Maggie had winked at her afterward, and told her she wouldn’t mind a bit of a role reversal from playing Blake Davenport.

Maggie had turned out to be a perfect costume partner, and the night had surpassed Alex’s expectations.

On October 31st, Maggie had come down to Alex’s apartment in a loud, orange jumpsuit, and they’d waited together, mirror glasses of scotch in their hands, until their arranged transport arrived. At the party, she took pictures with Maggie’s arm around her waist, and they even played out the usual arrest scene for the cameras, to go with their costumes. Alex isn’t quite sure how, but the fear of being so close to Maggie—that she still won’t think about—had paled in comparison to what she felt standing in front of so many cameras. It wasn't their first official first event as a “couple”, but King wanted to ramp up speculation, so they were instructed to be friendly, but not so friendly that it would be obvious there was “something” between them. For Alex, whose closest friend was her fucking sister—she had trouble with all of it. Maggie, however, always looked like she knew what she was doing, so Alex followed her lead.

The event had been crowded and loud—as to be expected when its host was Heidi Klum—and she’d barely had a chance to talk to Maggie much less hear herself speaking. (And they actually did that these days—talk on set, most would say ‘hang out’, between scenes. Their initial tentative friendship feels back on track.) So not talking to Maggie for an entire evening left her slightly unsettled, but simply her presence kept Alex...in check, so to speak. The party scene was her scene, and Alex couldn’t remember the last time she attended one without ending up drunk off her ass. The people vying for her attention and the endless, free flowing free drinks were too much of a temptation for old Alex, who just wanted to feel...something. But she’s trying not to be her anymore.

She’d eventually relaxed. The party was chock full of people, more important people than her, and the slight twinge of jealousy when Maggie said hi to all of them was only assuaged by the fact that she introduced her as well. A few of them mentioned her dad and working with him before he passed. Maggie had pressed her palm to her back then, in a silent show of support. Alex had stepped forward a moment later, the feel of Maggie’s thumb rubbing up and down on her skin making her shudder. She’d appreciated it, though. And she appreciated even more the fact that Maggie had never mentioned him, apart from when they first met. And she’d never asked. That gave her another good mark in Alex’s book.

After a while at the party, and the single glass of champagne she’d allowed herself, she’d even danced a little. It had been...fun.

They’d had a bite to eat after the party had ended, at La Nuvola Bianca NYC (Maggie kept insisting there was one in LA so she needed to say the name in full), and Maggie’s aunt had made cannoli (not cannolis as Alex had mistakenly called them, only to be quickly corrected by Maggie and her aunt that cannoli was the plural while the singular was cannolo) for them.

Besides that night, it’s just been quick walks in the park with Maggie, making sure to be seen together when they’re shooting on location. And coffee together in the morning at Starbucks.
Alex grimaces. *That* one wasn’t fun.

She walks to her kitchen, her footsteps noiseless due to the fuzzy socks—a gift from Kara—adorning her feet. She’d checked the web later that day, after the Starbucks pictures, to see the reaction—and every article just had to mention that *one* time she showed up to Starbucks drunk. The incident wasn’t even that bad, and she’s hasn’t pulled a stunt like that for months, but still…people don’t forget easily. J’onn said the PR contract would help fix that problem, and she’s seen some evidence of that, but she wishes things would speed up.

Idiotic people aside, her actual time with Maggie at Starbucks was nice. She almost wishes it had lasted longer, but the paparazzi only needed a few minutes to get the perfect shots of them; it wasn’t necessary to drag it out. It’s just, Maggie is starting to feel like a friend, maybe she is her friend, and Alex hasn’t had one of those that wasn’t related to her in years.

As Alex reaches for the tea kettle to start boiling water, she realizes she hasn’t really talked to Maggie lately—without long lenses stalking them—beyond the customary morning greetings. She wouldn’t mind changing that. She looks down at the small box of mint ginger lemon tea now in her hand. Maggie is a big tea drinker, and she’d given her the box the other day. Privately, Alex thought it sounded pretty disgusting—she likes mint, but she’s not a fan of ginger, and the combination of the two along with lemon doesn’t seem appealing. But Maggie had smiled when she gave it to her, ‘*I know you’re a big coffee drinker, but tea is healthier, and I saw this at Whole Foods and thought you might like it.*’ She’s learned over the past few months that Maggie is a very healthy person, the type Alex assumed only existed in ridiculous Hallmark channel movies about overworked female CEOs discovering their true calling is marrying some guy and having 3 kids. Not even her sister can resist an order of potstickers every once in a while.

But Maggie...she’s the type of person to voluntarily go to yoga—and even meditate— which sounds like the worst thing Alex could do to herself. They had special vegan ice cream for her at the craft truck the other night, so she assumes she’s a vegan to boot. And the time she caught her drinking coffee—her guilty pleasure, she’d said—she’d been sweetening it with fucking agave nectar, not even real sugar. An all around health nut if she ever saw one.

She turns the tea box over in her hands. Alex should probably take some tips from her to be honest, she’s lived exclusively on take out for years. Maybe now is the time to learn to cook more than two dishes. (Her repertoire is limited to pasta and quesadillas.)

She reads the ingredients on the box while the water boils. She can pronounce all of them. She’s pretty sure that means it’s healthy. Alex hums. It was a nice gesture on Maggie’s part. Maybe she should buy her a gift in return—just go to the nearest organic store and pick out the most expensive, healthy looking thing she can find.

The whistling of the kettle stops her musings, and she moves the kettle off the stove, placing a tea bag from the box in it.

She drums her fingers on the counter as she waits for the tea to steep. She lets her eyes wander through her apartment—a few red leaves have stuck to one of her windows, no doubt carried over from the trees lining the street below. Most of their leaves have fallen in a shower of red and orange as they walk deeper into autumn.

Thanksgiving is coming up soon, and Alex finds, surprisingly, that she’s not dreading it as much as usual.

That might have something do with the fact that Kara and her mom are on the other side of the
world right now—New Zealand. Kara had a 3 episode story arc in *Humans*, and their mom had chosen to join her during her second week of shooting and stay until Kara was done. It was weird, being so much farther away from her sister—Canada seemed tame in comparison to New Zealand, but the distance and space from her, and especially from their mother, has kept Alex focused on her own work and not on overthinking their annual Thanksgiving dinner.

She’s skyped with Kara a few times since she’s been gone, and her mom when she arrived, and her sister has sent her a million pictures of the gorgeous scenery of the country. Kara should wrap before Thanksgiving though; and Alex—so different than years before—can’t wait for her to, and to be on a filming break herself. It’ll be nice to see them in person.

Her cellphone shatters the silence of her apartment. She goes to grab it from its place on her bed, and she sees it’s her mom. As though her thoughts summoned her, Alex thinks wryly.

She picks it up and swipes to answer. “Hey, mom.”

“Alex! I’m glad I caught you. I know you’ve been busy lately so I wasn’t sure whether I’d get voicemail.”

There used to be a time where she’d let her mom go to voicemail even when she wasn’t busy, when she was just too tired or hungover to handle her, but not anymore. She’s trying to get her life together, and part of that entails talking more to her mother. It still feels like she’s walking on eggshells around her—waiting for that deep sigh tinged with disappointment and ‘Alexandra’—but so far, it’s been okay. Not great, but they can get there eventually, and she hopes they do. Things...didn’t used to be like this.

Alex wavers as she tries to pinpoint the exact moment things between them went downhill.

Was it when her dad died? She remembers the long days that followed, and how she felt like a year would go by in a single day. Her mom withdrew, dealing with her grief, and left Alex to care for Kara, who was even more distraught than Alex. Alex had resented her for it, back then, because Kara hadn’t known her dad for as long as she had, but as the days passed she realized it wasn’t the first time Kara had gone through something like that. Alex’s grief wasn’t the tear filled sorrow of her little sister—hers was all red hot anger, and punishing guilt, and screaming into her pillow while locked inside the guest bedroom’s bathroom, so neither her mom or her sister would hear.

Maybe that’s when her relationship with her mom started to go to shit. Or maybe it was after, the period when her mother emerged, red eyed but resolute, and seemed to put all her energy into making sure she and Kara were happy and fulfilled. For her mom, accomplishing the latter with Alex had meant Stanford. It wasn’t hard for her mother to convince her to go, her younger self had wanted something different and stabilizing. She felt terrible enough about herself without casting directors looking her up and down, finding flaws and reasons for her not to get the part, or on the other hand, hiring her for her last name and out of pity because of her father. She’d hated acting then—not the job itself, but everything that came with it. And so college was the answer. Stanford.

Then she dropped out. Maybe that was the moment their relationship turned sour. She remembers the long, fraught arguments over the phone with her mom over her choice. Her mom had been vehemently against her dropping out, halfway through her degree, but Alex had been insistent. School wasn’t the change she needed. So she turned back to acting, to what she knew and had grown up with. And it was good, until it wasn’t, and her mom had to get a call about her daughter driving drunk. She’s glad she didn’t quit after, because this—*Nightingale*—feels like exactly what she needed.

She knows it was the right choice for her, and she wants her mom to see that too—maybe she will
now, with her success on the show.

Her mother’s voice draws her out of her trip down memory lane.

“Alex? Alex are you still there?”

“Yeah, sorry, I just woke up,” she hadn’t, but the excuse slides easily off her tongue, “my head’s still kind of fuzzy.”

“That’s fine, honey. You must be tired with all those…extra shoots.”

Her mother’s inflection left no question as to what type of shoots she was referring to, and Alex cringes inwardly imagining her mother seeing those pictures of her and Maggie dressed up in ridiculous costumes.

“I am,” she says, then swiftly changes the subject. “It’ll be nice when we break for Thanksgiving though. When are you and Kara arriving in LA again?”

There’s a moment of silence on the phone before she hears her mother’s voice again.

“That’s actually what I’m calling about,” she sounds apologetic, and Alex’s stomach falls. “Production is running a bit behind here, and it looks like we won’t make it back to the states in time for Thanksgiving. I’m sorry sweetie, but we when we’re back we can have a late celebration okay?”

Alex swallows the lump of disappointment rising in her throat. “That’s fine. I’ll just stay in LA instead of Malibu and do my own thing.”

“Are you sure you don't want to go home?” Her mom asks. “You still have your key, right?”

Yes, but being alone in that house sounds like her definition of hell on earth. The memories would kill her before she managed to kill herself while trying to cook a Thanksgiving meal for one.

“Yeah, but there’s not a lot to do. I’d rather stay in the city, maybe I could call some friends, host a dinner...or something.”

“Well, that sounds like a great idea,” her mom says, clearly too busy to wonder exactly which friends she’s going to call, because she certainly didn’t approve of the last few crowds that Alex ran with. “We’ll have a real celebration when Kara and I get back.”

Alex hums in agreement.

She hates herself for feeling disappointed. If it was any other year, spending Thanksgiving alone with a bottle of wine and Netflix account would have sounded like an unattainable dream. So why does she feel the loss of their family dinner now?

She quickly switches gears. “So, you and Kara are good?”

“Yes, we’re doing well.” Her mom sighs. “It’s just beautiful here, we should all visit together sometime.”

“Sure, we could -“

“Oh.” She hears an increase of noises in the background, ”Kara’s done for the day. Sorry, Alex, I have to run, we’re eating dinner with the cast after this. We’ll talk soon, love you.”
“Right. Love you too, mom. Talk to you later-” The line goes dead. “Bye.”

Alex stares at the screen of her phone for a moment before putting it down. There goes her excitement for Thanksgiving.

Typical, the one time she’s looking forward to it the universe screws her over. She drags her fingers through her hair. It’s fine, there are plenty of places in LA that do takeout on holidays.

Alex sighs as she turns to walk towards her couch, in the mood for Netflix and nothing, when she remember Maggie’s tea gift. It’s definitely steeped now. She grabs it on her way to the television and takes a slow sip once she sits down.

Her face contorts into a grimace as the odd mixture of flavors slips down her throat.

She’ll stick to coffee.

Alex has a spring in her step as she walks to her trailer that morning, greeting some crew members along the way. Her gift for Maggie is heavy and prickly in her pocket, and she can already see Maggie’s smile in her head when she hands it to her. Initially, she’d thought, it was about evening out the scales, and maybe it’s a little about that, but she just -she wants to make her smile. That’s what friends do, isn’t it?

She lucks out when she finds Maggie outside her trailer, fighting with her things as she struggles to open the door. Alex gets it for her.

“Morning, Danvers,” she exclaims, climbing into her trailer while Alex holds the door open.

"Morning." She watches her move through her trailer, dumping her stuff along the way. She's not sure whether she should follow after her—Maggie didn't invite her in and she doesn't want to intrude, but then again continuing to stand here staring at Maggie probably isn't polite either.

"Uh, so you know last week how you -"

"Sorry?" Alex can hear Maggie's voice from somewhere in her trailer, but it slowly grows closer as she jumps out of her trailer holding a water bottle and her phone. "What was that, Danvers?"

The sun shines over Maggie's hair, making it look almost auburn, and she smiles up at her with the dimples in full force. She doesn’t understand how Maggie can be so cheerful in the morning. Alex suddenly finds that she's lost the ability to speak—she’s just never been good at giving gifts.

“Nothing,” she tells her. “It’s- it can wait. Yeah.”

"Mhm, okay." She looks amused now, and she's doing that head tilt thing again—which Alex privately thinks reminds her of the puppies she's seen at the dog shelters Kara visits sometimes, and which she’s dragged her to once or twice.

Maggie stares at her for another beat and then shakes her head with her smirk. "Well I gotta go, see you later."
"That...you will." Alex drags her hand down her face as she makes her way to her own trailer, right beside Maggie’s.

Her first scene of the day is with James in the precinct.

She’s had a few more scenes with characters besides Blake than she expected. She figured she’d be the cardboard prop to Maggie, only allowed a scene with someone else every 6 or so episodes, but that thankfully hasn’t been the case. Of course the show is still Maggie’s show with Blake at the helm, but Claire is a better role than she initially thought. And ironically, the PR contract has erased any misgivings she might have had about playing a les- a woman who likes women. It seems insignificant now that she’s acting that way in real life.

Alex greets James with a small smile as she enters the precinct set. It’s not just Maggie who she’s been talking to more and hanging out with on set. She’s actually starting to feel like a part of the Nightingale family these days.

“Hey James, nice weekend?”

He returns her smile, his deep voice booming in the space. “Amazing. I got this thing called sleep where you lay in bed for ten hours and wake up actually refreshed the next day.”

“You know I’ve heard of that, but I always thought it was a myth.”

“You’re looking at a myth buster then,” he says, winking at her.

“I used to love that show!” she exclaims, thinking about all the afternoons she spent with Discovery Channel on as a kid.

“Me too,” James said, and then the production assistant is calling them over to begin the camera rehearsal.

Only two hours later their scene is over and Alex is relegated to what she’s deemed the waiting chair. She’s checking Kara’s Instagram to pass the time while she waits to be called for her next scene when there’s a sudden whoosh of air to her left. Maggie’s plopped down into the chair at her side.

“Danvers.”

Alex raises an eyebrow. “Sawyer?”

“Did you try the tea?”

“I did! It was, uh,” she can feel the white lie on the tip of her tongue, but Maggie would probably appreciate her honesty more. “The flavor combination wasn’t my favorite, but thank you, again, for it.”

Maggie’s lips quirk up, “No problem. I’ll find a tea you like one day, Danvers. If you’d rather stick with coffee though,” she nods toward the coffee in Alex’s hand, “I heard Kopi Luwak is a great, very unique brand.” Her mouth twists into a smirk and Alex has a feeling she’s being set up for
something. “You ever hear of it?”

She shakes her head as she takes a sip of her latte. “What’s so unique about it?”

“It’s cat shit.”

Alex breaks out into coughs, her coffee going down the wrong way. “Excuse me?” She asks, her tone incredulous.

Maggie only smiles broadly, her tongue poking out between her teeth. “It’s made from the cat feces of the Indonesian Civet cat. It’s supposedly the most expensive coffee in the world, but I’d be up for getting it for you—only from ethical producers of course.”

“You want me to drink,” she pauses for effect, “cat feces liquid? Really, Sawyer? What did I ever do to you?”

Immediately after the words come out of her mouth, she winces inwardly, she can think of quite a few instances early in their relationship wherein she subjected Maggie to her less than friendly or horribly awkward moments, but she knows Maggie wouldn’t bring those up now.

“Don’t knock it until you’ve tried it, it apparently has a multitude of health benefits like,” she pulls out her phone, and pulls up the information way too fast to not have planned this. “It can prevent cancer, protect your teeth, and since it’s less acidic than normal coffee it’s good for people who suffer from digestion problems.”

Alex’s eyebrows climb ever higher, but she can feel herself smiling. “So you’re just looking out for my health, is that it.”

Maggie turns her full gaze towards Alex and shrugs with a grin. “As any good coworker would.”

Alex is about to respond when she’s interrupted by a PA calling Maggie’s name, and Maggie shoots her an apologetic look as she stands and starts moving towards the entrance of the tent.

“Sorry, Danvers, duty calls, but-” she chuckles, her eyes glittering. “I’ll pick up some of that coffee for you later.”

The tent is quiet once Maggie leaves, the only sound the muffled noises of the crew.

Alex has never considered herself a social person, someone who revels in the company of others or likes to be the center of attention of a large crowd. She did it in high school because she didn’t have a choice, what with her family and everything, but Alex has never...had too many friends. She’s stuck close to a select few people in her life, and only one of them isn’t related to her (though J’onn is practically family at this point). Her lack of personal relationships has never bothered her, but as she glances over at the now vacant chair to her left—Maggie’s laughter still ringing in her ears—her life feels vaguely empty.

Like some vital element is missing.
Maggie lets out a deep exhale as the director yells the final cut.

It’s been nothing but long, tiring weeks for weeks now, and since she’s the lead of the show she’s been working the longest hours. She can feel her exhaustion all the way down to her bone marrow, but the show’s been consistently pulling in great numbers comparable to the first season, which eases some of the pressure of her shoulders. She’s all too aware of the so called sophomore slump, how a show can be critically lauded and watched by everyone in its first season and then tumble down into the abyss of bad television in its next season. *Nightingale* has avoided that move by retaining its core writing staff and focus. The only real change this season has been the addition of Alex, and if anything it’s made the show better. It’s expanded their fanbase by opening the gates for the passionate shipper group to join in to root for ‘Dawson.’

She stretches and yawns as she makes the trek back to her trailer, willing her burning eyes to remain open.

Thanksgiving break couldn’t have come at a better time. She just has to make it back to LA and then she can sleep for four days. No work, no obligations, and no Anthony helicopter parenting the PR contract. He’d reluctantly allowed them to take a break due to the holiday, though he did tell them to include each other as one of the things they were thankful for in their turkey day posts. Spending time with Alex for the contract is hardly a chore though, and it’s certainly not what has Maggie sluggishly climbing up her trailer steps. Hanging out with Alex is almost like a respite from her busy days. Their conversations flow more easily now, and the frequency of painfully awkward moments has decreased—which Maggie is eternally grateful for. Alex is more comfortable around her, and it makes selling their relationship a hell of a lot easier. It also helps quiet the uneasiness in the back of her mind at a straight woman pretending to like girls for good press.

The moon is high in the sky by the time Maggie exits her trailer. It casts an eerie glow on the lot, only the skeleton crew are still around to shut down the set. Maggie plasters a smile on her face for the few people who wish her a happy thanksgiving as she leaves. As she approaches the parking lot, she sees a dark figure leaned against her car. She slows her steps, but then the figure steps into the street light and she sees it’s Alex.

“Danvers, hey! I thought you’d be on your flight back to LA by now.” The show had arranged a private jet to fly the cast back to California for the holiday, but as far as she knew Alex had opted out of it so she could catch an earlier flight back. She knows despite Alex’s apartment in New York, her life is still back in the golden state, much like Maggie’s. But unlike Maggie, Alex is here by herself.

It must be tough on her, uprooting her life for 9 months to live in a new city where she doesn’t know any of the people. Maggie knows smartphones and the internet can help bridge the geographic gap, but there’s a big difference between talking to someone on an electronic device and actually being with them. She doesn’t know how she would’ve handled it if Gabriella hadn’t moved out here with her. Sure, she told herself she could deal with it—as she does with any problem—but she’s honestly not sure. Her aunt is her one real confidante, the only person she can freely talk to about anything. Maggie doesn’t have to be the boss or the sweet, charming actress when she’s with Gabriella—all her meticulously constructed masks are removed and she can breathe freely. She’s not sure what she’d do if she had to brave moving to a new city and uprooting herself from her home—which for her, would always be her family.

Alex shrugs lightly.
“Nope. I decided to go back tomorrow with you and the rest of the cast. I don’t really have any reason to head home early now.” She takes a small step toward Maggie and pulls something out of her pocket: a wrapped small box. “But I wanted to give this to you before we left tomorrow. It’s just a small thank you for the tea.”

Maggie tilts her head, a small smile appearing. “You know the definition of a gift is something given without the expectation of receiving something in return, right? While I appreciate it, this,” she shakes the box and hears something rattle, “wasn’t necessary. Besides, you didn’t even like the tea.”

“It’s the thought that counts.” Alex shrugs, again. “And it’s not like it was necessary for you to buy me the tea to begin with. I’m just evening the score, so to speak.”

“I wasn’t aware we were in the midst a gift giving battle,” she shoots back drolly. “Fair warning, I’ve been told I’m too competitive for my own good.”

Alex smirks, and the space between them shrinks marginally as she takes another step forward. “Guess that makes two of us then.”

She wonders if Alex is even aware of her voluntary intrusion into Maggie’s personal space, usually she takes the opposite approach, maintaining as much space as she can between them—admittedly that hasn’t been much what with Anthony urging them to stand closer together in public. Maybe Alex is just used to her presence now after being exposed to it for some time.

“Mhm.” she moves back to stand directly under the streetlight as she opens her present. It’s nicely wrapped so she takes her time peeling the wrapping paper off to ensure it doesn’t rip. She looks up from her careful ministrations only to see Alex scoffing.

“Oh my god, you’re one of those people. Just rip it off,” she says, bouncing on the balls of her feet impatiently.

“You know for that comment I’m gonna open it extra slowly now.” She smiles smugly, the air about her sweet as syrup.

“Look the sooner you open it the sooner we can both get home,” Alex tell her, seemingly trying a new tactic. “You’ll just be throwing away the wrapping paper anyways so what’s the point?”

Maggie is quick to correct her, “I’ll be recycling the paper, but you have a point, Danvers. I didn’t want to ruin your beautiful wrapping though.”

“Please, I paid the cashier to do it for me,” she snorts.

“Well in that case,” she rapidly tears the paper off and looks inside the box: there lays a cylindrical tea container. Maggie takes a closer a look and she spots the “music box” tag at its side. A tea container music box. Her delighted laughter breaks the silence of the night, and she looks up at Alex whose face is positively beaming. “This is...perfect.” She makes the quick decision to envelop Alex in a short hug. “Thank you.”

Alex returns the quick hug, and then pulls away, scuffing her heel on the pavement as she directs her gaze downwards.

“It was nothing,” she says, but Maggie swears she can see a faint blush rising up her face. It would be too easy to tease her for it, but she restrains herself, not sure if Alex would appreciate the action or not.
The silence between them stretches as Alex’s eyes remain glued to the ground and Maggie looks at the music box, turning it around in the dim light. The realization hits Maggie like a lightning bolt: she’s going to miss Alex, the few short days they have off.

“Well, um, I gotta go crash on my bed.” She puts the gift back in its box and places it in her bag. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Danvers.”

Alex finally looks back up at her, her skin back to its normal pale shade. She nods.

“Bright and early.”

“Ma’am. We’re at Teterboro Airport.”

The driver’s voice wakes Maggie up from her dozing. She looks out the window into the inky black early morning, and her breath fogs the car window as she tracks the slow progression of snow flurries drifting from the sky towards the ground. The weather forecast had predicted the rare event, snow on Thanksgiving, and Maggie almost doesn’t want to leave New York. 10 years removed from Nebraska and she’s still of the opinion winter holidays should be celebrated with snow. Los Angeles certainly won’t have any, maybe some rain if the state is lucky, but it will be nice to spend Thanksgiving not only with her aunt but also their old friends from the hotel.

Maggie slings her backpack over her shoulder and pushes the car door open, leaving the driver with a ‘thank you’ and a tip. She walks the short distance from the car to the jet plane sitting in the runway. The airplane door is already open. She must have really been tired if some of the others beat her here. She hopes she isn’t late—that wouldn’t look good—and checks her silver wrist watch for the time. It’s 4:48 AM. Winn told her the plane didn’t leave until 5:45 AM so she’s in the clear.

The plane is large and imposing in the runway, its white bulk standing out against the dark backdrop.

Sometimes Maggie can’t believe this is her life now. Riding private jets from one cosmopolitan city to the next. It’s a far cry from her very first airplane ride, where she was stuck at the back of the plane next to a coughing man and a crying baby across the aisle from her, unsure whether she’d be well received when she landed, or whether she’d be received at all. She’s not sure who was more scared back then: her or the baby.

“Sawyer!” James’ head pokes out of the airplane doorway. “I know you like the cold, but the plane is much more comfortable than just standing out there.”

She rolls her eyes, though James probably can’t see it, and traipses through the fluffs of snow coating the ground up to the stairs. “You native Californians don’t deserve the snow, I swear.”

James places his hand to his heart, affecting a touched air. “Why thank you Maggie, I wholeheartedly agree. We deserve the sun and blue ocean, not this wet dandruff.”

“Snow on thanksgiving, that’s a miracle,” she tells him. “You’re ungrateful.”

“Aren’t miracles supposed to be good?” he replies.
She rolls her eyes, refusing to entertain his pure nonsense. The plane is much warmer though.

It looks like she’s the last to arrive; everyone else has settled into their seats and most of them are already sleeping. In the front of the plane she can see a head of auburn red hair, currently resting on the owner’s hand. Maggie makes her way to the front and deposits herself into the seat across from Alex, shoving her backpack underneath her chair.

Her arrival doesn’t appear to wake Alex, she looks pretty out of it actually—there’s even some drool at the corner of her mouth. She’s debating between waking the woman up or not, thinking her neck surely won’t appreciate being in that position for the entire 5 hour flight to California, when the pilot’s voice comes crackling over the speakers and does the job for her.

Alex wakes up with a cross between a snort and a groan issuing forth from her mouth, and she jumps slightly when she sees Maggie’s smiling face staring back at her. “Maggie!”

“Rip Van Winkle,” she greets, remembering the story her mom used to tell her as a warning against not sleeping in too long, and which used to give her nightmares as a child. She kicks her legs up onto the table between them only to realize a second later that her legs are too short to bridge the gap from her seat and the table.

Alex watches her legs fall to the floor and bursts out laughing, fully awake now.

Maggie grumbles, “Not a word, Danvers. You saw nothing.”

“If by nothing you mean your failed attempt at being cool then yes, I saw nothing.” Her lips twitch upwards, obviously trying to conceal a smile. Maggie isn’t sure how, but Alex Danvers makes tired, cold early morning flights look good. Her face is soft in the lights of the plane, and her hair is mussed from her nap.

“I have a witty rebuke on the tip of my tongue, but,” she yawns widely, “I’m too tired to engage in verbal war play right now.” Maggie leans back into her chair, pulling her left leg up underneath her other leg and curling into the corner of the chair. “The only thing I’m ready for is Thanksgiving and sleep. Lots of sleep. What about you?”

Alex shrugs nonchalantly “I’ll probably just sleep the entire break too. I’m not even celebrating this year because my mom and sister couldn’t make it home so...what’s the point?”

All Maggie hears is that she’ll be alone on Thanksgiving.

Maggie has some experience with that. It’d been her first Thanksgiving with Gabriella, and even though she’d told her aunt she was fine with her volunteering to work that day, it was not a great day for Maggie. She’d spent it watching TV and cleaning the living room for something to do. Her aunt brought her fancy turkey leftovers after her shift was over, but she would have preferred her company.

She feels bad at the thought of Alex going through that, and from there her brain travels to the next logical step. Her aunt certainly wouldn’t mind another person at their Thanksgiving...The more mouths she can feed the happier she is, although it’s not like many people are coming over, only a few of Gabriella’s old close friends from the hotel and Winn. And she has been bugging Maggie about wanting to get to know Alex better. She’s not sure Alex would want to come, but it can’t hurt to ask.

“My aunt is hosting a few people at my house for Thanksgiving,” she says quickly. “I’m sure she wouldn’t mind another person coming.”
“Are you—you’re inviting me to spend Thanksgiving with you?” Alex's face is a picture of disbelief.

“And my aunt and her friends, yeah. And Winn—he’s my assistant. So, how about it, Danvers?”

Alex scrutinizes her, a frown on her face. “Do you expect cameras to be there?”

Maggie is mildly disgruntled Alex thinks the only reason she’d extend her invitation is because of their contract, but she smother the feeling—an often used tactic of hers. “Not for PR, just—” she sighs. “Nobody should spend Thanksgiving alone.”

“I -,” she stops and looks out the window at the purple tinged blue sky. She’s fidgeting with her hands and bouncing her foot, and Maggie has no idea why she’s nervous. Maybe she’s trying to think up a nice way to say no.

“If you don’t want to come, that’s fine; I just wanted to let you know the offer is on the table.”

“Unlike your legs,” Alex blurts out, but she at least has the grace to look chagrined after it.

Maggie whistles and shakes her head disapprovingly. “Low blow, Danvers.”

“Just like your height. Sorry.” She winces apologetically. “That’s the last one I promise, the joke was right there, and I couldn’t not take it.”

She glares at her before looking away to smile. At least Alex doesn’t look like she needs 6 fidget spinners now, even if it did come at the cost of her short stature. “So do you wanna come or not?”

“Yes,” Alex pauses, and her voice is surprisingly small as she continues speaking a few moments later. “Yes. I’d like that, thank you for inviting me, Maggie.”

This is the second time Alex has said her first name she notes—and she’s not sure why that’s the first thing to register in her mind from her answer. She’s never had a particular affinity for her name, definitely not for her full name, but hearing it come from Alex sparks an inexplicable warmth in her.

The loud clang of pots hitting the floor rouses Maggie from her slumber.

The time difference always trips her out, the fact that she left New York at 6:45 AM but arrived in LA at only 9 AM, and the one constant she had was how exhausted she was, regardless of the time. Upon arriving home, she’d greeted Gabriella in the kitchen—her aunt had flown in ahead of Maggie to get things ready—giving her a quick kiss on the cheek before making a beeline towards her giant king sized bed to crash. She hadn’t even bothered to wash the plane off of her—although there’s a different degree of dirtiness that comes from a commercial flight vs a private jet—and she’s now regretting the decision as her face is plastered to her pillow with sweat. She looks over to the bed stand, and the alarm clock shows 11 AM. An hour and a half nap, not bad.

Maggie slides out of bed and rummages around in her dresser for suitable clothes for the day. After a quick shower, she saunters into the kitchen feeling much more refreshed.
“Wonder Woman arises from her nap,” Winn is standing in her kitchen, munching on some crackers and cheese over the sink.

“Gabriella gave you the crumbs speech didn’t she?” She winces as she walks to the fridge for a drink. Gabriella can be a bit anal about these types of things, especially during the holidays. She can’t count how many times she’s eaten cookies or bread over the sink to avoid one of her lectures about how crumbs were an invitation for ants to infest your house.

“Yep. Hey, have I ever mentioned that your aunt can be scary?”

“Only a few...hundred times.” She leans against the counter next to him, “You know she likes to mess with you right?”

“Doesn’t make it any,” he shoves another cracker in his mouth, “less scary.”

“Where is my lovely aunt anyways?” She’d expected her to be in the kitchen fussing over the food, but only Winn is here. She can definitely smell that her aunt was here though. There’s a delicious air permeating the kitchen, if she had to take a guess she’d say its arancini.

“I hear someone speaking about me.” Her aunt’s voice floats down the hallway, and Maggie smiles. “Piccola, you’re awake.” Gabriella wraps her in a tight hug. “Good, you can help with the food. And Winn,” she smiles brightly, “you can wash dishes.”

Winn makes a face before he stands up straight and salutes her. “Chef, yes, chef!”

Maggie follows her aunt into the fridge, and Gabriella hands her some vegetables to wash before she chops them up. “How was your flight, jetsetter?”

Maggie shoots her a sardonic look. “It was fine.”

“So when did you tell Alex to arrive?” Gabriella asks. Maggie had taken advantage of the in-flight wi-fi to text her and let her know to expect someone else, and Gabriella had been excited to spend time with her.

“I told her to stop by at four.”

“Four?!” Gabriella throws a half of a brussel sprout at her head. Maggie ducks. “She’ll miss my appetizers! She won’t get to experience my full Thanksgiving extravaganza.”

“I don’t think she’s ready for that.” She rolls her eyes and flicks some water at her aunt as payback for the brussel sprout. “She seemed kinda hesitant to accept the invitation, and I didn’t wanna spook her by subjecting her to almost a full day of you so early on.”

“You make it sound like she’s a jittery horse, she can’t be that bad.” Gabriella pulls out a baking dish to throw the chopped vegetables on.

“She’s not...bad, she’s just more susceptible to nerves, around me at least.”

“Ah,” Gabriella looks over at her with a knowing smile on her face. “Another victim of your dimple craters.”

Maggie scoffs and pushes her shoulder lightly. “You’re the only one who believes that’s a thing.”

“I’m a visionary, what can I say. In ten years when the dimples effect is in the dictionary I’ll be lauded for my foresight.”
All Maggie can do is laugh, and she hears Winn chuckling quietly from his place at the sink. This is how Thanksgiving should be, warm conversation in the kitchen with the smells of food soaking into every corner of the house. It’s so warm and content she almost forgets the empty places she’ll always have at the table every holiday, but she never quite can.

Maggie’s house in LA is definitely nice.

It’s smaller than Alex expected for someone who just starred in the hit summer film of the year, but then again, Maggie doesn’t seem to be one to flaunt her success like that. She walks up the white brick pathway, noticing all the impeccably trimmed foliage surrounding the house. Looks like Maggie’s taste for greenery goes beyond her degree, bonsai, and food, not surprising.

She stands in front of the large french door, just breathing quietly, preparing herself for what feels like a big step in their friendship. Maggie hadn’t phrased it that way, she probably only invited her out of pity, but Alex can’t remember ever spending Thanksgiving with someone who isn’t related to her.

It’s a holiday for family, and being here feels like a big deal.

She’s debating between knocking or ringing the doorbell when the door swings open, and a short man carrying a trash bag almost runs into her. It’s Maggie’s assistant, she thinks...Jim or something.

“Oh hey, Alex. Sorry, I mean Ms. Danvers.” He offers her hand, and Alex shakes it automatically.

“Nice to see you again.”

“Right, nice to see you too.” She decides against telling him she hates when people call her ‘Ms. Danvers,’ she isn’t that old yet.

“Everyone else is in the living room or kitchen so,” he shrugs and steps out of the doorway, opening the path for her.

She steps into the warm, loud room. The house is filled with people and the smell of turkey, and some other food she can’t identify. Upon a closer inspection, she sees there’s not too many of them, she counts 8 people apart from Winn, and Maggie and her aunt are nowhere to be seen, but they’re laughing loudly amongst each other, and passing around plates of food—it seems like more people than there is. And Alex feels like a fish out of water.

The room pauses as they notice her arrival, and she gives a small wave. “I’m Maggie’s...co-worker,” she says, quietly.

“Claire Lawson!” One of the men exclaims, and walks over to her, greeting her with a kiss to both cheeks. “We love Maggie’s show! Very good actress, you are, yes.”

He has an accent Alex can’t place, but she smiles at the compliment.
“Thank you.”

“Fabio! Let her breathe!” Maggie’s voice exclaims, and then the woman herself steps into the living room. “Alex, I’m glad you made it.”

She greets her with a kiss to her cheek, and Alex is stunned for a moment. Her face burns at the spot Maggie’s lips touched, and she hopes Maggie can’t tell.

“Hi,” she tells her softly.

“You’re our guest of honor,” Maggie tells her. “Sit down.”

Alex can tell she’s the only newcomer here.

Everyone tries to include her in conversation, and they’re incredibly kind, but she can see a rapport between them that must have been built over years of friendships, and Alex can’t measure up to that. Her gaze drifts away, and she finds herself following Maggie as she moves through the room, refilling drinks and walking around with appetizers.

She is intrigued at this new side of Maggie she’s seeing.

She’s certainly never seen someone like her—a successful lead actress—serving food at a party, even if it’s hosted by her aunt. Most people would hire someone for that.

But Maggie just walks around the party, talking to everyone, popping out words in Portuguese and Spanish, with the guests that she obviously knows well. Winn makes conversation with her for a little while, but not even that can help with the feeling that she’s not a part of this group. She’s the outlier in the perfect modern Norman Rockwell painting.

When Maggie’s aunt finally comes out of the kitchen, holding a large dish of Lasagna, Alex takes the distraction as an opportunity to slip out the back door while everyone is occupied with the food. She won’t be missed, anyways.

It’s warm outside, and she breathes in the perfect California air. It might be contaminated and full of smog—although New York’s air quality isn’t any better—but at least it's not fucking freezing.

“Sneaking out so soon, Danvers?”

She jumps at the sound of Maggie’s voice. She turns around, and the woman is staring at her, a slight frown on her brow.

“No- I mean. No. I'm just…” she shrugs.

“Everything okay?” Maggie looks concerned, and that’s not an expression Alex ever wants to evoke from her.

Alex sighs.

“I appreciate that you asked me over, but I-I don’t fit in there, I’m intruding.” She shrugs, again. “I think...maybe I should leave.”

Maggie nods, and Alex’s stomach falls when Maggie doesn’t outright deny it. She takes a few steps, until she’s beside Alex, staring off into the small garden in her backyard.

“You know...When I said ‘nobody should spend thanksgiving alone’ I was speaking from personal experience.”
Alex looks at Maggie, wondering in what world people wouldn’t want to spend the holidays with her.

“I’ve done it and it sucked,” Maggie says. “I cleaned the living room, and then I sat alone eating cereal and watching the Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade.” She turns to look at Alex, “It was crappy. Come back inside, please?”

Alex nods. She follows Maggie back inside.

Maggie isn’t a big wine drinker, but she serves Alex some red, a fruity, heady bottle that Gabriella has sworn up and down it’s delicious. The room has reached a lull, people lounging about talking quietly.

“So,” Alex breaks their silent companionship. “You moved here when you were fourteen,” she mentions, as she swirls her wine slowly.

“Yeah.”

“That must have taken guts. To leave your parents and everything,” she takes a big swallow of her wine and looks over at Maggie from underneath her lashes. “I could never be that brave, and certainly not at such a young age.”

Brave. That’s what Alex thinks she is. Maggie remembers her tears as her father bought her ticket at the airport. She can still feel the faint wisp of fear that crawled up her throat. It’s as if that moment is indelibly burned into her memory, she can remember every detail of it—the scent of the airport, the people glancing at them as they hurried to their destination, the voice of the flight attendant over the intercom. She wishes she didn’t. In college, one of her psychology professors had talked about how the brain can suppress traumatic events, but apparently she wasn’t lucky enough to experience that. Maybe lucky isn’t the right word, but it’s been ten years and the memory is as sharp as ever. Now isn’t the time for her self pity though. She shakes herself out of it and pours some more wine into Alex’s empty glass.

“It was hard. But it paid off,” she says. “Let me introduce you to a few people.”

Maggie walks Alex around the room, introducing her to Gabriella’s old co-workers, the people who had seen her grow up as she walked in and out of a cramped, hot kitchen in an upscale hotel none of them could afford to eat in. After a while, she leaves Alex talking to Winn, while she goes to see if any help is needed in the kitchen.

She emerges half an hour later, after helping to make a dozen Strawberry Daiquiris.

Alex is playing pool with Winn, and laughing loudly...clearly a bit drunk. They both are. Winn can’t hold his booze, she’s always known that, and Alex must have really liked the scotch Maggie had offered her after their glasses of wine had ran out, because she’s stumbling slightly as she plays on the pool table Maggie pulled out of her basement just for tonight. She looks...freer than Maggie
has seen her, unencumbered, but also just plain silly drunk. Maggie can't send her home like this.

She looks for Gabriella through the house, wanting her opinion on letting Alex crash at her place. Maggie has a single extra room with a bed—all the others turned into a private gym/yoga room, and a study—and it’s usually used by Gabriella. She actually finds her in it, in the middle of a phone call.

“It’s good, everyone’s really enjoying the food.” Gabriella laughs warmly, “Yeah, I’m sure you would.” Gabriella listens closely. Maggie wonders who’s on the other side of the line. “6 days, I’m going back two days later. Yeah, that’s enough.” Gabriella takes a step back, and nearly slams into Maggie. Her face is startled when she sees Maggie, and she quickly shuts off her phone.

“Who was that?” Maggie asks.

“Just...just work,” Gabriella tells her. Maggie frowns. Her aunt never lies to her, but her face looks almost...guilty. Maggie shakes her head. It's probably a misunderstanding. “Did you need something?” Gabriella asks.

“It’s just- Alex had a bit too much fun and, it doesn't feel right to me, to put her in a cab and send her home.”

“And you want her to crash here?” Gabriella finishes her thought and smiles. “Kid, I don’t know how you turned out so nice. It sure wasn’t from me.”

Maggie rolls her eyes and comes up to Gabriella, wrapping her arm around her and leaning on her shoulder. “You know you’re my role model right? You’re the person I always answer the ‘who’s your hero’ question with.”

"Did you have a bit too much fun too? Because you're usually not this sweet, either."

"I'm not drunk!" She protests. She's slightly buzzed, if that.

“Well, in that case, you don’t need to butter me up to get me to agree to let her stay.” Gabriella leans into her and drops a small kiss on the top of her head. “This is kind of your house.”

“I know, but I just wanted to run it by you. It is kind of your room.”

Gabriella smiles.

“Yeah, it’s okay. I’ll just sleep in your bed with you. It’ll be like old times. Try not to kick me this time though.”

Maggie pulls away to look up at her aunt. “That thing again? I still maintain you kicked yourself. None of the people I’ve slept with have ever told me I kick during my sleep.”

“And that’s the end of this conversation.” Gabriella turns and starts walking out of the room. “I really didn’t need to know that, Maggie. Come on, let’s go be gracious hosts to our guest.”
Kara does great in her audition for Captain Marvel.

Their mom was with her, so Alex is the first person she calls with the news, and she pushes down on her selfish disappointment to sound as excited for her sister as she should be. It’s not Kara’s fault that Alex is a trainwreck, constantly having to catch up to her little sister’s success. Kara gets a callback, and she skypes her with the news. She does amazing in it, too, and Alex isn’t surprised when Kara tells her she’s sure she got it, and neither is she when she calls her two days later to tell her she did.

But a week later, when her casting is announced. That’s when it hits Alex.

Her sister is going to be the next big thing—the next Gal Gadot, the next Emma Stone. And Nightingale is doing well, really well, but even critic-lauded and fan-favorite TV is still...TV. She didn’t see herself as a small screen actress, when she was younger, and Kara had been the one to saying she wished she could get a regular role in some TV show, because she’d loved to stay in the same place and make friends for years...friends! That’s on the same level as how nice the bathrooms are for Alex, when it comes to picking a job.

But here they are, and she really wishes she could be happy for her sister instead of happy and jealous.

But she hasn’t evolved that much yet, which is how she finds herself thinking about it and mumbling under her breath as she picks out the best strawberries from the container in the craft and services truck.

Kara was perfect for the role when she thought about it, then again, she was also perfect for Supergirl, and Superwoman, and—Alex is sure there are a dozen superheroes calling for 5’8 women with blonde hair and blue eyes.

“....Just because she’s tall,” she mumbles under her breath, getting a dollop of Nutella out of the jar to go with the strawberries. She can say fuck it to her diet for a day or two. She doesn’t even like her private trainer in New York and going to the gym every weekend is a chore.

“I don’t know Danvers, I'm 5'3" and doing just fine.”

She jumps at Maggie’s voice, and turns around in the reduced space of the truck to find her looking at her, an amused look on her face.

“What are you going on about?” she asks. Alex shakes her head.

“It’s nothing,” she says, turning around and getting her little plate of fruit and chocolate spread.

Maggie hums, and she takes the jar of Nutella from Alex’s hands before she can close it again. She takes the spoon and pops it in her mouth, and Alex wonders yet again about what sort of diet she’s on.

“I heard about your sister,” Maggie mentions around the spoon. She closes the jar, and she’s thankful Maggie hasn’t been double dipping. Nobody wants her saliva. Maggie takes the spoon out. “Captain Marvel? Nice. Congrats.”

“No my role,” she says, and it comes out more biting than she intended. It just reminds her far too much of people congratulating her for her father’s successes, as if his Oscar win was just like genes and could be transferred from father to daughter.
Maggie frowns. “Tell her congrats from me, then,” she says. “You okay?”

“I’m fine,” she says, picking up her miserable snack. She briefly wonders if another tablespoon of Nutella is out of the question.

“You sure?” Maggie asks, in her usual Maggie fashion. Alex thinks in some other life she could’ve been a detective. “What were you going on about earlier? About being tall?”

Alex blushed, embarrassed at being caught in one of her lowest, most petty moments. But she finds she doesn’t want to lie to Maggie. She never gets to just...let it out.

“It was about that, actually. The whole...Captain Marvel thing.”

“You’re not happy?” Maggie asks, surprised. Alex thinks that’s the appropriate response. She’s being kind of a shitty sister.

“It’s not that I’m not happy,” she tells her, lest Maggie thinks she’s a monster. And she is happy for Kara, after all. She’s just also...jealous. Mad, at being overshadowed yet again, and just when she was getting her act together again. “It’s just...there’s the PR thing and Claire and yet-” she struggles to explain it. She shrugs, finally. “My sister managed to outdo me once more.” Alex sighs. “You don’t have a sister, you wouldn’t understand”

“Right.” Maggie says, her voice quieter than Alex has ever heard it, and Alex wonders what is it she’s said.

“It just annoys me, that’s all,” she’s quick to fix. “I wouldn’t have been able to audition for that role. I’m not...beautiful.”

Maggie looks up at her, and she studies Alex in a way that makes her want to blush. She looks at her like she’s something...worth looking at.

“Yeah, you are, Danvers,” Maggie says softly, and Alex feels it in the pit of her stomach. She looks away.

"I’m not...classically beautiful," she corrects. She’s not the blonde, blue eyed bombshell that gets cast as Bond’s love interest. She’s not her sister, getting cast to play a superhero.

“’I’m not ‘classically’ beautiful, either,” Maggie tells her, shrugging. “Hell, I don’t even look ‘classically’ white. What’s your point, Danvers?’”

Alex shrugs, embarrassed. She’d never thought about it. How, if her dark eyes were enough to be passed for a role, Maggie might have it worse with her looks and well -she was tiny, to boot. And yet she was the lead of the show. Maybe Alex should stop finding excuses to feel sorry for herself.

“You should call your sister and tell her you’re proud of her, even if you’re not feeling it right now,” Maggie suggests, grabbing a banana and stepping out of the truck. “It’ll matter to her at the end of the day, and to you.”

If she had a sister, Alex reckons Maggie might be a better one than she is.
Kara Danvers announced as Captain Marvel

By Julie Lanegran | @julielanegran

Newcomer Kara Danvers is suiting up to play the lead in Captain Marvel, the first female-led Marvel Studios movie. After months of rumors, the actress known for her roles in The Shortest Ride, Highriders, and Alabama, was confirmed by a Marvel press release as the star of the film, expected to be released in 2019.

Captain Marvel, Carol Danvers, was created in 1968; her first appearance in Super-Heroes #13—a Captain Marvel story—as an American security officer with Captain Mar-Vell, an alien sent to study the planet Earth. She later took the moniker Ms. Marvel after her human DNA was fused with alien Kree genes, and she went on to inherit the title of Captain Marvel.

Hollywood has recently experienced a wave of critically lauded female leads in TV shows such as the year’s summer blockbuster The Informant, starring Sawyer, and HBO’s psychological thriller Squares.

Danvers can currently be seen in the film Flowers for Charlotte, and she will be seen in three episode story arc in AMC’s Humans early next year.
She gets an email from J’onn a split second before King’s drops into her inbox.

They both basically say the same thing, in wildly different words.

King thinks the PR relationship is going amazingly, and it’s time for them to move forward with it, to finally confirm all the media’s suspicions and let people know they are, in fact, “together”.

She has to kiss Maggie.

King has planned it all, and they’re supposed to go ice skating at Rockefeller Plaza, and then kiss as they walk out, just in time to be captured by the paparazzi. Alex’s mouth dries. She’s calling J’onn the following minute, his number long memorized as its the first one she dials when she’s in trouble. This has been agreed upon and signed, but it still feels like one of those occasions.

“I take it you read your emails, for a change,” J’onn jokes, but Alex isn’t in the mood.

“It’s too soon,” she blurts out. “It’s too soon, isn’t it?”

“That’s not my call to make,” J’onn tells her, and Alex sinks further in her chair. She doesn’t want to kiss Maggie. She doesn’t want to because she doesn’t know what it will feel like, and she’s terrified it’ll force her to think about things she’s not ready to think about.

“Are you alright?” J’onn asks, and Alex is embarrassed all of a sudden. It shouldn’t be a big deal. She’s 26 years old. She’s kissed plenty of people. This doesn’t…it doesn't have to be different. It’s acting. She’s kissed a lot of people for roles.

“Do you think you should talk to Maggie?” J’onn asks, and Alex shakes her head even though he can’t see.

“No. No, no. It’s just…it’s just a kiss. We don’t need to talk about it.” She’s never had a conversation like that with anyone, and she shudders even thinking about having it with Maggie.

“Are you sure?”

Alex pulls her laptop into her lap. The date is scheduled for Friday, a week from now, and that’s enough time for her to get over the ridiculous nerves swirling in her stomach -because that’s all they are. Nerves.

Stage fright, and nothing else.

“I’m sure,” Alex tells him. And she braces herself for the wait.
Alex refuses her help.

They walk into the Rockefeller ice skating rink, and though Alex is unstable on her feet, she sticks to grabbing onto the wall instead of Maggie’s offered hands.

Ice skating is what Maggie picked as their date this week, one of the two dates the contract allows one of them to choose, and Anthony had agreed when she’d run it by him. Maybe she should’ve asked Alex if it was okay too though. She doesn’t seem to be enjoying herself if her slow crawl along the wall and permanent grimace is any indication.

But Maggie enjoys the wind on her face, and the way the ice that’s just been smoothed is slick under her skates. She keeps a close eye on Alex as she does figure eights around the rink, and she winces as she sees her almost fall on the ice.

“Danvers, come on!” She slides up toward her and skids to a stop, her move kicking up ice flakes.

Alex shakes her head, letting go for only a second. She leans too far backwards and bats her arms to regain her balance before clinging to the wall again.

Maggie laughs despite herself.

She skates backwards in front of Alex, offering her hands.

“I won’t let you fall,” she promises. “Plus,“ she adds under her breath. “Think of how good it’ll look for the cameras. Come on, just take my hand.” She smiles reassuringly and adds as an afterthought in a sing song voice, “Take my whole life too.”

Alex gives her a look, “Cheeseball,” but the offer of great pictures seems to be the deciding factor.

“You better not let go, Sawyer,” Alex tells her.

“As Jack said to Rose, ‘never.’”

“Maggie, Jack let go and died in the movie what the fuck.”

Maggie laughs, “He totally could have fit on that board.” She receives both of Alex’s hands in her own and gently pulls her forward on the ice. Her hands are warm in hers, and she doesn’t even mind the death grip Alex has on them.

“You really like those death traps,” Alex mentions later, while they’re taking their skates off in the locker room.

Maggie shrugs. She really does, but after Alex fell twice outside—almost bringing her down once too—despite Maggie’s best efforts, it seems rude to rub it in her face.

“I’ve always liked it,” she tells her. From the time she was a little kid, there was always something
magical about ice skating. She still remembers the first pair of skates she got, pink and white, and though the memory is sour now, as most from her childhood, she hasn’t forgotten the feeling of flying. She was a natural.

“Gabriella and I go ice skating every Christmas,” she tells Alex. “It’s our little tradition.”

“I don’t think I’ve tried it since I was a kid,” Alex mentions. “First time in years,” she says, pulling her foot out.

“Well, I’m honored to have popped your ice skating cherry,” she says without thinking. Alex seems to choke on air, coughing as she blushes, and Maggie looks down. She focuses on putting her boots back on.

“The last time I was in Rockefeller center though,” Alex mentions, changing the topic. “It was after hours and I...was so drunk I couldn't even walk straight.” Alex purses her lips, and Maggie frowns. It doesn’t look like it was fun, by Alex’s expression, and Maggie thinks maybe she’s misjudged Alex because of the public image of a wild, party girl that she had. Nobody gets blackout drunk for fun, Maggie knows that keenly.

“I bet they’re going to mention it when these picture comes out,” Alex says bitterly. “Seems like I can’t do anything right in their eyes.”

Maggie wants to...comfort her, and she’s surprised by how the tender feeling spreads through her chest. This woman...Maggie had resented her at first, for pretending, but she can’t...she doesn’t want to blame her, or judge her, not when she’s witnessing firsthand how torn she is over it all. Maybe, to her, this really was the only way. She’s no Elisa, no woman she’s ever encountered before. Alex Danvers is something else completely, and Maggie vows to herself to let her be her own person inside her head from now on. She deserves a clean slate, free from whatever judgements Maggie has made before. She thinks she’s just started to know the real Alex, and she’s not at all bad.

“Are you ready to go outside?” she asks, knowing exactly what it means, what picture they have to take.

Alex looks up, her eyes wide like a baby deer’s, and Maggie offers her hand. Alex nods, and seemingly steels herself before taking it and following her outside.

Alex walks two steps behind Maggie, her heart beating harder the closer they get to the spot. Everything, down to the place they’re supposed to be photographed in, has already been chosen, already been carefully manufactured down to the last detail. All she has to do is follow the script, but she still feels disoriented, out of control. Like she’s standing on a precipice, the freezing, angry waters waiting for her below, and the ground receding below her feet. Terrified, she squeezes Maggie’s hand tighter, trying to absorb some of her confidence.

Five steps later and they’re standing at bottom of the steps. This is it. She gulps, her head feels light
and there’s way too much saliva in her mouth to be kissing someone. She tries breathing in through her nose and out through her mouth. In and out. Suddenly she feels a warm weight against her forehead, and she realizes she’s closed her eyes. It’s Maggie. She’s resting her forehead against Alex’s and looking into her eyes.

“Hey, it’s okay. I promise.” She takes both of Alex’s hands again, just like when they were skating.

Her eyes are so warm they make Alex momentarily forget about everything, her nerves, where they are, what they’re about to do. She breathes heavily, this time actually getting some air through her lungs. Maggie is still staring straight into her eyes, it’s a bit disconcerting actually. Her eyes are so brown, and she can see flecks of honey in them this close up. Maggie smiles softly at her, and tilts her head questioningly, silently asking if she’s alright.

Alex isn’t sure.

But she still nods slightly and closes her eyes again. And then Maggie’s warm breath is ghosting near her mouth and she’s kissing her. Maggie Sawyer is kissing her—on the corner of her mouth. Her lips are silky soft as she presses them to her face, low on her cheek. Alex’s eyebrows shoot up, because it’s not what Anthony had planned, it’s not what they were supposed to do, but either way something inside her feels relieved. Some of the pressure on her chest eases as Maggie pulls away, and makes no move to kiss her again.

Alex’s face tingles where Maggie’s lips just were, fluttering with a sort of electricity she’s never felt before.

“Let’s go, Danvers,” Maggie offers, nodding her head to where the car is waiting for them, and Alex nods gratefully, and follows after her.

Through the nerves and the overwhelming relief she thinks she discerns a feeling wildly different from the rest—disappointment.

Chapter End Notes

So that ending...remember when we said this would be a slowburn? We’d love to hear your thoughts about the chapter! Leave us a comment below! Or you can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meanstoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We’d love to talk to you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

We're sorry for the delay, but to make it up for it, this chapter is longer than usual!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

*Fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*: resolutely in action, gently in manner.
NEW COUPLE ALERT

ROCKEFELLER DATE FOR MAGGIE SAWYER AND ALEX DANVERS

Want to follow all the Celebrity drama? Download the *Ok Magazine App* to get it direct on your phone! 🔴

Dec. 12, 2018 8:38 AM

*The two met on set of Nightingale as co-stars.*

![People ice skating](image)

Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers were spotted at Rockefeller Center skating. The two of them have been on a string of outings since October, we rarely see one of them without the other attached to their hip. Sources at *US Weekly* that the two skated for around an hour and held hands as Maggie helped Alex find her feet on the ice. Cue the awhs! The cuteness continued after their date ended as Maggie kissed Alex on the cheek, but from the looks of it, her kiss was a little too close to the lips to be considered friendly. We certainly don’t kiss our friends like that!

It looks like we need to start thinking up a ship name for them...Magdawyer? Sanvers?
Her ankles are sore from skating.

The doorman to her building is the only person Maggie encounters as she slowly makes her way up to her room, craving rest. Alex took the stairs as soon as they arrived, after jumping out of the car without so much as a goodbye, but Maggie let it go—she knows Alex has to be more sore, and in more places than her, not to mention still spooked after the past hour. Plus, she was too tired to do anything else.

She hasn’t had a chance to skate since last Christmas—she’s just been too busy to go any other time during the year with wrapping up season one, promoting her movie, and then beginning filming for season two. She knows she’ll feel sore come tomorrow morning. She’s already starting to.

Maggie gets in the elevator. As much as her ankles ache from the skating, her mind buzzes as she thinks about the previous hour. About the kiss—or what was supposed to have been a kiss. The stage was set, Anthony’s instructions were fresh in the back of her mind, and they’d both known what was happening that night. It would’ve been a big step in their public relationship. But they didn’t take it.

She arrives at her floor, and sluggishly opens her door. She deposits her keys and wallet on the kitchen counter and debates showering for a second before deciding she just doesn’t have the energy for it. The car ride hadn’t been long enough for her to sleep—it hadn’t even been comfortable.

The half hour trip back had descended into a fraught silence. Alex had slid into the seat farthest from Maggie, which wasn’t that far in the backseat of the black SUV. Though the physical distance between them hadn’t been large, she’d felt them drifting apart yet again, and after things had been going so well.

Alex had stared out the window the whole time—the passing night lights flashing across her face like some sort of moving projection clothed as an abstract art performance piece.

Maggie had always loved going to museums. In high school, she’d gone on a class trip to the MoCA, and it’d fascinated her, although she frankly hadn’t comprehend most of what her professor was saying at the front of the group. At the first chance she’d gotten, she’d broken off from the group to explore on her own. She wandered into some exhibit and had stood rooted in front of a painting that’d caught her eye. She can’t remember either of the names now, but she still remembers what had been going through her mind then. The image is fuzzy, but she knows the painting was a large scale portrait of a woman staring off in the distance, her body turned inward from the audience’s gaze. Her expression is what had intrigued Maggie; it was a mixture of contrasting emotions, one overpowering the other depending on what angle she was viewed at. Maggie could take a step back and see she was a heartbroken, or move closer and think she was happy, but nostalgic. She’d spent what felt like hours glued in front of the portrait trying to understand what the woman was thinking.

She’d felt the same way with Alex in the car.
She could confidently guess she’d been uncomfortable, but as to why...she had her ideas of course, but when she glanced over at Alex’s face again, she hadn’t been sure.

She’s always prided herself as someone who can read people easily, and that talent usually extended to Alex as well, but there were some moments she just couldn’t get a handle on her. It bothers her more than she likes to admit. Knowing who you’re dealing with is power in this business, and she despises feeling powerless.

So it eats away at her, Alex’s attitude regarding their scheduled kiss. Alex had been too nervous tonight, too flighty, looking too much at Maggie like she was a lion about to pounce and not her co-worker, her...friend.

It unsettled Maggie. There was no way in hell she could have kissed her.

She flexes her hand, and she can feel echoes of the memory of Alex gripping it progressively tighter as they made their way from the rink to the stairs. She had tried catching Alex’s gaze to gauge her mood and offer her some reassurance, but her eyes had been lost—unfocused—looking anywhere but at Maggie. And that, combined with way she’d been trailing after her had made her feel like a soldier leading a prisoner to the guillotine, except she wasn’t just the soldier—she was also the executioner, hand holding the rope attached to the suspended weighted blade.

When they’d reached the spot that would set them perfectly against the lights and offer the best possible angles for the paparazzi they knew were waiting—the spot might as well have been marked by a big x like on sets—Alex had looked paler than a ghost, and her hand squeezing Maggie’s had grown sweaty. She’d been breathing deeply too—well, attempting to, with little success. She hadn’t even paid attention to Maggie standing mere inches away, too caught up in her nerves and what looked like fear.

Maggie remembers feeling her forehead resting against Alex’s, holding her hands in her own. Alex was warm against her skin, and her short puffs of breath had lightly hit her face. She’d opened her eyes when she felt Maggie, finally looking at her. And Maggie had slowed her own breathing, her gaze steadfast, and smiled, trying to will Alex into a state of comfort. It had worked, marginally. Then Alex had closed her eyes again, bottom lip trembling slightly, and Maggie knew she wasn’t going to kiss her that night, screw what Anthony wanted. Alex had clearly been on edge.

Of course she had to do something, or one of the paparazzi would’ve been liable to come out there himself and smoosh their faces together (per Anthony’s orders most likely) so she’d guessed a cheek kiss was safe. And if her lips landed a little too close to Alex’s lips, well, so much the better for the contract.

Maggie’s kissed a considerable amount of people in her short 24 years of existence. She’s had the bad, decent, mind-blowingly amazing, sloppy, heated, choreographed—she’s fairly confident she’s experienced the entire spectrum of kisses. Her kiss with Alex hardly registered compared to those—it was only on the cheek. The kiss itself only lasted long enough for the long lense to catch it, and then she’d led them back to their car. Alex was still skittish as they’d walked through the parking lot, but Maggie wasn’t surprised at her behavior. They’d left her previous nerves behind a while ago, but PDA in front of the cameras was a whole other step. Of course she’d freaked out. Maggie doesn’t exactly...blame her for her nerves.

Apart from her words, when they first learned of the contract, and her general uncomfortableness around Maggie scattered throughout the first few weeks...she hasn't seen much evidence that Alex is a raging homophobe. She thinks she might just be one of those straight people, the kind to loudly support LGBT rights and say it’s time for a lesbian Disney princess, but still look away when a same sex couple kisses. It’s not her fault, necessarily. She was raised in a heteronormative society
—they all were—and she’s pretty sure she’s Alex’s first gay friend. Though she knows she can’t be the first gay person she’s been around. It is Hollywood after all, but she’s most likely the first one she’s spent an extended time with and in a more intimate manner.

She’s not trying to make excuses for her, and part of her still thinks that lying about her sexuality is inexcusable, but she understands her nervous behavior. It’s the other part she doesn’t quite get. In the car, Alex hadn’t look disgusted, as Maggie would have expected from a woman who couldn’t bring herself to kiss another woman. If she had, Maggie would have given her a piece of her mind, and she certainly wouldn’t be understanding of her actions—she had no right to be disgusted at the thought of kissing her when she’d agreed to this contract in the first place. But she hadn’t. She’d look...confused, almost, and somewhat scared, and that’s what threw Maggie for a loop. She doesn’t know what was going on in her head, but she’s made the executive decision not to hold it against her because whatever her reasons—after so many weeks on set with her, all the time they’ve spent together shooting and between takes, and everything they’ve done for the contract already—Alex getting freaked out over their first kiss for the cameras isn’t a hill she’s going to die on.

She just hopes Anthony won’t kill her for it.

Maggie is late to set.

Alex knows this because she’s always there before Alex herself, and because she’s been standing outside her trailer door for 10 minutes—definitely not in a creepy way, she’s quick to reassure herself when she sees any passersby doing a double take upon seeing her—shivering in the freezing December air.

If she was a girl in a movie, she’d say she needed the cold air to think, but she’s not a fucking masochist, and she did all her thinking at home, late into the night.

Maggie had made the decision not to kiss her last night, surely spurred by Alex’s behavior—she’d been nervous and nearly frozen—and though Alex understands why she doesn’t understand…why.

She gets why Maggie wouldn’t go forward with what they’d been told to do—Alex was a mess, and that was on her, and Maggie surely wouldn’t want to work with her in those conditions, but she doesn’t understand why she’d go against King’s orders and risk breaching their contract. Did Maggie think she was so nervous she would’ve ruined it? Because it was just a kiss. Even if she didn’t want to go through with it in that moment, she would’ve been forced to suck it up, and she would’ve done it.

It’s not that Alex wanted to kiss her—she had to kiss her, and it throws Alex when things don’t go as planned, even more when she isn’t sure why. She isn’t sure how she’s going to ask her that just yet, but she knows she needs to. It’s just as she decides to sit down on her trailer steps that the inhabitant of the trailer walks up.

“Alex,” Maggie exclaims, surprised. “Hey,”
Alex jumps up to let Maggie unlock the door and quickly follows after her, shutting the door behind them. She needs to get this out before she loses her nerve, and it felt too private to ask over the phone. Maggie raises an eyebrow at her intrusion into her space, but she leans against her couch armrest, allowing Alex to speak.

“We were...we were supposed to kiss,” she states. “Why didn't we? Why didn't...you?”

Maggie gives her a look, but if she’s surprised by the question she doesn’t show it.

“I distinctly remember my lips touching your face, so I’d say I kissed you, Danvers,” Maggie tells her, but Alex recognizes the deflection in the joke. Maggie walks around her trailer, leaving her jacket draped over the back of the couch, and connecting her phone to a charger—why she doesn’t have it charged already is a mystery to Alex—but Alex doesn’t move from her spot. She’s not done.

“I’m serious.”

Maggie stops and crosses her arms, looking down. “You were nervous,” she tells Alex simply, meeting her eyes again. “Really nervous, and I couldn't kiss you like that, not even for a minute so they could take the damn pictures. It would have felt…” she winces slightly and casts her gaze at a point just past Alex’s face, “wrong, you know?”

It takes the wind out of Alex’s upset sails. She hadn’t seen it like that. Not even for a second had she stopped to consider maybe Maggie was stopping in deference to her, that she was trying not to make Alex uncomfortable.

A small part of her almost wants to blame Maggie for treating her with kid gloves, but it disappears as soon as it flares up. It’s just -not even her junior prom date bailed on kissing her when she was too nervous, so why would Maggie?

“So you were looking out for me?” she asks. “Is that it?”

“And for me.” Maggie shrugs with a smile, and her eyes slide over to Alex’s. “I don’t do bad kisses, even when they’re fake.”

Alex sputters, caught off guard by Maggie once more.

“See you on set, Danvers.” Maggie winks at her, winks—Alex didn’t think people seriously did that except on camera—and suddenly has her full swagger back. Her hips sway as she saunters over to the couch, which Alex only notices because no one’s hips move like that naturally, and she sits and props up her leg on the coffee table.

That’s probably her cue to leave.

Maggie spends more time thinking about Alex’s incredulous expression than is healthy.
She’d thought it was obvious that she didn’t kiss Alex because she was looking out for her, and it would be fucking terrible if Maggie didn’t care about how the girl she was kissing felt, but Alex’s expression makes her think about what kind of assholes she’s dated in the past.

Maggie only read a little about that part of her life when they first cast her, and most of it about Maxwell Lord, boyband member turned actor and Alex’s former boyfriend, and she knows she has no place prying into her personal life, but -

Her cellphone rings.

Maggie blesses whoever is taking her out of her spiraling, before she notices the caller ID, and cringes.

“Hi?” she asks, more a question than a statement since she doesn’t know which Anthony she’s dealing with this morning.

“How did you wake up this morning?” He asks in turn, his voice is artificially bright. So it’s asshole Anthony. Maggie sighs. “Well?”

“Good,” she replies, wary. She hasn’t had to deal with asshole Anthony a lot, she’s always been the studio’s sweetheart, but the man has a temper at times, and she’s sure she’s about to be on the receiving end of it.

“Awesome!” he exclaims. “Wanna know how I woke up? I woke up sure I’d have a dozen reporters wanting a statement from me because your relationship with Alex had been confirmed!”

Maggie cringes.

He bulldozes on, building up steam, but his voice still sounds freakishly cheerful. She’d rather he yell honestly.

“But instead, I have an idiot paparazzi texting me, saying that from every angle possible it looked like you were kissing Danvers on the cheek, and asking me why I told him to get down there for a hen peck when I promised him a real scoop. So. What happened?”

“I-huh.” She’s seldom left without words, but she hadn’t planned on Anthony being genuinely upset. She hadn’t planned beyond trying to assuage Alex’s discomfort. “We got nervous,” she says finally, sharing the blame with Alex. It would be wrong to blame it on her when Maggie is the one who chose not to kiss her based on what she saw.

“You got nerv- You signed a contract! And you’re actresses, for God’s sake! This should be routine!” Maggie winces at his tone of voice. She hears him take a deep breath on the other side of the line, and when he speaks again, his voice is wildly different. “This messes up my entire timeline, you do realize that, right, Maggie?” He sounds...sweet. And it makes Maggie feel like a scolded child. “But you know what? That’s what I’m here for, to fix things. Good luck on set today, Maggie. Expect my email.”

She blinks. The call is closed on his end.

She’d heard about his mood changes, of course, but she’d never been on the other side of his anger. She’d gotten used to being the leading lady who could no wrong, and it’s a bucket of cold water that perhaps she needed.

She hates the way he just went about it, but he’s not...entirely off base.
They did sign a contract. She signed a legal, binding document, even when she didn’t fully agree with the enterprise in the first place. Being uncomfortable with the idea of dating someone for publicity is wildly different from being uncomfortable kissing a woman who doesn’t seem on board with it, though, and Maggie wonders just how much more the contract she signed will ask of her, and of her moral code.

After the year is up, will she be able to look in the mirror and like who she sees staring back?

And if she doesn’t, will this career she’s been building be worth that price? She never thought she’d end up here, but maybe it’s the inevitable price everyone in the industry ends up paying, at one point or another. She’s only now acknowledging it could be a reality for her.

For the first time, she can feel the full weight of what she agreed to do like an anchor around her neck, dragging her down. Anthony is going to control her and Alex’s every action for the following year, and she won’t be able to refuse again, not if she doesn’t want to breach the contract. This was strike one. But she knows in her heart that if given the choice to redo that moment, she wouldn’t do anything different.

She’ll be damned if she lets this business change who she is at her core.

Alex sighs as she opens the door to her apartment.

She’s too tired to even flick her light on, and she rubs her bleary eyes as she finds her way through the dark toward her bathroom. It’s 1 AM, and her Saturday has just ended. Weekend shoots are the worst. Thankfully they’re not shooting tomorrow—well, technically today since it is Sunday now.

She goes through the motions of getting ready for bed, and after she’s ready—makeup washed off and comfortable yoga pants on—she slowly drags her feet to the kitchen for a drink of water before she succumbs to sleep. Two steps away from the fridge, she hits her hip bone painfully against the corner of her counter, and as she grasps around to reposition herself her hand lands on a cold metal object, which definitely wasn’t there this morning when she left for work.

She frowns, and turns the lights on to get a better look at it.

It’s...a can. The shine of the overhead lamps reveal a small can of coffee. Amor Perfecto, the name reads. It’s a Colombian brand of coffee, she learns as she turns the can over. Her Spanish is a bit rusty, but she can parse out the basics of the coffee while scanning the ingredients. There’s a small sticky note stuck to the front of the can, ‘No cat shit this time Danvers, enjoy.’

Alex can’t help the smile overtaking her face and the pleasant tingle traveling up her body. She pulls the sticky note off and reads the rest of Maggie’s compact—just like the woman—handwriting. ‘I stopped by during lunch to drop this off. Told the landlord I was your girlfriend to get in. Hope you don’t mind. (Btw, he likes the show.) Let me know if you like it! I can have more shipped for you.’
Maggie’s note is nice, but Alex’s words only register one word: girlfriend. That is what they’re trying to get the public to believe. She still shies away from word, but she brushes it off right now. She’s too tired to even think properly, because for a millisecond it felt nice and warm and comfortable, to think she actually had someone who cared about her that much, that she had a girlfriend. She’s fucking ridiculous when she’s almost asleep.

She leaves the gift on the counter for the following morning and heads to bed, water glass forgotten.

She dreams of beaches and coffee beans.

No cat shit this time Danvers, enjoy.
I stopped by during lunch to drop this off. Told the landlord I was your girlfriend to get in. Hope you don’t mind. (btw, he likes the show.) Let me know if you like it! I can have more shipped for you.

Sunlight illuminates the open space of her apartment as Alex sits at her table, inhaling the scent of coffee. She takes a careful sip of Amor Perfecto. The taste is...different to any coffee she’s had before. She usually likes her coffee bitter and strong, and the cup she’s brewed is...but it also tastes like oranges. Or is that lemon? There’s a hint of sweetness to the after taste even with the minimal
sugar Alex has added, and a prominent sort of fruity taste that makes her take a longer sip and try to figure it out as she holds it briefly in her mouth. It’s good. It’s really good coffee.

And now she has to think up a return gift for Maggie.

She refuses to lose their burgeoning gift off. She doesn’t know what to get her, though. It’s hard to think of a gift for a woman who has everything. It’s her yearly plight with her mother and Kara. She usually spends money on vacations and experiences, going sky diving or taking them to a new spa. She can’t just do that for Maggie? It’s too...intimate.

A light goes on in her head as she remembers the bonsais scattered throughout Maggie’s apartment when she was there two months ago. A small potted plant...she’d love that. It’s perfect.

She pulls out her phone to look up plant stores in the area. One of the first that pops up is Greenery NYC based in Brooklyn, which isn’t that far. She doesn’t have to be on set until 5. Destination chosen, she dresses quickly and pours some of the coffee into a to-go cup as she gets an Uber.

She’s too competitive for her own good.

Alex has an extreme of sense of deja vu, brought on by her own actions.

She is, again, standing in front of Maggie’s trailer waiting for her, but this time Maggie’s not late, Alex just got there earlier to ensure she could surprise her with the gift before they both get carted off to hair and makeup. She’s not sure why she’s put so much effort into a stupid plant—those 45 minutes she spent suffering through the store employee talking to her about every plant in their vast inventory is time she’ll never get back—but Maggie did take the effort to surprise her so it’s only fair she do the same. Every action has an opposite and equal reaction...she loved that principle in school. Though her action isn’t technically opposite since gift buying is the same action but -

“So is this gonna be a regular thing, Danvers?” Maggie asks, suddenly appearing beside her and cocking her head. “You running a greeting service?” The dimples appear. Maggie climbs her steps and stops just before entering, choosing to lean against the closed door.

Alex has half a mind to ask whether she chose that particular location to stand so she could look down on Alex for once, not the other way around, but things have been...weird between them, since the night of the kiss. Or maybe she’s the only one feeling like the air between them is...different, somehow. Either way, she is on a mission, and she doesn’t have time to tease her.

She rolls her eyes. “You wish.” Maggie laughs at that, the sound of it tinkling through the air, and tilts her head. “No uh, I really liked the coffee, and I thought I’d return the favor.”

“You just couldn’t let me get in the last gift in this gift war, huh? Figures.” Maggie’s face settles into a smile, and her eyes seem to twinkle in the cold morning’s sun rays.

“I don’t give up that easily, Sawyer,” she replies, a matching grin on her face. She carefully pulls out the gift from behind her back and presents it to Maggie. “I saw it and it re-” reminded me of you. It’s what she wants to say, what she was going to say, but she realizes now it sounds...wrong. That’s not something people say. “And I thought you might like it”
Maggie’s smile grows even wider, cutting across her face from practically ear to ear, and she quickly steps down the stairs to take the small potted cactus from Alex’s hands—looking over it the way Alex has seen Kara looking at puppies.

“That’s beautiful, Danvers. Thank you.” She finishes her inspection, the plant apparently up to snuff, and looks up at her, the now familiar mischievous glint in her eye. “Were you going to say it reminded you of me?” Maggie asks, and something lurches in Alex’s body, a weird feeling in the pit of her stomach. “Is this how you see me?” Maggie continues, smiling. “Prickly?”

“No, it’s cute.” Her tone was joking, but Alex was still quick to correct her—to too quick, because she clearly doesn’t think through what she says.

“You think I’m cute, Danvers?” Her right eyebrow arches upward.

Alex sputters. “No!” She stops. “Wait, uh, I don’t think you’re ugly or anything, but I didn’t mean it...that way,” she finishes, hating how stupid she feels.

“Mhm.” Maggie has a contemplative expression on her face as she turns to walk back up her stairs and opens the trailer door. She abruptly does a quick 180 turn to face Alex. “Guess I better work on that then.”

An inexplicable rush of heat flushes through Alex’s entire body, one she can only vaguely remember feeling in college.

Anthony’s email notification pops up while Maggie is scrolling through the news.

The preview lets her know this is the email she’s been expecting with a quiet undercurrent of dread, wary of what he’ll think up for them to do. Her thumb hovers over the mail icon, but she can’t put off the inevitable, so she clicks on it quickly. Better to look at it now so she has more time to prepare for whatever he’s chosen.

It’s a brief message. Straight to the point.

He wants them to turn the rumors about their relationship up to 11 by getting seen at a club together and having a short video taken by someone he’s paid off. Less of a mess, he says, if someone who frequents the club posts it on their Instagram stories. They just have to dance. According to Anthony, the resulting fan frenzy will take care of the rest. She’s not much of a party person, she’s tried to avoid that scene since her modeling days.

Back then, it’d been because she knew she was too young for it, and Gabriella would have killed her for it. But as she grew older and could legally enter clubs, she still rarely went. She was always too busy, and when she did have free time she spent it with Gabriella. She wonders, briefly, if she missed out on some experience most people her age have, some rite of passage or another. Then again, her adolescence was far from normal, there’s plenty of things she’s missed out on, and she doesn’t regret it.
The few times she did go to clubs it didn’t turn out well for her—one incident in particular jumps out at her. It actually could’ve sidetracked her whole career, if the news had leaked. Maggie has proven she doesn’t make the best decisions, drunk and lonely, in a dark club with pounding music. It’s not her scene.

Of course, now she does want the news to leak of this club visit, and it’s a simple enough request, but she can’t help resenting him a little for pushing this onto them; Maggie knows it’s her fault for choosing to be a gentlewoman with Alex though. She brought this on them. She gets another email just as she’s done reading the current one, also from Anthony—his private email this time, and not the King Productions one. She clicks on it, and reads his...specifications. It’s not just dancing, and Maggie swallows. What will Alex think?

Maggie’s done scenes with women before. She’s not new to it. A sex scene, even, in The Informant, and her co-star had been a stand up actress about it. They’d discussed the logistics of the scene and what they were comfortable with before it happened, and it went off without a hitch—as much as that was possible. Kissing on the job was always awkward, no matter how you spun it, and Maggie found her best kissing scene with a man and her worst with a woman about matched up.

Acting was acting, and intimate scenes always held a degree of discomfort, but at least she knew women. She’d been with women before. Her first kissing scene with a man in Rosewood Street had been nerve wracking if only because Maggie had let it build up in her head. At the end of the day, it hadn't been any different apart from the uncomfortable scratch of his beard, but she’d always wanted to play a gay woman like herself, if only to see if it would be less awkward.

She got her answer during Nightingale’s first season, and it wasn't.

It was still tiring, repetitive and uncomfortable—until it wasn't solely because after so many takes she’d grown used to it. But she felt in control and self assured in a way she hadn’t before, small and trapped beneath a man twice her size. (Their fans had loved their “height difference”. While Maggie had slightly resented the fact that she’d have said height difference with most of the population.)

It’s always weird to kiss someone for the camera, even if it’s a normal part of the job, and it can be even more stressful if the person you're kissing isn't the way you swing, so she feels for Alex. She’s been there. Their contract is another layer to it all, and although these days she doesn't give much thought to the other woman’s reasoning to...portray her sexuality as more colorful than it actually is, so to speak—though it's always at the back of her head—she doesn't want to make an uncomfortable situation any worse. And she certainly doesn't want to punish Alex. Maggie could never think that this is what Alex signed up for and so she should suck it up. It’s not who she is. Fake or not, she could never touch a woman if it isn't wanted.

They don't have to kiss tomorrow at the club.

Anthony is adamant about it, actually, but his vague descriptions of giving the tabloids something to write about, something unmistakably romantic—steamy is his word of choice—for the front page. Well, it's bound to be problematic.

Especially when they couldn't even get through one kiss.
The low buzz of La Nuvola Bianca surrounds Alex, and she closes her eyes briefly as she soaks in the noises and smells.

She’s become a creature of habit the past few months and she knows it. She’d usually go out headfirst, and confront whatever came her way, but J’onn asked her to keep a low profile—to keep her head down—and so she’s stuck to a few good places, none of them clubs.

So when at 10 AM, J’onn had shown up at her door unannounced and insisted she get out of her apartment and enjoy the city for once—on her own time and not for the contract—she’d agreed. If it had been any other person she probably would’ve closed the door in his face, but with J’onn, she’d just thought of bringing him to La Nuvola Bianca.

“So what’s good to eat here, Alex?” J’onn tilts the menu down to look across the table at her.

She picks up the menu too and hums quietly.

“Well as someone who’s tasted the owner’s cooking multiple times now, I’d say anything on the menu will be great. Maggie’s aunt has a real talent with food.”

The waiter stops by take their order, and then J’onn’s full attention is on her, those kind eyes staring at her with kindness, as they always seem to do.

“How are things going? Personally?” he specifies. “I know on the business front it’s been remarkably good. Fans love Claire, and you and Maggie together.”

She shifts uncomfortably in her seat and bites her lip.

“It’s actually that last part that’s been...giving me some trouble. I haven’t gotten the chance to tell you yet, but -”

He cuts her off with a hand on her arm.

“Rockefeller.” It’s a statement, not a question. “What happened?” He stares at her carefully, his dark eyes understanding. Alex shakes her head.

“During the date you mean,” she states, buying herself some time as J’onn nods, and never stops looking at her.

Alex sighs.

“I got...nervous. Maggie must have noticed. We didn’t...you know.” She can't even say kiss out loud, how will she be able to actually do it?

“I know,” J’onn affirms. “And so does King.”

Alex looks up at that. “Did he say something? Did he call you?”

J’onn shakes his head. “I actually wanted to talk to you directly about it. I didn’t just want us to go out for the fun of it.” She feels briefly betrayed, before dread takes over. “He contacted you, actually,” J’onn continues speaking. “Sent an email this morning.”

“What does it say?”
“He said you and Maggie complicated the timeline he had planned.” J’onn very uncharacteristically rolls his eyes. “So he came up with another...event, for you to attend. To speed things up.”

A tingle of fear tickles the base of her neck. “What do you mean event?”

J’onn nods toward her iPhone resting on the table. Right. It’s in her inbox. She slowly picks up the phone as if it’s a bomb, and she hands it to him, nonverbally asking him to do the honors.

He pushes the phone back into her hand. “Maybe it’ll be easier if I just explain.” He shifts his upper body closer and drops his voice, ensuring the natural volume of the restaurant masks their conversation—although they had been put in a more secluded area of it anyways. “It’s a club, Lavo. He wants you two to go and...spice things up. He’s not asking for any kissing though, just dancing together, like couples do.”

“Like couples do?” She raises her eyebrows.

“...Suggestively,” J’onn’s face looks pained by having to say that, and Alex isn’t faring much better. “That’s the exact word he used.”

She’s been to clubs before, far too many. She knows what game Anthony is playing, and she knows exactly what he wants. She isn’t 12 anymore. Memories flash through her mind of a sea of undulating bodies pressed together under colorful lights. She’s been there enough times herself, whatever man he’d picked for the night behind her, holding onto her hips. The thought of her and Maggie in that sea of bodies, partaking in the same activity stops her breath.

“What should I do?” Her voice comes out more pleading than she likes, but that is essentially what she’s doing right now.

“Do you want to talk about it?” J’onn offers, and Alex freezes at that. J’onn...J’onn knows, and that gives Alex come comfort, but she’s not ready to talk to herself about it, let alone J’onn. “No.”

“You should talk to Maggie then.” J’onn says. Alex looks up, alarmed. “About the club,” J’onn clarifies. “It can be just like shooting a...love scene,” J’onn says, and Alex cringes the same way she did when she was little and her mom explained the birds and the bees. This isn’t a conversation she wants to be having with J’onn—or with anyone, for that matter. “You can come up with choreography and execute it.”

Alex nods. It makes sense, but talking to Maggie about how they’re going to fucking grind at a club sounds like a solid nightmare.

“I hate to say it,” J’onn tells her. “And I don’t want to pressure you, but I don’t know if King will be as understanding if you don't follow his script a second time.”

It takes her a day to work up the courage to talk to Maggie.

She goes through her shooting for the day with a sort of nervous energy fueling her every move,
and when she’s done for the day she hurries back to the trailers, hoping to catch Maggie in hers before she leaves for the day. This time, she doesn’t have a cactus to hand in. But her skin does feel like it’s being pricked by a million of those.

Maggie opens her door at the first knock with a knowing look on her face. She wordlessly lets Alex in. She sits on the couch and gestures for Alex to join her, but Alex thinks it’s probably best she keep her distance for now. She chooses to stand across from her—the coffee table separating them—hands dangling by her side until she stuffs them in her back pockets.

Maggie’s acknowledges her decision with a small raised brow, but otherwise her face is neutral.

“You read Anthony’s email and want to talk about it I presume?”

She’s glad Maggie said it and knew what she wanted to discuss, that makes it slightly easier for her.

“Yes,” Alex is proud her tone comes out strong, resolute, and not wavering like she is on the inside. Maggie adjusts her position for a moment, quiet, and then looks up at her.

“I called M’gann, apparently he can make us do that.”

Alex frowns. “You didn’t think he could.”

Maggie shrugs.

“I think there’s a difference between getting photographed simply kissing at a skating rink and giving people a show at a club,” she says. Alex swallows at her choice of words. *A show*. Maggie looks up at her, and her face softens. Alex wonders if she sees right through her. “We’ll do whatever you’re comfortable with.”

Alex is taken aback for a moment.

“What about what you’re comfortable with?” Alex isn’t the only one in this PR relationship, and Maggie has been deferring to what she’s comfortable with since the beginning. Hell, that’s how they got into this position now.

Maggie shrugs. “I’m comfortable with anything.”

Alex’s eyebrows shoot upwards. She’s not sure that’s information she needed to know, or maybe she’s reading too much into her words.

Maggie’s own eyes grow wider as she sees Alex’s expression and realizes the potential implications behind her words.

“I mean—I know this is...new for you.” She raises both hands in front of her as a placating gesture. “And I don’t want to overstep. So you can lead the march, Danvers.”

“I’m comfortable with whatever you’re comfortable with,” Alex shoots back, not wanting to be treated with kid gloves, again. She’s a grown woman, she can and will handle this. It’s nothing she hasn’t done before, she tells herself. It’ll just be...with Maggie.

“That’s great, then,” Maggie says, tone conciliatory.

“Great.” She crosses her arms. There’s still more to talk about, though it’s thankfully less dangerous territory. “Um...what should I wear? King said he wanted us to match.”
Now Maggie looks amused, that small smirk curling the corner of her mouth upwards.

“I’ll wear black, Danvers. You can wear whatever you want. We’ll match.” She stands up from the couch and makes her way to the bathroom. “Give me a second,” she calls back. “I just have to return Blake’s clothes before I can go. We can keep talking outside.”

Alex remains standing in the middle of the room.

She takes a deep breath, the worst of it over. She’d like them to have a choreography to execute, like J’onn said, and she tries to mentally prepare herself for that conversation. Maggie is taking a while in the bathroom—it must take her some time to peel herself out of the jeans they put her in. Alex sighs, and starts looking around the trailer for lack of a better way to pass time. Maggie has one—no, two—bonsais here too. And her cactus, too, in the middle of her coffee table. Alex smiles. She has a few pictures up, most of them with Gabriella and a couple with James and the rest of the cast. Alex briefly wonders if she’ll be up there some time.

She wanders over towards the table by the mirror on the far left side of the room. There’s a few papers scattered on it, and she really shouldn’t be snooping—but she can’t help it when her eyes wander over them. She’s always been slightly curious of how much her co-star gets paid, it’s something not even J’onn knows. She sees numbers, and after a quick look to the bathroom door—still closed—she picks the page up. It’s...not what she expected. As she gets a closer look, she realizes the numbers are just tuition costs, it’s an invoice from a private school. Alex frowns. She knows of Maggie’s reputation as a player, but she wasn’t expecting something like this. She shouldn’t even be dating anyone because of their contract—Alex shakes off the ridiculous flash of irritation and what feels like jealousy—but just how old is her girlfriend?

It’s...fine though, she’s not here to judge anybody. She was almost guilty of the same thing once, even if in this case Maggie is the...benefactor, and not the other way around. It wasn’t rare. *Pius X School*, the invoice reads, and the first thing she thinks about looking at those words is her own private school, and being 16 and on the set of one of her father’s projects.

She only had a bit role in it, but she hung around on set long after it was over because she’d loved spending time with her dad. Her mom had been busy with a PhD at the time, and Alex had wanted her father’s company. And well, Martin’s. He’d played the son of the lead in the film, and he filmed a lot, but not so much that he didn’t have time to talk to Alex. He was smart, really smart. He was only 21, and he’d graduated high school early so he could pursue acting. Alex was confident she could have done the same, but when her mother had suggested not skipping grades in high school so she could keep Kara company—Kara, who had skipped two—Alex had agreed. She’d skipped third grade already anyways. She could’ve graduated already, too, and Martin knew that.

Alex had always liked the way he talked about her and her intelligence. He asked her out, a few weeks before filming was over, and Alex said yes.

And then her parents lost it. They didn't approve of her dating someone older, and although Alex tried to remind them that she was mature for her age, as they always said, they still wouldn’t allow her to go out with him. Kara, at 12, had a boyfriend of sorts at the time. The son of the cleaning lady next door, a quiet 11 year old that only ever talked to Kara. Kara’s English wasn’t that good, and his English wasn’t better, but they understood each other just fine in bits of English, Kara’s native French, and his Spanish. He made her laugh. Kara had even asked for her help to make him a Valentine’s Day card. Their parents had proclaimed their ridiculous puppy love ‘adorable’.

So why wasn’t she granted the same reaction?
She’d told Martin, who’d immediately told her that she was old enough to move out, that she didn’t need them. Alex reminded him she was still in school, and that she was sure the minute she left they’d cut off her credit cards. She hadn’t wanted to leave, not really...living away from her parents, living with a man, a boyfriend...it didn't sit right with her, and she’d never leave school. But he’d offered to pay for her schooling, said all his friends did that for their girls. He said he’d take care of her. That it wasn't rare in Hollywood.

“What are you doing?”

She drops the piece of paper by reflex, embarrassed at being caught snooping.

“Sorry. I was just -”

Maggie hastily grabs the paper and shoves it away inside a folder.

Alex tries to shrug it off. She can be cool about it. Plus—if she brings up their no dating rule, it’ll only remind Maggie of their first real fight, back at King’s house. Neither of them need that.

“You know, I had a boyfriend when I was 16 that offered to do the same thing,” she says. Maggie looks up. “Pay for my school, you know, since I was with him. I know how it is.”

Maggie’s expression is dark by the time she finishes her words. “This is nothing like that. I pay for my cousin’s education.”

“Oh.” She feels foolish, suddenly. And she fears she may have just truly pissed off Maggie, but how was she supposed to know? Maggie doesn’t talk about her family. But Alex has read enough about her many girlfriends. “Sorry. It’s just...you never talk about the rest of your family, apart from Gabriella. I don’t think I’ve read about them in the papers, either. I didn’t even think -”

“Obviously.” Maggie’s tone is still terse, but her expression is back to its neutral state. She sighs and looks up at the ceiling. “I’m not close with my family.” She turns back to Alex with a small, tight smile. “So for the club, I was gonna show you what I’m thinking of wearing. Let me just drop this off at Wardrobe and you can ride with me back to the apartment.”

Alex can spot the disjointed conversation change a mile away, and she doesn’t like it. She wants to know more about Maggie. She’s...so closed off, which one wouldn’t expect with a surface glance. She seems to talk to everyone, but Alex can’t think of a single conversation where she’s learned more about her—save for her brief mention of spending Thanksgiving alone.

“You’re not close but you pay for their education?” She asks. She moves her weight to her left leg and crosses her arms. “You must have a heart of gold, Sawyer.” She smiles teasingly, hoping to draw her out of her armor.

The smile falls off Maggie’s face, her eyes hard.

“I said drop it.”

She leaves her trailer, and Alex gets a feeling she isn’t coming back, so she rides back to her place in the car waiting on her. They never end up talking about the club.
The sunshine slants across Maggie’s bed, illuminating the various outfit choices laid out for tonight.

On her pillow is the classic little black dress, while a white blouse and black high waisted skirt lay at the foot of her bed, a blue dress she likes is thrown over the back of a chair, but she already told Alex she was wearing black. Maggie sighs. She’s not particularly in love with any of the options. She walks back towards her expansive walk-in closet, googling the night club Anthony’s sending them to as she goes. It’s an upscale establishment that ironically enough also serves as an Italian restaurant.

She rummages through her racks of clothes looking for something suitable and finally lands upon a pair of black leather pants. She looks back towards the bed, and the strappy white blouses matches well enough. She drops to her knees to look for shoes to match the outfit. She’s crawling towards the back of her closet when she hears Gabriella’s voice rising up from below.

“Oh Maggie,” she sings out, “I’m ready to judge your wardrobe choices and maybe your life choices too.”

Maggie yells over her shoulder, “Come on up, I’m in the closet.”

Her aunt’s footsteps enter her bedroom.

“I thought you left at fourteen, why the step backwards?” Gabriella laughs at her own joke, and Maggie suppresses a smile. “What will you tell your ardent gay fans who want you to and I quote, ‘shove your entire leg up their ass,’ which by the way I did not need to see.”

“It’s your fault for snooping over my shoulder on Twitter,” she says, muffled by the clothes hanging above her. “Got it,” she says triumphantly, her fingers closing around a pair of sandals that she bought specifically for her last trip to Disney World with Gabriella. They’re comfortable, and if there’s one thing Maggie remembers from the days where she forced herself to attend clubs for the networking—heels were terrible to dance with.

“What did you get?” Gabriella asks as she comes out, hair disheveled.

“My shoes,” she answers, throwing the leather pants on the bed and grabbing the blouse. She puts it on top, and drops the sandals to the floor at the foot of the bed. “So, what do you think?”

“Comfy chic,” Gabriella mentions. “I love it -” Her cellphone rings, and she takes a quick look at the screen.

“Who is it?” she asks, wondering if maybe she should go for some boots. She’s short enough as it is.

“Work,” Gabriella says quickly. “Give me a second, sweetie. And that blouse looks amazing by the way, two thumbs up from me.”

She gets up and walks out of the room, which leaves Maggie wondering since when does her aunt
need to answer work related calls away from her. It doesn't sit right with her, and it’s the second time this month that she’s been left in doubt as to who Gabriella is talking to, but she shakes her head, and files it away for later.

She has enough on her plate for tonight.

The car stops right outside the venue.

The street outside the club, Lavo, is dimly lit by the panel of bright yellow lights above the blue awning. She read the place is also a restaurant, and she fleetingly wishes they were out for dinner instead.

She and Maggie get out quickly, mindful of the busy street and the honking drivers behind their car. Alex shivers the second the chilly December air hits her bare legs, and she starts walking towards the entrance, hoping the movement will warm her up. Maggie follows right beside her.

Alex eyes the long line outside of the club, full of girls waiting in dresses shorter than hers and strappy heels in the freezing cold. It’s the dress code of a place like this, Alex knows that, and she feels a moment of sympathy for everyone who has to wait. Alex knows Maggie is the only one getting through the door wearing pants.

This is a familiar scene for her, one she knows as well as the periodic table, and the memories aren’t welcome.

Until recently her life was nothing but dimly lit, sweaty clubs, short dresses, and dancing the night away to the soundtrack of excessively loud pounding bass, all of that interspersed with set days before she was fired. After that, her days consisted of booze, shorter dresses, and bad sex if she was in a particularly self destructive mood. They keep walking towards the entrance, the winter cold slicing through her clothes.

Alex gives the line one last look. The only reason Alex hadn’t been one of those girls currently shooting them dirty look as they approach the bouncer had been because of her last name. If she wasn’t a Danvers, she would’ve had to wait in the cold, too.

They must know it, because Alex hears people’s whispers grow in number the closer they get to the entrance.

“Wait, oh my God, that’s Maggie Sawyer ,” comes one hushed tone towards her right.

“Informant...No, not the Netflix show, that spy movie ,” another higher voice jumps in.

“Oh, the gay girl? Go ask for a picture !”

“It’s Maggie Sawyer. ”

“The girl with her is from that show too, the cop one. ”
“Oh my God, ask for a picture!”

But nobody does, and soon enough they’re at the door, closed off with the red velvet rope she’s used to getting hushed through.

The bouncer towers over them, especially over Maggie who barely reaches chest level.

He flicks his eyes over to Alex for a moment, before returning his gaze back to scrutinizing Maggie. He looks her up and down with a sneer. Alex has the sudden odd urge to step in front of her, as if to shield her from the giant before them. She brushes off the thought immediately after it pops into her mind.

“You’re not getting in just yet,” he tells Maggie, before jerking his thumb toward the long line, “back of the line like everyone else, compadre.”

Alex frowns, not understanding where the fuck that attitude is coming from.

“Hey, I don’t know -“

She’s stopped by a hand at the small of her back. Maggie looks up at her with a quick warning glance as she pulls them both back from the bouncer—probably so she isn’t craning her neck too much to address him Alex thinks—and smiles brightly at him.

“The reservations were made last minute, but my name should be on there.” She pauses. “Maggie Sawyer.”

The bouncer looks amused at them, and Alex can recognize a guy on a power trip when she sees one. She suddenly feels the urge to get him fired—if she was younger and had more time on her hands, she would. The bouncer calls over a guy with a clipboard, and the man must clearly recognize them, because he goes white, and immediately talks to the bouncer in a hushed tone.

When the bouncer turns back, his expression is absolutely different.

“I’m sorry about the misunderstanding, Miss,” he tells Maggie quietly, and opens the barrier.

They’re led inside.

The place is crowded, and smells like air conditioning with a hint of sweat and the sickeningly sweet, dank smell of a certain strain of weed. God, it’s like she’s back in college.

They’re led to a table near the back, where there’s thankfully less people, and a waiter immediately serves them a bottle of champagne. They sit down, aware that they’re still early. King wanted them at a specific corner by 2 AM sharp, and it’s just barely 1.

“What was his problem?” Alex wonders out loud, thinking of the asshole at the door. She gets it’s his job to turn away people, that they can’t let everybody wanting to take a peek at celebrities in, but he didn’t need to act like that.

Maggie gives her a look. “He must have thought I was Mexican.”

“...So?”

“So, he’s a racist asshole, Danvers.”

Alex frowns. “But you’re not...not that it’d be okay if you were but you’re-“
“Yeah, it was misdirected, but it’s not about what I am or not with people like him, it’s about what I look like. He took one look at me and decided I was someone who didn’t belong in here.”

Alex frowns, her brow knotted.

“I’m…” she doesn’t know what to say. Sorry? Of course she’d noticed Maggie’s genes gave her beautiful tanned skin—she was actually jealous of it. She’d never given any thought to how that could be a problem for some people. But Alex knows most people aren’t like the bouncer—and especially not here, they’re in New York City for God’s sake. People generally don’t have problems with immigrants, be them Mexican or Italian. That’s not...that’s not a thing anymore, she’s almost sure of it.

“Forget about it,” Maggie tells her, taking a sip of the champagne flute in front of them. “This blows,” she mutters. “Want to order something else?”

Alex nods, easily shaking off the weirdness of the beginning of their night. It’s not something worth thinking about it.

She calls the waiter over and asks for a Black Russian cocktail, and Maggie corrects her, and asks for two. They kill time like that, and Alex is proud to have something where she knows more than Maggie. She smiles when she finds a drink Maggie likes, and she laughs when she finds a drink Maggie really doesn’t. Her entire mouth twists, and Alex finishes it for her. She won’t blame Maggie. She’s seen the woman can hold her alcohol, but absinthe is an acquired taste.

“It’s not even that strong!” Alex tells her. Maggie licks her lips.

“That tastes like the devil’s mouthwash,” Maggie tells her, and Alex laughs so hard she doubles over. She’d finish it for her, but she doesn’t think she can get it down without it coming out of her nose. “I’m glad you’re having fun, Danvers,” she states, before taking a look at the silver watch on her wrist. She sombers up. “It’s almost time,” she tells Alex.

All signs of laughter leave her body.

Maggie moves to stand up, but Alex holds her back with a hand to her arm.

“Just one more drink,” she tells her, and calls over the waiter. “Can we get two glasses of your best scotch?”

The man nods. Maggie gives her an amused look.

“Liquid courage?” Maggie asks. Alex smiles and nods.

“The best kind.”

The dance floor is crowded.

Sweaty bodies move up and down to the sound of the music, some Pop 100 tune she’s heard on the radio a thousand times on her way to work, when she didn’t tell the driver to turn it off. Maggie gives her a smile and a shrug, and begins bouncing up and down to the beat of the music.

“Might as well have fun!” She yells over the noise, and Alex lets herself be led by the hand to the middle of the throng of people. Surprisingly, she finds she’s more comfortable here than she was back at the ice skating rink. Maggie lets go of her hand, and Alex throws hers above her head as she begins to move to the sound of the music. She’s always loved the anonymity a crowd at a club offers, the way people just move as one without knowing each other or asking questions.
She’s pleasantly buzzed from their drinks, nowhere near where she got on her own, but it’s...enjoyable.

A different song comes on, a hip-hop one, and Maggie seems to perk up as she moves her shoulders to the beat. Alex laughs looking at her. Who would’ve thought. Maggie must notice her stare, because she looks up, and suddenly changes her movements. She looks at her with a glint in her eye as she starts doing the most ridiculous dance move Alex has even seen. She doesn’t even know what to call it, she does some sort of pop and lock with her arms like she’s clapping, but the actual clap never happens.

Alex laughs even harder, head thrown back, and Maggie smiles at her, tongue between her teeth. As she stops and returns to dancing like a normal human being, Alex realizes maybe making her laugh had been the entire point.

They dance face to face, and if Alex forgot about the contract entirely, it would really be like all those nights she used to go out before starting Nightingale, going out with her so called friends, except she’s actually having fun now. It takes her by surprise, but it’s true. She knows Maggie, they’re actual friends, nothing like the women she’d met once or twice and who only ever showed up at night, so Alex could get them into clubs and they could get drunk on expensive liquor while there.

Her fun is cut short when Maggie calls her down—Alex hadn’t noticed, but Maggie is shorter than usual. Alex is wearing the heels that better matched her dress, and although they’re not too high, she has almost a head of height on her. Alex notices Maggie isn’t wearing heels at all, but...sandals. Was that allowed?

“We should probably, huh, move to the corner,” Maggie tells her, her breath hot on her ear, and Alex nods even as she shudders. Maggie shows her her watch after she pulls way. “We have ten minutes still, but I don’t want to be late!” she yells. “This place is crowded!”

Alex nods, again, and holds Maggie’s hand so they don’t get separated as they navigate their way to the designated corner, on the opposite side of the DJ. The crowd is packed less tightly there, and Alex actually has room to move freely, which is all the more nerve wracking.

The song changes before they get there, and it’s a song Alex actually likes, though she wouldn’t easily admit it. Sia, she recognizes. She’s met the woman, and she felt weird greeting her through her wig, but she makes good music.

Alex didn’t even know you could dance to music like this with a partner. It’s the kind of song Kara would blast through the house first thing in the morning, and she —she really shouldn’t be thinking about her sister right now, as she tries to dance with Maggie in a way that’s appealing, that looks like they’re more than friends. They’re dancing the same way as before, only closer.

Maggie stares up at her as she gathers her hair away from her neck, the strands sticking there with sweat, and Alex realizes once more how small she is. She feels half a dozen jokes bubble up in her throat.

“What’s funny?” Maggie asks, and Alex shakes her head. Someone pushes her from the side, and she ends up even closer to Maggie, but she’s grown used to the distance between them by now—or the lack thereof.

She tries to shake off the weirdness of dancing so closely with a woman, and tries to enjoy the song, even as she steps closer to Maggie. Maggie follows her lead, like she promised she would. She feels the tips of Maggie’s fingers pressing into her waist, but Maggie doesn’t pull her in closer.
They’re just...closely orbiting each other as they dance. Alex closes her eyes and moves her hips the way she would if it was 5 months ago, and she’d found herself at some club trying to forget the last car ride she took with her dad. She lets her body move freely, and she doesn’t jump when it touches Maggie’s.

She opens her eyes when the song changes, and a second later Maggie nods towards her watch, even as she doesn’t stop dancing.

Alex swallows. She wonders briefly if King had them change the music just for them; it’s something his micromanaging ass would do. The song is slower than the one before, and Alex feels the loud bass in her chest, feels her heart beating along with it.

Maggie steps closer all of a sudden, to speak in her ear.

“I see the guy with the cellphone,” she tells Alex, her lips just brushing her skin as she speaks. Alex shivers. Maggie pulls away, but she’s still closer than before. It’s showtime. Alex feels nerves bubble up inside like an effervescent drink, but she’s distracted by Maggie, who grabs her hair in her hands and...sings along.

“You, huh, you like this song,” she mentions, or asks, she’s not entirely sure. Maggie nods a little, but she doesn’t smile, seemingly having slipped into a deeper level of focus. Alex wants to follow her. It’s not hard. Maggie’s body rises and falls to the beat of the music as she mouths the words. Alex doesn’t stop moving, letting her hips sway to the slower beat.

“....don't wanna be alone...” Alex stares at Maggie’s lips as she sings to herself. She’s enticing as she looks up at her, her eyes half closed and dark like ink underneath the club’s lights. Alex steps closer, until they're pressed together, her right leg between Maggie’s. She’s shocked at the heat for a moment, before Maggie’s warmth seeps into her and Alex only feels it like an extension of her own. Maggie nods.

Whatever you’re comfortable with, she’d said. But right now Alex feels doesn’t feel uncomfortable in the least.

Their bodies pulse together to the rhythm of the song, their hips almost slatted together. Maggie’s hand lands on her stomach, burning her. Alex feels like she’s breathing in smoke, or being intoxicated somehow.

“You can touch me,” Maggie tells her, her voice emanating from deep in her throat, and Alex does. She lets herself touch Maggie’s body and it grounds her. Her fingertips fall down her shoulder blades, her shirt sticking to her skin with sweat. She presses her palms against her back, the movement bringing them even closer so Maggie’s chest is pressed against her own. God, Alex can feel her breathe. Her rib cage expands against her body and hands and Alex feels like she’s living inside of her.

“You can, too,” she manages to get out through the thickness in her mouth.

“You can put your hands on me,” Maggie repeats, and just barely touches Alex’s arms, pushing them lower. Alex is surprised for a second, but she never stops to consider it, never thinks anything but — yes. Her hands slip down to cover Maggie’s backside, taut in the leather pants she’s wearing. She can feel her hips moving against her thigh to the beat of the music, and it’s even easier to match her rhythm.

She leans forward, her hair falling around her face, until she’s surrounded by Maggie. Her face ends up so close to her neck Alex can feel her hot breath bouncing off her skin. She jumps when
she feels Maggie’s lips brush just below her jawline, as it sends a sharp jolt of something down her body.

The music rises to a crescendo, and in a spur of the moment decision she grabs Maggie’s hand and turns her around.

Her hands gravitate to Maggie’s sharp hip bones as she pulls her body towards her own, their bodies moving as one, her chest pressed to Maggie’s back. Maggie’s hair smells like spices and she’s so warm in front of her, her hands covering her own—Alex has never felt like this.

“How are you liking Lavo tonight?!” The DJ screams as the song comes to an end, and Alex gets shocked back into her body. She lets go of Maggie. She looks around, finally noticing the other people, and especially the man putting his cellphone away as he nods to the both of them, a slimy smile on his lips.

Alex breathes in, and pointedly ignores Maggie’s eyes.

The video has been taken, they’re done for the night.

Stupid. That’s the only thought racing through Maggie’s mind as she strips off her clothes, leaving a trail leading up to her closet.

She grabs a pair of old red boxers and a white shirt, which she roughly pulls over her slightly pounding head. She grimaces preemptively at the headache she knows is coming tomorrow morning. Besides the aftereffects of the alcohol though, the night was a resounding success. Anthony will be pleased, the jackass. Maggie frowns as she feels her stomach swim, the alcohol sloshing around. She should’ve tried to make Alex comfortable with less enthusiasm, or at least had more dinner. But she’d been nervous, just like Alex—at the beginning, at least.

She shivers standing in her closet, feeling the ghost of Alex’s hands on her.

They...definitely fulfilled the requirements. Perhaps more than needed, but it never...hurt to be thorough. Alex in particular, with the way she started dancing with her towards the end of the song. She didn’t think she had it in her, but she’s learning not to underestimate Alex Danvers. She was very convincing tonight. Maybe too convincing, if her body’s reaction is anything to go by.

Maggie walks back to her bed as she thinks of her own actions tonight. She hadn’t meant to press her lips to Alex’s neck, that hadn’t been part of the plan, but they were so close it just felt natural—and it would’ve been, if she was dancing with a woman she liked and not her co-worker. It was a slip up. A mistake that she’s glad Alex didn’t call her out on.

And Alex herself...She can still feel her body moving against hers from behind, to the beat of the music. Maggie hasn't been with anyone in ages, and she can feel it. And Alex is...she’s a woman, an attractive woman. Maggie would have to be dead not to feel...something, so near her, and with her hands on her ass...God. Stupid.
But it’s done, and they won’t be doing anything like it again, so it’s pointless to think about it.

She takes two aspirins before she falls asleep.

She almost takes a cold shower, but she decides against it when she thinks about the implications of it. She just needs to wash off the grime from the club.

The smell of the sweet, tangy perfume Maggie was wearing somehow wafts through her nostrils. Some of it must have gotten on her skin while they were dancing together—she has to wash that off too.

She grabs her loofa and pours a generous amount of body wash on it, and then starts vigorously rubbing her skin. She doesn’t want to smell like a bar tomorrow morning. It takes her a moment to realize it’s the weekend and she doesn’t have to film the following morning, but she doesn’t stop until her skin is pink, figuring it can’t hurt to be clean.

She washes the soap off with her hands, finally feeling more like herself. The warm water rains down on her as she runs her fingers through her hair and down her neck, feeling strange as she remembers Maggie’s lips on the skin there. That was an accident. She cleans the night from her body, and resolutely ignores the wetness she encounters between her legs as she washes it away immediately.

She doesn’t want to think about it, but it’s feeling more and more like she doesn’t have a choice.
To respect Alex and Maggie’s privacy, we will not be posting or RT’ing the IG story taken of them at the club. Thank you.

Vote for Alex as Performer of the Month!
Maggie catches herself thinking about that night at Lavo as the week starts again.

Things have been weird between them the few times they’ve seen each other at work, and though she always thought it might be weird for a couple of days after things like this...she can’t help but place most of the blame on herself. She got embarrassedly caught up in the moment—she felt Alex jump when she kissed her neck, and afterwards she’d turned her around, as if wanting to keep Maggie away from her—and now she’s messed their relationship up. It’s like a constant cycle of two steps forward and three steps backwards with them.

This time she feels like the sole reason things have regressed again. Alex’s feelings towards gay women aside, she can imagine any person in Alex’s shoes would feel weird after the way she acted in that club.

She hopes it fixes itself soon. In the meantime, she has yet more things to worry about.

Time doesn’t wait for anybody, and the Golden Globes nominations are coming up soon. M’gann has told her based off the chatter her chances of being nominated for *The Informant* are good, but Maggie is never sure of anything. It’s a primarily action driven film, and she knows the Academy doesn’t always bother to consider action films over the indie hits. But M’gann has been successful in building the narrative around her as the next big star, and she’s seen this happen time and time again with other actresses.

They get their big break, the public falls in love, and then the awards follow. M’gann has taken her from point A to point B, and she trusts her in this. She wants to get there. Of course, what also ends up inevitably happening after ‘there’ is the fall from grace, as the public moves onto the next star and proceeds to shred the old favorite for even the smallest mistakes.

She won’t think of that now though.

The Danvers late Thanksgiving meal ends up taking place in mid-December.

A week after the club, Alex welcomes her mom and sister to her apartment, for a dinner that she’d been excited for in its moment, but now could only dread. Things had changed since November, shifted, somehow. And with her relationship with Maggie everywhere online and in the papers after the stunt at the club, she just didn’t want to face her mother.

There wasn’t much she could do, however, and tonight she found herself sitting under the careful gaze of the eldest Danvers, her wine glass empty in her hand.
“So... I’ve been seeing a lot about you and Maggie on the news.”

“Don’t mention it,” she pleads, and uncharacteristically doesn’t care that it sounds like she’s pleading. The thought of her mother watching that video—a video that she can’t bring herself to watch—is mortifying.

“I’m just—that’s a good thing, isn’t it?” her mom asks. “J’onn is happy?”

“Yes, J’onn thinks it’s good. But I don’t want to talk about it,” she states. “And I mean - Kara! How’s the Captain Marvel stuff going? That’s more important.” It’s the first time in her life she’d rather the focus be all on her sister. She’ll be happy to be ignored if all she brings to the table is a fake relationship she’s not too proud of.

Kara helps her out, turning the conversation away from her.

“Oh my God, Alex, they showed me the concept art for the suit and it’s- it’s unbelievable.”

Alex can believe it.

They spend the rest of dinner talking about it, and the topic naturally bleeds into Kara’s role in *Humans*, playing a sentient robot—and wasn’t that a paradox? They’d given her blue contacts that Kara had begged to take home. Her sister looks like a kid during Christmas as she promises Alex to show her how she looks with them on after dinner. Alex smiles and nods, but thinks to herself that Kara already has bright blue eyes. What was the point?

Dessert passes by in a blur of ice cream and brownies, and since tomorrow they’re all taking a walk through Central Park, her mom heads to bed earlier.

It’s only then, when she and Kara are putting the dishes in the dishwasher, that her sister brings it up again. Or rather, Alex does, because her little sister’s poker face is crap.

“Fine, mom is gone,” she tells her. “You can talk about it.” Kara tries to look innocent, but that expression started failing her when she hit 14.

“I wasn’t going to say anything,” she says. Alex rolls her eyes.

“Please, you’re dying to mention it. I can smell it.”

Kara gives her a look before finally giving in.

“Nothing. It just -it looked real.”

Alex gulps. And the same knot of uncertainty she’s learned to live with during the past week threatens to choke her.

“Well, I am an actress.”
The Golden Globe nominations land on a Tuesday.

Maggie hates it, because that means she has to work, and she can’t stay glued to the TV screen like she’d prefer. M’gann had promised to let her know first thing if she heard her name come out of the mouth of one of the hosts, but Maggie has still been a jittery mess since she arrived on set. She curses the time difference between NYC and LA.

The nominations begin at 7 AM Pacific Time, which is 10 AM her time, and she still has an hour to go ‘till then. Her nerves and anticipations are almost so bad they derail her acting; it takes her a little longer than normal to film some scenes she’d regularly nail. Her mind is a thousand miles away in Los Angeles.

Finally, 45 minutes past 10, the PA tell her she got the phone call she’s been expecting. She’s thankfully finished her scene with Alex, who’s still acting somewhat cold towards her, and grabs the call, walking a short distance away from the set.

Her hand is shaking, and she tries to stop it with her other hand, but that one is trembling too.

“M’gann?” Her voice is breathless. She feels like she’s walking a tightrope above a 100 foot drop, and whether she makes it to the platform and safety depends on whatever words will come out of M’gann’s mouth.

“Best Actress in a Motion Picture - Drama.” Her voice is diffused with warmth and pride. “Maggie. You did it.”

“No,” Maggie’s voice breaks embarrassingly, but she doesn’t care at this point, it’s the fucking Golden Globes. “We did it.” And it’s true.

M’gann has been such a huge part of her success. From the start on Rosewood Street to Crush and now here. Maggie lets out a deep breath, and she can feel tears pricking the corner of her eyes. She feels like she just ran a marathon in the span of a minute, but it was worth it because she finished first, victorious and exuberant.

Thank you is what she tries to say, but the words get stuck in her throat. She closes her eyes, trying to regain her focus.

“Maggie? You still there?” M’gann’s question comes through the phone.

“Yeah, uh- sorry I just -”

“I get it, this is a big moment. I’m so proud of you, Maggie. You deserve this, and come January you’re gonna be walking up on that stage collecting that award.”

Maggie chuckles wetly. “If that happens, you’ll be the first person I thank, well, second after Gabriella.”

M’gann laughs too.

“I’m okay with that. You gonna call her up after this?”

“She’d kill me if I didn’t, and then how would I accept my award?”

“Call her,” M’gann tells her. “We’ll talk later, okay?”

Maggie nods vigorously, even though M’gann can’t see her. Words once again fail her.
“I will. M’gann I-” she doesn’t even know what to say, how she can put all of her gratitude into words. The human language can be so limiting sometimes. “Thank you for everything, I, uh, couldn’t have done this without you.”

“There’s no need to thank me, Maggie, you know that. My job is easy with a talent like yours.”

M’gann tells her she’ll be down to visit soon, and the call ends. She’s already trying not to cry, but she knows talking to her aunt will do her in.

Her hands are steadier as she dials her aunt’s number from memory.

As she’s waiting for her to pick up, she realizes her face hurts, and it’s because she’s been smiling since M’gann told her the news. The phone dial continues, and Maggie taps her foot impatiently. One of the few times Gabriella isn’t answering her phone right away and it’s only the most important day of Maggie’s career thus far. She hopes she didn’t let her phone die again while working, it’d be so like her. The phonecall goes to voice message, ‘Hello! I’m not available for some reason, probably related to cooking. Please leave me a message!’

She sighs, her aunt probably did forget to charge her phone, or she’s busy. She scrolls through her contact list to the Ls and calls the restaurant line, careful to press on the NYC one.

“Hello, this is Maggie, I’m trying to call Gabriella and she isn’t picking up, could you tell her I’m trying to reach her?”

There’s a brief pause on the other end.

“...Maggie? Her niece?” It’s silent again, before the voice comes back in, this time much quieter. “Miss Sawyer, I’m so sorry. Your aunt she -she had a bad fall and was taken to the hospital. It just happened, that’s probably why the hospital hasn’t had the chance to call you.”

Maggie feels the world slow to a standstill. The sounds of the set vanish, and the cold biting air of winter is gone. Everything is replaced by the overpowering fear that consumes her. Gabriella.

“What hospital?” she asks the man on the phone breathlessly, snapping into autopilot mode.

“Mount Sinai,” he says. And Maggie is moving.

“My aunt’s in the hospital I’m leaving,” she tells the director as she jogs by him, headed for the parking lot. She stops a taxi outside and gives him the address, and then she’s on her way. It’ll be faster this way by minutes, but she resents not being able to do anything but worry as the taxi driver does his job.

Her mind flies with a hundred terrible possibilities.

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Alex is free Tuesday night.
Everyone on set is, thanks to Maggie. All she knows is that Gabriella had a bad fall, because she didn’t even see Maggie leave set when it happened. She took a phonecall after they finished and then didn’t come back. Alex got the news from the baffled director of the episode, but even so, she felt her hands were tied.

She felt terrible for Gabriella—she liked the woman, and she’d be genuinely kind to Alex the few times they have met, but she didn’t know what to do. She didn’t know in what hospital or clinic she was, or even if Maggie would want her to be there. Things have been strange between them lately, especially from her side as she can’t even look at Maggie in the eyes without remembering the way they’d danced together—but even if that wasn’t the case, Maggie might want only family. Or her other, older friends. In the grand scheme of things Alex is still a stranger.

That doesn’t keep her from being worried though.

And later that afternoon, when she overhears Louise saying Gabriella is at Mount Sinai, Alex makes the decision to visit her. Whatever...nerves she might be feeling following their night at the club, whatever she might want to avoid facing...none of that matters in the face of Maggie’s aunt getting hurt. She can’t avoid Maggie. She wants to be there. And so she goes.

Getting to Gabriella’s hospital room is more complicated that she thought. Alex had believed, from movies, that if you just gave someone’s name you’d be given a room number and that would be it. It isn’t. She’s just lucky that the nurse at the front desk watches Nightingale and believes her when she says she knows Maggie, because she calls to Gabriella’s room. After they give the okay, Alex is allowed to go up—not without the nurse mentioning to her that most of the surgeries she performed in Body of Medicine were impossible.

Alex gets in the elevator.

She briefly thinks of what to say to Maggie, especially after a week as weird as this one, that felt even worse because they’d be getting along so well. Gone were the days of their gift-offs, and Alex considers for a moment not going up at all, but falters as Maggie already knows she came.

If she left -that’s not who she is. She’s never been a coward with people before, and she isn’t about to start now.

The door is closed when she gets there, and she doesn’t want to knock so she softly opens it.

Gabriella is asleep.

It’s the first thing she notices as she slips quietly inside the sterile while room. The second is Maggie, sitting by her aunt’s bed, her back to the door. Alex clears her throat, and Maggie looks up. Her eyes are red and swollen, and it hurts Alex to see her like this.

“Danvers, hey,” she says with a rough voice.

“Is she going to be okay?” she asks, alarmed, nodding towards the bed.

Maggie chuckles.

“Yes, she’s going to be perfectly fine. It’s just a concussion and they’re keeping her overnight for observation. I’m just-” she chuckles again as she wipes her eyes with her fingertips. “I’m just being a wuss.”

“Maggie, no, she’s your aunt.” Alex is walking toward her before she realize what she’s doing, and then she’s enveloping Maggie in a gentle hug. Maggie returns it, tightly, and Alex wonders if
anyone else has been with her today.

Alex pulls away, her hands soft on Maggie’s shoulders.

“You okay?”

Maggie nods. “Yeah. Sorry, I-”

“No, I get it. You love your aunt.”

Maggie sighs.

“She feels like more than that you know? She...she basically raised me, in all the ways that matter.” Maggie’s voice goes quiet, and Alex doesn’t take her hand away. Instead, she lets her thumb rub Maggie’s shoulder. Maggie steps away, not before giving her a thankful smile. She stands at the foot of Gabriella’s bed. “Do you, huh, do you remember before, when you asked if it had been hard to move and I said no?”

Alex nods. She’d thought then what she thinks now —that Maggie was brave. Strong.

“I lied,” Maggie tells her. “It was. It really was. But I had Gabriella,” Maggie says, and Alex recognizes the same tone with which she speaks about Kara when J’onn asks. Despite everything, Kara is her closest family in the world, and she loves her more than anyone. “My second month in LA I got pneumonia,” Maggie keeps talking. “I’d...I’d been stupid, walking through the rain without an umbrella. And Gabriella stayed at the hospital with me even when they threatened to fire her at work.”

Maggie looks up at her and shrugs sadly, and for the first time Alex wonders about Maggie’s life before she started being successful. The way she speaks about it, about her aunt being threatened with losing her job...it sounds tough. Her dad worked for himself, and her mom had her pick of hospital to choose from. Alex never had to worry about something like that.

“What about your parents?” Alex asks. “Didn't they support you after you moved?” Maggie doesn't say anything, and her silence is enough. “So they don't support your career?” Alex infers.

Maggie smiles grimly.

“You could say that,” she tells her, but Alex doesn’t get the joke. “Gabriella is the only one who’s always been in my corner,” Maggie looks down. “And I know this wasn't serious but...it just scared me, that’s all.”

Alex nods.

“I get it. And I...I wanted to see how you were.”

“I appreciate it. I know things have been-”

“It’s been weird on set-”

Alex chuckles. “Go ahead,” she tells Maggie.

“Things have been weird after the club. We both feel it,” she says. Alex doesn't deny it.

“I know, I’m sorry-”

“Don't apologize. You haven't done anything wrong.” Maggie is quick to say.
“I don't know about that. I mean—we agreed to this contract, we knew what we were getting into.”

“I know. But—”

“We should be able to be friends through it all, shouldn't we?”

Maggie nods. “So we grind at the club and we go to work together the next day, maybe get a friendly coffee?” Maggie mentions flippantly, and Alex, shocked, thinks she was right in her assessment of Maggie, that Thanksgiving night a month ago. She is brave.

“I like the sound of that -the coffee, I mean.”

“Sure you did, Danvers,” Maggie jokes. And some semblance of normal slips back.

Maggie walks into the bathroom, intent on washing her face for any traces of tears.

Gabriella should be waking up soon to eat dinner; her aunt would never waste a chance to try new food and recommend improvements, even if it was hospital food, and Maggie doesn’t want her to know she’s been crying.

Alex’s unexpected visit and their conversation had her tearing up again, and she needs to wash that off her face. God, she’s such a dumbass. Once she loses her cool it’s like a dam has been opened, and all her emotions stray close to the surface for hours afterwards. She won’t blame herself for it today, not after she got the biggest scare of her life.

She’d desperately given Gabriella’s name at the front desk, only to be sent to wait outside the ER. She hadn’t, instead asking about her through the entire room to anyone wearing white coats. Thankfully, the nurses had guided her to where Gabriella was getting checked out by the doctor instead of kicking her out of the hospital.

Her aunt had been fine, for all intents and purposes, awake and speaking with the doctor, and Maggie had hugged her for a long moment, the sheer relief bringing tears out of her eyes. Gabriella insisted she was fine, even through the double vision and the confusion. The doctor had ruled she had a grade 2 concussion, and they were keeping her overnight in observation.

Maggie had readily agreed when Gabriella couldn’t fully explain how she’d fallen, because she didn’t remember. Brief memory loss was normal in those cases, the doctor had explained, but that hadn’t sounded the least bit normal to Maggie.

Contrary to what Maggie had believed her whole life, the doctor actually recommended Gabriella sleep and get as much rest as possible, so Maggie had forced her to try and sleep the entire afternoon. She’d been asleep for a while when Alex had arrived, and Maggie hadn’t dared wake her.

She splashes water on her face, and then takes a piece of toilet paper to rub away the eyeliner stains
beneath her eyes. No wonder Gabriella was worried about her crying when it looked like that.

She’s almost done when she hears someone else’s voice in the room outside, and she throws the paper away, wondering if Gabriella’s dinner is here or if its the nurse coming to check on her. They said they’d do that through the night.

But as she opens the bathroom door to see a man she’s never seen before leaning over her aunt, and calling her Ella as she hugs him back—she’s shocked.

She’s even more shocked when they share a kiss on the lips.

“Excuse me?”

“Oh, hey, sorry we haven’t met yet...I’m Christopher.”

Maggie smiles, even as her entire stomach churns, putting her acting skills to good use.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Maggie. Gabriella’s niece.” Who the fuck are you? she wants to add, but she has a good idea already and she doesn’t like it.

Gabriella who’s been watching their interaction quietly until then, suddenly interrupts.

“Chris...do you mind getting me some coffee from the cafeteria downstairs?” she asks, and he frowns, before getting an Eureka expression and winking at Gabriella as he leaves. Not very bright then.

“Before you say anything, I know he really can’t lie, okay?”

Maggie ignores her aunt.

The fucking nerve to joke...Gabriella sits up, trying to meet her eyes, but Maggie pointedly looks away.

“Yeah, seems to me the only liar here is you.”

She can’t help but feel like a teenager again, feeling the bitter, biting anger that rarely overcome her as a teen take over in full now. She’s hurt, but she doesn’t want to feel that pain so she’d rather be angry.

“Maggie,” Gabriella sighs, and motions for her to come over to her bedside. Maggie walks over, crossing her arms and looking expectantly at her aunt.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you,” she says, and Maggie bites her lip. Gabriella is just confirming what she already guessed, that she was dating someone behind her back, and Maggie hates the tears that prickle her eyes. They never lied to each other. Never. “It’s just, it’s still new, and I wasn’t sure how long it would last, and you had so much to deal with, the contract, the new season, promoting your movie. I didn’t want to add anything that could stress you out. I know you always like to feel in control.”

“New?” That’s the word Maggie chooses to latch onto. “How long have you been seeing each other?” The memory of Gabriella on the phone at Thanksgiving pops into her mind, it must have been him then. And when she was getting ready for that night at the club.

“Three months or so, but it’s not that serious.”

Maggie is quiet. She turns her back towards Gabriella, and walks a few steps to the large window.
She thinks it’s fitting the only view she has is of the oppressive black sky and the too bright street lights of the hospital parking lot. The moon is hidden behind clouds tonight.

She can hear the faint sounds of ambulance sirens in the distance, and a crying infant down the hall. She hates hospitals.

Her eyes are glued to the streets down below as her next words come out, softly.

“I think...you should rest. I’m gonna go, and I’ll see you later. If you -if you want help I’m here.”

“Maggie wait -“

Maggie ignores her, and she’s 10 steps away from the door when she makes the split decision to return to Gabriella’s bedside, and lean over her to hug her gently.

“I’m not...mad zia. I’m just -“ hurt is what she wants to say, but she doesn’t want to make her aunt feel bad. She’s not a lost little girl anymore, depending on her for everything, even not feeling left out. They’re both adults now, and she needs to act like one.

I love you,” is what she settles with before leaving.

She pulls her hood up and her worn black leather jacket tighter around her—she absentmindedly realizes she left her winter coat in Gabriella’s hospital room—as she walks down the sidewalk, not knowing where she’s going, but knowing she needs to do something. She walks, and after a dozen blocks go by she stops feeling the cold as much as she feels she’s become one with it. The freezing December night has seeped into her bones, and Maggie is thankful. She likes the way it makes her feel numb. She just doesn’t...understand. She tells Gabriella everything. Every disappointment, every hope, every bad date she’s ever had since she started dating at all. That guy...Maggie can tell Gabriella likes him, loves him even, and she doesn’t understand how there can be someone in the world Gabriella loves, that Maggie didn’t even know existed until an hour ago.

She somehow ends up back at her apartment.

She doesn’t know how long it took her to walk here, but she does register that her feet are sore and the bottom of her jeans are wet. Her teeth chatter as she enters her quiet apartment, locks the door, and immediately pulls out the strongest alcohol she has on hand.

She sits in the dark and drinks.

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King’s next assignment arrives into her inbox early one Sunday morning, and Alex is ready for it. When he underlines that he needs a kiss for the cameras, she’s not surprised.

She knows the grace period is over, and either way, it couldn’t be more...demanding than the night at the club had been. Nothing could be like that. And so she swallows her nerves and her first order of business for the day isn’t even to call J’onn—but to talk to Maggie about it.
She goes up to Maggie’s loft just shy of midday—which is why she stops in her tracks when Maggie answers the door wearing nothing but a shirt that she can see, her bare legs rubbing together to preserve heat as Alex stands in the door, just...looking.

“Come in, it’s cold,” Maggie says, ushering her in, and Alex has no choice but to comply. It looks like Maggie has just woken up, and she’s about to offer to come back later when her eyes notice Maggie’s...she’s not wearing a bra.

She forces herself to look at her face only, and Maggie looks...tired. Different.

“Are you okay?” she asks, her embarrassment at catching Maggie unaware fading into concern. “How’s Gabriella?”

Maggie shrugs and diverts her gaze.

“She’s fine,” she mutters. Alex frowns.

“What did you want, Danvers?” Maggie asks, brightening up a little.

“Have you checked your email?” She asks, for once in their time together having the upper hand when it comes to information. But Maggie looks so down that’s it’s not even satisfying.

“No. Anthony, I’m assuming?”

“Yeah. The...kiss,” Alex tells her. “Next week. He said we can choose the place, so we don’t ‘get nervous’ again, but he wants it.”

Maggie nods. “It was a matter of time. Are you cool with that?” Maggie asks, and Alex is touched, that even with her aunt being out of commission and how it’s clearly affecting Maggie, she’s still concerned about her.

“Yeah, don’t worry about me.”

It’s strange not having Gabriella help her pick out her outfit.

The day of their first kiss date—or as her an Alex had dubbed it, Operation Basium, Latin for kiss, she’d been informed by Alex, and she’d agreed because it sounded funny—arrives bright and early, without a care about her being in a bad place with her aunt.

It’s been over week since Gabriella’s fall—from grace, her mind supplies—and she has visited her since then, given that she’s confined to her apartment, but all their visits have been tense.

She’d driven Gabriella home after her 24 hours at the hospital had ended, and her aunt had tried to restart their conversation, but Maggie had made it clear she wasn’t ready to talk about it.
Since then, they’ve mostly sat in silence when together, or opted for only discussing trivial stuff. It reminds Maggie of how she used to be with her mom, which she hates because Gabriella is so much better than her mom. She shoves that all down though, as she finished getting ready. Today is about her fake date with Alex, and she wants to be a good company.

She’s actually a bit excited to show Alex around the city she loves. It’ll be a nice distraction.

Maggie’s been to Manhattan for some modeling gigs and TV roles in the past, and she’s explored the city every chance she’s gotten. And every single time she discovers something new—she loves it. She doesn’t even mind the array of smells wafting through the air or the brown slush they walk through. It’s part of the city’s character. She’s not sure Alex agrees though—her face has shifted from contentedness to a slight grimace as they’ve walked down the sidewalk, through the icy mess left by last night’s snow—but she’s determined to change that.

She knows just the way to show Alex the magic of New York City, and she sees their destination up ahead. Staten Island Ferry looms large in front of them. It’s one of her favorite places to visit with...Gabriella, just to pass the time, and she’d sent the time and place to Anthony last night as required, so the cameras would be ready. All they had to do was show up.

She points ahead, and Alex finally recognizes where they’re going.

“Maggie,” Alex stops her midwalk with a hand to her arm. “Wait, I don’t have any cash on me, do they take Visa?”

Her expression is worried, and Maggie can’t help laughing.

“It’s free, Danvers.” She grabs Alex’s hand and pulls her towards the entrance with excited steps. “Come on!”

They make their way to the top level of the boat, two more people in the throng of bodies trying to get to work on the island, and Maggie finds them a free spot where they can lean over the railing. She looks out at the city and choppy waters below, and closes her eyes savoring the smell of the ocean and the invigorating cold air hitting her face.

“It’s amazing, isn’t it?” she turns to ask Alex. She stares at her with a small smile, but she shakes her head.

“It’s cold,” she states. Maggie smiles.

“I grew up in Nebraska, you know? And I don’t miss a lot from that place, but one of the things I miss are the winters. Good cold winters full of snow, the way it’s meant to be.” She chances a look at Alex, and her gaze is far away, as if she’s imagining Maggie’s childhood winters along with her. Maggie closes her eyes again as the ferry finally starts moving. “The one thing California couldn’t give me,” she tells Alex, even as she realizes it’s a lie.

There’s another, but that one’s more impossible than snow in LA.
Alex watches Maggie enjoy the day with her eyes closed, and though she huddles in her jacket—there’s something fundamentally wrong about it being sunny outside when it’s this cold—she likes the fact that Maggie is having fun.

She deserves to feel carefree after the scare with her aunt at the hospital. And she feels privileged that she gets to be the one to see it—even if it is being required by a contract.

The ferry moves along the water, and Alex barely notices the man on the other side of the boat, taking pictures of them. He at least does a good job of pretending to be a tourist and not a paparazzi. If she doesn’t look at him, she can almost feel like she’s a tourist herself, getting shown around the city by a friend.

Alex looks straight ahead—in the distance she can make out the Statue of Liberty. It looks...smaller than she expected, and she can’t believed she hadn’t’ seen it before. They must have passed by it during their helicopter ride, but she must have been distracted—probably by the woman at her right. Maggie had been scared of the height.

She’d spent Thanksgiving alone once when she was younger, her parents don’t support her career, and Alex is sure she loves her aunt more than anyone in the world. She knows more and more about her every day.

Alex is about to point the monument out to Maggie, but she’s already noticed, if her sparkling eyes are any indication.

“Lady Liberty,” Maggie announces, saluting her. Alex hums in agreement.

“Give me your tired, your poor,” Maggie says, and it takes Alex a moment to realize she’s reciting a poem. “Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” Maggie says. “The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door.” Maggie gives her a smile. “You ever heard it, Danvers?”

“I recognize some of it. It’s what’s written on the statue, isn’t it?”

Maggie nods.

She gasps, suddenly, and Alex looks behind her.

"What?"

"Your hair, look,” Maggie whispers, and Alex stays still as she touches the side of her head. “It’s a snowflake,” she says, but it melts too fast for Alex to see it.

“With this sun?” she asks, looking up and starting to feel the tiny pinpricks of cold against her cheeks.

Maggie shrugs.

“Sunshowers happen,” she says, before closing her eyes to seemingly enjoy the tiny ice particles hitting her face. Alex shakes her head, and finally decides to close her eyes too. It feels...cold. And not any different than before. But she feels well accompanied.

Maggie sighs.
She nods over her shoulder, pointing to the paparazzi.

“We can come back outside for that guy on the way back, give him his pictures.” Maggie shoves her hands into her jacket pockets. “Want to go inside now?” she asks.

Alex looks down at Maggie’s lips, and then shakes her head.

“Not just yet.”

And then she pulls her in.

Chapter End Notes

We dropped a lot of hints and Easter eggs in this chapter. We'd love to hear your thoughts about it all! Leave us a comment below! Or you can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meanstoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We'd love to talk to you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alis Propriis Volat : She flies with her own wings

Lulu
@dawsonwarrior

Oh my god it’s happening. i cant breahte its happening everybody STAY CALM

Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers caught KISSING! Since October, rumors have been swirling about the co-stars of the hit show Nightingale, mainly, people have been wondering about the status of their relationship after numerous photos of them on and off set looking more than friendly.

However, we can now exclusively confirm they are dating or at least hooking up because not even hollywood stars kiss their friends like that!
@maggiesawyer @alexdanvers do you guys need anything? some snacks? a condom? let me know. oh god i love you guys.

live or die trying
@clairelawxnxn

omg i can’t believe we’re getting a dawson slowburn AND alex and maggie are actually dating too...this is every lesbian’s romcom dream come true we’re so blessed

@lesbianmaggie and i showing up at sanvers future wedding
Alex tilts the to-go cup all the way back, trying to collect every last drop of coffee.

She probably shouldn’t even still be drinking coffee—it was one of the items on the do-not list the private trainer assigned to her by the show, Matt was his name, had given her. Alex privately thought they couldn’t have given her a more stereotypical dudebro guy. She persuaded him to let her continue having one morning cup of coffee. It helped her art and all that. She couldn’t act without it. (Actually, she couldn’t be alive without it.) Matt would’ve liked her a lot less without any coffee in her.

Alcohol was another thing she wasn’t supposed to consume anymore, but they both knew that rule wouldn’t be followed. Alcohol was a necessity of the job, everybody knew it, and she didn’t even drink much of it anymore either.

Done with her drink, she pushes her chair back—the metal legs screeching on the sidewalk—and throws her cup in the trash. She’s on her way out of the cafe when she passes by a magazine stand and a particular face catches her attention. It’s Maggie’s. It’s her Vogue cover. She looks regal in a white dress, looking off to the distance. Her lips are stained a brilliant red that contrasts with the white of her dress and the dark background. Alex briefly wonders how they shortened her hair to chin length when she knows the shoot was done a few weeks ago—Maggie had brought the interviewer to set and everybody had been notified to be on their best behavior for the day—but then she remembers the magic hair and makeup can work.

She spends another moment looking at the magazine before quickly grabbing one from the stand. She hesitates for a second before grabbing two more. She could surprise her sister for once. She hands the man a $20 dollar bill for the three magazines. He gives her $1 in return, and Alex tells him to keep it. Damn, when had they increased the price?

“You a big fan of hers?” He asks, nodding towards the magazines in Alex’s hand. Alex smiles faintly.

“Yeah, sure.”

She folds them and carries them in her hand the block to her apartment. They’re too big to shove in her purse, and Alex briefly wonders why her first thought is to hide them.

She rounds the corner to her building and slows as she sees a handful of paparazzi outside, waiting for her—or Maggie possibly. Their presence had gotten worse since they’d gotten the tip about where they lived while the show filmed, and it had reached an all time high since the kiss a few days ago. It’s never ending.

Alex stops to consider her options, wondering if it’s worth it to go back to the cafe to wait it out until they leave, or take a detour and enter through the back, but then she decides she’s being ridiculous. She’s dealt with the vultures since she was a child, and she’s not afraid of them—she’s not afraid of anything.

Even if she was, there’s no going back as they’ve already spotted her. She fixes a bright smile on her face, taking a deep breath as if off to battle, and strides into the fray.

“Alex! Are you gay?!”
“Alex, look this way! You’re gorgeous!”

“Did you see Maxwell Lord’s tweet about you? Any response?”

“What do you think about your sister’s Golden Globe nomination?!”

“How’s Kara?!”

“Alex is Maggie as a good a kisser as people say?!”

She inwardly scoffs at that last question, but smiles throughout.

“I’m really happy about Kara and Maggie’s nominations! Have a nice day everybody. Enjoy the great weather!”

As soon as the cameras disappear she lets a frown slip over her face. God, they’re fucking annoying.

She’s not entirely sure whether Anthony placed them there or not, but she didn’t tell him she was going out today and she’s fairly certain he doesn’t have people watching her (yet). That leaves the option that they were there for her, which in the larger picture is good, and they didn’t even ask her any alcohol related comments. It’s an improvement.

They still had to ask about her sister, though, the superhero. The Golden Globe nominated superhero.

After she’d gotten home from the hospital that Tuesday, she’d finally checked her phone—she’d turned it off in deference for Maggie and her own dignity, a cellphone going off in the middle of an emotional hospital room would’ve been embarrassing—and saw 5 missed calls from Kara and a few text messages telling her to call her when she had the chance. Ten minutes later, after listening to Kara’s screams and unintelligible rapid fire gibberish, she found out the reason. Kara, her little sister—who just started acting a few years ago and landed a fucking superhero role like last month—was also nominated for a Golden Globe, Best Supporting Actress in Limited Series or Motion Picture.

It was for her role in Highriders, the HBO Western themed short series she’d filmed this past spring. Alex had shaken off the jealousy curdling in her stomach and congratulated her, to her face, switching the phone call to FaceTime. She was happy for her sister, of course she was, and seeing her ecstatic face through her screen had instantly dispelled any lingering feelings of jealousy. Kara had been so happy and her happiness had been contagious. Alex promised to properly celebrate with a sisters night when she was back during her fast approaching winter break. She’d been about to end the call when Kara had told her to congratulate Maggie for her big nomination too. That had thrown Alex for a loop, but she hadn’t let it show—it wouldn’t do for her sister to know she hadn’t even realized her co-star had been nominated too.

Alex felt stupid. She’d quickly googled Maggie’s name and there it was, Best Actress for a Motion Picture Drama. She’d mentally slapped herself for not congratulating her while she was at the hospital. Then again, she’s not sure that was the appropriate setting to offer such congratulations.

That was what she’d gotten for taking a nap straight after finishing all the scenes they could on set without Maggie’s presence and not checking her phone before she’d collapsed into her bed. She hadn’t been sure of her course of action after that. Another gift? But that’d seemed silly in light of Maggie’s aunt’s situation. She’d settled on a text. A text was safe, and it’d let Maggie know she was happy for her, and that she wasn’t so self involved she didn’t know about the fucking
nomination. She’d sent it, and Maggie had replied with a simple thumbs up emoji. The next time she’d seen her, Maggie hadn’t mentioned it, and neither had Alex. They’d both had more important, kiss related things in their minds.

She finally enters her apartment, and makes a beeline for the shower after dropping the magazines on her coffee table. She’d headed out for coffee and a small breakfast first thing in the morning, having run out of both in her own kitchen, and she hadn’t even taken a decent shower. She turns the faucet on, sitting on her toilet seat as she adjusts the heat.

Her phone rings with a text, distracting her from the task at hand, and she decides to take care of whatever it is before she undresses. She knows she won't be able to enjoy her shower with something to do right after. She looks at her phone, and it's J'onn. He tells her to call him, and she does right away. J'onn is...he's J'onn.

"Hey, good morning," he greets her. "Are you busy?"

"No, I just woke up an hour ago."

"Do you want to be busy?" He asks. Alex frowns.

"Meaning?"

"I have four magazines knocking down my door Alex, and that's just for next quarter. You haven't given me an answer yet."

"Sorry." She touches her fingers to her forehead. She knows she hasn't, she's just been too focused on the show and on the contract to think about possible interviews. She hadn't wanted to, either. There was something vulnerable about letting people write about her. She could control the direction of the questions, and manipulate the interviewer, and fake what she needed to—Alex is pretty sure she could pass a lie detector test. But she couldn't control what they wrote, or the pictures that got published. She's an actress, sure, but she's always felt more comfortable with her private life in the shadows. Claire Lawson, her other characters...they're not real. But having 'Alex Danvers' emblazoned over a magazine cover is very different from a role. It's her.

"It's not a problem, but you do have to let me know if I can set it up."

Alex hums. She thinks about Maggie's magazine cover, waiting in her living room. She...wants that. Her mother would love to have another one, it's been over a year since Alex has gotten a spread like that. And with Kara about to film for her Marvel film...she doesn't want to compare herself, but it would be something to have her accomplishments out there, too. She hasn't wanted to, but that changes now.

"Sure. Yes, of course. As many as you want."

"That's a change," J'onn says, surprised. "Sounds like you're in a good mood."

"I don't know," she says. "Filming is almost over. I'm looking forward to the break."

"Well, that's good Alex. I'll talk to you later, okay? I have some work to do," he laughs.

"Bye." She closes the call.

J'onn's call was a welcome distraction, but the paps don’t leave her mind, and another comment one of the photo hounds made floats to her consciousness. Maxwell Lord. A name she didn't need to hear ever again. What they said was even more alarming than someone asking about her ex-
boyfriend, though. They’d mentioned a tweet. Alex doesn’t do social media much, definitely not enough for J’onn’s taste, and the fact she missed this just proves it.

She reaches for her phone, and searches for his Twitter. She’d never find whatever it was in the sea of notifications she’s always drowning in, the good comments as equal as the bad.

It’s the last tweet from his account, from an hour ago.

The Lord
@MaxwellLord

I guess now I know why our relationship ended 🤣. I wish Alex and her girlfriend the best!

Alex grits her teeth. Well, he’s as self centered and smarmy as ever. Some things never change.

Alex huffs. As if that was why their relationship ended. Nevermind that what she and Maggie had, and therefore the entire “gay” reason Max was trying to imply, wasn’t real, it had ended because they had nothing in common apart from one fucking hobby: science. And he’d spent far too much time explaining it to her, acting like her two years of college still didn’t trump the education his daddy had bought for him. He’d been a terrible kisser, too.

She strips and enters the shower, her mind ruminating over the subject. She can’t help but think back to her kisses with Max and compare to them to her most recent experience.

Her kisses with him had been sloppy and emotionless on her end. She can remember how he kept trying to shove his tongue down her throat, and it’s not a memory she likes. In fact, she’s tried to suppress it to no avail. Her kiss with Maggie had been...very different. It’d been a short, closed mouthed kiss. She’d pulled her in by the lapels of her winter jacket and just...done it.

The hot water pounding against her back is a refreshing wake up in addition to her coffee, but Alex doesn’t think anything rouses her quite as much as remembering that moment.

She can scarcely believe she did it, but Maggie had been looking at her with her cheeks pink from the cold and her eyes bright... And the paparazzi had been right there, and Alex wanted to do this on her terms this time. A small part of her had wanted to prove to Maggie that she wasn’t a little kid that needed to be handled with gloves, too. She was one half of their agreement, and it was about time she stepped up to the stage.

Kissing Maggie...It had felt good. The way kissing anyone feels good.

Alex was a medical student, she was almost a scientist. She knows science, and she’s done her research. Kissing—kissing anyone—increases the levels of oxytocin in the body, and endorphins, and dopamine. It’s human to enjoy kissing. And Maggie’s just -she’s a good kisser.

She’d reacted the second Alex’s lips had touched hers, had gone soft and pliant against her, below her. Alex had never kissed anyone shorter than herself, or anyone that felt quite so delicate to the touch. Not that Maggie was weak, she was just...small. Her frame felt delicate yet strong below Alex’s hands. Her lips had been cold from the biting wind, but after a second they’d warmed against her own. And all the while her stomach had been fluttering, had felt positively efervescent, like Alex had decided to swallow a dozen Alka Seltzer tabs.
Her body had gone haywire. It had just...been. Happened. And the way her heart had sped up, had stuttered along almost to the rhythm of the choppy waters below, had been normal. She doesn't think there’s a person alive who could kiss someone else and not get nervous. It was basic science, response mechanism millenia old. It didn't mean anything more. (And there’s something almost liberating in that.)

It doesn’t mean what those paps had been asking—yelling—at her. That she’s gay. Though for the purposes of the contract she couldn't say no -well, she guesses she could, and let them think she’s bisexual, but J’onn told her the better road was to not adress things at all. He’d said it with a glint in his eye that Alex didn’t want to acknowledge. Like he was protecting her but also...sad.

And there’s no freedom to be found in that.
19 STYLE RULES FOR 2019

HOW TO WEAR BLUE

SEXIER SILHOUETTE

THE RIGHT SWIMSUIT FOR YOUR BODY TYPE

FASHION EVERY DAY
Maggie turns on the TV simply to fill the dead air in the room.

Gabriella stands in front of her, the kitchen island a barrier between them, as she chops basil to sprinkle over her frittata. The taste is too strong for Maggie, but Gabriella can never have one without it. Maggie chews her eggs as the sounds of early morning *Criminal Minds* re-runs fill the space. They don’t talk.

Gabriella had shown up unannounced early this morning, and Maggie had only known it was her and not a gifted burglar because she smelled her aunt’s signature frittatas, a scent she’d grown familiar with in her younger years. Back then, she’d gladly served as Gabriella’s test subject for new dishes she’d cook up for the hotel, and then later on for her own restaurant. Those were simpler times, harder for them financially, and shitty for her emotionally, but at least she and Gabriella hadn’t kept secrets from each other.

And they certainly hadn’t trapped each other in the other’s own apartment, knowing that the person was too polite to ask them to leave.

She still felt indebted to Gabriella, like everything she had was just as much hers given the amount of sacrifices her aunt had made for her—Maggie could never kick her out, and Gabriella knew it.

She takes another bite as Gabriella finishes fixing up her plate. The cheese melts on her tongue, and the broccoli is still crunchy, and even though it’s the perfect combination of textures she knows and loves, she can’t muster up more than a sentence.

“This is good,” she says out loud.

“Thank you,” Gabriella responds.

They eat their breakfast in silence.

It’s not awkward. It could never be with them. But it is tense, slightly, fraught with the knowledge that for some reason or another, a big part of her aunt's life had been concealed from Maggie. She only has a few bites left when Gabriella speaks up.

“So... your Vogue cover. I saw it on all the magazine stands on my way over.” Her aunt offers her a smile. “You look amazing.”

“Thank you.”

“I read the interview, too,” Gabriella tells her, and Maggie imagine Gabriella waking up early, like she did when they were younger, so she could be at the magazine stand before it opened or at the 7-Eleven near their old apartment. Back when they didn't get copies of the magazines sent to their apartment, but had to buy them like everyone else. She can remember Gabriella proudly telling everyone that would listen that the girl in one of the pictures on page 14 was her niece.

In the early days of her career, when she wasn't sure she would succeed, every small picture on the pages of a magazine had felt like a win. Now she’s nominated for a Golden Globe, and posing on the cover of *Vogue*, and it doesn't feel as good as it did those days.

“The guy sounded like as much of a douche as you told me he was,” Gabriella comments.

Maggie nods, and takes a sip of her orange juice.
Vogue was a huge fucking deal. Even M’gann had said those exact words, and the woman wasn’t known to curse. And the interview itself had been nice, along with the interviewer, a man in his forties who—if a bit obviously enamored with her—had asked good enough questions. (She supposes it’s better to be interviewed by someone who loves you rather than the opposite; it at least guaranteed you’d be placed in a good light for the interview.)

She’d showed him around set, let him tag along at her photoshoot, and eaten lunch with him at La Bernardin—a restaurant chosen specifically to fit the elitist tastes she knew he had. She’d had Winn look into him, so she’d have a grasp on his character and know which face to present to him that day.

She’d quickly read over the copy Gabriella had brought, and it was a good profile, glowing really. She’d underestimated the interviewer though, some of his observations of her character—the way she carefully chose to present herself to the public—hit a little too close to home.

“You played him like a fiddle.”

Maggie softens at that. “Did you read the Gal Pals comment?”

Gabriella nods, seemingly excited that she’s finally saying more than two words to her. Maggie feels guilt bubble up, but it’s still overshadowed by hurt.

“‘A laugh that can’t be faked’,” she quotes. “Or whatever that was.” Maggie shakes her head. “I was faking it.” She snorts. “Gal pals.”

Gabriella laughs, and Maggie would be lying if she said she didn’t miss the sound. It’s been days, but she’s spent an entire decade with Gabriella...a week feels like a lifetime. And Maggie knows it’s in her power to fix it, but she can’t bring herself to yet.

“The interview was amazing,” Gabriella promises her. “I bought a dozen and I’m giving them to everyone at work. And the pictures -you looked like a princess.”

Maggie takes her plate to the sink the second her throat begins to itch and her eyes inexplicably burn.

“Thank you,” she tells Gabriella, her back to her as she scrapes off the last of the frittata and puts her plate in the dishwasher for later. She clears her throat. “Look, Aunt Gabriella, I loved breakfast, but I have to go exercise.”

She’s briefly surprised at herself for the way the title leaves her lips. She’d been raised to believe calling adults by their first name was disrespectful, and so Gabriella had always been ‘aunt Gabriella’, regardless of their ages. She’d called her that, too, after she first moved, but Gabriella had quickly trained her out of the habit.

But she feels like a kid again now, just a little lost, and it seems her language regresses with her.

“Exercise,” Gabriella says, her tone a picture of disbelief. Maggie turns around, slapping a smile on her face.

“Yeah. I’ve been trying to put more hours in. There’s the big fighting ring story line coming up next year, and with Christmas...I can’t afford to slack off now.”

“Right.”

“I’m just gonna use the gym downstairs,” she tells her. “You’re welcome to join me,” she offers.
But Gabriella doesn’t exercise other than running, and they both know that.

“I’m good, sweetheart, I’ll just clean up here and be on my way.”

Maggie nods, biting her lip.

The door clicks closed after her a few moments later, and Maggie doesn’t turn around to get a last glimpse of her expression. She doesn’t think she can handle it.

The cold air of the empty gym room hits Alex like a freight train as she halfheartedly warms up.

She’s going to have to ask the management to up the heating in her building’s gym. It’s clearly not working. She goes down on a lunge as she finally feels her muscles wake up. She’d called Matt, her personal trainer, and told him she couldn’t make it to their session today. The paparazzi were still outside, probably, and even if they weren’t, their yells and Lord’s tweet had left a metaphorical bad taste in her mouth. And a very real headache. Not exactly conducive to training.

But her personal trainer, of course, had then shown up at her door—his face far too bright for a Saturday. She wonders if King paid him to make sure she wouldn’t gain a single pound; it fits his MO. But she doubts King would trust him to carry out his requests, even the simpler ones. Alex has learned over the course of their months together that Matt isn’t the smartest tool in the shed. Ask him about body fat percentage and he’ll give you a straight answer sure, but Alex doesn’t think he can name all the planets in the solar system. He’s nice enough to her, though, at least.

A loud clap from the corner shatters the quietness of the room.

“Okay! Enough warm up, time for the gloves!” He bounces on the balls of his feet excitedly, and Alex is suddenly struck with the image of a golden retriever waiting for their owner to throw the tennis ball—silly, but ultimately harmless. He kind of reminds her of a younger Kara, actually.

She walks over to the corner and grabs the gauze and tape on the floor, shucking off her thin jacket in the process. Hands wrapped and boxing gloves fitted on her hands, she turns to face the heavy bag swinging from the ceiling.

She starts off slowly, starting up a rhythm to her punches. It’s repetitive and steady, perfect for Alex to clear her mind—which she usually does do, but today she can’t seem to stop the buzzing of her brain. Her hits land a little harder as she picks up speed and loosens up, feeling sweat dripping down her neck and chest.

Out of the corner of her eye, she can see Matt giving her a thumbs up with a big grin on his face.

“Great form today, Alex. You’re really hitting those punches.” He laughs, “I feel bad for the person fueling those.”

She smirks and throws a particularly strong right hook causing the heavy bag to swing wildly off to
the side. She stops it in its return path headed straight for her face, not even budging as its full weight impacts her arms and reverberates through her body. J’onn and her had trained with an even heavier one back in LA, on the weekends he could allow it.

And Alex is much stronger today than she was months ago.

“Never wrong to let off a little steam,” she shrugs nonchalantly, and he rewards her with another grin and offers she take a 5 minute cool down break, which she politely refuses. Alex isn’t about to break her rhythm now, and she’s having a good time. She’s always liked the idea of kickboxing—any exercise where she could hit things was amazing in her book—ever since she’d been introduced to it on set of one of her dad’s films. She’d watched from the sidelines as the actor had gone through the choreography of the boxing ring scene with his scene partner. And when she’d gotten home that day, she’d declared to the household she’d be picking up boxing along with her surfing. Like most of her impulsive ideas, it hadn’t materialized, and she had never actually practiced it until J’onn had asked her to go to the gym with him one Sunday morning, when she was fighting off a killer hangover.

She realizes now she missed it. It was a healthy outlet for letting off steam, far better than blackout partying, even if she hadn’t been able to see it at the time. She can definitely see it and appreciate it now.

Today, the source of her hits is a smarmy, self satisfied baby faced man and his ridiculous tweets, and his even worse past behavior. Maybe past Alex, too, for ever thinking it would be a good idea to date him. Every thwack of the heavy bag is accompanied by an inward snide remark to Lord that she unfortunately hadn’t gotten the chance to tell him before their short lived relationship came to an end.

Half an hour later, she can feel her body slowing down, her muscles burning with exertion. Finally, she’s done, and then Matt pulls out a pair of 10-pound dumbbells.

“It’s arm day, you know what that means!”

She takes the weights without a word, and starts the practiced repetitions. It’s a lot harder now, but she knows she’s going to feel exhausted afterward, her mind clear, and so she pushes herself.

“Do you mind if I leave you at this? I have another client back at the gym.”

“It’s fine.”

Matt nods, and her with congratulations of a hard day’s work. Alex thinks about making this permanent thing. She hates going to the gym, and she has a private gym right in her building. She might as well use the facilities the show is paying for. It’ll certainly makes her life easier, and it’d prevent any sweaty post-gym paparazzi pictures from popping up on the internet. She takes a breath, and let’s her body fall forward, the dumbbells hanging from her hands.

She’s already fantasizing about her second shower of the day when a familiar pair of legs walk in. At least, from her inverted position all she sees are legs at first, and then firm, toned thighs, and then -places her hands have been.

“Hey, Sawyer,” Alex says, straightening back up and putting the weights down.

“Hey, yourself,” Maggie says. She’s wearing a sports bra and form fitting leggings; Alex has never seen her like this. She realizes Maggie could have had a full back tattoo that she hadn’t known anything about. She doesn’t. Her stomach and back are toned and tan, like the rest of her body.
Alex suddenly feels very self conscious underneath her sweat stained tank top. “We’ve been living in the same apartment for months and this is the first time I run into you,” Maggie says, putting down her bottled water on one of the workout benches.

Alex shrugs.

“I don’t really go out a lot,” she tells her. Cutting out her nightly outings meant that she had very little left to do but work. Most of the times she’d gone out this month, it was with Maggie herself, to fulfill the contract. Alex picks the weights back up again, starting her last set of reps. “I’m actually training here now,” she tells her, her choice made. “So I guess I’ll be going out even less.”

Maggie gives her a knowing look as she begins to wrap her hands. Alex didn’t know she boxed, too. It makes sense, that they’d put them in the same training regimen. She briefly wonders if that means they could spar some time. She’s never sparred with anyone, not even Matt, because he thinks she’s not ready yet. But she thinks she could take Maggie. She wonders if the sweat makes it harder to land hits, if their skins sliding together would make it-

“Danvers!”

“Huh?”

“The paps,” Maggie explains. “They got to you?”

“Oh.” Alex shakes her head to clear it. She shrugs. “It’s not worth it.” She’s not letting them trap her in her own home, she’s just deciding to pick her battles. And walking out of her apartment 3 times a week to encounter that particular bunch would only mean she’d eventually pick a battle she shouldn’t, and break someone’s nose. And she doesn’t need to be there again. She looks at Maggie, who’s pulling out a pair of boxing gloves, a pink stripe going down the middle. “It must be worse for you anyways,” she mentions. “What with the nomination and everything.”

Maggie looks up at her and shrugs.

“They’re more annoying than usual. I can deal with it.”

“You’re far more patient than me,” Alex tells her. She groans as she starts on the second set, drops of sweat sliding down her back and between her breasts. She can feel her biceps burn as she pushes herself to the end.

“If you’re stressed, you could come to yoga with me,” Maggie offers.

Alex chuckles as she puts down the weights.

“Thank you, but I think I’ll pass.” She takes a long swig of water before picking up her towel.

“Don’t knock it ‘til you’ve tried,” Maggie tells her, a glint in her eye.

“I’ll see you later,” Alex says, and starts walking toward the door.

“Wait, Danvers?” Maggie calls out. Alex turns around. “Help me out?”

Maggie’s arms are extended in front of her, both covered in boxing gloves, the velcro strap in her right hand hanging loose.

Alex walks back to her.

She takes Maggie’s forearm in her hand, noting the warmth and softness of her skin, and then
wraps the strap snugly around her wrist.

“That okay?” she asks, looking up and then getting startled by Maggie’s immediate proximity. She didn’t realize how close they were standing. Maggie hums and nods her head. Alex shakes her head as she steps back. “How would you have put them on if i wasn’t here?” she asks her.

Maggie shrugs with one shoulder, and then makes her way toward the punching bags.

“Guess I’m lucky you were.”

Alex salutes her, and then makes her way out of the gym.

When she arrives at her bedroom, she forgoes a shower in favor of a more pressing issue. She splits open the Vogue issue with Maggie on the cover.
Hollywood’s Golden Girl

Photographed by Patrick Bernandine

Be it as a hardened cop or a secret spy, Maggie Sawyer steals the spotlight and proves she’s a new kind of star.

Written by Joe Gladen

The sun looms high in the sky, casting its rays over the sparkling sidewalk and weakly warming the busy passersby below. A beautiful New York winter is the backdrop to my meeting with Maggie Sawyer.

I am meeting her at Le Bernardin—an upscale French seafood restaurant seemingly perfect for the opulently rich, famous, and young of Hollywood. But make no mistake, Maggie Sawyer is not your average movie star. Everything about the woman seems fresh and new, down to the way I learned of our designated meet-up location.

Usually in these cases, an assistant will send me a quick email of the address or I’ll be informed by my boss. Instead, I received an email from one Maggie Sawyer herself informing me of our spot and telling me that she was excited to meet me. Sawyer’s personable charm is an oft talked about thing in the media whenever she is on, which is quite often these days, but as the cynical man I am, I never quite believed any of it.

I enter the room and there she is, standing demurely in the corner. The only movement in the room is a slight flutter of the white tablecloth pushed by the breeze from the window. It is like a scene from a Renaissance painting: Girl in White, Artist Unknown, Oil on Canvas, 2018. The scene is so perfect I am almost hesitant to break its component, but I am a man on a mission.

Upon seeing me, she stands from her seat and makes her way toward me. My first impression of her is that she is small, very small. On scene, Maggie is a force to be reckoned with. She towers (metaphorically) over her co-stars and steals the stage. In person, she is simply a young, short woman. Incredibly young actually—only 24 years old. And she looks even younger than that. Her face is free of makeup and I note a light scatter of freckles across her face and trailing down her neck. She is wearing an airy billowy white dress covered by a light black cardigan with golden straps. Standing, her hair is curly and soft. Her eyes are warm as they look into mine.
Maggie Sawyer built a Ballarat car, known as the Blue Springs, in Nebraska. Home to nothing—and I don’t mean that in an insulting way. I looked up the town myself after hearing I’d been gifted this opportunity to interview Miss Sawyer, and it’s the epitome of rural America. The population was 331 as of the 2010 census, and I can imagine it had a significant uptick since then. It’s remarkable that such a vibrant, talented young lady came from such a small landscape.

When I ask her about her childhood, the reserved woman doesn’t tell me much. She was raised Catholic, much like myself. She had dogs when she was very young. Her dad was a police officer, and her mom was a secretary for the nearest high school, the next town over in Wynona. When I ask her if there’s anything she misses about Blue Springs, she tells me she misses their winters.

Maggie’s humble beginnings in the industry started at the age of fourteen. When the young girl decided to move to LA, her aunt—her mother’s sister—suggested she pursue a career in the arts. Shortly after, she was tapped by a photographer to model.

“I was accompanying my friend, Lisa,” Maggie tells me. “She was the model—not me. But one of the photographers there told me I’d be perfect for a project he was doing, and I showed up to that, and it all kind of snowballed from there.”

It’s no hard to see why the girl caught a photographer’s keen eye. I’ve seen the photos and even at a young age there was something serious and captivating about Maggie that captured your attention. After being discovered, Maggie did a few more photos and before gravitating towards acting.

“I left modeling when I realized I was growing up,” she jokes. She went on to pursue a handful of inconsequential roles. Finally, she landed her big break on the teen drama web series. And unlike other stars from a show who have faded into irrelevance, her trajectory of drug abuse, Sawyer caustically shuns into darkness.

Her projects following her Rosewood exit were a series of short career moves. A soapy drama, a love story, and a new take on the iconic role of an uptight but humorous hybrid in Nightingale. The leading lady role and an overnight success. And of course, her biggest role to date, one of the summer’s highest-grossing films: The Infor.

Maggie has accomplished all of this in one short year. In the business, you can’t stand your trepidation in meeting such a remarkably talented woman. But for now, Maggie proves she’s one of the most impressive celebrities I’ve interviewed in a while.

Maggie Sawyer has a unique beauty to her. And I don’t mean that in the way a person of unique beauty is. She’s not porcelain-skinned nor does she possess blue eyes, blonde hair and legs. She’s got a hint of mystery when the lights hit her just right. And as mentioned, she’s short.

Her beauty is unique in the sense that you only catch a few moments of noticing her you soon realize that it’s not in her looks, but rather her being. Her beauty has a gentle warmth, and it’s not in your face, it’s not pushy. It’s in everything she does, the way she carries herself.
her eyes, and that smile. Those dimples, I can report to all those wondering, Maggie Sawyer's dimples are indeed a force to be reckoned with. When she smiles, they pop out in full force. When she purses her lips in thought or sticks her tongue out between her teeth while telling a story, a small dimple will appear. I am half convinced she's just a collection of dimples disguised as a woman.

The waiter stops by our table, and Maggie insists on ordering for both of us—and paying. I confess that it's usually me ordering for women and not the other way around, but something tells me to trust her on this. "You're my guest of honor today," she tells me, laughing. "But that also means I'm in charge of your schedule for the entire day."

Maggie Sawyer is simultaneously intense and measured. She will look you directly in the eye when speaking, which is a bit unnerving at first since most people don't, but as

"She has an insatiable hunger for greatness."

relationship with her co-star, Sawyer sidestepped the question artfully, as if she is wont to do.

"We spend a lot of time together on and off set, and we've become really close friends because of it. When I met her something just clicked! We're...what it is, the press says?...She turns her full smile on me. "Caf pals. We're caf pals!" She laughs at her own joke, and winked at me in a way that cannot be fabricated.

It's in moments like this that her age shines through.

She is still in the early stages of adulthood, and people often seem to forget it because she regularly presents herself with such grace. Spend more than a few hours with her, however, and an even more impressive fact jumps out—her attitude isn't a happy accident of nature, but rather seems to be carefully and consciously sustained by the actress.

established, she is not like most people. I asked her what she thought set her apart from everyone else and her response?

"I don't think I'm the appropriate person to ask. That's like asking a person why they think they're great. For the person to answer themselves would be seen as extremely presumptuous. So I'll leave that answer to others."

Ask others, and they'll be quick to tell you.

"She has an insatiable hunger for greatness, balanced with a sense of self-awareness of the responsibilities of the job beyond her years," Nightingale shorthand writer Anthono King told me over the phone.

I had the opportunity to see some of what he told me as I trailed her on set for a day. She gave me a personal tour of the set, introducing me to the passing crew and cast members, including Alex Dunne, her rumoured friend. When asked of the nature of her

You'll never know something about her that she doesn't want you to, a remarkable quality to have in Hollywood.

In a world filled with the need to know as much as possible, as fast as possible, Maggie who hasn't had a single scandal in the entirety of her career remains a mystery, and that makes her all the more alluring to Hollywood, and of course, to her enamoured fans.

She is adept at navigating the choppy waters of stardom, and when she does stumble her ambition pulls her back on her feet.

Sawyer's ambition is what propelled her from the silver screen to the big screen again.

A lot of stars could become comfortable, headlining their own shows and relishing in the niche audience—especially for such a popular show Nightingale.
Maggie gets to the makeup trailer ten minutes past her usual time.

It’s their last day of filming before their winter break, and it’s almost like her body knows it, already craving getting to sleep in.

“You’re joining me today?” she hears behind her, and turns around to meet Alex’s eyes. The last of
the sleep fog leaves her as she wakes up fully.

“Well, this is my usual makeup trailer, so I’d say you are joining me.”

Alex smiles, and Maggie returns it.

“My makeup crew already went home,” Alex explains. “Set feels kind of empty.”

Maggie nods in agreement. Only the skeleton crew is around to keep things running, and she and Alex are the only members of the cast shooting today, apart from a few extras. They’re shooting on location until late tonight, and after that -they’re free.

“Soon enough that’ll be us,” she tells Alex.

“Not before our dinner tonight. And King’s party.” Alex rolls her eyes as she shares a look with Maggie.

Maggie spreads her arms beguilingly, smiling all the while. “Welcome to the life of glamour I lead Danvers.”

“Right, you’ve experienced his annual Christmas Festivities Bash before,” Alex winces apologetically.

“Experienced it just about covers it. I don’t know about enjoying it.” Last year, it was filled with Anthony’s friends, all cut from the same cloth as him, and she doesn’t expect this year to be any different. Except for the addition of Alex—and the duties associated with the contract. She just knows Anthony will insist on some sort of spectacle from them tonight. He’s never been one to pass up an opportunity, and a Christmas party moment he can feed to the press to keep them occupied over their break is exactly the type of stuff he loves.

Alex gives her a grim smile, and Maggie laughs.

“After you m’lady,” she says, comically opening the door of the makeup trailer with a deep bow. Alex walks through, her cheeks pink from the cold.

“Maggie’s brought a friend!” Louise announces when she walks in, and Maggie realizes that Alex and the rest of the cast have their own makeup crew, and she has Mary and Louise all to herself. Apart from Maggie getting her makeup retouched between takes, Alex doesn’t really know them.

“Alex,” she says. “This is Mary, and Louise.”

“Nice to officially meet you,” Alex says, shaking their hands. “I’ve seen you around on set a few times.”

“Yes, we’re usually running after this one,” Louise jokes. “Sit down ladies, it’s the last day of school.”

They do, and Maggie pulls her leg up to rest on the seat of the chair, propping her other leg up and resting her chin on her propped knee.

“Wait...Mary and Louise?” Alex chuckles to herself. “My middle name is Alcott,” she says.

Mary looks at her with a frown. To be fair, Maggie doesn’t know where she’s heading either.

“What?”
“Louisa May Alcott. Author of *Little Women*? Your names are almost like hers,” she supplies, her own connection from the similarity of their names to the famous author probably didn’t translate to the rest of the room.

Realization dawns on Mary and Louise’s faces, but then they look at each other, almost twin-like, and their face blank at the same time.

Mary looks at Alex very seriously. “I never learned to read.”

Alex’s face goes pale.

“Oh. I’m so-”

Louise breaks first, laughing  “Oh my God kid, lighten up,” Mary says. “I’m kidding! I’m kidding!”

Maggie, chuckles, but then stops after a look at Alex’s face. She’s embarrassed at being the butt of the joke, no matter how harmless, and Maggie feels a bit guilty.

“Oh, leave her alone,” Maggie says, rubbing her hand over Alex’s shoulder. She’s not a touchy feely person, and she’s come to realize neither is Alex, but it feels natural. “When I first met them,” she tells Alex, “they had me call them by the other’s name as a joke for an entire week.”

“What can we say, we’re old women. Pesterling you young things is our only joy.”

“Dramatic,” Maggie notes. “You should’ve been actresses too.”

“We’ll leave that to you,” Louise says, taking out the bottle of foundation. “Now sit back, both of ya.”

Maggie does, and the process of putting on her makeup seems longer than it does daily, almost how the last class before Spring Break seems to last a year.

“I do read,” Mary tells Alex a little while later, as she’s delineating her eyes. “But I’ve never read that particular book. Is it good?”

Alex lifts one shoulder in an attempt at a shrug, she can’t fully shrug for fear of messing up Mary’s steady hand and getting poked in the eye. “My sister, Kara, she loves it. I’ve never read it. But I did see the movie.”

The day is almost half over by the time Maggie has a moment to herself. She peers out her the window of her trailer looking for any PAs headed her way to inform of her an extra shot needed or more blocking for the upcoming scenes. The coast is clear, and she pulls the blinds back.

She pulls her cellphone out, making the call she’s been thinking about all morning.

“This is Maggie Sawyer’s assistant, how can I help you?”

“Hey, there,” she greets Winn.

“Boss lady! Hi, how is everything? I was about to send you an email with your flight information for getting back here. And wow, do we have a lot of work ahead when you’re back for the big Gs and the Oscars. I have a shortlist of all the designers wanting to dress you, but you have the final call. M’gann wants to be there when you choose, too. We need a decision before Christmas.”

“Right. I’m not calling about any of that, though.”
“Oh, okay. What’s up?”

She sits down on her couch, the leather feeling cold beneath her jeans.

“I need you to research something,” she says carefully, slightly disbelieving that she’s actually doing this.

“Okay, boss. Who am I...researching?” Maggie can hear the air quotes in his voice. She smiles lightly. And then it disappears as the weight of what she’s doing really falls on her.

“Christian.”

“That a name or a religion?” Winn asks.

“Name. Goes by Chris.”

“Okay. Last name?”

Maggie hesitates.

She doesn’t know. She and Gabriella only had a few conversations since that afternoon at the hospital, and her aunt had tried to bring up her boyfriend more than once, but Maggie hadn’t felt ready to deal with it and her lying about him. As a result, she had absolutely no idea of what his last name was.

“I don’t know.”

Winn doesn’t answer for a moment.

“Maggie, you do know there are at least a few million Christians in the country, right? I’m sorry but it’s impossible to track someone down by a name. Do you have a picture you can send me? Or maybe you could describe him to an artist—you’re not looking for someone who committed a crime against you, are you? Because in that case the first step would be to go to the police, and if they can’t do anything then yes, of course I would try to rain hellfire over anyone who-”

“Winn. It’s nothing like that, okay? He’s...friends with Gabriella. I just want to know a bit more about him, that’s all. But that’s all I have.”

“He’s friends with Gabriella? From the old hotel? Or her cooking class?” She hears quick typing. “Because I can pull up a list of people who signed up for that class…”

“No. I don’t know much about him, really. He could be from here, or LA, though I’m leaning towards LA because I’d never seen him before and Gabriella and I spend so much time together...unless she saw him while I was at work?”

“Maggie, what’s going on? Is Gabriella...seeing this Christian? You know, like -”

“You know what, this was stupid. I shouldn’t be trying to snoop into her life like this.”

“If he’s friends with Gabriella...she has security cameras set up at both of her restaurants. Remember how she asked me to set them up here? And in New York, too. I could maybe...take a look? And if I see some guy who matches his description I’ll find out who he is and give you a call?”

“That’s…” Terrible. She knows it is. It’s all kinds of terrible that she’d breach Gabriella’s privacy like this. But she just needs to know, needs more information so she can make a decision on what to
do next. She needs to feel in control, and getting the information that she’s missing is the only thing right now that could do that.

Maggie bites her thumbnail while she wonders if she’s capable of that.

An agonizing moment later and she decides that she isn’t. Regardless of how much she might feel like a girl again, Gabriella isn’t abandoning her just because she’s dating someone, regardless of how long she’s lied about it. (3 months, her mind supplies. 3 months.)

“Don’t,” she tells Winn. “Don’t do that.”

“Okay. I think I found something anyways.”

“What did you find?” she asks, feeling guilty even as the need to know expands in her chest.

“Do you remember the weekend long pottery class Gabriella took a few weeks ago?” Winn asks. Maggie nods, thinking back to the way her aunt had gotten home, clay under her fingernails, and how she’d had Maggie get Winn to receive the final piece of “art” she’d made back in LA, because she wanted it on her mantelpiece.

“Let me guess, there wasn’t any class?” she asks, already dreading the answer. For Gabriella to have been able to keep a relationship secret for so long, she must have had to lie a few times, probably more than a few.

“No, there was. And a Christian Miller was enrolled with her. I just looked up their Instagram and if he’s user @Chrism75 then I’m guessing he’s the one standing next to Gabriella. I’m sending you a picture, hold on.”

Maggie gets the text a minute later, and when she opens it -yes, it’s him. Mild smile and light eyes and a bit taller than her aunt, who was already taller than Maggie. She remembers he towered over her, that day at the hospital. She hadn’t seen the picture before, hadn’t even thought to look for it.

“Maggie? You there?”

“That’s him,” she says. “Is Gabriella on his Instagram?”

“His Instagram is private, so that’s gonna take me a while. I can try to brute force crack the password.”

“No. Nothing illegal. Nothing like that. Just...google the guy. Find his LinkedIn profile. Facebook. I don’t know,” she tells Winn, trying to keep the unease out of her voice.


She sighs and massages her forehead with the tip of her fingers. “I just want to know what kind of person he is. There’s gotta be something, right? Charities he’s donated to or participated in, Facebook posts in support of movements. I just need something, okay?”

There’s a long pause on the other line.

“Consider it done, boss.” Winn’s voice is soft, and Maggie is—once again—filled with a rush of gratitude towards her assistant. She knows her request is unorthodox, even for a celebrity probably, but he was still instantly willing to help.

“I just want to know if he’s a good guy,” she tells him quietly, hearing the vulnerability seeping
“Maggie...I’m going to be honest. With how much I love computers, and I love them a whole lot, I don’t think you can find out that through the internet.”

“I’ll talk to you later, thanks for doing this.”

She closes the call.

Alex fights to keep her eyes open as the last scene of the day drags on.

The sun has already disappeared from the sky, leaving the street illuminated only by the unnaturally bright set lights and the orange glow of the fire she’s huddled next to for warmth. It’s the only thing she doesn’t like about shooting on location. The tents are always just a little colder, and Alex can’t go to her trailer when setting up the cameras takes too long. Alex puts her hands deep in her pockets.

Maggie stands at her side, drowning in an oversized winter jacket much like her own, the only difference being the large hood pulled up over head. Only the tip of her nose is visible at this angle. She reminds Alex of one of those eskimos and she chuckles softly.

Maggie peers up at her from underneath her ridiculous hood. “Something you find amusing, Danvers?”

“Just your jacket,” she tells her. “It’s so big and you’re so...small.”

“You couldn’t hold off on the short comments even during the holiday season?” She clutches her hand to her heart in an overly dramatic fashion. “That’s harsh, Danvers.”

Alex shuffles closer to her for heat, as the cool penetrates her outer layer. Maggie might be small, but she seems to be her own furnace, always comfortable in the cold.

“I never said being small was bad, good things can come in small packages.”

“You think I’m a good thing?” Maggie asks, looking up at her. “I’m touched.” She bumps into Alex’s shoulder and doesn’t pull back afterwards—they stand shoulder to shoulder now, sharing body heat and company, and Alex is briefly surprised at how much she enjoys it. She’s never had a friend on set like this.

She’s probably never had a friend like this, period.

“What’s not small about you is your head,” she tells Maggie flippantly. “How do you even hold the weight of it up?”

“My ears balance it out,” Maggie tells her, and Alex doesn’t even have time to laugh out loud because they’re being called back for what hopefully will be the last scene they shoot tonight.
Blake breaks out into a dead run after the perp, her boots pounding the asphalt with every step she takes. She hates runners. Most of all, she hates big strong men who think they can abuse women half their size, and in front of their children at that.

He turns a corner, and Blake scrapes her hand on a rusty pipe as she uses the momentum to change her course and launch herself into the alley he ran into.

It's a dead end.

He knows it, too, even as he starts pointlessly trying to climb the fence at the end, his hands scrabbling for purchase on the metal.

Blake grabs him by the ankle and pulls, and he slams into the ground with a satisfying smack she can feel in her bones. Bastard.

“Davenport!”

Blake listens to Lawson’s breathless scream behind her, but not even God can stop her now.

“Malina Weasley, your ex-wife.” She grabs him roughly by the lapels of his jacket. “Remember her?”

“I don’t know anything about that bitch!” He struggles against her grip, but she rams his head back onto the cement below to quiet him.

“You put her in the hospital,” she reminds him, putting her knee on his neck. “We have a witness. Your four year old child! She pointed you out in pictures as the person who did that to mommy, you absolute piece of shit. Talk, now.” She puts her full weight behind her knee, but he doesn’t budge. “I said talk!”

She just barely dodges the spits he throws at her face.

“Davenport, I’m calling for backup,” Claire says behind them, her voice shaky, but Blake shakes her head.

“No, you won’t,” she tells her partner carefully—her tone even and calm as if this is just any other day on the job—and then turns back to the man spluttering beneath her knee. “You ready to talk?”

“I don’t have anything -” he wheezes and splutters as Blake increases the pressure on his neck, relishing in the purple tinge creeping up his face. She finally eases up the pressure, not wanting to kill the man. He gasps for air, his chest heaving. “I got nothing to say to you, bitch.”
She simultaneously pulls up her knee to deliver a vicious hit to his groin and smashes his head on the ground again. “You sure about that buddy?”

Claire looks on in horror.

Blake’s usually deep brown eyes are almost black now, and Claire shivers at the picture she presents now. She knew Blake had a reputation as a tough detective, the whole precinct knew she didn’t always follow the rules, but everybody ignored it because she brought in results. Her success rate was the highest in their district, and who could argue with that?

The daughter of two attorneys maybe.

Claire squares her shoulders and approaches her partner. “Blake! Enough, this isn’t the right way.”

Blake turns back to Claire then, her gaze dark and furious. She involuntarily takes a step backward, feeling the beginnings of fear trickle down her spine. Her body language must give her away because a second later Blake’s face shifts back to its normal neutral expression. She turns back to the suspect with a sneer, but she’s removed her knee from his neck and backed off slightly Claire notes with a small sense of victory.

“Maybe you’ll talk back at the precinct,” Blake grumbles. He looks smugly back up at her and then nods towards Claire with a wink.

“Thanks for the help, sweetcheeks.”

A flush of anger rushes over Blake at that, and her arm is moving before she can even think it through.

The loud cracking sound of his head as it hits the muzzle of her gun echos in the empty alleyway.

Claire is stock still, her eyes disbelieving at what she’s just witnessed. But her body starts moving and she skids to a stop next to the perp, her knees hitting the asphalt, hard. His face is a mess, smeared with blood and bruised, and she can clearly see the trail of Blake’s gun along his face. His neck is an ugly mottled purple and green blotch. She brings a shaky hand over his nostrils, looking for a sign of life.

She looks up at Blake.

He’s not breathing.

“Cut!”

Everyone claps as they finish their scene, and Alex starts to as well when the director says the words she’s been longing to hear.

“Great work! This one stays!”
Alex sighs. She’s free until late January, and she’s looking forward to the small vacation. Award season is coming up and she’s fully aware of that, but before that there’s the holidays, and getting to sleep in every morning.

A production assistant wraps her winter coat around her shoulders, and she walks back toward her chair, in search of her cellphone and water bottle before the car takes them back to set. From there, she can take her usual car ride home. God, she needs her license again.

“Danvers! Did you see who showed up?”

Alex looks up at Maggie, still bright eyed at this time of night. “Huh? Who?”

“A bunch of fans have been over there all night, watching us film,” Maggie tells her. “We should go say hello.”

Alex frowns.

It’s not something she’s ever done. They always filmed on set back in Body of Medicine, and fans rarely had a chance to show up because of it. She’s not even sure how Maggie still has the energy to smile and talk with the fans after that intense of an action scene. She’s not sure she feels like it, either.

“Danvers, please. They’ve been braving the cold just to see us.”

The guilt trip only works because Maggie pairs it with a ridiculous look in her eyes, and an expression that could rival Kara’s.

She lets herself be lead toward the edge of the cordoned off area, walking through the last of the crew putting equipment away.

The buzz reaches a crescendo as the people—girls, really—standing there see them come closer.

Alex even hears a few high pitched squeals and gasps and sees some of the girls physically hopping around in excitement. Her own reluctance at prolonging her already long, tiring day by stopping to chat with the small crowd dissipates. These fans waited probably all day in the cold just to get a glimpse of them. They’re the ones avidly watching Nightingale and probably the source of most of the nice, if a bit inappropriate, tweets in her mentions.

She notices Maggie in the corner of her eyes quickening her pace to meet their fans, and she catches up to her. They’re met with a sea of bodies and yells. Alex can’t help but smile at their excitement, and Maggie is laughing alongside her.

“How long have you guys been waiting out here?” Maggie raises her voice above the noise, and Alex is surprised such a large voice can emanate from such a small being.

Alex joins in, “You must all be freezing.” She laughs, “I can’t believe you’ve been standing in this freezing weather just for us.”

“Some of us sat towards the end!” A voice pipes up from the back of the group.

“So, you guys, I’m sorry but we need to know. What about those ferry pictures? Is it seriou-”

Another fan quickly butts in with an apprehensive expression. “Let them have their privacy, they get enough of that from the paparazzi they shouldn’t get it from their fans too.”
“So where are you all from?” Maggie interjects. “Are you all from New York?”

“I’m from New Jersey,” one of the girls answers, and it’s like no one brought it up at all.

They talk for a few minutes, and then they take turns taking pictures with anyone who wants one—which is everyone. After a while, Alex relaxes. She realizes that they’re not the type of fans she dislikes, the ones who seem to judge her every move and write terrible things on social media. They’re just...girls. And they admire her for some reason. What she does, it doesn’t feel like enough to warrant that.

Most of them begin to leave after they get their pictures taken. One girl hangs back, though, and she tentatively edges up to Maggie.

“You okay sweetie?” Maggie asks.

She nods, and pushes her hair away from her face before she starts to talk.

“I just wanted to tell you,” she takes a deep breath. “I just- I wanted to say...Sorry, I’m nervous.”

“Oh that’s okay,” Maggie tells her, rubbing up and down her arms. “Take your time.”

The girl smiles.

“I just wanted to tell you that Blake gave me the strength to come out.”

Alex looks away. She’s obviously talking to Maggie, and it feels like she’s intruding.

“And Alex-”

Alex looks at her, startled. “You two...watching you two, and Dawson -I mean, I know nothing has happened on the show yet, but I mean, we all know so-”

Maggie chuckles wetly. “I just wanted to thank you,” the girl says. “Both of you. You made me strong.” She reaches forward to squeeze Alex’s hands, and Alex returns her grip as if in a trance.

“You were already strong,” Maggie tells her, before wrapping her arms around her in a hug. Alex lets go of her hand.

The car is ready for you,” an assistant comes up to inform them. They quickly say their goodbyes, and as they walk away, Alex chances one last look at the girl with tears in her eyes. She’s not deserving of the happy smile and wave she gives them as they leave.

She’s lying, the both of them are lying.

Alex wonders for a moment if their lie is worth it, if it helps someone like that girl. She can’t imagine what that must be like. The exchange between Maggie and her echos through Alex’s head on repeat as she gets in the car on the way back to set. The fan’s words strike a chord in the depths of her soul, and a small voice worms its way into her mind, breaking the echoes of the girl’s words. What if. Theoretically, if she was in her shoes...well, she’s a grown woman. And if it was just her mom, and Kara, and J’onn -it’d be easy. But it’s not. It’s the entire world, waiting for her to mess up so they can judge her, scrutinizing her every mistake so they can declare she’s staining her father’s memory.

If Alex was like that girl, she could never do what she says Blake gave her the strength to do.
Maggie gets the call as she’s packing up her trailer. She’s putting all her tubs of chapstick and chargers into a bag, anything that she might not want to leave behind for a month or so in a place that’s probably going to be fumigated, when her cellphone starts ringing.

It’s Winn, and Maggie’s surprised at the hour. It’s 4 AM here, which means it’s 1 AM in LA. And Winn always, religiously goes to sleep at 11 o’clock. She feels a smattering of guilt that she’s ruined his sleeping schedule with her insane demands as she answers the phone.

“Winn, hey?” Her stomach flutters as she anticipates what he’s calling about.

“Hey. So...I found what you asked me to.”

“You did? That was...fast.” It had been a scant 12 hours since their conversation.

“Chris Miller is a very trusting man,” Winn tells her. “He also seems perfectly harmless from what I could see. I’ll let you be the judge of that, though. I sent you an email with everything I could find.”


“No problem. And with that, I’m going to dive into my bed and sleep for 48 hours so my sleeping schedule can recover. Goodnight.”

She smiles to herself. “Night.”

She pulls her bag down and grabs her laptop from it. She’s too curious not to check right away. She enters her email, and soon enough she’s learning that Christian Miller is a 33 year old restaurant manager whose hobbies include anything outdoorsy or to do with food. He’s attended the LA Food Fest since its inception in 2010, which Maggie knows and Winn had found thanks to his friends’ instagram accounts. He volunteers at one of the local veteran’s shelters in LA, which is currently using his smiling face as an advertisement to encourage more volunteers. He has a cat, and she has no idea how Winn found that out, but it’s a bullet point.

Winn was right, there’s nothing shady or bad about him—the only fault she can find is that he seems a bit bland, and not too bright she remembers wirily from her short meeting with him. That may be a deal breaker for her in a relationship—she couldn’t bear to be with someone who couldn’t keep up with her mentally and physically—but if Gabriella is fine with it...Who is she to pass judgement? She wants her aunt to be happy, first and foremost. She’s a good person, the best person Maggie knows actually, and good people deserve to be happy. There’s one last file attached to the email.

It’s a video.

Maggie clicks on it with trepidation, only to realize a few moments in that it’s security camera
footage of La Nuvola Bianca LA. It’s grainy footage of Gabriella and Chris having lunch, she guesses by the food on their table. Her aunt has her head thrown back in laughter, and Maggie can hear the sound of it in her head. Chris is looking on fondly across the table from her, and his hand is holding hers on top of it. The longer she watches the video the lower her stomach sinks. They look really happy together, and she can’t remember the last time she saw her aunt this happy around someone who wasn’t her.

She can’t believe Gabriella hadn’t told her about it at all. But she still knows she can’t stand in the way of it.

Maggie closes the laptop and packs up the rest of her things. It’s time to go home.

She doesn’t sleep. She gets home at 5 AM, and it’s too close to her usual wake up time to do anything but wait for the sun to rise. Although that’s not the only reason. Her fingers tap out an uneven rhythm on her dining room table as she waits for her aunt to appear. She’d called her 15 minutes ago, as soon as the clock struck 7, and asked to speak with her.

Maggie finally feels ready to talk. She’d needed time to mull her feelings and the situation over, but she’s done that now and the conclusion she’s come to leaves her feeling empty. She just needs Gabriella to confirm her suspicions and she’ll move forward with what she’s decided.

A steady knock on her door disrupts her racing mind.

She takes a deep breath before opening it, and then she finds herself engulfed in her aunt’s arms.

“I don’t care if you’re still mad at me, I deserve it, but I needed this,” she says, and Maggie swallows thickly and returns her embrace. Her aunt pulls away. “You said you wanted to talk?”

Maggie nods.

“About Chris,” Maggie clarifies. A somber expression comes over Gabriella’s face, but she seems to suck it up as she nods and walks in after Maggie. She sits down on the couch, and Gabriella joins her.

Maggie asks the first question burning in her mind, the one no one but Gabriella can answer.

“How serious is it with him?” She asks quietly. “Do you see...a future, with him?”

Gabriella meditates on the question for a moment, and then...she shrugs.

“I don’t...know, can anyone know? But I really like him. He’s sweet, and he’s nerdy and lame, but it’s...cute. He’s cute. He’s really kind, too. And he can’t lie for shit.” Gabriella cracks a small smile.

Maggie scrutinizes the look on her aunt’s face. She’s talked with Gabriella after her dates before, and she’s never looked like this. She looks...softer, happier.

“When did you meet?”

“Remember a few months ago when I decided to hire people to manage the LA restaurant while I was gone? Well, he was one of the people I interviewed, he’s a restaurant manager.” Maggie’s eyebrows rise. “Oh didn’t give me that look, I didn’t hire him,” Gabriella tells her. “But we did exchange numbers, and we ended up talking later. We...clicked, he’s in the same industry as I am
and you know that makes things easier. When I came back to New York, we kept talking, and he came here a few times and things just naturally progressed from there.”

Maggie’s voice drops, thins, fills with uncertainty as she ask the question that’s been bothering her most of all.

“Why keep it a secret from me?” she asks. “We’ve never kept things from each other, we’ve never lied. So why?” she demands, her voice rough.

Her aunt hesitates at that. “I don’t...At first, it was because you were busy promoting your movie. You were so excited and so busy every night-”

“Oh, so it’s my fault?”

“Maggie, no. It was your time to shine. It was your time, and I didn’t want to get in the way of that. It was just texting, back then. And I thought, I don’t tell you about everyone I text. It’s not a big deal. And then when we went out on a date and it kind of felt like a big deal, but there was the new season to promote, and then we moved to the other side of the country. I honestly thought it would be over after that. I did. But Chris proved me wrong. I should’ve told you then, I know, but then the whole contract business came along, and that was a big surprise to both of us. It didn’t feel right to saddle you with my relationship drama when you had some of your own, even faked.”

Maggie bites her lip, and looks away. Gabriella wraps her arms around herself, and suddenly her aunt seems smaller than Maggie has ever thought her to be, tiny and fallible. Her aunt’s eyes are watery, and that dissolves her.

“But part of me also knew that if I’d told you about him, you would’ve told me to go home.”

Maggie looks up. She shouldn’t be surprised at how well Gabriella knows her.

Gabriella continues, “After that, there just didn’t seem like a good time to tell you. Next thing I knew three months had passed. I’d kept this secret from you for three months, and I felt horrible about it.” She drags her hand down her face. “I know we always tell each other everything, but at that point it’d already been so long, and I couldn’t figure out a way to dig myself out of the hole I’d put myself in.”

“That’s what you’re going with?” Maggie gives her a look, she can feel there’s more to it than that. Gabriella sighs and moves to grab Maggie’s hands in her own.

“This sounds foolish outloud, but I guess I was nervous you wouldn’t approve of him, and I didn’t want to choose between the two of you. And -and I was scared I would have to, because Maggie, I will always choose you, but I also didn’t want to lose him.” She finishes her speech with a deep breath, her eyes watering, and Maggie can feel tears pricking her own eyes too.

“He seems nice,” Maggie says finally, and Gabriella eagerly takes the closest thing to approval she can muster right now. “Are you happy? Are things okay between you two?”

Gabriella nods.

“Long distance isn’t ideal but we’re making it work.”

Maggie looks away, she doesn’t have the strength to look into her aunt’s eyes as she prepares herself for the fatal blow.

“For now, sure, but it won’t work forever. The show is going to continue shooting in New York for
the foreseeable future. What are you going to do? Put your relationship...your life on hold for me?”
She looks up at her aunt, and it’s like she can read her mind, can see where Maggie is going with
this. “I don’t want you to do that. Gabriella, you’ve sacrificed so much for me already. You didn’t
even need to take me in and raise me-“

“Of course I did.” Gabriella’s grip on her hands tightens, her eyes bright in the early morning rays
starting to come through her windows. “You’re family, of course I had to.”

“My parents didn’t, and they’re family too.” She pauses to swallow the lump in her throat. “I’ve
been thinking a lot about this since I found out,” Maggie confesses. “And I’ve realized you’ve had
your life on pause for me since the day I showed up. The focus has always been on me, my career,
my show, my movie. And I just expected you to always be there, which is selfish of me.”

“Piccola, you’re a kid! And I’m the adult, that’s how it works! And it never felt like a sacrifice to
me. The years we’ve spent together have some of the best of my life. And getting to watch you
grow up into this beautiful, amazing woman has been an honor.”

You deserve to live your own life, Gabriella.”

Gabriella’s eyes are filled with crystalline tears as she looks back at Maggie.

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying I think you should go back to LA and live your life,” she says firmly. “You can hire
someone else to run the restaurant here. There’s only one reason you’re in New York, and that’s
because of me.”

“You’re asking me to leave?” Gabriella looks shocked, and hurt at the words it has taken Maggie
everything in herself to get out. “But you’re...you’re my kid.”

“You’re eleven years older than me. I literally could not possibly be your kid.”

“You’re my kid,” Gabriella insists, a tear falling down her cheek. “I feel like I’m abandoning you.
Leaving you by yourself...” She sniffs and wipes the tear away with the back of her hand. “Plus
your middle name is Ellen. you were even named after me.” Her aunt’s tone is teasing, but its
effect is lost due to her watery eyes and the small depression she gets in her chin when she’s sad.

They have the same one.

Maggie can’t stop the tears from clouding her vision either, and she can feel some slip down her
face. “That’s not even close.”

Gabriella only smiles—a sad, muted smile. “If you need something, anything, call me. I’ll be on
the first plane back.”

Maggie nods, acknowledging her words for what they are. An acceptance of what she’s set into
motion.

Gabriella hugs her, and Maggie returns the embrace, trying very hard not to feel 14 years old again.
Nat King Cole’s deep baritone voice comes crooning from the surround system speakers in Anthony’s apartment.

The entire place is decked out in tinsel and wreaths, with wooden Christmas decorations littering the tables and lined up on the mantelpiece. It’s unabashedly over the top and outrageous, just like the host of the party. There’s even a two foot high real gingerbread house serving as the centerpiece on the large dining room table.

Maggie watches the crowd of people talking and laughing under the multicolored Christmas lights hanging from the ceiling from her corner in the room. She’s taking a sip of her eggnog, creamy and strong, when a shadow suddenly casts over her.

She looks up, only to meet James’ eyes. Her co-star is wearing a tacky red Christmas sweater with a stuffed animal reindeer head protruding from the front of it—she’d wager there’s a matching tail on the back.

“So,” he leans against the wall next to her and lowers his head (damn his height). “Your girlfriend around?” He laughs at his own words, clearly loosened from the good eggnog already, and Maggie groans.

“You promised you wouldn’t say anything.”

Telling James had been easier than she’d expected. He was a smart man, with his own photography gig on the side, which was mostly funded by rabid Captain Ellis fans (and there were quite a bit of them, begging him to take his shirt off. Never let it be said that Nightingale didn’t cater to all demographics.) James knew the power fans had, and how harnessing that was just as important for an actor as actually being able to act.

He’d still smiled grimly at her, and mentioned how the tables had turned.

Last year, he’d been the one telling her he was dating a co-star: Lena Luthor. Oddly enough, the woman had played a FBI agent, an old flame of Blake’s. But in real life she’d only had eyes for Captain Ellis. Maggie didn’t really see it coming. James hadn’t exactly had a soft sport for Lena when she had first joined the cast in episode 3, after everyone had already bonded filming the pilot. But it had happened, and everyone on set had been privy to their flourishing relationship. And then to its tumultuous end. They were both professional about it, but Maggie could feel the tension every time she stepped on set.

When she’d told him about the PR contract, the last thing he’d said was that she’d told him it seemed like a bad idea to date a co-star, and she’d ended up doing the same, even if it was fake. It was some type of funny to him.

“I actually have a confidentiality clause in my contract preventing me from saying anything. That doesn't say anything about not teasing you."

“You promised.”

“No. I implied that I understood, and I was cool with it. Which I am. I’m also cool with teasing you. So. Where is she?”
“Hasn’t arrived yet,” Maggie finally tells him, if only to shut him up.

“Is that why you’re skulking in the corner? Waiting for your lady love to arrive? Do you think she’s coming?” James asks.

Maggie’s stomach falls at the thought that she might not. She’d seen Alex last that night filming on location, and she hadn’t actually said her goodbyes. She thought she was seeing her tonight. And she does know that they’re seeing each other very soon anyways for the Globes, and that they resume filming in a month, but Maggie doesn’t like to leave things open ended. And shoot her, she wants to wish her a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

“She’ll come,” she tells James, and finishes off her eggnog in a big gulp. Alex, much like Gabriella now, are flight risks. And the more eggnog she drinks the better the party is, and the less she can remember that her aunt is leaving New York tomorrow.

Alex shows up to the party half an hour and way more alcohol later. She is also—surprisingly—wearing an ugly Christmas sweater, actual ornament baubles and even lights attached to the embroidered pine tree on the front of it. Alex Danvers enjoys partaking in the Christmas spirit. Who would’ve thought. Maggie immediately makes her way towards her, blatantly ignoring James’ amused looks in her direction.

Just as she’s about to enter Alex’s vision, a hand grabs her elbow and guides her the rest of the way towards Alex. She looks up at the hand’s owner to her left: Anthony. She shoots him a questioning look, and he shoves her lightly in front of Alex and subtly nods upwards.

A sprig of mistletoe hangs innocently above the two of them, and she catches Alex’s slightly widened eyes as her gaze falls back down. She looks over at Anthony, and he’s got his phone out and ready to go.

“So I can,” he does air quotes, “accidentally upload the photo to social media.”

Maggie swings her eyes back to Alex, who looks slightly blurry. Alex shrugs lightly at her. Anthony’s throat clearing prompts her into action, and she leans up to press a light kiss to Alex’s lips. They’re cold from the air outside she assumes, and taste...like cinnamon. She pulls away the next second, when her mind incoherently suggest she stay kissing Alex until her lips warm up.

Anthony gives them a thumbs up and leaves them standing awkwardly under the mistletoe.

Alex pulls them out of the spiraling awkwardness. “So, drinks?”

Maggie knows she probably shouldn’t drink any more, but she nods anyways and leads Alex to the open bar. She orders them two Santa Clausmopolitans—which Alex laughs at and Maggie can only shrug helplessly in return, she certainly didn’t throw this party together.

“King really goes all out huh?” Alex smiles and leans up against the bar counter, the white fairy lights entwined throughout the bar bringing out the auburn highlights in her hair. Her body position is relaxed and easy. Maggie doesn’t think she’s ever seen her looking so...comfortable—besides when they act together, then Alex is as fluid and confident as ever. It must be the holidays. She assumes Alex is going home, and since her family couldn’t make it back for Thanksgiving she must be looking forward to celebrating Christmas with them even more.
Maggie matches Alex’s loose stance, though hers is caused more by alcohol than comfort, and barely registers the feel of the rough texture of the wooden counter rubbing against her arm.

“You’re one to talk, Danvers.” She nods towards her sweater, and Alex rolls her eyes, lips quirked up in a smile.

“My sister bought it for me as an early Christmas present.” She shrugs. “And when I told her about this party she insisted I wear it.”

“Well, give her my thanks,” she raises her cocktail glass in the air. “You’re the brightest thing in this room.”

Alex scoffs and looks down at her sweater, pulling at the hem of it to get a better view. “Let’s just hope nobody spills water on me with the electrical wires running through the sweater.”

“Alex Danvers sparks up Nightingale Christmas party; I can see the headline now.” Alex’s subsequent laugh feels like a victory, and Maggie savors the warm glow in her chest—from the presence of the woman across from her or the alcohol, or a combination of them both, she isn’t sure. It’s silent after Alex’s laughter dies down, and Maggie picks at the loose thread on her jeans. She’s fairly certain she’s the only one in the room not decorated by some Christmas object.

The holiday isn’t her favorite, it’s a time meant for family, and that only brings up bad memories for her.

She’s thinking about asking Alex if she’ll be going home, just to be polite, when Anthony drops by suddenly, a smile on his face.

“Up on my public account for four minutes before I deleted it, and Sanvers is trending in the US.” His face is positively gleeful as he claps them both on the back, almost pushing Maggie forward into her drink. “Merry fucking Christmas to us, ladies!” He steps back. “And I’ll get my happy New Years too.”

He’s quick to leave after depositing the “good news” and the sudden cold on her back and his last words lingering in her mind are the only remainder of his presence. She hope he doesn’t have anything outrageous planned for them for the New Year celebrations.

Maggie rolls her eyes and downs the rest of her drink in one gulp. “Wanna get out of here?”

Alex eagerly nods.

The noise of the party slowly fades away as they navigate their way through the crowd to Anthony’s balcony. Frozen chunks of snow peep out between the rails, and Maggie shivers slightly in the cold December air, her leather jacket, while stylish, not offering much protection from the cold.

Alex, with her sweater, doesn’t have that problem. She steps out farther onto the balcony to lean against the rail, looking out at the view of the city lit up at night. Maggie opts to hang back nearer to the door and away from the wind.

Alex’s back is to her when she begins to speak, her voice soft, and Maggie has to strain to hear her. “You know, that was my first mistletoe kiss.”

“It was?” Maggie immediately feels a wave of guilt wash over her.

Alex nods and scratches the back of her neck. “Now that I think about it...it’s just never happened.”
“Sorry.” Alex deserves better than a kiss born from a web of lies, and Maggie mentally berates herself for giving her such a forgettable first. She’s realized over the course of their friendship—the word slips easily to mind when she thinks of Alex now, and she files that information away for another day—that there’s a lot of firsts Alex hasn’t had the chance to experience. She’d been the first person to take her ice skating, and the first to take her on the ferry, and now the first to kiss her under the mistletoe...she remembers a dozen of little things.

Due to their contract, Maggie is the one giving her those firsts, which is a pretty shitty situation. Experiencing what should be special life moments you can remember when you’re older, with a person you’re only with for the cameras. It can’t be helped though, they both signed a contract and its handcuffed them together for a year (less than a year now, she absentmindedly notices, surprised at how fast their time together has gone). So she gets to be Alex’s first mistletoe kiss. Now that she thinks about it, she can’t remember when her last one was. Emily, maybe?

“It wasn’t bad,” Alex tells her, turning around to face Maggie.

“Not bad?” She scoffs and joins Alex by the edge of the balcony. “Not the best compliment I’ve received from a woman.”

They’re not touching, but Maggie is still hyper aware of the warmth radiating from Alex, and her slow, steady breathing—the rise and fall of her chest. Alex is the only person she’s had contact with besides Gabriella for months, and now her aunt will be leaving soon. Alex will be leaving soon, too, back to her family. And she knows it’s senseless, but she feels left behind all the same.

All she has waiting for her tonight is an empty apartment.

“We’ll, we’ve established I don’t have experience kissing under mistletoe, so it could have been terrible.”

Maggie laughs. She looks up at Alex, who is also chuckling. There’s a sprig of mistletoe above them, hanging from the balcony of the next floor over, and she makes a split second decision.

She reaches up and kisses Alex, half on her lips.

“There,” she says. “Placeholder kiss until the right one comes along.”

Alex touches her lips, her heart beating hard in her chest, and tilts her head at Maggie. She points above her.

It’s mistletoe. Of course. Because Maggie wouldn’t just kiss her.

She drops her hand from her mouth.

“How much did you have to drink, Sawyer?” she asks, forcing a chuckle, noting the way Maggie takes a second to stand up straight as she steps away from her. Maggie meets her eyes, seeming
much more somber than the minute before.

“Not too much,” Maggie tells her. She looks out towards the streets below, and Alex notes all the mirth of a kiss between friends has left her face.

“Are you okay?” she asks, concerned. Maggie meets her eyes.

“Yeah. I’m fine.” She shrugs, and then sighs. “My aunt is just...she’s moving back to LA for a while.”

“Oh, wow.” She’d come to think of Maggie and her aunt as a team, inseparable, and the news surprise her. She likes the woman, too.

“Yeah, it’s…it just has me bummed out,” Maggie says, but her face looks like it’s more than just being bummed out. There’s no trace of dimples as she looks at her shoes.

“Do you wanna talk about it?” Alex offers. She doesn’t like seeing Maggie like this. Maggie, who is usually so strong, now stands before her looking...vulnerable.

“Thanks, Danvers, but I think im just gonna...go home, you know? This party is too full.”

“Okay,” she says, frowning. "Um, I’ll see you around."

Maggie nods, and makes her way back inside.

She watches her leave, and she isn’t sure why it feels like there’s a string connected to her, pulling her along.

She closes her door after herself, going through her mental list to make sure she isn't leaving anything behind.

She calls the elevator, and when the doors open she pulls her suitcase inside and straight into a warm body. She looks up with an apology on the tip of her tongue when she sees who it is. Maggie’s warm brown eyes stare back at her. Her hair is in a ponytail underneath a white baseball cap, and she’s wearing a sleeveless hoodie and black leggings, a light sheen of sweat coating her brow too. Alex can’t fathom running outside in this weather, but she knows Maggie is a health nut who also—for some odd reason—doesn’t mind winter.

"Hey Danvers," she greets her, seemingly in better spirits than she was last night. "You heading to the airport?" she asks, nodding towards her bags.

"Yes," she says, putting her hand out to hold the doors so she can get her bag inside. Maggie helps her roll it in.

"I just came back from there," she tells her. "Dropped off my aunt."

"Oh." Maggie didn't want to talk about that last night, and Alex doubts that will have changed, so she changes the subject even though she's curious. Is it her restaurant? She can't think of another
reason that Gabriella would want to leave Maggie's side. "How's traffic?" she asks.

Maggie shrugs. "Don't know, we took the subway and then the AirTrain. You should try that some
time," Maggie suggests, her tongue trapped between her teeth like it's a good joke. It is. Alex
doesn't like the subway as is, she can't imagine dragging a suitcase after her. Maggie points
towards her attire. "I actually got off a few stations away to get in some exercise. Almost knocked
down a magazine stand by accident."

A lightbulb goes off in Alex's head.

“Oh my God, I'm so lucky I found you. I almost forgot." Maggie eyes her as she rummages in her
messenger bag, finally pulling two items out. Maggie's eyebrows shoot up when she sees they're
her cover of Vogue. "I know it's kind of weird, but could you sign this for me?" she asks, digging
through her bag for a marker. "It's for my sister and her friend."

"Kara Danvers likes my stuff?" Maggie asks, something Alex can't quite decipher in her voice.

"You got it," Alex says. "Please?"

Maggie smiles, seemingly amused. "Sure." She grabs the sharpie Alex is offering, and then signs
both of the magazines. The elevator arrives to the first floor just in time for Alex to put them away
and grab her suitcase.

“Do you need some help? Let me help you.” Maggie says. She carries her bag outside the building,
and it's...nice. Really nice. Alex doesn't have friends like this, friends that make her feel so taken
care of. "You waiting for a car?"

Alex nods. "You could keep me company," she offers, not feeling ready to say goodbye to Maggie
for the foreseeable future just yet.

"I'd be happy to. So, what are you doing for the holidays?"

"Flying home to Malibu," Alex tells her. "Christmas with the family and all that. Thankfully
Kara’s boyfriend isn't coming, so it'll be just us. What are you doing? Where are you going to?"

Maggie shrugs, her lips pressed into a thin line.

"I'm staying here. There’s just something about New York City during Christmas..." she trails off.

Alex crinkles her nose. It's even more crowded than usual, there's that.

"Are your parents flying in?" she asks. "Your, uh, cousins?" She adds as an afterthought,
remembering the bill in Maggie's trailer. She doesn't know much about Maggie's family.

"No, it's just me. And Gabriella is joining me for New Year's."

Alex nods. "That's good. But your parents won't miss you?"

She can't imagine missing Christmas dinner with her family, even if she wanted to. Her mom
would never allow it.

"We're not really close," Maggie says offhandedly. Alex suddenly wants to offer her own home, to
ask Maggie to come back to LA with her for Christmas, but she doesn't think Maggie will want to
fly, and either way, it's weird to ask.

"Right." Alex thinks for a moment. "When you said they didn't support your career I just thought...I
don't know. That they would've gotten over that." She shrugs lightly. She can't image that anyone, anywhere, wouldn't move heaven and earth to spend time with Maggie. She doesn't understand how her family wouldn't mind not spending Christmas with her. "I mean...you're amazing, Maggie."

Maggie half smiles, an elusive dimple showing itself for the first time today.

"Am I, Danvers?"

Alex feels her cheeks warm but Maggie looks pensive, so she answers her rhetorical question anyway.

"Yeah, you are," she tells her firmly. "What you've done...you're an amazing actress. And a good person. And the best fake girlfriend anyone could ask for." Maggie looks away, smiling now, and Alex pats herself on the back. "And hey, did you know I was going to be a doctor? I dropped out to act. My mom wasn't happy at first, but she came around. Your parents...it might be taking them longer, but they will, too." She tells Maggie, and then a thought occurs to her. "You know...we're not that different."

Maggie gives her a look.

"You have no idea."

Alex isn't expecting them.

She’s dragging her luggage, her eyes on her cellphone as she texts J’onn, asking about the car he’d arranged for her. She knows it’s not his job, that she needs to hire an assistant soon, but he said he didn’t mind. But he doesn’t answer his texts, and so she stands in the middle of the airport, googling shuttle services that will take her to Malibu.

But then a familiar squeal pierces through the air, and Alex looks up to see her sister holding a cardboard with her name on it, and her mother standing next to her, arms open for a hug. Her footsteps quicken and she meets them in the middle of the airport.

Later, she huddles with Kara in the backseat, while her mother drives.

"I’ve missed you," Kara tells her, squeezing her. "Wait ‘til you see what I have planned for tonight."

"Before you start telling me," she stops her sister, knowing how she can get. "I brought you something. It’s kind of silly but..." She shrugs, and gets one of the signed magazine’s out of her bag. "I thought your friend would appreciate this. And you."

"You got it signed?!" Kara throws her arms around her again. "I just won a thousand best friend points," Kara states, as she pulls out her cellphone and starts snapping a picture of the magazine,
surely to send it to her friend.

Alex smiles as she sits backs, and she accidentally meets her mother’s eyes in the rearview mirror.

Her mom smiles at her. She looks...proud.

The buildings blur by outside the window as they make their way to her childhood home, to spend Christmas together like they used to. She wonders if her mom will make the mulled wine her dad used to make, that he swore was okay for the kids to have because the alcohol had been burned off, and if Kara will make the ugly, deformed sugar cookies she’s so fond of eating by the bucket.

Alex closes her eyes and leans onto her sister’s shoulder, relaxed enough to sleep until they get there.

A warmth that no alcohol could mimic descends in her chest, making her feel better than she has in years.

The Christmas lights hanging from Maggie’s largest bonsai twinkle faintly in the reflection of her window.

It’s dark in her apartment tonight. The night sky is clear and the moon is almost full so she didn’t see the point of wasting electricity. Her one allowance was her electric fireplace, and she sits on her couch, watching the flames dance and crackle over the glass at the bottom. She pulls the Macallan scotch bottle, a gift M’gann sent her for the holiday, closer to her and wraps her hands around it, resting her chin on the top of it. It feels too early for a drink.

She pulls out her phone to check the time, the bright fluorescent light illuminating her face in the darkness. It’s 6 PM. If she was back in LA with Gabriella they’d be settling down to eat right about now. Her aunt would be cutting the prime rib and doing her ridiculous happy dance at a job well done. Charlie Brown’s Christmas special would be playing in the background, and her stomach would start hurting 30 minutes into the meal because she ate too much. But she’s not home, and Gabriella isn’t here. Her aunt had flown back to California two days ago, and Maggie had insisted she didn’t need to fly all the way back out to the east coast just for Christmas since she’d be coming for the New Years anyway. She knew Gabriella was busy transitioning back into managing La Nuvola Bianca LA and her life there. One missed holiday wouldn’t make a difference, she’d argued.

As if her aunt could hear her thinking about her, the ding of a new message from her pops up. She opens it and is greeted with Gabriella’s smiling face hovering over the loaded dinner table. In the corner of the photo she can see a head of brown hair and a hand reaching for the bread—Chris, she assumes. She tears her eyes away from the happy photo to read her message, “I miss you! Merry Christmas.”

She turns the phone screen off, the sound of it echoing in the emptiness of her apartment. She looks out the window. It’s started to snow again, big white flakes falling from the sky and sticking
to the window panes. The city is blanketed in snow, and it’s somehow muted the usual vibrancy of New York. Or maybe she’s the muted one.

Later, she’ll heat up some of the homemade turkey, mashed potatoes, and gravy that Gabriella insisted she make her before she left, because she needed to have a real Christmas dinner during Christmas. Later, she’ll turn the TV on and stuff herself with the food while watching some overplayed Hallmark Christmas movie.

But for now, Maggie curls up on the couch and pulls the throw resting on the armrest over herself. She gets 5 minutes to feel lonely. Just 5, and then she has to get up. (She can hardly believe she still remembers what she used to tell herself as a kid—it’s been so long since she’s used it.) But she does, and curls up further in the couch. It’s slightly chilly in the room, and her fake fire is too far away to offer much respite from the cold.

Maggie doesn’t think anything could, anyways.

Chapter End Notes

We've surpassed 100k words and the tables have turned. We'd love to hear your thoughts about it all! Leave us a comment below, or you can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meanstoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We'd love to talk to you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

News announcement! We will be taking a one week hiatus in order to get back on track of our usual Monday posting schedule. But we shall return with a new chapter on the 26th. Hope to see you all then!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Ad astra per aspera*: a rough road leads to the stars

She digs deep when she feels the board rise, her arms burning with the effort to move faster. She pulls them out of the water the next second, positioned below her chest so she can pop up to her feet.

And then....she’s free.

She feels the rush of water below her board as the wave carries her forward, bigger than any other she’s been able to catch today. The water is calm. It wasn’t a good day to go out surfing, but her time back home—and it does still feel like home—is coming to an end, and she can feel it. Soon enough she’ll be back in front of the photographers and the flashes of their cameras, the yearly nightmare that is award season rolling around like a crappy, un-surfable wave, and after that back to New York, back to set. And although she enjoys being on set these days, it’s still a far cry from the calm, peaceful days she gets out here.

The wave carries her as far as it can, before she jumps off her board and lands in knee-deep water. She pulls her board by the cable attached to her ankle and tucks it under her arm as she breaks off into a jog back home.

The beach is empty this morning, just like she likes it, and it takes her less than 5 minutes to reach the fence of her backyard. She leaves her board right inside, where she can comfortably stick it in the sand, and unzips the top of her wet suit, enjoying the breeze chilling her bare stomach. She hadn’t worn this bikini in years, but it’s nice to see it still fits. The practical, front zipped top and the simple bottoms make it a dozen times better than anything she has back in NYC, and she makes a mental note to take it with her as she enters through the backdoor, dripping water onto the wooden floors.

“Alexandra, take the wet suit off outside!”

She whips her head to the right, to see her mom with her hands on her hips standing in the kitchen.
“Water damages wood, sweetie. You know that.”

Alex looks down to the growing puddle beneath her feet. She sighs.

“Sorry,” she says under her breath, stepping out of the wetsuit and bundling it up in her hands as she makes her way towards the stairs. She shivers at the air conditioning, her bathing suit no match against the cold air, and she hates herself a little for not bringing a towel with her to the beach. Would have saved her the reprimand, if anything.

“You look so thin,” her mom suddenly mentions, and Alex stops at the bottom of the stairs. “Are you eating well? Are they working you too hard in New York?”

“I’m fine,” she says, pressing the wet suit tighter against herself. She thinks she looks better than fine, actually, kick boxing and weights putting muscle in places there weren’t any before. She feels good, she feels...strong.

Her mother hums.

“Do you have the name of your personal trainer? I’d like to see his credentials.”

“Mom, I’m fine!” She exclaims. Her mom raises her hands in a gesture meant to placate her, but that does the exact opposite. It only makes Alex feel like she’s the unreasonable one. “I’m gonna go shower,” she says finally.

She walks up the stairs, making her way towards her room. Before she gets there, Kara pops her head out of her own room. She’s clad in pajamas, her hair in a braid.

“What was that about?” she asks around a yawn.

“Me ruining our floors by dripping water everywhere.”

Kara giggles.

“She’s been telling you not to do that since we were little,” she mockingly reprimands. Alex grunts.

“She never told you anything,” she says under her breath.

Kara steps out of her room. “Alex-”

“I’m taking a shower,” she announces, and enters her room, closing the door after herself. She locks it, and then locks the bathroom door too, for good measure. She’s not in the mood.

She’s been home for 2 weeks and although the type of grievances her mom has had with her have been of the smaller type—miraculously they haven't gotten into any big fights, Kara has diffused those—it’s still annoying how her sister can do no wrong, but Alex is expected to be a paragon of perfection.

The endless nagging little things she does wrong are just as insidious as the big fights they have, and Kara doesn't get it. As a little kid, she would throw ice cream on the floor and their mom would take a picture instead of telling her to clean it up. (If water ruins wood, then what the hell does ice cream do?) When Alex got an earful every time she stepped inside the house wet. It’s a double standard that she feels petty bringing up, but that annoys her every time.

She steps into the shower, hoping the hot water will release her tense muscles.

It’s not even 8 AM yet.
She’s scrolls through her messages, lying on her side on her bed as her hair dries.

J’onn wants her to hire a personal assistant. She should get on that, it’s not his job to arrange all her stuff. And he has news about the interview they talked about; he’ll get in contact with her when something is finalized. Alex feels...excited at the prospect. Not just because it’ll good for her career, but because she’s missed being in front of a camera. There’s something about the feeling of being under hot, bright lights and posing in ridiculous dresses that reminds her a little of her dad, running after her with an old Polaroid and snapping pictures so he could remember how she looked in any particular moment.

A knock on her door fractures the memory.

“I come bearing breakfast!” Kara says through the door, and Alex gets up to open the door for her sister, her earlier annoyance gone like dregs of foam down the drain.

“Come in,” she calls to Kara, who’s already 3 steps inside, a tray in her hands.

“Eliza made us pancakes, and I made you some bacon.”

Alex takes one from the tray and moves her laptop from her nightstand so Kara can deposit the food there.

“You mean you made us some bacon,” She corrects her, and Kara smiles sheepishly, grabbing one from her plate as well.

Kara groans, flopping face down on the bed.

“She’s really into the vegetarian thing, and I want to try it, but I can’t. No more potstickers, Alex!”

She chuckles and grabs her plate from the tray.

“You could get veggie potstickers,” she suggests, taking a bite of the pancakes. “These...taste different,” she notes with a wrinkle of her nose.

“No eggs,” Kara says, raising her head off the bed.

Alex swallows the mouthful and puts it down, never to be picked up again. She takes a bite of her bacon instead.

“I thought you’d be into this healthy stuff,” she says.

“No way. This is too healthy. I already had to give up sticky buns Alex. Sticky buns!” Kara sits up fully on the bed and shakes Alex by the shoulders to punctuate her words.

“Well, you wanted to be a superhero. Wonder Woman doesn't do carbs.”

“Maybe Captain Marvel does,” Kara mumbles, picking up her plate.
“No crumbs on my bed,” Alex warns her, only half-joking. Kara sticks her tongue out at her and starts eating her breakfast.

It’s nice, to be like this again. She hadn’t been too fond of Kara when she first arrived, but those last few years of highschool, and before she left for college...they’d gotten closer. They’d had many a night where they stayed up talking, and plenty of mornings they’d slept in and tried to whip up breakfast while their mom was at work, only to end up at IHop...she’s missed it.

“How’s training going? I’ve heard you in the gym.” She’s taken her two weeks of vacation as just that—vacation time from work, which for her includes the elliptical time she’s supposed to do. Alex liked kickboxing and surfing just fine, but she draws the line at using contraptions usually bought through late night shopping channels by housewives.

But Kara- she’s been in their house’s gym, usually used by their mother only, every day before dinner.

“Oh my God, look at this!” She lets go of her bacon only so she can flex her arm and show Alex her bicep. She’s...impressed.

“When did that happen?” she asks.

“I talk to the director all the time, and we agreed we wanted her to be a real superhero, and so I had to get ripped, just like all the other boys, and I loved it! I had my doubts, and Mon-El said he didn’t think it’d look good on a girl-”

“Mon-El is an idiot.”

“Alex...he’s-”

“I’m just saying, if you want to grow arms the size of my head for your movie, you should. It’s your body. It’s your movie! Your boyfriend shouldn’t get a say in any of that. That’s not what mom taught us. Or...dad.” She takes a sip of her orange juice.

“I know,” Kara says quietly. “But!” She brightens up again. “He came around. He thinks it’s hot now.”

“ Didn’t need to know that.”

Kara laughs.

“He must be excited to show up to the Globes with you,” Alex mentions, trying to be supportive. She doesn't need details of her little sister’s romantic life, but she can ask her this much. “And the Oscars.”

“Actually...I’m thinking about taking mom to the Oscars,” Kara says. Alex raises her eyebrows. “Do you remember when we were little,” Kara asks, “and we promised that mom and dad would be our dates when we were both nominated for an Oscar at the same time?”

“Yes. You were twelve.” That seems increasingly unlikely, at least for her.

“I know. And this isn't that but...it’s our first big award show. And you’re already going as Maggie’s date-”

“We don’t know that.”
Kara ignores her. “I just thought it’d be nice if we were all there, you know? Maybe it’s silly, but I like to think dad will be looking down on us.”

Alex looks away, outside the window. The waves are getting bigger now, on the beach below.

“I think it’s a good idea. Mom will really appreciate it.” she makes herself say, through a tight throat. She looks back at Kara. “You should take her next year, too. She should be there when you win that Oscar.”

“Alex! We don’t know if I’m ever going to be nominated.”

“You already have a Golden Globe nomination under your belt for Leah,” she tells her, naming her character from Highriders. “It’s only gonna get better for you. If not next year, then the year after that. I know it.”

Kara gives her a look. “I could say the same thing to you. You’re working again, and on Nightingale—you could film one of those mind game movies you like so much and get a nom too.”

“Psychological thrillers,” She corrects her sister. “And I don't know.”

It looks increasingly unlikely, to make a comeback that big. She stopped working for ages, women that do that don’t get to start making movies again and win Oscars. She has a reputation dragging her down, too. It’s not realistic. But her little sister has a future with the brightness of stars ahead of her.

“Maybe I was right when I was twelve,” Kara says. “We could still get nominated at the same time.”

Alex snorts, but her mood falls when she remembers the other half of Kara’s childhood dream.

“But dad won’t be there.”

Kara drags her hand across the comforter to squeeze hers.

“All the more reason for us to try to be as good as he was, isn’t it?” she says, more serious than Alex has ever seen her. Then again, she’s always known acting was important to Kara, and their dad’s legacy. She just forgets, sometimes. Alex picks up her orange juice, and passes her sister her own glass.

“To trying to be good,” she says, jokingly.

Kara shakes her head. “To the Danvers sisters,” she toasts. “One day, the Academy won’t know what hit them.”

Alex smiles.

“To the Danvers sisters, we should come with a warning.”
Maggie wakes up to the glaring sun hitting her directly in the face.

She rubs the sleep out of her eyes, yawning, and peers out the airplane window at the bright blue sky, scattered with puffy, cotton candy clouds. They must be flying over the midwest right now given the amount of time that’s passed since she and Gabriella boarded. Her aunt had returned to New York City for the New Years as promised, and they’d watched the ball drop in Times Square, followed by their own private champagne party. It was nice, and her aunt had been in high spirits off of her first Christmas spent with Chris, which had only reassured Maggie that she’d made the right choice by staying in the city. It was a hassle to fly 5 hours for a single holiday, that was true, but letting them have their own special moment—especially when Gabriella had felt the need to hide her relationship for so long—only seemed fair.

She glances leftward for her aunt and is welcomed by an empty chair, but a few more seconds of being awake and the quiet noise of a movie playing wafts from the front of the plane. First class is more or less empty, and she gets up slowly from her seat to make her way towards the noise. She pauses mid step to listen more closely, something seeming familiar about the voice coming from the television, and then she realizes it’s her own.

Gabriella is watching The Informant (for the at least the 7th time she knows, Gabriella saw it at least 5 times when it was in theaters and then watched it again when it came out on DVD and Blu Ray). She can only smile and shake her head lightly as she joins her aunt in the seat beside her.

“Good movie?” She reaches over to grab some of the popcorn from the bag in her aunt’s lap.

“Oh yeah,” Gabriella’s voice is droll. “The lead is this kind of unknown actress, but my gut tells me she’s going places.”

It’s the penultimate scene in the film where Jude appears to allow the villain to live, walking away from him, only to whip around at the last moment and shoot him between the eyes just as his hand reached for his own hidden gun. There’s been talk of a sequel—or multiple depending on how the hypothetical second film performs—but Maggie is still undecided about it. Assuming the following films were as successful as the first, or even more, it’d be a steady source of income and give her a consistent box office presence, but being stuck in a multi-movie contract would limit her already sparse time eaten up by Nightingale. She has time to make her decision though, and right now she has more pressing issues to attend to, like the Golden Globes.

Maggie scoffs. “Really? I heard people say she was a one hit wonder after her first movie.”

“Twenty bucks says she’ll be winning a Golden Globe soon.” Gabriella cracks an impish smile and tosses a piece of popcorn Maggie’s way—which she catches midair.

Things between them are better, but not quite what they used to be.

She’s trying to shake off the last cobwebs of hurt and betrayal, but even without them Maggie can still feel a distance between them which she isn’t sure how to bridge. She wonders briefly if it isn’t distance at all, and simply the space occupied by another person—by the man who’s a part of Gabriella’s life now. She’s never had to share her like this before, she doesn’t know what that feels like.

Maybe it’s simply the organic progression of life. Most families don’t remain tightly knit after the family members reach a certain age—usually at whatever age they move out of the house or become financially independent. And Maggie has now accomplished both of those things. What’s
happening now with Gabriella is only natural. Her aunt is 34, and she loves kids—she gives away dessert to the cute, well behaved ones all the time at her restaurant. It’s only normal she’d find someone to settle down with, to get married and have kids of her own—not keep looking after the teenager left at her doorstep.

They watch the final scene in silence, contrasting the loud noise of explosions and gunfire coming from the television.

Maggie pulls out her cellphone, even now, finding her ugly crying unbecoming to watch. She knows it got her a lot of praise, and that Jude’s boss has just died and she has to take over now—it’s the high point of the movie, but she doesn’t need to see her snot covered face.

She unlocks her phone. She and Alex did a split screen Instagram live the day before—at the request of Anthony of course. They hadn’t spent the holiday together, and he wanted them to kickstart the year by letting people know they were still going strong. It had gone well, great actually.

Alex has improved a lot from her early uncomfortable, awkward filled moments with her. She remembers their first selfie, when Alex had jumped away from her like she’d been electrocuted milliseconds after the photo was taken. Now...she’s pulling her in for kisses on ferry rides and not even being phased by Maggie’s drunken, spontaneous pecks.

She can’t help but cringe remembering that ill fated moment. She’s grateful that Alex didn’t make an issue of it, even though she could have.

She’d been drunk for most of the Christmas party, and she’d kissed Alex twice, once because she had to, because the contract demanded it of her, and once because...she’d been sad, and lonely, and nothing had ever made her feel as consoled as a beautiful woman—which was a terrible habit. And Alex was her friend, and she was so sweet that night, talking about never having had a mistletoe kiss before her...it made the knight in rusty armor living inside her come up to the surface. But that half kiss, innocent as it was, played at blurring lines that she should never cross, and neither of them need that.

Next time she thinks Alex deserves a better kiss, but she won't be the one giving it.

She shakes the memory off and starts scrolling through her Twitter to see the reaction to their New Year live stream. She’d been sleep deprived and tired because of it, but the fans didn’t seem to notice—or were too distracted by “Sanvers” as they were now called, which Maggie laughed at. It’s the first time one of her off screen relationships has been given a ship name, and it’s a bit odd, but she was definitely rooting for that name amongst the others Anthony told her he’d suggested to E!News. An endless list of tweets flashes before her eyes as she spares them each a few seconds long read over. She’s met with the usual enthusiastic all caps screaming and memes.

Maggie slows her Twitter scroll as she sees tweets about their Christmas party kiss and then quickly pulls her phone to her chest when Gabriella pops her head over trying to get a look at the screen.

“The last time you looked at my Twitter you were left horrified and complained about the comments for a week. Neither of us needs a repeat of that.” She raises an eyebrow with a look, which her aunt matches before relenting with a huff and rolled eyes, turning her attention back to the TV.

The fan reaction to their kiss was...incoherent excitement. A few people felt guilty that they’d gotten a peek at a picture that was “never supposed to have been posted”, and a few others tag
Anthony asking him to be more careful—exactly what he wanted. Sometimes Maggie is surprised at the way he can manipulate the narrative so well, make people believe what he wants them to so easily. Maggie hopes there’s never a day where that amount of power is turned against her.

The movie ends, and Maggie tucks her phone away along with thoughts of that night, watching the credits roll.

She hears Chris’s heavy footsteps before she sees him.

Gabriella had asked if it would be okay for him to come over as soon as they landed at LAX, and Maggie had only nodded and agreed. She’d managed to catch a couple hours of sleep on the plane, and while not exactly refreshed, she wasn’t feeling like the living dead when they arrived to her house an hour ago. She’s glad she’s meeting Chris—properly—here. At least it’s her turf.

His boots clank on the wooden floors, and Maggie eyes him from her place in the kitchen.

He immediately walks over to Gabriella to press a quick kiss to her lips, followed by a hug. He suddenly meets Maggie’s eyes over Gabriella’s shoulder, and Maggie looks away, feeling like a child caught looking where she wasn’t supposed to. Out the corner of her eye, she sees him wave, even though his arms are laden with plastics bag filled with their breakfast. She knows it’s senseless to dislike him without even knowing him, and that from what she does know he’s a good guy—she can’t help being distrustful. It’s been just her and Gabriella for too long.

"Maggie! Hey!" He exclaims, and then, after Gabriella says something under her breath, he sombers up. Her aunt makes her way into the kitchen, Chris hot on her heels.

"Maggie," Gabriella says, smiling. "This is my boyfriend, Chris."

Maggie takes a breath and does what she does best—acts.

"Hi," she tells him, extending her hand. "Nice to meet you."

"Nice to officially meet you too," he says, shaking her hand firmly. "There was that whole thing at the hospital that didn't work so well," he mentions, and Maggie winces, remembering the sense of betrayal that had filled her back then. "Not the time for jokes about that yet, I got it. I brought breakfast!" he exclaims abruptly, lifting the bags in his hands for all to see. Gabriella ushers him along to the large breakfast island, and gives Maggie a look.

"Thank you," she mouths, and Maggie jokingly rolls her eyes at her aunt.

Chris unpacks the breakfast burritos he's bought, along with the fruit and tea he got them—or did he make them? Maggie remembers that he's in Gabriella's business. Her thoughts seem to call him, because he looks up at her and brings her a single brown paperback.

"Special delivery," he says, and Maggie raises an eyebrow as she grabs it. She opens the bag, and sees there’s a cupcake inside. “A good luck gift for you,” he tells her as she pulls it out, grinning and giving her a thumbs up. He reminds Maggie of one of those Boy Scout Leaders.

She looks down at the white frosting and the message in blue written upon it. ‘Break a leg!’
“I think that’s for theater,” she mentions, placing the cupcake beside her on the counter and looking back up at him, cursing his height as he towers over her seated position. Chris’s smile freezes on his face, and he awkwardly scratches his neck. “I really like it though,” she’s quick to add, sure that Gabriella is intently watching their interaction. "Thank you."

"No problem," he says, returning to her aunt and the rest of their breakfast.

There's still a certain tension palpable in the air, the jarring sense of being in your home but not feeling comfortable, and her phone luckily offers an escape as it starts ringing. She halfheartedly motions towards it and shrugs, leaving the room and the couple as she answers.

“Can you come down?” Winn sounds like he’s been running for 5 miles. Maggie can already see in her mind’s eye the pit stains on the solid bright blue button up shirt he’s probably wearing. “I’m on the first floor and nobody will help me with the elevator. My hands are full, and I can’t put these boxes on the floor. They cost more than my own life.”

Maggie sighs for show. “On my way.”

The elevator doors open to Winn’s grateful face peeking out behind the stack of boxes in his arms. She grabs one of them and holds the door for him to enter. Her makeup artist, Patricia, and stylist, Ilana, arrive just as she and Winn are setting the boxes down on the dining room table.

They all proceed to carefully pull the thousands of dollars worth of sparkling jewelry out of the boxes onto the white table cloth—except for Chris, who’s standing in the corner trying to keep his 6 foot tall bulk out of the way of the commotion transpiring in the room. Apparently he’s smart enough to know when he’s not needed because out of the corner of her eye she sees him grab his coat from the back of the couch. Maggie breathes out a soft sigh of relief, glad that the elephant in the room is leaving—and yet feeling mildly guilty about it.

“Maggie,” she feels a large set of hands clap down onto her shoulders. “I’m heading out for a restaurant management conference in Denver for the weekend, but good luck at the award show! I’ll be watching!”

“Mhm.” She tolerates his half hug and gives him a small wave. He says his goodbye to Gabriella next, and Maggie tries to ignore them, which proves difficult when her aunt is standing just to her left. She unfortunately swings her gaze around to Gabriella just as the two kiss, again. She wishes it didn't feel awkward for her, but Gabriella has been her parent in all the ways that count, and she can count on one hand the times she's seen her this smitten, with fingers to spare.

He leaves, and Gabriella quite literally slaps his ass out the door. Ugh.

After they sort the jewelry out, they quickly move onto the shoes, handbags, and makeup for the big night. At last, all the small orders of the day dealt with, they can advance to the main event. They move into the living room where her designer dress is laid out on the couch, the silver trees and pale pink flowers sewn into the black fabric sparkling under the lights. The dress came fresh off the runway, but Maggie obviously doesn’t have the body proportions of a runway model thus necessitating she stand for probably an hour or so while Ilana makes the necessary modifications.

She'd said something about sewing her into the dress.

Maggie starts stripping right in the living room, helped along by Ilana, not seeing the point of going to the bathroom. She is quickly reminded that Winn is still with them as she hears a high squeak from her assistant and looks over just in time to witness him squeeze his eyes shut comically and turn around.
"I'm wearing pasties already!" she lets him know. She knew she'd be half naked for a good portion of her morning. Ilana pulls out her measuring tape, getting straight to work.

"Assistant, assist," Ilana demands a few moments later, waving for them to bring the dress to her. Winn tries to do so, his eyes resolutely on the floor and more than half-closed. "Isn't he gay?" Ilana asks her under breath, but Winn hears, because he's quick to pipe up.

“No, nope! Not gay. Just uncomfortable at my boss seminude.”

It’s probably terrible, but Maggie chuckles.

Ilana, Winn and her aunt slip the dress over her head, the fabric feeling lighter than she expected.

"Two inches...and one..." Ilana mumbles under her breath, and Maggie slips into her head as she lets her do her job. She’s thinking about the speech she has to write, in case she wins, and that alone is so surreal that she actually loses sleep over the endeavor. What could she say, that was worth hearing?

After Ilana is done with her clothes, Patricia steps forward with an eye shadow palette and a black sheet that she wraps around her front.

“Can’t stain that proof God is real that you’re wearing,” she says, and gets to work trying out the makeup looks she’s been texting Winn for weeks. She’s lightning fast, as she’s only testing out colors, and Maggie notes how different makeup feels when it’s not being caked on to last 12 hours. She tries on a few lipstick colors, too, but in the end, Patricia ends up choosing a simple dark pink lip stain.

“You look much better when you’re natural,” she says, stepping back and removing the coverup. She puts her hands on her shoulders, and gently turns Maggie towards the mirror.

She looks like everything she’s ever dreamed.

Kara’s long, blonde locks whip into Alex’s face—carried by the wind rushing past them in her blue convertible—as she reaches to turn Britney Spears’ wailing off.

“Alex,” Kara whines, a piteous expression on her face as she looks over at her.

“Eyes on the road,” Alex pushes her sister’s head frontward back to the road. “We don’t need you losing your license, too.”

They’re a little over a quarter into their drive back to LA, and Alex already misses the ocean.

The crashing waves lulling her to sleep, the salty tang of the water hitting her during early mornings spent surfing. Soon enough, the familiar congestion and smells of the city will invade her senses, but for now she enjoys the still fresh air, breathing in deeply.
It’s a beautiful January day, the cloudless blue skies seemingly stretching on forever. It’d be the perfect day for a motorcycle ride, if she was even allowed to drive it. But she’s not, and that’s why her little sister is stuck as her chauffeur. It’s frankly embarrassing for her to think about.

“When will you be getting your license back?” Kara asks, driving along a wide curve, the motion of it pushing Alex up against the side of her door.

“Less than a year to go now,” Alex averts her gaze to the passing scenery, trying to keep her voice light and free from any of the shame born from that fateful night that led to her license suspension.

“We should celebrate when that day comes,” Kara suggests. “We can invite mom, too, and make it a girls night.”

“Mom?” She cringes. “I don’t think she needs any reminders of my screw ups.”

Kara presses her lips together.

“It was...just a mistake. We all make them.” Her sister looks at her and quickly returns her eyes to the road ahead. “What’s important is that you moved on from it and got better.” Kara touches her shoulder reassuringly, and Alex can feel the sympathy dripping from her gesture. “Remember when I was little and I used to tell you you were my hero?” Kara asks. “I know I haven’t said it in a while, but you still are.”

Alex huffs out a breath. “A hell of a hero to have.”

“That doesn’t mean you have to act like it all the time, though,” Kara says. Alex frowns. “I know... you don't always let us see when things are hard for you.”

“What do you mean?”

“When we got the call about...what happened. Mom said it wasn't the first time that you’d done it. And Alex, I didn't even know you liked to drink. I’d never seen you drunk! And whenever I used to visit your apartment, everything looked perfect, and you looked fine and pretended like everything was okay. And I was...dumb, I believed it.”

Alex remembers the mornings she hurried around her apartment, throwing away empty beer bottles and stuffing her dirty clothes underneath her bed, throwing the piles of dirty plates in the sink straight in the trash.

“You weren’t dumb,” Alex says. She’d just seen what she’d wanted her to see. “You were my little sister.”

“Your dumb little sister,” Kara says. Alex chuckles, and swallows through the tightness in her throat. Kara looks at her over the center console. “I'm not a little girl anymore, Alex. You don't have to pretend with me.”

Alex doesn’t know what’s worse. The realization that Kara knows the place she was in, even before she got fired, or that she’s asking now, like Alex is still struggling. Why does it feel like she is?

“I’m getting my act together, Kara,” she says. “You don’t have to worry about me.”

Kara gives her a look.

“I’m not worrying,” she tells her. “I just want to say -I’m proud of you.”
The days until the Golden Globes pass by in a blur, and before she knows it, Maggie is walking around her apartment now that she still can, getting a feel of how to move inside this dress. Tonight will be harder if she doesn’t get a handle on it. And she’d hate to be Jennifer Lawrence and fall.

It’s only going to get harder once she puts her shoes on—or rather, they help her put her shoes on. As it is, she drags the hem of the dress through her apartment, but it’s worth it if it helps her re-learn how to breathe.

“You’re going to open a hole in the ground,” Gabriella says, looking at her with the same awed shine in her eyes she’s had all afternoon, which has succeeded in making Maggie feel like she’s drank 3 glasses of scotch—raw and vulnerable, and too close to emotion for her own good.

“Come here, take a picture with me,” her aunt pleads. “Winn! Take a picture of us!”

Winn walks over with his cellphone already out, and Maggie chuckles. She stands next to Gabriella quickly, and smiles what she knows already will be the most genuine of the night, the pose the most natural too.

“Just like junior prom,” she jokes, and Gabriella laughs.

“But this is a much nicer dress,” she adds.

“I would love to see those pictures,” Winn pipes up, and Maggie raises her eyebrow with a pointed look. “And I would love to go check on our limo arrival time,” he adds, quickly exiting the room. “Time for the shoes!” he yells, popping his head back in through the doorway before moving along.

“You need a hand?” Gabriella asks, gesturing towards her shoes, and Maggie nods gratefully.

She can’t kneel at all, and she’s scared of sitting and ruining something, so she stands while Gabriella ties the sky high gold silver heels.

“I’ve been here before,” she says, from somewhere, obscured from view by the large skirt of her dress.

“You haven’t,” Maggie scoffs. Of all the things her aunt has done for her, putting on her shoes isn’t one.

“Yes,” Gabriella insists. “You were 4. And you had these pink light up velcro shoes. And a fondness for taking them off and chucking them everywhere-”

“I refuse to believe that.” She rolls her eyes, her aunt has a habit of exaggerating stories to make them more entertaining -for her, at least, as Maggie really isn’t fond of her aunt using that story of her getting dizzy and throwing up at Disneyland as an icebreaker.

“Lift,” Gabriella orders, and Maggie lifts her left foot. “The kicker is that you didn’t know how to
put them back on. And your folks were exhausted so you’d run up to my mom to ask. Or me. Of course, I was in high school, and I thought you were an idiot then.” Gabriella stands up, brushing off her knees. “I didn't know yet you'd be the best of the family.”

Maggie feels something burn behind her eyes.

“Let me look at you,” Gabriella grabs her by the shoulders and Maggie stands up straight. Nobody’s approval has meant more to her in her life. “You’re going to make me ruin my makeup,” Gabriella sniffs, and Maggie lets out something that suspiciously sounds like a sob, but she reels it back in. It’s just a gasp, an expulsion of air and emotion that she can’t afford to give into right now.

Gabriella dabs under her eyes and then beams. “When you’re out there, just know that win or lose, I’m always with you, okay?”

Maggie nods. Gabriella hugs her, tight, and then pulls away only to kiss her on both cheeks.

Maggie finally turns around to look at herself in the mirror.

Damn them, the shoes actually make the entire look come together. She looks taller, and stylized, and she’s no longer dragging the hem of the dress. She barely recognizes the elegant woman staring back at her in the mirror. Gabriella steps up beside her, shorter than Maggie for a change.

Her aunt fixes a piece of her hair, tucking it behind her ear.

“I wish they could see you right now.”

Maggie’s stomach falls.

She tries to meet Gabriella’s eyes through the mirror, but Gabriella isn’t looking at her. She seems lost in thought.

“Franky should be here, she should get to see you like this. She’d be so proud...She’d look up to you.”

Maggie presses her lips together.

“And Sofia and Charles...”

“Don’t,” she stops Gabriella.

When she thinks of Franky and...Sofia, too. All she feels is pain. Loss, acute and biting.

But...Charles...she’s empty. Disconnected. And it’s those feelings that make her anger flare up.

Because she only got a cursory glance at chubby cheeks and a gummy smile and tiny, tiny fingernails. And it makes her so, so angry that she didn’t know, that she never got to and will never get to hold hi-

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” It’s not Gabriella’s fault; she’s the person who’s least to blame in the entire situation.

Maggie takes a deep breath.

“I want Franky here. I want all of them here, I’d be lying if I said I didn’t, if only so I could show them...but it’s not possible. And it’s going to drive me crazy to keep thinking about it. So let’s
just...not talk about it tonight, okay?” Maggie’s let far too many big moments in her career be tinged by her past, trying to drag her down.

Tonight won’t be one of them.

Gabriella nods.

The moment is broken as Winn comes barreling through the door, breathless.

“The limo is here!”

“Oh, girls! You look gorgeous!” Their mom exclaims, and Alex can’t see her hands but she can picture them pressed together in delight. “Step closer to the screen, come on.”

She and Kara do, identical excited—and exasperated—smiles on their faces. Just like prom.

“A Alex turn around, let me see that jacket.”

She obediently does, beginning to feel more comfortable in the quasi suit she wasn’t sure about at first.

“Oh that’s amazing. You remind me of your father so much. Can I take screenshots on this thing...?”

Kara laughs, and Alex chuckles through the sting in her eyes.

Thankfully, the doorbell rings before she can do something stupid like get emotional.

“Eliza, Mon-El is here!”

“Oh, I want to see him too!” Eliza says, and Alex slips away from the scene. Her sister and boyfriend leave a second later, with a promise to meet again before the show starts, and then Alex tells her mom to turn her TV on so she can catch Kara arriving on the red carpet. She’s only waiting for Maggie, anyways. Her mom disconnects the call.

It feels like only a few seconds have passed in the apartment, surrounded by Kara’s makeup girls and her assistant, when the doorbell rings again. The swirl of nerves start in her stomach at the thought of walking the red carpet, and she’s thinking about poses to do beforehand when she opens the door.

Her lungs stop working.

Or maybe her heart lurches inside her ribcage, or her trachea closes up; it feels like something fundamentally wrong in her insides when she sees Maggie look so incredibly different—painfully beautiful—and yet the same woman she knows.
Maggie raises her eyebrows.

“Danvers, you clean up well,” Maggie says, and Alex works to find her tongue so she can answer.

“You do too. With the dress and the shoes and the hair...” Alex feels her arm doing some awkward up and down sweeping motion towards Maggie and wills herself to stop. When did she lose control of her body? Why can’t she breathe?

“Thanks,” Maggie says, her eyes trailing over her suit. “Shall we?” she asks, meeting Alex’s eyes once more, and offering her elbow for her to grab onto.

And Alex can only follow after her.

Bella
@alexmaggie

“Maggie Sawyer has just arrived at the red carpet, and on her arm is co-star Alex Danvers, daughter of renowned filmmaker Jeremiah Danvers. Rumours have been circling around for weeks that the pair, who star together on hit show Nightingale, are romantically linked”
Bella
@alexmaggie

Replying to @alexmaggie

“if a picture of the two women sharing a kiss that surfaced a few days ago wasn’t enough confirmation, tonight Maggie and Alex are proudly walking together on the red carpet.”
maggie and alex sitting in a tree k-i-s-s-i-n-g
@lesbianmaggie

MAGGIE IS GONNA HAVE SO MUCH FUN RIPPING THAT SUIT OFF OF ALEX AFTER THE AWARDS TONIGHT
#ERedCarpet #GoldenGlobes

1/8/19, 6:11 PM

35 Retweets  123 Likes

penny
@sanversdawson

Replying to @lesbianmaggie

ADSDKF WHY WOULD YOU POST USING THE HASHTAGS FOR ALL THE LOCALS TO SEE

maggie and alex sitting in a tree k-i-s-s-i-n-g
@lesbianmaggie

BITHC WHY WOULDN’T I? THE PEOPLE DESERVE TO SEE IT ALSO IT’S TRUE
omg theY!!!! LOOK AT THEM GO THATS MY BABIES AND IM SO FUCKING PROUD THEY’RE SO GORGEOUS
#ERedCarpet #GoldenGlobes
omg i always assumed maggie was the top and alex was the bottom but after tonight’s outfits (princess dress & dom suit)...maybe they switch

1/6/19, 6:47 PM

7 Retweets  23 Likes

it’s blake bitch
@dawsongays

Replying to @sapphicsawyer

PERSONALITY WISE maggie is the top but in bed they switch i can FEEL it in my soul

1 Retweet  3 Likes

it’s blake bitch
@dawsongays

alex is a pillow princess please
Maggie walks down the few steps after her interview, her heart beating hard the way it always does after a microphone has been in front of her. She doesn’t think it’ll ever stop being nerve-wracking.

Winn helps her down the last step, before guiding her to where Alex is standing, waiting for her. “How did that go?” she asks with a nervous smile, and Maggie wonders if her mood is contagious. “Good. She asked if I had my speech written, just in case I won,” she tells Alex.
“Well, do you?” Alex asks. Maggie nods.

“Just in case.” Maybe the more she says it the less devastated she’ll feel if she doesn’t win. Simply getting nominated is an accomplishment in and of itself, but winning would be...everything. And she knows she worked her ass off, that inasmuch as you can qualify something as abstract as acting, she went above and beyond. She deserves it. It’s a sense of accomplishment that she’s never quite felt before.

She craves to have it acknowledged by her peers.

“Oh, Kara is over there!” Alex says suddenly beside her, before the cameramen take her attention. Maggie already went through the endless pictures and interviews herself, so she lets Alex be guided by Winn to one of the lines for whichever reporter, and looks for Kara Danvers in the crowd.

She’s wearing a long, white dress smattered with flowers, and she’s blindingly blonde, and so much taller than her—she can tell even from this distance. She looks nothing like Alex. She remembers the next second that the woman was adopted by the Danvers family, and guesses the difference in appearance makes sense. She’s never seen one of her movies that she can remember, but it’s Alex’s sister.

She should probably say hello, or wait for Alex to introduce her. She doesn’t approach, though, when an even taller man—God, Hollywood—steps close beside her, wrapping his arm around her waist. Must be the boyfriend. She’d heard Alex mention him once or twice. Manuel, or something. She certainly hasn’t seen anything of his.

Maggie isn’t one for snap judgements, or so she tells herself, and she maybe be influenced by Alex in this, but she can’t help but dislike the way he seems to cling to Kara Danver’s arms. She’s seen it before. Maggie’s met plenty of men who see women as decorations, or trophies to be shown off. Mon-El’s body language exudes, ‘This is my girlfriend, look at her, she’s nominated tonight’. Maggie wonders if he tells random passersby his girlfriend is famous.

“You’ve seen Mon-El,” Alex says from behind her, and her tone of voice makes her smile.

“Don’t like the boyfriend?” She asks, and Alex sputters.


“Maybe she has bad taste,” Maggie says, turning around. She grabs Alex by the lapels of her jacket, seemingly straightening it up. The sound of camera flashes is instantaneous. “Good thing her sister is better.”

She winks and steps away.

They don’t make it five steps before the cameras are calling for Alex and Kara to take a picture together, and Maggie is content to fade into the background for a moment.

She observes the way Alex lights up around her sister, and the genuine smile she gives the cameras as she squeezes close to her for a picture. She’s seen Alex look that way once or twice before, and she’s glad she’s gotten to see Alex Danvers being herself, if that’s what it looks like.

Soon enough, the photographers are satisfied, and Maggie puts on a smile as the picture perfect entourage comes her way.

“Maggie Sawyer,” she says right away, extending her hand towards the younger Danvers, and the
blonde takes it a firmer-than-she-expected grasp.

“I know! I’m Kara, Alex’s sister! But you know that. Oh my Gosh, me and my mom loved Rosewood Street. We loved Maya and Leo. I cried when you died! Maya should’ve gotten to end up with Leo, honestly.”

Maggie tries not to wince. She still remembers the day she read the script in which her character’s boyfriend cheated on her with her sister. God, straight people.

“Ha, thank you.” She gives Kara a smile. “Danvers, you never told me you watched that show.”

“Oh, Alex didn’t, she was having a punk-rock phase at.”

“We should go in,” Alex intervenes, and Maggie chuckles out loud, but finally follows her date and her sister inside the building.

‘

Tens of circular, pristinely set tables cover the room floor lit by the shimmering white lights hanging from the ceiling.

Alex can see a number of people have already taken their place at their assigned tables, and the stagehand leading their group—her, Kara, Mon-El, Maggie, M’gann, and some of the people from The Informant she’d recognized after google searching the film—weaves them in between the tables and people milling about to their table at the front.

Each person’s name in the group has a neat white name card placed behind their plates.

Alex settles into her seat in between Maggie and Kara, stomach queasy. She doesn’t want to think about why that is, but if come later in the night Kara does end up walking up to that stage, she suspects the queasiness will only increase. She picks up the menu for the show, trying to ignore her current thoughts, and inspects what they’ll be served tonight. The first course of the evening is something called Delicata, which she discovers from its caption is some sort of fancy vegetable dish with fresh basil, teardrop tomatoes, roasted butternut squash, garlic flowers, and purple sweet potatoes. The main course is fresh Mediterranean Chilean sea-bass served on top of a red beet risotto with baby beets, yellow squash, zucchini, and broccoli florets. Dessert is a white coffee liqueur biscuit served with a white chocolate coffee cream, Frangelico mascarpone, and a praline.

Well, she may not enjoy the show, but she will definitely enjoy the food.

Her perusal of the menu finished, Alex looks up from the table and is surprised to see the room practically full now. Black suits and thousand dollar dresses litter the space, and across from their own table she can see Meryl Streep and her husband. Being here is simultaneously a new and old feeling for Alex. She’s been to the Golden Globes before when Body of Medicine was on, and even further back then with her father. Lately—with everything—she hasn’t attended any award shows. Not much has changed since the last time she was in this room though, the same fancy food, decor, and people wearing rented designer outfits they’ll be returning in the morning.
She’s always thought of the entire award season experience as a Cinderella experience: a beautiful dress gifted by your fairy godstylist that would disappear come morning (when it had to be returned).

“Oh my gosh!” Kara slaps her hand on Alex’s elbow, her grip tight and her long nails digging into Alex’s skin. “It’s Oprah. Look, but be discreet about it!”

Alex gently pries her hand off of her. “We literally met Oprah when we were younger, remember? Why the onset of starry eyes?”

“Because it’s Oprah,” Kara shoots her an incredulous look.

“I have to say,” Maggie pipes up from her right, and Alex quickly turns to look at her, and then just as quickly looks away upon realizing how close she is to her. “I agree with your sister on this one, Danvers.”

“I wasn’t saying she isn’t a big deal,” Alex protests. “She’s just not someone I’d get starstruck over.”

Maggie props her elbow up on the table, leaning closer to Alex—giving her a full face of the sweet perfume she’s wearing—and resting her chin in the palm of her hand. “So who’s worthy enough for the unflappable Alex Danvers to be starstruck over?”

Alex rolls her eyes as Kara erupts into giggles at her left.

“Oh! Oh, I know this one,” Kara’s claps her hands together, face lighting up. “Marie Curie, that scientist who died from radiation poisoning.”

Maggie laughs and lightly bumps Alex’s shoulder. “Or maybe Isaac Newton? Albert Einstein? Galileo?”

“Well, now you’re just listing off famous scientists,” she mutters, face lightly flushed as she picks at the napkin in her lap. Their teasing continues until the first course is served and the show begins, but Alex—despite her protests—finds she doesn’t mind it at all. The opposite actually. She’s glad Maggie and Kara seem to be getting along; Kara is the most important person in her life and Maggie is...she’s become a good friend, and a steady fixture in her life for months, now that she thinks about it.

She’s by far the person Alex spends the most time with due to their jobs on and off the screen. And she’s genuinely nice and good and absolutely beautiful, especially tonight.

Alex can take a bit of good natured ribbing.

The show goes by fast between small talk with the rest of their table, the food, and the little moments where Kara and Maggie talk to each other, Alex getting stuck in the middle and not minding one bit.

It goes by so fast that before she knows it, Best Supporting Actress in Limited Series or Motion Picture is up, and Kara tenses up beside her.

Her sister smiles wide, her shining face up on the huge screens in front of them as one of the nominees, but Alex recognizes that smile. It’s the same one she wore during an oral presentation with one of their tutors, or waiting for their parents to tell her what they thought of her singing as a
girl. She’s nervous, happy yet terrified.

Kara grabs her hand under the table, tight, and Alex jumps when her knuckles bump with Mon-El’s in Kara’s lap. She’d holding on to them both like her life depends on it, but nobody can tell.

Alex feels her own grip becoming progressively tenser the closer the presenters get to announcing the winner.

“And the winner is...Xenia Dvorak, *American Horror Story: Ghost Town*.”

Kara lets go of her hand, only so she can politely clap like Alex realizes she should be doing. She claps, while the winning actress makes her way to the stage, but she never takes her eyes of her sister. There are unshed tears in her eyes that she tries very hard to hide under a brilliant smile, but Alex knows her.

She hates that look on her face, and hates the Hollywood Foreign Press Association for not recognizing Kara’s work—that she deserved this—and she hates how she can’t protect her from the crushing disappointment she knows she’s feeling, as one of her dreams slips right through her fingers.

But most of all, Alex hates the relief that stealthily courses through her.

The night drags on forever.

Maggie curses the fact that her category isn’t announced until basically the end of the award show, the delicious, outrageously expensive fancy food that’s been served throughout the night has hardly helped pass the time. She can’t really eat, anyways, for fear of messing up her makeup or being caught in an unflattering mid-bite shot by the cameras for millions of people to see. Not to mention, the top part of her dress is skin tight, and see through.

The actual show itself is—as per usual—a collection of a few good moments (watching her fellow actors be awarded and tear up on stage) interspersed with the awkward comedy of the host and various presenters. Her company for the night hasn’t been much better. Their table has been suffocatingly subdued since Kara lost her nomination, which Maggie understands, but it’s affected everyone’s moods. Alex’s sister is still young and talented, she’s sure she’ll have plenty of more chances to win. The woman looks devastated though, and the same expression shadows Alex’s face along with a few others that she can’t place.

All together, the night’s festivities have been dampened. She remembers attending her first Golden Globes, back when *Crush* was nominated. The movie hadn’t won, and she wasn’t even nominated individually, but the novelty of her first Golden Globes had left her in a perpetual state of poorly concealed awe the whole time. She hadn’t been able to take a plus one back then, so Gabriella had stayed home, and texted Maggie every time she saw her on screen. (Three times, total, and one of those she was simply behind a nominee.)
Fast forward to the present day, and she has been recognized individually, but the novelty has worn off a bit. Jimmy Fallon delivers another subpar joke met by fake titters and then it cuts to commercial, but not before teasing the announcement for Maggie’s category coming up after the break. As soon as the cameras cut, Kara jerkily stands up, muttering ‘bathroom’, and leaves, Alex following after her. Maggie is left at the table with The Informant director and producers and some other Hollywood film producers—she’s honestly not sure who they are or what they do, there’s far more people at the awards that she doesn’t know than does.

M’gann left the table awhile ago to do what she does best, network with the other Hollywood elites—by the time she returns to the table she’ll probably have three new projects lined up for her Maggie thinks with a light chuckle. Her body is buzzing with the anticipation of what’s to come after the break, and she’s not sure whether she should get up and walk it off—but play it off as socializing with her fellow actors—or just sit and wait it out. Lucas Grones, one of The Informant producers makes her decision for her by starting up a conversation, and she’s stuck talking with him until Alex and Kara return, looking subdued, and M’gann slips back into her seat just as the signal the cameras will begin rolling again is given.

This is it. The moment she’s been dreaming of since she first started acting.

The presenters rattle off a few mandatory jokes, and then they start announcing the nominees. Maggie feels the camera on her as her name is announced after the first nominee’s, and she smiles broadly, hoping her nerves aren’t plain for everyone to see. The space between when the presenters finish announcing all the nominees and start opening the envelope with the winner’s name seems to stretch on for an infinity. Maggie can hear her heartbeat, feel her pulse in her ears. The man finally opens the envelope and she sees his mouth forming words.

‘And the Golden Globe goes to...Maggie Sawyer, The Informant.’

The room erupts into applause and Maggie’s body is frozen, stuck to her chair.

The world is shrunk down to this sliver of a moment, captured in time forever. But then she feels someone push her to a standing position—she thinks it might’ve been M’gann, although she’s not sure. Her legs are shaky as she stands, but when she finally does get her bearings the first thing she does is hug M’gann, hard. She manages to get out a dozen ‘thank yous’ in the crook of M’gann’s shoulder before she gently nudges her away and towards the stage. She gets a few pats on the back on her way there from the producers, and it’s all surreal, like she’s walking on air.

Maggie’s body goes into autopilot mode and carries her to the stage and to the microphone awaiting her big speech, and all that runs through her mind is to keep breathing.

When she reaches the stage she hugs the presenters and then feels a cold, heavy metal thrust into her hands: the Golden Globe.

Its weight is grounding, and her heartbeat slows down marginally, her stomach settling as well so she doesn’t feel a minute away from expelling the delicious dessert she ate onto the tables placed at the front of the large room. Maggie grips the award tighter and glances down at it, running a finger over her name engraved in the plaque. She takes another deep breath, knowing she needs to begin her speech. She only has a limited amount of time to give it, and she’s seen other actors’ speeches cut off because they didn’t finish when they were supposed to.

“I’d like to start off by thanking the Hollywood Foreign Press Association for uh,” her voice wavers slightly as she stutters and pauses to swallow, which garners a laugh from the crowd. She
smiles sheepishly and plows on, “For allowing me to be in this room filled with so many extraordinary people who also happen to be talented artists.” She chuckles nervously. “I actually do have a speech prepared,” she twists her upper body around as if to pull a slip of paper out of some fold of her dress, which produces more laughter and Maggie joins in, feeling more at ease.

“I’d like to also give a big thank you to Elizabeth McCue—the remarkable director who brought it all to life—David Weiss, Lucas Grones, and the entire cast and crew of The Informant for allowing me and helping me embody the role of Jude Fuery. Another big thank goes out to all the people who supported the movie and myself, to my fans, my manager over there, M’gann,” she points out to her in the audience before continuing down her list, “and to the person who’s supported me from my very first photoshoot when I was wearing overalls—I was actually fourteen at that time, by the way—to now, to...wow, this. The biggest thank you goes to my aunt Gabriella, and -and to my whole family too.” She adds that last line as an afterthought, realizing it wouldn’t do to only thank one member of her family when the public assumes she’s close with all of them. In her peripheral vision she can see the one minute signal and hurries to finish her speech.

“This award is for the young girl who sat in her tiny living room with her grandma watching the Golden Globes every year and dreaming of being on the very stage I’m standing on right now, accepting the same award in my hand. This is for the young girl with an impossible dream, that through some bizarre twist of the universe came true. And to all the young girls out there watching this with the same dreams I had as a child, I can’t wait to see you standing on this stage one day too.”

Alex watches Maggie disappear behind the stage, the sparkles from her dress visible even in the distance.

Their table takes a few minutes to return to normal, having exploded in celebration when Maggie’s name was announced, and she realizes her hands sting from how hard she’s been clapping for Maggie.

She looked amazing up there.

“Congratulations,” she tells Maggie as soon as she seats down, and she doesn’t quite know who starts it but then she’s holding Maggie between her arms, feeling her long hair tickling her neck as they hug.

On a whim, she presses a kiss to Maggie’s cheek afterward, and her stomach clenches with embarrassment as she notices the stain of lipstick she’s left behind on her skin.

“Sorry...your face...” she rubs her thumb over the offending mark, ghosting over the deep dimples that don’t seem to disappear from Maggie’s face.

“It’s fine,” Maggie says, still smiling the widest Alex has ever seen her.

“You were amazing up there,” Alex tells her, verbalizing what she’s been thinking ever since
Maggie won. She’s never seen her more beautiful, more luminous than in that moment, and it had nothing to do with the bright lights of the stage.

“Thank you,” Maggie tells her, before she’s whisked away by M’gann for another round of congratulations.

Over her manager’s shoulder, Maggie shares a smile with her.

The press room is hot and stuffy with the amount of reporters and photographers squeezed into one room. Maggie is herded in by the some of the crew onto the stage, the lone black microphone stand contrasting the blue of the background. The questions start coming in seconds after she adjusts the stand to fit her height so it’ll carry her voice across the crowd.

“Maggie,” she casts her eyes around the whole room, trying to find the voice among the sea of bodies pressed together. Her eyes finally alight on the speaker and she nods for her to continue.

“Congratulations on your win tonight, and what a great speech, especially the end. Can you speak a little more to how much winning this award means to you?”

“Oh boy,” she takes a deep breath. “It’s tangible payoff for all my hard work, and more importantly it’s recognition from my industry peers that the work I’m producing is worthy of praise. I’d do this job even without praise, but it’s always gratifying to receive any.” She swallows and looks back down at the golden award in her grasp, pondering the best way to answer the core of the reporter’s question. “I’ve given up a lot for my career over the years—relationships, normalcy, privacy, sleep, a large portion of my life really, it’s all gone towards acting. And I’ve never regretted that. I know the perks from her job far outweigh the benefits; I’m not trying to spin some sob story, but this industry can be difficult sometimes. It can leave you wondering why you even bother to act, or try. Moments like this,” she raises the award in her left hand, “are a reminder to keep moving forward, to never give up.”

“Maggie, hi.”

She waves back with a smile, “Hello. How are you doing?”

The reporter laughs. “Good, good. What’s more important right now is you though. The Informant has been such a notable success not only because it’s a female led action film, but also because your character, Jude Fuery, is gay too. You’ve played three LGBT roles so far, and of course, you’re openly out. How do you think the business is doing telling your community’s stories?”

“Better. But there’s definitely room for improvement. One of the things I loved about Jude was that her liking women was never something that had to be explained to the audience in the film, it was just another part of her. We need more media showing that, because we are more than our sexuality, we have personalities and stories outside of who we like to kiss that deserve to be told just as much as any coming out story.” A round of applause follows her reply, and she smiles triumphantly inside. The room is eating out of the palm of her hand. She’s had plenty of experience with the press, but this is her first press conference at a big awards show, which had made her
slightly nervous. It looks like she’ll only be receiving soft ball questions tonight though, perhaps a courtesy to the winner.

“There’s been talk of possible sequels to *The Informant*. Are you open to continuing to play Jude and does tonight’s win for your portrayal of her bode well to future sequels of the movie?”

Maggie’s smile never falters as she strings together another measured response. It’s easier than she expected, the high of having won, the weight of the award in her hand, carrying her forward with a sort of ecstatic assurance she’s never quite felt before. She feels high on it, energized.

A few more minutes of the back and forth, and then she’s herded off to take portraits with her Golden Globe.

The entrance to the Netflix hosted after party is congested with cameras and reporters, all vying for their attention.

Alex feels like a sheep being herded through the field as the party attendants push through a clear path for them towards the red carpet. Once there, Maggie is shepherded off immediately for solo pictures, leaving Alex to face the photo hounds alone. She hadn’t realized just how comforting she’d come to find Maggie’s arm around her waist, her warm presence beside her as they stood shoulder to shoulder.

“Alex!”

“You look gorgeous, Alex, look this way!”

“To your right!”

“Smile again, beautiful!”

“The front please, Alex!”

The cacophony of their yells still makes Alex’s ears ring unpleasantly, even though she’s been subjected to them—for worse reasons than tonight’s—far more than she enjoys. But she grins and bears it, it’s just another part of the job.

She walks as soon as she’s able, only to be face to face with reporters, their microphones, cameras, and even cellphones at the ready.

“Alex! Here, please. How does it feel to have your little sister nominated for a Golden Globe?”

“I’m- I’m very proud of her.”

“She started acting after you did, no family drama?”

“Never,” she says firmly. “She deserved that nomination and in my opinion she deserved to win,
to.

“That’s good, thank you Alex.” The man nods, before his attention is swept away. “Deborah! Please, over here!”

Alex looks around, trying to see where exactly Maggie is, when her name is called again—her full name this time.

“Alexandra!”

She finds the source of the yell, a short, balding man that stands alone, holding his own camera.

“Just two years ago you were fired from *Body of Medicine* and this year you walked the Golden Globe red carpet,” he states, and Alex feels her blood sour like a tangible thing, feels the shift in her as he reminds her of one of her lowest points. “What can you tell us about that comeback?” He asks, clearly pleased he seems to have rattled her.

She tries to smile, and come up with a reasonable answer, one that corrects—his truthful assessment—that she’d been fired. But he’s not done.

“What do you think your father would think about your career right now?”

She sees red.

Rage bubbles up in her stomach, as she hears the question drip with the same judgment she has heard from her mother, and herself, far too many times to count.

Alex takes a step towards him, unsure what she’s going to do, but then feels a gentle hand circling her wrist, halting her.

Maggie.

“Who let paparazzi inside?” Maggie asks one of the bodyguards, and even though the man tries to show his name tag proving him as a TMZ photographer, he’s escorted away.

Maggie steps closer to Alex, whispering under her breath.

“This place is teeming with reporters waiting for the next big scandal and if it’s from the date of a winner? Even better for them,” Maggie says. “Don’t let it get to you.”

But all Alex hears is ‘the date of a winner’, and it does nothing to improve her worsening mood. It’s all she is right now, after all. She got fired, like that asshole said even though that’s not the story they spun for the public, and now she’s here with her fake date, trying to absorb some of Maggie’s good press.

She shakes off Maggie’s hand, and makes her way inside.
Maggie can practically see a cloud forming over Alex’s head reflecting her impromptu mood change.

She knows Alex’s past is not something she likes to think about, and Maggie hasn’t pried. She respects her co-workers, and she doesn’t ask about their private lives or their families unless they volunteer the information, because she likes having that privilege herself. So she doesn’t know the details, and she certainly doesn’t know if what that ass had said was the truth, and Alex had been fired from her last show, but her reaction all but confirms it.

It has nothing on the reaction the mention of her father brought out of her, and while Maggie knows he passed years ago, and she recognizes his name, she hasn’t pried. But she can’t help but wonder.

The mention follows them for the rest of the night.

Alex becomes withdrawn—sour—a version of herself she’s seen before and that she doesn’t exactly like. Maggie circles back to her after doing her rounds in the room greeting fellow actors and being congratulated at each turn, but it hasn’t changed. She sighs, and pulls out her phone. There’s a dozen new typo-filled texts from Gabriella that she spends a few minutes trying to decipher before admitting defeat. She’ll have to ask her what they meant when she sees her later tonight. She quickly texts her aunt that the after party is going great. She’d asked her to come, but Gabriella had opted to watch from the sidelines and-

“Maggie Sawyer!” Someone says, and she turns to meet—that’s the guy from Star Wars. She almost wants to turn around and find Alex. Space fighting sounds like just her thing.

“Congratulations,” he tells her, shaking her hand. “You’re so young, you’re going to do great things.”

She smiles, admittedly a bit starstruck, even though the man’s name is failing to come to mind at the moment. She’d seen the movie with Gabriella the day it came out. He waves as he leaves, and Maggie does the same. She chuckles to herself.

As she navigates her way back to her table, she can see Alex is sitting in the same morose position as before, but with 4 more champagne flutes decorating the space to her right.

“Maybe there should be an age minimum for winning a Golden Globe,” Alex is whispering under her breath when Maggie arrives at the table, and the drains the flute in her hand.

“You jealous, Danvers?” she asks as she sits down.

“Not of you,” Alex says right away, and Maggie reminds herself there was no way she could hear her previous conversation.

Maggie gives her a look, and Alex shakes her head. “It’s nothing.”

But it’s clearly something, and Maggie bets it’s about the mention of her father before, but she tries not to let it derail the rest of the night. She’ll ask her, tomorrow. She carefully sits down in the seat next to Alex, making sure her dress isn’t mangled in the process.

“If you say so.”

Alex’s mood doesn’t look like it’ll be improving anytime soon, and Maggie hears someone calling her name. Decision made of her next route of action, she turns back to Alex.
“I heard they’re serving a great red tonight too,” she nods towards the empty glasses, which produces a pointed look from Alex. “I heard someone call my name, I think, sorry—I’m just gonna,” she waves vaguely behind her.

“That ‘someone’ is Charlize Theron.”

“Well,” Maggie’s lips turn up. “I certainly can’t keep her waiting.” The last she sees of Alex she’s flagging down a waiter balancing a tray of various drinks.

Charlize Theron is absolutely stunning in person—stunning and slightly intimidating. The aura about her thrums with power and a measure of dignity. Maggie just wishes she could properly focus on the acting icon standing in front of her congratulating her and enthusing about how great it is to see fresh talent come up. But she can’t because her mind is stuck on another beautiful woman currently sitting alone. She responds to Charlize’s words with her own words of gratitude and compliments for the woman, and then politely extracts herself from the conversation. She pushes her way back to her table, trying to see around the crowd for a glimpse of Alex. The table is empty, but she sees a flash of auburn red hair and the sleeve of a black suit jacket slip outside the balcony through the large glass double door. Her heeled feet quickly carry her to the same vicinity, and she steps out onto the balcony, reflexively tensing in preparation for the cold, but it’s warm outside—of course—a reminder that winter seems to never touch this part of California.

The change in temperature aside, the scene in front of her prompts a sense of deja vu; it reminds her of that night at the Christmas party, except Alex is the one on shaky ground now.

“Do you want to talk about it?” she asks softly, looking around to make sure they are alone on the large balcony. They are.

“About what?”

“Whatever has you this upset,” she says. Alex doesn't say anything, just holds her elbows, looking smaller than she has all night in the tailored, feminine suit her stylist put her in. “It’s about your father, isn't it?”

Alex turns around. “It’s not.”

“Alex, I saw your reaction when that asshole prodded you like that, and you don't need to tell me, but...I'm here for you, okay? Let’s go back to the party,” she tells her with a tentative smile. “We can find some ridiculously expensive appetizers to snack on. Let’s go-”

“I can't pretend to be happy right now. I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry but I don't want to go back inside.” Maggie frowns, and takes a step closer, but Alex isn’t done. “You're right, by the way. Great sleuthing skills. It was about my dad, and a dozen other things. Tonight has been a shitshow.”

Maggie takes a step back.

She just won a Golden Globe—it’s one of the happiest nights of her life. And Alex seemed to be having a good time up until that asshole’s questions, but maybe she just wasn’t paying close enough attention because of her own blinding, overpowering happiness. She feels a jolt of guilt run through her at that thought.

They’re supposed to be in this together.

“Chasing after my father’s shadow was enough but now I have to add Kara to that list, and then you show up looking like that and it makes me...” Alex shakes her head, and Maggie’s stomach
swoops as she imagines the ending of that sentence. “I’m nothing but your arm candy.”

“Don’t say that,” she tells her quickly. “You’re my friend.”

“Not tonight. Right now I’m your fake date because I can’t get back on my feet on my own-”

“A alex, lower your voice-”

“Everyone knows how much a fuck up I am either way-”

“You’re not the only one with issues!” Maggie blurts out, finally. “But you don’t hear me saying anything. Gabriella moved back to the other side of the country and I haven’t complained to anyone, and certainly not you.” Maggie slowly expels a breath. “This was one night, Alex. My night.”

The drunken anger leaves Alex’s face, eyes going soft the way she knows them to.

“What happened with Gabriella?” She asks gently, but Maggie shakes her head. As if she’d tell her anything. It’s her own shit.

“Can we just finish out this party?” she pleads, and Alex nods.
Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers made their red carpet debut at the Golden Globes tonight, much to the delight of the entire internet. Their passionate fans took to social media to express their excitement at the couple’s first public appearance together this season.

The co-stars were first seen together at dinner back in October, and their relationship only persisted since then. PEOPLE can officially confirm Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers are in a serious relationship. Sources close to the situation tell us they would like to give their relationship a real chance, without the glare of the public shining down on them.

Sawyer and Danvers are currently shooting the second season of ABC’s hit show, airing Thursdays, 9/8 Central.
Alex gets to her apartment late that night.

She climbs the stairs, her heels in her hands, and thanks her lucky stars that the concierge remembers her enough to lend her a master key so she can go inside. She steps out of the stairway into the hallway, and then stops in surprise at an unexpected small figure sitting at her door, back leaning against the wood and head in her arms.

“Kara?”

Her sister looks up, grey tracks down her cheeks. She’s quick to wipe them away with her palms.

“Alex!” She stands up, fighting a little with her dress. “I didn’t know when you were getting back.”

“I thought you were with Mon-El,” she says, walking faster towards her. “Did he-”

“I asked him to go home, and had the driver drop me off here,” she says quickly. “Think we could have an impromptu sister night?”

Alex looks at her sister, at her eyes shining with tears, and she can see nothing but the girl who was afraid of everything, and couldn’t bear to shoulder thunder alone. Her heart constricts in her chest.

“Of course,” she tells her, and opens the door.

“Do you want to call mom?” she asks, once Kara is installed in her couch with ice cream and a blanket. Kara shakes her head. “Mon-El and I are gonna drive up to see her soon. I just want sister night right now.”

“More like sister early morning,” Alex says, trying to make her laugh. “It’s 3 AM.”

Kara chuckles, but it lacks its usual light.

“Do you want to talk about it?” she asks, pushing down everything that came crawling back up to the surface tonight to focus on her sister. Kara needs her.

Kara shrugs. “It’s just...for a moment there I really thought I was going to win,” she says, her voice small. “And it’s fine, I’m just...”

“You get to be sad, Kara,” Alex tells her squeezing her knee. Kara sidles up to her, offering Alex some ice cream. Alex grabs her spoon, but doesn’t dig in just yet. “You’re twenty-two,” Alex reminds her. “You have dozens and dozens of more opportunities to win that award. One day, you won’t know where to put them. You’ll give Meryl Streep a run for her money.” Kara cracks a smile. “And you know what?”

Kara looks at her.

“You get to pick the movie,” Alex tells her, and Kara grins as she gets the controller and logs into her Netflix account.
“Oh, I know what we should watch!” She pulls up The Informant on the screen. “You’ve seen it, right?” Kara asks, and Alex shakes her head.

“Alex! It’s Maggie’s film! It’s the role she won for tonight,” Kara says, as though she needs the reminder. Her sister’s face only falls marginally when she mentions the award Maggie received, and which slipped from her hands.

Alex lets Kara put on the film.

Halfway through the first scene, she hears a sniff by her side. When she turns, she sees there are tears in Kara's eyes.

"Oh, Kara-"

"I'm fine," she says, though it comes out like a sob. Alex wraps her arms around her sister, and lets her get it out. Her shoulders shake with the force of it, and Alex forces herself to be a rock, to be the immovable stone that her sister's tidal wave of grief may crash against. It doesn't take long for her to stop crying, but even then she doesn't pull away, and they watch the film pressed together, like they used to watch horror movies when they were young.

Maggie's isn't a horror movie. It's not bad at all. In fact, it's good, really good. Alex likes the fast paced actions sequences, and the biting, badass dialogue, and it's at once so easy and so hard to see the woman she’s come to know in the secret spy on her screen. Her hair is shorter, and her voice is deeper, somehow, than Maggie’s, but the way they carry themselves is the same, that overwhelming confidence that everyone around her can feel.

Kara falls asleep halfway through the movie. Alex doesn’t blame her, she’s seen it before and she’s exhausted from her day. She’s not even mad she’s done that thing again where she forces her to watch a film only to conk out halfway through. She’s just thankful she’s asleep. She covers her with the throw over their legs, and turns her attention back to the screen.

She might as well finish the movie. It’s really good, after all—not that she’ll tell Maggie that.

The next scene makes her fidget. A tall, pretty blonde brings a glass of alcohol to Maggie’s character, Jude, her hips swinging, her heels clicking on the floor. Alex can hear the sound reverberate through her apartment. Jude grabs her wrist before the woman can leave, and then takes off the hat she’s wearing, a black fedora that would look absolutely ridiculous on anyone else.

Everything happens fast. In the next scene, Jude is pushing the woman against the bar, and kissing her neck as she rips the back of her dress with her hands. The blonde moans and then grabs Jude’s hair, bringing her to her lips, and Alex watches, enthralled.

Oddly enough, she thinks that she knows what it feels like to kiss Maggie like that. Well, not exactly like that, as she sees the blonde’s tongue slip past her lips—but enough. She wonders if the way the actress playing opposite Maggie is moaning is genuine, if it’s even ethical to enjoy a sex scene you’re shooting for the cameras. Wonders what it means for herself then, that she hasn’t hated all her kisses with Maggie.

Or that she can’t stop thinking about the way she looked tonight.
Maggie hasn’t even gotten her foot out of the car when she hears a loud whoop and sees Gabriella running down the pathway towards her. Her aunt pulls her the rest of the way out of the car—Maggie hopes she didn’t damage her dress in the process—and engulfs her in a tight hug.

“Piccola! I’m so proud of you.” Her arms still around Maggie, she rocks them both side to side, squeezing even tighter. “The neighbors yelled at me twice to keep it down, but I ignored them both times, and then yelled back to shut up because my niece had just won a fucking Golden Globe.”

Maggie pulls away, laughing. “Gabriella, the neighbors don’t even live that close by.”

She shrugs. “I have those middle aged white man at a sports game lungs on me, you know that—it’s a family trait.”

Maggie rolls her eyes and tugs her inside, laughing all the way. She kept dozing off on the ride back to her house, but now that her aunt is here a fresh surge of energy crashes through her, leaving her on a temporary high.

“Do you want some food or something? I can make food. And we need to get you out of that—”

“No to the food,” she cuts Gabriella off. “My stomach is still jittery so I’m not going to even risk eating anything. Also, it’s 3 AM, and we’re leaving for the airport in four hours. But yes to the dress, please and thank you.”

“Whatever you want.” Her aunt stands motionless, hands clasped at her chest just looking at Maggie with an awed expression. “You’re amazing, you know that right?” She cuts off the protests resting at the tip of Maggie’s tongue ready to be freed. “What you’ve accomplished is extraordinary. Maggie, you are extraordinary. You’re a...” Gabriella snaps her fingers in the air trying to come up with the word. Then her eyes light up and she performs a snap that finishes in a pointed finger at Maggie’s face. “You’re a real star.” She starts giggling at her own joke, and Maggie suspects she’s already had her celebratory drinks in honor of her win.

“Let’s get you out of that dress,” Gabriella offers, and Maggie thankfully follows her inside her room.

Maggie sleeps the entire ride to the airport.

She feels bad that Gabriella doesn’t get the same chance to since she’s the driver, but her aunt had insisted in driving her herself. Secretly, she’s thankful. Maggie knows she’ll see her soon enough when she flies back for the Oscars, but it’s still time apart that she doesn’t like. Like the most diligent of Uber drivers, her aunt brushes off her concerns as she helps her unload her suitcase from the car onto the sidewalk.

“I’m not getting on a plane today; I can sleep after this.”
“That is true,” she admits. Trunk closed and bags taken out, they stand in silence on the sidewalk. “This is it then,” Maggie shrugs her left shoulder and tucks her hands in her back pocket, a now familiar sinking feeling in her stomach at leaving her aunt.

Gabriella pulls her close, her arms a safe haven around her. “I can make an impromptu visit to NYC if you want. Just call me.”

“What I want,” Maggie pulls back and reaches down to sling her backpack over her shoulders, “is for you to stop worrying about me. Stay in LA. I’ll be back for the Oscars in like a month anyways.”

“Children, they grow up so fast,” she clutches her heart with one hand and then throws the back of her other hand across her forehead for good measure.

“Geez, where’s your Golden Globe?” Maggie rolls her eyes and turns to leave. She turns back at the last minute, to drop a quick kiss to her cheek and get one last hug in. Gabriella laughs. “Love you, zia, I’ll call when I’m back at my apartment in NYC.”

“You better,” she tells her, and lets her go. "And Maggie!" she yells suddenly in her sports stadium voice. “I love you too, kid!”

Maggie winces at her volume and the people staring at them because of it. But she wouldn't change it for the world.

Alex is already in her matching seat in business class when Maggie boards the plane.

Thankfully, her seat is elsewhere, still close by, but at least in a different aisle. She considers greeting Alex, but ultimately decides against it, thoughts of that night quickly coming back to her. It's not that she's mad, and they ended the night on a civil note at least, but Maggie likes to give things their space. They can talk when they land.

Maggie settles into her seat, headphones on and phone out, and soon enough they’re taking off. She scrolls through the video screen for something to pass the time. She picks a TV Show about two LAPD detectives, and the dead wife angst coupled with the explosions is enough to keep her somewhere between entertained and bored. Halfway into her second episode, she chances a glance toward Alex and sees her asleep already, one of those scratchy blue blankets draped over her.

Her fingers itch. She doesn't want to be that person, but for God's sake, she already did it to Gabriella. She can't get worse than that.

Maggie pauses her show and unlocks her phone. Her movements are hesitant as she types in the Google search, “Jeremiah Danvers”, but she pushes forward. She wants to know what managed to put that look in Alex's face the previous night. It's the type of curiosity that she could never stop, that gets her in trouble.

She reads the headlines, and it’s so much worse than she thought.

""
The flight feels shorter than usual, and Alex wakes up only 20 minutes before they land.

Maggie talks to her the minute they're outside the plane, asking about the flight and whether the terrible airplane blankets are comfortable, and it's suddenly like their argument of the night before has dissapeared. Alex has half a mind to ask her if King has sent them any indications about posing for photos as they leave the airport, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

Maggie is just being...nice, nicer than she deserves, considering she decided that getting drunk last night—drunk and mean—was a good course of action. She wonders if she should bring it up, but she doesn't want to remind Maggie of what she'd almost said. She was drunk, and tries to ignore that even in the light of day she can't say it was a lie. Maggie showing up, dressed like that...Alex shakes her head to clear it.

They share a car on their way back to Manhattan, and Maggie sleeps this time.

Maggie's stomach rumbles as she watches the presenters announce the nominees for category after category.

She'd been far too nervous to eat when she woke up early that morning after a restless night of sleep—her mind too over excited at what was coming the next day. If the Golden Globes were her biggest accomplishment, then the Oscars are her biggest dreams. It’s the craziest thing she ever imagined for herself, back when she got her first bit role in *Law & Order SVU*. Academy Award nominated actress Maggie Sawyer. Maybe even winner.

It’s the top of the mountain, the highest she can reach. And she can feel it, just at her fingertips.

God, she can’t wait to hear it. She can feel M’gann and Gabriella are just as jittery, even through the texts in their group chat. They’re both at work, but Maggie knows the little TV inside La Nuvola Bianca’s kitchen is turned onto Good Morning America, and that M’gann is watching, too. Her last message had been directed towards Gabriella, telling her she would give her 15 minutes only to congratulate her when they announced it, and then it was her turn.

Finally, after what feels like forever, it’s time for the Best Actress nominees.

"Elle Fanning, *All the Bright Places* .“ Maggie squeezes the edge of her couch as they read name, after name. She know she's holding her breath, and consciously forces herself to breathe. "Brooklynn Prince, Princess."

There's only name left to be announced, and her heart lives in her throat as the presenters prepare to say it.
“And Meryl Streep for *Come What May*. Those are all our Best Actress nominees.”

Maggie swears she feels the sting in her skin as her heart falls and shatters, shards flying in every direction.

Her name is not there.

Chapter End Notes

The long awaited Golden Globes are here. We'd love to hear your thoughts about it all! Leave us a comment below, or you can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meanstoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We'd love to talk to you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Odero si potero, si non, invitus amabo: I will hate if I can, if not, I will love against my will

in mourning  
@maggiesxwyers

can’t wait to wake up tomorrow to maggie sawyer golden globes winner, oscar nominee, and soon to be oscar winner too

1/22/18, 11:49 PM

15 Retweets  38 Likes

in mourning  
@maggiesxwyers

Replying to @maggiesxwyers

well this tweet didn’t go well... everyone please...
well this tweet didn't age well... everyone please respect my privacy while I mourn

[pills rattling]

penny
@sanversdawson

bitch you jinxed her omg

in mourning
@maggiesxwyers

I HAJE YOU
She breathes in, and out. In, and back out.

Maggie briefly thinks as much as her not getting nominated doesn’t seem fair, it’s not fair for her to feel as strongly as she does about it too. She’s been through so much worse, through so much shit.
So why does this make her chest constrict and her lungs feel like they’re going to burst?

She decides she won’t cry over it.

It’d be pointless, senseless, if she shed a single tear because she didn’t get a nomination for an award. She gets to be disappointed, but she shouldn’t act like a little girl about this. She crosses her arms and presses them against herself, as tight as she can against her stomach, and keeps breathing methodically until the burn in her eyes passes.

She emerges to find the rest of the awards have been announced, and the current show is simply a recount of what they just stated. “Oscars 2018, Snubs and Surprises!” the news ticker reads, and Maggie turns off her TV. That’s what happened. She got ‘snubbed’. Or so M’gann would say, and Gabriella, and everyone who saw her arrive on set at the ass crack of dawn and leave late at night, almost every day for months... Maggie isn’t a proud person, she’s not conceited, but she is proud of her work. She busted her ass for The Informant. She thought she had this, at the very least the nomination, in the bag. She won her Golden Globe in the same category, she was convinced she had it. M’gann was too. And Gabriella had made her promise she’d get to be the first one to congratulate her already.

What went wrong? She swallows down the thickness in her throat, and rubs her hand over her face. It’s done, she’s not nominated, and it’s fine. It’s not the end of the goddamned world no matter how much it feels like it. Regardless of the bruises and the all-nighters and -the contract.

M’gann had wanted her to have a steady girlfriend so she’d look great during award season. And it had worked, she’d said it herself. The Golden Globes articles had been a gold mine, and M’gann was sure that even if the movie didn’t get a nod, she would. It only made sense. But it didn’t happen, and now she can’t help but wonder if it was all for nothing.

She was never going to get nominated, had she just been through the small almost-scandal with Emily a few years ago or had she been married to some women and had two kids. It was never about her image, or her values. It was about her choice of partner, it had to be, because it doesn’t make sense. Maggie isn’t one to assume that every person who’s ever treated her wrong did so out of homophobia or misogyny or misguided racism based on her Sicilian, toasted skin—but she can’t find a explanation that fits as much as that one. She would’ve been the first out lesbian nominated.

She would’ve been able to say she left the hellhole that was Blue Springs, Nebraska, and she was out and proud her entire career, and she worked her ass off and was nominated for an Oscar. But that isn’t happening now.

What was the point of everything with Alex? The initial fighting and awkwardness, the hit to their initial friendship and the learning to exist around each other both as women playing a role, playing at being in love in front of cameras and as friends, if it didn’t achieve what it was supposed to? It didn’t help her chances in the least.

She was supposed to think she could beat them at their own game. That she even had a shot.

She runs her fingers through her hair, down to her wet T-shirt—she’d left her shower in a hurry, and dressed without even drying her hair, because she wanted to be in front of the TV on time. The chill of the wet shirt sticking to her back combined with the air conditioning finally pulls her out of her frozen state, and she notices her cellphone is ringing nonstop.

Gabriella.

Maggie reaches for the phone.
“Do you want me to be there?” Is the first thing that her aunt says when she opens the call. “I can be on the next flight over.”

Maggie takes a deep breath, trying to control the desire to cry climbing up her throat. Those first few months with Gabriella, she’d forced herself to keep her emotions on lockdown. She’d gotten good at pretending like she was fine, at folding the pull out couch and showering before Gabriella was even awake because it wasn’t her responsibility to take care of her. She’d become practiced in the art of occupying the least amount of space possible. But then everything happened with Elisa and Gabriella showed her that it was okay to cry, to feel.

She forgets that lesson sometimes, with women she dates or friends she refuses to let closer to her than necessary, and every once in a while she still aids herself with alcohol to really let go...but she’s never forgotten that lesson with Gabriella.

Right now though, she can’t be that little girl crying into her aunt’s chest, and feeling for the first time in her whole life what she’d always hoped to feel with her own mother but never quite did.

“No, Gabriella. It’s fine. It’s just...it’s just an award.” She forces her voice to remain even. “It’s not like someone died.”

“I know,” Gabriella tells her, her voice concerned. “But you really wanted this. Oh, Maggie-”

“It’s fine,” she insists.

“You deserved this. Nobody deserved it more than you. I don’t know what they were thinking! No offense but that little girl is like eight! Who nominates an eight year old?!?”

“Gabriella...it’s fine, really. I’m sure the kid deserved it too.”

“You’ll get a nomination, piccola. You’re going to get there, I know it. I’m sorry, I was so sure you’d get this...M’gann said-”

“I know. We all thought it was a given,” she says. That was her first mistake. “It’s fine, though. I’m fine. Actually, I’ll talk to you later, okay? I want to talk to M’gann about a few things, and I have lines to learn this afternoon.”

Gabriella is silent for a moment. Maggie can see her in her mind’s eye, frowning, the space between her eyebrows folding in the little divot that she called her only decent dimple. (“Because you got them all, kid.”)


“I love you too.”

As soon as she closes the call, her phone is ringing again. It’s M’gann, and Maggie is still running through the words she’d said when they’d first chosen to go through with the contract, and ‘Oscar campaign’ stands out, and she doesn’t want to be angry with her manager, and friend, for something that isn’t her fault.

So she doesn’t answer.

Instead, she makes time by having a glass of orange juice for breakfast, trying to inject some normalcy into the fucking day, and when hurt has given way to anger that she was overlooked so clearly—and it loses its ability to swallow her whole—she makes her way down the stairs of the building.
Six flights of stairs is enough to get her heart rate up, and she goes down them so fast it keeps her attention occupied. Maggie think she should probably hit the gym.

She makes her way to the apartment mailboxes, intent on focusing on bills to be paid and checks to be made. That’s normal, and she needs to treat today with normalcy—as opposed to bending under the weight of the disappointment that threatens to crush her. She just needs to keep moving until the feeling that something she’s been working towards for a decade was ripped from her—was never hers in the first place. She just-

“Maggie!”

Maggie turns around only to meet Alex’s eyes, that look at her in much the same way she imagines Gabriella or M’gann’s would.

“Hey, Danvers.”

“Hi. I saw the nominations. That-”

“It’s fine-”

“That was fucking bullshit.”

Maggie’s eyes pop open, and her lips break out in a half smile against her own volition.

“Language,” she chides Alex, marvelling at how a few curses have already done more to lift her mood that running down 6 flights of stairs.

“How the hell could you not have gotten nominated?!” Alex exclaims. “You won the Globe, it’s almost a prerequisite at this point.” Maggie’s smiles fades. The reminder that they all thought she had it in the bag already is too raw.

“Well, the Academy didn’t think so.”

“That was bullshit,” Alex insists. Maggie is amused at how determined Alex looks, but at the end of the day, she’s a creature of habit, and her often-followed gut feeling is telling her she needs to be alone.

“I -huh. I have stuff to do at my apartment so…”

“Oh, sure. Sure.” Alex presses her lips together, and Maggie makes quick work of grabbing her mail.

“I’ll let you get back to your things,” she says, waving a hand at Alex’s outfit—she’s wearing running shoes and leggings. Alex nods, and Maggie turns around, quickly retreating back upstairs.

But before she can get very far, a warm hand hooks her wrist with one of her fingers, and Maggie nearly shudders at how delicate the touch is. She looks back, and meets Alex’s eyes. She feels breakable this morning, and Alex is touching her like she’s made of glass.

“You really deserved it, Maggie. Everyone knows that.”

“Thanks,” she says, and damns herself when the soft understanding in the dark hazel eyes of the person she’s come to consider her partner, in a way, for the past few months, makes her throat feel tight.

She climbs up the stairs back to her apartment two at a time.
Alex’s feet pound out a steady rhythm on the running trail, matching her heartbeat.

Her lungs seem to work overtime to absorb more oxygen, and she can almost feel her heart rate increase in turn to pump that oxygen through her blood. This is what running does for her. It grounds her. She never feels as in control of her body, apart from maybe when she’s acting, in the thick of an emotional scene. Her breath comes out at a measured pace as sweat rolls down her neck, drenching the short hairs at the base of her neck.

It’s a cloudy, cold day—made even more so by the tree branches hanging over the path and filtering out the sky—but she stopped feeling the cold during her 4th lap around the Reservoir Loop, and she’s clocked three more laps since then.

Tchaikovsky’s Overture 1812, Op. 49 rings in her ears as the flourishing climax of the song reaches its peaks and the cannons go off in the background.

People always do a double take when she tells them she likes exercising to orchestra music and original movie scores. It’s not information that many are privy too, but the little clique of girls who had adopted her back in LA seemed to think it was strange. It is a bit unorthodox, she supposes, a full orchestra blaring in your ears. But she thinks it can be just as motivational as whatever it is other people listen to. Like the top 100 stuff that Natalie and her other ‘friends’ back in LA liked. The music currently blaring in her ears is what she grew up listening to too, and it reminds her of her dad.

As a filmmaker, he’d always had an added appreciation for movie scores—often performed by a philharmonic orchestra—that he passed down to her. She can still clearly recall many a ‘the floor is lava’ games played in their living room set to the Star Wars theme wherein she was transformed from a 5-year-old enthusiastically jumping from furniture to furniture into a rebel pilot dodging enemy fire from the Empire. She’s older now, and the floor isn’t lava—although in her career she has had instances where it felt like she was tightrope walking over a lava pit all the same—but her choice of music hasn’t changed.

In her 8th lap, Alex starts slowing down, beginning her cool down period.

She hadn’t particularly wanted to jog this morning, but Matt insisted she needed to make sure she was back in tip top form now that shooting resumed, and it wasn’t like she’d actually gone to the gym during their break. Nightingale is in the back half of the season now, and Claire—as her naivete slowly wears off in the remaining episodes—will be in more action scenes, which Alex loves. It’s why she was excited to sign up for the show in the first place, to play the badass with big guns. Claire’s big scenes are still with Blake, of course, but the prospect of practicing fight choreography with Maggie is actually a bonus.

She hasn’t gotten her boxing match with Maggie just yet, but a choreographed side-by-side fight should be almost as fun. If it was any other way, she’d take advantage of having found Maggie out of her apartment to pitch the idea—but Maggie probably isn’t in the mood to box right now. That is,
unless some of the Academy members are on the other side. At least that’s what Alex would feel like doing if she was in her place.

She’s not sure about Maggie. Especially since she didn’t even seem to be angry this morning at the mailboxes, she just seemed sad—and resigned. Alex felt a stab of hurt at seeing her like that, and it fueled her own unexpectedly fiery anger at the award committee for doing that to her, for painting that small, quiet expression on a face made for smiling. They’d snubbed her, plain and simple. Kara had woken her up with a barrage of texts saying just that.

Alex had managed to get one half smile out of Maggie this morning—with a small dimple in her left cheek that had somehow looked more sad than anything—but it’d faded as quickly as it’d come after Alex’s outburst. Maggie was probably just smiling at her big mouth, prone to blurt out things she shouldn’t—a trait she still hasn’t fully broken despite her decade plus in a business where that type of thing could end her career. She’d bulldozed on after that, taking the upturn of lips as a good sign, only to watch it fade at her reminder that it was practically unheard of for an actor to be nominated for Golden Globe, but then skipped over for the Oscar in the same category.

It really is bullshit; her own dad was nominated for and won the Golden Globe for Best Director, and then went on to do the same with the Oscars. Maggie deserved that too.

She’s by far the best actor Alex has had the privilege of going toe to toe with, and Alex can see how her own acting is elevated in scenes with her. She’s had a front row seat to how hard she works on Nightingale too, and Alex is sure she worked even harder in The Informant. The whole thing was bullshit.

Maggie hadn’t looked any better as she’d gone back up to her apartment—her presence diminished and that innate air of confidence she exuded gone—and the lingering last look she’d given Alex stayed with her through her run, pushing its way to the forefront of her mind.

Maggie was usually so tough, and now she looked so...vulnerable.

And Alex can’t stop thinking about what to do.

She doesn’t know what to distract herself with anymore.

If Maggie has something she hates about herself, and she has a few things, it’s the fact that she can’t let things go. She needs to chase something down until its inevitable end, needs to know why things happen, especially when it concerns herself and why she wasn’t good enough for something. As a kid, she used to ask herself why her parents hadn’t...just loved her enough, and as an actress she’d only traded the familiar thorn filled sentence towards every project where she wasn’t chosen, every casting where she didn’t get a callback.

Awards that everyone was so sure she’d be nominated for, that she never got anywhere close to.

She doesn’t want to think about any of it now.
She hates herself a little for the way her brain knows exactly how to distract her, how to keep her neurons busy and engaged and firing away so she doesn’t think about her own shit. She gravitates towards her laptop.

As she pulls up Google, she feels just as dirty as she did when she was 15 and discovered porn for the first time. Her eyes unable to look away or stop watching as she found something that held her attention, part curiosity and part taboo. This is some of both. She already invaded Gabriella’s privacy (and her aunt doesn't know about that one yet) and this isn't different. She's aware of it.

She has a fucking problem because it doesn't make her stop.

She scrolls down the page to an article she hasn't read, written a few days after Jeremiah Danvers' death, the morning of his funeral. Paparazzi pics of a younger Alex dressed in black stare back at her—and that's too much. Maggie exits the page. And then looks for another one, without pictures.

She can't imagine going through something like what Alex did and never talking about it. It’s some level of fucked up that she found out without giving Alex the chance to tell her herself.
Her legs settle into walk as her jog comes to an end, and she finds now that she’s glad she took the run, if only because it cleared her mind, and gave her an idea. She should do something to cheer Maggie up. That’s what friends do, and she certainly counts Maggie as her friend now—and hopes the feeling is mutual.

She gives it some thought as she briskly walks through the cold streets in the direction of their apartment building. She quickly goes over things she knows Maggie likes doing in her head. She likes taking care of her bonsai, but that’s not really a group activity and Alex can’t see it being especially fun either. Knowing her luck, too, she’d be liable to ruin the miniature tree, which would just make Maggie feel worse. She enjoys a good scotch, but a strong scotch doesn’t seem like the best route to take after a disappointment, and it’d only have a temporary effect that would fade quickly come the harsh light of morning. She has plenty of experience with that. Maggie absolutely loves her aunt’s tiramisu. At their first meeting at La Nuvola Bianca last year (and Alex’s steps
falter for a millisecond at the startling realization that it’s been 6 months since then) she’d taken her time savoring each bite with a small sigh or moan of appreciation afterwards, that had embarrassed Alex at the time. But her aunt isn’t in New York City anymore, which she hadn’t even known until Maggie told her, so bringing her tiramisu might just remind her of that fact. Maggie likes the color pink, despite her continued insistence that the pink apparel and accessories she sports are, in fact, magenta (which is...pink). Alex could buy her something pink from Victoria’s Secret, but she immediately cringes at the mental image of herself walking into the store, surrounded by lingerie, to buy a gift for her co-star, and the option is quickly shelved. She probably likes the theater, and they are in the home of broadway, but snagging good last minute tickets the day of the show might not be doable, even given her celebrity status. And she wants to do something today to cheer her up, not in three weeks.

That leaves...well, Alex isn’t sure. She still knows far less about Maggie than she’d like, but she respects her right to privacy—Alex is already intruding enough as it is with the contract, though Maggie did agree to the intrusion. Her list of things she knows Maggie likes at an end, Alex moves onto the next best thing: a generic list of fun activities.

There’s bowling at Chelsea Pier, which would be fun if only to see which of them would win. Karaoke, that’s another thing people like to do, and there are karaoke places liberally littered throughout the city—her singing skills are a bit rusty, but she knows she could still belt out a great rendition of “Breathe 2 AM,” though it’s such an old song by now she’s not even sure it’d be an option. She passed a pinball bar one day while on her morning coffee run, that could be fun. She also knows there’s a vibrant paintball industry in NYC, which she’s actually been dying to partake in herself, but she just hasn’t had the time. It seems a bit more aggressive than what Alex is aiming for though, however, the idea is good—she stores it away for future use. Maggie might not feel like going out, Alex thinks suddenly, and that leaves only the tried and true method of eating your feelings away with some nice, greasy junk food. Pizza.

Pizza and beer could be good. She could just...show up at Maggie’s with the food, and then move on from there. To what, she doesn’t know. Her plan isn’t as solid as she’d like.

But if it eased that expression on Maggie’s face, at least it’d be a good a start.

Her phone rings, and Maggie jumps.

She grabs it and slides the green icon across her screen by rote, before she remembers she’s trying to avoid a conversation with M’gann. It only pushes the Oscar nominations of that morning all the more painfully to the forefront of her mind. And with those, the same thoughts she’s been trying to avoid. What was all this for? She’s not nominated so what was her stupid campaign and insane PR contract for? She’d never wanted to lie, but she did so convinced there’d be a huge payoff, the nomination or even win she’d always been chasing after.

“Maggie, I can hear you. I know you’re there.”
She sighs. “Hey, M’gann”

“How’re you holding up?”

“I’m fine.”

“You don’t sound fine.”

“Well, what do you want me to sound like? I just wasted a half a year of my life on the contract, all the work in the movie was for nothing-”

“Maggie.” M’gann sounds empathetic, but firm. The exact same reasons Maggie had chose her when she was just starting out. Because she looked at her and didn't see a fragile little girl with stars on her eyes, but a hard working woman ready to give whatever it took. M’gann was ready to demand it. Maggie can hear her do it now. “Are you hearing yourself?”

Maggie shakes her head. “What was the contract for? You wanted it for my Oscars campaign, and I’m not nominated.”

“I wanted it for award season, and yeah, the Oscars were a part of that, but Maggie, this has been amazing for your public image. Even without a nomination, you’ve never had as much positive news at the same time on as many different publications.”

“And Anthony paid for most of them.”

“He certainly didn’t pay for the twitter trends, nor did he pay for the uptick in viewers for the show. I know you feel terrible, but don’t kick yourself down further and kid yourself into thinking you’ve wasted anything. You made a damn good movie, too. And I don’t know a Maggie Sawyer that feels bad about working hard.”

“I don’t,” Maggie admits. Award or no award, she had given _The Informant_ her all. It was—it is—her first film as a lead. She still remembers the night of the premiere, and no- nothing could have topped it.

“Thought so,” Mg’ann tells her, and then hums. “Have you talked to Gabriella?”

“Yes, of course,” Maggie says, frowning at the tone of M’gann’ voice. “What does it matter?”

“I know your M.O. Maggie,” she says simply. “You close up and lock it away and -”

“I dont need a therapy session, M’gann,” she says firmly, and instantly feels guilty about her outburst. M’gann is in her corner. She always has been. She’s just on edge. “I’m sorry. I just…”

Mgann sighs. Maggie hears the resigned little sound over the line, and feels like a scolded child without her ever saying a word. She’s acting like one all the same.

“Get some rest, eat something,” Mgann tells her finally. “Feel better.” It’s so genuine that it makes her feel even worse than a second ago. M’gann is disappointed too, Maggie has to remember that. They were both banking on her being nominated, and it would’ve been big for M’gann’s own career too.

“Call me when you do, okay?”

“Yeah, okay,” Maggie replies, tone softer.

“Goodbye.”
Maggie sits back down in her couch, her eyes trailing over the images from the crash that were so readily available on Google images.

She hates that she can’t stop looking, and she can only imagine how hard it must be for Alex to know that those exist. She went through some shit as a kid, nothing as bad as this, but she at least has the comfort that there are no photos.

Alex isn’t that luck-

“Maggie?!”

She slams her laptop closed. A few knocks follow the initial exclamation, and hot guilt floods her at being caught red handed, even if Alex didn't know she was more or less looking into her. (More, definitely more.)

She gets up from her couch and covers the distance between it and her front door.

She looks into the peephole. “Danvers?”

“The one and only.” Alex’s smiling face looks back up at her, and Maggie opens the door. “Brought pizza,” Alex says simply, holding up two boxes and a six-pack of beer.

Maggie frowns, even as a small smile sneaks onto her face.

"Pizza and beer?” she asks. “Did you get your wires crossed, Danvers? I don't really have anything to celebrate today.”

“No,” Alex says, at her rebuttal. “I just thought we could...hang out.”

Maggie hums.

“Break both of our diets you mean,” she points out, thinking of her next gym session already. She was proud of how strong her body was. And she wasn’t opposed to eating crap every once in a while, but she’d certainly developed a taste for the clean, vegan options LA had offered her in high school and college.

“That, too. One of these is all veggies and fake cheese. I know you’re a vegan.”

Maggie smiles, and grabs the beer as she ushers Alex inside.

“I’m not actually,” she corrects the other woman.

The expression on her face makes Maggie smile to herself.

“Then why do they keep giving us vegan ice cream on set? They said you asked for it…”

Maggie shrugs. “I like the taste.”

Alex stares.

“That’s...really fucking weird, Sawyer.”

Maggie laughs.

She looks for a pair of plates in her kitchen as Alex opens the pizza boxes, letting her know that she’s stuck with the vegan pizza anyways. Maybe this is what she needs.
“Wanna talk about it?” Alex asks, when their plates are clean save for the pizza borders littering Maggie’s plate. Apparently, it wasn’t worth eating them since they had nothing on top, according to the woman.

“Huh?” Maggie looks up, her face open and calm and Alex feels bad for bringing it up. Realization dawns on her face. "The Oscars, you mean.”

Alex nods.

Maggie shakes her head, and takes a drink of her beer. They like the same kind.

“It’s done. It’s...whatever.”

“Well...if you ever want to talk, I’m here. I’m right downstairs, actually.” That gets Maggie to smile.

“I feel I’m climbing the walls at this point, Danvers. My aunt is worried about me, my manager is giving me space. And I’m…” Maggie shrugs, and Alex wonders if the woman ever spells out how she feels, if she ever puts a name to those feelings like Kara so easily does. She wants to hug Maggie, because she can imagine the disappointment she’s feeling, has felt similarly a dozen times over. But she can’t.

“Let’s go out,” Alex says, because that’s something she \textit{can} do.

Maggie gives her a look.

“Where?”

Alex is at a loss. There’s a thousand and one places in this city, but she doesn’t know where she’d take Maggie now that she’s half been given the chance. Maggie seems to notice, and she raises her eyebrow in a challenging smirk.

“Actually, I think I know a place.”

They take the subway there.

Maggie doesn't tell her where they’re going, but she tells Alex to bundle up, and 20 minutes later as they walk towards the subway station together, she understands why. They walk to the nearest
station through slushy sidewalks, and they ride the subway to Brooklyn.

Alex must admit that she’d never been to the city. It sounded slightly dangerous to her ears, a place where someone who was obviously a tourist might get mugged. But Maggie, her blue beanie pulled low over her forehead and her hands deep inside a black winter coat, looks as comfortable as any New Yorker. Alex trusts her.

That trust wavers just a tad when Maggie guides them into a lonely, graffitied part of town, leaving behind the cobblestone streets and the brick houses, and exchanging them for a small place with a metal door, and tattooed men loitering outside.

“Dollywood,” Maggie says, when a metal slab is pulled in the door and a pair of dark eyes look out. Alex raises her eyebrows. The door opens a second later.

“A speakeasy, almost, isn't it?” Maggie asks, turning around.

“Alcohol is legal,” Alex says, matter of fact. Maggie chuckles.

They leave their coats on a booth at the back, and no sooner is her coat is down than Maggie challenges her to a game of darts. Alex readily accepts. Maggie wipes the floor with her. In Alex’s defense—she’d had two beers earlier, and the cold must have somehow exacerbated the effects of the alcohol, because she’s usually a great aim. Maggie sticks her tongue out in concentration every time she throws, and Alex looks away.

“Pool, next?” she offers, and Maggie turns back at her with a twinkle in her eyes.

It’s Alex’s game.

She takes off her sweater, standing in the warm bar in only a tank top, and she cracks her knuckles in a way the she knows she can afford. She won’t be losing tonight. Maggie laughs, until she sinks the first 2 balls. Then her tongue comes out again in concentration, but it doesn’t help her any. She’s not bad, exactly. Alex is just excellent, and Maggie is...not.

But she’s fun when she gets exasperated, and the minute she takes out a $20 dollar bill and offers Alex to place bets on it, the game actually gets started. With her so called “encouragement” on the table, she improves marginally, but she’s not match for Alex.

4 games later and $80 dollars richer, Alex finally walks back to their table with two beers, and a crick in her back that she wouldn’t change for the world.

“Where did you learn to play like that?” Maggie asks, and Alex smiles wistfully.

“We had a pool table in the basement. My dad liked it. He taught me how to play. He taught Kara, too, but much like you-” she takes a sip of her beer for effect, “she was hopeless.”

“Low blow, Danvers. And after you’ve left me in the street, too.”

Alex snorts. “I’ve seen your loft, you’ll be fine.”

Maggie laughs. It dims after a minute, and Alex is determined not to let that smile slip off her face, so she changes the subject.

“Wanna order something?” she asks. “What do they serve here?”

“That’s a great question,” Maggie says. “I’ve only seen the cocktails menu, so... Wanna try this
out?"

“If I get food poisoning and have to miss work you’re taking the blame.”

“Cross my heart,” Maggie promises, before getting up and getting them both menus.

They end up ordering something called ‘The Mushroom Monstrosity’, and Maggie looks entirely too excited to try for someone who’d initially balked at the offer of pizza.

It’s a damn good burger. Alex is already thinking about inviting Kara here so she can demolish one on her own, or maybe bring J’onn the next time he visits her. Maybe Maggie could tag along. She takes another big greasy bite, her mouth overflowing with mushrooms, bacon, lettuce, and fried onion rings, not to mention the thick meat the burger boasts off. She realizes if her mother was there she’d chide her for eating the way she is, but Maggie isn’t any better, and Alex...embraces it. Nobody is pointing a camera at her. Nobody in this seedy bar in the far side of Brooklyn cares about her, or about Maggie, and she has no reason to pretend here.

She notes Maggie’s eyes wander off outside halfway through the meal, her face taking on the same expression she had that morning by the mailboxes, and Alex takes out her cellphone on a whim.

She types but a few words, before the barrage of articles start to appear.

“Behold Maggie Sawyer, leaping, swinging, and punching her way through The Informant, the spy movie that has topped quite a few Bond ones, if you’re man enough to admit it,” she reads out loud.

Maggie looks up at her at once, with a curious frown on her face.

Alex clicks elsewhere.

“Italian-american actress and model Maggie Sawyer is somehow the perfect blend of superbabe-in-the-woods innocence and mouthiness.” Alex looks up. “Okay, that one is kind of weird.”

Maggie smiles. “What are you doing?”

“I’m just showing you, that regardless of what a bunch of old men were thinking—although they clearly weren’t thinking when they didn’t nominate you—people love you. They love your work.”

Maggie’s smile softens, and she looks at Alex in a way that makes her look down and click on another article.

“Maggie Sawyer’s emotional, raw performance as a girl living in a psych ward is nothing short of amazing, this critic is very seldom awed but she is now.”

She thinks she sees a blush tint Maggie’s cheeks, but she doesn’t stop. Even if it embarrasses her, even if she’s not used to or doesn’t like people praising her success to her face—she deserves it.

“Maggie Sawyer, Rosewood Street,” she reads. “Her lack of experience doesn’t show on screen. Her character adds a fresh, magnetic energy to the show.” Alex laughs. “What is this picture?”

“Let me see,” Maggie demands, and Alex turns her phone over. Maggie groans. Alex only chuckles louder at the ridiculous pose.

“Hey, it’s fine you were like twelve in this picture. We all have bad childhood photos.”

Maggie meets her eyes. “I was eighteen.”
“Oh.” Alex frowns for a beat. “Well, you’ll look amazing when you’re thirty-seven.”

Maggie acknowledges her words with a fry thrown her way, and between chuckles they go back to her meals.

And if they accidentally chew with their mouths open, it’s because they know nobody is watching.

The streets of Manhattan are freezing in the dead of night, the corners of the sidewalks stacked with tiny mountains of brown snow and ice. Alex tucked her scarf over her nose and mouth a while ago, but Maggie breaths in the freezing air, nothing to protect her face but a blue beanie pulled over
her forehead. Her nose has gone red, but apart from her hands shoved deep inside her pockets, she
doesn’t seem to be bothered.

Alex makes a mental note to find out just how cold Nebraska gets in the winter, because she can’t
fathom anyone who would enjoy this weather, regardless of where they grew up.

She forces herself to speed up when she’s left seeing the back of Maggie’s head, brown waves
bouncing with her steps. She falls into step beside her.

“Can’t keep up, Danvers?” Maggie asks, her breath coming out in white puffs.

Alex shakes her head. She’d dignify her words with an answer, but she doesn’t want to take the
scarf away.

They turn on their street, and everything goes even quieter, calmer. There are no cars, somehow,
something she’s never seen in Manhattan. A taxi speeds by as if to shut her up, and Alex chuckles
inwards. She’ll never forget the city she’s in.

“Wanna go up for a nightcap?” Maggie asks, and Alex realizes they’re in front of their building.
They walk up the few steps toward the front door.

“I think we live in the same building,” Alex says, ducking her head and walking inside when
Maggie holds the door open for her. The air is gloriously warm inside.

“You know what I mean, want to come up to my loft?” Maggie asks. “Hmm. I like saying that. My
loft. The loft.”

Alex smiles as she stares at Maggie. The couple of beers they had at the bar seem to have had some
effect on her, and she’s as loose and mellow as Alex has ever seen her. It’s lovely to watch.

“I’d love to,” she tells her.

They climb the stairs quietly, and it’s only 6 floors, but it never occurred to Alex to call for the
elevator. She’s had more fun with Maggie tonight than she can ever remember having with anyone
apart from Kara, in ages. Maybe since the earlier, better days of college. She doesn’t want the night
to end just yet.

They pass Alex’s floor, and she follows Maggie as she climbs the steps to the last floor of the
building—technically. There are 7 floors, but that’s only because the apartments on the sixth floor
have two levels. (And Alex remembers the stab of bitterness she felt when she was told one of
those lofts wouldn’t be hers.)

“My lovely agent sent me a bottle of whisky for my last birthday,” Maggie informs her, as she
opens the door. “I’ve been looking for a good occasion to open it.” Her voice taking on a hint of
wistfulness, and Alex wonders if she’d wanted to open it when she got nominated for an Oscar.

She follows Maggie into the large apartment.

She looks around while she retrieves the bottle of alcohol, staring up at the long beams and the
high ceiling in the middle of the step. The second floor is almost one large inside balcony, and
Alex is curious about the space. She takes a seat on the wide breakfast island separating the
kitchen from the living room.

Maggie walks back to her, a black box in her hands.
When she’s close enough, Alex reads it. This is not a Luxury Whisky, the box reads. Maggie pulls out a dark caramel bottle from it.

Maggie stares at the box.

“79% Glen Ord sherry butt,” she reads. “17% grain Whisky…100% expensive.”

Alex snorts, the words sounding far funnier to her ears than they probably actually are.

Maggie serves them both two fingers, and Alex gets up from her place at the breakfast island and walks around her apartment, eyeing the high ceilings and the second floor balcony on three sides of the room. The fourth, is the wall facing the main street, although calling it a wall is being generous. It’s just floor to ceiling windows, one after the other.

Alex wonders how Maggie can live like that. She has curtains in her own apartment.

“Isn’t it weird how anybody can stare into your apartment and see what you’re doing?” she asks, and then takes a sip of the whisky. It’s good, heady, the perfect mix between bitter and sweet.

“One way glass, Danvers,” Maggie says. Alex can hear the smile in her voice, can imagine the dimple playing on her cheeks. “I can stare at them all day, but they can’t look back at me.”

Maggie goes quiet for a moment, now beside her, staring out into the streets below, and Alex thinks about what she just said. It seems lonely, somehow, being able to watch the world pass by without it knowing you’re there.

The quiet is broken with Maggie’s snort. “I’m not an exhibitionist.”

Alex smiles, but she doesn’t let go of her words just yet. She’s known Maggie for months now, and she hasn’t heard her talk about her friends. Alex hasn’t talked about hers, either. She wonders briefly if that’s because they’re even more similar to each other than she thought, and they both just...don’t have any. Any worthwhile ones, at least.

Alex wonders if maybe they could be that for each other.

“Should I refill that?” Maggie asks, breaking Alex out of her head, and Alex nods. Maggie refills her glass, and Alex takes a thoughtful sip as her mind zones in on something.

They had fun tonight, a lot of fun.

And for the first time, it’s not going to be on the papers the next day.

Alex could get used to that.

January turns into February without much fanfare.
The weather remains in the freezing range, the skies overcast and cloudy with the sun trying to fight its way through. The wind still blows bitterly, exacerbating the chilled air and battering the people below as they commute through the city. Even Maggie begins to be slightly bothered by the length of the winter, if only for the scenes she has to film where she can’t afford to be wearing appropriate clothing.

The city hums along regardless of the passage of time.

Shooting for Nightingale resumed last week, and it’s taken until their second week for the crew and cast to acclimate to set life—for the show to return to a well oiled machine. Maggie’s body definitely protested upon returning to her regular 4:45 AM mornings, but it’s nice to see everybody regularly again too. Mary and Louise had outrageous holiday stories featuring their ridiculously large families they’d regaled her with her first day back. Jeff had pictures of his grandkids to show her, his face filled with pride as he showed off his daughter’s newest baby girl. Gabriel greeted her with cries of ‘golden girl’ and double cheek kisses, twice. She and Alex settled back into their rhythm before the break, but with a new feeling to their friendship now.

Maggie feels like they’ve finally built a new, solid foundation in their near constantly shifting, cautious pas de deux—which she attributes to their outing after the Oscar announcements—or lack thereof. She’s actively kept her mind off of that topic, opting to throw herself headfirst into Blake with renewed vigor.

And as the days have passed, the sting has lessened more and more.

Being back at work also means fully resuming the contract duties again. Anthony had been positively ecstatic about their display at the Golden Globes and every article written that mentioned Maggie’s win and who her date for the evening was. His unabated glee capturing all his attention, he’d even allowed them a brief breather their first week back, but as Monday rolled around he returned to his normal, self interested self, somehow even more overbearing. Maggie knows why though. A very important holiday is coming up—one that Anthony put in all caps in the subject of the email he sent this morning: Valentine’s Day.

Maggie’s never had a particular affinity for the manufactured holiday that practically required couples to commit ostentatious public acts to their significant others to prove how much they loved each other. It’s not Maggie’s style, but she’s dated plenty of women who do love it—the dressing up, the fancy dinner, the rented out ballroom filled with rose petals and champagne. She always tried to give the woman she was with the perfect Valentine’s Day, when the cookie cutter holiday came around. And when she hadn’t, the relationship ended shortly after with her girlfriend citing reasons such as emotional unavailability—and often physical, too, with her long hours on set—uncaring, workaholic, player. Sometimes she’d even get a borderline sociopath thrown over the shoulder as the door slammed shut.

This year, she’s not expecting the holiday to be any better than previous years.

For one, there’s the added component of her being legally forced to celebrate it for the world to see. Then there’s the hyper romanticized nature of the holiday itself, and who she’ll be spending it with. She moved past dreading spending time with her co-star months ago. And dread is not the word she’d use to describe the tug in her chest present when she thinks about spending February 14th with Alex, but Valentine’s Day is a big deal. It’ll be their first date truly dripping with built in romanticism and a gravitas exaggerated by corporate America.

In his email, Anthony gave her a list of locations available for the big day. Only one option on the list popped out to her. They would start the night with a dinner at 30 Rockefeller’s Rainbow Room, situated on the 65th floor. Maggie had never been, but she’d read the reviews. A stunning view of
the city as you dined—or so google had informed her. Afterwards, and that was the part that caught Maggie’s attention, they would take a limo to the Empire State Building to finish off the night.

She doesn’t possess any strong feelings for or against the Rainbow Room, although it does have rave reviews so she assumes it’s a great establishment, but visiting the Empire State is definitely something she’d actually enjoy, and it certainly checks all the boxes off for Valentine’s Day.

Although the place is the quintessental—and in this case unoriginal—romantic location made for a When Harry Met Sally moment, there is something to be said for a good old fashioned classic. The Empire State Building is as classic Valentine’s Day and New York as one could get. And it’s beautiful at night from the observatory deck. She’d visited once a few years ago while shooting in the city.

It’d been a punishingly hot August day, her clothes glued to her skin with sweat. She’d had a cold then too, somehow caught in the summer, that combined with the heat left her feeling miserable. As the afternoon had worn on, she’d wandered the city, browsing street markets, popping into smalls shops when she could for a respite from the sun, and ended her day standing in front of the imposing, towering Empire State Building. She’d spontaneously decided to follow the stream of people entering and bought tickets, squeezing her way into the crowded elevator up to the 86th floor. When she’d exited, she was greeted by almost the entire city landscape laid out before her glowing in a variety of shimmering hues, lit up by the rays of the dying sun and set against the tinted sky swirling with purple and pink clouds. She’d maneuvered her way through the crowd of bodies until she was pressed up against the metal barrier, hands clinging to the metal bars as she looked at the view. And that’s how she stayed as the last vestiges of sunlight disappeared at the line of the horizon and the inky dark of night took over.

At night, the city had shone in a different way, lit up this time by the artificial yellow and white lights of the buildings. It was still magical.

It was in that moment Maggie fell in love with New York City. It’s a fond memory of hers, and it’s one she’d enjoy sharing with Alex. Considering the woman hadn’t even been on the Staten Island Ferry before Maggie took her, there’s a good chance she hasn’t lived the full Empire State experience either. Although Alex certainly grew up with the means to do so. When she was there that first time, she saw lots of smiling parents and their children. She could easily see Alex as a young girl with her family visiting, probably rattling off the history of the building’s construction. She was definitely one of those precocious kids—which hasn’t changed—but Maggie wonders how much of her younger self can still be seen today. If what happened...changed Alex. The same way what happened...changed her.

She sighs and pushes the mindless train of thought away for another day. She might as well start planning for Valentine’s Day seeing as how it’s Saturday, meaning she has the free time to do so. Maggie knows what Anthony would want for the big day, the most over the top gag that’d probably make both her and Alex puke at its tackiness. But she’s not sure what Alex would enjoy, and she would like to make sure Alex enjoys the night too. Something in Maggie’s gut tells her she hasn’t had many, if any, great—hell, even decent—February 14ths with a special someone. Her dating history is pretty bare, Maxwell Lord being the only significant guy she can recognize, and he’s a known asshole.

This seems like it will be another first for Alex, and Maggie finds herself trying to strike the right balance between what Anthony wants and what Alex would like.

She grabs her phone from the counter, unplugging it from the charger, and hits the first number in
her favorites.

“Maggie! What’s up? This is a good call, right? Not an ‘oh shit, I accidentally killed someone’ call?” Gabriella pauses to laugh at her own comment, and Maggie can hear the sounds of a restaurant in the background. “I am fully equipped to handle either, but if it is the latter, I’ll have to get back to you later this evening with my full escape to Antarctica with a new identity plan.”

She gives her aunt’s little joke a short laugh—to be polite. Her humor is starting to sound more and more like Chris’.

“Are you working today? I can call back later if you are, it’s not that important.”

“I was working, but someone,” Gabriella coughs lightly, and Maggie knows who she’s talking about, “forced me to take the day off because it’s not healthy to work on the weekends, apparently.”

“Hmm,” Maggie hums. Chris still isn’t her favorite person, but she is glad he’s getting Gabriella to spend more time outside of her job. When La Nuvola Bianca was just starting up, it was necessary for her to be there at least 6 days out of the week, but by now she could probably switch to part time only.

“And that was my short way of saying I’m free, spill the beans, kid.”

“What makes you think there are beans to spill in the first place?” she scoffs.

“Oh Maggie,” Gabriella chuckles. “You have that tone of voice that screams ‘this is important to me, but I’m going to pretend like it’s not just in case it inconveniences the other person.’”

Maggie raises her eyebrows slightly, not enjoying her aunt’s accurate assessment and elects to ignore it. “Anyways. Anthony wants a big extravaganza for Valentine’s Day -“

Gabriella’s low whistle interrupts her. “And you need my help planning out the big day for your special lady friend.”

“I wouldn’t phrase the last part of your sentence that way, but essentially, yes.” She refills her mug with more tea and moves to the dining room table towards her laptop.

“First things first, location?”

“7 PM dinner at the Rainbow Room followed by a trip to the 86th floor of the Empire State Building.”

“Damn, can I come too? A friend of mine went and said the charcuterie was tongue meltingly delicious.”

“Sure,” Maggie replies drily. “You can third wheel the entire night; I’m sure neither Anthony nor Alex will mind and the public will think it’s normal for me to take my aunt on my romantic Valentine’s Day date.”

“Okay, okay, message received,” Maggie swears she can hear Gabriella’s eyes rolling through the phone. “Moving onto the next item on the list, things Alex likes?”

That gives Maggie pause.

The first thing that pops to mind is a good scotch and coffee, but after that it becomes more
difficult. Alex likes spending time with her sister, but that’s not relevant to a romantic holiday. In the mornings, sometimes Maggie will see Alex covertly—to any eye but Maggie’s own—take two blueberry muffins to eat with her daily cup of coffee. The day after it’s rained, Alex will intermittently inhale deeply throughout the day, breathing in the fresh, sharp scent that rain brings. She enjoys physics, Maggie thinks, because only someone who liked the subject would voluntarily choose to read a science magazine, placed as decoration, before the morning table read began. Maggie can’t think of any way the information she’s learned about Alex will help her plan a good Valentine’s Day though.

She knows what Alex doesn’t like, which could also be a starting point. She doesn’t like winter and all that comes with it, early mornings, healthy food, or big public romantic gestures—which is exactly what Anthony has planned.

“Uh, my mind is blanking at the moment, sorry,” she settles for.

“Blanking.” Gabriella sounds skeptical, but thankfully she doesn’t dwell on it. “Flowers. Everybody enjoys those. Show up at the beginning of the date with a bouquet?”

Maggie winces slightly. “That’s pretty cliche. I’m pretty sure I’ve seen it happen a million times on TV. Anthony might even ask me to do that anyways.”

“It is cliche yes,” Gabriella sighs exaggeratedly, “but you’re not giving me much to work with here, Maggie.”

“Sorry.” She matches her aunt’s sigh, but hers is genuine in nature. “I don’t know enough tangible things Alex likes, especially in regards to the romance department. Not that this would have to be that, of course. It’d be a...friendly date, for us. While we act out Anthony’s date.” Gabriella hums, and Maggie keeps going. “She doesn’t actually like big overt gestures—but because of the contract I have to do it—which is why I want to do my best to make the day still somewhat enjoyable for her at least. I know it sounds stupid—”

“It’s not stupid, it’s sweet. But, may I ask,” Gabriella pauses, and the silence lengthens to the point where Maggie is considering asking if she’s still there, but a moment later her aunt’s voice comes through the phone again. “It sounds like King has the night planned, why call me? Just follow what’s written—eat dinner, go to the Empire State—you don’t need to do anything extra. It’s not like you’re actually dating.”

The questions makes Maggie squirm, legs shifting beneath her on the couch, the leather pulling at her bare legs.

That night, at the Christmas party, she hadn’t expected to be Alex’s first mistletoe kiss, but she was, and it got her thinking. Maggie is now fully aware of the weight on her shoulders of being responsible for someone’s big first moments—even if they are only happening because of a PR deal—and she doesn’t want to screw it up. Her first impression of Alex was that she was a prickly, awkward person, but if you managed to get beyond her hard edges, she was a good person. A person who shows up at her door with pizza and beer to cheer her up because she noticed you were down. A friend who buys little gifts as part of a ridiculous gift war and indulges scattered, disjointed late night/early morning ramblings in between takes. She can err on the side of impulsiveness, to her own detriment, and she’s been on the receiving end of her misdirected anger, but she’s also funny (unintentionally at times), sweet, and sincere in everything she does—she can’t help it.

Maggie isn’t sure how to articulate that all to Gabriella, and oddly enough, she doesn’t even want
to. It feels too private, too between her and Alex. But her aunt is still waiting for a response.

“I just want…” Maggie picks at a loose thread on her sock, buying time to formulate the best answer, “a friend to have a good Valentine’s Day, down to every detail. I get the feeling she hasn’t had many.”

“A nice gesture for a friend.” Gabriella hums again on the other line, and Maggie thinks she can hear Chris’s voice in the background. “That simple huh?”

“Mhm, yeah.” Maggie pulls her legs up close to her body and wraps her free arm around her knees. “Simple.”

A drop of sweat rolls down her neck.

Alex quickly swipes it away, looking over at Maggie in the process and wondering how she’s remained sweat free. Maybe her skin also includes sweat preventative measures because the universe decided not only should her skin be down feather soft, smell amazing all the time, and glow when the sun hits it, it should also remain unmarred by rivulets of sweat in the heat too.

Red balloons seem to cover every corner of the pier, the color—a staple of Valentine’s day—only making it feel hotter than it is.

Maggie must feel her gaze glued to her because her eyes swivel over to meet Alex’s, bright and warm as ever. “Something on your mind, Alex?”

“You,” she tells her honestly, her eyes roving over the jean shorts she’s wearing, tight and cut off just below her ass.

“And what are you thinking about me?” Maggie asks cheekily, and Alex grabs her by the waist and pulls her closer to her body.

“How fucking amazing you look right now,” she tells her roughly, not recognizing her tone of voice. Maggie makes her feel like this, so overwhelmed, so...consumed. Alex doesn’t have a care in the world for everyone around them, the faceless strangers going about their day looking like nothing but blurs around them.

“Remember what King told us,” Maggie whispers, stepping closer to her, and Alex nods. What King told them. She brings Maggie closer by the lapel of her leather jacket and then she’s kissing her, taking Maggie’s lips between her own.

King’s orders.

She has to kiss Maggie. She has to...feel how small yet strong her lithe body is beneath her palms, the leather jacket doing nothing to hide how delicate the curve of her small waist is, and how good her hips feel when she lays her hands over them, her thumbs brushing her hip bones. Maggie sighs
against her, pressing herself even closer, her tongue entering her mouth.

Alex opens her mouth, trying to devour her, feeling her tongue tickle and play with her own, wet and hot, so, so hot inside her mouth.

Alex lets her fingers trail downwards, over the curve of Maggie’s ass, and thanks God or the devil or whoever is listening that the weather is so warm, and Maggie is wearing jean shorts that cut off just below her ass. It’s so easy to let her hands trail downwards, so good to just let her fingers sneak below the hem of her pants when Maggie moans her assent against her mouth and then dip beneath her underwe-

Alex wakes up to a knocking in her door.

She’s sweating, the heater blasting hot air throughout the room, and Alex curses New York’s weather for changing so swiftly while she was asleep.

A quick look at her alarm clock let’s her know it’s 10am. Maybe it’s on her.

She’s not one to sleep in, and she finds she hates it this morning, as her heart still beats fast and hard with the remnants of a dream that has all but faded from her conscience. Her entire body seems to...pulsate with it, though, and she doesn’t like the hot rush over every inch of her skin. She needs to turn her heater down.

There’s another knock on her door, and Alex realizes what woke her up in the first place.

She throws on a robe and makes her way towards the door. She opens it only to find a delivery guy, holding a humongous bouquet of red roses. She knows they’re from ‘Maggie’, King had given her orders regarding those already last night.

She signs for the cheesy bouquet and then she’s quick to bring it inside, and lay it on her table, taking a quick picture. The sooner she’s done with it, the sooner she can take a shower and wash the bothersome sweat off herself.

She post the picture, and drops her robe on the way towards the bathroom.
Apparently, King thinks Valentine’s Day is so important that both she and Maggie get the day off.
It’s a day she would normally spend working from dawn to sunset, and then afterwards returning home to melt into the couch. As it is, she doesn’t have anything planned to occupy the 11 or so hours until her dinner with Maggie.

The shower shocked her out of any remnants of sleepiness—she’s taken to starting her showers off cold to wake her up in the mornings, and then turning the knob around to hot once sufficiently alert—and once clear, her mind had turned to the dinner tonight.

Alex isn’t a fan of Valentine’s Day.

She’s never had a good one, or even been on a date for it. She doesn’t count the little chocolates her parents gave her as a little kid, or the outings they planned as a family once Kara came. Valentine’s day was supposed to be about love, romantic love, and Alex had never had that on the date. The closest she came to it was with her college boyfriend, but they broke up two weeks before the holiday. There was one other time she hooked up with a man she can’t remember now, an extra from Body of Medicine who had listened to her talk about her lines instead of asking for a selfie. It was as unsatisfying as it sounded. She’d felt dirty once he left, like a conquest, like something he would brag about having to his friends—and the clearest memory she has of the night is accidentally falling asleep in the bathtub afterwards.

As far back as she can remember, most of her February 14ths were spent studying when she was still in school, and then working after she left school. It’s never been a special day for her. Unlike Kara, she doesn’t attach unrealistic visions of romance and dashing men sweeping her off her feet to it. It’s simply...just another passing day. But this year it isn’t.

It’s one of the most important dates for the contract, as King has been keen to remind them as he’d fluttered around them all week like a fucking mosquito.

Dinner at the Rainbow Room followed by the Empire State Building—neither of which she’s actually been to, but she’s heard of them both. Alex has just spent most of her 26 years on the west coast. Stanford was there, and all her acting roles had been shot in California, too. She knows from old photos that she visited New York with her parents to see a Broadway show back when she was little, and it was just the three of them. But beyond the recollections of the cold weather and accidentally stepping in a large puddle—ruining her cotton blue tights—the memory of it is vague. And since then, she has visited a few more times, keyword being visited; she never stayed long.

Years later, finding herself living here has been a bit of a culture shock. But Nightingale has left her either too busy or tired to engage in much sightseeing in NYC beyond checking out the nearby coffee shops. Actually, now that she thinks about it, her introduction to the city has been largely at Maggie’s hands, or besides her.

Skating at Rockefeller—sober—riding the Staten Island Ferry, and now their impending Empire State excursion. (Technically, King had a hand in it too given that all of those activities were due to the contract, but she doesn’t want to give him any credit.) It’s been...nice to see New York through Maggie’s eyes. Her rose tinted view of the city has managed to bleed into Alex’s periphery, making her notice and appreciate small things that never registered in her brain before.

People don’t try to make small talk with her here, unlike in LA, they go about their business briskly and with a purpose, which Alex appreciates. As an extension of that, they don’t make awkward eye contact either. The other day she passed an old couple, in their pajamas, having a heated fight in the middle of the street and no one had even given them a second glance. New Yorkers mind their own business (largely because they don’t care about other people’s shit, she supposes). But still, it’s nice.
The prospect of experiencing more of the city isn’t disagreeable. The fact that she’ll be spending it with Maggie makes it something to look forward to—which catches her off guard.

Alex is actually excited to celebrate the holiday with Maggie, even if it’s only for the contract. She thinks it might be fun. She and Maggie have been making the best of their scheduled outings, to a point where Alex barely notices the cameras, and spending Valentine’s Day with Maggie—with a friend—although not the purpose of the holiday, could shape up to be one the best ones yet.

But the dinner is still hours away.

Her temporarily forgotten coffee is cold as she sips it, eyes wandering her apartment for something to do. She could clean. Her mantle is a bit dusty, and the counter could use a good scrub.

J’onn put together a list of potential assistants for her that he’d already personally interviewed, she should probably get around to picking one. Inviting someone unknown into her life who’d be privy to intimate knowledge about herself isn’t something Alex seeks, but it is necessary, especially now that her career does appear to be recovering.

She grabs her phone, unlocking it and opening PDF attachment J’onn sent her of names, and walks towards her couch. She settles into the cushions and grabs a nearby notebook—she was a notorious note taker in college, or doodler depending on how interesting the subject was.

The hum of the television and the monotony of names scrolling past her eyes helps quiet her mind, but she can still feel thoughts of tonight’s dinner trying to push their way to the forefront.

Alex waits just inside the door, saving herself from the cold outside.

The short dress she’s wearing has a cutout on the middle of her breast bone, and she doesn’t need to be exposed to the New York winter dressed like this.

Her watch lets her know it’s 6:30 PM. Maggie said a car should be arriving for her just about now. Alex checks her message again, short and sweet—like the woman herself. A police siren goes off in the distance, and the sidewalk outside the building is a steady stream of people rushing home, or perhaps off to fancy Valentine’s dates like she is.

It’s a normal Thursday, except it’s not. It’s Valentine’s day, and the excitement she felt earlier in the day has mixed with a fluttery nervousness now, making her restless.

She shifts slightly from her position leaned against the wall, the blue fabric of her dress rising slightly on her leg. Alex gives herself another once over. Maggie just told her to wear something nice, but she’s not sure if her version of that word matches what Maggie wants. The dress was one she’d had sent over from LA, and it’s one of the few pieces of her wardrobe not tainted by alcohol and sweaty clubs. She didn’t want tonight tinged negatively in any way. For some reason, it’s important to her that this outing be a success—for both of them, for their relationship -their fake relationship.

Shiny polished shoes enter her vision, and she looks up.

“Miss Danvers,” the man bows slightly and gestures towards the entrance, “your car awaits.”
The ride feels short, and as the driver pulls into the block he asks whether she’d prefer to be dropped off on Fifth Avenue or right at the Rainbow Room entrance. She chooses the latter, but a split second later changes her mind as she suddenly feels she could use the fresh air—maybe it’ll calm down the fluttering in her stomach.

Rockefeller Center towers over her as she steps out of the car, its large presence immediately filling her view.

She takes a moment to appreciate the architecture of it, of New York City in general. It has a long, significant history that makes Los Angeles pale in comparison, Alex will give the city that. It’s got character, as Maggie would probably say. She didn’t get a good chance to admire the skyscraper last time she was here, their impending first kiss occupying every corner of her mind—leaving no room for ruminations over the grandness and history behind the impressive building.

Alex’s heels click on the sidewalk as she briskly walks past the ice rink below, sparing it only a short glance.

Her feelings surrounding that night are...mixed. There’s the embarrassment of falling on her ass so many times and telegraphing her nervous so much so that Maggie didn’t even kiss her properly because of it. But there’s also the remnants of fun when she did manage to get the hang of it, and the warm pressure of Maggie’s hand in her own.

She feels a buzz in her coat pocket and pulls out her phone to see another message from Maggie, smiling at the words.

‘On your way, Danvers?’

Alex pockets the device, her smile growing as she quickens her pace, no point in responding when she’s almost there. The elevator ride up to the Rainbow Room is as long as to be expected—made even longer by the stops on numerous floors along the way—but finally the 65th floor button lights up and the doors open.

The restaurant is gorgeous.

Floor to ceiling windows line the walls of the circular room, and a large, dazzling chandelier hangs in the center of the the space. A soft pink light surrounds the ceiling where the chandelier is placed, creating a perfect Valentine’s Day atmosphere.

She only has the chance to take a few steps out onto the carpeted dark floor, before a man in a white suit greets her with a smile.

“Madam, your table is this way.” He smiles over his shoulder as he weaves them between tables in the circular room. “I must say, your date looks beautiful tonight too. You’re quite the lucky lady.”

“Mhm,” Alex raises her eyebrows, wholly unsurprised that Maggie’s looks charming yet another individual. And if it’s not her looks, it’s her personality, her laugh, or maybe just her dimples, that draw people in like bees to honey—or like Kara to potstickers. She almost bumps into the man when he abruptly stops with a flourish of his hand and a nod of his head.

“You table, Miss Danvers. Enjoy your dinner and your date.”

Alex turns to thank the man, but her eyes catch Maggie’s figure at the table, and suddenly she can’t breathe. The background noise of the restaurant diminishes until all she can hear is a ringing in her ears. The entire world narrows to one focal point. All she can see is Maggie. She fills her every sense, and Alex’s neurons fire off faster than she can comprehend, sending her brain haywire.
She’s beautiful.

Alex has always known that. From the moment she laid eyes on her while watching her old roles, she had enough visual acuity to assess that Maggie Sawyer was an objectively beautiful person. She had nice bone structure, a pleasing even distance between her facial features, and besides her height, her body was up to the Hollywood standard.

And it’s not like Alex hasn’t seen Maggie dressed up before. Their first dinner at La Grenouille she was wearing a black lacy dress. She’d gotten an up close view of the gorgeous designer dress she wore during the Golden Globes. Last summer, when they were still on uneven ground and cautiously trying to suss the other out, she’d seen Maggie dressed up for their photoshoot. But tonight, she looks different, or maybe Alex’s perception is what’s changed. Perhaps, the world infinitesimally shifted when she wasn’t paying attention, and now she’s in an alternate universe where everything is just slightly off, but enough for her to notice.

“Danvers!” Maggie stands up, dimples in full force. “You made it, I was starting to think you might not show,” she jokes.

Alex’s tongue feels heavy in her mouth, like she’d just gone to the dentist and they’d shot her up with novocaine.

“Sorry uh,” she swallows a few times, her suddenly burdensome tongue getting in the way. “The elevator ride took forever. People just getting on and off…” she half waves her arm to the side and scratches the back of her neck, averting her eyes and hoping to god she isn’t blushing.

Maggie tilts her head, her eyes gleaming with a warm sparkle that Alex has noticed often makes an appearance around her.

“I have heard that’s what people do on elevators,” her smile is impish now, and Alex can only roll her eyes, but she feels more in equilibrium now. Maggie has a way of doing that; she’s often the one who throws her off center to begin with, but she also has the ability to right her. “Well,” Maggie walks around the table, pulling out the chair opposite her own. “Your seat awaits.”

“Aren’t you the gentlewoman,” Alex smirks gently as she takes her seat, pulling down the napkin onto her lap.

“I try,” she shrugs. “You need to take a look at this menu, it’s pretty fancy fare. Though my aunt did say she heard good things about the charcuterie.”

Alex follows suit, opening up her menu. It is a nice selection of food, and she looks up to ask Maggie what she’s thinking of getting, but the vision in front of her causes her words to catch halfway in her throat.

The candles on the table illuminate Maggie’s face, burnishing it in a warm, flickering yellow light and highlighting her bronzed skin and full lips pursed in thought. Alex gulps, eyes flying back down to her menu. Her nostrils flare slightly as she breathes in and out slowly. The window at her left offers her some much needed distraction, and her breath halts for a whole other reason.

The city is gorgeous laid out in all its expansive, bustling glory in front of her eyes, the skyscrapers gleaming and proud—the cars whizzing below creating a light show. She can appreciate New York even more at this angle. She can even see the Empire State building lit up in pink for the holiday.

It’s cheesy, but Alex smiles all the same.

“It’s a beautiful city, isn’t it?” Maggie disrupts her thoughts, and she slides her gaze towards the
woman. Her chin is propped in her hand, eyes looking out the window.

“Yeah, beautiful.” Her tone must sound off because Maggie’s eyes lock onto hers, and Alex has the urge to look away, but she wills herself to keep eye contact, and it’s Maggie that breaks their locked gaze.

“You know, Danvers, I was thinking earlier today that...”

Alex feels her body lean forward, stomach pushing into the edge of the table, in anticipation of her next words. But it’s in that moment the waiter arrives, and Maggie’s words, whatever they might have been, remain unspoken.

“Let’s share a dessert,” Maggie lets the menu fall onto the table and glances up at Alex just in time to see her rolling her eyes, but the small smile at the corner of her mouth belies her mock annoyance.

“Could that be any more cliche?”

“Okay, Chandler,” Maggie scoffs “I just thought that since we had a big dinner, we could both share a dessert. Our trainers would probably thank us for it.” And Anthony, she wants to add, but she doesn’t want to break the atmosphere. She and Alex had fun tonight during dinner, and even though she knows it’s not real, in most senses of the word—that they’re here under contract—she doesn’t see the point in mentioning it.

‘Make it look good,’ Anthony ha’d texted her. ‘It cost me an arm and a leg to get reservations.’ But Maggie thought that was his problem, not hers, and she wasn’t about to work even on Valentine’s day. They were here, that was enough. She could have fun with Alex without thinking of the cameras capturing their every move.

“Mhm,” Alex’s fingers drum against the back of the menu for a second before she places the menu on the table atop Maggie’s own. “Kaffir Lime Cheesecake Brulee. How about it, Sawyer?”

“I was actually thinking of the liquid mango ravioli,” she crosses her arms and smirks. (She’s fine with anything to be honest, but it’s fun to see the twist of mild disgust that crosses Alex’s face.)

“Mango and pasta should not be together, ever.”

Maggie throws her head back, a laugh erupting forth. “Oh my god, you think it’s literally mango wrapped in pasta.”

Alex glowers at her across the table, a light pink dusting her face, and Maggie takes pity on her. Not everybody grew up in a restaurant or around food all the time like she did.

“It’s a mango puree served in a spherical shape, which the chefs achieve by submerging it with sodium alginate and letting it sit in a bath of calcium.” Alex’s face immediately perks up at the
sound of some form of chemistry, and Maggie inwardly smiles. “And no, I don’t know the exact chemistry behind it. My aunt tried to explain it once, but I’m pretty sure she didn’t know either.”

“Not a fan of science?” Disappointment flashes over Alex’s face, and Maggie shakes her head. She hasn’t been that forthcoming with her interests, she supposes, and she doesn’t take offense solely because she knows Alex and her have been in the same boat. So many people look at a pretty face and see nothing beyond it.

“I am, actually. It was my thing in high school. But there’s a big difference between mango science and the kind of science you studied in college.” Maggie gives her a look. “That we both did, actually. Botany is a science. And Psychology-”

“Is not psychiatry. Where’s the science behind treating serial cheaters or giving people couple’s therapy?”

“An elitist, are you?” Maggie teases her. “It’s the highest form of science!” Alex outright rolls her eyes, twice, at that, but Maggie continues on. “The human brain is an entire world, Danvers. There’s a universe inside every head around you.”

“Including the plants, miss botany major?”

“Don’t start.” She rests her forearms on the table and leans closer to Alex, making sure she’s fully in her line of vision. “Nerd.”

The street lights flicker by on Alex’s face through the slightly dirty car window, and Maggie has a flashback to another car ride taken not too long ago, but with a far different atmosphere. Alex is smiling now for one, and Maggie can read the happiness on her face like a book.

The cab has a distinct smell of alcohol in it, an individual with too much to drink probably just rode the same cab, and part of the carpeted seat beneath her thigh is stiff, meaning she’s probably sitting on a stain. But it’s nice, mostly because of her company.

“Anthony wanted a limo, but I put my foot down,” she tells Alex.

Alex wrinkles her nose at the smell. “I don’t agree with King very often, but maybe he was right.”

“That’s not very nice of you, sweetheart,” the driver suddenly says, and Maggie chuckles as Alex slinks back in her seat.

"Come on, Danvers. It's part of the experience."

The elevator doors ding open to reveal a nearly full deck. Couples stand together on every corner of the observatory deck, taking pictures of the view—and of each other. Alex looks over at her with a curious expression, and Maggie raises an eyebrow, giving her the signal to ask whatever is clearly
on her mind.

“Aren’t you afraid of heights? I know there’s glass on the 102nd floor, but -”

“It’s sweet that you care, Danvers,” she nudges her shoulder against Alex’s, bringing their bodies leaned up against the back of the elevator closer together. “But I can manage.” She hopes. Where she’s actually planning to take Alex doesn’t have any glass.

It barely has any barrier to stop people from the at least 1250 foot drop off of the Empire State Building onto the streets of New York.

They go out to the deck, and not two minutes later a young girl comes up to them and asks for a photo. It unleashes at least half a dozen people taking a break from their celebrations to take selfies, even if they don’t know who they are—as demonstrated by the older man asking if Alex played softball—and as soon as it’s over they make their way back inside, away from the cold and most of the crowd.

She’s sure it was Anthony’s plan all along.

But Anthony hadn’t specified which floor they needed go to. He wanted their Empire State excursion more as a nice bonus gift the press could tack on at the end, is the impression Maggie gets. The pictures they took just now serve as proof and evidence enough. So she thinks she should be free.

“Want to take a break?” she asks Alex, who gives her a look.

“You mean leaving?”

“Not exactly. Just... a break away from their cameras.”

Alex frowns, but she finally nods, and Maggie leads the way.

“Wow,” Alex sighs as they step out into the observatory deck of the 103rd floor.

Maggie keeps her distance from the waist-high edge, and when looking down at the buildings becomes too much, she stares resolutely at her shoes. Alex has no qualms about leaning over the barrier, her eyes bright, and Maggie tugs uselessly at her dress.

“Danvers, be careful,” she tells her. “I’d hate to have to recast Claire.”

Alex laughs, but when she turns around it fades slightly.

“You are scared,” she mentions, and Maggie rolls her eyes even as she takes another small step backwards.

“I’m cautious,” she corrects Alex. She looks amused.

“Come here.” She offers her hand, and Maggie takes a breath and takes it, if only because she wouldn’t be able to live with the teasing if she hadn’t.
“The view is amazing from up here,” Alex whispers softly, her breath blowing out in white puffs of air. Maggie squeezes Alex’s hand tighter, and looks down at the buildings and the lights, at the black river in the distance.

“It’s something else,” she admits, and lets herself take a long look before she lets go of Alex’s hand and takes a step back into the apparent safety of being inside. Alex continues to stare out, her short hair blowing in the wind. Maggie has half a mind to pull her back, scared the wind will blow her away.

Alex turns around.

“You planned this,” she says accusingly. “I’m sure people can’t just come up here because they want to.”

Maggie shrugs with one shoulder. “I...might have pulled a few strings.”

Alex stares at her. “Why?”

Maggie takes a moment to answer. She doesn’t know how to word it, in a way that won’t offend Alex, nor make her sound like a fool.

“I just wanted at least one part of tonight to be real, you know? We deserve a good Valentine’s day, don’t we?”

Alex smiles softly. “I think this was my best one yet. Not that- not that I never dated someone around this time of year or anything, it’s just...my relationships...The picture perfect Valentine’s day dinner. It just never...”

“Never happened?”

Alex nods.

Maggie does too.

“I can relate to that. I don’t think I’ve been single during Valentine’s day that much since I was a teenager, actually, but it just wasn’t my thing. Everything on February 14th feels...just a little bit forced.”

“This doesn’t,” Alex says.

Maggie swallows, then nods. “You’re right, this doesn't.” Maggie looks out into the distance, the buildings not seem quite so imposing from here.

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Alex.”

They take their heels off at the bottom of the stairs.
Maggie can walk in them just fine, but she doesn’t actively like wearing them. She has an appreciation for a good 3 inch heeled boot, but stilettos are more trouble than they’re worth. So she takes them off, and Alex follows along, laughing.

They climb the stairs to Alex’s floor, bouncing between comfortable silence and small talk about the Rainbow Room’s food. Finally, they arrive at Alex’s door.

“Thank you for a great night,” Alex tells her, turning around before she opens her door.

“Thank you for coming,” Maggie answers.

Alex tilts her head. “I think I was legally contracted to,” she points out, and Maggie chuckles.

“You know what i mean.”

“I do.”

It’s the best she’s felt with anyone who isn’t her aunt in she can’t remember how long. Maybe ever. And she knows one thing that will make the night better.

“Can you come upstairs for a second?” she asks Alex.

The other woman frowns, but nods. “Sure.”

They climb the stairs for the two remaining floors before reaching her loft, and then Maggie runs inside her apartment, leaving an amused Alex outside, after being ordered to stay put. She grabs what she needs, and then exits just as fast.

She hides it behind her back.

“It’s technically the 15th now, but I got you something. For real.” She brings her arms around from behind her back, and shows the stuffed animal to Alex. “Happy Valentine’s day.”

Alex smiles, and grabs it.

“I can’t believe you got me a-”

“I know,” she tells her, preening. Alex shakes her head, but then smiles.

“Thank you.” She looks down at the toy in her hands, and then back at Maggie. “I, huh...I didn’t get you anything.”

“I guess that means I’m winning the gift war now, then.”

Alex looks up at her, incredulous.

Maggie turns around to enter her apartment. “Goodnight, Danvers,” she throws over her shoulder.

“Night.”

“Oh, and Danvers?” she asks, before closing the door. Alex meets her eyes. “Press his paw when you’re alone.”

Maggie disappears inside her apartment, something like contentment filling up her chest.
Alex holds her heels in one hand and the stuffed animal in the other as she enters her apartment.

Her feet ache, and she’s tired, but it’s the good kind. She hadn’t felt in a while, not since the last time she got to surf back in Malibu, before the Globes. She drops her shoes somewhere between the living room and dining room, and she climbs the few steps to her bed before sitting down on it.

She feels ridiculous for being so excited to see what Maggie meant, but there’s no changing that now.

She presses the animal’s paw, and for a second, nothing happens.

Then, a very distinctive roar fills the silence – Maggie’s voice.

Alex laughs out loud, the sound bouncing off the walls of her empty apartment. She gets a rush that she doesn’t often feel, to take a picture and share it with anyone who may want to look. It’s the first time she wants the world to know something about her and Maggie, and it’s exactly because of that that it feels good to keep it to herself.

She takes out her cellphone, takes a picture, and then sends a text to her sister before she’s able to go on with her night. It’s somewhere between washing her makeup off and putting on her pajamas that she realizes something that makes an already perfect night even better.

Maggie had called her ‘Alex’.
Light tries to make its way through Alex’s closed eyelids.

She groans—half asleep—rolling away from the window to resume her sleep, and she almost achieves it, but a loud ping somewhere near one of her pillows jolts her fully awake. She must have forgotten to charge her phone last night, early this morning technically, and left it on her bed. She half-heartedly flings her left arm out, groping around for it. Her hand falls on something small and hairy, and the smile that spreads across her face is instantaneous. It’s the lion Maggie gave her. She
left it in her bed too last night. But the one object she’s looking doesn’t appear to be where she thought it was.

Alex sits up and forces her eyelids to open, blinking for a few moments in her mostly dim bedroom, half lit by the shaft of light streaming through the room from the window. She turns around, yawning in the process, to look for her phone. It’s hidden beneath a pillow in the far corner, and Alex grabs it, wondering who is waking her up at this time in the morning.

It’s J’onn. Multiple messages from him actually.

She slides open her phone to and frowns as her eyes scan over the 5 messages sent. She quickly jabs her finger at the link he sent, and the seconds it takes to load seem like a century. Finally, though, the page loads, and what she sees makes her frown deepen and her stomach curdle.

Photos. Pictures from their moment up on the 103rd floor, the supposed break from the cameras that Maggie had offered her, out of the kindness of her heart, Alex had originally thought. But looking at the article now, reading the words detailing a fair deal of their time up there, from when Alex pulled Maggie up beside her to peer over the edge to Maggie’s subsequent retreat, it’s all there for everyone to see.

She feels a tendril of anger start creeping up her spine, but its warring with another feeling—embarrassment—and the latter is winning. She’s so stupid. She thought their moment last night had been genuine. She’d opened up to Maggie, and for once, Maggie had done the same to her. It just felt...real. But that was Maggie’s job wasn’t it? To portray a false front so truthfully and naturally that it felt real to the audience. And maybe some of the emotion Maggie showed her in the moment was real, most actors draw on at least a semblance of their own experiences and emotions for roles, but she’d wielded it with the precision and grace her mom possessed during her surgeries.

It was just for the contract. It didn’t mean anything beyond the piece of paper binding them together. Alex was the only one last night who’d imbued the moment with a sense of gravitas.

She thought they were...being actual friends to each other, and instead for some reason Alex has been thrown out of the loop. Was she that bad an actress that King needed Maggie to fool her into thinking there were no cameras so she’d let her guard now? They’d been doing a decent enough job, or so she thought.

She stews the entire ride to set, and her makeup girl has to ask her to stop frowning twice before she can manage it.

Alex hates feeling like she's not on solid ground. She hates not knowing what's going on.

It’s just her luck that her first scene that morning is with Maggie, exactly the person to blame for her mood this morning. And King. But she doesn't have to see King every day.

“You okay?” Maggie asks, halfway through a scene, and Alex shrugs it off. But when the director asks if they want to take 5, Alex jumps at the chance. And she can't help but look at Maggie before she takes off in the direction of her trailer.

“We deserve a break, right?” she says, echoing Maggie's words at the Empire State building last night.

“Yeah…?”

She almost sputters at how nonchalant Maggie is, as embarrassment burns hot on her cheeks.
She walks away.

After her initial scene with Alex, the rest of Maggie’s morning flies by, perhaps because her mind is more occupied with Alex than her lines.

Alex seems to be in a mood, and Maggie doesn't understand the reason why. She guesses something could have happened with her sister or her mom, and she’s intruded enough—it’s not her place to ask. But she’s still curious.

She’s thinking about asking her directly, how Alex had asked when she’d been down about the Oscars, but she doesn’t get a chance to leave her trailer because her phone starts to ring.

“M’gann, hi.” She wonders briefly what’s the reason behind her manager’s call this morning.

“Hi, Maggie.”

“What's with the tone?”

“Well, we got huh,” M’gann pauses, and she can hear her exhale her breath slowly through the phone. “An offer came in this morning. For you to present at the Oscars.”

Maggie’s stomach drops.

She’d dreamed about being on that stage in wildly different circumstances, and she can’t imagine getting to do it for the first time just to hand over an award to someone else. But she doesn't think she has a choice.

“It’d be bad form not to do it, wouldn't it be?” She asks M’gann, already knowing her answer.

“Yeah,” M’gann tells her. "It’s the Oscars. It’s an honor to present.”

“Feels more like a slap to the face,” she confesses.

“I know. Should I give them an answer?”

“Surprising you haven’t already.”

“Maggie. You know you always have a choice. But this is important.”

“I get it. Let’s do it.”

"Good. In other, happier, news I saw the pictures of you and Alex up on the 103rd floor-”

Maggie cuts her off, confusion flooding her brain. “The what?”

“The pictures?”
“We were up there alone. It wasn't -it wasn't for the contract. I just wanted to show Alex…” realization dawns on her as she runs through Alex’s behavior just earlier. “That's why she’s mad,” she thinks out loud.

“Who is mad? Maggie?”

“I’ll call you back, okay?”

Maggie dials a number that she sadly has come to know by heart.

“Hello my leading lady! To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Did you get your paps to follow us to the 103rd floor?” She asks right away, she doesn’t have time for his antics.

“I didn't.” He replies, but his voice is gleeful. “I commend you on it though. A genius move Sawyer, you’re a natural.”

Maggie is quick to correct him, “They weren't supposed to be there. I didn’t mean to-”

“Then why go up there with her alone?”

His tone isn’t even malicious, only curious, but he isn’t entitled to know her reasoning. “I have to go on set,” she hangs up without another word.

The spread at craft services doesn’t look particularly appealing today, but Alex’s eyes roam for some blueberry muffins, hoping they’ll at least have those available. She spots one at the back of the table and is about to reach for it when a voice startles her, stopping her movement.

It’s Maggie. Alex steels her spine and sets her face, not wanting to blow up again at her, at least not on set—it isn’t professional.

“About last night,” Maggie’s face is conciliatory, her tone soft. “I didn't -”

Alex interrupts whatever excuse was about to come out of her mouth. She doesn’t want to deal with it right now. “I just don't understand why you couldn't just tell me we were going to take pictures. Why let me make an ass of myself and start talking about -”

“Wait, you think I knew?” Maggie asks, and the steam goes out of her

“I -”

“I didn't know, Alex,” Maggie tells her, her eyes sincere if not slightly insulted. “Why would I pretend it was just the two of us?”

“I don't know. For the contract? If King told you -”
“We signed that contract together,” Maggie fires back.

Alex is just as quick to respond, “Like he doesn’t tell you information I’m not privy to. You’re his shining star of the show. I feel like half the time I hear about our dates through you before I even hear from him.”

“I’m not on Anthony’s side. We signed that contract together,” she insists. “I’m not here to make a fool out of you, Alex. We’re on the same team.” Maggie reaches out tentatively, touching her arm. “Remember?”

Alex doesn’t know what to believe. But in that moment, she chooses to believe in Maggie.
hello my name is
@gayalexdanvers

oh my!!! godsdfjksl!!! those vday pics!!
THEEYYY!!!! FUCKING INVENTED TRUE LOVE

I'm shaking, you gays.

caitlyn
@dawsonlgbt

Uh can everybody sharing those vday pics not?? It
looked like a private moment. I don’t think they want it
spreading around. Let’s be respectful guys.
Alex does a lot of thinking on the ride home that evening.

She thinks about Maggie telling her for all intents and purposes that she's on her side, and she thinks about the contract itself and what it means that they're finally on the same page about it.

But most of all, she thinks about their Valentine’s day. About Maggie’s eyes sparkling in the Rainbow Room, and the way she laughed and called her a nerd. And their moment up on the 103rd floor and how she felt like she could demolish skyscrapers with her bare hands when Maggie trusted her enough to hold her hand and not to let her fall.

Her mind keeps racing in circles, round and round, over every little detail from that night. Maggie’s warmth as they stood side by side in the elevator. Maggie laughing while trying to steal some of Alex’s portion of their shared dessert. Maggie handing her the stuffed animal lion, and that last look she threw over her shoulder suffused with more warmth than Alex even knew could exist.

The car jolts forward as the signal turns green, and it’s as if the movement slides a piece of herself into place that she wasn't aware was missing.

The realization hits her full force, taking her breath away.

She wanted it all to be real.
We're back and we've officially hit ten chapters! We'd love to hear your thoughts about it all! Leave us a comment below, or you can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meanstoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We'd love to talk to you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

_In vinculis e tiam audax_: in chains yet still bold

“Action!”

“Came to say I told you?” Blake asks, her voice rough.

Something in Claire’s chest hurts seeing her like this. She was there when they asked her to hand in her badge and gun, and she would’ve never been able to imagine the mighty Blake Davenport so beaten down. She thinks she might have heard her voice crack, like it does now.

“No. I brought you a drink,” she says, handing her the bottle of water. She’s brought in enough perps to know that waiting to be interrogated is the worst part for them, and none of them make an effort to make it easier. But she does, because Blake is not a perp.

She might make her life a living hell sometimes, and she might be the reason Claire is saddled with so much paperwork, but the woman in front of her?

She’s her partner.

“Thanks,” Blake says, voice still uncharacteristically small.

“He’s guilty as sin and everyone knows it,” Claire tells her. Blake smile lightly.

“Guilty as sin,” she repeats. “Who speaks like that?”

Claire smiles. She welcomes the usually annoying teasing.

“I’m sorry,” Blake apologizes, and Claire frowns.

“For what?”

Blake looks up. “They’re gonna put me on leave. Maybe even take my badge. I was supposed to be your partner and show you the reigns, but I’m gonna get sacked and you’re gonna get something else.”

Claire shakes her head.

“They won’t,” Claire tells her, sitting down in front of her. She extends her hands over the table,
trying to lessen the space between them somehow. “They’re going to see that you made a mistake.”

“I’ve made a lot of mistakes. Too many of them.”

“You’re a good cop. They’re going to see that and give you your badge back. And if they don’t—”

“I have nothing else.” Blake shrugs. “The force is my life. I’m married to my job. Those guys out there...I’m sure half of them hate me, but they’re my only family.” Blake eyes fill with tears, and a single one rolls down her face. Claire has never seen her cry. Blake Davenport was always larger than life itself. But now she seems so small. “And you...This is it for me, Claire. It always was.”

The door slams open, and Captain Ellis walks through, his face twisted in a disappointed frown.

“Lawson, out. Davenport and I need to talk.”

“Cut!”

Maggie dabs under her eyes, erasing the remains of tears, and what she’s sure must be mascara and runny eye liner.

Her makeup girls never thought to give her heavy waterproof makeup. Blake Davenport doesn’t cry, as a rule. She drags her chair back and gets up without looking. She runs into someone, and she knows by the light, barely fragrant scent behind her who it is before she even turns around. Not one of the camera guys, then.

“Danvers—”

Alex rapidly takes a large step back. She seems to realize just how large at the same time it registers in Maggie’s brain, because she steps slightly closer towards her.

“Small room.” She shrugs.

“Hm, is that right?” She smiles, and a matching smile slips onto Alex’s own face. Maggie is pleased, too. That was a scene well done.

Alex seems to think so, too. She looks happy, kind of like on Valentine’s day. The overly bright lights of the police precinct set reflect off of her hair, lighting up the stray fly always framing her face. It’s a good look for her.

“I uh,” she breaks their intertwined gaze, stuffing her hands in her back pockets and shifting her weight into her heels. “Just wanted to tell you good work, Sawyer.”

“You think I’m good, Danvers?” Maggie steps closer—fingers hooked in her belt loop—looking up
at Alex with a teasing smirk.

“I think you're great,” Alex chuckles. “A great actress!”

Maggie tilts her head, amused. “You gettin’ soft on me?”

“Me?” Alex’s eyes widen as she presses the tips of her fingers to her chest. “Pft. No! Nope,” Red curls sway back and forth as she shakes her head emphatically.

Maggie’s opens her mouth to respond with another teasing quip, but she hears her voice being called by a PA. “Sorry, Danvers, gotta run.”

She’s a few steps away when she abruptly remembers her earlier Oscar thoughts this morning. She and Alex will need to coordinate looks again, and she’s not even sure if Alex has thought about what she’ll be wearing. Maggie swivels back around, a question resting on the tip of her tongue for Alex, but the space before her is empty.

“Makeup,” the PA tells her, and she nods.

Maggie closes her eyes at Mary’s request, letting her touch up her makeup—the powder brush tickling her nose as she stifles a nose twitch.

It’s a surprisingly mild February day, and she hopes it’s a sign of winter falling away to spring. She loves winter more than most, but even she’s ready for sunny days and clear sidewalks. She’d like to walk outside without the frigid wind numbing her nose and doing its best to pierce through her oversized winter jacket. New York winters have made her appreciate the near constant 70s weather in LA at this time.

Mary tilts her face slightly upward, and Maggie relishes in the warmth of the sun hitting her cheekbone. “You’re in an awfully good mood for a Saturday on set.” Mary rolls her eyes, “I swear King is trying to work you to death with all these weekend shoots.”

“I’m just ecstatic that I get to see you an extra day of the week, Mary,” she jokes, shrugging and cracking a smile—which earns her a light swat on the shoulder and a fond, exasperated utterance to stay still. “The sun is shining, for once, and I’m being paid to do what I love. What’s not to be happy about it?”

“That’s nice to hear, honey. Some of us were just,” she pauses for a moment, “worried, that the Oscars snub was still getting you down.”

Maggie swallows. She thought she’d done a good job hiding her feelings about that, but maybe not.

Mary’s words serve as reminder of what she’s agreed to do, and she feels March 3rd loom ever closer. She’ll need to start looking at dresses for the award show soon. Originally, when she’d naïvely thought she would be nominated—and even had a shot at winning—she’d been eying a floor length, clean white dress with the back cut out, only a single cored rope connecting the spaghetti straps that would’ve rested at her shoulders to the lower half of the dress. It would’ve been a showstopper, a dress made for a winner. But she won’t be needing it now, something
simpler will be more appropriate. It’ll be a more somber affair than she’d envisioned months ago, but perhaps—she thinks suddenly—her company will lessen the blow.

Alex will be her date. Anthony hasn’t sent her any message with orders for the night for the two of them like he did with Valentine’s day, but it’s the Oscars—of course they’ll be attending together. They hardly need instructions from him anymore either, as the 6 month mark of their relationship is creeping up. They’re pros at the contract by now, and February 14th was probably the biggest milestone they needed to ace, which they did (disregarding the miscommunication between them the following morning—which had veered into the territory of their early stages together—as Alex jumped to the worst conclusion about her, but Maggie had managed to smooth it over quickly).

“Done.” Mary’s voice pulls her out of her distracted thoughts.

“Thanks,” Maggie smiles fully now that she’s able to without disrupting her makeup touch up. “And I’m fine, really. You don’t need to worry about me.”

“Well,” Mary lowers her head conspiratorially, “Louise was the one who wanted to know. She can be so nosy,” she shakes her head disapprovingly, and Maggie has to use all of her restraint not to laugh at the woman’s unintentional irony. As if both of her makeup women aren’t known by everyone on set as the generally good hearted, but extremely chatty gossipers. Not to mention, Maggie knows she’s included in that gossip herself.

Maggie winks, deciding to indulge Mary’s deflection.

“Right, well convey my message to Louise then?” Mary nods in assent, leaving her with a relaxed wave of her hand. Once she’s out of earshot, Maggie lets out the chuckle built up in her throat, turning to walk to her next scene.

It’s a good day to work.

The slam of the door echos in her trailer as Alex lays back against the solid surface, breathing out slowly.

Thoughts of Valentine’s day crash over her, like the waves that would knock her off her surfboard back in Malibu and drag her into the salty, eerily muted world below. Alex feels like that now. Oddly freed due to the weightlessness of the water, and yet lost, uncomfortable without knowing where the surface is. The feeling had seeped into her during those first early morning moments today—after her unexpected realization the night before—and then stayed with her through filming. They’re still lodged in her chest now.

She’d woken up exhausted this morning, which she’d fully attributed to a certain individual.

Last night, after she’d gotten home, her body had gone through the motions of preparing for bed, but her thoughts had been elsewhere—floating in some incorporeal plane of existence. Scenes from the past few months had flashed through her mind with the velocity of a film reel set at
hyperspeed, blurring by as if she’d been sitting in a train car watching the outside world rush past her in a blend of dappled colors. And she, the lone passenger, was frozen in her seat. A being trapped in stasis.

By the time she’d deposited herself into bed, the maelstrom pounding against her skull had settled into a static noise, drowning out any coherent thought. She’d spent the night slipping in and out of an uneasy, fitful sleep broken up by periods of tossing and turning. Finally, just as she could blearily see the rays of sun creep into the sky, she’d fallen asleep out of pure fatigue. Two hours later she’d woken up, and the bedside alarm clock had informed her she’d needed to get up in 30 minutes. Still groggy and eyes hurting from a lack of sleep, she’d swung her legs off the bed, displacing her crumpled sheets, and stood up, just as the impact of her epiphany—warded off by shock, perhaps—slammed into her chest. Its impact had reverberated throughout her body. It hadn’t stopped.

Alex groans, head dropping into her hands.

Somewhere along the way, her dread and anxiety of their contract obligations had been replaced by a warm flicker at dimpled smile aimed her way. It’d dissipated in the face of soft, brown eyes—depthless in their understanding and kindness. Maggie Sawyer had walked, strolled even—with that easy gait of hers usually only reserved for people of a certain, taller height—past her carefully constructed defenses. She hadn’t torn them down, she didn’t need to (it probably wasn’t her style anyways).

If she learned anything during her brief time in college studying biochemistry, it was to look at the facts. The facts are these: Maggie has quietly become an important part of her life, a friend, her closest outside of Kara. Alex looks forward to the time she spends with her now, on and off set. None of that is a bad thing. In fact, her mother would be ecstatic that Alex finally found a friend in an industry sorely lacking any. The only difficulty—one that Alex never foresaw—was that by allowing Maggie to slip into the crevices of her life, it’d set off a domino effect.

Perhaps it was only the inevitable result of that warm June day when their orbits first brushed past each other.

For so long, Alex has successfully quelled that...part of herself. She knew it was there, and J’onn knew too—her conversation back when she first was offered the contract is still with her. But she’d always pushed it down. Down and away. It’d been simple to brush it off in lieu of focusing on more important things like school—at first—and then her career. When she’d found herself without either of those, it was all too easy to indulge full time in alcohol and partying. But now she’s sober.

The world is in sharp focus once again, and the thoughts she’d shoved into the recesses of her soul, stifled by the darkness, have resurfaced. A small part of her momentarily resents Maggie for so casually upsetting her carefully constructed reality.

She’s toppled years of meticulous avoidance and willful ignorance, but Alex doubts she’ll ever realize it. And she certainly won’t be informing her of it any time soon, or at all, period. Maggie can remain blissfully unaware of the seismic shift that’s occurred, of the chaos brewing inside her, but Alex no longer has that option. She cannot ignore the flutter in her chest when she thinks of Maggie smiling at her this morning—looking far too beautiful and refreshed than anybody had a right to before the sun even rose. Now it’s impossible to turn a blind eye to the uptick of her heart whenever Maggie is particularly close to her, filling all of her senses. She definitely can’t ignore the prickle and flush of her skin, hot and slightly uncomfortable—if only due to the infrequency with which she’s ever felt this way—born from simply examining the effect Maggie has on her.
She doesn’t want to just be Maggie’s friend or fake girlfriend, she doesn’t want the false shroud of the contract on their relationship. She wants it to be real. Alex wants Maggie to be her real girlfriend who takes her up to the secret top floor of one of the tallest buildings even though she herself is afraid of heights. She has a crush on her co-star—a woman. It’s as simple and complicated as that. Alex briefly considers that it might not have anything to do with who she is, or her sexu- or the other thing.

It’s...Maggie. How could she not like her?

She’s tough and she’s smart and she’s just -she’s so beautiful. Inside and out, cliche as that may sound. Her eyes shine with warmth and genuine kindness, even when she’s exhausted and it’s 3 AM and they still have another scene to finish. She makes people feel welcomed, like they matter. She holds the door open for crew members and waits on the stairs for Alex to finish saying her goodbyes so they can walk back to their trailers together. When she smiles, it only magnifies the effects of her eyes. The dimples appear—sometimes large as a crater, other times just a small depression in her cheek—and Alex swears the world brightens just a little bit each time. The birds seem to chirp louder, the sun pierces through the clouds to warm the ground below, and the atmosphere feels lighter, as if the universe is transforming itself into something more brilliant and beautiful to match Maggie’s smile.

And she can’t fucking believe she’s been so blind that she didn’t notice she was crushing on Maggie until it had already happened.

A knock on the door she’s laying against startles her, and she jumps, as if the person on the other side could hear her thoughts.

“Five minutes,” a PA says, and Alex takes a deep breath before she stands tall again. She has work to do, and working is exactly what she’d like to do now, to keep her brain occupied. Everything with Maggie still feels raw, and with the Oscars looming closer, she just- she doesn’t think she can do it.

“Miss Danvers?”

“Got it!” she tells the person on the other side of her trailer door, and then hears him walk away.

The world won’t stop for her.

She saunters up to Alex during their break, catching her unaware as she gets lunch from one of the catering servers.

“That looks good,” she mentions, smiling at the girl serving the vegetable soup, and she gets a smile back. “I’ll have a plate,” she says, before nudging Alex with her hip.

“Hey,” Alex greets her, grabbing her plate. She waits to the side until Maggie has hers, and then they sit on one of the free spots to take their lunch. Maggie smiles at how right it feels. It took
them some time to get here, but this is exactly the feeling of partnership she was after when they were looking for a co-star.

“Have you seen your dress?” She asks, before taking a sip of the soup. It’s warm, just like she likes it—too hot and it frustrates her not being able to eat. But the soup is citrusy and shock full of crunchy vegetables—just like she likes them—it takes her a minute and a couple of spoonfuls to realize that Alex hasn’t answered her question.

She looks up at her.

“I don’t think I’m going.”

“To the Oscars?” It’s incomprehensible that Alex won’t go, that she can even make that choice. If it was up to Maggie she wouldn’t be presenting, but she is, because that’s how this works.

Alex shrugs.

“What? Why? Alex, you’re my date.” The words surprise her for how sincere they are. She’d just assumed she’d be taking Alex, because award season was a big part of their contract. And she’d already accepted it in her head, made herself feel better with the fact that Alex would be there and Maggie could just...try to have fun on a night that would be absolutely shitty otherwise. The image of Alex by her side, that she wouldn’t have to do it alone, had already given her a semblance of comfort.

“I just don’t...Look, it’s personal. But I can’t go. I’m going to talk to J’onn about it, and I’ll talk to you later, okay?” She stands up, throwing her legs over the bench, and then she’s off. Her abrupt exit leaves Maggie dumbfounded.

Alex’s plate sits untouched at the spot across her.

Alex gets home at 3 PM that afternoon.

She’s not used to leaving set when it’s still light out, but it’s supposed to snow that night, and production was moved to the following day. Alex wishes it hadn’t been. Her brain is buzzing, the familiar uncomfortable itch she’s grown used to permeating every inch of her skin.

When Alex was a kid, she didn’t see her grandparents much. Her mom wasn’t close to hers, and her dad’s lived on the other side of the country. But she remembers clearly one trip they took to visit them, and how her grandfather had told her a story about there being two wolves inside every person, a good one and a bad one. Alex had ignored the moral of the fable, arguing that it was literally impossible for an animal to live inside a person, unless it was a parasite, and wouldn’t the story be more realistic if it was about intestinal worms? (She’d been a weird kid, too smart for her age, always trying to fit in.) She remembers the story now.

She can clearly feel two sides of her at war, each fighting with the strength and fierceness of
wolves.

There’s the side that argues that this... *feeling* is born from their forced close proximity and fake dates. Alex has been pretending to date Maggie for a while now, and she hasn’t been with anyone for even longer; and so with every kiss and every hand hold, reality just became blurred, confused with fiction. The same side insists that kissing Maggie feels good because kissing feels good, period, and it has nothing to do with the woman herself. That side tells her vehemently that she doesn’t need for the world to analyze her under a microscope even after the contract is over. That she might feel something for Maggie, but it’ll pass, and it doesn’t mean anything in the long run, she’s not like *that* —one day she’ll find the right man.

And then there’s the other side, that wants her to acknowledge what she’s pushed down for years. That wants her to remember Vicky, and how much she placed in their friendship, and how much she liked when they’d fall asleep together on her bed watching a movie in the dark. The brightness of the screen had always made her eyes hurt, but she hadn’t minded. Not when Vicky’s body pressed at her side spread a warmth deep inside her. This side tells her that J’onn already knows, that he knew without her saying a word. That she’ll be fine, that the comments that will follow will be long forgotten after she finally embraces the way she feels.

The two wolves clash, viciously ripping at each other.

Her grandpa had told her that the wolf that wins is the wolf that she feeds, but Alex can’t think about anything but needing a drink herself.

And it’s not just that, not just the Maggie side of it, that has her on edge.

Sure, she wants to miss the Oscars because taking pictures kissing Maggie and wondering if everyone who sees those pictures can see the way she feels painted in her face sounds like a nightmare. She’s pretended to be... *attracted* to Maggie, for months, but it’s different now that she thinks she might be, for real. (And that word—attraction— sends a shudder down her spine.) But that’s not the bigger reasons.

It’s the Oscars themselves.

They’ve always been tied to her dad, and so she’s always avoided this time of year, and she never had the opportunity to come so it was easy, to hole herself up somewhere and let the event pass.

She’d made a promise to her dad, when she was nothing but a kid. And she made the same promise to herself after she quit school to take up acting again.

She’d be breaking it if she went.

She’s thinking about the pros and cons of getting two fingers of scotch to process, when her cellphone rings, and her plan is shot to hell when she sees it’s J’onn. She takes a breath before answering. He’s the person who knows the most about her, probably more than Kara, if she’s counting...that. She can’t saddle him with more of her crap, but he’s her manager. Of all people, he should know she’s decided not to show up.

“Hey-”

“What’s this about you missing the Oscars?”

“Who- How?” She stutters. Nothing for her to tell if her already knows.

“Maggie told M’gann, who told me.”
“You talk to M’gann?” Alex asks.

“That’s not important,” J’onn tells her. “What’s important is that you can’t miss this.”

She sits down on her bed, sighing.

“So King will be mad - big deal.” She could care less about the guy. They did more than enough for Valentine’s day, and for the Globes.

“This isn’t even about King,” J’onn tells her. “Yes, he’ll be angry, and if he was angry enough he could pursue legal action because you signed a contract. But as your manager - as your friend .. Alex, it’s insane not to attend the oscars. The exposure alone will be great for your career.”

Alex closes her eyes against his logic. She knows.

“Why now, why this?” J’onn asks. “Talk to me.”

Alex shakes her head.

“I just...I wanted to be there because of me.”

“Oh.”

“Not as someone’s plus one, not because of Maggie or because of Kara.” She’d promised her dad, when she was just a kid. That she’d follow in his footsteps. That he’d be proud of her one day. “I wanted it to be me.”

J’onn is silent for a moment, but Alex can still hear him on the other side of the phone, can almost feel his presence. It’s calming. She misses him.

“I understand,” he says finally. “But I have to insist. You can’t let this huge opportunity go to waste because of your pride.” Alex swallows to wet her dry throat. She doesn’t correct him. “Not to mention,” J’onn tells her. “King isn’t the understanding type. Even if we wanted to get you out of this... There’s not a way, Alex.”

She has to reluctantly agree.

“Okay,” she says finally, accepting his words with all the somberness of a soldier accepting to go into battle.

“Do you have a second? I was meaning to tell you that I set up that interview we were looking at two weeks from now. Elle Magazine. I’ll visit you soon so we can talk about it, but I just wanted to tell you…”

She’s not sold on attending the Oscars and dredging up her past, but J’onn words are a balm that she clings to.
“Boss, is it safe for me to open my eyes?”

Winn’s voice comes from somewhere behind her, and she turns around to look for him. His eyes are squeezed shut, arms crossed as he bounces on the balls of his feet. Maggie rolls her eyes.

“I’m not trying on dresses yet,” she tells him. “You’re early, no one’s arrived yet. I was just looking at makeup ideas.”

Winn’s eyes pop open and he bounds over to her; if she squints she can see a tail wagging enthusiastically in his trail.

“I can help with the makeup.” He skids to a stop before her. “Warm tones suit you best, and the no makeup makeup look is definitely the way to accentuate your natural beauty. It worked great for that shoot last year. I’d also suggest—”

“Winn,” he jolts slightly at Gabriella’s voice, voice drying up with a squeak, as she enters the room. “I think you’ve been spending too much time around Maggie.” She comes up behind her to peer over her shoulder, “But you’re not wrong,” she turns to wink at him, “for once.”

“Well, since you two are the makeup experts,” Maggie tells them, “why don’t you pick out something to compliment blue.” She stands up from the makeup chair and flops onto the nearby couch. “At least until Jocelyn arrives.”

Gabriella taps her foot in thought, as if to ponder the proposal, before shaking her head and joining Maggie on the couch—as Maggie knew she would. “It’s all yours, tinker boy,” Gabriella delivers her words with a grand flourish at the array of makeup products scattered near the lit up mirror.

He rolls his eyes, but immediately stops upon catching sight of Gabriella’s mock glare. “Yessir!”

“So,” Gabriella turns to her, throwing an arm around her shoulders. “How’s it going? I feel like I haven’t seen you in person in ages. And I had to work this morning and you were out like a rock when I left so we didn’t even get a chance to talk.”

Maggie sinks into her embrace.

“We text almost every day,” she reminds her aunt.

It’s been tough to adjust to not having Gabriella a short car ride away, as she knew it would be. Maggie had flown out of JFK airport as soon as she’d gotten off work yesterday, in LAX late last night. Gabriella had picked her up from the airport—greeting her with a tight, achingly familiar hug that Maggie had missed more than she’d like to admit. The car ride back to Gabriella’s apartment had been excruciatingly long, the typical Friday night traffic in LA slowing them down, and Maggie had dozed on and off throughout. She’d only woken up long enough to get out of the car once they’d arrived and prepare for bed.

The puffy white comforter of her bed (technically, it was the guest bed, but Maggie had spent so many nights in it, it was practically hers) had been a welcome relief, and she’d fallen into it shortly after.

Sunday morning had dawned on her far too soon, and now half the day had already passed. She’s leaving for New York in 8 hours. Taking the redeye back to Manhattan so she can be on set tomorrow morning. She wishes she could stay longer, just like this, settled into Gabriella’s side while Winn mutters to himself in the corner. It feels like old times, before Nightingale, blockbuster movies, and Oscar snubs. The only person missing from the picture is Alex, and then it’d be perfect.
Her last thought startles her. She’s not sure when Alex became part of her ideal day, but she supposes it’s only natural that the woman has woven herself into Maggie’s life given the amount of time they spend together. Their fake relationship, as of this month, has officially lasted almost as long as her longest real relationship did, which is laughable, but also a depressing indicator of her love life. It’s not like she’s had trouble finding women to date—she hadn’t gained that womanizer reputation M’gann hated so much for nothing—but she’s never connected with a woman enough for it to last. Or maybe, she just hasn’t found anyone she’s willing to put before her career.

“So?” Gabriella nudges into her, and pulls her attention away from ruminations over her lackluster love life.

Maggie shrugs. “Not much to report. The show keeps me busy as usual, and when I’m not on set I’m doing contract stuff.”

“Everything is,” Gabriella’s tone is tentative, “good then?” Maggie can hear the unspoken message beneath her words. The Oscars. She wants to know if she’s actually fine with it. It seems to be on everybody’s mind nowadays, including her own unfortunately.

Her eyes land on the floor, tracing the patterns in the carpet. If anybody else were asking, Maggie would deliver her rote diplomatic response with a smile, but it’s Gabriella.

“In about two weeks, everything will be great. But as of now,” she lifts her shoulder and drops it with a sigh, “I’m dealing with it.”

“If it makes you feel any better, I wrote a very critical message on the Oscars website,” Gabriella tilts her head to peer into her eyes, and her own small smile causes one to break out on Maggie’s face.

She sits up straighter, pulling her leg beneath her, and turning to face her aunt. “Please tell me you didn’t put your real information into the boxes?”

“No of course not,” Gabriella scoffs with an offended frown. “Don’t be silly, I used Chris’s information,” her face turns into a positively evil smirk. Maggie rolls her eyes. Looks like even love—or whatever it is they share—hasn’t completely softened Gabriella.

“Speaking of Chris,” she’s proud of herself for managing to get his name out in a completely neutral tone, “how’s he doing? I didn’t see him last night or today.”

“Great. He’s been busy with job interviews actually. The restaurant he worked for is closing and he’s looking for a new job. He’s getting offers left and right,” Gabriella says, with the same tone she’d talked about Maggie getting good grades back in the say. She’s proud. “One even in Argentina.”

Gabriella chuckles, but Maggie can’t tell if that’s a good or bad sign. Argentina is pretty far away, putting it lightly. And if he does take it, would that mean Gabriella would move with him? The thought instantly makes her uncomfortable, her stomach queasy. Maggie thought having her aunt on the other coast was bad enough, she can’t imagine her in another country.

She takes a small breath, making sure her body language is carefully blank as her next words come out. “Argentina, huh? What happens if he gets it?”

“We’d try long distance,” the smile slips off of Gabriella’s face as she shrugs softly. “I guess.”

Privately, Maggie doesn’t see long distance working—in her experience it rarely does, in fact, it had been a mess with Emily—but she keeps the thought to herself and presses into Gabriella’s side
more. They both watch in silence as Winn rifles through the makeup and periodically checks his phone.

She can’t wait until award season is over.
Oscar day rolls around, and finds Alex woefully unprepared.
The fact that her sister is picking her up later makes her feel marginally better, but she still has nerves eating her up from the inside out. She spent the entire night awake, tossing and turning, trying to make sense of this thing that’s gotten so large and complicated as to consume her every waking thought. She doesn’t want to talk to Kara about it. It’s too soon and she hasn’t figured it out for herself, let alone for other people, she doesn’t know what she’d tell her. And J’onn isn’t available right now. And Maggie...Alex can’t approach Maggie about this. It’d be too close to admitting she feels...something, for her, and she cannot do that.

So she walks around her old apartment and lets it fester.

It grows and merges with her other worries.

Her dad was a staple at the Oscars. Her parents had gone every year they could since he’d won. If possible, Alex was an Oscars brat. She knew the ins and outs of the show, and her parents regaled her and Kara with countless stories when they came back. Her dad had offered to take her one year, the last year he went, and she’d volunteered to stay with Kara instead. They could go together next year. And they never did.

She knows people will ask about him tonight. She’ll take pictures with Maggie and with Kara, and her career will be compared to his, and her accomplishments will be held up against her sister’s in the worst game of compare and contrast.

It has Alex, for lack of a better term, antsy as shit. She plops down on her bed, rubbing her temples. It’s sharp and sudden, the thought that she knows how to get rid of it.

She did it in college, when she was frustrated because of her grades and then even more frustrated because of the bad sex she subjected herself to. Most times it worked and sometimes it didn’t, and she’s a grown woman, she’s not ashamed of it.

Her mind made up, she makes her way to the bathroom.

She sits down on the toilet, dropping her pants and underwear to her ankles. She’s doing this for one reason only, and she doesn’t see the point in pretending she isn’t. One of her old friends used to call it having solo sex, but the idea seems laughable to Alex. People can never be as comfortable with a partner as they are with themselves, for starters.

She thoughtfully wets her forefinger on her tongue, and then slips her hand down her stomach, between her legs.

If she had some more time she’d try to read some erotica beforehand, but she really just wants to relax, to banish her anxiety with a well placed orgasm. She can’t be buzzing like this for the rest of the afternoon.

Her usual fantasy plays out in her head.

Some faceless man has her on her back, and she feels him touch her ankles, then the back of her knees. Climbing up and up her body. She’s single-minded in her focus, repeating to herself that it feels good like a mantra. She rubs faster, eager for that spark that signals she’s on the right path to getting what she wants. Until then, it feels like nothing.

The faceless person reaches her belly button, and she imagines hot breath on her stomach.

She’d tried to love it as much as she was supposed to, the one time she’d had this done to her, but it hadn’t been that special. Her fantasy is so much better, when it works.
She rubs a little faster, but then her mind gets distracted, she loses focus.

Dimples and brown eyes invade her mind, and she has her hand between her legs -this is a terrible moment to think about Maggie Sawyer. Alex squirms. *Just don’t think about her*, she tells herself, trying to go back to what she was thinking, to the tried and true fantasy she’s always used. But it doesn’t work.

She refuses to give up, somehow feeling like walking out of her bathroom, slightly sweaty and with nothing to show for it would be even worse.

And then there’s a change.

And the faceless man she imagines has a face. And it’s not a man anymore.

It’s Maggie.

Maggie looking up at her with half lidded bedroom eyes, holding her thighs open with the strong hands that have held Alex’s so many times. Alex shudders, and has half a mind to stop, to get out of her bathroom and stop being so fucking weird, but she can’t. She feels herself grow wet, and then wetter, and she suddenly won’t need to spit on her finger anymore to be wet enough to finish (she refuses to taste herself), because her finger briefly dips into her entrance and she’s so, so wet.

She slides over her clit faster, finally feeling that spark that makes her thighs clench and her legs open wider.

She groans from the back of her throat, as the Maggie in her head finally puts her mouth on her, her tongue. Alex’s hips lurch forward, and she tries to keep the noise to a minimum as she moves. Fantasy Maggie kisses her stomach, her hand making a trail from Alex’s hip to her center, and Alex bites her lip, but it’s useless-

“Maggie!”

An explosion erupts in her entire body, overwhelming in its intensity. Her mind blanks out, and for a few incredible seconds there’s nothing but white hot pleasure pulsating, radiating from her center—and surprisingly, down to her legs. Her toes curl of their own volition.

She catches her breath when it’s over, clenching her legs together as a few aftershocks still allow themselves to be felt.

Her eyelids open to stare at the tiled wall in front of her.

She hadn’t realized she’d closed her eyes. She melts against the back of the seat, feeling like she just took a giant dose of Prozac. Like she’d just exorcised every ounce of stress from her body. Her muscles feel made of putty, useless and limp. It’s never...she’s never felt like that, never had one that... *strong*.

And fuck, had she really called out Maggie’s name just as she’d c-

“Alex! Alex, it’s Kara! I’m here! Are you ready?”
“There,” Jocelyn steps back, her sharp eyes scrutinizing Maggie.

Maggie resists the urge to squirm under her intense gaze. The makeup artist Winn hired is apparently one of the best in the business, probably because, as she quickly found out, she’s a perfectionist. Maggie can appreciate that, but she’s not the biggest fan of the extra time it takes the woman to finish her face.

Jocelyn gives a sharp nod, satisfied with the finished product, and begins methodically clearing the area around them.

“I’m gonna grab a quick bite to eat downstairs, but I’ll be back in time to do any touch ups before you leave.”

“Thanks.” Maggie smiles at her. “Winn was right, you do great work.” Jocelyn rolls her eyes at the mention of her assistant, but she smiles in return.

The door closes quietly behind her as she leaves. Maggie stands to survey the hotel room she’s rented. She figured it’d be easier to prepare for the night here, closer to the Dolby Theatre. And it’ll be less she has to clean up were she to get ready at her house. She walks over to the half open closet, a flash of blue peering out of it. Her dress. Her Zuhair Murad dress straight from this season’s collection. It wasn’t her first choice, but it is stunning, with its shimmering deep blue fabric and deep V at the front. The way it drapes reminds her of waterfall. An expensive, glossy waterfall. She’s just waiting until Ashley, her stylist for the event, arrives to help her into the dress.

Maggie turns, walking toward the large bay window. The sun is still high in the sky. The red carpet won’t be for another few hours, but her dread, thick and potent, has already begun. She swears she can feel it filling up her lungs, weighing them down and making it harder to breathe. But now isn’t the time to freak out.

The cool glass of the window in front of her looks inviting; she has the urge to rest her forehead against it and take a moment to breathe, but Jocelyn would kill her if she messed up her hard work.

Maggie straightens up, shoulders back. Alex and Kara should be arriving soon, and she can’t be the gracious host she offered to be and have an internal freak out at the same time.

Once M’gann had called her to confirm that Alex was attending the show with her, she’d invited her and Kara—to be polite—to make use of the rented hotel room she’d be using for the night. She’s still not sure why Alex was against going to the Oscars, and it’d been obvious Alex wouldn’t appreciate her asking, so she’d let it go. But she’d thought inviting her to prepare with her would be a nice olive branch, or show of support.

She looks at her reflection in the window pane and forces a smile. Familiar twin dimples reflect back to her in the glass. She looks happy, to anybody who doesn’t know her well enough to spot the difference, but it’ll have to do for tonight.

A rapid knock on the hotel door breaks the silence of the room.

She’s only halfway across the room when she hears Kara’s loud voice through the door.

“Hi! It’s us!”
Alex winces slightly at the volume of Kara and Elliot’s conversation over her head.

Her scalp hurts from the tight rollers encasing her hair, and their spirited exchange isn’t helping the growing headache at the base of her head. Elliot has been doing their hair for years now, and he and Kara struck up a good friendship. She likes the man too, even if he is a bit too loud for her taste. It’s not surprising he gets along with her sister though, they both share a love for pop culture and bad reality TV shows.

“Alex!” Elliot claps his hand on her shoulder, body shaking with laughter. “Do you remember that?”

She’s lost. She stopped following their conversation 10 minutes ago, but she smiles and nods nevertheless in agreement.

“God, how long have I been doing your two’s hair?”

Alex thinks back, doing the math quickly. She first met him on set of one of her dad’s films. He was part of the crew then, and a year later when she’d needed a hair stylist for a movie premiere, her dad had suggested him. Ever since, he’s the person she’d call for big events like this. And it was only natural that he’d start doing Kara’s hair too, when she got into the business. He’s the family stylist now, so to speak.

“Eight years now,” she tells him.

He steps back, perhaps to admire his work, and beams—clapping his hands together.

“Eight years. And hey!” He puts his hands on Alex’s shoulders. “You’re part of the team now!”

Alex frowns, not catching his meaning.

“Your girl in the bathroom…? I gotta say, I wasn’t surprised, but then again it takes one to know one.”

“Oh! Oh.”

Kara giggles. “Elliot, no, Alex is-”

“Happy to join the team,” she says succinctly, and Elliot laughs again.

“Oh! Oh.”

Kara turns toward her the minute he’s out of earshot. “Why didn’t you tell him the truth?”
Alex shrugs, an uncomfortable weight in her stomach.

“I can’t,” she excuses herself. “He’d have to sign a NDA like you and mom did. It’s not worth it we see him like twice a year.”

“Oh, right, the NDA. Sorry.”

Alex feels guilty for accepting her apology. It’s not exactly why. She just...wanted to know what it felt like, to tell someone that, even if it was a lie. “No problem.”

“Your turn for the hair, Kara!” Elliot calls out as he comes back inside, and Kara jumps on the bed, awaiting the stylist. Alex watches her and Maggie get their long hair done, and not for the first time she’s thankful for the haircut Nightingale gave her.

She just hopes the show doesn't make her cut it any shorter. She’s not fond of the soccer mom hairstyle.

She and Kara sit on the bed, while their makeup artist gets her things ready on the vanity on the other side of the room. The rollers are finally out of her head; she just has to get her makeup done and she’ll be ready to step into her dress. Faint nerves tingle at the pit of her stomach, but Alex squashes them down like a soldier preparing to step into a minefield. Tonight’s a mission, like any other.

She looks to her side at Kara, who sports a wide smile on her face.

“Why are you smiling like that, pray tell?”

Kara snorts. “Like what?”

“Exactly like that!”

Her little sister shrugs, picking at the edge of the old hoodie she’s wearing.

“This is nice, that’s all,” she tells her. “We’re getting ready for the Oscars together...the Oscars, Alex! And we’re both going and we both have dates that we love, it’s awesome.”

Alex swallows, hard. “My date is fake, remember?” she reminds her.

“Oh, you know what I mean! Maggie and you are friends now!” A mischievous look descends upon Kara’s face, and Alex instantly dreads what her sister is about to do. She’s seen that expression over the years more than she’d like, and she knows that what follows after rarely turns out well for her. “Hey, Maggie!” Kara calls out—hands cupped around her mouth to amplify her voice over the music. Alex throws herself across the covers to cover her mouth. Kara is stronger than her, and Alex isn’t quite sure when that happened. But she’s not invulnerable. Alex knows her kryptonite.

“Stop, or I’ll tickle you until you cry,” she warns her menacingly, hands hovering over her stomach.

Maggie pops her head out of the bathroom, a slight frown on her face.
She’s wearing a bathrobe instead of the sweatpants and t-shirt she was sporting earlier, and Alex tries to keep her eyes on her face.

“You called?” Maggie asks. Alex pokes Kara’s back, reminding her of the threat, and her sister gives in.

“Nope, no,” her sister smiles, pretty unconvincingly Alex thinks to herself. “I was just...talking about Maggie Smith. She deserves another Oscar, right?”


She disappears back into the bathroom, and Alex tickles Kara, once. Just to retaliate.

“You said you wouldn’t,” Kara laughs breathlessly, sitting up straight.

“Never said that,” she argues, and then breaks out into a smile. “Just said I would if you didn’t take it back. Turns out I would either way.” Kara sticks her tongue out at her. Alex has missed this. These bright spots of happiness that she took for granted with Kara when they were still just kids, and that they lost for a while there after everything with their dad. He’d want them to be closer. And Alex wants that too.

She’d tried to hide her mess from her sister, when she had already known. There’s nothing stopping her now from stepping up and being the sister Kara deserves. Brunch with their mother every two months and odd visits here and there won’t do anymore.

If the wistful look Kara gets is anything to go by, she agrees.

“I know you’ve been busy with work and the contract and everything,” Kara mentions. “And I’ve been busy too, with the new movie...but I’ve really missed you, Alex.”

Alex scoots over over on the bed, throwing her arms around Kara—imbuing a silent apology in her hug. Her sister returns the hug with superhuman strength, snuggling in her arms.

“I’ve missed you too.”

The hotel room looks like a mini hurricane went through it.

Clothes are strewn on the floor, couch, bed, over chairs, and some even under the coffee table. But far from being the work of mother nature, it’s only what’s left in the wake of the Danvers sisters, a force to be reckoned with in their own right. In the past hour since they swept into the hotel room—Kara charging into the room with Alex trailing after her—they’d turned the once pristine room into a hair sprayed locker room of shoes, clothes, and a number of other assorted scents. Taylor Swift blares in the background, Kara apparently being a big fan.

Maggie picks her way around the wreckage of the room, wondering if the two of them are always this messy. She thinks maybe their parents allowed it when they were younger and the behavior
carried over into their older years.

Maggie knows if she ever pulled a stunt like this when she was living with her parents, her mom would’ve grounded her for a week. If she’d done it while living with Gabriella, it would have only made their lives more difficult, considering the limited space in their apartment. Even worse, Gabriella would have probably made her watch The Brady Bunch reruns while they cleaned up. The cheesiness might make her aunt laugh, but it just makes Maggie cringe.

A loud laugh comes from the bathroom, and she’s surprised she recognizes it as Alex’s.

A minute later she steps out, her sister in tow, wearing a gorgeous red lace dress. She’s breathtaking. Maggie must be staring because Alex looks up at her a moment later, a light flush to her face, and Kara giggles beside her. Maggie averts her eyes, coughing slightly to clear her throat. “You both look really nice.”

“Thanks!” Kara enthuses brightly, and Alex smiles softly.

Alex detaches herself from Kara’s grip and maneuvers her way around the mess on the floor towards her handbag. “When do I -uh we,” she bends over to grab the purse, “get to see you in your dress?”

“My stylist should be over soon to help me in it.” Maggie pulls her robe a little tighter, feeling under dressed with both of the Danvers looking straight out of a catalog.

Kara pipes in, “So what’s the plan of action tonight ladies?”

“We leave the hotel, get in a fancy car, and then walk on a red carpet while hundreds of sweaty men shout at us,” Alex delivers drily, and Maggie has to stifle a laugh.

Kara only rolls her eyes exasperatedly. “You know what I meant Alex.”

“We’ll walk together,” Maggie declares.

And suddenly the Oscars don’t sound half bad.
alex is an 11 course meal omgg im soo gay look at her shes so beautiful adf im literalt shaking as i tpe this

3/3/19, 6:45 PM

49 Retweets  78 Likes

Replying to @clairedawson

it's blake b*tch
STFUuuuu at alexs sister omg those genes are so strong can i get some of them too lemme visit their mom

3/3/19, 6:50 PM

35 Retweets 123 Likes

Madi
@karamelstar
Replying to @dawsongays
Why did you cover Mon-El's face in the picture? He looked nice too, it was a date ❤️

it's blake bitch
@dawsongays
LMAAoooo why wouldn't i cover his ugly ass face is the real question noone wants to see him

davenport
@saphicsawyer
Replying to @dawsongays
Alex isn't paying attention to the most important night in Hollywood.

The crème de la crème of the industry is all around her, exchanging small talk during commercial breaks and buzzing with excitement before each winner is called. She doesn’t even know who won Best Supporting Actress until the blond girl from the bird film Kara liked so much walks to the stage to pick up her award. She’s too busy thinking of Maggie.

It was easy when she remained ignorant to how she felt, but now that she’s let herself accept what’s happening, it’s made it all the more real. Her thoughts buzz as fast as race cars on the last mile of Formula One. There’s Maggie’s chaste kiss on her cheek earlier that night, on the red carpet, and her smile when she left an imprint on her skin, her dimples popping. And deep down, she’s also thinking about Maggie’s legs in her dress and Fantasy Maggie’s face between her own legs, and that’s the one that makes her stop, and force herself to look around, if only to get out of her own head. She’s never done...that, to the thought of anyone. She’s never felt like this.

It feels like molten lava is running through her veins, climbing up her throat and making her flushed.

Maggie is so warm beside her, her bare arms brushing against her own every time she claps for a winner, and it’s a particular hell that Alex has never imagined for herself. It’s a relief when Maggie leaves her side to present.

Only a minute passes after Maggie leaves before she’s approached by a producer who claims to have worked with her father.

He enthusiastically shakes her hand and sings praises of her father, in particular the film that won him his Oscar. Alex swears she can physically feel the temperature around her drop at the mention of her dad’s film. It triggers memories of that night, of the exuberation and the excitement, and her parents letting her stay up late to celebrate. Of how the name of said film had come by her dad in the first place.

By the time the man leaves, her mood has worsened exponentially. She shifts in her seat
uncomfortably, desperately wanting to stand and do something, but the commercial break ends in 2 minutes. Instead, she’s forced to remain in her seat—her broken promise hanging over her like a guillotine. She’s not who she’d wanted to be. Most importantly, she’s not the person her father would’ve wanted her to be.

Alex Danvers. Daughter of famous late director Jeremiah Danvers. Sister of newly rising star Kara Danvers. And Maggie Sawyer’s plus one.

She needs a drink.

Maggie spends most of the evening dreading having to present.

Years ago, when she and Gabriella were still living in a one bedroom apartment in Crenshaw, they would make an evening out of it. The week before, they’d try to go to the movies and watch some of the nominees, and download the others. Then the day of the show, they’d get some popcorn and chocolates and takeout, that they normally didn’t treat themselves to, and watch the award show. Gabriella and her would place bets on which actor or actress would win, and her aunt would tease Maggie about the day she’d be on that stage.

Then she’d graduated to actually coming to the award show with Gabriella as her date, and they’d watched wide-eyed as everything unfolded right before their eyes. Gabriella hadn’t let up teasing Maggie about the day she’d be up there, but quieter so Keith Urban and Nicole Kidman, sitting in front of them, wouldn’t hear.

She’s supposed to get on that stage tonight, but it’s not exactly under the circumstances she would have liked. Either way, there’s no getting out of it, and when they finally call her to get backstage, Maggie’s ready.

Or she hopes she is.

She’s ushered into the crowded backstage area, people in black tie affair stoically standing around wearing headsets, and directed to sit in a director’s chair with presenter in big, bold white letters on the back of it. This is her first time backstage at the Oscars, and while she was hoping her first time here would be after exiting the stage, her Oscar in hand, it still is pretty exciting to be in the thick of it. She swivels her upper body to look behind her at the large, plastic Oscar statues lined up. In front of her are 3 televisions broadcasting different angles of the show, and below those is a long table draped in black and covered in food. On the left side of the room are the Oscar awards, one after the other in longs rows standing in the glass shelved display. A bright yellow light serves as a backdrop to the gleaming, golden awards, which only further embellishes the gravitas and distinction the award carries.

She’d really thought one of those might have belonged to her.

Her co-presenter arrives shortly after, and all Maggie can think is that Alex would love to meet him. Fifteen minutes later and they’re given the go ahead signal.
She walks out, squinting briefly at the sudden lights, her hand tucked into Diego Luna’s elbow. She’s never met the man, and they’ve never so much as practiced the script they were sent together (Maggie couldn’t make it to the Oscar rehearsal due to shooting conflicts), but she trusts that they both learned their lines well enough to not be embarrassing.

They make it to the microphone, and Maggie takes a deep breath, controlling her nerves so her voice won’t shake.

“Good evening. Maggie and I are here to present best foreign film,” Luna starts. “Which is fitting, considering my mother was born in England.”

“Really?” Maggie asks, acting with practiced ease. “My mother was born in Italy.” The sentence is easy to utter, after years of pretending she still has parents.

“My father was born in Mexico,” Luna says in kind. “Maggie and I can attest that it is not an individual’s country of origin that makes them remarkable, but rather their qualities. It’s the same with films.”

She tips her head up towards the microphone.

“No matter what language they are in, movies speak to the shared humanity in all of us,” she says.

“Contending for best foreign language film tonight, movies are from: Spain, Japan, Italy, Belgium, and Sweden.”

The next moment is bittersweet.

Because for one second it doesn’t matter that she got snubbed, and that she didn’t want to present in the first place, because looking out into the audience, in her long flowing dress...Maggie can’t believe she’s presenting an Oscar.

And the next second her mood falls again, as she remembers the months of effort and the year of wait just to have her hopes thrown back in her face, for a probable reason that hurts just as much as it did when she was a teenager. She’s a lesbian and that’s not a good look, according to them.

“Here are the nominees for best foreign film,” she says finally.

Maggie returns to her seat during the next commercial break.

She makes her way to her row, the skirt of her dress in her hands as she navigates the steps in her heels. When she finally sees Alex, all red hair and red dress, it feels like a breath of fresh air.

She sinks back into her seat, her mood somehow back to where it was when she didn’t hear her name called out that morning. Suddenly, cold fingers touch the back of her hand.

Maggie swivels her head to look as Alex grabs her hand.

She forces a soft smile on her face, thinking that they must be getting back from break, or some other photographer must have their lens on them, but as she looks around...she doesn't notice a single camera. Alex offers her a supportive smile, and Maggie lets out a breath, lets the false joy
slip from her face as she allows herself to take this moment of comfort.

It’s real. And she needs it.

They come back from the commercial break.

And between their bodies, hidden by their dresses and out of sight of any cameras, Alex keeps rubbing her thumb over her hand.

“I’m not feeling well,” she mentions, as the car drives away from the Dolby Theater.

“You okay?” Maggie asks, her hand immediately finding a place on her back, and Alex feels a
slight twinge of guilt for lying, coupled with the flutter that always seems to rise in her gut whenever Maggie touches her.

She exhales.

“I just-” she blows out a breath, looking out into the streets of LA. Her apartment is still her own. She could go there. But she doesn’t think she needs the memories. Back to the hotel it is. Its nondescript white hallways and elegant red sheets were exactly the type of wildly different scenario that might help her clear her mind.

(Wildly different now, that she’s spent months living in New York City, without getting drunk every night and renting out rooms to spend the night. If she hadn’t gotten Nightingale …Well, she wouldn’t be here.)

“You just…” Maggie trails off, and Alex meets her eyes. She shrugs.

“I just don’t feel like partying right now,” she tells her. “I’m sorry.”

Maggie nods. “I don’t either, believe me, but….“ She shakes her head. She seems to swallow whatever it is that was going to leave her mouth. “You don’t have to apologize -it’s fine. I just thought we’d be walking in together, that’s all. I can call M’gann…”

“Thank you.”

“Sure, Danvers,” Maggie tells her, and then she’s grabbing her cellphone from Winn’s hands. He’s been so conveniently quiet in the front seat, Alex had almost forgotten Maggie’s assistant existed.

Alex looks out the window as Maggie makes her calls.

It’s not just that she doesn’t feel like attending a celebration.

She doesn’t, she can’t stomach having to fake smiles and pretend to laugh, and for all intents and purposes act the entire night, and it’s not even the prospect of walking around and being asked about their relationship, of having to talk about dating Maggie while the woman in question was right beside her, or of having to lie, in a myriad different ways.

It’s also because of the reason why. She didn’t receive an invitation for the party. Maggie received an invitation, and she’s going as her plus one. And when she pointed that out to J’onn in one of their emails about the show, he’d mentioned maybe she could be Kara’s plus one, if Mon-El had been invited.

And that’s the thing. She doesn’t want to be there because of her sister, or because of her girlfriend -her fake girlfriend, at that. Alex has always wanted to get places because of herself.

She tried as a teenager, attempting to build a name apart from her father’s accomplishments, and she tried like hell in college, thinking that maybe her path was to follow her mom and stay away from the lights. But she failed, both times. And she isn’t entirely sure what she’s trying to do now. It almost feels like cheating, to be backed by Maggie and their relationship. Like skipping steps to where she wants to be. And she never wanted that.

The car stops at a red light, and a soft hand lands on her shoulder.

“James is going to wait for me.”

“That’s good.”
“Are you gonna be okay?” Maggie asks. “Isn’t J’onn-”

“I can handle my own life,” Alex says, and tries to soften her features to counter the words that come out with more bite than intended.

Maggie doesn’t say anything.

“I’ll see you, then,” Maggie says, and they remain quiet until the car stops outside and Winn helps Maggie out. Alex gives their driver the direction of the hotel.

Los Angeles flashes by outside her window as she itches to just...forget.

Maggie arrives at the venue to a bevy of flashing camera bulbs (and more than a few shouts from the crowd asking where Alex is).

James is waiting for her, as he said he would, and they do their obligatory solo shots for the paparazzi and then a few group photos. Maggie doesn’t even bother to talk to the reporters lined up on the red carpet. She knows what their questions will be, and she doesn’t feel like contributing to the frivolous fodder of Hollywood, Not tonight. She’s faked enough smiles.

This is Maggie’s second time at the event, and not much has changed. Fancy dinner tables littered with wine glasses cover the floor, and there’s an area cordoned off for dancing complete with a DJ. They navigate a path toward a clear table.

A vase of white flowers make the centerpiece of the extravagant decorations. The plates are so clean she can see her reflection in them. The scene before her is impressive, but all she can focus on is the empty seat to her left—where Alex would’ve been—mocking her.

“So Alex couldn’t make it?” James’ voice cuts across the table, he nods at the empty space beside her.

“She wasn’t in the mood,” she shrugs, not wanting to show her disappointment. “Award season can be pretty draining,” she points out, feeling the need to preemptively defend her.

James lifts his hands in a conciliatory manner. “You’re preaching to the choir right now.” He smiles. “But you and I can still have a good time.”

“Yeah,” Maggie breathes in and smiles. She grabs a flute from a passing waiter, and James does the same. She raises it. She can already tell it’s champagne so expensive you can taste the money with each sip. “To a good time,” she toasts.

“And to the end of awards season,” James adds with a clink.

Eventually, more people trickle in to join their party, and soon enough their table is one of the loudest in the room.
Maggie partakes in the lively discussion, but only just enough so nobody notices anything off with her. Her heart isn’t in it. Her feet hurt. The food, while definitely cooked by a famous world class chef, goes down her throat like cardboard. And her mind is miles away, in whatever hotel room Alex is staying in. Maggie would wager she’s alone and making full use of the mini fridge drinks right about now. It doesn’t feel right to leave her like that, but she didn’t want to force Alex to come. She already hadn’t even wanted to attend the actual award show, and it was only because of M’gann talking to J’onn that she came (Maggie had felt like a child tattling on their friend to their parent when she’d made the call, but it couldn’t be helped—if she’d showed up without Alex, the speculation would have spread like a wildfire, not to mention, King would have had their heads). But Maggie is immensely grateful she came, after all.

She’d made her night significantly better than what it would’ve been had she been alone. Alex tends to do that. Maybe she should return the favor.

Maggie grabs her phone from her purse, checking the time. She’s been here for approximately three quarters of an hour, 15 minutes more and it should be acceptable for her to leave. The subsequent minutes pass by excruciatingly slow. Maggie feels like she’s aged 5 years by the time the new hour hits. As she stands to leave, a round of pleas entreating her to stay greet her, but she brushes them all off with a smile, citing tiredness as reason for her early departure. James offers to walk her out, and she accepts.

She’s almost out of the room when she spots Kara sitting on one of the couches against the wall—Mon-El nowhere to be seen. The younger Danvers is twiddling her thumbs, literally, while glancing around the room. Maggie had wanted to leave, but she finds she can’t with that scene.

“One last stop,” she tells James, and holds his arm to steer him in Kara Danvers’ direction. The blonde notices her right away, and stands up to greet her.

“Maggie!” Kara envelops her in her arms and—go figure—she’s a hugger. “Where’s Alex?”

“She wasn’t in the mood for a party,” Maggie says the night’s favorite excuse. “You’re looking lonely, though,” she mentions off handedly.

Kara waves it away. “My boyfriend went to get us some drinks... a little while ago.”

“Well, until he returns…” Maggie pushes James a step forward. “This is-”

“Oh my God,” Kara says. “You’re James Olsen.”

Maggie raises her eyebrows.

“I’m sorry, I know you from- from Nightingale, obviously!” Kara snorts, loudly. “But also, you were Guardian! I loved that show when I was in high school. My mom and I still watch sometimes. We love it! I mean, I liked it, and you were- I mean,” Kara giggles. Maggie hides a smile. It’s like watching a car crash.

“Thanks,” James tells her, with the easy smile Maggie knows. “You know, almost nobody talks about that show anymore. I still have a few of the original posters...I could give you one.”

“Oh, wow.”

“I mean, for your mom, or...”

“For me! But I can’t. Oh God, I can’t.”
“I’ll send it with Alex—”

“Pfft, no, I can’t.”

“It’s just a poster, please. But first, we should be properly introduced. James Olsen,” James tells her, extending his hand for a handshake. Kara stares at it, dumbfounded. “I know who you are, but seems kinda rude not to let you introduce yourself,” he says.

Kara stares, and thankfully snaps out of it.


“Kara…”

Maggie smiles to herself. At least she’s leaving them both in good company.

“I’m going to walk myself out,” she tells James, and then waves goodbye to Kara. She doubts it’s noticed, however, with the way they’re focused on their current conversation. She takes one last glance back at them before exiting the room.

At least one good thing happened tonight.
The 2019 Oscars provided us with plenty of fashion fodder, thanks to a stacked red carpet. Up in a gorgeous Givenchy dress, Oprah stumped in a low cut, midnight blue dress by Versace. She didn’t come out until after the finale statuettes were handed out. The stars arrived at Vanity Fair’s After-Party an hour ago, all of your favorites—Margot Robbie, Saoirse Ronan, and Maggie Gyllenhaal—showed up in style with the night’s winners in some award-worthy outfits of their own, and did so in impeccable looks so far from the after-hours Oscars, ahead. And stay tuned to Glamour for more Oscar style!
The dim light from the lone desk lamp casts shadows across the room, some of which are banished by the illumination from the moon beaming through the window.

Alex watches the mix of shadows and light dancing across her stretched out legs. The small bottles on the floor beside her gleam in the semi-darkness. She drops her head onto the glass behind her, letting out a puff of air. Her limbs feel loose, the sensations of the world just a little less strong. The alcohol is working. She drops her hand to the floor, knocking over a couple empty bottles in the process—the resulting clinks fragment the tranquility of the moment. She gropes around for a few minutes, trying to find a full bottle. Her hands wrap around the neck of one and slowly slides down, feeling the four rounded corners. Jack Daniels if she had to guess. That’s what most hotels like this will have stocked in the mini fridges. She’s been here, in this exact moment—sitting on the floor with a variety of mini alcohol bottles scattered around her—more times then she’d like to count. She’s not proud of finding herself back here.

Sometimes it feels like she’s going in circles. She thinks she’s making progress, but then she’ll inevitably loop back to the start, and the cycle starts over again. But well, it is the Oscars, a night that’s been touchy for her since her dad died. Perhaps she can grant herself some leeway tonight.

She knocks back the Jack Daniels in two gulps. She relishes the burn down her throat and prick of water at the corners of her eyes. The empty bottle joins its fellow fallen comrades in a growing pile. She wonders what Maggie’s doing right now. Whether she’s enjoying the party. She seems to thrive in those types of situations, her natural charm and affability taking center stage and winning the hearts of all lucky enough to be around her. James is with her too. And she knows Kara and Mon-El went. Maybe they’re all together, laughing and drinking champagne

Alex grabs another bottle because apparently it’s not doing its job yet. The alcohol is supposed to make her forget, not think about Maggie even more.

She doesn’t want to think about how her dress perfectly exposed the smooth, unblemished expanse of her back. She definitely doesn’t want to think about how perfectly her hand fit in the small of Maggie’s back or the warmth she could feel radiating from Maggie’s skin through the thin fabric of her dress. That dress. Maggie had pushed Kara and her into the bathroom while she changed, claiming she wanted it to be a surprise. And when she finally had called to them that they could come out, Alex’s jaw—embarrassingly—almost dropped. She’d looked like some ethereal... water faerie.

She’d managed to get out a compliment, she thinks, most of her memory of that moment is the way Maggie laughed at her, eyes sparkling and smile miles wide.
Maybe Maggie is smiling at someone else like that right at this moment. But it doesn’t matter. Alex doesn’t care. Just because she’s admitted to herself she may like her co-star, a little, doesn’t mean she can’t smile at other people with the entire galaxy in her eyes.

She grabs another mini bottle but lets it rest in her hands for the time being. Her mind starts to drift until it lands back on the other elephant in the room pressing into her brain. Her father.

She doesn’t want to think about her dad, and how he carried her on his shoulders when she was little. How he took her to his movie sets and let her sit on his lap while he directed. Or the years after Kara entered their lives, and the four of them were a family, whole, together.

She’s not sure whether she’ll ever escape his shadow, and she’s not even sure if she wants to: it’s one of the few things left of him.

Alex doesn’t believe in heaven, or God, but if there were an afterlife, she’s sure her dad would be looking down at her, a small, disappointed expression painting his face. Her eyes start watering, and she can’t blame the burn of alcohol this time. She closes her eyes, head lolling down onto her chest. She can feel the barriers, usually so stoutly constructed during the daylight, start crumbling.

Emotions—shame, self-loathing, disappointment—wash over her like the waves that used to lap at her feet back home, when she was younger.

When she was still happy.

The door is open when she arrives.

Maggie’s heels click on the linoleum floors as she enters, and she quietly toes them off at the door, just in case Alex is already asleep. But she isn’t. A lump on the bed shifts as she closes the door with a click. Alex raises her head slowly, alcohol impairing her movements Maggie would guess. And sure enough, she spots a cluster of empty mini bottles carelessly spread on the floor.

“How in the…. world, did you find me?”

By the way Alex drags her words, Maggie’s guess is proven right. She’s drunk.

“I called M’gann, who called J’onn.” Maggie drops her purse on the table by the door. “He made your reservation. You really ought to get a personal assistant.”

“Why are our managers talking?” Alex slurs. “It’s weird, isn’t it? I think they’re like, friends now.”

“Maybe they are.” She shrugs, even though she doubts Alex can see it in the darkness and with alcohol clouding her brain. “It’s none of our business though.”

“Mmph,” Alex’s reply is unintelligible as she flops back onto the bed. Maggie lifts her skirt, squinting at the floor as she walks to the small kitchen for a glass of water for Alex.
“Is the party over?” Alex asks.

“No,” Maggie calls out from the kitchen. “It’s only 12,” she says. “They were just getting started.”

She walks to the large bed dominating the bedroom area, and clicks on the lamp on the bedside table. She thinks she should feel strange, or weird, for doing this for her, but she doesn’t. Alex brought her beer and pizza when she was down. They’re friends.

Alex squints against the sudden light, and Maggie touches her shoulder. She’s still wearing her deep red dress.

“Sit up, I brought you some water.”

Alex obeys, but she doesn’t drink after she takes the glass from her hands. She just stares at it, and then at Maggie.

“Why did you leave early?” she asks, her voice rough. But before Maggie can think of an answer, Alex avalanches forward with words that break her heart. “Is it because you pity me? I don’t need your pity.”

“I just like spending time with you, Danvers,” she tells her, sitting down on the bed. “Besides, a room full of straight men? No thanks.” She scratches the back of her neck. “No offense. Nothing against straight people.”

Alex snorts, but her face looks the farthest thing from amused.

“You okay?” she asks softly, her hand hovering close to Alex’s shoulder.

“Did you, huh, did you see Kara? I didn’t tell her I wasn’t going.” Alex kicks off the covers, and Maggie looks away when her dress rides up her thighs. “I kind of... only decided that after the awards.”

“Yeah, I told her you weren’t up to it,” Maggie answers her. “I left her in James’ company, actually, so she should be fine.”

Alex hums, and Maggie follows her as she makes her way on uneven steps towards the kitchen.

“Is that all you’re worried about right now?”

“What makes you think I’m worried about anything?”

Alex opens the mini fridge, and Maggie is surprised when she fishes out two other tiny bottles. Just how well did they stock up this room?

“Alex-” Maggie puts her hand over hers, preventing the newly opened bottle to be brought up to her lips. “You can talk to me.”
Alex stares at Maggie, her vision swimming, and her words running through her head. *You can talk to me, you can talk to me.*

“Can I?”

Maggie frowns. “Of course. We’re friends. I’m- I’m here for you.”

“But I shouldn’t. Because It’s not on you,” her voice is foreign to her own ears. Her tongue loose and numb with alcohol, her throat raw with tears unshed.

“What’s not on me?” Maggie gently pries the bottle out of her hand, setting it on the counter.

“That I’m a mess right now. A failure.”

“Alex, don’t talk like-”

“My dad was the fourth youngest person to ever win an Oscar for best director, did you know that?”

“I didn’t.”

"He always did things like that. The youngest...youngest person to have however many films premiered at Cannes. I can’t- huh- I can’t remember...how many there were.” She tries, but her head hurts, and that’s not even the point she’s trying to make. “He once did 7 films in a year, too. And he adopted Kara a year before that and it never affected his life, you know? He was always there. He’d take us on location. He was always a good father, even when he was a fucking genius elsewhere.”

“Alex…”

“Do you know how he died?”

It’s so easy to utter in the dark of the hotel room, drunk, staring at the girl—the beautiful woman—she’s starting to crush on.

Maggie shakes her head.

“It was a car accident,” Alex tells her, shuddering as she remembers that night. It was cold, unusually cold for a January in Malibu. “We were driving home...and this car came out of nowhere. I wasn’t wearing a seatbelt, and my dad wasn’t either. We were fine, though. The car...the car hit us pretty hard and left, but we were fine. But the car wouldn’t start. We were in the middle of the road...I don’t remember anything after that.”

There are tears in Maggie’s eyes, or so she thinks. She can’t see very well in front of her.

“I woke up in the hospital. Another car...an oil rig...it didn’t see us in time to stop. I remember asking where my dad was, but nobody would tell me.” The nearly detached way she’s been speaking swiftly stops, as she remembers the anguish she felt in those few minutes. “I kept...I kept asking, I think I might have gotten hysterical at some point because the next thing I remember is waking up again, groggy, exhausted. My throat felt raw.” It’s not different to how it feels now, all the alcohol she’s swallowed having made it burn. “My mom and Kara were there, and I could tell just by looking at their faces that something was wrong.” She meets Maggie’s eyes, tears finally falling from her own. “I knew he’d died.”

“Oh, Alex.” Maggie takes a step toward her, her face anguished, but Alex takes a step back.
“It was my fault!” She sobs out the truth that haunts her. “It was my fault.”

Maggie shakes her head, but Alex takes another step back.

“You see it now, right? I’m not...I’m not good. I- I keep living in his shadow and everyone thinks I should be amazing because I’m his daughter but most days, it feels like I’m drowning.” The truth is out in the open, stained with the booze and saliva she can’t help but spit out as she speaks. The wretched proof of her misery. “And Kara- Kara was always the better daughter. And I’m- I was glad, when she didn’t win at the Globes. Because it would’ve been just another thing...another fucking thing that she’s better than me at.” She drags her hand down her face. “Doesn’t that make me a terrible sister?”

“It makes you human,” Maggie says, but Alex shakes her head.

“I’m- I’m not.” She struggles to put into words the way she feels. The knowledge that she can’t compete with someone like her sister, that she can’t live up to the memory of her dad. And now Maggie...”And you,” she adds. You look so beautiful it hurts, Alex thinks, and I don’t know what that means for me, I don’t want to know.

“You’re standing here,” she says finally, meeting Maggie’s eyes again, and the depthless brown pools are trained on her. “And you’re...looking at me like that, and it just makes me more- more-”

She stumbles as she takes a step forward, and then she’s encased in a delicate embrace.

Maggie’s arms around her seem to help her keep it together, the strength of her hug making Alex feel safe, even through the constriction of her rib cage. Maggie is deceptively strong for such a small woman. And that strength is focused on her now.

It makes Alex feel strong in turn. Makes her feel brave.

The words fight their way to her conscious, dragged up from the depths of her heart, where she’s been keeping them locked since she was a teenager. The woman in her arms isn’t the exception to the rule.

It’s not just Maggie.

She likes women, and she really likes one in particular.

Chapter End Notes

Alex is moving forward (finally), and so is the fic. We’d love to hear your thoughts about it all! Leave us a comment below, or you can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meanstoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We'd love to talk to you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!
Interlude I: Alex

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars.

We are made of starstuff.
Alex doesn’t like feeling like she’s not good enough.

She tries to follow her teacher, but when she finally moves her leg the way she’s supposed to, with the arm she’s supposed to—her teacher turns back to remind her to point her toes.

Alex points her toes.

She forgets to move her right arm. She looks up at the large window, the sun shining through the slightly dirty panes, and she can see her daddy and her mommy looking at her. Her mommy waves, and her daddy gives her a thumbs up with a big smile.

Alex blows out a breath and tries again.

She knows she’s not good. The other girls follow the teacher but Alex is always behind. Her mommy keeps saying ballet is hard at first, and that she’ll get better, but Alex doesn’t think she will.

And she hates it.

Her mommy and daddy always tell her how exceptional she is, but Alex doesn’t feel that way when she’s in ballet class. She just wishes she was home, swimming in the pool or reading one of the books her daddy got her for her last birthday, because Alex can read without stopping now. Her mommy says she’s special. Alex likes that. She’s the best at reading, and swimming, and remembering all the planets there are. She just wishes she was any good at ballet.

She’s glad when the class is over, like she always is.

She jumps into her daddy’s arms as soon as the teacher lets them out.

She doesn’t let Rosa change her out of her leotard when they get home.

Her nanny chases after her, but Alex throws her dance bag on the floor of her room, and then runs back downstairs, so she can show her mommy and daddy what she learned. She tries to remember which foot goes with which hand as she comes down the stairs. She finds them in daddy’s office, talking, and she stands in front of the TV her daddy keeps there.

“Look!” she calls out, and her mommy smiles, and her daddy closes the folder he was reading from.

“Let’s see it, bunny,” he says.

Alex tries.

She tries really, really hard to do what her teacher did, but she knows it doesn’t look the same. And the very worst part is, she doesn’t have a barre to hold on to, so when she tries to go on her toes, on releve, she loses her balance, and then she’s on the floor, on her knees.

Alex feels her face go hot, especially her cheeks. She knows they’re red, and she doesn’t like it.
Her lip wobbles.

“Alexandra, get up,” her mommy says. “That was a nice try, sweetie.”

“It was amazing!” her daddy says, and he claps, but it only makes Alex feel worse.

Because she’s smart.

And she knows he’s smiling and clapping because he’s her daddy, not because she’s any good. Alex does get up. But only to run to her room. She climbs up the stairs the fastest she’s ever done and throws herself on her bed.

“Are you okay, Alex?” Rosa asks. “Do you want me to bring you some water?”

She shakes her head.

She hears heavy steps, and knows her daddy is there. She smooshes her face against her pillow.

“I got it Rosa, thank you,” her daddy says.

Alex resolutely keeps her face pressed against her pillow, even when it gets hot and hard to breathe.

“Why are you mad, hunny bunny?” her dad asks softly. “Is it because you fell? Because you know, daddy has fallen a lot of times. I even have a scar in my leg, I fell really hard playing football in college. I got up, though. Just like you did. And kept trying. You can keep trying, too.”

Alex raises her head.

It’s not what she wants. She doesn’t like ballet. She doesn’t want to try anymore.

“You don’t want to keep trying?” her daddy asks. “Or you don’t think you can? Because I believe in you.”

Alex looks up at him, finally.

She likes it when her daddy says that. It makes Alex feel like she can do anything. But she doesn’t want to do this anymore.

“No,” she tells him, sitting up.

“No what, princess?”

“I don’t want to try,” she tells him, staring at the bed spread. It’s *The Magic School Bus*. She pokes her finger into Wanda’s face, and watches as her face gets twisted with the sheets. She looks up at her daddy. “I don’t like it.”

Her dad smiles a weird smile. It doesn’t look happy.

“Then why didn’t you tell us, bunny?” He asks her softly. Alex wasn’t expecting that.

She shrugs.

“You and mommy liked it,” she tells him. “I just wanted to be good so you’d…”

“Be proud of you?”

Alex nods. And suddenly she feels like crying. Her lip wobbles, but her daddy picks her up and sits
her on his lap.

“Mommy and I will always be proud of you, Alex. You don’t need to keep going if you don’t like it.”

Alex frowns at that. She didn’t know she could just...stop. But it’s not just that she doesn’t like it. How mad she feels when her arms and feet won’t move the way she wants them to makes her feel way worse. The other girls look like fairies and Alex feels like a robot.

“What’s worse than not liking?” she asks. Her daddy pushes her hair behind her ear while he thinks. It feels nice. And Alex knows her daddy knows the answer because he knows everything.

“Well, that would be hatred. When you hate something.”

Alex undoes the bun pulling on her hair, and her daddy helps. When it’s finally gone, she feels free.

“I hate ballet,” she states firmly.

She feels bad for a second. She thinks maybe her daddy will be mad, or her mommy will be sad, because she liked doing Alex’s hair up in a bun, and they both always stayed to watch her dance, even when the other moms and dads left. But she hates it.

“Well, that’s okay, Alex. We’ll find something you like.”

Alex hugs her daddy.

But as she does, she starts thinking that it’s not that she hates the dance. Her teacher looked pretty as she turned and turned, and her classmates were nice. It’s just that she can’t do it, and that’s what she doesn’t like —what she hates.

Alex hates feeling like she’s not good enough.

She’s in awe of the bright lights.

She cranes her neck to look at the ceiling and sees the giant stage lights—that’s what her daddy tells her they are, when she asks. The ceiling is so tall—Alex has never seen a building be that big inside, ever.

“Hey,” her daddy laughs at her and she can feel the rumble of his laugh in her chest. He puts her down. “Don’t look directly at the lights, you’ll hurt your eyes.”

Alex nods, and holds his hand as they walk through the set.

It’s her first time on the set of one of her daddy’s movies—her first time on any set. Her mom didn’t want her on set because she said Alex was too young, but her daddy insisted she should go as her birthday present.

She’s 6 years old today.

And Alex doesn’t feel any different, but she’s not silly enough to think any changes in her body or
brain could be seen so soon. But she does know that she starts school soon, and she’ll be attending first grade in the fall. And she’s gotten good at math, because she practices with her mommy, and she knows that in 4 years she’ll be 10, because 6 plus 4 is 10, and that’s double digits. It’s a big change.

She’d woken up early that morning and immediately ran to her parents room to wake them up too.

Every year, she gets measured against the door frame of her bedroom door, twice. Once on her birthday, and once on some other day, in the middle of the year, but Alex never knows when that is. But her birthday she remembers. And earlier this morning, she couldn’t wait to see how tall she’d gotten in the last 6 months. (A year has 12 months which is the same as 365 days. So half a year is 6 months.)

She’d grown 2 inches since she was 5.

“What are you thinking about, bunny?” Her daddy asks.

Alex looks up at him. “I’m gonna be taller than you soon,” she tells him confidently. If she keeps growing 2 inches every year by the time she’s 80 years old she’ll definitely be taller than him. He’ll need to hold her hand.

“I can’t wait to see that,” he says, and then introduces her to the actors and crew, who call her little Danvers and are very nice.

Alex likes it here.

She sits in her daddy’s lap behind a big camera and watches the actresses act.

Alex didn’t understand it when she was little, but she’s 6 now, and she knows a lot more than she used to. It’s like play pretend, except her daddy comes up with the stories, and the actors make them come true. And then they put them in the movie theaters and everyone goes to watch them.

She didn’t understand that, either. Why her daddy would want the whole world to see his ideas. She wouldn’t want anyone to watch her while she plays pretend with her dolls. But her daddy seems happy, so Alex guesses it’s okay.

“Cut!” he exclaims suddenly, startling her. The actors stop acting. They have to listen to her daddy. “Great take. Let’s take five, okay?”

The actors leave and stop looking sad all of a sudden. They were acting.

“Cool.”

Her dad laughs, and Alex looks over her shoulder to see her mommy is there too.

“Hi, mommy!”

“Hello, darling. How are you liking the set?”

“They all have to listen to daddy!”
Her mom laughs. “They do.”

“They could listen to you, too,” her dad says. “Wanna yell ‘action’ when they get back?”

Alex turns around, nearly falling off his lap.

“Really?”

“Yes, really,” her daddy promises. “What do you say? Do you think you might want to be a director, like daddy?”

Her mommy walks over closer, putting her head over his shoulder.

“Oh maybe she’ll be a scientist, like mommy,” she says.

“Or a model, like mommy,” her daddy says.

“Hush,” her mommy tells him, before kissing him on the mouth. Yuck. Alex ignores them and thinks about a more important thing. Something she didn’t know.

“You were a model?” she asks, excited. She can’t really imagine her mom on TV, or on those pictures on the buses that they drive past sometimes.

“She was!” Her dad exclaims. “You think you might wanna see those pictures, bunny?”

Alex nods so hard it feels like her brain shakes inside.

“I’m gonna show her your mullet, Jeremiah,” her mommy tells her daddy.

Alex frowns. “What’s a mullet?”

Both her mommy and daddy laugh. Alex smiles, but she doesn’t like them laughing when she doesn’t know why. She forgets about it quickly, though, as the actors come back, and her daddy does let her help out.

She yells “Action!” the loudest she’s ever yelled anything.

Alex dozes off on the car ride back.

A breeze floats in from the open windows, and her mommy and daddy speak in low voices about something she doesn’t understand, something that must be complicated. She doesn’t worry about it. She doesn’t have to because her mommy and daddy are the smartest people in the world.

Alex likes the piano music coming from the car radio, and hearing them talk, and before she knows it her eyes slip close.

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Alex is 6 years and 4 months old the first time she gets on a plane.

She keeps track of the months, because she knows she’s starting first grade soon, and it makes her next birthday seem even sooner, and she likes that. They’re flying to New York. Her mommy
bought her a book about it, and they’ve been reading it together every night for the past month. Alex wants to see the Statue of Liberty.

She knows New York is on the other side of the map, the other coast, and that it takes a long time to get there, but she’s excited.

They’re the first to board the plane.

Her daddy leads her up the ramp and the steep stairs onto the airplane. They turn left into a large cabin with big comfy seats—blankets wrapped in plastic lay on each cushion—and TV screens are on the back of the seats. Alex feels a wave of relief wash over her. She was worried the plane might be cramped and full of people. She remembers seeing the inside of an airplane in a movie; it’d been filled with coughing people and crying babies all squashed up against the other like sardines in a can.

Alex looks up at her daddy, face questioning. “Which seats are ours?”

“The very front row,” he replies, smiling. Alex bounds up the front, throwing herself into the seat closest to the window and peering out onto the ground below at the small people in orange walking about.

Once they’ve settled into their seats, a pretty blonde lady in uniform walks up to greet them. She smiles at Alex kindly and pulls out a small backpack from behind her, handing it over to her. Inside of it, Alex finds a coloring book and crayons, stickers, an airplane pin, and a stuffed animal dog key chain. She loves planes.

She busies herself by coloring, glancing up every few seconds to make sure the colors on the paper are accurate to the actual plane. Accurate means the same, she read that last night. Soon enough, other people start trickling aboard, and their once empty cabin fills up, but there’s still lots of space left.

“Alex,” her mommy’s voice and hand on her wrist breaks her focus on making sure the gray of the walls is inside the lines. “We’re about to take off, look out the window.”

She snaps her head around to look outside, and sure enough, the ground beneath them is moving. She presses her face up against the window and watches as the ground moves by faster and faster. The airplane seems to tremble, and she feels a heavy pressure pushing her down. She gasps, but then her mommy and daddy hold her hand and Alex isn’t afraid anymore as the ground gets farther and farther away.

They’re in the air.

“Did Rosa pack my blue tights? I wanna wear my blue tights.”

Her mommy does her makeup in front of a mirror, while her daddy puts on a tie. They’re going to the theater, and Alex has never been old enough to go before. They’re seeing The Lion King, and Alex likes lions. She likes watching Animal Planet.

“I’m sure she did, sweetie. I’ll help you find them in just a second.”
“Okay!” she exclaims, and runs out of her parent’s bedroom to the living room. The hotel room is small, and apart from her room and her parent’s room, there’s one big room with a kitchen on one side and a living room on the other. All in one.

Alex runs to the window, and looks out onto the streets below. She’s never been this high up.

“Found the blue tights!” her mom exclaims, and Alex hurries back into her room to finish getting ready. The car is waiting for them downstairs.

The streets of New York are kind of weird, Alex comes to find out. She saw a man sleeping on the sidewalk when they arrived. (She’s not sure why he was doing that since people are supposed to sleep in beds. Maybe it’s a New York thing). She doesn’t like it.

She likes it even less as they’re exiting the hotel, headed for the car.

She steps in a puddle.

“Mommy!”

Her parents look at each other, and her daddy picks her up.

“We’re going to be late if we go back, honey. It’s not that bad, is it?”

Alex shakes her head, and bites on her lip to keep it from wobbling.

Her mom rolls the hem of her tights up when they’re inside the big black car, but Alex hates it. She still feels dirty.

It’s crowded.

She sits in the middle of her mommy and daddy, and it’s a lot like the movie theater, except there’s not screen. Alex realizes that’s why it’s called theater in the first place, and she wonders which came first. She can probably ask her mommy to get her a book about it.

The lights go low, and Alex swings her feet, excited.

But when it starts, it’s too loud.

The songs go by too fast for her to know what they’re singing, and she doesn’t really like the way the people are dressed. And she has to keep reminding herself they’re just people, because some of them don’t look like it. There’s too much paint on their faces. And Alex is sitting right up front. At one point, she thinks one of them stares at her so she hides under her daddy’s arm.

Broadway isn’t exactly what she expected, but her mommy carries her on her hip the whole way home, even if Alex’s sneakers dirty up her pretty dress. And it’s okay.
Alex buzzes with excitement her first day of school.

She loves learning. Rosa has already taught her a few words in Spanish, and Alex knows how to ask for grilled broccoli for lunch. She can’t pronounce *por favor* all that well yet, but Rosa promised to practice with her. She reads almost as well as her mommy does, too. And sometimes, she even knows which facts her daddy is going to tell her about one of the many planets pasted on her bedroom roof.

Her daddy says she needs school because there’s almost nothing else they can teach her. Alex knows he’s joking, but she’s excited to learn new things all the same.

Her parents drop her off at school one sunny late August morning.

Her uniform smells nice, because Rosa used the soap she likes when she washed it, and her backpack has a lot of tiny Jupiters on it. It’s her favorite planet.

“Let’s walk you inside—”

“I can do it!” Alex exclaims. She’s in 1st grade, not a baby, and she notices that only the babies in kindergarten are getting walked inside with their parents. She skipped kindergarten. She didn’t need it.

“You sure, bunny?”

Alex nods.

Her mom clasps her hands together, and her eyes look wet—like she wants to cry—but she’s smiling.

“All right. Make lots of friends, okay?”

Alex nods. She stands on the steps of her school and waves as they get into the car.

They hold hands, and they look at back at her every few steps. Alex wonders what her daddy is going to work on in his office when he gets home. She wonders what her mommy is going to do at the lab today. She wonders what Rosa is going to cook for lunch, and she’s sad that she’s not going to get to know how to say it in Spanish. Suddenly, school doesn’t seem so great.

She runs and bangs her hand on the car door.

Her mom opens it, and Alex climbs inside onto her mommy’s lap, between her chest and the steering wheel.

“Oh, my baby,” her mommy says, hugging her back.

“Hang on,” her dad says. And then Alex frowns as her daddy gets out of the car, and then there’s a bright flash. He puts his camera down.

“One day you’re going to appreciate this picture, bunny,” he tells her.

Alex lets them drop her off in her classroom.

“What shall we read for story time today?”
The whole class starts yelling at the teacher, and Alex closes her eyes. She hates it when people are noisy. And her mommy taught her that yelling gets you nowhere. But then she looks around, and figures that there’s no way her teacher is going to listen to her if she doesn’t scream too. She raises her hand, and yells.

“Goosebumps! Goosebumps! Harry Potter!”

“All right, I hear…” “The Berenstain Bears Go To School”?"

Alex plops down with a huff. Well, that’s just dumb.

The teacher must notice, because then her eyes are on her, and Alex looks back up, defiant.

“Alexandra, let’s turn that frown upside down! What book did you want? We could do it after lunch!”

Alex brightens up. “Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.”

“I’ve…actually never heard of that book,” her teacher says. “What’s it about? Does your mommy read it to you?”

“I read it,” she corrects her. “It came out in June,” she tells her teacher. “My daddy bought it in England. He was there shooting a movie.”

“Did he meet the Queen?” someone asks, in awe.

“What Queen?” someone else pipes up.

“Where’s England?”

“Quiet, class,” the teachers says gently.

“I don’t know,” Alex answers the boy. “I’ll ask him.”

“That sounds like a very good book, Alex, but you need to pick one from our bookcase.”

Alex sighs. She looks at the bookcase. They’re all…books for little kids. Like the type she read with her mommy when she was 3. She’s not 3 anymore.

“Rainbow fish?” She asks. Her teacher seems pleased.

“Rainbow fish it is! Now, story time.”

Alex dozes off before Sister Bear ever gets to school.

When the bell for recess rings, Alex is almost crushed by the rush of feet running towards the door leading to the playground.

She huffs and crosses her arms; it’s only the first day, but she’s not a fan of her classmates—or their choice in books. But now that they’re all gone, maybe she can find a book from the shelf she
likes. Alex stands and moves in between the wooden desks to the small bookshelf in the corner. Her eyes scan the spines of the books; there’s one about a mouse and cookie that Alex quickly skips over (silly), another about some blind mice, and *The Ugly Duckling*. She’s actually read that one with daddy before, when she was little, and she liked it, but it’s another book that catches her eye, one with a title she’s having trouble pronouncing—which is what makes it stand out.

Alex pulls the book out, eyes narrowed in intense concentration on the name.

Ch-ry-san-the-mum. The cover does have a mouse on it, which seems a bit silly, too, but she lets it go and plops herself into the beanie bag beside the bookshelf. She’s just cracked open the book, when a short cough distracts her.

“Alex?” It’s Miss Johnson, looking down at her with a crinkle in her forehead like her mommy will get sometimes when she’s reading books late at night. She leans down so she’s eye level with her, and Alex likes how blue her eyes look up close. “Why aren’t you playing with the other children outside?”

“Do I have to?” she asks, brows furrowed with worry. It’s her first day of school, she doesn’t want to get in trouble.

Miss Johnson smiles at her, but it doesn’t look like the smiles her daddy or mommy will give her when she’s done something good. And the crinkle is still in her forehead.

“Sweetie, why don’t you go outside and make some friends?” She gently pulls the book from Alex’s grasp, setting it on the floor. Alex’s eyes flicker from the book to Miss Johnson’s eyes.

Mommy told her to make friends too, and she also told her last night to listen to her teacher and do as she says.

Alex jumps up from the beanie bag, mind decided. “Okay, if you really want me to.” She turns to leave, but then remembers the book and spins around. “Can you save that book for me to read later, please?” she asks. The teacher smiles in return, a big, full smile this time.

“Of course, Alex. Have some fun now.”

It takes a few moments for Alex’s eyes to adjust to the sun, black spots dancing across her eyes as she blinks.

When her vision clears, she sees different groups of kids scattered around the playground—some climbing the jungle gym, others on the seesaw. But the swings are empty. Alex decides to swing for a while. Her mommy taught her how to push herself by moving her legs, and climbing higher and higher does sound nice.

But a second before she gets there, a girl with bright blonde hair steps in front of her.

“Do you want to be my best friend?” she asks. Alex blinks.

She’s never had a best friend, apart from her mommy and daddy. And Rosa. Maybe Rosa is her best friend. But they’re all grown ups. Alex has never really played a lot with kids her age.
“So?” The girl asks again, and Alex doesn’t really know what to say. But then another girl, with even lighter blonde hair and brown eyes nudges the other girl aside.

“No, be my best friend.”

“Why?” Alex asks curiously.

She doesn’t know any of her classmates, she didn’t go to preschool with them like a lot of the other kids seemed to. Her daddy and mommy just taught her instead—Rosa too, sometimes. This is her first time being around so many other kids, and her day has barely started.

She didn’t expect any of them to talk so soon, or at all. She was always excited about learning, but meeting other girls was never something she thought about much. But it’s nice.

She feels something warm in her chest, and it spreads all over her body.

“You’re Alex Danvers, right?”

“Huh...yeah.” She frowns. Miss Johnson made them introduce themselves, but she can’t remember this girl’s name.

“My daddy said your daddy is important,” the girl says. “And I should be friends with you.”

The warmth Alex felt disappears, leaving her cold and uncomfortable. None of these girls, and there is a small crowd around her now, want to be her friend because they like her. They’re just doing what their parents told them, like when she listened to Miss Johnson and came out to play—a decision she’s sorely regretting now.

Mommy did tell her to make friends, but she’s sure she didn’t mean friends like this.

“I don’t wanna be friends with you,” she tells her, and ignores the rest of the girls, choosing to go sit by herself under a tree. They ignore her too, after she goes.

They can’t all be like that.

She’s gonna find a girl that likes to read and likes space just as much as she does, and she’s gonna be her best friend. Because she’s gonna like Alex too, for Alex, and not because of her daddy.

She just has to wait a little bit, she knows it. And so she sits alone during recess, until they allow them back inside and she can start her book.
“Can we go out to the beach?”

“Didn’t mommy take you this morning?”

“Yes, but I want you to come too.”

“Daddy is working, sweetie.”

Alex huffs.

“Why don’t you have Rosa take you to Mackenzie’s house, huh?”

“Mackenzie is with the parents at their lake house for the weekend.” She’s her best friend from school, and Alex really likes going over to her house. It’s smaller than her house, but where Alex has bookcases lining some walls, Mackenzie actually has a library. They both love to read, and that’s why Alex liked her so much when she introduced herself to their first grade class, a month after school started. She’d just moved to Malibu.

It’s been a year now, and although they’re friends with everyone, they’re just more friends with each other.
“Can you play with Rosa for a bit, then? I promise I’ll take you to the beach tomorrow.”

Her daddy speaks without ever looking up from the bunch of papers he’s working on.

Alex decides right then that if she can’t get her dad to stop working, then she’s just going to have to work too. She marches out of his studio, grabs a stool from the breakfast island, and diligently marches back to his studio, balancing the heavy wooden thing in her arms.

She drops it next to her father’s desk and then climbs on top.

Her dad just stares at her as she sits, his eyes sparkling.

“What are you working on?” she asks, with the most grown up voice she can manage.

Her dad smiles.

“It’s a new film,” he says. “This is the final draft of the script. I’m just fixing a few things before I send it to Hanna. Do you remember Hanna?”

Alex nods.

“What’s it called? The movie?”

“Body of Water,” he says, with a curl in his lip that Alex doesn’t like. Her dad always sounds excited when he talks about a new movie, but she can tell by his frown there’s something bothering him about this one.

Alex looks at the stack of papers on her father’s desk, and thinks about the name. She’s heard it before in geography.

“Like the Great Salt Lake? We learned about it in school.”

Her dad looks at her for a moment, and then a smile breaks out across his face. He rips out the first page of the script and crumples it.

“Yes, baby, exactly like the Great Salt Lake.”

Her dad is excited that night at dinner. He takes his notebook with him, and every once in a while he jots something down. Alex is used to it, like she’s used to her mom sometime’s taking calls during dinner. She once asked her dad why he didn’t work, and he’d explained that that was his work.

Alex hadn’t understood back then that you could have a job you liked, and do it from home. Especially when her father had said that jumping rope couldn’t be her job when she grew up.

“You really changed the title?” her mom asks her dad, with the same smile she always has when he’s like this.

“I really did. And Liz, everything started flowing afterward. The title -it was lacking. It didn’t reflect the atmosphere of the film, Alina’s loneliness…there was that scene in the middle I told you
about, remember? The one I wasn't sure of.”

“I do.”

“I’m scrapping it altogether. Having her visit her parents was the right call from the start, I shouldn’t have changed that. And there’s the lake house, so the pond near her school from when she was a kid? I’m changing it to a lake. It connects everything.”

Her mom laughs. “I love seeing you like this.”

“Thank your daughter,” her dad says. “You gave birth to a genius;” he states, and then winks at Alex. Alex grins.

“Did Alex inspire you?” her mom asks, and Alex sits up straight.

“Alex came up with it.”

She’s not quite sure what it means, because all she did was tell him about school, but she feels very proud of herself.

Her mom smiles.

“That’s my girl.”

Alex’s 3rd grade class has a bring your parent to school day.

For Alex, it’s both good and bad. It’s good because her mom takes time off work to come, but it’s bad because she wants her daddy to be the one to come, but he’s still on set in Arizona, and he can’t take time off. Her mom stands at the front of the class, in her white lab coat, with all the other parents while they wait for everyone to arrive.

“All right!” Miss Grenchen says brightly. “I think that’s all of us. Any volunteers?”

Alex looks at the mom, silently asking her not to volunteer. She’s thinking that she doesn’t need to be called a nerd, when there’s a sudden noise in the hallway.

“Did someone ask for volunteers?”

“Daddy!” Alex runs out of her seat and jumps into his arms. He huffs as he picks her up, but he does it anyway. She can’t believe he’s here and not in Arizona.

“Hello, bunny. Miss me?”

Alex nods against his shoulder.

“Mr. Danvers,” her teacher says. “What a pleasant surprise! My husband is such a big fan of your movies.” Her dad puts her down, and shakes her teacher’s hands.

Alex sits up extra straight and smiles proudly when her daddy speaks to the class.
“I actually started out as a photographer, kids. My muse, of course, was my beautiful wife, Eliza, Alex’s mom. We met at the premiere of *A Room With a View*. That’s before your time, kids.” The other parents laugh, and Alex does too, more because she’s happy than because she understand what movie he’s talking about.

Her mom comes forward, and she talks about being born in France, and growing up modeling. But then she says that what she does right now, being a scientist, working at a lab, it’s what means the most to her.

Alex doesn’t fully get it, but she’s proud of her, of both of them.

She’s in the cafeteria with Mackenzie when she notices a couple of boys from her class approaching them out of the corner of her eye.

Alex winces. She doesn’t like any of the boys at school. They’re all smelly and loud. Alex hopes they’re not walking up to her, but then she sees Matty, one of her least favorite people in school, staring at her. He’s coming over, and Alex hates him. She told her classmates about how her daddy had let her be in one of his movies last week, and he’d told Alex that she probably broke the camera.

“Hey princess, where’s your royal car?” Matty laughs at his words, and his friend beside him joins in (for what reason, Alex doesn’t know, it wasn’t funny at all).

“Do you mean carriage?” she corrects him, because she can’t help herself, before pointedly turns her head away, crossing her arms and sitting up straighter. But Matty doesn’t budge.

“Why did you get both of your parents to come to school today?”

“It was bring your parent to school day, genius,” Mackenzie tells him. Alex smiles at her friend.

“Yeah, one! Alex got both her mom and dad just to show off. Aren’t you mad, too?”

“I think you’re jealous,” Alex tells him.

“And maybe you should have cooler parents,” Mackenzie backs her up, sticking her tongue out at him.

“Maybe you shouldn’t be ugly!”

Alex sees red.

Mackenzie is her best friend, and nobody insults her friends. But Matty isn’t just mean, he’s *stupid*. Because Mackenzie? With her dark eyes and dark skin and curly, bouncy hair? She’s the *prettiest* girl Alex has ever seen.

She doesn’t talk to Matty. She just pushes him, hard, until he ends up on his butt on the floor, crying.

Alex doesn’t regret the choice, not even as she sits in the principal’s office, Mr. Sterling staring sternly at her and her parents seated on either side of her.
“He called Mackenzie ugly.”

Mr. Sterling sighs, the light reflecting off the balding, shiny spot on his head. “So he deserved to get hit?”

“I didn’t hit him,” Alex is quick to argue. “I just pushed him.”

“Okay,” the principal looks towards her daddy, “we’re not moving forward with this.”

Mr. Sterling looks back at her, face disappointed, but Alex finds she doesn’t care. “Yes, what Matty said was wrong. He was very mean. But we can’t just push people when they’re mean, Alex.”

“Why not? He deserved it.”

“I’m sorry,” Her daddy says to Mr. Sterling. “We’re going to have a very long talk with Alex when we get home.”

They do.

But Alex still doesn’t budge.

“He was mean to Mackenzie! She’s my best friend!”

“I know, bunny, but you can’t push him for that.”

“He deserved it!”

“Eliza,” her daddy sighs and puts his hands on his hips, “back me up. This is all you.”

“Me?”

“That’s your side of the family,” her daddy says, and her mom huffs. Her parents share a long look before her mom turns back to her.

“Alexandra, there are rules.” She runs her hands through her long blonde hair. Alex has always looked like her dad. “Why are your father and I and Rosa the only ones allowed to touch the stove?”

“Because I might burn myself,” she answers automatically.

“Exactly,” her mom smiles at her. “And why aren’t you allowed to go to school in your bathing suit?”

Alex smiles, even though she’s not sure whether she’s supposed to. “Because we have to wear our uniforms.”

“Correct. That’s a school rule. Another school rule, is that you can’t get physical with your classmates. You can’t kick them, or bite them, or push them. Do you understand that?”
Alex nods. “But—”

“What if Matty thought reading was bad, and he pushed you for it?” Her mom sits on the couch beside her, placing a hand on her leg.

“That’s not the same thing!” she protests. That’s comparing apples to oranges. Her daddy had taught her the meaning of that just last week—it couldn’t be done because the two fruit are so different.

“I know. But he might think that. And if there were no rules in place, then he and other bullies like him would have free range to do whatever they want. But they can’t, because of those rules,” her mom explains. “And those only work when everyone follows them. So..?”

Alex sinks further into the couch, already seeing where this speech is going.

“I won’t push him again,” she mutters quietly.

“Good,” her mom says. Alex stays staring at her sneakers. But then her mom tips her head up, grabbing her cheeks in her hands. “Oh my beautiful Alexandra. There’s a world inside every single person around you. You can’t just focus on your own. You have to think things through before you do them. You can’t always react first. Violence isn't the answer.”

Alex nods begrudgingly. The back of her throat itches, but she won’t cry.

“That said,” her daddy pipes in, “we are proud that you stood up for your friend. I asked Mackenzie’s parents and she’s coming over for a sleepover this weekend.”

Alex jumps into his arms, laughing.
Her mommy is home already when Alex comes home from school.

It’s weird, because her mom always leaves work at 5, but she’s there, and her daddy is hugging her and looking the happiest she’s ever seen him.

“Miss, your parents are waiting for you,” Rosa tells her. “Give me your backpack, go on.”

Alex walks into the living room, still super confused.

“Daddy?”

“Alex!” He picks her up and swings her around, and Alex giggles, surprised. “I got it. We got it!”

“What?” she asks, already laughing. His laugh is contagious.
“The Great Salt Lake was nominated for an Oscar.”

Alex hugs him. She knows that’s good, and she really hasn’t seen him happy like this, ever. It looks like the sun is glowing below his skin. Like he swallowed a star.

“We’ll have dinner, anywhere you like.”

“Anywhere?” she asks.

“Anywhere,” her mom answers, coming to stand behind her father, resting her head on his shoulder.

“Can we eat at the beach? Out in the backyard?”

“Are you sure? We can go down to the city. Or we could-”

“I’m sure,” she tells him.

Her daddy helps Rosa pack strawberries while Alex and her mom pick out a blanket, and then they take the basket to their backyard, and walk hand in hand down the rock paved road down to the sand.

When the wind blows their food gets covered in sand, but they still laugh.

Alex stays up past her bedtime to watch the Oscars.

Rosa doesn’t stop her because she wants to watch the show, too, and so they lay on their stomachs on Rosa’s bed, watching the TV. She wants to catch a glimpse of her parents. Alex wishes she could have gone.

The red carpet there looks a lot like the red carpet from The Great Salt Lake premiere, and she’d attended that with her parents. Her daddy had held her hand the whole time, and carried her around when he gave interview, even though she was getting much too big. He told the reporters how Alex had come up with the title of the movie at least a hundred times.

It was the best night of her life.

She’d wanted to go to the award ceremony too, but her mom said she was too young. Her daddy had wanted to take her, though. They’d even argued about it. And it was the first time Alex could ever remember hearing them fight.

“I was her age when I started modeling. You can’t throw her in front of all those cameras. She’s a child. She should get to be a child!”

“She’s my child! This is are our life, Eliza. She likes it-”

“She’s nine!”

Alex can still hear them in her head. She hadn’t gone, at the end of the day. So she’d promised herself that she’d go one day, when she was old enough. She’d promised her daddy, too. She’d
wanted to go with him. But he’d shaken his head.

“If you do go, I want it to be for you. Because you want to be there. I’ll be fine.”

She still wishes she was there.

She tries to watch every category, but she must fall asleep, because she feels Rosa tapping on her shoulder. Alex groans.

“What?”

“Child, your dad is on TV,” Rosa tells her. “They’re announcing the nominees.”

Alex’s eyes pop open. She sits up, and she holds on to her nanny’s arm as they call out the winner for Best Director, finally.

It’s her dad. He did it.
Alex has always loved the stars and planets pasted to the roof of her bedroom.

They glow in the dark, and she falls asleep every night looking up at them. She can't even remember when they were put up there. They've just always been there, and she likes them. She loves them, actually. But she's 10 now. So she's too old. She didn't think she was, but last week, when Mackenzie and Emily and Ashley came over, they fell asleep staring at her roof, and Ashley said those plastic stars were just like what her little brother had. That they were for little kids. And Mackenzie had laughed, too. So the stars have to go.

She tells her dad as much one fall morning. He asks if she's sure a few times, and after Alex assures him she is, she watches as he gets up on a ladder and removes them, one by one. She almost tells him to leave Jupiter behind, but she bites her tongue. She's not a little girl. She doesn't need glow-in-the-dark stars.
At least, she doesn’t think she does. But that night, her room feels too big; dark and eerie. The noise of the waves and the wind outside gives her chills, instead of lulling her to sleep. She can’t make out the roof in the dark, and for a moment she just lies there, feeling like the top of her house is gone and she’s just staring up at the universe. At nothing.

It takes her a long time to fall asleep that night.

She doesn’t tell her parents what’s wrong, even after she falls asleep during breakfast 3 days after that.

She doesn’t want to admit she’s...kind of scared of the dark, like she’s a little kid. She wasn’t afraid of it when she was younger, and it’s just embarrassing to be now. She’s 10. She’s basically an adult. She just needs to suck it up.

Her brave front lasts for about two days.

Sunday night, once she’s already in bed with the lights off and huddled beneath her covers—eyes almost sliding closed—she sees a large, dark figure looming through the doorway out of the corner of her eye. The scream that climbs up her throat is instinctive, as is her increased heartbeat. Only moments after though, the light is turned on and Alex sees that it’s only her mom, but the damage is done.

“Sweetheart,” her mom rushes over and kneels by her bedside. Alex looks away, embarrassed at being caught screaming like a little girl. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” she mutters, eyes resolutely glued to her sheets.

“Did I scare you? I was just checking on you.”

“No! It’s nothing,” she insists.

“That scream didn’t sound like nothing, Alexandra,” she grabs Alex’s hand, running her thumb over her knuckles. Alex sighs and casts her gaze upwards, looking at the endless, dark empty expanse of ceiling. Her mom follows her eyes, and then grips her hand tighter. “Ah, I see,” she nods to herself before leaning over to gently kiss Alex’s forehead. “Goodnight, dear.”

Her mom leaves her door wide open, which Alex usually doesn’t like, but now lots of light from the hallway stream into her room. She touches the spot on her forehead where her mom kissed her, still faintly warm, and rolls over to face the doorway. She can sleep with the door open one night.

She slips into a dreamless, deep sleep shortly after.

“Dad,” Alex calls out, toeing her sneakers off and dropping her backpack in the front hall as she walks to the kitchen for her afternoon snack.
She doesn’t find her dad, but she does find a small plate of crackers, cheese, and carrots with ranch dressing waiting for her on the island counter. She grabs the plate and walks towards her dad’s office, munching on the carrots and relishing the sweet, fresh taste and crunch. Her dad isn’t in his office either, which is odd because he almost always is when she gets back from school. Alex searches the entire lower level for him and still comes up empty handed. Done with her snack plate at that point, she deposits it in the kitchen sink and heads up to her room—maybe he’s upstairs for some reason.

Halfway up the stairs her nose wrinkles upon smelling the sharp, potent scent of paint. Alex wasn’t aware anything was getting painted today.

Curious, her pace quickens as she takes the last four steps two at a time. The first thing she sees is some of her dad’s friends—who she remembers from the few times they’ve been over for summer barbecues—going in and out of her room. The second thing she notices is the paint buckets hanging from their hands. Alex takes a couple steps forward, wanting to investigate what’s happening to her room and slightly worried at what they could be doing with that paint. A solid body stops her in her tracks though.

It’s her dad.

“Dad?” Alex pokes her head around his body, or rather, tries to but is gently prevented from doing so by her dad’s hand at her shoulder, keeping her still. Realizing her peeking is futile, she stops abruptly and looks up at him quizzically. “What are they doing in there?”

“Just a little...refurbishment. Remember what that word means?”

Alex scoffs. “Of course I do. It means updating something or renovating it so…” she tries to peek again, and sighs when her dad doesn’t let her. “So it’s better.”

“Exactly and you,” he grabs her shoulders and turns her back towards the staircase, “are not allowed to see it until it’s all done.”

“But dad,” the whine comes out involuntarily. Alex knows it’s not something older, mature kids such as herself should do, but she really wants to see her room—now.

He just smiles at her patiently and pushes her farther forward. “I’ll call you when it’s done, promise.”

Once she’s downstairs, Alex does everything she can think of to occupy her time—watch TV, read a book, finish a puzzle, take stock of what’s in the fridge, and then all the pantries.

She’s finishing her dad’s crossword when finally, she hears his voice floating down from the stairs.

She swears her body has never moved faster than it does as she races up to her room. She skids to a stop in front of it, breathless in anticipation. Her dad is at her doorway, and her mom too. They both smile at her and lead her into the bedroom. Alex looks around wildly, craning her neck this way and that trying to find anything different, but...everything looks the same.
If this is a joke, it’s not very funny, she thinks, mood starting to sour. It must show on her face, because her mom and dad laugh to each other—like they do sometimes when they’re watching TV together and one of the characters says something that Alex doesn’t think is funny, but her parents apparently do.

“Bunny,” her dad takes her hand and points to the ceiling, “look up.”

Alex does, and all she sees is her boring white ceiling.

But then the lights go out. Suddenly, what was a span of seamless white is now a galaxy across her entire ceiling with mountains, pine trees, and shooting stars. She lets go of her dad’s hand, slowly walking around the room in wonder. In one part of the galaxy, she can even see the northern lights painted in various hues. It’s beautiful, and most importantly, it glows.

It’s perfect.
Alex gets home early her last day of 5th grade.

It feels big, because she’s finally done with elementary school, which took forever, even if she did skip the fourth grade. She drops her backpack at the door, where she knows Rosa is going to see it and pick it up, like she always does. She wonders what she made for lunch. Alex is in the mood for soup, and Rosa makes the best lentils soup that Alex has-

“You’re too kind, sir, too kind.”

“No, please. You’ve been with us for years.”

“Thank you. Ma’am-”
“It’s alright, Rosa, we get it.”

Alex frowns.

She follows the sounds of the voices, straight into her dad’s studio. Rosa is there, and so are her parents, and her mom has tears in her eyes.

“What’s wrong?” she asks immediately, alarmed.

“Alex, you’re home,” her dad says, surprised, and Alex frowns. She doesn’t know what’s going on, and she hates the feeling.

“What’s wrong?” she asks again.

Her dad blows out a breath, apparently looking for words. Her mom doesn’t speak. It scares Alex. Her parents are the smartest people she knows, and if they can’t answer her question, then who can?

She turns towards Rosa, the person she’s always come to after she goes to her parents. She doesn’t even let her ask the question again before answering it.

“I’m leaving, sweetheart,” she says.

“What do you mean you’re leaving?” Alex asks. “It’s not Sunday yet.” Rosa always leaves Saturday night, and she comes back on Mondays. And she spends part of the summer away, but Alex doesn’t know where she goes. Is she leaving early?

“I mean, I’m not going to work here anymore,” Rosa says. “I’m going back home.”

Alex doesn’t get it. Here is home.

“Rosa is returning to Guatemala, Alex,” her dad tells her. “One of her sons is ill, and she needs to go be with him. She’s leaving tonight.”

Alex knows geography, and she knows where Rosa was born. It’s too far away. It sounds final.

“But you’re coming back, right?” Alex asks, hearing her own voice grow thin.

“I don’t know,” she tells her. “I don’t think so. But you don’t need a nanny anymore. You’re all grown up.”

Alex shakes her head. She doesn’t think of Rosa as her nanny, or their maid. She’s just Rosa. She’s just always here, with them. With her.

She runs out of her dad’s studio.

There’s a knock on her bedroom door a few minutes later.

The person walks in, and Alex knows it’s Rosa by her footsteps, soft and quiet.
“Are you okay?” she asks, but Alex doesn’t answer. “Miss?” Rosa tickles her ankle. Alex kicks her away. She hears her sigh, and then the bed dips on one side. Alex turns to look at her.

“Why do you have to leave and stay there. Why can’t you just come back?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know how long it’s going to take my boy to get better,” she tells her. Alex sits up, but keeps her eyes on the sheets. “It’s been my pleasure to watch you grow up niña linda, but I have to look after my own kids now, okay?”

Alex didn’t know Rosa had kids. She said she had sons, but Alex always thought they were grown ups. If they were kids, like her, then why wasn’t Rosa with them?

“Don’t leave,” she pleads again, feeling tears prickle her eyes.

Rosa has lived with them ever since she can remember. She’s welcomed her home from school ever since Alex started it. She’s made her lunch every time. She stays with Rosa when her parents have to go into the city and she’s too young to go. They bake cookies together and Rosa teaches her Spanish. Alex doesn’t want her to go. She needs her.

“I have to,” Rosa tells her. “I’m sorry.”

“But who’s gonna, who’s gonna-” Alex breathes in. “Who’s gonna teach me Spanish.”

“Your Spanish is already very good. You don’t need me, not anymore.”

Alex tries to swallow down the knot growing in her throat. She doesn’t need a nanny, that’s true, but she needs her friend. She climbs into Rosa’s lap, like she did when she was little, and holds on to her.

For the first time Alex can remember, her mom makes lunch.

Sometimes Rosa makes dinner, and other times it’s her dad or her mom, but lunch is always Rosa’s. Alex comes home from school and it’s always ready, always something she likes. She doesn’t know what it’s going to be like tomorrow.

Her mom makes alfredo pasta. Alex usually loves it, but not even the garlic smell wafting through the kitchen makes her feel better.

Her mom and dad serve Rosa, and Alex takes a cue from them and serves her a glass of orange juice, like the dozens of times Rosa has done the same for her. They have lunch together, and they laugh, but something heavy and bitter wraps itself around the base of her throat. Alex feels like crying, but she keeps it down. She guesses that’s what being a grown up is like. She suddenly wishes she was a little girl.

“No te vayas a olvidar de mí, okay?” Rosas asks a little while later, when all her bags are already by the door. “Que yo no me voy a olvidar de tí.”

Alex nods. She’d never forget Rosa.

“Promise?” Rosa asks.
“Promise,” Alex tells her. Rosa kisses her forehead, and a moment later she drags her suitcase out the door. Their driver is waiting on the street, ready to take her to the airport.

Rosa turns around and waves before getting in the car.

And then she’s gone.

Her dad gets an offer to direct a mini series that summer.

He’s excited about it, but Alex hears him and her mom argue about it at night, when they think she’s asleep. Not even the sound of the waves right outside can cover their voices. Alex doesn’t know what the problem is, until one of those hot summer nights, she hears him talk about the amount of time it would take him away from home. 7 months.

It’s the better half of a year, and suddenly Alex isn’t excited about it anymore. She’d been thinking about asking her dad to let her be in it, like she was when she was little, and visiting the set in Canada, but she doesn’t want to do any of it anymore. It’s too long for her dad to be away.

She’s about to get up from her bed and tell them as much, when her dad says something she hadn’t thought about.

“Come with me.”

Alex tiptoes out of bed, and cracks her door open to hear them more clearly.

“Alex’s school-”

“She has to start middle school in a new school anyways, we could find one in Canada. Or we could homeschool her again. She entered first grade light years ahead of the other kids.”

“Love, my work-”

“You’ve been talking about taking some time off to start your PhD for months now. When is the time going to be right if not now?” Alex doesn’t hear what happens for a moment, but then her mom speaks again.

“If Alex doesn’t want to do it, we’ll have to find another way. She comes first.”

“She comes first. But she’s our daughter. You think she didn’t inherit our sense of adventure?”

“Your sense, you mean.”

“Ours,” her dad says. “You did agree to marry me. And stay with me. A lowly filmmaker, when you’re an accomplished doctor, scientist...”

“I think that’s why I married you.”

Alex can’t hear anything then, but she smiles to herself. She’d like to visit Canada. And she definitely doesn’t want to not see her dad for 7 months. She’ll miss her friends, but she’s sure she can visit in the weekends. And spending school time with her mom, reading, like when she was little, instead of with a teacher in a classroom with loud, smelly boys...it sounds amazing.
Alex opens her bedroom door, and crawls through the hallway, her knees getting caught in her nightgown. She feels like a secret agent, or a spy, trying to find out more intel.

She puts her ear to the door, trying to listen to what’s going on inside.

She can’t hear much, but then her mom...gasps? Alex focuses, and hears what she thinks sounds like a zipper. Are they getting ready for bed already?

“Oh, Liz...”

Is her dad moaning? And her mom...Alex realizes what’s going on like a flip has been switched in her head.

She runs back to her bedroom, and slams the door.

Alex’s jittery legs pop up and down a mile per minute, shaking the entire car. A firm hand clamps over her legs, stopping the rapid movement.

“Alex, we’re just going on set,” her dad glances over with a smile. “This isn’t anything new for you.”

“We’re not just going to set,” she’s quick to point out. “We’re going to my first movie set where I’m gonna be acting in front of the camera. This is, it’s...” she gestures wildly for a moment trying to find the right words that will convey how important this is.

Her dad had asked her to say a line in one of his movies when she was 8. And she’d agreed because it had looked fun. But she wasn’t a character, she didn’t even have a name. Her credit was Girl #3. But now...her character does have a name. She’ll be on set for two days. She has to learn dialogue. It’s different. It’s huge.

Alex knew just how much because her mom hadn’t wanted her to do it, not at first. But her dad had persuaded her, saying it’d be something fun to do together. Her mom had frowned, that way she did when her dad suggested pizza and ice cream for dinner, but she had agreed. Alex still didn’t know what the big deal was, but she didn’t think about it. She was too excited to be here. Exhilarated, even.

When she arrives on set, positively vibrating with excitement, she’s ushered towards the trailers—which she’s seen from a distance but never entered, besides her dad’s, but that doesn’t really count. A nice lady applies some light makeup to her face. She only has two scenes and a few lines, but still, it’s something.

When she hears action and sees the stage lights lit up, she feels a thrill shoot through her body. It’s like reading a hundred books at the same time, or going out to watch the stars and accidentally catching a peek of the entire universe. It’s like swimming in the pool in her backyard or her dad teaching her to surf, but a dozen times over.

Alex loves this, more than she’s ever loved anything else.
A pair of steady, unreadable eyes follow Alex around, making her back prickle. She knows Leonardo Da Vinci’s most famous painting is just that, an inanimate work of art, but those eyes are definitely glued on her.

The Louvre was the fourth big stop on her surprise Parisian birthday trip.

Alex turns the polaroid camera in her hands—a gift they'd given her on the plane over, so she could document the trip—and then decides to snap a picture of the eerie Mona Lisa. Alex grabs the result, waving it around until the image appears. It's her best birthday week yet.

Leading up to the big day, her parents had been suspiciously quiet. And they'd always changed the subject when she’d asked them what special thing they were doing for her birthday—last year they’d rented out a trampoline park for her, and the kids from her book club. Thus, it was no surprise that come Wednesday, her parents had woken her up in the early, dark morning with huge matching grins, waving plane tickets to Paris in her face.

They’ve only been here two days so far, but they’ve already visited the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower on her birthday, and the Notre Dame. This morning, they’d gone to Disneyland Paris, which was pretty similar to the California version. And then onto the Louvre. The historic museum is definitely the highlight of the trip. There’s just so much to look at. She didn’t even know where to begin. The intricate carvings and details in the walls alone had kept her occupied for the past half an hour.

Alex pushes her through the throngs of people, finally getting away from the Mona Lisa, looking for her parents. She’s hungry, and lunch sounds great right about now. They can always return to the Louvre afterwards. She wouldn’t mind spending another day or two here.
They end up retiring to their hotel rooms after lunch, but Alex doesn’t mind.

Paris is littered with great little bookstores, and she occupies her time reading on the veranda of their room, a light breeze fluttering by. Her interest in the book only lasts so long though. It’s not long before her thoughts stray from the lines of texts blurring on the creamy white pages towards their day tomorrow. Her mom is visiting a friend from her modeling days, that she hasn’t been able to get in touch with after losing her phone number. Even her MySpace page is abandoned. Alex hopes she can find her, but in the meantime, she’s spending the whole day with her dad.

Alex wonders what’s left in Paris for them to do. They’ve hit most of the main tourist attractions, but she supposes this city has an endless source of them. Whatever she does end up doing, she already knows that this trip has made her 14th birthday the best yet. They’re going to have a hard time topping this next year.

Her dad and her visit the Jardin des Serres d'Auteuil.

Alex laughs when her dad uses her as a translator—her french is even better than her mom’s now, even when her mom is the one that taught her during their usual homeschooling sessions. The gardens are beautiful. The different greenhouses are grouped around a spectacular tropical greenhouse filled with palms, pools upon pools of Japanese carp fish, and an even an aviary. They walk through gardens full of orchids, azaleas, and ferns. There’s also cacti scattered about and even tiny bonsai trees.

Alex holds the map up in her hands as they have dinner, choosing what they should see afterward. Her dad answers his cellphone, and Alex puts her map down.

“Did she find her friend?” she asks, but her dad holds up his hand. He frowns. Something drops in Alex’s stomach.

“Is mom okay?” she asks quickly. Her dad never looks like that. He doesn’t answer her, and tendrils of anxiety seem to replace her every nerve. “Dad!”

“Eliza, breathe. I can’t understand you. Okay- okay, we’re on our way. I love you.”

“What’s wrong?”

“We’re meeting mom back at the hotel, let’s go.”

They leave their half-finished crepes behind.

Alex sits in her room as her parents talk in their own.
Her mom was calm when they got there, but Alex could tell by the red framing her eyes that she’d been crying. Alex wonders if she couldn’t find her friend because she’d died. It’s the only logical explanation for her reaction. They hadn’t spoken in months, but Alex can imagine it would hit her hard. She’s only met the woman twice, and she had no memory of her other than dark hair, and dimples. Alex feels bad because she doesn’t feel bad. Her mom looks destroyed.

Her parent’s voices grow louder, and Alex—despite what happened last time, years ago, when she tries to listen in on them—puts her ear against the door.

“She has nobody.”

“Eliza, what you’re saying…”

“I know. Believe me, I know. But I met that girl when she was a few months old. The last time Alura was in the states, she was four. I remember her, Jeremiah. And she’s alone now. *Un Pupille de l’Etat, and or* phan with no known family. That’s not the life she deserves.”

“I know. I remember her from New York-”

“When Alex was ten, yeah. That’s the last time I saw her in person. We caught up every few months, but I forgot...Maybe if I’d called-”

“You couldn’t have known.”

“She’s been in care for three months, Jeremiah. They said she’s not adjusting well, and of course she isn’t. She’s not much younger than Alex- Oh, Alex. What are we going to tell her?”

“So we’re doing this?”

“Don’t you want to?”

Alex pull away from the door. She’s not stupid. She knows what they’re talking about, and she can’t even begin to comprehend the idea. Do they want to...adopt some kid? Or do they just want to bring her to America? Alex’s head spins, and she sits down in her hotel room desk chair, cursing when the floorboards creak beneath her.

“Alex?”

“Shit.”

Her hotel room door opens not a second after that.

“You okay?” her dad asks, and Alex nods. She tries to pull her acting lessons forward from the back of her mind, but it’s no use. She can’t make her face go blank as much as she tries to. "How much of that did you hear?” her dad asks, and Alex tells him the truth.

"Enough."

Her dad sighs. “Your mom and I have to talk to you. We need to talk as a family.”

An hour later, Alex only knows two with certainty.
One, her life is about to change, cataclysmically, and she's hopeless to stop it. And two, the kid's name is Kara.

Chapter End Notes

We've had this planned since the beginning, to break up the story a bit and provide some background for our characters. We'd love to hear your thoughts about it all! Leave us a comment below, or you can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meanstoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We'd love to talk to you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!

Also another small note that we thought might interest our readers. A group of Sanvers fans are flying a sky banner over the Supergirl set that will read "Bring Maggie Back #SanversMatters", and in accordance with that we're going to be tweeting the hashtag #BringMaggieBack to the writers and producers. If any of you are on twitter, feel free to join us! We've also started a petition to let TPTB know that Sanvers fans are still fighting for our couple, here's the link if you'd like to sign: https://www.change.org/p/berlanti-productions-bring-maggie-sawyer-and-sanvers-back-to-supergirl

We hope that Chyler, Floriana, and the writers and producers will see how much support for Sanvers there still is. Hope to see you there!
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fortuna vitrea est; tum cum splendet frangitur: fortune is glass; just when it gleams brightest it shatters

The rustle of pages fills the apartment, broken up intermittently by the scribble of a ballpoint pen scrawling over paper.

Various magazines are strewn across Alex’s kitchen table, one of which she’s currently using as a coaster for her coffee mug. The faint strains of Bach’s Orchestral Suite in D Major—number 3 she thinks, but she could be wrong, she’s not too well versed in Bach—waft through the room from the record player situated atop the table behind her couch. She’d ordered it from Amazon a couple months ago—and had some records from her LA house sent to her too—as part of an attempt to make her New York apartment more homey. And it’d worked, slightly, by bringing back memories of her teenage years and long hours spent in dusty, claustrophobic record shops looking for the latest record from whatever band she’d liked at the time. Looking back at that now, she’s realized her younger self hadn’t actually liked record collecting, it was just something she’d done in a bid to appear unique and cool (for lack of a better word).

On the surface though, the story does make for good interview fodder—and that’s exactly what Alex is looking for right now.

Her eyes survey the table before her, looking for a flash of yellow and seizing upon it when it’s found. She adds the idea to the growing bullet point list titled in large letters ‘interview prep’. J’onn had called 3 days ago to confirm that Elle wanted to do a full spread with her—interview, day long photoshoot, and her face on the cover. It was actually one of a few that had wanted to interview her after J’onn had let publications know she was open to it, which makes her pride glow, just a tad.

After her departure from Body of Medicine and the subsequent self made shit storm, she wasn’t sure she’d ever be back in this position again, multiple magazines vying for the chance to interview her.

Now that she thinks about it, she’s in a better position than she ever was before Nightingale, even better than when she’d just landed Body of Medicine and people had buzzed that Jeremiah Danvers’ daughter was finally coming into her own. Her reputation was shinier back then, cleaner and free from the stains that mar it today, but she’d also had the unavoidable cloud of the elitist daughter only successful because of her father’s fame hanging over her head. There’s still some of that now, but her tumble from grace, while not fun to experience, had served to bring her image down to earth. She’s the underdog now, the star with a rough past struggling to rise from the ashes.
to greater heights. J’onn was right all those months ago when he’d said people would root for her comeback—everyone loves a comeback story. And the only thing people loved more than that was a love story.

Alex is loathe to admit it, but the PR contract was a good idea, one that’s been hugely beneficial to her career. (She’s not sure how Maggie has benefited from it, though. Maggie would have soared regardless of her.) She’s the one who needed the help, and Maggie had been there to offer it—hand warm and smile bright—not only in terms of her career but also in more personal ways. Her mind flashes back to Oscar night, but only for a moment, before shying away like a moth burned by a captivating, flickering flame.

She can’t get distracted by Maggie, she needs to focus. But then again, she looks back down at the notepad, eyes landing on the second header. This will be the first time she’s asked questions about Maggie and their relationship, in a public, authorized forum wherein she’s required to answer—unlike when random paparazzi yell out questions about them. She can’t be caught with her foot in her mouth. It’d be bad for her and the contract.

And it’ll also be the first time she’s asked about her...sexuality, unless she tells J’onn to blacklist that topic, but if she’s answering questions about Maggie it’s bound to come up. She still recalls what King said in that first meeting, that she didn’t need to directly address it. A vague non answer would suffice, but now, accepting what she has, it feels wrong to follow his advice. But she can’t - she’s not ready to truly reveal that part of herself. For a lie, she was willing to let people believe she liked women, but now that she’s accepted it’s true, it’s more difficult to stomach. It’s the difference between the implications of a lie—a lie that would be forgotten in time, only a phase in her life to the public—and the cold, hard truth. Permanent. Indelible. Not to mention, it’s one thing...liking women, but to know what to call herself? Alex hasn’t figured that one yet.

Alex sighs, dropping her head in her hands, fingers sliding through her hair. It’s so...complicated.

She quickly glance at the time. 10:47 AM. J’onn should be arriving soon to prep her for the interview and photoshoot. She’d wanted to get a head start before he arrived though, hence the disarray on her kitchen table—and in her head. She’s been going at it for at least 45 minutes, and all she has to show for it is a half made list and a host of new knowledge learned about her peers (Emma Watson thinks avocado is delicious, groundbreaking journalism at its finest).

A coffee break is in order, Alex thinks. She stands, stretching in the process, back popping ominously, and walks to the kitchen. The coffee pot is cold by now, but the microwave can fix that quickly.

The whir of the appliance joins Bach’s consummate playing as Alex leans against the counter, surveying her apartment. It’s quite sparse, monochromatic. Sure, it could be on the pages of a home design magazine, but it lacks heart, that lived in feel that homes acquire over time. Right now, it looks like the spare, barely visited vacation property of a 46 year old single woman with no love life or friends. In other words, it’s what she used to envision her own life being 20 years from now. Compared to Maggie’s apartment with its darker tones, red brick, and touches of individuality in the form of bonsai trees dispersed throughout the lower level, her own abode is even more soulless and boring.

Alex frowns, her brain having looped back around to the subject of Maggie of its own accord, an occurrence that’s been happening at an alarmingly increasing rate. But that’s just due to her recent acceptance of her small crush. (And fuck if her stomach doesn’t swirl with drunk butterflies when she thinks about it.) It’ll pass.

The obnoxious beep of the microwave alerts her that the coffee is ready. She takes it out, and it’s
just her luck that J’onn chooses to knock on her door as she returns to the table, startling her enough that she jolts. Alex hisses as the hot liquid splash onto herself. She winces, setting the mug down in passing before letting J’onn in.

J’onn raises his eyebrows ever so slightly and glances over her cream colored, now coffee stained pajamas. “Nice look.”

“Perfect for an interview, right?” she quips, stepping aside so he can enter.

“I see you’ve already begun preparing for it,” his gaze rests on her messy table—hands on his hips. He turns to smile at her, a faint crinkle creasing his eyes. “I’d expect nothing less from you. Although, I’m not sure this amount of...research is necessary.” He pulls out a chair to sit in, gesturing for Alex to do the same. “Alex, you’ll be fine. The interviewer will probably be asking soft questions, and we can always ask them for a draft to look over before it’s published.”

She sighs. “That’s easy enough for you to say, but I’ll be the one actually doing it.”

“And that’s why I’m here,” he places his forearms on the table, hands clasped. “To ensure that you can handle any and all questions thrown your way.”

“Okay,” she sits up straight, feeling like she’s about to take an oral exam worth her entire grade. “Let’s start.”

“First question,” J’onn’s face is serious as his eyes meet her own, and she resists the impulse to squirm under his steady gaze. “What is your favorite color?”

The pure mirth that bubbles up in her throat—rushing out like a river of laughter—washes away her residual nerves. J’onn is one of the few people who can bring her down from the self-imposed cliffs that wreak havoc on her nerves.

The subsequent questions are easy from there, and Alex settles into an even rhythm. It’s just like riding a bike. Easy. Programmed into her brain and accessible as needed. That is, until a certain string of words come out of his mouth.

“How did your relationship with Maggie Sawyer come about? None of us even knew you swung that way. How would you define your sexuality?”

The bike careens into a tree with an ear splitting screech.

She knew it was coming, but foresight doesn’t translate into an ability to answer the question. The silence between them stretches on and on, teetering on the edge of horribly painful.

“Alex,” J’onn relaxes his posture, tone quieter. “You need to prepare for this type of question. It’s the main reason we’re even doing this.”

“Right.” She can hear how strangled her voice sounds, and it isn’t helping either of them. Alex closes her eyes, taking a moment to orientate herself. “We met on Nightingale as everyone knows, and we just clicked instantly. It was natural I started to develop fee-“ she stutters, “that I began to feel, huh, to think about Maggie…” She stops. The word are lodged in her throat, burning a hole in her esophagus. She feels dizzy, stomach swooping and skin clammy. It’s true now, her planned answer to satisfy the faceless future interviewer, and that adds a layer of cold, heavy fear.

A warm, large hand on her shoulder shakes her out of frozen state.

“Alex,” his touch triggers her lungs to begin functioning again, and she breathes in, trying to find
“It’s not,” she gasps out, shaking her head vehemently, eyes starting to burn. “That’s the problem. Everything’s wrong, it’s all fucked up and I made it that way. It’s my fault.”

“This is about more than just the interview, isn’t it?” J’onn has always been astute in his assessments of where her mind is at any given moment. Alex winces.

He pulls out the chair next to her, sitting down and angling his body towards her. “Explain it to me, Alex. You obviously have something sitting on your chest right now. Let me take some of that weight from you.”

Alex’s eyes, previously glued to the table—roving over a minuscule haircrack she’d discovered—dart up to meet J’onn’s face. His expression reminds her of her dad. It brings back memories of nights on the beach with him coaxing her out of the shell she’d withdrawn into. But she’s not a teenager anymore, and her father isn’t here to help her. She’s an adult, with responsibilities, one such being answering the interviewer’s questions. And she might not have her father anymore, but she has J’onn, and the man sitting across from her has been a stabilizing force in her adult life, perhaps the only one she had after she was fired.

She owes him the truth, at least.

“It’s true. That’s the problem. What I was about to tell you, well you as the interviewer. I have uh,” she pauses, swallowing a few times, mouth unbearably dry, “I began to...think about Maggie.”

“Think about her?”

“To...develop feelings for...her.” She doesn’t need to explain what type of feelings she means, because J’onn knows, he knew before she ever agreed to audition for the role, before Alex even accepted it to herself instead of consciously pushing it down. She sneaks a glance at him, and his silent support bolsters her. She pushes past the lump in her throat. “The fake became real, and now all the lines are blurred and I don’t know what’s up or down.” She shrugs, at a loss.

It feels like she’s in house of mirrors, and everything is distorted, even herself. How can she, at 26 years old, realize and accept something she was supposed to have known her whole life? Where does she go from here?

It’s silent after the last words fall from her mouth, and Alex is too scared to look up and guess what J’onn’s thinking now. She shrinks into her chair, pulling her arms and legs closer to her center as if to protect herself—from what, she doesn’t know. The apartment feels drafty suddenly, and Alex fights the urge to shiver. But then, a pair of warm arms engulf her.

“I’m proud of you.” It’s not the words she expected to hear, but she clings onto them regardless—an anchor in a tempest. “And Alex,” he pulls back from her, arms slipping to grip her shoulders firmly, “you haven’t done anything wrong, and you don’t need to have it all figured out right now. It’s okay to be confused.”

Alex gasps—a wet, hollow sound that rattles around in her chest. J’onn’s words wrap around her, softening the jagged edges left in the wake of her freshly fragmented reality. If she could speak around the lump in her throat, she’d thank him for...everything. But as it is, all she can do is grasp his hand laying on the table beside them, trying to imbue every emotion she can’t put into words with the touch. J’onn understands, as he always does, and the corners of his eyes crinkle.

“I never wanted to make this harder for you,” J’onn says. “The role, and then the contract—”
“Did you know?” Alex asks, her voice thin and faltering. “I mean, you knew about...about me, back when I still trying to ignore...so did you know? That this role and Maggie, would make me…”

She doesn’t know what to call it. But J’onn shakes his head.

“I always hoped you saw yourself, every part of you, the way I did. But I wanted you to take this role for no other reason than it was available and a great career move.”

“Spoken like a manager,” Alex tells him, wiping a stray tear with her thumb.

“And a friend, I hope,” J’onn says, squeezing her shoulder softly. “And Alex...from what I’ve heard, Maggie is a remarkable young lady. I can’t think of a better recipient for your affections.

Alex has never liked crying. It was childish, a sign of weakness and lack of control. But sitting here now, in her slightly chilly, sterile apartment— the faint noises of New York coming in through the window—with the closest person she has to a father today at her side, it’s cathartic to let a few tears carve a salty, silent path down her face.

J’onn wraps her in his arms once again, and her lungs expand and contract with air; it’s like she’s taking her first breath. She closes her eyes, letting the loss of vision sharpen her other senses. The noises grow louder, the smell of coffee pierces her nose, along with J’onn’s cologne, and she can feel every groove and crevice in the seat below her. Perhaps this is simply the eye of the storm, and she has stormier forecasts ahead, but for now, she lets go. Someone knows every single thing she doesn’t have the guts to say out loud, and he’s still here.

Alex has never felt freer.
Memories of the night of the Oscars flash before her eyes as Maggie makes her way down the stairs to Alex’s floor.

Her heart still clenches remembering the feel of Alex, usually so collected and steadfast, small and vulnerable in her arms. Her body had been trembling slightly, vibrating with a torrent of emotions that Maggie had never seen her grapple with. She’s still surprised even now, two days later, that Alex had opened up so much to her. She’d let Maggie see the gaping wound, still oozing blood, that’s seemingly plagued her since her father’s death. It had looked like a terrible burden for any single person to carry on their shoulders for so long, and it’s a weight that Alex has seemingly resigned herself to shoulder—as if she deserved it. She’d been adamant against Maggie’s assurances that his death wasn’t her fault. The psychology student in her says it’s Alex’s way of punishing herself for being the only one who survived that terrible accident. Her survivors guilt floating in her subconscious, chipping away at her heart. It kills her that Alex feels that way, and
there’s no solid way to help her.

The white knight in Maggie, present since she was a child, rails against her rib cage, fighting to be let out to help Alex. But just like that night, Maggie subdues it. As she’s grown older, she’s realized that other people’s problems can’t be solved by her sheer will alone, by a lance and shining armor. Life is far more nuanced than her childhood dreams. And she’s not even sure her relationship with Alex is at that level, that Alex would even want her help or to talk about it. If it weren’t for the alcohol and painful significance of that night for her, she knows nothing would have happened. Alex would’ve continued grappling with her own demons alone.

What Alex has given her, a glimpse into the deepest and darkest parts of her, is something to be cherished—held close and protected. Maggie won’t ruin that trust with rash, bold actions.

That night, she’d held Alex in her arms for what felt like an eternity and a split second all wrapped in one. She’d waited for the tears to fall, thinking that no person could bottle up the intensity of emotions coursing through Alex without bursting, but the dam had remained intact. Maggie doesn’t know how much time had passed before Alex had gently extracted herself from her arms, eyes looking anywhere but at her own. The moment had ended, burned out like the 4th of July sparklers Gabriella used to bring her when she was a kid.

After, she’d helped Alex to bed, with only minor protests from her as she’d gently pushed her into the bathroom, a change of pajamas in her hands. Maggie had considered staying the whole night—the couch looked comfy enough—just in case Alex might’ve been so drunk as to be a danger to herself in her sleep, but she’d also suspected that Alex may not have wanted to face her so soon after such a heavy moment. She’d settled for a note, scribbled on the hotel notepad.

The ride back to her hotel had been long, and when she’d finally made it into her own bed, she’d spent an hour tossing and turning before she’d managed to hold on to a semblance of stillness and sleep.

Alex’s apartment door comes into focus, and Maggie hesitates only for a moment before knocking. She hopes she isn’t waking her up, but they are due on set in 40 minutes so Alex should be awake. Sure enough, she hears shuffling around from behind the door followed by a loud thump—she winces at that—and then the door is swinging open to reveal a slightly disheveled Alex Danvers.

“Morning,” Maggie looks her over discreetly to ascertain that nothing is off. She hasn’t really talked to her in two days, apart from brief small talk at the airport when they flew back into NYC, and she worries—more than she likes. More than she should.

“Hey, Maggie,” Alex leans against the doorway, blowing a stray hair out of her face. “It’s pretty early, what’s up?”

“I uh,” she shrugs, “just wanted to check how you’re doing.” (After the Oscars remains unspoken, but they both know it’s what she means.)

Alex smiles at her, nose crinkling ever so slightly. “I’m good. You?”

Maggie has to stifle a laugh at their awkward small talk, but the mood of the room is promptly lifted.

“I thought we could ride to work together this morning, if you want. Maybe stop by for a quick coffee run on the way to set too.” She knows she’s being particularly nice this morning, more so than usual, but she can’t help it. Seeing Alex look so...broken, had shifted something inside her. If there’s anything within the realm of possibility that Maggie can do—small or big—to prevent Alex
from slipping back into that state, she’ll do it.

Alex’s brow crinkles slightly, looking confused, but her smile remains intact. “I have my own car waiting, but thanks.”

“Oh, okay,” Maggie scratches the back of her head, studying the door frame studiously—the white paint is chipping just slightly about three quarters up. “I’ll see you on set then,” she stands for another moment, hands in her jacket pocket, waiting for a response from Alex, but she just nods her head.

Maggie is two steps away from the door when she feels a gentle pressure at the crook of her elbow. She looks up at Alex.

“Yeah?”

“There was something I did want to talk to you about,” she pushes a wavy curl behind her ear, ducking her chin and crossing her arms. “What happened after the Oscars…”

“Oh,” Maggie hadn’t anticipated that Alex would want to even address what’d transgressed between them that night. But the woman in front her, currently looking at the floor, a faint sense of embarrassment emanating from her, continues to surprise her. “You don’t have to,” she doesn’t want Alex thinking she’s obligated to explain herself. “Not if you don’t want to, really, it’s fine.”

“No, I do.” Alex lifts her gaze, eyes glinting with determination. “You deserve an apology. I was...incredibly unprofessional-“

“We weren’t at work, Danvers,” Maggie reminds her, and it’s not like she’d thought at all about the professionalism of it in the moment. Comforting Alex had been her only priority.

Alex puts a hand up, stopping any further words from her. “And I shouldn't have thrown all of that at you. Especially about...my dad.” She takes a small step towards Maggie, eyes soft under the mild yellow lights of the hallway. “I’m sorry I told you the way I did.”

Maggie swallows, feeling guilt bubble up in her throat.

“Actually, Alex...I already knew.”

“Oh. Right.” Her face, open mere seconds ago, rapidly closes, turning neutral.

“Not...not since the start though.” Maggie considers telling Alex the truth, that she specifically sought out the information, but a small voice tells her it might anger Alex, and she, coward that she is, doesn’t want that.

“I wouldn't be surprised if you did. I think the accident was a question in some trivia app,” her tone and body language are flippant, a striking contrast from the last time she talked about her father, but Maggie can see it’s a facade. It looks like that openness she’d exhibited was a one time deal, a rare sighting of an endangered animal. Alex continues on in the same manner, “My mom was pissed about that.”

Maggie flinches. “I’m sorry.”

Alex’s eyes are void of warmth as she shrugs Maggie’s words off. “It’s fine. We should head to work.”

“Right.”
Maggie’s boots click on the cement of the parking garage as she walks to her motorcycle, helmet under her arm.

She and Alex had split ways in the lobby, but her co-star still occupies her thoughts, a progressively regular development. Specifically, her last words in that hotel room. She didn’t give them much thought when Alex had said them then, nor in the following days. But now, her mind clear and uninhibited, the words ping pong around her head. The way Alex had looked at her—soft and yearning—coupled with the words she never said...it confused her. “You’re looking at me like that, and it just makes me more...” Alex hadn’t finished her sentence. But for just a second, it had looked like Alex...wanted her.

Maggie gets on her bike and puts on her helmet. The passing thought vanishes just as quickly as it had formed. As she starts the engine and cruises down the street, the preposterous idea is left behind with the dust of the road.
What television show would you watch if it included full nudity?

Alex looks at her cast mates, furiously scribbling on the pieces of paper in their laps, and tries to think of her own answer. She’s never thought about it. She’s never even watched porn, past the occasional glance at whatever someone she was seeing was watching, or what she got sent to her cellphone as a joke. She doesn’t really see the point in staring at naked bodies, when for all intents and purposes, genitals just...do not look good. Which actor would she want to see naked? Alex looks up, glancing at James, who’s just finished writing his answer, and Thomas the Sound Guy, who answered...way too easily. She looks at Maggie, and the concentrated frown marring her features as she looks at all of them, and she immediately looks away. Her mind conjures up the fantasy Maggie from before the Oscars, who kneeled between her legs, fully dressed.

She can’t answer with her own fucking show.
She scribbles down the first answer that comes to mind, *The Crown*. It’s the last show she and Kara binge watched, while she was home in Malibu for the holidays. Thomas the Sound Guy reads out loud their answers, and Maggie chooses Alex’s card. Ever astute in reading other people, she manages to guess who’s behind it.

“*The Crown*?” Maggie’s face is amused as she looks at her, “Really?”

“It’s just the first show that came to mind,“ Alex is quick to defend herself. “My sister loves it. What’s wrong with it anyways?”

Maggie raises her hands, tone conciliatory. “It just seemed like a unique show to want to see everyone naked in. But it wouldn’t be surprising you’d choose a period drama. Easy to guess.” Maggie smiles to herself and looks down at her cards, “Nerd.”

“I’m the nerd and yet you’re the one who picked it as your favorite answer?” Alex scoffs, leaning closer to Maggie from across the table.

Maggie meets Alex’s eyes, a glint of challenge gleaming in her honey brown pools, but James cuts her off before she can respond.

“Okay, lovebirds.” He smirks at them both. “Let’s get back to the game.” They roll their eyes in unison, and Maggie shoots her a mock incredulous look—the shared camaraderie warms her chest.

James draws the next card with a flourish. “What have you done that is considered taboo?”

Everybody immediately starts writing down their answers, many at the table chuckling as they do so. Alex can think of one, or maybe two taboo things she did during her post *Body of Medicine* days, but they’re not funny occurrences to be read between friends—they’re shameful. She doesn’t know what Maggie would think of her if she knew the kind of shit she’d gotten involved in—tripping on acid comes to mind—which were clearly not her finest moments. Alex finally writes one thing she is proud of.

James drums his hands on his chair as they all deposit their questions in the center of the table, face gleeful as he mixes the pieces of paper together. He begins to read them.

“Going to a nudist beach,” he raises his eyebrows, looking slightly impressed. “Dating a white girl. Called my teacher a...c-word to her face in high school. Anal sex.” James’ eyes light up at that as he rubs his hands together, “Oh, the game’s getting started now!”

A call from production pulls his attention away from the game. “Olsen! Five minutes. Makeup.”

“And...I gotta go. Work calls, ladies,” his face falls, standing and grabbing his jacket from the back of his chair. “Mine was dating a white girl, mormon to boot.” Maggie laughs. ”And for the record, my favorite was definitely the anal sex.”

Alex looks at the card he just dropped. Written above Anal sex is Maggie Sawyer.

Her vision goes blurry for a second, and she suddenly feels hot all over.

Maggie gives her a look, rolling her eyes while a faint smile plays at her lips.

“Don’t judge,” she chides.

Alex clears her throat, twice. “Didn’t that, uh, didn’t that hurt?”
Maggie smirks. “Oh, I wasn’t the one getting fucked, Danvers.”

Alex gulps down her very soul.

“Maggie! Wardrobe!” an assistant calls out.

“Coming!” Maggie turns toward her as she gets up. “See you later.”

Alex finally lets go of the breath she was holding.

Alex flips through her script, memorizing the mannerisms she's written down for Claire in this particular scene. Claire is realizing she roughed up a subject during questioning the same way Blake did, and she's beginning to realize how her partner has been affecting her own behavior. She's not sure if the shaking hands are too much or just enough, but the director will let her know when they do start shooting. She pulls out a pen, about to write down another option when Maggie saunters up to her.

Alex wills her face not to flame red remembering their Adult Loaded Questions game earlier that day.

She hadn’t been able to nail a single scene since then, her mind blanking out every time she pictured Maggie doing...that, with someone. To someone. She shakes her head, willing herself to stop thinking about it as Maggie comes closer.

“Danvers,” Maggie tilts her head and smiles, a deep dimple in her left cheek popping out. “I gotta ask. Your answer to that last question...what was it? Did you hit up a nudist beach?”

Alex smirks, competitive streak flaring up. “Wouldn’t you like to know.”

“Hey,” Maggie protests. “I showed you mine…”

As if Alex could ever forget that, she’s pretty sure it’s been burned into her brain in big bold letters, but she acquiesces to Maggie’s request.

“I said the c-word to my teacher.”

Maggie whistles, leaning back on her heels, hands in her back pockets. “You cursed your teacher out? Why?”

“She picked on my sister.” Alex shrugs. “She was in AP math so we were in the same class, and she was brilliant, but her English still wasn't perfect.” Alex can remember numerous situations of similar nature, and the thought of them still makes her slightly fired up. Kara didn’t deserve that. Alex was only too willing to stand up for her sister, once they’d gotten past their initial awkward phase. She’d felt a particular satisfaction cursing out Mrs. Miller that day. “The teacher told her we didn't have all day. And I told her she could wait or was she too much of a...you know.”

“Damn,” Maggie’s smile grows wider, tongue poking out at the side of her mouth, and Alex definitely doesn’t notice how pink it is. “You’re a badass, Danvers.”

She doesn’t think so, but when Maggie says it, she almost believes it.
‘Nightingale’ at PaleyFest

TANNER STRANSKY  March 06, 2019 at 3AM EST

It was a gasp one minute and a sigh the next from the moment the PaleyFest panel for ‘Nightingale’ at Beverly Hills’ Saban Theatre. The first 22 minutes, in fact, were especially filled with a screening of this Thursday’s new episode of the drama, which

The episode was focused largely around Claire (Alex Danvers) finding her footing time, while Blake (Maggie Sawyer) serves out her remaining time on the desk after day’s episode. (See an EW exclusive clip of the episode below). In the meantime, dangerous secret about the Chief of Police.
Maggie quietly opens the door to her apartment, her Blake boots clacking on the stone floors as she enters. She’d been too tired to change out of her wardrobe, and at this point, they just let her take the clothes home.

She walks into her kitchen, reaching an arm overhead into the glasses cabinet. She could use a glass of water. She goes up on her tiptoes-

“Need some help?”

She gasps, but the sudden fear is replaced with excitement when she sees her aunt standing behind her, smirking at having startled her.

“Gabriella?”

“Any other aunts you wanna tell me about?”

Maggie laughs, and the next second she’s hugging Gabriella with everything she’s got.

“I missed you, kiddo,” Gabriella tells her, and Maggie almost laughs. She’d seen her only a couple of days ago, when the whole cast had flown to LA for PaleyFest, but it’s not the same. She lived with Gabriella for...nearly half her life, at this point. Until a few months ago, she saw her every single day. A few days here and then, and a few weekends, can’t compare to that.

She’s happy her aunt is happy, and that she’s building her own life with her boyfriend, but it’s still difficult not to feel lonely.

“I’m making dinner,” Gabriella tells her, when she finally lets go of her.

“I wouldn’t expect anything else from you,” Maggie says. She takes a seat on the breakfast island, as her aunt walks around her ample kitchen, delighted. Maggie loved this apartment at first sight, and part of that was because she knew that Gabriella would love the kitchen. It’s just a shame it hasn’t been used to its full potential. She’s a fan of takeout and simple, healthy meals. Chopping vegetables doesn’t require a built in stove top.

“How do you feel about lasagna? Good ol’ red sauce and real meat. With ricotta, none of that nonfat stuff.”

Her mouth waters at the mere thought. “I think my trainer isn’t going to be happy about that.”

“You gotta live a little,” Gabriella says. “The show’s already taken dating from you. You can’t let it take lasagna.”

Maggie smiles faintly, but she doesn’t really feel that the show has taken anything from her in that aspect. Yeah, the contract makes it hard to date, so hard it’s understood to be impossible, but Maggie doesn’t...miss it. She hasn’t thought about seeing anyone, or even about sex. Hell, she hasn’t masturbated in weeks. She’s been so busy with work, and she’s spent every free moment either with Alex for the contract, or with Alex because she wanted to—it hasn’t even crossed her mind.
“So?”

“Huh?” She shakes her head. “Yeah, lasagna sounds great,” she tells her aunt. Maggie watches her mull about the kitchen, taking packages of mozzarella cheese—it must kill her to use the store bought stuff, Maggie thinks—and a carton of ricotta out of a reusable grocery bag. Of course she’d gone shopping for the stuff already. She knew she was going to win. Maggie could never say no to her lasagna.

“You know, if you’d taught me how to cook instead of always insisting on cooking, I’d be better at it by now.” Gabriella had taught her how to make a couple of dishes, but she’d never had the passion for it that her aunt has. She’s a decent cook, at least, if not a very creative one.

Gabriella clicks her tongue. “Your food is just fine.”

“That what you say about chefs you don’t like!”

“No,” Gabriella corrects her. “It’s what I say about everyone who doesn't cook as well as I do. But now that you mention it, help me make the sauce. Get up!” Gabriella throws her a wet hand towel, and it hits her square in the face. “Chop, chop!”

Maggie laughs her way into the kitchen.

Alex twists the napkin in her hands nervously, left leg jittering and shaking the small metal table. She checks her phone for the time, and there’s still ten minutes to go.

Casting a discrete eye over her fellow coffee goers and finding none paying attention to her, she turns her phone’s front camera on herself, checking for the millionth time that not a hair is out of place. Today is the big day. This’ll be her first solo interview for a major publication in two years, maybe even more. It will, hopefully, be the first of many more to come.

She inhales and closes her eyes, trying to will her parasympathetic nervous system to kick in and calm her body. Her heart is beating embarrassingly fast for such a simple affair that, at most, will be one hour out of her day.

“Alex Danvers?” Her eyes snap open at the utterance of her name, darting up to see a young woman wearing glasses and a tentative smile. She looks as on edge as Alex feels inside, though she’s doing an admirable effort of hiding it, and that immediately soothes her own frayed nerves. She’ll have the upper hand in this situation. Alex stands, shaking the woman’s hand.

“You’re with Elle magazine right?”

The woman nods. “Carolina O’Hara, big fan, by the way.”

Alex’s face breaks out in a smile at that. This will be a breeze. She’d feared the publication would send her some hard-hitting journalist looking for a scandalous scoop or sensationalized story to
plaster on their cover. But it seems the universe is on her side for once, or perhaps J’onn ensured she’d be placed with someone who’d want to write a great profile on her.

Carolina sits down across from her, smiling again before pulling out a notepad, pen, and audio recorder.

Alex’s eyebrows raise slightly, not expecting her to start off so soon. “Are you sure you don’t want a drink before we start? It’s on me,” she offers.

“You mind if I start recording now?” she asks, ignoring her question as she turns the recorder on, the red light lit up sharp and bright. Alex’s mood sours. She hates when people ask her an empty question for the sake of some false sense of politeness and then just go ahead and do the thing without even waiting for a response. But Alex affixes a polite smile on her face, nodding with practiced ease.

“It’s been great seeing you back on screen after that break you took. What’s your favorite thing about being on Nightingale?”

Straight to the point, then. At least that’s a question she anticipated, and prepared accordingly for.

“Definitely the cast and crew. Everyone on set treats each other like family so it’s a super warm, inviting environment.” The response slides easily off her tongue. Just like riding a bike.

Their exchange carries on in the same manner for 30 minutes (not that Alex is checking the time), and only a few questions force her to pause—taking a moment to get her thoughts in order and respond diplomatically. But there hasn’t been one mention of Maggie so far, which worries her. She’s the ticking bomb, the giant—small, actually, Alex amends in her mind with an internal laugh—elephant sitting at their table. The time looms closer to noon, and Alex’s tension only increases at the start of every new minute.

There’s a halt in their conversation as the interviewer scribbles furiously at her notepad, which is of course hidden from Alex’s view—though she has half a mind to sneak a look. But then Carolina snaps her head back up, expression unreadable.

“And finally, a question you had to see coming, your relationship with Maggie Sawyer came out of the blue for all of us,” she slides the audio recorder even closer to Alex, eager for her big scoop Alex is all too aware. “We didn’t even know you liked women that way. How did that all come about?”

“Mhm,” Alex takes a sip of her cold coffee, buying some time. Dread creeps up her spine, cold and heavy as always, but she fights it back, biting the inside of her cheek until she tastes blood, metallic and tangy. “It was uh,” she pauses, swallowing under the now scrutinizing gaze of the interviewer. “We spend a lot of time together on set and…” it was impossible not to develop feelings for Maggie being around her so often, Alex thinks. Nobody could withstand the charm of those dimples and that smile. But she’s not about to say any of that publicly, god forbid if Maggie ever read this interview. Alex pulls her brain back to the topic on hand. “When we...started dating, I didn’t even think about her gender,” she can hear the words flowing from her mouth, but it’s as if she’s just a spectator watching in fascination—her own verbalized thoughts warbled and distant, nonetheless she pushes through it. “It was a non-issue for me. And we’ve had a really great time together so far. Maggie is a genuinely kind, beautiful individual, and I’m lucky to have her in my life, in whatever capacity.”

Her last sentence takes a moment to register in her conscious. She’d thought about it briefly, and chosen the best words that could describe her supposed relationship with Maggie, taking into
account that it was going to end after a certain point and they’d still work together; her sentence made sense, from a logical point of view, from a PR point of view. But Alex is surprised at how true the sentiment is.

Maggie...she’s turned out to be the better angel J’onn had joked she was so many months ago. And even after their contract ends, she hopes they can still remain friends. They’ll keep working together on the show, sure, but never before has Alex felt this type of camaraderie with a co-star, and she hopes it doesn’t end. It’s difficult to envision her life without Maggie as a permanent fixture in it.

“Mhm,” Carolina’s gaze is still searching, but she clicks off the recorder and sets her pen down. “It’s been a pleasure, Miss Danvers. Thank you for your time,” they shake hands again before Carolina stands up and leaves. Alex sits back in her chair, relieved.

She can hear birds chirping in the distance, intermingled with the noises of the city. A baby starts crying to her left, adding its voice to the symphony of noises. A light cold breeze ruffles her hair as someone opens the door to the cafe. Alex takes it all in.

The interview is over and done, and for the first time in a while, Alex is confident about how she performed. She was good. She wasn’t caught off guard and didn’t stutter her way through any of questions. She handled it, and there’s few things that give her a greater sense of satisfaction than knowing she did good work.

Through the window, Alex watches as the sun fights its way through heavy clouds, as if announcing the arrival of spring.

Alex thinks the new season will be good.

Maggie slurps the noodle into her mouth, sauce staining her chin. She chuckles as she quickly grabs a napkin, hoping none of it fell on her couch.

“It’s like you never grew past fourteen.”

“Lies,” Maggie says, swallowing her bite. “I’m taller now.”

“Barely,” Gabriella teases her, chuckling as she takes a bite of bread.

The TV is on quietly in the background, some Hawaii 5-0 episode that neither of them are paying much attention to. It’s nice. It’s reminds Maggie of all those nights they spent eating on their couch—back when the couch was still her bed—watching shows together. It was their time to hang out, to talk about their days over the buzz of the commercials, back when Maggie was still quiet and withdrawn, and Gabriella was still figuring out how to be an adult for her.

The couch is certainly much better now, and not where she’ll spend the night, but Maggie still cherishes those memories. Those evenings shaped her. Gabriella did. And she hasn’t been the niece
she could be.

“How’s Chris?” she asks, thinking she owes it to her aunt to be interested in her relationship, when Gabriella was always interested in hers. Her aunt helped her pick out clothes for her first date. She’s been a shitty person for not getting to know Chris better, and she knows it. She can excuse herself saying she’s been busy with the show, or she hasn’t had much free time because of the contract, but deep down Maggie knows she’s just gotten herself out of the way for two reasons that have been haunting her since she was a kid. One, because she doesn’t want to be a burden for anyone, least of all Gabriella after everything she’s sacrificed for her, and two...because she’s hurt, because deep down she still feels abandoned and she hates that feeling.

“He’s good.” Gabriella takes another bite of lasagna, and then washes it down with wine. Where she would usually take a hearty sip of her favorite red, she barely seems to taste it now, and that’s what alerts Maggie to that something is wrong.

“Are you sure?” she asks carefully. “Is everything...okay between you two?”

Gabriella looks up at her, and Maggie can see in her eyes that she’s concealing something from her. For how well her aunt can read her, Maggie could always do the same. But this seems worse than them being behind on paying the bills, or Gabriella pretending she’s not okay with letting her skip school to go to an audition.

“We’re good,” she repeats. She dabs at her mouth with a paper napkin, and then zeroes in on the coffee table, her mind seemingly a hundred miles away. She looks up at Maggie. “Do you remember how I told you he was getting offers for a new job?”

Maggie nods.

“Well, he got this really great one...in Argentina.”

Maggie stops breathing for a second.

“He’s moving?” Maggie asks, feeling a stab of anger towards Chris because how could he move and leave Gabriella? Especially when she’d stayed in LA to be with him and let Maggie stay in New York... a sudden thought hits her like a lightning bolt, and Maggie realizes she’s thinking about it the wrong way. It’s not Chris that’s the problem. “Are you...going with him?”

She’s filled with cold dread at the possibility of Gabriella making her home in another country. Having her on the West Coast was bad enough, and no amount of phone calls could make up for seeing her everyday, but Maggie could still fly in whenever she had 3 days in a row free from filming. Whenever she had business in LA or an event to attend, Gabriella was there. It was hard, but not impossible. Having her in Argentina...Maggie doesn’t really understand that concept, can’t begin to wrap her head around it.

“No. No, Maggie, no. I... I couldn’t. We’ve only been dating for seven months, for god’s sake. We’d...We had discussed moving in together, sure, but doing that in another country? It’s too much, too soon.”

“But you want to,” Maggie states. She doesn’t ask. Because Gabriella looks the same as she did when she decided she was going to get La Nuvola Bianca a second Michelin Star, no matter what. It’s hope, longing, and a disbelief that she can do it, all rolled into one.

“You’re here,” Gabriella says, confirming her suspicions. She’s the reason. “The restaurants are here.”
“The restaurants can function with you away,” Maggie says. And she doesn’t know if she can, if she can function like the well oiled machine that her aunt has made her restaurants, both of them, without her around, but Gabriella doesn’t need to know that. “And I’d be fine,” she tells her, hoping she’s not lying. “You’re in LA most of the time already. If you wanted to go, if that’s something you wanted to do...then you should do it.”

She puts her plate of lasagna on the coffee table, the reality of this pushing its way through the numbness now lodged in her chest—plaguing her like a bad cold she can’t get rid of.

“Seven months is nothing,” Gabriella says. “We’ll probably break up.”

“Seven months is a lot,” Maggie tells her. “It’s longer than I’ve ever been with anyone. And it’s the longest you’ve ever been with anyone.”

Gabriella hadn’t dated much, and the guys she did date never lasted long. She hadn’t given that the attention she should have back then. She was a self-centered teenager, and she’s not that person anymore.

Gabriella doesn’t have an answer to her words.

“You look so happy with him,” Maggie tells her. “Even when you first started dating, I could see the way you looked at him—”

“How did you…”

Maggie winces. She remembers watching the grainy security camera footage, and a wave of shame crashes over her as she realizes that she has to come clean, something she should have done a long time ago.

“I might have had Winn look into him,” she confesses.

“Maggie.”

She forces herself to meet Gabriella’s eyes, and she doesn’t know if she finds the disbelief more hurtful than the disappointment shining in them.

“It was after the hospital, I was mad, and I had no idea who he was, and you’d lied to me! You’d never lied to me before!”

“I had. About the bills, about being able to afford your cellphone bills when you were in high school. I lied a lot, Maggie, to protect you. ” She feels it like a punch to the gut, Gabriella’s reminder of everything she’d done for her while she grew up. Her aunt has never reproached her for a single thing. And it only makes it easier to say what she needs to now. “And I don’t know, in my own way I felt like I was protecting you too. And myself.”

“But not about yourself—”

“And I am entitled to my privacy. Especially from you. I didn’t hover when you were growing up. I took care of you, but I never went through your stuff or scared away your girlfriends.”

“I know.” The waves of guilt don’t stop, and she can’t think about anything but Gabriella wasting her youth raising her, when she’d never asked for it. She’d been given an impossible situation and pulled herself and Magie through the other side, and at the first moment she hadn’t been honest with her, Maggie had betrayed her trust.
“Then why?”

“You lied,” Maggie says simply, feeling like a child. It’s the reason, the bare bones of it, and she knows it doesn’t carry enough weight for her to deem it valid. It’s not. “I wanted to see why. I wanted to know about him, because you didn’t tell me.”

Gabriella sighs. “So it’s on me.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“But it’s what you’re implying. And you’re...partly right. I should’ve told you. Deep down...I was just scared, too.” Gabriella shrugs. “You have to know I’ll always choose you, Maggie.”

“I would have never made you choose.”

They’ve been here before, it feels like dialogue she’s learned. Like she’s on set, and they’ve repeated the scene so many times that she plays it out by rote, her lips uttering the words without her brain engaged in their meaning. They went through this when Gabriella went back to LA to stay there. And Maggie knows how this scene ends.

“I know that, piccola,” her aunt says. “I don’t...like what you did, and I’m going to have a talk with that assistant of yours about this, but I can’t stay mad at you. You know that, right?”

Maggie swallows down the knot in her throat.

“You should go to Argentina.”

She can see it in her eyes that Gabriella wants to, and Maggie would never be able to forgive herself if her aunt stayed behind and missed out on an adventure, missed out on love, because Maggie wanted her around.

But Gabriella shakes her head.

“It’s not just the restaurant, or you...keeping me here. We’ve been dating for so little, in the grand scheme of things. This is...insane. I’m thirty-five years old-”

“You’re talking like you’re ancient!”

“And I mean, sure, we get along great, and when he stays over he doesn’t pee on the seat, and I don’t have to ask him to clean up after himself, and he’s almost as good a cook as me. I love his cat! And the cat loves me. And the sex...the sex is amazing.” Gabriella holds up both of her index fingers in front her. “He’s this bi-”

“I don’t need to know that. I really don’t. Please.”

“My point is...okay, so it’s great now. But living with someone changes things.”

“How would you know? You’ve never lived with anyone but me! And roommates. You’ve never moved in with a guy. You’ve never done any of those things, and I can't help but think it’s because of me.”

“Maggie-”

“I was a kid when I came to live with you. We shared a one bedroom apartment for years. You never really had that chance.” Once she got used to it, that small apartment became her home, her sanctuary in a way that not even her parent’s house had been, once she’d grown past the age of
having birthday parties. Gabriella had accepted her, every part of her, and that’s something nobody else in the world had ever given her. And she did it at the expense of herself. Gabriella was her age, when she took her in. Maggie wouldn’t be able to do what she did. She shakes her head, willing herself not to cry. “Hell, you caught me with a girl more often than I ever caught you with a guy,” she says, trying to lighten up the mood.

“Because I was the adult,” Gabriella says simply.

“And I’m an adult now,” Maggie states. “And if you want to move to Argentina with your boyfriend and learn how to cook their food and have crazy sex you don’t need to tell me about, then I support you. No matter how crazy it is, or how long you’ve been dating.” She gets it out in a single breath. “I just want you to be happy.”

Gabriella quickly dabs under her eyes before enveloping her in a hug. Maggie sighs, feeling the same quiet calm and support she’s felt in this place since she could remember.

“I don’t know,” Gabriella tells her, pulling away. ”I’ll...I’ll think about it. But even if I did. I’d still visit you as much as I do now. It’s eleven hours. I could catch the red eye and just get a good night’s sleep on the plane.”

Maggie doesn’t mention what they both know: Gabriella has never been able to sleep well on planes. For now, she just smiles, and nods.

Gabriella had looked the flights up.
Maggie Sawyer, 24, and Alex Danvers, 26, stepped out early Saturday morning for an appointment. The two picked up to-go orders and sipped them on their way to couples yoga. Maggie and Alex were all smiles as they exited the yoga studio an hour later. The pair had similar accessories: rain coats, boots, leggings, and yoga mats (pink for Maggie and blue for Alex).

Sawyer and Danvers’ relationship began back in October 2018, and it’s only gotten stronger since then with the two spending attending the Golden Globes and Oscars as a couple. That super duper romantic Valentine’s Day date. They’ve been dating for around 6 years now, which is the longest we’ve seen Maggie stay with one woman! (Click here to see Maggie Sawyer’s dating history.)

The adorable couple didn’t seem to mind the paparazzi or the cloudy, overcast sky. The power of true love!
Maggie almost misses the flyer stuck to the front of her trailer door.

She’s in a hurry to drop her things off in her trailer—she’d slept through her first alarm this morning, making her a few minutes later than usual now—and she hastily opens the door, but the bright mixture of colors catches her attention.

She backtracks her steps to get a better look at it. Paintball. And scribbled in the margins at the side in what she recognizes as Alex’s messy handwriting, a time and address. She smiles. She grabs the flyer on the way out, tucking it into her pocket. Today is going to be a good day, lateness be damned. She can feel it.

Blake doesn’t have any scenes with Claire that morning.

It’s only during her lunch break that she has the time to seek out Alex. She asks around set for her whereabouts and is met by a few mocking grins and waggling eyebrows from some of the crew—which she promptly ignores. But Paul is helpful, directing her towards Alex’s trailer where he’d seen her go off, arms laden with food.

She pulls out the flyer, now crumpled, as she walks. She smiles to herself as she thinks about Alex coming early to set so she could tape the flyer on her door. It’s a nice gesture, and spontaneous, which Maggie didn’t know Alex had in her. Apart from that one night, months ago, when they’d raced to their apartment—she hasn’t seen wild Alex appear. It could’ve been a fluke.

She knocks twice on Alex’s trailer door, loud and emphatic. Her knuckles have barely left the door when it opens.

“Sawyer,” Alex smirks, moving out of the door frame so Maggie can enter her trailer.

Maggie holds the flyer up, a smile overtaking her face. “Danvers, what is this?”

“I think you know what it is,” Alex playfully says before walking to her table to sit and resume eating her lunch. Maggie follows after, snagging a tortilla chip and receiving a light slap on the hand for it.

“Maybe,” Maggie shrugs. “But if you’re gonna invite me out, I think I deserve a proper invitation.”

Alex rolls her eyes, but she stands, brushing her hands off on her jeans and clearing her throat. “Margaret Ellen Sawyer,” Maggie kicks lightly at her leg for the use of her full name, but Alex just smiles at her. “Will you please accompany me to a game of paintball this Saturday at 10 AM?”
“Just the two of us?”

“Pfft, no! What?” Alex’s tone is incredulous as she waves away the question. “No, I mean, the whole...cast. James thinks it’s a great idea, and you mentioned Winn is visiting you on weekends so that’s great, he could come too. Your aunt even, if she’s around.”

“It would be fun to shoot Winn,” she says, smiling up at Alex. “Okay.”

Alex’s grin matches her own. “Okay”

Maggie gasps, her breath knocked out of her with the force with which Alex slams her against the wall, her body pressing her against it.

Alex’s breath bounces against her lips, they’re so close, and their chests are pressed together as they wait.

“I think he’s gone,” Alex whispers, and Maggie nods. She’d never noticed Alex’s perfume, but standing so close, she can’t miss it. It’s soft yet sharp, like the woman herself. “Sorry if I pushed you too hard,” Alex says suddenly, moving away from her. Maggie breathes in deeply, finally having the space to.

“You’re good, Danvers,” she tells her, tugging the gun closer to her chest. She hears a sound behind them, and in the next second she’s pushing Alex out of the way, forcing her down just as a paintball whizzes by her head, a hair’s breadth away.

“Whew, close one. Too close,” Alex says. “Stay vigilant, Sawyer. I’ll take the left perimeter, you take the right,” Alex orders with a brisk nod, and then she’s off, quickly crossing the remaining length of the room with an impressive jump somersault—where she learned to do that, Maggie doesn’t know—landing behind the large tower of fake box crates in the corner.

Maggie shakes her head, smiling, this is yet another new side of Alex she’s discovering, and it’s one she’d like to see more of.

She knew from their gift war—which she was still winning—that Alex had a competitive streak a mile wide that matched her own, but seeing it in action is a whole different story. She’s seriously into this paintball game, face determined as she ruthlessly shoots down the opposing team members. She’d taken out Winn early in the game with a direct hit to the chest. Now it’s only their team, James—who’d had the unfortunate luck of partnering with Winn and Drew, both uncoordinated individuals with a terrible shot—and Taylor’s team of three, their main competition. They’d had the odds stacked against them as the only team of two, but Maggie had a feeling they’d rise to the occasion.

“Sawyer!” Maggie turns her head towards the left perimeter to see Alex furiously motioning at her to move to the right side of the inside arena.

“Got it, Agent Danvers!” She mock salutes, and then dashes over to the fake rusted metal bin, keeping her body low and sliding into position when she’s close enough. She cocks the gun over her knee, peering over the barrel for potential enemies. It’s clear, and silent...too silent. A loud warcry whoop comes from behind her and Maggie whips around, dodging a bullet just in the nick
of time. But another bullet from the opposite direction hurtles by dangerously close to her right shoulder. It’s an ambush. Taylor’s team has her surrounded from the looks of it.

Maggie breaths hard, looking around. She needs to escape the enclosed space and get out into the open—a moving target is harder to hit.

Maggie tucks her gun to her side and starts running, staying close to the floor. Her heart beats a mile a minute, adrenaline coursing through her body. She relishes the feeling, a rakish smile overtaking her face.

She’s five steps away from the safety of constructed wall when a faint exhale behind her—right on her six she’d wager—pricks her attention. She slows her dash minutely, taking the chance that her assailant will want to get closer before taking the kill shot and lets the person get within her gun range. One shot. That’s all this will take. Running on pure instinct, she throws all her weight into the balls of her feet, using the momentum to whirl her body around and land in a crouch. The thwack of the bullet hitting a tactical vest is music to her ears. Taylor shoots her a mock glare, staring down at the messy paint splatter dripping down his vest.

“That was a nice shot, Maggie,” he smiles at her. “It’s always good to go out with a bang.”

Maggie’s eyes widen as he jumps out of the way, making way for a bullet heading straight her way. He was the diversion. The pawn sacrificed in hopes of capturing the larger piece. There’s a hail of bullets on her tail now as she cuts a zigzag path through the various barriers laid out across the arena. She can’t face them alone.

“Danvers, I need you!” she exclaims, hoping her partner is close enough to hear her. She throws herself behind a concrete slab, her weight causing the inflated stuffed object to shake slightly.

“Maggie!” Alex’s voice comes from somewhere towards her left, but she doesn’t raise her voice or lift her head above the barricade for fear of being noticed by their enemies too. She’d successfully lost them, she hopes, and she can’t give up her position now. But soon enough, deep red hair comes into her line of sight and it’s the most beautiful vision she’s ever seen. Alex Danvers, decked out in all her paintball gear—tactical vest, goggles, knee and elbow pads, and gun hoisted over her shoulder—smiling down at her like some vengeful angel.

Alex’s smile falters as she crouches behind the barrier, shoulder pressed up against her own.

“Did I get paint on my face?” she questions in a whisper.

“Huh?”

“It’s just -you’re looking at me...weirdly.”

Maggie quickly averts her eyes, smiling to herself and shaking her head. “It’s just good to see you, Danvers.”

“Did you think I wasn’t going to show up?” Alex turns her head, her face so close that Maggie can see the flecks of color in her irises. She had never noticed that Alex’s eyes aren’t brown, like her own. There’s flecks of green in the gray. “I’m not losing you.”

“That’s incredibly noble of you, but if we want to win the game -”

“If you’re about to suggest what I think you are…” Alex fixes a warning glare on her.

“Hear me out,” she angles her body inwards, closer to Alex. “I just took Taylor out, meaning
there’s only Michelle and Miranda left on his team, and no offense to them, but they can’t shoot for shit. I create a diversion to draw their attention away from you, hopefully taking them down with me in the process, and then you can take out James, and we win the game.”

Alex shakes her head adamantly. “I’m not going on without you. It’s both of us or nothing.”

The smile that stretches across Maggie’s face is involuntary. Alex is deadly serious right now, all over a simple paintball game. It’s equal parts ridiculous and endearing. She feels a laugh bubbling up in her throat, but she does her best to stifle it upon seeing the half offended expression it elicits out of Alex.

“Ride or die?” She offers to Alex, all too happy to indulge her impossibly earnest concerns.

“Ride or die.”

The mid-afternoon sun filters weakly down on them, struggling to offer any warmth, but Maggie doesn’t mind. She doesn’t even the notice the cold or the breeze picking up—blowing around various strewn litter covering the sidewalk.

Their party had quickly dispersed after their successful paintball victory. Winn had to leave right away to catch his plane back to LA, and James excused himself early too, citing that he was meeting someone for a drink. That’d left her and Alex alone to walk back to their apartments, not that Maggie is complaining. Alex is certainly her closest friend on set now—overtaking James’ hold to that title weeks ago—even with her disrespect of healthy lifestyles.

“How can you say that when you’ve never even tried it!” Maggie exclaims, arms flung up in exasperation.

“It’s vegan ice cream, Maggie,” Alex argues back, laughing all the while. “I don’t need to try it to know that it’s disgusting and inferior in all ways to regular ice cream.”

Maggie raises her eyebrows, face the picture of disbelief. “I can think of one big way it is superior.”

“Oh, that.” Alex dismisses it with a shrug, coming to a stop at the street crossing. “Nobody eating ice cream is thinking about their health,” she jabs the crosswalk button once, and then five times more in quick succession.

“What will it take for you to try some of my, and I quote, disgusting fake ice cream?” Maggie turns to face the street, the wind doing its best to blow her away. “Money? Food? Begging?”

“Hmm,” Alex tilts her head in thought, the back of her hand supporting her chin, doing a passable imitation of the thinking man. “I don’t know Maggie…”

“I have a proposition,” Maggie announces, looking both ways before crossing the street as the light turns green. “I’ll try your favorite, most greasy, unhealthy food if you try vegan ice cream.”

Alex throws her a skeptical look and hums quietly to herself in thought. But once they’re on the other side of the street, she stops in her tracks, decision made. “Deal,” she thrusts out her hand to
shakes on it.

Her hand is warm in Maggie’s, nearly warm enough to banish even the cold March day.

She almost doesn’t want to let go, but the moment passes, carried off by a gust of wind.

Sharp, repetitive knocking wakes her up.

Alex groans as she rolls in bed, opening eyes thick with sleep to squint at the alarm clock. The blurry red numbers inform her it’s 6:17 AM. Far too early on a Sunday morning to be woken up, but the knocking persists. Apparently whoever is banging down her door won’t leave until she—with force if necessary—makes them leave.

She grumbles, shoving the covers off her with a kick and standing up, even as the world takes a second to settle around her. The walk to her door is short, and made even faster by her irritated gait. Alex yanks the door open ready to tell whatever newspaper boy to fuck off back to Kansas, but her righteous annoyance fades mid-throat as she’s greeted by Kara’s bright face, Elle magazine in her hands.

“When did you get here?” A visit from her sister is the last thing she expected. Last she knew, Kara was shooting in LA.

“I landed last night,” Kara pushes past Alex’s immobile body, wrinkling her nose at the clothes haphazardly strewn on her couch and the dishes from last night still in her sink, which Alex had been too lazy to put in the dishwasher. She sits down at her table, brushing off the table top in front of her with the magazine.

Alex, still facing her now empty doorway, rolls her eyes before turning back around and joining Kara at the table. “Why didn’t you say?”

“I knew you were out with friends,” she shrugs, flipping through the magazine. “I didn’t want to bother you.”

“How did you -”

“Oh Alex, you look amazing!” Kara cuts her off, grabbing her arm in excitement and bouncing in her chair. Alex winces slightly at the force behind Kara’s grip. She’s not sure when her sister became so strong—must be all that superhero training for Captain Marvel. ”Have you texted mom already? I’ve been holding myself back to let you do it, but if you don’t text her in the next second then I swear I’m showing her the cover myself.”

Alex leans forward, carefully prying Kara’s fingers off of her arm. “It just came out this morning, so no I haven’t had the chance to.”

“Your phone!” Kara jumps from the table, running over to her bed. “Where is it?” She jumps onto
the bed, throwing pillows and covers carelessly in search of the device.

“Kitchen.”

“Oh.”

Alex hides a smile behind her hand, apparently not very well though because Kara bats at her shoulder on the way to the kitchen. She grabs the phone, pulling out the lightning cord, and hands it to Alex.

“I’ll let you do the honors,” Kara’s tone is solemn, but her sparkling eyes and the twitch at the corner of her mouth belie her forced gravitas.

“Fine,” she sighs, swiping up to access her camera and pulling the magazine over to take pictures of it. She makes sure to be meticulously slow in her actions, arranging and rearranging the magazine just so. Kara remains silent next to her, lips pressed tightly together, for 2 minutes. Alex is impressed, but as she expected, Kara breaks a second later and grabs the phone from her hand.

“Let me help you with that,” Kara smiles at her, sugar sweet. Alex just raises her eyebrow, forcing an innocent expression on her face.

Her phone is soon thrust back into her hand, the photos already selected in her iMessage text box and ready to send to their mom. Alex’s thumb hovers over the send arrow, twitching slightly. The realization dawns on her that she’s nervous about what her mom’s reaction will be. She hasn’t even had a chance to look over the interview, leaving that duty up to J’onn.

Alex looks down at her own smiling face in the glossy pages of the magazine. *Rising Phoenix.* Her eyes quickly scan over the interview, pages flipping with a small woosh. It’s a bit more...critical at the start than she’d expected, but as she reads the last part, she can see why. Carolina needed to begin with the less than savory aspects of her life so the story could rise, triumphant and flourishing at the end. Her story. And it was great.

“Alex?” Kara’s gentle voice pulls her from her contemplation. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah,” she nods with a small smile. “It’s just- I haven’t done this,” she gestures down to the magazine below, “in a while. Feels like a big moment.”

Kara leans closer, placing both hands on Alex’s knees. “And it is. You deserve this, Alex. I’m so proud of you.” Alex puts her own hand atop of Kara’s in a silent display of appreciation. She hits send, watching the blue bar at the top of the screen load the images.

She looks up at her sister, a grin slowly forming. She’s excited, an emotion she hasn’t associated with her mom in years—unless it was excitement to leave her company. She wants her mom to see her spread. That feeling blossoming in her chest is pride, pride in herself, of how far she’s come in two short years since that fateful day she was fired.

She wants their mom to be proud of her, too, the way she’s always proud of Kara.
Fierce, determin
is taking the wo
years

Often times, we become
infatuated with the
play our favorite char-
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better or for worse, we mon-
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Perhaps no actress best e:
society’s paradoxical beh-
wars Hollywood than Ale

RISING

PHO
Nightingale launched Maggie Sawyer from rising star to the talk of the town (a move which she later capitalized on with her Golden Globe winning performance in The Informant). The question buzzing on everybody’s lips could it do the same for Alex Danvers?

The narrative started to shift, and in June when her casting as Claire Lawson was announced, it transformed completely.

The swirl of rumors and surrounding her sparked a sudden the world decided a rising Phoenix engu flames—burning bright for a triumphant comeback story making. The underdog we all root for.

The wave of public sentiment in her favor, and it was bold Danvers own actions. Her morning club escapades vanished. Paparazzi altercat whispers of rude fan encounter appeared, leaving only the resulting smoke of their existence.

The fervor to see Alex back screens only grew with each release to the public. At a time as her star power rose another underlying story brewing—one that was overlooked due to the improbity of it all, but that in hindsight quickly point to as a single element of the most recent saga long and winding story.

Photos surfaced of Alex Dan her co-star Maggie Sawyer some quality time together, and of itself was not unusual more and more instances between the two occurred, and the nature of interactions changed into something identifiable entity to the generic—perhaps closer than just
ELLE: How do you feel about the overarching comeback narrative that’s been echoing around you recently?

Alex Danvers: I can understand why people are so bent on insinuating it, everybody loves a good comeback story. And I don’t mind it necessarily, but comeback also carries the negative connotations of where I was before Nightingale. I wasn’t in the best place, that is true, but I wasn’t as much of a [laughs] mess as the media liked to make me out to be.

ELLE: What would you coin this recent rise in your career you’re experiencing then?

AD: A...resurgence. You know, I used to surf a lot when I was younger, and this feels like...how the waves could be amazing one day and barely there the next. Right now, I’m...higher than I’ve ever been, and it’s all thanks to my amazing fans.

ELLE: On that topic, you’ve gained a number of gay fans through your portrayal of Claire Lawson. What has it been like to represent the LGBT community through Claire and Dawson?

AD: It’s an honor and privilege to play such a nuanced character like Claire who has her own backstory and storylines and just happens to be gay too. This is my first time playing a gay character, and I’m definitely mindful of doing the community she’s part of justice.

ELLE: What was your audition for Claire Lawson like?

AD: Nerve wracking [laughs]. The whole audition process for Claire was pretty fast. My manager told me the show wanted me to try out for the role, and then just a few weeks later I was doing the chemistry read with Maggie.

I was definitely nervous when I first walked into the room and saw Maggie and Anthony King [Nightingale creator & showrunner], but once I started doing the scene it all clicked.

ELLE: Claire is another role on your long list. You’ve bee in the industry, whether that was your own work or your father’s over ten years now. How did you find your way into the industry and behavior today?

AD: It’s a love, made me an expert the ins and outs of the business, good, bad, and ugly. All known is the crazy world wood. The more I’ve been other people the more I’ve unique my childhood was. I first set when I was 6 years old, I’ve always been such a huge part of my life and identity. I don’t have I would be without.

ELLE: So there was never else you wanted to be growing up? Acting has always been for me.

AD: I did want to be a Jedi but that never panned out. And I still think being or scientist would be an interesting career. But acting really has big dream since I was young. Hear the director yell “action” that camera on me...it’s like body lights up.

There’s a quote by Carl Sagan goes, and I’m paraphrasing.
Maggie’s eyes glance over the last page of the spread.

She takes in that last sentence, smiling to herself. From the words alone, she can so easily see Alex in her mind’s eye, standing tall and proud. She knows better than anyone how media can change the way a person is perceived, but she didn’t read anything in the article that she didn’t know
already—at least, from Alex’s character.

It’s a great piece, especially the photos. Maggie loves the sense of movement. It reminds her of Alex playing paintball with her, and how she’d put her whole body into it, in a way that Maggie had never seen her do before. It comes across in the picture. Maggie is an objective, casual observer, and she can see that Alex’s body is beautiful. Her legs especially look great in that one print dress. She closes the magazine, sliding it between her leg and her chair. A congratulations is in order.

Maggie starts to stand, wondering about where she can find Alex, but then she sees the woman in question heading her way. Alex plops into her own seat beside her.

“Hey, Maggie.”

“Danvers!” she smirks. “I didn’t know you surfed.”

Alex smiles briefly, and then frowns, slowly realizing she hasn’t let Maggie in on that detail.

“You bought the magazine?” she asks, and Maggie nods, pulling out the copy. Alex’s cheeks turn pink.

“You looked amazing.”

“Pfft,” Alex waves her off, as usual. “Thanks. I mean -” she shrugs. “Thank you.” The smile pointed her way is sincere.

Maggie is baffled at the carefully nonchalant, self-deprecating response Alex has given her every time she’s thrown a nice thought her way. It could just be an extreme case of humbleness, but something in her says the reaction is born more from a lack of confidence. Nobody can be self-assured all of the time, Maggie herself has her own flaws, and she’s beginning to recognize Alex’s. That’s not to say Alex isn’t confident on screen, and in front of the public at red carpets or parties, but it’s in these smaller moments, just between the two of them, that Maggie can see the chinks in her armor.

She resolves to compliment her more often. She’ll fill those chinks herself if she has to.

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Alex sits up in bed, tired and frustrated.

She’s annoyed at the thought of adjusting her thermostat again, but attributing her inability to fall asleep to something as inane as the weather would be naive. And incorrect. She’s been trying to sleep for 4 hours now, but her bed suddenly has a million lumps in it, and that Italian takeout she had for dinner isn’t sitting right in her stomach.

It’s just her luck that tonight, of all nights, the universe refuses to let her sleep.

She and Maggie have a flight to catch before dawn, and with every passing minute she’s losing
sleep she desperately needs. They have the GLAAD awards to attend tomorrow night, and she’d prefer to be alert for them, lest anybody points to her tiredness as a sign of disinterest and screams homophobic. *Nightingale* is nominated, so she also needs to be at the top of her game tomorrow. She can’t half ass it. From what she’d found out via research, the GLAAD awards are a pretty big deal in the gay community.

*Nightingale* looks like it’ll be a shoe-in to win as well. King had informed them to prepare and memorize a speech because there was a good chance they’d be walking up on that stage together to accept the award—and this seemed like an award that he couldn’t buy for them, either. (Well, he’d told Maggie to prepare, and Alex had just so happened to be in the same vicinity when it happened. She’s noticed more and more that King doesn’t seem to trust her enough to carry out their contract obligations, and the thought bothers her more than it should—it’s not like she cares about King’s opinion of her).

Maggie will be doing most of the speaking either way, which lifts some of the stress she’s feeling over the award show. But not all of it. Her brain is buzzing even this late at night, and Alex hasn’t found a way to quiet it. The awards tomorrow...they bring to the forefront things that she hasn’t been keen on giving much thought to. She’d looked up the GLAAD organization, and the words thrown at her had left her mind going a thousands miles an hour. She...likes Maggie, she knows that. And she’s accepted that maybe it’s not the first time she’s felt this way towards a woman, although it’s so...complicated, to try and untangle every single friendship she’s had in her life, and analyze it under a microscope. But if the day came where she had to pick a name and stick with it, Alex doesn’t know what she’d do. Lesbian sounds like a dirty word to her ears, and didn’t she like that kid when she was 16? That means she likes men, too, doesn’t it?

She’s heard Maggie say she’s gay a few times, and although the word is comfortable by now, it feels terrifying to use it on herself, the label too permanent. What if it’s just a phase? What if it’s not...real?

Her alarm clock rings while she’s still laying awake, trying to figure it out.

off.

Maggie leaves her hotel room in high spirits.

She’d fit in as much of La Nuvola Bianca’s best salad as she could before stepping into her dress, and Gabriella had helped with the zipper. Even with the food, everything still fit. They hadn’t hired dress people, Winn not considering it necessary for an event much smaller than the Oscars or the Globes—but it meant infinitely more to Maggie. Maybe not for her as an actress, but for her as a person. As a gay woman. As an out and proud lesbian—and it had been a long road she’d walked to be able to state her sexuality to proudly. She’d lived her life the way she was meant to far younger than most, but not a day goes by that she doesn’t feel what it cost her. She wishes no kid had to go through what she did. And she’s not naive enough to think she’s making a tangible difference—shitty people will be shitty people—but if a single kid in a situation like hers feels less alone, then she’s done something.
The elevator stops on the lobby, and Maggie exits it, making her way towards the car that she’s been texted is waiting for her. Sure enough, she can see Alex as she walks closer. The sight only makes Maggie feel better about her evening.

She enters the car, and the driver immediately starts the route towards The Beverly Hilton hotel, their destination.

“Danvers,” she greets, and Alex offers her a faint smile in answer. Maggie frowns lightly.

If Alex’s jaw clenches any tighter, it’s liable to crack, she thinks, discretely glancing over at her co-star. The low hum of the car is the only sound accompanying as they cruise the LA streets, and Maggie wonders if Alex is nervous.

She already made a promise to herself, and she’s not one to neglect following through, so she reaches for Alex.

A warm pressure on her thigh startles Alex, but it’s only Maggie, looking over at her with that soft expression she’s become all too familiar with.

It’s only now that she’s accepted her... crush, that Alex can admit to herself that the “sickness” she’d felt in the pit of her stomach whenever Maggie had turned those unreasonably soft eyes on her was born from her attraction to her—and not food poisoning. She feels the same flutter in her stomach now as Maggie smiles at her.

“This’ll be easy for us,” Maggie’s voice is gentle and low. “Third time’s the charm.”

Alex squeezes Maggie’s hand, already feeling her nerves quell in the face of her calmness.

“And hopefully this night will end better than the previous nights.”

Maggie chuckles, “Hopefully. We don’t have any after parties to attend this time at least,” she points out. “I think that may have been our bad luck charm.”

That does cheer Alex up considerably. The award show will be over in the afternoon, and then a late dinner finishes out their day. All things considered, it shouldn’t be a bad day. They just have to get through the actual show.

And wait to see if they win.

The flashes of the cameras and shouts from the paparazzi will never be a pleasant experience, but
surprisingly enough, Alex finds she isn’t as uncomfortable as she expected to be. Perhaps it has something to do with the woman beside her, arm wrapped around her waist, but Alex feels like she could take on an army. Or the dozen cameramen in front of her.

“Beautiful smile, Alex!”

“Gorgeous, look this way!”

“We’re the couple of the night, it seems,” Maggie whispers in her ears as they walk, and Alex’s hates her stomach for swooping at Maggie’s words. They send a shiver through her, and she has to make an effort to pay attention to walking in her heels and posing at the appropriate times.

The want that rushes through her is indescribable.

She knows it’s not real, but her body doesn’t, and now that she’s accepted this—that she’s embraced the fact that Maggie Sawyer drives her crazy—it’s hard not to enjoy the arm around her waist, the hand holding her own.

She feels like a woman dying of thirst, stranded in the desert and enjoying the sight of an oasis. It’s nothing but a figment of her imagination, the possibility of anything real and tangible between them, but that doesn’t stop Alex’s brain from conjuring up the images, and they’re not dissimilar to what’s currently taking place.

It’s the first red carpet Alex can remember where she doesn’t fake any of her smiles.

Maggie shifts in her seat, trying to find a degree of comfort in the stiff chair. If luck goes their way, she won’t be sitting for much longer.

Their category is up next.

The lights in the crowd dim, preparing for the presenters to enter the stage. Maggie breaths in, feeling her heart pound in her chest. The presenter’s words barely register in her ears, and this time it’s Alex who’s laying a calming hand on her. Maggie shoots a grateful glance her way before turning her attention back on the stage.

She takes Alex’s hand from her thigh, and holds it in her own. Her blood rushes in her ears, and Alex’s touch grounds her.

“And the winner for Outstanding Drama Series is... Nightingale!”

The eruption of applause is deafening.

Maggie stands, hand still holding Alex’s, and leads them up to the stage.

She takes a moment to adjust the mic stand down to her height, which she can see Alex smirk at from the corner of her eye. She rolls her eyes, but the moment relaxes her, gives her a semblance of
“First of all, we’d like to thank GLAAD for having us here tonight and putting together this fantastic event. It’s incredibly important to highlight and recognize positive LGBT representation.” She pauses to take a breath, recalling the words she’d written down days ago. “We’d like to thank ABC Studios for making Nightingale possible. Thank you for green-lighting a show with a lesbian lead, and believing in it every step of the way. Thank you to the producers, writers, cast, crew, and everyone who championed this show from the very beginning. We couldn’t have done this without their support.”

“And,” Alex chimes in from her left, “we’d like to thank our amazing, passionate fans who tune in every week and fill our twitter mentions with hysterical screaming, which I still don’t understand, but appreciate nevertheless.” That generates a ripple of laughter in the room, and Maggie feels a small glow of pride for Alex.

Maggie picks up where she left off. “We do this all for you. And we are honored to represent you every week. This award is yours.” She takes a breath and keeps going, letting her heart speak for her. “I was that sad girl sitting in her room thinking there was no one in the world who felt the way she did.”

“Whenever I hear your stories, and one of you says that Blake Davenport made you feel less alone...that’s when I know it’s worth it.”

Alex feels the back of her eyes hurt as she looks Maggie. She can’t picture the strong, brave woman at her side as a scared little girl, but the honesty with which Maggie says the words leaves no question as to their veracity. She’s wearing her heart on her sleeve, and Alex has never seen anything so beautiful, so passionate. Maggie is breathtaking.

“So thank you,” Maggie says, “from the bottom of my heart. For loving Blake, and Claire, and for supporting positive representation for lesbians everywhere.”

The word that Alex had shied away from just last night doesn’t sound so bad rolling off of Maggie’s tongue.

She’s supposed to do the send off, a thank you and a goodnight is all that’s written in their speech, but something feels missing. Maggie must misunderstand her hesitance for nerves, because suddenly her hand is holding hers.

Alex steps forward to the microphone.

“Thank you all, and...and thank you to this woman right here, for her fearless performance as Blake. I am privileged to have a front row seat to the hard work and dedication Maggie puts into her character every day. Blake may be an inspiration to people, but Maggie Sawyer herself is an even bigger one. So thank you to this amazing woman—and to the fans, and to GLAAD.
Goodnight.”

Alex lifts their connected hands, feeling like an Olympic athlete standing on the podium, with gold around their neck as the crowd cheers them on.

*Nightingale* won, and she begins to lose her reservations.

Maggie walks her to her room.

They're staying on the same floor, a couple of rooms away, and Maggie walks closely by her side as they reach Alex's door. Alex opens it, immediately missing Maggie's warmth once she's inside. She looks up at Maggie, just on the other side of the doorway.

"Wanna come inside for a nightcap?" she asks.

Maggie gives her a look. “An evening cap you mean. It’s like 6 PM.”

Alex laughs. She hasn't had a single drop of alcohol, but she already feels drunk. Drunk off winning, drunk off...Maggie. She doesn't want this part of the evening to be over yet. They have a dinner to attend, still, but she wouldn't mind extending this for a few more minutes.

"Come in,” she insists, and Maggie follows her inside.

Alex takes two glasses from the small adjacent kitchen her hotel room is equiped with. She serves them both a finger of whiskey, just what was inside one of the tiny bottles stashed in the mini fridge. They bring back memories of her ridiculous drinking the night of the Oscars, and that only serves to remind her how good Maggie had been—even when she'd acted like an asshole. Alex hands her the glass, and Maggie takes it.

She looks at Maggie taking a sip, and then looks away when her eyes zero in on her.

"You went a bit off script at the end there," Maggie points out, and Alex feels her cheeks heat up. She shrugs.

"You really did deserve it," she says, hoping her congratulating Maggie wasn't too much. She meant every single word. She takes a sip of her drink, letting the strong, bitter taste slip down her throat and warm her chest—although the current conversation is already doing a fine job at it. "You really meant it,” she says offhandedly.

Maggie looks up at her, questioning. “Meant what?”

"What you said, when you received the award. About representation and stuff.” Alex shrugs. The words feel wrong, awkward, in her mouth. "I don’t know, I guess I just thought...that you didn’t really care about that stuff. About Blake being...gay, and all that.”

“Where did you get that impression?”

Alex frowns, suddenly feeling like she has to tread carefully. “I’m pretty sure I read it in a magazine.”
"I probably said something like it, to be honest," Maggie tells her, and Alex is surprised. "Something about how...I picked Blake because she's an amazing character, and how Jude Fuery has an amazing story and I didn't do the movie just because she's gay, and all that. Because I can't just tell whatever straight dude is interviewing me that I don't like playing straight women. That's boring as shit. That would go over like gangbusters. No offense."

Alex flinches. She wants to tell Maggie, but she can't, not without letting her know why she knows. Because of her.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know it meant...so much to you. I'm sorry that I can't...understand."

"Danvers, you don't have to-I'm just being weird. It's fine." Maggie drains her small glass, and then puts it down on the dresser. "See...it means something to me because what I said is true. When I was fourteen...it doesn't matter now, but it wasn't easy for me. I was...I was so ashamed, and scared and—I don't want kids to feel like that. If having Blake or Jude or whoever I play on their TVs makes it even a little bit better for them, then I've done something with my life, you know?"

Maggie's eyes are lost somewhere on the carpet, but then she looks up at Alex. "Thank you for helping me do that."

"I..." Alex is at a loss. She hasn't done anything. It's as though Maggie reads her mind, because she insists.

"Thanks for being my Claire."

Alex smiles.

The words get choked up in her throat, fighting to crawl out. She wants to tell Maggie, to let her know how her stomach swoops whenever she smiles, and how she never liked being intimate, but her imagination can conjure up images of Maggie between her legs so easily, and how she's so confused and everything is so damned complicated, and she would love it if she had someone on her side.

Maggie is so strong and so sure of who she is, and Alex doesn't know anything about herself with that certainty. All she has is how she feels whenever Maggie smiles at her.

But before she can even begin to formulate a sentence, Maggie is hugging her and going back to her own hotel room.

... ... ... ...

Maggie fights a losing battle not to take her shoes off.

She's 2 doors away from her hotel room when she finally gives in, deciding that she's basically in her room as it is, and no one is watching. She sighs as she feels the soft carpeted floor beneath her bare feet, and covers the rest of the distance to her hotel room door. Her chest doesn’t let go of the
warmth of the alcohol Alex offered until she’s knocking on the door, waiting for Gabriella to let her in. Her dress had no pockets for the hotel key.

She debates the professionalism of having another finger of booze before she has to go down for dinner.

“Gabriella? You haven’t started celebrating without me have you?” She rises up on her tiptoes, shoving her smiling face directly in front of the peephole. The door opens a second later.

She's expecting a hug, or kisses on both cheeks, or at the very least congratulations. What she doesn't expect is how pale Gabriella's face is, and how strange her mood seems. She doesn't seem mad, or upset, but Maggie can feel the nerves radiating off of her in waves.

“Franky called,” Gabriella says finally.

“Which Franky?” Maggie frowns, trying to put a face to the name. "Oh! She did my hair for the TCAs two years ago didn't-"

“Your sister, Franky.”

Chapter End Notes

They're good friends! Alex is crushing hard! And Maggie's sister called? We'd love to hear your thoughts about it all!

Leave us a comment below, or you can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meanstoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well. (And feel free to use your first language! We'd love to talk to you in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, or French). Thank you for reading!

PS: If you are able to, consider donating to the #MaggieMatters Fundraiser for TrueColors Fund, Cyndi Lauper's organization to battle homelessness in LGBT youth. (Yes! That Cyndi Lauper from 'all through the night' and Alex's karaoke song.) Moreover, on April 19 we will be tweeting Floriana and the producers to respectfully let them know why Maggie matters, we'd love if you could all join us!
Curae leves loquuntur ingentes stupent: mild sorrows speak, but great ones are speechless.
AND THEN once inside the show we get shots of them holding hands AND NIGHTINGALE WINS

they're so Powerful... their mind... UGH it amazes me sometimes.

AND THEN THEY ACCEPTED THE SPEECH & WE ALL CRIED WHEN MAGGIE SAID I WAS THAT SAD GIRL SITTING IN HER ROOM THINKING THERE WAS NO ONE IN THE WORLD WHO FELT THE SAME WAY

AND FUCKING THEN ALEX BUTTS IN AT THE VERY ENDD TO SAY WHAT AN INSPIRATION MAGGIE IS AND TAHNKS HER PERSONALLY BC SHES SO IN LOVE
Bella
@alexmaggie

MOVE IM FUCKING GAY OMG MY PANTS WHERE ARE THEY ARE ALSKDFJKADJ
Her phone rings, relentless, and she hurries from her place on the hotel bed to get to it.

“Hello?” She asks as she answers, not even bothering to check the caller ID. Very few people in the world have her number, and she doubts it’s her mother.

“Congrats, Alex!” Her sisters cheery voice brings a smile to her face. Normally the acute tone would make her wince if she was in a particularly bad mood, but she feels good. She likes winning, modesty be damned. And she liked winning with Maggie even more.

“How did you hear so fast?” she asks Kara, before putting her phone on speaker and setting it on the table. She reaches backwards, trying to undo her zipper. “They don’t even air this.”

“Twitter,” Kara says, as if it was obvious. Alex hums. She still hasn’t developed a taste for social media, and her Instagram account looks like a Maggie Sawyer fan page if only because the most recent posts she has are motivated by the contract she signed. “I knew you’d win,” Kara tells her, and Alex smiles to herself.

“I mean, it’s not an Emmy,” she jokes, but it still sings in her chest, the satisfaction of doing something right, and having that be acknowledged. She wasn’t involved in the creation of the Dawson relationship, but it feels like a part of her at this point, and it pleases her that it’s appreciated.
“I mean, no, but it’s just as good,” Kara tells her. “It’s better, actually. What you’re doing...it helps people.”

Alex frowns.

Claire...was a role. A role she loved, that came with co-stars she enjoyed hanging out with, an apartment she liked, and good pay, but she’d never considered it this...transcendental thing. It was just another character.

But she remembers the girls who’d waited for her and Maggie to finish filming that night all those weeks ago, and the words they’d said to Maggie. She remembers Maggie’s impassioned words in her acceptance speech, and the honesty she’d given her regarding her own past only a few minutes ago. It meant something, to those girls, and to Maggie herself.

And deep down, she knows it means something to her. Without Claire...without Maggie...she would have never accepted she liked women that way.

And that’s too much to think about while she has her sister on the phone.

“I guess,” she tells Kara, shrugging even though Kara can’t see her.

“I’m proud of you,” her sister tells her, voice soft through the phone. It’s not uncommon for Kara to express that sentiment to her, even when she doesn’t deserve it, but it feels different now—more important given the nature of what she’s praising her over.

Her sister loves her, Alex knows that as well as she knows herself.

Telling Kara what she’s recently accepted...it would be a relief. Like breaking the surface of the water after getting knocked off her surfboard, that moment where her burning lungs finally expand with the oxygen she’d craved while fighting the waters below.

“Thank you,” she says. There’s so much more she wants to tell her, but it can’t be done over the phone. She thinks about Kara’s upcoming visit, and her stomach clenches with nerves. Will she even be able to get those words out, or will they stick in her throat?

“I can’t wait to see you next week,” Kara tells her, as though reading her mind. “We’re gonna have an extended sister night.”

“We haven’t had that in ages,” Alex mentions, a degree of regret in her voice. She loves working on Nightingale, but the only downside is that she’s not always available to hang out with Kara. Before, Kara would visit her any time the schedule of whatever she was currently filming would allow, and Alex would only have to clean out her apartment of any remaining empty beer bottles to receive her. Now, she’s just as busy as her sister, and their free time rarely lines up.

They got lucky next week.

Kara’s Captain Marvel is taking a 2 week long break while they move from filming in Belgium to the states, while Nightingale’s next episode is heavy on Captain Ellis, so Alex has moved to the background for the first time since she was cast. She only has a few scenes, and none with Maggie, and she can sleep in on Sunday since she doesn’t have to show up to set at all that day. So, sister night. A long overdue one.

Alex smiles as Kara lists all the TV shows she pretends to binge watch with her, and which New York City restaurants she wants to try, and as she wonders out loud if potstickers from Chinatown will be better than any others she’s tried before.
“Can’t wait to find out,” she tells her sister. “Listen, I have to change—did I tell you there’s a dinner after this? And then I’m going to go find Maggie, but I’ll text you later, okay?”

“Of course! My bad! Go get changed, don’t get in trouble!”

“Bye, Kara.”

Mentioning Maggie to Kara only makes the previous few hours feel all the more real, and even though it’s been a while since they picked up the award, Alex can still feel the adrenaline rushing through her veins. She hadn’t known she would mention Maggie until she did, but it felt right. Holding her hand felt right.

Alex tries to dampen the tingle running up her spine, playing with her nerves, but the feeling spreads across her body, effusive in its warmth.

It almost feels like she’s gliding as she walks over to her suitcase open on the hotel room floor, bending down to pull out her attire for dinner. And the light, fluttering buoyancy beating against her rib cage doesn’t end even as she exits her room, door clicking closed behind her.

She’s being ridiculous, Alex knows this. It’s not like her dinner with Maggie is a real date, it’s simply another contract obligation just like the dozen or more before it. Her brain understands that, but a small part of her—suffocated and hidden for so long—apparently refuses to cooperate with logic. Surprisingly though, Alex realizes she doesn’t particularly mind.

As a child, she’d let herself believe in Santa Claus during Christmas time and in the Easter bunny during Easter, even though they both seemed preposterous, just to feel included. She’d learned soon enough not to tell kids that the tooth fairy wasn’t real, and instead participate in the “who got more money from the fairy” competition.

She’s far from a child now, but maybe she can indulge herself with the same private game of make believe just for one night.

Maybe in some other universe, it’s a real date.

Maggie sits on the hotel bed, heart beating hard as blood rushes through her ears.

Her mind runs a hundred miles an hour, neurons and synapses firing off as she grapples with the fact that this happened and she isn’t ready.

“How did she find out?” She asks, once Gabriella is silent. “You said mom threw away all my pictures. What did she...what did she tell you?”

The question does nothing to help Maggie process.

She’d always thought about Franky, late at night when she couldn’t get to sleep and could do nothing but remember. She’d think about who was helping her get ready every morning after she
was gone, if she was asking about her, if she remembered her. After awhile, she used to wonder about how long it had taken for her sister to forget her. Most recently, she’d thought if in a twist of fate, Franky’s the one doing all those little things Maggie used to do for her, but for Charles now.

She dreams about Franky, too. But in her dreams they’re always as they used to be. Maggie’s still a little stick of a girl, and Franky is a toddler who Maggie is supposed to dress every morning and help brush her teeth. And then she wakes up and remembers that Franky is older now, that she’s not that little girl anymore.

She’s her own person, and Maggie doesn’t know her. She didn’t get the chance to.

“She was snooping through Giorgia’s things when she found a photo album,” Gabriella tells her. “Or so she said. I think it’s that one from when we first moved—it used to be at Nonna’s, do you remember?” Maggie nods. “She told me she asked Giorgia about the girl in the picture next to her, and that’s how she found out her mom had a sister, and that we weren’t close because I lived in California.”

Maggie nods again.

She’d never really thought about it, how Gabriella hadn’t committed too great an offense as to be erased from family albums—not like her.

“She googled me,” her aunt tells her. “And La Nuvola Bianca’s site and articles about it are the first few links that show up, but after that-”

“Me.”

She looks up at her aunt. She’s been intertwined with Gabriella ever since she moved with her. Maybe this was just a matter of time.

(And maybe it’s on her, the fact that Gabriella chose, and she chose her above her sister and above being an aunt to Franky, and being a good daughter to her own mother, back before Nonna died. Gabriella might not have been erased, but she suffered the same fate as Maggie, out of her own volition.)

“You’ve given interviews that call me by name,” Gabriella tells her, sitting down next to her on the bed. “She told me she read your Vogue Magazine spread.” Maggie remembers the spread, the elegant dresses and jewelry draped over her body like she was royalty. She loved that spread. Vogue had felt like a new apex in her career, a new mountain just climbed. “You said...the interviewer wrote...that your mom was a school secretary, and your dad was a cop, and you were born in Blue Springs, Nebraska, and you left at fourteen, when Franky was—”

“Three.”

Her throat closes as she imagines the little girl she knew who used to follow her absolutely everywhere and take Maggie’s word as law.

“She put it together.” Gabriella shrugs. She looks nervous, but there’s a brightness in her eyes beneath it that Maggie doesn’t understand. “I mean, with me, it was too much of a coincidence. She’s your sister, she’s smart. She called La Nuvola Bianca, and I have no idea how she strong armed them into giving her my cellphone. And then she called me.”

Maggie swallows, trying to wet her dry throat.

She must have so many questions. She must think so many things about her. She’s not ready.
“Do my parents know?”

“No,” Gabriella tells her, and Maggie breathes slightly easier. “But she asked me why you left.” She meets Gabriella’s eyes, and her aunt presses her lips together after the words. She doesn’t know the reasons why, and her parents don’t know she knows at all—it all begins to feel even more complicated. “She asked if you were the one paying for her private school. She’s smart.”

Maggie lets one side of her lips lift in a half smile. She always was whip smart. She frowns.

“Does Sofia-”

“She doesn’t know either. Franky told me.” Gabriella grabs her hand. “But she wants to tell her, she said that too.” Her aunt squeezes her hand. “You should’ve heard her, Maggie.”

The words make the first tear fall from her eye.

She doesn’t know how her own sister sounds, or how she looks. It’s been a decade. The little girl who loved her is gone, and Maggie doesn’t know the person in her place.

A knock at the door makes her straighten up.

“Maggie?” Alex’s voice filters through the wood, and she drags her hand down her cheek, erasing the evidence the toll of the last few minutes have had on her. “Are you ready?” Alex asks.

Maggie lets go of Gabriella, standing up.

“I have the dinner.”

“You can skip it-”

“I can’t,” she tries tugging at her zipper, and then gives up as Gabriella stands up to help her get changed. “I’m getting dressed, Alex!” she yells out. “Give me a second!”

“Oh, okay. Sorry!”

“I’ll be back in an hour or two, okay?” she tells Gabriella, slipping on the pair of sandals she picked for the occasion. The world swims for a second when she stands straight again. Alex is right outside the door, waiting for her, and Franky is calling their aunt, demanding to speak to Maggie. She doesn’t think the dizziness has anything to do with changes in spatial positioning.

“What do you want me to do, if she calls again?” Gabriella asks, and Maggie is at a loss. Alex is still waiting. “She hung up because Oscar had gotten home.”

It’s a name she hasn’t heard in a long time. Gabriella avoids it if she can. And now Maggie can’t escape.

“I don’t know.”
The car ride to dinner is short—and quiet.

“You okay?”

Maggie ignores her, or doesn’t seem to hear her, so lost in her head she appears to be.

Alex frowns. She mentally traces over her steps, wondering if she did something to upset her earlier, if her going off script with the speech was that bad, but she can’t think of anything that would warrant this.

“Maggie, did something happen?”

Maggie looks up then, and her eyes focus on Alex. Really focus, as she seems to come back to the present, but the frown marring her features doesn’t go away.

“No. No, I’m good.”

Alex doesn’t believe her, but then the car’s stopping and they’re walking into the large dining room, and she doesn’t get the chance to ask.

They're immediately inundated with congratulations, and though Maggie accepts them with a kind smile, it’s not the type of smile Alex is used to. Her dimples barely show up on her cheeks, and she seems to be a hundred miles away even as she gracefully crosses the room, heading for their assigned seats. Alex is helpless as she follows after her, surely not accepting congratulations as well as Maggie does.

They sit at their table, and the man at her right is quick to engage in conversation about one of her father’s movies. Alex smiles, and nods, playing along with him and with the rest of the table.

She’s aware of Maggie in her periphery, quiet and withdrawn, only ever chipping in when it’s absolutely required of her.

When the subject matter turns towards LGBT activism, she takes over, comfortably answering in a way not dissimilar to her thank you speech.

But she still seems...off, and Alex can’t let it go.

The sky is pitch black as they enter the plane, almost oppressive in its darkness.

Given her career choice, Alex is no stranger to red eye flights, but heightened familiarity doesn’t make it any easier to bear. King had scheduled them the earliest possible flight back to New York —why, she doesn’t know, she tends not to think about what goes in that micro-controlling greedy brain of his.
After their dinner, the mostly silent, reserved affair—on Maggie’s part—continued during their car ride back to the hotel. There were no comforting glances exchanged this time, instead Alex was simply left with the fast fading memory of Maggie’s warm touch.

Something obviously had happened to Maggie between their GLAAD win and dinner, but Alex can’t be sure what, and she doesn’t want to pry. She doubts Maggie would even tell her anyways. It’s something that’s bothered her—an itch on her brain, persistent and irritating—for some time now, but even more so given recent events, largely, her embarrassing Oscar night fiasco.

A significant imbalance exists in their relationship, one that’s only grown in the past few weeks alone.

Or perhaps the chasm between how much Alex has opened up to Maggie versus the latter to her has always been there, but she was simply too oblivious—too self focused—to see it. She’s known Maggie for almost 10 months now, and she’s considered her a friend for 5 of those months. And yet she still knows so little about her.

Sure, she knows small details like how she takes her coffee—plain, except for her agave nectar, which makes the coffee far too sweet, and Alex still grimaces in disgust remembering the sip Maggie had let her have one morning—and that she owns a pink yoga mat. She’s close with her aunt, but the internet had informed her of that before she’d even met Maggie. Now that she thinks about it, she’s amassed quite a collection of details in her mental Sawyer encyclopedia, but they’re just that: details. The only significant piece of information she’s stored away that pops out to her is that Maggie had spent Thanksgiving alone, at least once. But even that can be explained away by her job. She could’ve been shooting in a remote location and didn’t think it worth the time to fly back to LA for just a few days. Alex had seen her do that for Christmas last year.

People who keep their personal life as closely held as Maggie does generally do so because they have something to hide, at least that’s why Alex opts for privacy. But she doubts what Maggie is hiding, if anything, and she does begin to suspect there’s something she’s hiding, is bad—not in the same way that her past alcohol-related digressions she’s tried to hide are.

Alex chances a glance over at Maggie, eyes sliding to the aisle across her own. She’s curled up in her chair, legs pulled up beneath her and arms crossed. Her gaze is vacant and unfocused, just like it was at dinner, as she stares at some spot on the floor. She looks unbearably small, not only physically but emotionally as well. She’s deflated. That confident charm and ease she’s come to associate so closely with Maggie is gone. It reminds Alex of when she’d run into Maggie after the Oscars nominations had been announced. She’d clearly been down then too, but it looks like she’s in even worst shape now. And once again, just like she had two months ago, the urge to comfort her surges through Alex.

She opens her mouth, intending to try and do just that, but the words get stuck in her throat, sticky and obtrusive.

“Danvers.” Maggie swings her gaze toward her, those usually sparkling, warm eyes now dull in the dim lights of the airplane. “Something the matter?”

A million responses race through Alex’s mind, all just various ways of asking the question burning at the tip of her tongue, but she swallows her concern down.

“No, I was just uh,” she mentally scrambles around for a safe topic of discussion, triumphing when she alights upon one, “just thinking about how great it was to win the GLAAD.”

That evokes a whisper of a smile from Maggie, but it disappears moments later, gone like a wisp of
smoke blown away by the wind.

“IT was,” she replies, voice diminished, before curling further into her chair, angling her body towards the window and away from Alex.

Alex fights against the sinking feeling in her chest at Maggie’s clear rebuttal of conversation between them, but it is late. They’re both tired, and she isn’t obligated to entertain Alex’s menial small talk. The fact that she’s even letting Alex see her like this is a step forward, or perhaps Maggie is just too caught up in whatever storm of thoughts is whirling in her head—seemingly drowning out the rest of the world—that she can’t be bothered to keep her defenses up.

Regardless of the cause, ruminating over it until it drives her crazy won’t help anyone. Alex closes her eyes, letting sleep pull her under.

The sun is just peeking over the horizon by the time the plane lands, casting its rays over the already busy runway.

Alex grabs her backpack, slinging it over her shoulder and exiting the plane. All she wants is to fall into her big, blessedly comfortable bed and fall asleep. Her sleep on the plane had been fitful at best, and certainly not kind to her body—the crick in her neck is still throbbing. The universe doesn’t want that for her though, it appears.

When she calls, the person on the other side of the line informs her that the car assigned to take them to their building is running late. Just her luck.

She turns toward Maggie, just stepping off the airstair. “We can wait in the Delta Sky Club?” she suggests, not knowing how long their wait will be, but wanting to do it in comfort—and with food. But Maggie waves her off with a slight shrug, scuffing her foot on the asphalt beneath, eyes averted.

“Actually, I think I’m just going to take the air train back to the city.”

“Oh. Sure.”

It’s not even the dirty subway that makes her not offer to accompany her, it’s the sense she gets that Maggie wants to be alone.

Maggie nods. “I’ll...I’ll see you around, Danvers.”

Alex is surprised by the quick hug Maggie gives her before she steps back and walks away, hiking her backpack higher on her shoulder. The hug, the warmth of it, that brief moment of connection...it feels right.

But watching Maggie’s silhouette become smaller and smaller the farther away she gets—that doesn’t.
Maggie pulls into her parking space, quickly shifting the transmission into park.

She doesn’t get out of the car, not yet. She has an hour of hair and makeup ahead of her, and then a few minutes changing into her wardrobe for the few scenes she has to shoot today. It’s going to be just her, Blake going solo because she thinks she’s a bad influence on Claire, and no other actor will be there to help her through the scene. James won’t be there to make her laugh. Alex won’t be there to meet her eyes and join her in the zone of concentration they slip into when they act together.

She rests both hands on the steering wheel as she tries and fails to quiet her mind in preparation for the day ahead.

She hadn’t managed anything close to it this past weekend. Her thoughts had been solely focused on Franky’s call while she traveled in the air train back into the city, and then took the right subway home. She hadn’t been able to think about anything else through Saturday, through her training, through her running. She’d gone for a ride on her motorcycle, and it had done nothing to help clear her mind.

Franky hadn’t called again. Gabriella had kept her informed, texting her every couple of hours, but her little sister hadn’t contacted the aunt she didn’t know again. Maggie had wondered what to do about it for the whole weekend, but she still wasn’t sure of anything. Alex had invited her to go to a tapas bar on Sunday, and she’d declined once she explained that it wasn’t for the contract. (And wouldn’t that be something, neglecting her responsibilities because she was too busy with her own life.)

Her phone rings.

She wishes her heart didn’t skip a beat the way it does when she looks at the caller’s ID and sees it’s her aunt. Maggie knows what she’ll say before she even answers the call.

“She called me again. Asked more questions.”

Maggie closes her eyes. She was expecting it, but still a persistent little drum beat of pain flares up behind her eyes.

“What did she ask?”

“Why I wasn’t close with Giorgia. If I have pictures of you two together. If I’m sure you’re her sister.”

“What did you say?”

“I told her the truth.”

“About what dad.”

“No. No.”

Maggie blows out a breath. Even now, so many years later, it still makes her face and chest feel
hot, ashamed.

“I told her that you're her sister, and that Giorgia and I weren't that close growing up because there's almost a ten year age gap between us.”

Maggie’s lips turn up faintly, a small, jagged smile cutting across her face. “There’s ten years between me and Franky.”

“And you were really close. What are you going to do about that?” The way Gabriella changes the subject isn’t subtle at all, but Maggie has spent the last 48 hours thinking about what to do, exactly, and she’s no closer to deciding than when she was first told Franky reached out. She isn’t sure what’s there to do.

“I need...time, Gabriella, to decide what to-”

“What’s there to decide? She’s your sister,” Gabriella says. “She has a right to talk to you. You….Maggie, you have a right to talk to her. This isn’t about your parents anymore.”

Maggie huffs. “Of course it is.”

She can’t imagine them being happy about Franky getting hounded by paparazzi when she’s with her. She can’t imagine them being happy about her flying back to Blue Springs—actually, flying into Beatrice, and then taking a rented car up to Blue Springs, because they refused to move out of the asscrack of the world, even when Maggie offered to buy them a bigger house in the city.

And it’s not just that, it’s not just them, but them in the eyes of Franky, and Sofia, and Charles, when he’s old enough to understand what they did. Is it worth it, to change who her parents are in their eyes? They’re just kids. Charles is just a baby.

Maggie has nothing to offer past money and comfort, she has always known that.

“Listen, I know Oscar won’t budge, but I wonder about my sister,” Gabriella tells her. “She still sends me birthday cards, Maggie, and we speak once a year. Our mother...she taught us how to be sisters, she knows she’s depriving her daughters of that.”

“Dad said I’m not part of the family anymore, don’t you remember?” Maggie sighs, resting her head on the steering wheel. Even after all this time, after all this wretched heartache, she can’t call him Oscar. She can’t call her Giorgia. In her head, they never stopped being mom and dad.

“They don’t have to like it. And before...before you were too young to really fight for this, and Franky was, too. Sofia was a kid. But they’re old enough now, Maggie. And Franky made the first move. She tracked me down. She needs her sister.”

“What if she doesn’t?” She voices what she’s afraid of, deep down. Seeing her parents again...it would hurt, but it wouldn’t destroy Maggie. She’s made of harder stuff than that. But what would inevitably crack her heart beyond repair is seeing the one good thing she left behind in Blue Spring, the one good memory of her childhood, irreparably tainted.

What if she’s not enough? What if Franky and Sofia...hate her? Charles...he doesn’t even know her. What if when Franky sees her she’s just the shitty sister who abandoned her? And she’ll know she’s gay. Maggie doesn’t want to think about seeing disgust in her sister’s eyes. She can’t blame a person for the way they were raised, and she can’t expect her sister—who took so much after their mother—to see Maggie any differently. It won’t be her fault. But it’ll kill Maggie all the same.

Franky is still a child. She’s only 14. She’s curious about the sister she didn’t know she had, the
sister she must have forgotten.

It doesn’t mean anything. And their father…he won’t be happy. Maggie knows it. She knows he cherishes Franky, and Sofia, and she imagines he does Charles—she can’t know anything about him, she doesn’t get to, but he always wanted a ‘little man’. He loves them the way he didn’t Maggie, at the end, or the way he really did love her for her entire childhood, until she grew up into someone he couldn’t stomach.

Maggie left behind the happiness and innocence of childhood at age 14, but her sister doesn’t have to. The hideousness of the world has a way of staying outside of Blue Springs, in the little town where everybody knows everybody, and she doesn’t want to ruin that.

“She does need you, and Sofia, too. They might not remember you, but they’ll know you as soon as they see you. And Charles—”

“I’m nothing to him. He doesn’t know me. I can’t just show up and demand—”

“You’ve sacrificed so much in this life, Maggie. You’ve gone through more shit than anyone your age has any right to. But you don’t have to keep sacrificing this.”

Maggie closes her eyes, tight, until her ears fool her into thinking there’s a plane passing by and her eyeballs hurt.

“I don’t know,” she finally tells Gabriella, in a thin voice she can’t recognize as her own. “I don’t know, Gabriella. What if she’s like…”

“Like them?”

Maggie doesn’t answer. She can’t believe she’s that transparent, but then again, Gabriella could always read her well, even over the phone.

“Maggie, she managed to track me down, and get my cellphone number, and then had the courage to call me and demand your number, because she wanted to speak to you. She has guts, Maggie. That doesn't remind me of my sister. That reminds me of you.”

Maggie swallows, pushing down the uncertainty—the fear clouding her judgment—and the hope that has begun to surface like a green stalk pushing through cracks in the asphalt.

“I’m already late,” she tells her aunt. “I have to go into work.”

And so she does.

Alex’s eyes snap open at the blaring of her alarm.

She reaches over to grab her phone, and shuts the alarm off with a pleased smile.
It’s her day off today. She can sleep in, and on weekday at that. On a Monday. She pulls the covers up around her, burrowing deeper into her bed and slipping back into the oblivion of sleep.

She’s woken up by a melody floating from her floor. She frowns as she stretches her body, working out the kinks from sleep, and listens closer. She recognizes the song as the beginning notes of NSYNC’s “Bye Bye Bye.”

Alex’s eyes open. That’s Kara’s ringtone.

She sits up and throws the blankets off of her, and then power walks to the front door. She hadn’t realized how desperately she missed her sister until she was standing right outside her apartment.

Kara crushes her against her chest, arms wrapped tightly around her. It’d be painful if Alex weren’t used to it.

“Ready for our day?” Kara asks, pulling back slightly, excitement oozing out of her very pores.

“I…”

“Yeah, you are!” Kara exclaims, and grabs Alex by the wrist.

She doesn’t let go.

“Alex! Alex!” Kara grabs her wrist, pulling her into another store.

Alex lets herself be dragged into yet another establishment, feeling like they must already have visited every single one on Fifth Avenue. She internally vows that she’ll pick the next store.

“Look at that dress in the corner, it’d be gorgeous on you!” her sister gushes, and Alex is powerless to stop her as she heads straight to it.

She stops before the dress Kara points to. It’s a deep red mid-thigh dress with a white pattern adorning the front. It’s not...her. But that shade of red would probably look great on Maggie’s darker skin tone, now that she thinks about it. She voices that thought seconds later.

“I think this would look better on someone with Maggie’s complexion.” She looks back at Kara.

“What about this?” Kara grabs a shirt from above, pulling it down to hold in front of her. Alex pushes it away with a gentle arm.

“This store just isn’t my style,” she waves her arm around at the array of bright patterns and textures in explanation. Her wardrobe would consist of just various shades of gray and black if it weren’t for J’onn insisting she brighten up her image. Kara meets her apathy with a shrug, quickly
pulling them back out onto the street.

The next store ahead is a bookstore, and Alex breathes in deeply as she steps over the doorway.

She’s always enjoyed that undefinable smell a room full of books will carry. It reminds her of long summer days lolling on her couch, a good book her only companion. Alex makes a buzzline for the mystery section, eyes lighting up at the great collection available. Kara trails after her slowly, eyes glued to a thick history text.

“You like John Grisham?” Kara peeks over her shoulder, the corner of the book she’d been reading pressing into Alex’s back.

“Not really, but I thought Maggie might like it.” She opens the hardcover, skimming through the first few pages. Maybe a gift would cheer her up, show her that people—namely herself—cared. Alex tucks it into her side, decision made, and then browses around in the science section until Kara’s stomach loudly alerts them that it’s time for lunch.

They stop at a sandwich shop with a small outdoor patio for seating. As Alex orders for them at the counter, she notices a group of young girls approach Kara, squealing all the while. She fights the urge to roll her eyes at the familiar scene playing out before her, one that will only increase in frequency once Captain Marvel comes out. She dawdles up around the counter window, wanting to avoid Kara’s groupies, and she’s largely successful, except for one girl she sees break off from the group. Alex smiles slightly at the girl, and it’s returned in full force by her.

“You’re-”

“I’m her sister,” she cuts the girl off, already knowing the words that’ll come out of her mouth.

“You’re Claire Lawson.”

“Oh.”

“I love you so much, you have no idea!” Her face is positively beaming as she looks up at Alex, and Alex isn’t quite sure how to handle the intense... adoration she can feel radiating from her. Suddenly, she wishes Maggie was here. “I have a twitter account dedicated to you!”

(Alex briefly hopes she isn’t one of the weird fans who replies to her tweets with sexual comments.) The response does take her by surprise though. She hasn’t had many, if any, Claire fan encounters without Maggie by her side.

“Thank you,” she tells her awkwardly, and then channels the capable, controlled persona she had to use for so many years while at Body of Medicine. “I’m really glad you’re enjoying the show.”

“I love it. I love you! I wish you were the lead, to be honest.”

“Me? No! No, no way,” Alex is quick to argue. “I couldn’t do anything without Maggie. She’s the driving force of the show.”

The girls gives her a look, and then seemingly steels herself for her next words. Alex does the same.

“Is she really your girlfriend? Because one of my followers swears up and down that it’s just for publicity, but Maggie stans have literally never seen her date anyone for so long and I mean, the way you look at her...I’m sorry if it’s weird that I’m asking, but I had to. I would’ve died if I met you and I never did.”
Alex swallows. She doesn’t know what some of the words even mean, and now it’s not the time to
go over their entire time together and wonder what she did wrong that a random teenager would see
through it—so she decides to be painfully honest.

“I like her more than I’ve ever liked anyone.”

The words leave her mouth easily, far easier than she anticipated, and so much more honest than
she’s been out loud in months.

“Wow.” The girls says. “I kind of can’t wait to feel something like that.”

Eventually the fans do scatter -after a selfie or three they take with them- and Alex and Kara are
left blessedly alone to enjoy their meal. Alex pulls out the metal chair at their table, pulling her
phone out of her back pocket before sitting down.

“Alex, we said no phones!”

“I’m just going to text Maggie real quick and see if I can drop this book off at her place. Just two
minutes.”

Kara hums. “Fine.”

Alex sends the quick text, and then deposits her cellphone onto the middle of the table, neatly
stacked above Kara’s. It’s what their mom sometimes asked for, when they had dinner back home.
No cellphones.

“All done,” she says. But Kara doesn’t stop looking at her oddly.

“You two seem close,” she mentions offhandedly. “You and Maggie I mean.” Alex thanks heaven
she isn’t eating in that moment.

“I mean...pffft.” She shrugs, and stuffs her mouth with a bite of salad.

“It’s nice,” Kara rectifies. “It’s been a long time since you’ve had a best friend. I think...not since
high school.”

Alex briefly thinks about Vicky, and then shakes her head.

She shrugs again, hoping if she does it enough times at some point Maggie will begin to feel as
unimportant as a shrug makes her seem. Because the truth is Maggie feels like a close friend,
maybe even her best friend—after Kara. But it’s so much more than that.

She wasn’t lying when she told that fan what she did.

She feels...so much for Maggie. Nobody has ever made her heart race solely with their presence
beside her like Maggie has. And it’s both surprising and terrifying how easy it is to think the
words, when a few weeks ago she wouldn’t even accept she could feel this way, despite knowing it
on a surface level for ages. Maggie makes her heart speed up, hands sweat, and stomach tangle with
knots—knots that sometimes only grow tighter, until she feels them between her legs...
“I’m almost jealous,” Kara says.

Alex coughs, a crouton certainly going down the wrong way.

“You do not have to be jealous of Maggie,” she tells Kara. “I can promise you that.”

Kara shrugs, and carries on eating her lunch, and Alex tries to, her cheeks flaming.

It’s not even remotely the same.

Kara insists they stop by the grocery store for proper sustenance for movie night—which she knows to Kara means copious amounts of junk food—before heading back to her apartment.

The supermarket is fairly quiet this afternoon—most people are still at work—only a few fellow shoppers occupy the space. An old man and his wife, bickering over fruit it appears. A mom and her young daughter, the latter gleefully sitting in the cart being pushed around. It’s a completely pedantic normal scene, and Alex relishes it. Her life is far from normal—she’s in a fake relationship for publicity for crying out loud—and she wouldn’t want it to be, but she does enjoy the rare moment of normalcy when she can. It grounds her.

Alex pushes the cart through the aisles, watching in bemusement as Kara throws everything under the moon in their cart. She knows they’re both on healthy, low fat diets for their respective roles, but they agreed to train together before Kara leaves, and that small amount of exercise should completely cancel everything else out.

She notices a customer’s lingering stare on Kara from the corner of her eye, but thankfully, nobody approaches them.

Carrying the groceries to Kara’s rental car and then up to Alex’s apartment is a struggle, but between the two of them they manage to get all of it in one trip.

As soon as the bags are unloaded, Kara runs off to the bathroom, returning a minute later decked out on *Captain Marvel* pajamas. Alex raises her eyebrows, questioning her sister’s wardrobe choice, and also the fact that she’s in her pajamas when the sky hasn’t even darkened yet.

Kara, reading her face clear as day—an ability she’s only honed through the years—just shrugs in response.

“They were a gift from the director, and it’s not like we’re going out again today.” She turns to the television, grabbing the remote on the table in the process, putting herself in charge of their viewing choice, as per usual. Alex just hopes she doesn’t make her sit through *Gossip Girl*, again.

Pizza and potstickers ordered, Alex makes her way to the couch, tub of ice cream and two spoons in hand.

“Dessert before dinner?” Kara asks, already grabbing the spoon from her. “I like the way you think.”

Alex fixes her eyes on the screen before her, trying to will herself to be just as interested in the
royal entertainment as Kara. But her mind soon starts to wander, and she can feel herself about to slip into the shelter of her thoughts when an image on the television catches her attention. It’s Lord Snowdon, in bed with Camilla Fry...and her husband. It’s obvious that they all just had sex, and Alex glances over at Kara from the corner of her eye, to gauge her reaction, but she isn’t...reacting at all. Her face has the same focused, intrigued expression it always does when she watches something she likes. Alex can’t see any trace of shock or discomfort from her sister, and that gives her pause—forcing her to recall their phone call a few days ago, and the thought that had flashed through her mind during it.

If she were to...tell to Kara, she wonders how it would change their relationship. If it would matter or if it would be a non factor. She knows Kara has a friend who’s gay, or at least, who dates both men and women—so she’d probably be okay with it—but still, her stomach recoils at the thought of telling her. Mixed with the mild nausea is something brighter though, soft and enticing in its possibility. It’s the possibility of sharing the weight pressing her down with the closest person in her life. J’onn helped her carry that weight, but Kara would throw it off her entirely.

They’re sisters. And it’s true that Alex hasn’t been as truthful with Kara lately—she thinks back to hiding beer bottles when Kara would visit—but she wants to change that. She doesn’t want to hide something this big from her. And Kara likes their hairdresser enough, doesn’t she? All signs point towards Kara accepting her, regardless of who she might like to kiss. It’s wholly irrational for Alex to still be scared, but a small persistent voice keeps ringing in her head. What if it’d be different for Kara because she’s her sister? It’s one thing to have a gay friend or hairdresser, but it’s an entirely different beast when it’s in your own family.

And would she tell her...what? That she’s gay? But what if it’s not real? What if it’s just a phase? Or what if, like Kara’s friend or Lord Snowdon, she’ll end up liking a guy at some point the same way she likes Maggie now, therefore making all this unnecessary. (Deep down, Alex knows it’s not going to happen. Yes, she likes women. But she feels like she only likes women.) It’s just so complicated. She’s spent countless sleepless nights trying to make sense of it all and—

“Alex!” Kara waves her hand in her face, succeeding in pulling her thoughts from the abstract spiraling possibilities to the tangible here and now. “What’s got you so distracted? I’ve been trying to get your attention for like an eternity.”

“If you’d let me pick what we watch my attention wouldn’t have strayed,” Alex deflects quickly.

Kara rolls her eyes with a huff, crossing her arms and tossing Alex the remote control. “Fine. But no scary movies, promise?”

“Why does nobody I like enjoy the same movies I do?” Alex bemoans aloud, scrolling through the movie options on Netflix.

“Well, you don’t like a lot of people.”

Alex gives her a look, and Kara smiles sheepishly, trying and managing to get away with it.

“I’m kidding, I’m sure you’ll find someone to watch your terrible horror movies with one day.”

Alex immediately thinks of the one person she’d want next to her, indulging in cheesy horror flicks.

An image flashes before her eyes, or rather a dream, impossible and out of reach. Maggie, sitting on her couch, body pressed up against hers and a smile on her lips as they fight over the popcorn, too absorbed in each other to notice what’s happening on the screen. The desire that jolts through
her at the idyllic scene playing in her mind steals her breathe away. She wants that with Maggie. She doesn’t just want the...physical part, she wants the mundane moments, the boring details, with Maggie too. But the likelihood of it happening is near to none.

Alex swallows roughly, shoving down her raging emotions. It’s sister night, not obsess over Maggie night. She has the rest of her time after Kara is gone to do that.

She picks a random movie and hopes Kara didn’t notice her mini freak out, burrowing further into the couch. A beat later, she feels a warmth at her side and looks down to see the top of Kara’s head resting on her shoulder.

“I’ve missed this.”

“Me too.”

That night, they sleep shoulder to shoulder, just like when Kara was little and she’d come running to her during thunderstorms. With her sister there, her apartment seems brighter, somehow. Everything seems better. They talk well into the night, and Alex doesn’t quite know when she falls asleep.

All she knows is that she feels at home.

The blaring alarm of her cellphone roughly rips her from sleep.

Maggie groans as she sits up, reaching for it to make it stop, and she quickly realizes it’s not her alarm at all, but rather a call. And one that Maggie has been dreading.

She doesn’t know how M’gann knows about Franky, but she can feel in her gut that’s what her manager is calling about. It’s been four days, and this is the biggest thing she’s kept from M’gann since she was a teenager. Every misstep, every bad decision, every bleary eyed picture outside of a club at 3 AM with a woman who wasn’t a girlfriend...M’gann was there to do damage control. But Franky isn’t collateral damage, and Maggie doesn’t know yet how to feel about her contacting her, certainly not enough to inform someone else about it.

She knows ignoring M’gann won’t solve anything, and this...thing could easily affect her career if it got out. She certainly doesn’t want that happening, especially when she still hasn’t decided what to do about Franky, whether she should even call her or try to have a relationship with her.

Maggie drags her hand down her face, her eyes still thick with sleep. Some part at the back of her mind brings up M’gann’s calm voice and understanding eyes, and Maggie slowly realizes she’s being stupid. She’s folding in on herself, the way she did after everything happened with her parents and she didn’t want to take up space, even when that space was simply in other people’s minds. M’gann will help her. She cares about her. And talking to her could make her future course of action clearer.
She inhales, letting the air fill her lungs like a balloon, and answers the phone.

“M’gann.”

“Maggie. Gabriella’s caught me up on the…” She pauses delicately. “On the news. How are you holding up?”

She’s not sure how to answer that. The short answer is not good, but she’s always had a habit of shying away from admitting to anybody that she’s not at one hundred percent. It feels like giving them a weapon, a cudgel to hold over her head, something to control her with.

She settles for a rote response, one that probably won’t satisfy her manager.

“I’m alright.” She gets up and walks slowly to her leather couch, sitting down as soon as her legs touch the cushions.

“Alright enough to talk about the PR angle of this situation?” M’gann asks, voice still sympathetic.

“I don’t think I have the option not to be,” Maggie admits, voicing what they both know to be true. They can’t let this potential ticking time bomb go unmonitored—it hurts to think of Franky as that, but this could easily spiral out of their control if the news was leaked. And M’gann knows it, if her unusual, straight-to-business call is anything to show for it.

If the press found out about Franky they’d start sniffing around for more, wondering why she never spoke of her sister. They’d learn about Sofía. They’d know about Charles. Their sniffing would lead them right into Blue Springs, Nebraska and the story of a young girl ousted from her home, her town, by her own parents, over a rumor—one that was all too true.

A rush of nausea rushes up her throat at the thought of everyone—and it would be everyone, a scoop like that would be plastered on the web, the first google result for all to see—learning about that part of her past without her consent or control. It would be like being 14 all over again.

Maggie swallows roughly, forcing the nausea down and trying to calm herself.

“I’m afraid you’re right,” M’gann’s voice cuts through the buzz of thoughts ricocheting through her head. “This has the potential of being a PR mess if your sister starts telling people who her sister is. If she gets it out there that you didn’t have a relationship with her growing up, that you haven’t seen your family back in Nebraska since you were a child...It doesn’t look good. And we also have into account the danger that what happened with your parents could get out there too.”

“I know,” Maggie’s voice is thin—timid—despite her best efforts to quell the pure dread fraying at her nerves. M’gann’s words do nothing to reassure her. So much for that.

“Although if the latter were to get out, it would work so much better than you having your family hidden away like dirty laundry. Excuse my crassness here, but I could easily spin what happened in your favor. Hollywood loves a good-”

“Sob story,” Maggie finishes her words, the very phrase leaving a bitter aftertaste in her mouth.

“That’s not exactly what I was going to say,” M’gann corrects her. “But I told you this when we first met, secrets like this are hard to keep quiet. It’s not too late to put it out there ourselves and spin the story in our favor.”

Maggie shakes her head, even though M’gann can’t see.
She doesn’t need anybody’s pity, nor does she want it. And she doesn’t want to profit off of it in any way either—she’s not looking for any Oprah tell-all interviews to pour her guts out to the world. She’d much rather forget it, bury it in the past where it belongs. It’s of no use to her now.

That 14 year old girl was scared and stupid. She’s not her anymore.

She’s better, stronger. It’s pointless to re-open old wounds; she’s been moving forward—determined and steady—ever since the day she got her life ripped away from her. She’d just fooled herself into thinking the past wouldn’t have a way of catching up. While she may want to forget what happened that day, she doesn’t wasn’t to forget Franky, or Sofia. She still wants to have a semblance of a relationship with Charles, if that’s even possible. She’d convinced herself she didn’t need it, that making sure they had a good life was enough, but she isn’t entirely sure of that now. She’d be happier with them in her life, she knows that in her core, as sure as the sun rises and sets each day. Beyond that though, the path forward is still unclear, misted over with a thick, impenetrable fog.

“Point being,” M’gann steers the conversation back to the topic on hand, “we need to decide what to do about this. Can we talk to Franky and ask her not to divulge anything? Can we get in touch with your parents and ask for their assistance?”

Maggie blanches at the thought.

“How do we take care of this without making you seem callous, and without, as you said, painting your past as a sob story?”

“I don’t know,” she says, although she doesn't think M’gann was expecting an answer. “I think I need to decide what I want to do about her call in the first place, don’t I?”

“I mean...isn't it obvious Maggie? She's your sister.”

Maggie feels the inexplicable urge to laugh at how clear cut M’gann makes the situation out to be. Franky is anything but simple, their relationship anything but clear cut and expected. If her life had been what she expected, she would have seen her grow up, she wouldn’t have gotten thrown out of her house and dropped off at the airport with a single fucking bag. The answer is not obvious.

“It's not that simple,” she tells her softly. She sighs. “Look, M’gann, I have to go. I have to get to set.”

M’gann hums, surely acknowledging her evasion for what it is.

“Call me as soon as you decide, please.”

Maggie gets up, forcing herself to face the day. She has a job to do. The world won't stop for her.

“Will do.”

She just isn't sure when that will be. She’s not 14 years old anymore, and she’s glad for it, but there’s at least one thing she can admit she misses from those days.

She used to be braver back then.
Alex wakes up to the smell of breakfast.

It’s personally her favorite way to be awoken, and she inhales the smell of bacon and butter as she stretches and gets out of bed. Kara is in the kitchen, on the phone, and Alex takes her time making her way toward her, giving her time to finish the call. She wonders if it’s their mom. And then she quickly realizes it isn’t when Kara laughs—and loudly snorts. Her boyfriend then. Alex heads into the kitchen. She greets Kara with a passing wave—that her sister insists turning into a bear hug.

Alex smiles at the breakfast Kara has ready for her.

Her coffee, just the perfect temperature, slides smoothly down her throat instead of scalding it as it would on a normal work day because she chugs it first thing out of the shower to wake herself up even more. The smell of bacon and chocolate pancakes fills her apartment, and the television in the background playing a *Friends* rerun completes the picture perfect scene.

“I see you’re finally awake, sleeping beauty,” Kara chuckles at her own joke, of course, and Alex only rolls her eyes lightly.

“So sorry that some of us aren’t sunshine personified in the mornings,” she scoffs, swiping a slice of bacon resting on a paper-covered plate. Kara swats at her hand with the spatula, a glare forming on her face, but the small curl of her lips gives her away. Alex hoists herself up on the kitchen island, kicking her hanging legs absentmindedly as she enjoys her bacon, savoring the juicy flavor and salty tang.

“Who were you on the phone with this morning? Mon-El?” Alex is proud of herself for saying his name without the slightest hint of negative inflection in her voice. She’s not an actress for nothing. Kara’s back stiffens ever so slightly as she turns the stove top off, sliding the pancakes onto a serving platter. “Why would you uh,” she chuckles nervously, “think that?”

“Well,” Alex shrugs, unsure why her sister is acting like she was caught with her hand in the cookie jar. “Your voice sounded all high and weird, like it always does when you’re talking to someone you like.”

“Pffft. It was a friend.” Kara titters unconvincingly, setting the food down on the table with a loud thunk. It’s always struck Alex as hilarious that Kara was such an awful liar considering her career is literally being paid to lie—at its core. She briefly entertains the thought of torturing her sister even more, but the birds are chirping up a symphony outside her apartment, the sky is so blue it’s nearly blinding, and her stomach is gurgling in earnest for sustenance. She’ll let Kara off the hook, for now.

Alex only manages to eat a small portion of the food, her chewing too slow to match Kara’s hyper fast fork flashing from the serving plate to her mouth. Alex is almost impressed.

“The training I’m doing for the movie makes me hungry all the time.” She shoots Alex an apologetic look before taking the last pancake. “Sorry,” she gets out around a mouthful of food.

“Oh yeah,” Alex utters, tone droll. “You look super sorry to me.”
Kara scrunches up her nose, reaching over to push her shoulder.

“Hey,” she mock protests, “why am I the one being pushed when you’re the only pancake thief in this house?”

Kara rolls her eyes with a huff. “Don’t you have somewhere to be?”

“And now you’re trying to kick me out of my own apartment,” Alex mutters, shaking her head disapprovingly. Kara just gives her a pointed look, one that’s effects is all but lost due to the milk mustache on her sister’s face.

“I’ll clean up breakfast.” She stands, walking over to Alex’s seat and forcibly pulling her up too. “Go, get showered.”

Alex huffs, but she does as her sister says and quickly gets ready for work.

It’s both exciting and daunting. She’s always happy to head to set, always excited to get her scenes for the day down and get to play with her fake gun. But she’s been thinking of Maggie nonstop ever since they last spoke—at the airport, Alex had seen her once or twice while they left the apartment during the weekend but they hadn’t really moved past pleasantries.

Something is still bothering Maggie, and she’s not sure what it is. Deep down, she can’t help but wonder if she’s already fucked this up.

She finishes gathering her stuff, and sends a text to her driver. Mere seconds after the whoosh of his text message reply sounds, Kara descends upon her, as if sensing there's nothing keeping her around.

Kara walks her out, hands on her back. Her sister is effectively pushing her out the door.

“Go! I’ll be here when you get back!”

The door is almost closed before Kara’s head pops back out, smiling. “Have fun with your bestie!” She closes the door before Alex can shoot back a response.

She sighs, and then smiles as she starts walking toward the elevator.

It’s nice to have her sister around.

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Despite her best efforts, Maggie can’t fully concentrate on any of her scenes.

She stutters, and misses her marks, and she thinks she even sees one of the extras rolling her eyes when they have to start from the top for the third time in a row. If she doesn’t pull it together soon, the entire cast and crew will notice—not just an extra. (Not to mention, she’s almost convinced there’s a snitch on set, because every time they don’t finish shooting on schedule Anthony hears about it.)
If he comes to know she’s not at her best, hell will rain down on her. She’s largely remained on his good side, and it’s because she’s professional and damn good at her job—he can’t argue with the results or the numbers the show is consistently pulling in each week.

But the moment she falters, she knows he’ll be there—eyes sharp and power over her, wielded with precision.

She shakes her head, trying to get out of it and focus instead on Blake’s feelings towards Claire in this scene.

She doesn’t want to be a bad scene partner to Alex, and she certainly doesn’t need Alex looking at her again with a dejected expression, eyes large with pity. She’d done it that morning, when she got on set, and Maggie had requested Mary to re-powder the nonexistent shine on her nose so she could avoid a conversation. She’s aware of what Alex will try to do.

Alex knows her well enough by now to determine when she’s actually happy and when she’s just faking it, and Maggie, surprisingly, is fine with that. What she isn’t comfortable with is fully letting Alex in. And Alex will pry. She looks at her like she pities her—like she’s confused—and like she’ll ask the first chance she gets.

And Maggie isn’t entirely sure she won’t slip and tell her everything. It’s not like her, but a call from a sister you haven’t seen or heard from in ten years can throw anybody off their game in her defense.

It’s not like she could tell her what’s happened even if she wanted to. At this stage, the less people that know about Franky—and Sofia and Charles—the better. But her self reassurances do nothing to stop the well of guilt that bubbles up each time Alex offers a kind touch or a tentative smile aimed her way, only to be rebuffed at every turn.

She’s been a pretty shitty friend this morning, and she resolves to fix that—to be kinder to Alex and reach out in return—some other time, when she’s not so raw. She just has to get through today, and then she has the entire day off tomorrow. She’ll be able to regroup then, decide on a course of action and get things back to normal.

She sighs just thinking about tomorrow. She hasn’t had a day off during the week in months. She looks at Alex, who’s mumbling her lines to herself between takes as she’s wont to do. They both have the day off, actually. James is shooting Captain Ellis’ big episode where he faces off with the corrupt chief of police. James loves the storyline, it’s all he’s been talking about for days ever since they received the script. He’s excited, and rightfully so too. He deserves to have the spotlight on him, he hasn’t had that since the show began. And if it has the added benefit of giving Maggie a breather in the middle of the week, all the better.

The director calls them back, and they go through the scene one more time. Claire finally tells Blake that maybe her harsher ways are needed sometimes, in the climax of the episode, but Blake is conflicted over her satisfaction at Claire seeing things her way and disappointment that her protegé has copied the worst parts of herself.

The feelings are not difficult to tap into.

When the director finally calls cut, Maggie’s legs quickly beat out the familiar path from the precinct set to her trailer.
Alex is greeted by a chorus of people when the scene is over.

She’d gotten straight into Hair and Makeup when she arrived and hadn’t had time to say hi to everyone—which was a thing she did now. She’d only been gone for three days, but due to the unusualness of having a Monday off, and her sister time with Kara, it’d felt like longer. She’d missed it.

She waves at the sound guy before stepping away from them all. The barrage of greetings and congratulations on the GLAAD award almost distract her from the woman she’s been wanting to talk to all weekend. She look around, and sees the back of a brown mane of hair, rapidly leaving the set.

“Sawyer,” Alex calls out, hurrying her steps after her. “Hey! Maggie!” She finally grabs her attention as Maggie turns to look at her.

She slows down, giving Alex time to catch up with her. Maggie looks better than she did after their flight, but then again, she is in full hair and makeup. Mary and Louise would have to be pretty incompetent at their jobs to fail at making someone as naturally beautiful as Maggie glow.

As Alex gets closer though, something their previous scene didn’t warrant, she realizes the artificial glow of her skin isn’t reflected in her eyes. Her stomach drops, steps slowing until she’s walking by Maggie’s side.

“Danvers,” Maggie says, crossing her arms as she walks. “Good to have you back on set.” She smiles, but the dimples are missing, and her eyes still lack the usual luster and shine they have.

“Yeah,” she agrees. “I missed y- I missed filming.”

She closes her eyes tight for a second, taking advantage of the fact that Maggie seems to stay one step ahead of her as they walk. Stupid.

“How was yesterday?” she asks, grasping at any possible topic of conversation. She’d been thinking about seeing Maggie all weekend, but she hadn’t given much thought to exactly what she would say. All she knows is she needs to understand why she’s acting like this.

“Good. Good, yeah. Easy.” Maggie comes to a halt suddenly, and Alex is surprised to see they’re at the parking lot, close to their trailers. “I’m gonna go get ready for my next scene…”

“Of course. Yeah.” She presses her lips together in what she hopes is a smile. “See you.”

Maggie salutes her as she walks away, but the easy charm that usually accompanies the gesture is missing. And her face still looks like it did back at their post-awards dinner, like there’s something on her mind—something bad—and she can’t think of anything else. It unsettles her.

Alex decides something, as she watches Maggie walk away.

Maggie may not let her in on what exactly is bothering her so much, but that doesn’t mean Alex
won’t try her hardest to wipe that artificial, poor approximation of happiness off her face.

The rest of Maggie’s day goes better, but only marginally so.

Once she kicks herself into shape her performance gets better, but she still—for the first time she can remember—can’t wait to go home. She walks back to her trailer after her last scene of the day, already changed back into her own clothes instead of Blake’s. She has a lot to think about, a lot to decide—

“Maggie!”

She turns back, only to see Alex jogging up to her. She stops, and watches as Alex slows to a measured walk once she realizes Maggie is waiting for her to catch up—probably feeling embarrassed at running after her co-star, Maggie would guess.

“Danvers,” Maggie greets her, pleasantly enough, she hopes. Alex had been nothing but kind all day, and Maggie appreciates it—but she’s still bothered by the fact that she seems to warrant special treatment, that Alex has noticed there’s something wrong with her. James hadn’t acted any differently around her. Neither had Mary or Louise or any of the cast and crew. But Alex had been staring at her with concerned doe eyes all day, as if waiting for Maggie to break down, and she didn’t like it—but at the same time, she found it comforting, only a little. Alex is her friend. She cares.

“You leaving?” she asks, and Maggie nods. Alex returns the gesture. “Walk you to your trailer?”

Maggie nods again, against her better judgment, and restarts the trek back to her home away from home.

They’re mostly quiet as they walk there, only making small talk about the weather—spring was finally in full swing—and the new brand of lipstick they’re using on Hair and Makeup. Maggie senses something between them, senses Alex is holding something back, and she hopes her co-star doesn’t state it out loud. She doesn’t want to make things tense between them, but if Alex asks her what’s wrong, she won’t do anything but rebuff her.

She thinks she’s dodged that bullet when they get to her trailer, and Alex lets her climb the starts without much else than a ‘byes’.

But then Alex clears her throat.

“Maggie?”

She closes her eyes briefly before turning around and facing her. She doesn’t want her to ask something that she won’t be able to answer.

“Yeah?”
“I was just...I was just wondering, you know, since we both have the day off tomorrow....I thought maybe we could go out tonight? Have some fun?” Alex shrugs, chin tilted down and eyes peering hopefully at her.

Maggie is taken aback. It’s not what she expected in the least.

“I don’t know, Danvers,” the words are out of her mouth before her brain catches up, and she curses herself for them the moment she sees the flash of disappointment dart across Alex’s face. “I’m...I’m not really in the mood to go out, sorry.” Maggie stops with her hand on her trailer door handle. She turns around fully to face Alex. “Maybe some other time?” she’s quick to add, trying to offer up a suitable excuse and assuage her own guilt at making Alex look like a kicked puppy.

“Yeah -sure. That’s fine,” Alex smiles at her, taking a step back. “I guess I’ll see you later then, Sawyer.”

“Right.” Maggie offers a small wave and musters up the best smile she can. Her last glimpse of Alex is of her back, walking away from her, hands stuffed in her back pockets. Maggie sighs and starts fishing her keys out of her pocket. Operation don’t be a shitty friend is already failing and it’s existed for less than an hour. She slowly walks up the stairs, ears acutely tuned into the rhythm Alex’s boots are making on the concrete as she leaves. Maggie pushes her trailer door open, one foot over the threshold when the rhythm behind her stops abruptly.

“Maggie, wait,” Maggie turns around, eyes glued to Alex as she backtracks her steps. “Look...I don’t know what’s bothering you, and I don’t need to know if you don’t want me too. But I am here for you, okay? In whatever capacity you’ll allow.” Alex finishes her speech with a short exhale, face nervous as she looks up at her.

Maggie feels a small smile forming on her lips—the first genuine one in ages.

It’s definitely not what she expected. Like so many other times, Alex surprises her for the better. She can’t tell her about Franky and about her parents, she’s not sure she ever will, but the fact that she’s not being pressured to...it’s a good feeling.

It’s been a long time since she’s had a friend like Alex. In fact, she’s not sure if she ever has, not counting Gabriella. The least she can do put aside her own feelings and reciprocate. It might even make her feel better to spend time with Alex, if the twinge of warmth in her chest is any indication. She’s used to closing herself off when dealing with personal, emotionally charged issues. She knows that. And she also knows it’s not the healthiest coping mechanism. Spending time with someone else could do her good.

“So...” Alex breaks the growing silence, eyebrows raised slightly and gaze imploring. “Lunch?”

Maggie lets a beat pass.

“Sure.” Somehow it feels like she’s accepting more than just a simple lunch, and perhaps she is. She’s voluntarily letting someone besides Gabriella into her self-imposed fortress of solitude, but she still wants this on her terms—she hates feeling out of control. “But how about we order in? Like I said, I’m not in the mood to go out.”

Alex’s smile is dazzling.

“Sounds good to me.” Alex’s smile wrinkles her nose slightly, and it causes Maggie’s own smile to grow too.

“It’s a date then,” she tells her, turning back to her door and fully stepping inside the trailer.
“See you later, Maggie.”

“See you around, Danvers.”

“Kara,” Alex calls out, wrestling her boots off her feet and throwing her jacket on the couch. ‘I’m home.’

Her sister’s blonde ponytail pops out of the bathroom. “Alex!” She runs over, sliding on the hardwood in her socks the last few feet. “I made spaghetti with meatballs and garlic bread.”

“You made bread?”

“I...bought bread and put garlic butter on it,” Kara clarifies.

“Aha,” Alex says, smiling. “That’s great, Kara.” Her spirits lift even higher at the mention of the food awaiting her. She has a date—a friendly, lunch date with Maggie. She gets to spend time with her and maybe help her with whatever has her so down lately. Another sister night with great food to go with it is just the cherry to top it all off. Things are looking up.

“I was also thinking we could Skype Eliza tonight, since she hasn’t heard from the two of us together in awhile,” Kara continues, tone even brighter.

Alex’s good mood deflates slightly.

It’s not that she doesn’t want to talk to her mom, it’s just that today has been such a good day that she doesn’t want to potentially end it on a sour note. But she can’t say no when Kara is looking at her like that. It’s not like she has a good excuse to refuse anyways. She nods to indicate her acceptance, which elicits a small hand clap from Kara.

Dinner is good, not so surprisingly. Unlike herself, Kara can cook without setting off the fire alarm or melting her best plastic spatula. It’s just another thing on the ever growing list of things her sister can do better than her. And that still annoys her, but not as much as it used to. Not like it did before Nightingale. She’s grown as a person, she decides. (A small voice tells her it’s because of a certain dimpled co-star that’s nudged her along.) Plus she gets good food as a result of her sister’s skills in this area, so she’s not complaining.

They eat some of the leftover ice cream from last night for dessert, allowing each other just one more instance of cheating on their strict diets. Kara grabs her laptop on the way back from serving herself seconds, depositing it on the table before them.

Alex stifles a sigh, popping open the laptop and booting up Skype.

Things might be better with Kara, but her relationship with her mother remains unchanged. She’d sent her a nice text congratulating her for the show’s win the other night, and Kara had passed
along how their mom apparently thought Alex looked beautiful on the red carpet, but things between them are as cautious, as vaguely tense, as they have always been. (Or at least, since she was barely more than a teenager, but she tries not to think about that.)

Soon enough, their mom’s smiling face is transmitted through the screen.

“Girls! Oh, it’s so good to see both of you, and together.” Alex can hear the news on in the background. The sun is still shining back home due to the time difference. She might be making things up in her head, but she thinks she can hear the sound of the waves crashing outside.

She feels a pang of something she hasn’t experienced in a long time. Homesickness.

“And Alex,” her mom turns her attention on her, an unexpected move considering she almost always makes sure to talk with Kara first. “I’m sorry I didn’t get a chance to talk to you earlier, but work has been keeping me so busy. Things at the lab are...” she rolls her eyes, “You know how it is. And I know I texted you, but I just wanted to tell you face to face how much I liked your spread, Alex.”

“Yeah?” She hates how hopeful her voice sounds, how childish, but she still hasn’t managed not to crave her mother’s praise and validation. She’s self aware enough that she can admit to that. (And oh, isn’t that something she’s doing a lot of lately? She might possibly be entirely gay, and crushing the hardest she ever has on her co-star, and she craves her mom’s validation, and hey, she probably drinks too much, while she’s at it.)

“It was beautiful.” Eliza smiles, that warm happy smile with crinkled eyes that deepens the lines on her temples. “I’m so proud of you.” Alex’s heart soars.

“Well,” she shrugs her shoulders, feeling the need to brush off the compliment. “It was alright, I guess.”

“Alex!” Kara nudges her shoulder with a laugh as their mom’s voice chimes in to protest her deflection. “When did you, of all people, become so humble?”

“Hey,” Alex frowns in mock offense. “My head is a perfectly normal size.”

She loves her accomplishments, and it’s easy to feel proud of them—even to boast a little, sometimes. But it’s not so easy in front of her mother.

Eliza cuts in, “Both of you girls deserve to feel proud of everything you’ve accomplished. Kara with that big movie of yours, and Alex with Nightingale .”

Alex slinks back, letting her sister take center stage.

“It’s only because we had such a great mom to steer us the whole way.” Kara leans in close to the screen to deposit a few air kisses. Her mom pretends to catch them. It’s a silly scene, but Alex smiles to herself as she witnesses it.

“What have you been doing?” their mom asks. “Tell me, I want to know everything!”

They tell her. Or at least, Kara does, while Alex chips in every once in a while when her sister lets her excitement over New York City get the best of her. Her mom mentions how happy she is that they’re getting to spend time together, and Alex shares the sentiment. She’s missed her sister, and she resolves even more strongly to spend more time with her, maybe try and fly out during the weekends to wherever she’s filming when Kara can’t come to her. She remembers her dad telling her that a life in Hollywood could be a lonely one unless you surrounded yourself with good people
and held on tight, and she hasn’t been taking that advice as seriously as she should have. (A little voice she’s begun to recognize as her own heart, whispers that Maggie is one of those people.)

“And Alex, what did you get?”

Alex blinks, focusing back on the screen. “Huh?”

“What did you get, sweetie?”

“She didn’t get anything!” Kara exclaims before she can answer, and in that moment, Alex is thankful her sister has a bad habit of answering for her, because she has no idea what they’re going on about. “She only got a book for Maggie.”

“For Maggie, huh?” her mom says, and Alex feels the urge to look away. Her scheduled lunch with Maggie tomorrow glows in her brain like a big neon sign, and she wonders if it’s somehow visible to anyone looking at her.

“And we met some fans afterwards, and took a couple pictures—this one girl had a Captain Marvel comic, apparently she’d asked her boyfriend to run home and get it for her when they saw us at the stores.”

Kara retells the rest of their day in details, and before she knows it, the atmosphere has changed. It feels like those bright years before the accident, when Kara had finally adjusted to their family, and they were still being homeschooled and spent a lot of time with their mom as a result. When they would follow their dad to wherever he was filming, and they’d have dinner outside wherever that was, taking in their surroundings and talking to each other. They lost that, after her dad…

After , they had dinner in silence, and that soon evolved into each of them retreating into their rooms. The long conversations stopped, and sister nights became a rarity. This brief call thousands of miles away feels like an echo of those better times. And just like those, soon enough it comes to an end.

“Okay girls, I have to go, but we’ll talk soon,” their mom says. “Promise me you’ll let me know as soon as you’re back on set, Kara. And Alex, sweetie, please call me when you have time, all right?”

They both make their promises, although Alex knows that Kara will be the only one keeping hers. The room falls into silence after the call is over.

“Now that wasn’t as bad as you expected, was it?” Kara turns to her with a triumphant expression.

“It was fine,” Alex huffs out, refusing to give her the satisfaction of being right. She grabs her empty bowl of ice cream, walking over to put it in the dishwasher. “So what movie are we watching tonight?”

“Actually,” Kara joins her by the sink, rinsing out her own bowl, “since I’m off to Kansas tomorrow, I thought I’d let you pick out the movie,” Kara says, mentioning the next place her shooting schedule for Captain Marvel is taking her to. “Unless you just wanna hang out. We haven’t really talked for hours like we used to in ages.” Kara shrugs, but the gesture is anything but careless. Her words are measured, practiced. “We used to fall asleep talking, Alex.”

Kara seems shy, almost hesitant as she brings it up. Alex’s movements stop, heart rate ticking up just the slightest. This is it. The opening she needs to tell Kara.
The idea’s only grown since last night, coming in second only to Maggie in how much she’s been thinking about it. She breathes in slowly, bracing herself on the counter—eyes glued to the dripping sink faucet as she prepares herself to start what feels like will be one of the most important conversations of her life.

“That sounds...” she gulps, fingers turning white as her grip on the counter top increases, “that sounds good, yeah.” She turns from the sink and makes a beeline for the couch—Kara following after her. Once they’re both sitting down, Alex adjust her upper body, leaning closer to her sister. “I have something I want to- I need to say.”

“Good,” Kara sets her face, tone just as serious as Alex feels. “Me too.”

“You go first,” Alex tells her, partially because she’d rather hold off on her talk as long as possible and also because she wasn’t expecting Kara to reply the way she did—her interest is peaked now. As far as she’s aware, there’s nothing going in Kara’s life that she needs to be concerned about.

Kara sighs, flopping back onto the couch with a groan. “I don’t even know where to start.”

“If you don’t-”

“No. No, no.” Kara sits back up, straightening her shoulders determinedly. “I’ve become friends with this person...this guy, who’s really funny and sweet and kind.” She frowns. “We met a few weeks ago, but we’ve been spending a lot of time talking and texting, and we...hung out, once, not counting when we met, and I- I just really like hanging out with him.”

Alex nods her head, not sure where this is going—interest waning quickly. Kara made a new friend, nothing uncommon there.

“It’s just,” Kara continues, pointedly not looking at Alex, “I’m kind of confused because I like him, we’re just friends though- just friends. But Mon-El doesn’t know we’re friends. He doesn’t know about him at all. And I don't know...” her voice trails off softly.

“Are you afraid he might get jealous?” she asks. “Well, if you're just friends,” Alex ventures, testing the waters, “why don't you just mention it? Are you afraid he might get jealous?” She wouldn’t be surprised if he did. He seems to be the jealous, insecure type who’d want to control who his girlfriend can interact with. Alex hasn’t spent any significant amount of time with him to dispel those beliefs. Now she can see why this could be a problem Kara needs to talk to her about. And Alex doesn’t mind.

But her window to tell her sister about Maggie and her feelings is fast closing. The spike of courage she’d had to tell her has all but faded, and she begins to tell herself that it won’t kill her to wait until another time.

Her confusing feelings will still be there, or better yet, maybe they’ll have disappeared entirely.

“No!” Kara’s sharp voice interjects. “Pfft. There's nothing to be jealous about. But I just,” she shrugs helplessly, shoulders slumping. “I don’t know.”

“Well, it sounds like you really like this new friend of yours, and I don’t think that’s something you need to worry about. Mon-El doesn't get a say on who you’re friends with.” She makes sure to add that last part, forever threading the line of being polite and supportive of her sister’s most serious relationship to date and keeping her bad opinions to herself.

“Okay, I lied. I lied.” Kara breathes the words out with obvious regret, and Alex scoots closer to her sister on the couch. Her sister never lies. She’s a terrible liar.
“Maybe there is something to be jealous about. Because what if I…” Kara swallows with difficulty, and Alex frowns. She’s never quite seen her sister look this conflicted. “What if I like him...like him.”

“Oh.” She feels her eyebrows raise up. She doesn’t see how she hadn’t noticed the way her sister had been speaking, perhaps too focused on the fact she had a boyfriend, to realize she spoke as though she had feelings for someone else. “Your new friend?” Alex asks, just to confirm.

“I love Mon-El!” Kara exclaims, answer enough to her question. “I do. We’ve been together for almost a year now, and I know he’s planning something for our anniversary, and he’s...he’s amazing Alex.” She reaches over to grab her hand, squeezing it tightly as if trying to prove through her grip how much she loves Mon-El.

“But?”

“But I don’t know.” Kara crosses her arms, as if she’s hugging herself, and Alex gets the urge to protect her, to hurt whoever is hurting her—but in this case, it seems to be her own heart. “Mon-El gives me butterflies,” Kara says quietly. “But my friend...even with a text, my stomach feels like I’ve swallowed a whole zoo.”

Kara looks down, keeping her eyes glued to the couch as her fingers pull at a single loose thread. She looks ashamed—regretful—and Alex hates that expression on her sister’s face. She sits even closer to her, and pokes her softly to get her to look up at her.

“Listen...You don’t have to tell me about this friend of yours if you don’t want to, but I know that if you like him then he must be a good person.” That hasn’t exactly been true with Mon-El, but Alex swallows that detail down. “And I can’t tell you what to do with Mon-El. If you want to break up with him, if you want to stop talking to your friend...You have to make that choice, Kara. But whatever you decide to do...whatever you think is best?” Kara nods, hanging onto her every word. “I’ll be here, okay? I’m your sister, I’ll always be here. And I’ll back you up.” Kara smiles, even as a lone tear slips down her cheek. “I love you,” Alex tells her.

Kara throws her arms around her, hugging her tight.

“Thank you,” Kara says, muffled by Alex’s clothes. A minute goes by, and then she speaks up again, even softer. “Am I a horrible person for feeling this way?”

Alex shakes her head adamantly. The idea that Kara could be bad, let alone horrible, doesn’t compute with what she knows of the world.

“You’re the best person I know, Kara,” Alex assures, kissing the side of her head. Kara pulls back, smiling, and then takes a deep breath.

She wipes her face with her hands, and little by little her sunny disposition seems to return.

“So...what were you going to tell me?” she asks with a small chuckle.

Alex smiles, shaking the question off.

“It doesn't matter. It can wait.”
Maggie drops her bag at the door, dragging her feet as she makes her way inside her apartment.

For a moment, she hates how big it is. The large, half a dozen floor to ceiling windows let in the dying light of day, bathing every surface with an orange glow, giving the place a layer of warmth that in reality it lacks. She’s alone here. Gabriella is in LA with her boyfriend—and Franky is in Nebraska and doesn’t know her—all she has is this huge fucking apartment.

She makes her way to the second floor, opting out of making herself something for dinner.

She walks straight to her bookshelf, in search for a book that she knows she brought with her when she first moved. She only has 2 dozen books here, give or take. There’s a couple of crime novel paperbacks to pass the time between takes, and a cookbook or three courtesy of her aunt. It’s a healthy mix between fiction and fantasy and even the rare self help book or two (she’d liked yoga enough, but eliminating all negative feelings from her life wasn’t something she could do.) The copy she’s looking for however, is wildly different. It’s a kid’s book.

She’d bought it the summer after middle school, and read it through rough times, escaped into it when her life hurt.

In a way, it’s poetic that she keeps what she does in there.

She locates the book, and takes it with her to her bedroom.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain feels light yet sturdy in her hand as she walks the few steps into her large bedroom. She cracks the hardcover open as she sits on the edge of her bed, and then her thumb finds the place where the inner lining is peeling off—where it has been peeling off for over a decade, making it the perfect place to keep things safely hidden away, protected.

She pulls out the photograph, discolored by time and wrinkled by the amount of times she’s pulled it out to look at through the years.

Gabriella had gotten it for her, after her Nonna’s funeral. Maggie hadn’t thought to pack photographs—maybe she was in shock, or deep down had thought whatever was happening wouldn’t be permanent. But the result had been the same, and she would have been without them if Gabriella hasn’t gotten her some. Maggie keeps her favorite inside the book.

She’s 10 in the photo, not quite smiling as she poses by a baby Franky’s side. She was a tiny newborn, skinny and delicate, but in a few weeks she’d gotten chubby enough to please even the most demanding of Italian grandmas. Maggie smiles faintly as she rubs her thumb over the picture.

She loves her life, she does, but she’ll be damned if sometimes she doesn’t miss her childhood. It was a time of dreaming about the beach from triple landlocked Nebraska, of fucking budget birthdays and freezing winters, yes, but also...family. Simplicity. The innocence encapsulated in the single picture she holds in her hands...Maggie has yet to feel it again.

She puts the picture back in its pocket in the book and closes it, effectively cutting off the trip down memory lane. She wipes her face with one hand as she grabs her cellphone with the other and dials Gabriella’s number.
The phone rings, and Maggie doesn't try to call again, simply texts her before she loses her determination.

*I’m not sure how my parents are going to take it,* she writes, *but i want to talk to her. Can you send me her phone?*

She stares at the text for a minute, until suddenly Gabriella begins to type. A number appears, and then a message.

*Do you want to talk?*

And another.

*We should talk, Maggie. Let me ask them to cover me at work.*

She calls her aunt, and she answers on the first ring.

“So you sure?” Gabriella asks, breathless. She must have been running back and forth in the kitchen.

“No,” Maggie answers honestly. “But I think have to try,” she sighs. “What do you think?”

“I think it took you awhile, piccola.”

Maggie shakes her head. She understands now Gabriella’s hopeful looks after Franky initially called. Her aunt had wanted this. And for all Maggie thought about this during the last couple of days, she selfishly hadn’t given any thought to Gabriella, and how this might affect her. Her aunt had been cut out of the family without committing any crimes of her own, had chosen of her volition to be on Maggie’s side and not play in the middle. And it had cost her her other nieces.

“Let me know how it goes, please,” Gabriella begs.

“I will,” Maggie promises.

“Okay. I...I’ve wanted you to talk for so long. I’m glad it’s finally happening.”

“I’ll call you later,” Maggie promises, thinking about how Gabriella had wanted this, and yet she’d never said—never brought up what she thought Maggie should do. She’d always been at the helm.

She closes the call, and stares at the phone number her aunt has sent her.

All her fears bubble back up to the surface. Maybe she was naive, to think she could carry on like this for the rest of time. Maybe Gabriella is right, and Franky needs her, which means she’s been selfish in staying away per her father’s command. Maybe calling is the wrong choice, and it will only confuse Franky further and create problems where there weren’t any.

Maggie types the number and deletes it and then types it again, as those concerns circle her mind.

Long minutes pass, and then they turn into hours. She makes herself dinner after all, and then studies her lines, and then looks at the time zone difference between her and Franky. Midnight passes.

Maggie falls asleep without being able to bring herself to call her.
Alex forces herself to wait until 12:15 PM to text Maggie.
She’d never understood the ridiculous notion of playing games with people, the dumb dance Kara did when she liked someone and agonized over how long to wait until it was socially acceptable to call them back. Alex had never understood it, never seen the point in pretending.

She kind of gets it now.

She likes Maggie, and she doesn’t want Maggie to know that she likes her. She doesn’t want to seem eager, yet she doesn’t want to be late. Her mind goes off on a tangent, wondering if 12 PM is the universal hour for lunch, or at least the time where Maggie usually has her midday meal, or if it’s too early and she should call Maggie at 2.

It’s ridiculous. She feels ridiculous, and silly, and giddy in the best way possible. She knows it doesn’t really mean anything, and part of her is guilty at being excited at the prospect of spending time with Maggie in private, away from the intrusive flash of paparazzi's cameras, when Maggie doesn’t seem to be feeling well. But she can’t help it. She texts her at 12:15.

Maggie texts her back 10 minutes later, and Alex finds herself climbing the stairs up to Maggie’s floor at 12:45 PM.

She knocks on Maggie’s door when she gets there, once, and Maggie answer a mere moment later. She greets Alex with a quick, small hug, and her stomach constricts as she inhales the scent she’s learned to identify as uniquely Maggie’s.

“Come in,” Maggie tells her, closing the door after her once she’s across the threshold. “Um, what do you feel like having? I’m sorry, I hadn’t given it much thought.”

“It’s okay,” Alex shrugs, walking further into Maggie’s apartment. Nothing has changed since the last time she was here. “Does Italian sound good?”

Maggie jokingly grimaces, and Alex raises her hands in a placating manner. “Don’t look so excited.”

Maggie chuckles.

She’s trying not to catalog Maggie’s every expression, but she looks better than she did yesterday. She’s laughing and joking, at least. Alex hopes with every fiber in her being that whatever had her so...strange, so worried, is resolved now.

“How about Chinese?” Maggie asks. It’s Alex’s turn to purse her lips.

“I had a ton of Chinese with my sister a couple days ago,” she tells her. “Um, should we leave it to luck? I’ll rock, paper, scissor you for it.”

Maggie lets out a sudden burst of laughter, and Alex frowns.

“What’s- what’s so funny?”

Maggie just shakes her head. “Nothing, Danvers. I’ll scissor you for it, too.”

They end up ordering Chinese.

Alex gets the orange chicken while Maggie gleefully munches away on beef with mustard leaves,
with a joy that dispels all doubts Alex might have had about her being a closeted vegan. They talk between bites, about James and the new episode, and what their plans might be after they finish filming. Alex’s mom and Kara had talked about their usual summer vacation during their skype session last night, and Alex found she was almost excited about it as she told Maggie. Spending time with her sister and mother doesn’t sound so bad, if it’s how their call was. Maggie on her part is filming a movie towards the start of summer, but it shouldn’t take more than a moment. She winks, telling her it’s a secret still, and that M’gann would have her head if she knew she was talking about it. Alex swears to her she’s trustworthy, cross her heart and hope to die.

“I like you alive and kicking, Danvers,” Maggie retorts, and then cracks open her fortune cookie. Alex slurps the last of her vegetables, and reaches for her own, only to find out there isn’t one. She searches the bags on Maggie’s coffee table one by one, but the elusive package holding her fortune cookie is nowhere to be found.

“What’s wrong?” Maggie asks, leaning forward to peer into the bags herself.

“They didn’t give me a fortune cookie,” Alex tells her. She sounds dejected to her own ears. In her defense—she’s a paying customer, and as such she expects a certain level of competence. How hard can it possibly be to put 2 fortune cookies in a bag instead of just one?

“Oh,” Maggie hums. “Well, we can share mine.”

“I can’t share your fortune,” Alex is quick to protest. “That’s against the rules!” She’s sure she’s heard or seen that in a movie somewhere. Maggie chuckles.

“Danvers, I swear this is like, an American invention. Just take it.” Maggie smiles as Alex looks dubiously at her. She huffs jokingly, and then grabs the small strip of paper from Maggie’s hand, eyes scanning over it quickly.

Change can hurt, but it leads a path to something better.

She’s not one to internalize random sayings of questionable origin—her distaste over her missing cookie is mostly over the unfairness of it—but the words do hit a nerve. She’s...changed, lately. If not inside herself, in the way she handled what was already there. And she still doesn't know what to do with the fact that she likes women, that she likes Maggie, but it feels good to be able to think about it freely, instead of pushing her brain to think of something else.

“Nice,” she tells Maggie, handing the piece of paper back.

“And true,” Maggie adds. “I think.”

She leaves her plate on her coffee table, and then leans back, patting her—admirably flat, firm—stomach.

“I feel like having dessert. Don't you, Danvers?”

She could eat.

“What do you have in mind?” There weren’t a lot of options at the Chinese place they called apart from a weird red bean ice cream that would’ve melted on the way over anyways.

“Tiramisu.”

Alex scrunches her nose. “You like tiramisu?”
“I love it. Don’t tell me you don’t like it!” Maggie exclaims, and Alex immediately shakes her head.

“I mean, it’s not that I don’t like it. I just don’t think there’s anything special about it.” It’s a dessert like any other. It doesn’t hold a candle to a good apple pie with ice cream, or even brownies. Lemon custard. She could go on.

Maggie shakes her head. “Then you haven’t been having the right tiramisu. I’m gonna change your mind.”

“Do you... just keep a stash on your fridge?” Alex asks carefully. Maggie chuckles as she shakes her head.

“Uber eats,” she says. “We’re ordering tiramisu right now.”

Alex raises her hands, helpless to stop her.

She wouldn't want to.

Maggie looks beautiful as she smiles, happily tapping away at her phone—the white light illuminating her face, which only highlights her features—but then again, she always does. Alex feels warm, as though there's a hot ember inside her rib cage, heating her through the inside out.

It's moments like this, that make Alex doubt.

Maggie and her have fun together, they laugh together. They can walk a red carpet one day and then order Chinese and simply talk the next day. It’s the simplicity that Alex’s always wanted in a relationship but never was able to find. They fit together, like two atoms coming together to form the most beautiful matter. Being with Maggie feels safe and warm and right, like nothing ever has in her life until now. She’s crushing hard, she knows that, but she’s just now realizing the depth of those feelings. She wants Maggie. To be with Maggie. They'd be good together. Can’t Maggie feel it too?

Maggie looks up at her after she puts her phone down, and Alex gets lost in her brown eyes, finally glinting with that familiar warmth she’s missed these past few days. She feels tipsy, like she’s standing on the pleasant edge of having drunk just enough, that place where she doesn't manage to stay very often before she descends into just drunk. But this feels permanent, and she hasn't had a single drop of alcohol.

“Something on your mind, Danvers?” Maggie asks, eyes sparkling.

It would be so easy to ask. So simple to bring up how she feels about dating a co-star, just to gauge her thoughts on the matter. She’s terrified as fuck, but she can’t help the way her mind splits wide open with the possibilities. It would be simple to ask, and even simpler to just...kiss Maggie.

The thought stops her cold, but there's something that feels right about it. She's kissed her before, countless times for the cameras, all closed lips and hyper aware of everything—everybody—around them.

This would be different.

She doesn't know if she has the guts to do it, not when Maggie doesn't know anything about the turmoil inside her mind for the past few weeks. But could she ask?

“Nothing,” she shrugs. And then arms herself with courage and decides to just go for it. “Just,
huh...how do you feel about co-stars dating?”

Maggie doesn’t even stop to think about it before she answers.

“That’s a bad idea. Don’t do it, Danvers.”

Alex feels the ember sizzle out in her chest, as if it’s been doused with cold water.

“Oh. Why?”

Maggie shrugs.

“I saw how awkward it was after James and Lena broke up. The rest of season 1 was…” She shakes her head. “It just makes for a bad working environment. Why?” Maggie is careful as she speaks next. “Someone in our cast...caught your eye?”

“What? No. Not at all,” she denies vehemently. “I was just wondering—for a friend.” She doesn’t have any friends, apart from her sister and Maggie. She was stupid to think they could be more.

“You okay, Danvers?” Maggie asks softly, her warm eyes trained on her.

“Yeah. I’m...yeah.”

The doorbell rings, saving her from letting Maggie see the hot shame bubbling up her throat. It feels like rejection. Even if Maggie knew she liked her, it wouldn't change anything. They work together. It would never happen.

“That was fast,” Maggie mentions. Alex forces herself to smile.

“I’ll get it.”

“Okay, Danvers, I’ll get us some plates. You can't just eat tiramisu out of a plastic container.”

She heads off toward the kitchen, and Alex goes to get the door.

It's not Uber Eats.

A man stands at the door, a heavy frown marring his features.

“So you're the girlfriend, then,” he says, and Alex feels an uncomfortable chill run down her back at the way he spits out the word girlfriend. It sounds like mockery. “I recognize you from the papers.”

Alex’s heart races, even though she doesn't understand who he is, or what's going on.

And then Maggie enters the living room, her arms laden with ceramic plates and cutlery. She lets them fall to the floor, the plates breaking into fragments.

A cold stab of fear rushes through Alex as she watches the blood drain from Maggie’s face, leaving her the palest she’s ever seen her.

Maggie looks like she’s seen a ghost.
Her blood rushes through her ears.

Maggie remains frozen as she stares at the figure at her door. The years have weathered him, in a way that she hadn’t imagined. In her mind, he was always the same man. She realizes she froze him, kept him in her head the exact same way he looked when she was a child. She never accounted for him aging, for the years that passed—never expected to one day see him as an adult herself. They’re equals. He doesn’t have power over her—she won’t let him have it, and that’s a choice she can make now. But that’s not what it feels like, even though she doesn’t feel much of anything.

Maggie didn’t expect it to go like this.

It’s the first time she’s seen her father in over 10 years and all she feels is...numb.

“How did you find my apartment?”

She’d thought about a thousand different options through the years, a million possible ways in which she would confront him, if she ever saw him in person again. And yet all she can do is ask how he got there.

“Your address was on Franky’s school bill,” he says simply, and his voice...that hasn’t changed. It brings Maggie back to the little peach colored house in Blue Springs, Nebraska, to waiting until her daddy came home from work to show him what she’d done at school. It brings her back to the night she lost everything.

Her chest constricts. The numbness gives way to an ache, the pain of an old wound that has dulled with time, only to be ripped open again by a careless misstep. The weight of those 10 years of rejection weighing her down. She hadn’t expected it to be this painful, seeing him again.

“Excuse me, who are you?” Alex’s voice breaks through the moment like a breath of oxygen into her lungs, and Maggie suddenly takes note of her surroundings—realigning herself and finding her footing. She’s not a child anymore. She’s not alone.

But she still can’t find her voice.

Her father looks at Alex with disdain.

“This is why you can’t be a part of our family anymore, and yet you blame me,” he says, turning his dark eyes—eyes so much like her own—back on her. “When you’re the one choosing to live like this.”

Maggie feels Alex bristle up next to her. “Excuse m-”

“Why are you here?” she demands, taking a step forward and putting herself between him and Alex.

Her dad narrows her eyes, and the disappointment brimming in them is just as strong as it was 10 years ago.
“Let’s talk outside, it’s about Francesca.”

Chapter End Notes

Oscar showed up, yikes. And Alex felt a bit of rejection, but hey, at least she knows she wants to be with Maggie now. We’d love to hear your thoughts on this chapter! Comments feed our muse! Leave us a comment if you want the slow burn to speed up!

You can find us on twitter, anddirtyrain @meanstoflourish and softsawyer @circledflight. We also track #SanversFakeDatingAU so feel free to leave your comments there as well.

We also wanted to let you know we will be taking a relatively short hiatus until May 21st due to both of our busy schedules and Ultimates weekend. We'll be posting Maggie's interlude, covering her childhood up to age 14. We're super excited about it! See you all then! Thank you for reading!
Interlude II: Maggie

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Nature's first green is gold,

Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leafs a flower;

But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief.

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay.
Maggie’s first memory is of her dad.

One chilly fall morning, her second grade teacher—a tall, thin woman with the brightest hair Maggie has ever seen—asks them to write about it. She puts down “My first memory” in big letters on the board and asks them to write an entire page worth of whatever they can remember. Miss Redway’s handwriting is so pretty, and it always makes Maggie try extra hard to draw her letters properly, so the teacher will tell her ‘good job’ and give her a gold star, and maybe even smile at her.

“Did you understand the assignment, Maggie?” Miss Redway asks sweetly, and Maggie nods really fast. She wants Miss Redway to know she’s smart.

She’s the prettiest, nicest teacher Maggie has ever had. If her mom allowed her to, she’d bring her an apple every day like one of the boys in her class does.

Miss Redway smiles at her, her teeth all white and perfect, her lips painted red, and then she walks around to help one of the boys who doesn’t understand. Maggie takes out her notebook and a pencil, and gets to work. She has to do good. She’s a year older than most people in her class,
because her birthday is only a month after school starts, but she’s the smallest. She hates feeling behind.

So she tries extra hard to remember.

At first it’s stuff that she knows happened recently.

How she scraped her knee last month, and the scab took ages to fall off. How her aunt Gabriella visited for the Fourth of July this year, and she brought Maggie sparklers all the way from where she lives in California.

She tries to think harder. She’s 8 years old now, so there’s a lot to think about.

She remembers her seventh birthday, because although she hadn’t had a birthday party, her dad let her ride around in the back of the police cruiser. And her dad’s partner had given her a huge chocolate bar just for her, the kind she was never allowed to get at the grocery store. She frowns as she thinks back further and remembers her sixth birthday. She remembers finally getting the birthday party she’d always wanted, and inviting her two favorite friends. There hadn’t been balloons floating all around the house like at Jessica’s birthday party, but her mom had put up a few pink balloons with a white ‘Happy Birthday!’ written on them that she’d tied to the windows with string. They’d spent the entire morning blowing them up until Maggie felt like she couldn’t breathe anymore. She remembers the big pink candle with a ‘6’ covered in glitter. And the cake, which had been very small, but her friends had liked it and so had Maggie. She remembers that aunt Gabriella still lived with Nonna back then—now she’s away at college. She doesn’t remember her fifth birthday as clearly, and she can’t remember her fourth birthday at all.

Maggie drops her head on her desk, and closes her eyes really tight as she tries to think. She remembers her mom serving her cereal, but she does that every morning. She thinks she remembers the sippy cup she used to carry around everywhere when she was little, before she started going to school. (Her daddy had thrown it away the day before because she was supposed to be a big girl now.) She remembers, kinda, aunt Gabriella painting her nails for the first time, but only because her mom had told her the story, shaking her head. Maggie thinks about her mom’s stories, and tries to remember one of them. She can sort of remember the first dog they had, and daddy’s birthday weekend in the city once. Her mom tells those stories often enough because she’d hated that dog, and because she’d given her daddy a watch for that weekend and her daddy still has it.

And there’s the story about her falling in the lake.

Her mom had told her that the winter when she was three, the ice on the pond close to their house had been very thin, and Maggie had walked outside when her mom wasn’t looking. The ice had cracked and she’d fallen in, and it was pure luck that her daddy had been outside chopping wood, because he’d seen her, and he’d gotten her out.

Maggie doesn’t remember it at all.

But what she does remember now—so clearly it’s almost as if she was back there—is sitting in her daddy’s lap in front of the fire, shivering, while her mom piled blankets upon blankets around her. She remembers her daddy’s big, warm hands around her own, and how he blew into them to warm her up.

Maggie raises her head from her desk and starts writing.

Miss Redway calls on them one by one to the front, so they can read what they wrote. Anne can’t read very well, but Maggie likes her, even when her mom always looks at Maggie like she’s
smelled something rotten. Maggie claps the hardest when Anne is done. Even with all the stops and stutters, she liked her story about getting a puppy for Christmas when she was four.

When Billy talks about how he remembers being carried by the stork and dropped at his parent’s front door, everyone laughs, and so does Maggie. She knows that’s not where babies come from. Her daddy already explained how Baby Jesus gifts babies to couples who love each other and are married and pray very hard for them. She’s not quite sure what her mom meant when she told her daddy to just tell her she’d been a surprise, but Maggie thinks maybe it means her mom had prayed for Maggie without realizing it.

Their class is the smallest in the whole school, and after Sam and Jack and Molly are done, it’s Maggie’s turn.

She takes a deep breath before she starts to read.

She tells the class how the winter when she was three had been very cold—she pretends to shiver, and some of her classmates laugh, even Miss Redway smiles—but not cold enough for the pond to freeze solid. She reads aloud how she’d wanted to play and had sneaked out when her mom wasn’t looking.

She pretends she’s one of the mimes she saw on TV and walks on the tips of her toes in front of the classroom. Her classmates laugh, but she knows they’re paying attention to her now. And Maggie doesn’t actually remember most of what she wrote that she did, but her mom does, so that must be enough for the assignment.

It’s not a lie. It’s play pretend.

She reads out loud how the water was so, so cold, and she couldn’t touch the bottom of the pond. (She still can’t.)

“But then,” she reads, “someone pulled me out, like a guardian angel from the Bible. It was my daddy. He took me inside. I remember my mom putting blankets around me, and my daddy blowing on my hands until I was warm again. My daddy is my hero.” She finishes with a big smile, feeling her nerves settle down.

Maggie swears Miss Redway claps the hardest of the whole class.

Her mom picks her up from school that afternoon, and Maggie can hardly wait until five when her daddy gets home and she gets to show him her assignment, and the big golden star her favorite teacher put on the top.

When he sees it, he kisses both her cheeks, and puts her assignment on the fridge.

They spend her birthday that year at her grandma’s house.

Maggie loves it at her grandma’s. Her house is big, bigger than theirs, and it’s so high up on a hill that Maggie feels like she can see the entire world. Or at least, the whole of Nebraska. Her grandma laughs and tells her, in her accented English, that it’s not even half of Gauge County.
That the world is bigger than Maggie realizes.

Her mom and her grandma cook, but her daddy isn’t there because he has to work. Maggie swallows down her disappointment as she asks them to let her help, and she feels very grown up when her mom tells her she’s a good girl. She kneels on a stool and washes potatoes while her grandma peels them, and her mom chops them into cubes and throws them in a big pot with olive oil and onions.

The house smells like food and Maggie loves it.

Her mom lets her pour the water over the potatoes, and she likes the sizzling the pot makes. Her grandma keeps her pasta in jars, and she and her mom speak in quickfire Italian while she throws it in the pot. Maggie can’t understand a word.

Her mom and zia Gabriella speak like that, too, when she comes over, but her mom has never wanted her to learn. She remembers being little and sitting on her grandma’s lap, repeating a few words after her. And then her mom getting upset and telling grandma that Maggie’s an American—she speaks English.

Maggie has never quite understood why she couldn’t just speak both.

Her mom says it’s too late, anyways.

She plays outside for the rest of the afternoon, and it’s only when the sky is beginning to get colored in with orange that her daddy arrives. He brings a cake, and he picks Maggie up even though she’s getting too big.

“For my princess,” he tells her, and Maggie laughs so hard when he tickles her that her stomach hurts. He puts her down, and her grandma goes to check on the food while fondly saying something in Italian.

“What does ‘fossette’ mean?” Maggie asks her mom later as they’re setting the table. Her mouth tickles as she imagines the pasta, soft potatoes, and cheese. Her grandma is the best cook in the world.

“What?” her dad asks, from his place at the head of the table. Her mom always says men are not supposed to work at home, because they’ve already worked all day. Maggie thinks that’s not fair, because her mom works, too, but she doesn’t say anything. It’s probably in the Bible, and her mom says nobody can argue with that.

“‘Fo-fossette’,” Maggie says again, looking to her mom. “Grandma said it earlier.”

“Dimples,” her dad tells her. Maggie never knew he could understand Italian. “Your grandma said if you keep smiling so much those dimples are gonna stay permanently on your cheeks.”

Maggie smiles, and then consciously touches her cheek.

She had never paid much attention to the little holes that form on her cheeks when she smiles, but she didn’t think they were a big deal. Nobody else in her class has them but Molly, and she has bright blonde hair to go with them. Maggie had thought once that she would rather trade her dimples for hair like that. But if Nonna and her daddy like them, well -she thinks she probably wouldn’t.

They have dinner on Nonna’s big wooden table, and afterward her Nonna gets up and brings her her birthday cake.
She collects a few thin little candles that she has lying around, and then sticks them on the cake until they make 9. Her mommy lights them, and her father gets up from his place at the head of the table. He picks Maggie up, and places her there. They push the cake in front of her, and then start to sing Happy Birthday. It’s Maggie’s favorite part.

Her mom brushes her unruly waves away from her face, and Nonna looks down at her with a smile. Her daddy winks, and Maggie feels extra happy to be sitting in his place.

When the time comes for her to blow out the candles—she wishes for roller skates, and for her life to always be this perfect.

Her first communion is in December, and it’s the reason she didn’t get a birthday party, only dinner with Nonna.

Her mom had told her they needed to spend the money on her first communion dress, and Maggie hadn’t thought it was a fair trade off, but she does now, a little. It’s the prettiest dress she’s ever worn.

It’s white and made of gauze that seems to float when she moves. She keeps twirling just to see it move. Maggie has never liked dresses much, and certain parts of it are stiff and itchy, but her grandma and her mom and her daddy all look so very proud, so she sucks it up and smiles for the disposable camera her daddy buys for the occasion.

She takes pictures with her mom, and then with her daddy, and he says they’ll ask Nonna to take one of the whole family. Her grandma is meeting them there.

There’s a thick blanket of snow on the ground when they leave the house, and she only has one thick jacket on top of her dress, so it doesn’t get wrinkled. Maggie briefly wonders what it would feel like to jump into one of the banks of freshly fallen snow, and then quickly removes the thought from her mind, knowing the type of spanking she’d get if she did. Her daddy carries her to the house so she doesn’t get her shoes dirty. They’re shiny, black charol shoes that her mom bought her a couple months ago but she’s never worn before. They’re starting to get a little tight. She’s wearing frilly socks, too, and there’s nothing positive about those. They just itch.

They drive to the church, and it starts to snow halfway there. The snowflakes hit her window and melt. Maggie’s eyes follow them down the glass.

“Are you excited, Maggie?” her daddy asks.

“She better be, that dress cost an arm and a leg.”

“Yes,” she answers her daddy. If not for her first communion itself, but for the fact that she spent three months staying at her church after mass for Sunday school, and this is the culmination of all of that.

“You’re a big girl now,” her daddy says. Maggie feels something warm in her chest, even through the cold that sneaks in because the heating in the old car has always been faulty.

“I’m still the shortest one in my class, though,” Maggie says, and that gets her parents to chuckle as
they pull into the church parking lot. The trip two towns over to the Christ The Redeemer Catholic Church always seems short. All the other kids are already there, milling about wearing their own scratchy-looking white dresses and white shirts with black pants for the boys. Maggie thinks she’d like to try out the shirt and black pants combo. It certainly looks more comfortable.

Her eyes skim over the parking lot while her mom finishes applying lipstick. She looks really pretty today.

Maggie stares out of the window and waves to one of the boys. He waves back. They used to play ball together after Sunday school, but one of the catechists said it wasn’t ladylike, so they don’t anymore. Maggie wishes they did. She looks around, and then her eyes zone in on a thin figure wearing a long black skirt.

“Nonna!” she dashes out of the car, throwing the door open and jumping onto the asphalt. Except it isn’t the asphalt, it’s just snow, cold and wet, getting inside her charol shoes.

“Margaret!” her mom screeches, and Maggie wants to get back in the car but it’s too late. Her mom gets out of the car, her eyes incensed and her hand already raised. Maggie knows how it goes. She’s gonna grab her wrist in one hand and spank her bottom with the other, and all the other kids are going to see.

“Oh, leave the child alone,” her grandma says suddenly, stepping carefully over the snow in thick boots that look silly under her long skirt. “You were a nightmare too, Giorgia,” she says. “Half the food would go on your clothes when you ate.”

“Mother, I’m trying to teach her—”

“Come here, Maggie, dear,” she says, and Maggie hurries to her side. “Let’s get those shoes dried up. We have to look our best for God don’t we?”

Maggie nods furiously, and then grabs her grandma’s hand, following her inside the church. She turns back to look at her dad, and he looks...amused. Maggie smiles and waves.

The hem of her dress—thank God, and Virgin Mary, and baby Jesus—dries before mass starts.

Maggie twists the puzzle piece in her hand.

She decides she’s gonna try to finish the puzzle before her daddy comes home and her mom calls her for dinner. It’s the most she’s done the whole day. School was boring, but then again, the the days before winter break are always kind of boring. Maggie likes school, for the most part, and not having much to do every day gets old fast. The teachers have them play and color and not much else since all the exams are done, and everyone is just waiting to go home for the holidays. She likes it more than actual winter break though, which is still a couple of weeks away. Her mom will be home with her all the time then, because the highschool she secretaries for also closes. Maggie knows her mom won’t let her turn the TV on more than usual.

She lets out a small ‘yes’ as the piece in her hands reveals itself to be part of the whiskers from the kitten on the right, and she presses it into place. She’s almost done. She’s done it a couple of times before, but it never gets old to be able to finish it. (As far as she can, because there are two missing
She picks up another piece, and begins looking at the colors when there’s a sudden yell coming from the living room.

“Maggie!”

“What?!” she yells back, and then realizes that was a bad idea as soon as she doesn’t hear anything back. She stands up, ready to say sorry when her mom yells again.

“Maggie, come here! There’s someone here to see you!”

Maggie frowns.

For a moment, she thinks maybe one of the girls from school is here to play with her, but nobody’s ever been to her house before. Maggie walks out of her bedroom with careful steps. The first person she sees is her grandma, sitting on the couch.

“Hi, Nonna,” she starts saying, but then her eyes stray and she notices, just inside their front door, someone she hasn’t seen in ages.

“Aunt Gabriella!”

Maggie sits on the floor of her bedroom, what seems like hundreds of plastic logs scattered in front of her, which she works to stack beside her in neat little piles. She has one pile for the long logs, one for the medium, and a smaller pile for the tiny pieces.

“You really like it, don’t you?” Aunt Gabriella asks, and Maggie nods, beaming.

Her aunt sits on the edge of her bed, the gift she brought Maggie now open as she figures out how to actually play with it. She grabs the container, looking at the pictures of the log cabins on the shiny plastic wrapper. It looks simple enough, the logs are just stacked one on top of the other, locked in place by laying the pieces in the specific grooves carved out in each log.

“All my mom buys me is dolls,” Maggie says, looking at the door in case her mom comes in.

“I know,” aunt Gabriella says, “that’s why I got you this. You can make some really cool stuff.” Maggie nods. She’s seeing it already. “Maggie?” She looks up at her aunt, who’s biting her lip. “I’m sorry I couldn’t make it for your birthday.”

“It’s okay.” Maggie shrugs. Her birthday feels like it was a long time ago, it doesn’t even matter anymore.

“I heard my mom made pasta e patate,” aunt Gabriella mentions.

Maggie looks up at her, plastic log in hand. “I didn’t know that’s what it was called. What’s patate?”

“Potato. It sounds the same, doesn’t it?”
“I guess…” Maggie says, and aunt Gabriella chuckles. She passes Maggie a piece she missed, and Maggie places it in the big pile, all the pieces now sorted so she can begin to build.

“I don’t understand why Giorgia never taught you Italian,” her aunt says. Maggie shrugs. She doesn’t get it either, but as she finally grabs a couple of logs and quickly gets them to look like a bench, it doesn’t seem important.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t make it to your first communion either,” aunt Gabriella says. “School has just been…crazy. And with my job…” she trails off.

Maggie thinks about it. She misses her aunt. She can still remember when aunt Gabriella still lived with Nonna, and went to the same high school her mom is a secretary at. Sometimes aunt Gabriella came home with her mom and they had dinner together. One time, aunt Gabriella painted her nails. But ever since she went to college in California, Maggie hardly ever sees her.

“Mom said it doesn’t matter, that God knows you wanted to be here,” she says, hoping her aunt doesn’t feel bad. “And mom said she’s sure you prayed for me during mass all the way from California.”

“And my sister is never wrong, is she?”

Maggie shakes her head. Her mom is never wrong—only when her daddy says she is.

“Don’t tell anyone, but I don’t go to church that much anymore,” her aunt whispers. Maggie smiles when she presses her index finger to her lips, and she does the same.

Maggie only misses mass when her daddy takes her with him to run errands, but most of the time they all go, and they pinch each other when the other falls asleep—quick, before her mom sees. Then they’d both be in trouble.

“Since I couldn't make it to either, though…” her aunt trails off. “I brought you two gifts.”

“Really?!” Maggie asks, momentarily forgetting about the logs in her lap. The only time she ever gets more than one present is at Christmas, and that’s next month.

“Wanna see the other one?” her aunt asks.

Maggie nods.

Gabriella takes a small plastic package out of her backpack, and hands it to her.

“It’s a tamagotchi. It’s like a digital pet. You have to name it, then feed it and take care of it. One of my friends has one, like, she’s literally in college and has one. They’re all the rage. Supposed to be addicting. Wait, sorry, do you need help opening that?”

Maggie nods. She’s not allowed to use big scissors yet, only the ones with rounded corners.

“Right, right. You’re nine-”

“I’m nearly ten,” she protests.

"Right," her aunt repeats, smiling. She tears the package open with a small knife that looks like a pen, that she takes out of her backpack. She hands the small, round object to Maggie. It’s lighter than she expected. She pulls the small white tab at the back, and an egg appears on the small screen.
“Where did you get it?” she asks Gabriella, in awe of the little thing in the screen.

“Toys R Us,” her aunt says, pulling out the instructions from the now mangled plastic package.

Maggie knows the store. There’s one in Omaha, and her daddy has let her go inside a few times, but she’s never gotten anything.

“There’s one in California?”

“There’s like...fifteen in California,” aunt Gabriella says. ”Probably more. There’s three in my city alone. I went to this one close to my new job. I’m working as a bartender now.”

“What’s a bartender?” Maggie asks, looking up at her from her spot on the floor.

“I, huh... I serve people their drinks at a hotel.”

“It’s like a waitress, Maggie,” she hears suddenly, and looks up to find her mom at her bedroom door.

“Oh, okay,” she says.

“Logs...” her mom says. Maggie keeps her attention on her new toys, knowing from her mom’s tone of voice that she’s not talking to her. She’s talking above her, to her aunt.

“They're supposed to develop spatial intelligence.”

“It’s a boy’s toy.”

"It’s a toy," aunt Gabriella retorts. Her mom hums.

“And what’s that?” she asks, and Maggie looks up. Her mom is staring straight at the oval shaped, bright purple toy in her hands. The egg has cracked, and a tiny little creature is walking around inside the screen.

“It’s a Tommygotchy!” she says brightly, showing it to her mom.

“Tamagotchi,” her aunt corrects. “It’s like a virtual pet,” she says to her mom.

“A virtual pet?”

“I have to feed it and take care of it,” Maggie supplies.

“What kind of name is that? Is that Chinese? Do you have any idea the amount of ungodly things that come from China? You don’t even know what that means Gabriella, and you're handing my daughter-”

“It’s a toy -”

Her mom shoots aunt Gabriella a piercing glare, the kind of glare she gives Maggie when she forgets to take off her shoes in the entrance and tracks dirt into the house. And that’s her cue to melt into the background and hope her mom doesn’t turn her anger on her. But her aunt doesn’t back down, she never did from what Maggie can remember.

“It’ll prepare her to be a mother, isn't that what you want?” Her aunt’s voice sounds funny again, just like it did earlier. She’s drawing out her sentences and putting more force behind certain words.
“And what's *that* supposed to mean?” her mom bites out, the cutting edge to her voice grating on Maggie’s ears.

“Nothing,” out of the corner of her eye, she sees her aunt Gabriella put her hands up in surrender. “I’m just saying, it’s a nice toy for girls her age. Everyone has it.”

“Not here.”

“She’ll be the first, then. Everyone at school will wonder where she got it. Come on, Giorgia. You’ll be the best mom in the world to everyone Maggie shows it to.”

Her mom narrows her eyes. “Leccaculo.”

Her aunt raises her eyebrow, and a smile pulls at the corner of her lips.

“I don’t want you staring at that screen the entire day, you hear me?” her mom tells Maggie, but she doesn’t sound angry anymore. She knows whatever fight they were having, her aunt Gabriella won. “It'll rot your brain.”

Maggie diligently nods.

“What is California like?”

Maggie lies beside her aunt, her Tamagotchi—newly named Loppy—laying on her chest.

“Well, the part I live in is called Los Angeles,” her aunt says. Maggie’s bed is just wide enough for the both of them to fit, shoulder to shoulder. She can hear the grownups in the living room, talking, but aunt Gabriella is here, with her. Maggie knows she’s her mom’s sister, but her aunt doesn’t seem like a grown up the way they do. But she’s not a kid, either. It’s a weird in between, but her aunt told her she’d rather hang out with her, and Maggie is thankful for it. “And it’s nice, really nice. There’s a lot of things to do. I have pictures close to the Hollywood sign and everything.”

Maggie tries to imagine it, but it just looks like Omaha in her head.

“You know, when you go to college you can find out,” aunt Gabriella says.

“Nah,” Maggie says. She looks back down at the toy in her hand, losing interest in the conversation. She feeds Loppy, and watches as the hunger bar fills up.

“No what?”

“I don't wanna go to college,” she says.

Her aunt sits up. “Don’t say that, Maggie. Why not?”

“I just don’t wanna go, ever,” she says, sitting up too. “Mom didn’t go, and daddy didn’t go, and he’s the smartest person in the world,” she tells Gabriella. “It just seems like a bad idea. I’d miss everyone too much. I don’t ever want to leave.”

Gabriella nods, her lips pressed together. She seems sad, but Maggie doesn't understand why.
“You’re sweet, Maggie.”
Maggie loves winter.

She loves the cold, and the bare trees with icicles hanging from their branches. She loves the snow, when it’s falling relentlessly or when it’s powdery and fresh on the ground first thing in the morning. She especially appreciates the snow that’s wet enough to stick together for snowball fights or snowman building. Most of all, she likes that her daddy seems to work less during winter. He usually goes into the city, all the way to Omaha, to do stuff for the police department there. He grumbles under his breath that they think of him as their messenger boy, but Maggie loves it because her daddy usually takes her with him and after he does what he needs to do, they spend the whole day together—just the two of them.

She also likes the city. Omaha is noisier than Blue Springs, but the buildings are the tallest Maggie has ever seen. One of those bright winter mornings, her daddy leaves her at the park in the center of the city, instead of on the benches outside of the precinct, and hands her a five dollar bill.

“Don’t leave the park, all right?” he asks, and Maggie nods. “Go have fun with the other kids. Eat something. I’ll be back in two hours, give or take, and we’ll go feed the ducks.” Maggie smiles. She loves doing that.

Her daddy walks away after she takes the money and enters the precinct on the other side of the street. Maggie takes a deep breath, looking around. The park is full of kids, playing in the snow, and a few steps farther away there’s a cotton candy stand and a hot dog stand. Maggie licks her lips. She walks over there, wondering if she could get some chili cheese on hers. But then something else catches her eye.

There’s a small street between the park with all its brightly colored jungle gyms, swings, and even a merry-go-round. On the other side of it, there’s another park, where grown ups mill around with their dogs—who are also wearing cute little coats. There’s a skating rink in the middle of it. A big sign reading ½ hour for $2 calls her attention—the 5 dollar bill in her pocket seeming to glow. 1 hour would be 4 dollars. She can still have her hot dog, and skate. She’s not sure if heading over there counts as leaving the park, but the street is so small and empty that it can’t possibly be wrong. Besides, her daddy never gets mad at her.

Maggie saunters over there, eagerly handing the man at the booth the five dollar bill.

“Can I have half an hour, please?” she asks. The man peers over the booth counter at her and slides his glasses down his nose, eyes serious looking. She fidgets slightly under his gaze, but keeps her eyes on his. Her daddy said people who have nothing to hide make direct eye contact, and she has nothing to hide, despite the expression on the man’s face making her feel otherwise.

“Where’s your parent, kid?” he asks, pulling his glasses off and letting them hang like a necklace around his neck. “You don’t look old enough to be left unsupervised.”

“I’m nine, I’m just small for my age, sir,” she replies in her most polite tone. The man’s face is still skeptical, but he grabs her five dollar bill, pulling out a small wallet and counting the change.

“Try not to get knocked down by the other kids, or a stray gust of wind.” He chuckles at his words, but Maggie doesn’t think he’s very funny. She keeps those thoughts to herself though, taking the change and shoving it the pocket of her puffy jacket. He shuffles around in his booth for a few moments before pulling out a pair of worn, cuffed black ice skates. “This is the smallest size we got,” he hands the skates over, depositing them into her eagerly awaiting hands.
“Thanks!” she throws over her shoulder, already running toward the rink, skates swinging wildly in her left hand.

It hits Maggie that she’s never really skated much before, apart from that one time during second grade when Molly invited the whole class to an ice skating rink for her birthday. She’d liked it then. The pond near her house freezes over in the winter, and Maggie slides across the length of it on her boots, the ice getting slippery enough when it’s just rained and the water has quickly frozen over. This is almost the same.

She puts on the skates, scrunching her nose at the wet smell emanating from them. She hobbles the few steps to the rink—and then she’s off. It’s like riding a bike. The girl at the ice skating rink from Molly’s birthday party had called her a natural, and Maggie had giggled the hardest she can remember. She loves this. The ice is slick beneath her blades as she slips through the gaps between people on the rink, savoring the sting of cold air whistling by her face.

Half an hour goes by far too fast, and she’s quick to hand the man at the booth another two dollars. Some of the other people have trickled off by now, leaving her room to actually skate now. She lets loose, she falls a couple of time trying to do tricks, but once she gets the hang of it she’s off, twirling and spinning with reckless abandon. She’s going so fast it feels like she’s flying across the ice. Her heart races a mile a second. Her face almost hurts from smiling so hard, but it’s the best kind of pain she could experience.

She loses track of time.

She’s trying to balance on one skate only when she hears a booming voice breaking the silence of the morning.

“Maggie! Margaret!”

It’s her daddy. She skids to a stop at the edge of the rink closest to his voice, waving her arms to get his attention.

“Daddy! I’m here!” she calls out, already feeling guilty at the worried expression painting her daddy’s face, which only grows clearer as he hurries over towards her—not even bothering to look both ways before crossing the street.

“I told you not to leave the park,” he huffs out once he’s standing before her, arms crossed as he looks down at her, eyes shining with worry and some other emotion she doesn’t recognize on her daddy’s face.

“But I’m at the park,” she’s quick to protest, grabbing her daddy’s hands and looking up at him imploringly.

“You’re at a park, not the park I left you in.”

“Okay, but look!” She lets go of his hands, skating to the center of the rink and twirling just like she’d figured out to do. She looks at his face to avoid getting dizzy, and by the time she’s made her 4th turn the corner of his lip is curled up.
The last day of school before Winter Break, Anne takes one of her Christmas present’s to school.

Her dad and her mom are divorced—Maggie asks her what that means, and she learns it means that they got married but then got un-married. Maggie didn’t know that was allowed. She heard at church that marriage was forever. But divorce also means that Anne sees her dad only on the weekends, and since this year Christmas falls on a Thursday, she won’t see him at all that day. (Something about that seems awfully sad to Maggie.)

But Anne doesn't look sad as she shows off the shiny, brilliantly white ice skates her dad got her in advance.

Maggie kind of thinks they don't really count as a Christmas present since she opened them before Christmas, but she gives Anne a pass, like she always does. And the skates really are pretty. They’re shiny and smell like new, and have pink shoelaces. Maggie runs her hand over the metal blade and the flowers creeping up the side when Anne lets her hold one.

The memory of ice skating in Omaha is strong in her mind as she hands it back.

It had been so fun. Sometimes at night when she can’t sleep, she’ll close her eyes and be taken back to that rink and the sound of her skates scratching the ice and the absolute freedom she’d felt flying across the frozen landscape. Anne’s skates are so much prettier than the skates she’d rented though.

She can’t stop talking about them when she gets home that day.

She talks all through dinner, telling her parents about how much nicer they were than the ones in Omaha.

“You took her ice skating?” her mom asks suddenly, and Maggie realizes that they hadn’t told her. Her daddy had only mentioned that they went to feed the ducks at a lake to her mom and shrugged.

“I’d say she took herself,” her daddy says, chuckling. He winks at Maggie, and Maggie smiles back. She kind of had.

“She could’ve broken her neck,” her mom says. “Those things are death traps.”

“You should’ve seen you daughter on those death traps, as you call them. She was amazing.”

“She should be focusing on school,” her mom says, before going on a rant about the history test Maggie got a C+ on. Maggie eats her spinach. At least her daddy thinks she was good.

“Maggie!”

She looks up from her book—tearing her eyes away from the worn pages of Charlotte and Wilbur’s story—upon hearing her daddy’s voice. He’s home! She drops the book, but before she can get out of bed and run to the door, she hears her mommy speaking.

“What is that?” she asks. She sounds...upset, and for just a minute Maggie imagines her dad brought home a puppy. Maggie wishes they could have a dog again, like they did when she was
little, before she started school. But she doesn’t hear any barking.

“Keep your voice down,” her daddy says. “Where’s Maggie?”

“She’s in her room, asleep,” her mom says. Maggie frowns. She wasn’t sleeping, she was reading—and she told her mom she would be. “What are those?” her mom asks again. “Don’t tell me you bought her-”

“Keep it down,” he asks again.

“Those are death traps!” her mom exclaims. A careful, tentative smile spreads across Maggie’s face. Could her daddy have…

Maggie runs to the living room, where her daddy stands, a big bag in his hands. He looks exasperated at her mom when he sees her, but then he smile down at her.

“Hey Maggie, when’s Christmas?” he asks, coming to a stop in front of her while poorly hiding the box she’s already seen behind his back.

“On Thursday,” she’s quick to reply, feeling a small bud of excitement grow inside her at the look on her daddy’s face. She resists the urge to crane her neck around to try and see what he’s hiding before he wants her to, opting to instead keep her gaze trained on him. She sees a flash of bright red out the corner of her eye. Everything buzzes inside her in, like she swallowed a beehive.

“And today is Monday, but I think you can open this now.” He pulls out the bag—she can see it’s covered in glittering snowflakes now—and hands it over to her. “Your mom ruined the surprise already, so…” He finishes with a small shrug.

Maggie is reverent as she holds the gift in her hands, delicately placing it on the floor beside her. White tissue paper covers the top of the bag. She’s slow and deliberate as she pulls the tissue out one by one, fingers tingling with excitement at what lies beneath. A simple shoe box greets her eyes first, and as she slowly takes it out and then lifts the lid off, she sees a peep of white. Her breath catches in her chest as she pulls out the object.

It’s a pair of creamy white ice skates with white shoelaces and the holes where she’d push the laces through are gold. Maggie swears she’s never seen anything prettier in her life. She carefully places the skate back into its box before promptly launching herself at her daddy, the force of her motion causing him to stumble back with a chuckle.

“I love them!” She squeezes her arms around him as tight as she can, pressing her face into his stomach. “Best Christmas gift ever!” she crows.

Her daddy ruffles her hair, leaning down to drop a kiss atop her head.

“Anything for my princess.”

Maggie spends a good half hour just looking at the skates.

Her mom and daddy disappear inside their room at some point, but Maggie doesn’t even notice, too
in love with the shoes in her hands. They’re really, she thinks, the nicest thing she’s ever had. And then she realizes they’re hers, and she can put them on, and they become the nicest thing she’s ever worn. Her First Communion dress is a sorry second place.

She’s in the living room teetering around in her skates when she hears her parents’ voices coming from their room, a murmur which soon gets increasingly louder. They sound like they’re arguing, and Maggie pauses at that. She doesn’t like when they fight or raise their voices at each other. It feels wrong. She tries to ignore them—and the uncomfortable heavy pit in her stomach.

Despite what she means to do, their words manage to float through the thin walls.

“Pair of skates,” her mom huffs. “And we don't eat meat this month.”

“Did you see her?” her daddy replies. “That girl is so obsessed with those things she won’t notice.”

“But we will,” her mom argues. “She’s going to outgrow them by next winter and you’ll have wasted our money.”

“I bought them a little big, she can stuff the front with cotton now and by next winter they’ll still fit. Besides, she’s already up to your shoulders, she’s probably not gonna grow much taller, the poor thing.”

Maggie frowns. She wants to be tall. She looks down at her skates, and realizes her daddy is right. She can freely wiggle her toes inside. She takes them off and tip toes to her room, intent on finding socks she can stuff the front with so they’re a bit tighter.

She passes by her parent’s room on the way back, and they’re still arguing. But now, instead of ignoring them, Maggie takes a step closer to the half-open door and listens.

“We work too hard for you to be wasting our money like that. You’re spoiling her rotten,” her mom accuses, tone as cutting as Maggie’s ever heard.

“And she deserves every bit of it! That girl’s an angel!” her dad exclaims. “When has she ever done anything bad?”

“Because she doesn't do those things in front of you!”

“Oh, please-”

“It’s like you love her more than me!”

Maggie flinches at her mother’s sudden yell.

“Giorgia, that’s enough woman. Learn when to be quiet,” her dad spits out. “I’m the head of this house, not you.” Maggie holds her breath as she hears him walk around the room. “And don’t you say anything to Maggie about those skates, understood?”

Maggie runs to the living room before either of them come out.

She doesn’t hear her mom’s response, but she thinks she might have agreed, because when she does leave their room and watches Maggie wobbling on the carpet of the living room in her sock-stuffed ice skates, she doesn’t say anything.
That winter, Maggie gets blisters from the amount of time she spends on the frozen pond near her house, scratching the ice with her brand new skates.

By the time she goes back to school, they no longer look new and shiny. There are scuffs all over them, the gold paint has chipped off of the shoelace holes, and they look more grey than white. But she stills loves them. They’re not worth showing off to her classmates, but Maggie does it anyway—her daddy bought them for her. Anne is the only one who tells her they’re cool when Maggie takes them to school.

One afternoon, Anne’s mom drives her to Maggie’s house so they can skate together. Anne’s still look beautiful. She’d never used them. They have fun that afternoon, circling around the pond, and she helps Anne up when she falls. Her mommy watches from the window of their house while Maggie has fun, and she waves when Anne and her mom away leave, but she doesn't come out.

“You really like those things, don’t you?” her mom asks when she comes back inside later that day, when it’s too dark to see. Her daddy is pulling a double shift, and that means he won’t be home until after Maggie’s bedtime.

Maggie nods seriously. “They’re the nicest thing I’ve ever gotten,” she tells her.

“What about the doll I got you for Christmas?”

“She’s nice, too.”

“You’ve barely played with it,” her mom reproaches her. “You're out there sweating all day and getting yourself dirty and wet like a boy.”

Maggie doesn’t answer. She knows it’s not polite, and it won’t do her any good. So she just stands there and looks at a spot on her mother’s forehead to avoid looking in her eyes.

“I don’t know what I did wrong with you, Margaret.” Her mom sighs. “Go get cleaned up for dinner,” she commands, and Maggie runs to her bedroom as fast as she can with the ice skates still tied to her feet.

She takes them off with care, and then takes off layer after layer of clothing. She grabs her shirt and uses it to wipe down the skates until they’re shiny again, even if they’re not very white anymore. She puts them back inside the box they came in before getting dressed again and sitting at the table for dinner.

By the time next winter rolls around, the skates don’t fit anymore.

“Maggie, can you stay after class?”

Maggie looks up at her teacher’s prompting. A few of her classmates snicker, and she swallows the sudden knot in her throat. She doesn’t know what she did.

She nods. Miss Wilbur smiles gently. The boy behind her pokes her on the back, giggling. Maggie
really doesn’t know what she did.

The 10 remaining minutes of class go by slowly, and after the bell rings she gets to watch her classmates run out while she stays sitting like a lamb for the slaughter. She sighs and grabs her backpack before slowly walking up to Miss Wilbur’s desk, willing the slight tremble in her legs to stop.

Miss Wilbur is her favorite teacher in her grade. She always smiles at Maggie when she enters the classroom and praises her when she gets an answer right. And even when she answers incorrectly and some of her classmates laugh, Miss Wilbur doesn’t, she just tells her she’ll do better next time.

So she really hopes she isn’t in trouble.

Last week, Jason was asked to stay after class, and Maggie had seen him come out of the classroom ten minutes later, face dejected and head bowed. She’s not sure what he could have possibly done wrong though. Jason is nice. He’s quiet, and he likes to draw little dogs on the edges of his notebook pages that he lets Maggie look at. In return, she tries to help him with his reading, but he’s still not very good at it. His mom had come to the school to talk to Miss Wilbur yesterday. Maggie doesn’t want to be the next Jason, she doesn’t want her mom to come to the school.

Her feet come to a stop directly in front of the desk, knees almost hitting the scratched, worn wood.

“Did I do something wrong?” The direct route seems best to her, better to not to let it drag out any longer than needed. She’d rather face the punishment now.

“Maggie, no.” Miss Wilbur looks at her straight on, adjusting her glasses. “Sweetie, you’re one of the best students in class.”

“Oh,” she breathes out in relief, a rush of warm pride washing over her and leaving a pleasant tingle behind.

“What I wanted to talk to you about is somewhat related actually.” She opens a creaky drawer, rummaging around in for a moment before pulling out a piece of paper and sliding it over to Maggie. Her eyes quickly scan the page, taking in the information presented. Boys & Girls Club is what she reads at the top.

“It’s an after school program that offers a lot of fun activities for kids. They’ve got theater lessons, dance classes, arts and crafts, and homework help,” her finger stops at each item on the list. “You don’t need the last one though,” Miss Wilbur adds. “But I think you could really benefit from the theater classes. Do you like dance? You’ve got a real flair for performance. You can read out loud so clearly, and the way you recite those poems I send? Oh! You’d be an amazing public speaker. They can help you with all of that.”

“May I?” Maggie asks, gesturing to the paper. Miss Wilbur nods affirmatively, and Maggie picks up the flyer. Underneath the Boys & Girls is more small text which causes her stomach to sink upon reading it. It’s for Lincoln county, and that’s an hour away. But she would really like to go. It sounds more fun than anything has in awhile. And the idea of taking classes solely focused on doing the one thing that makes her feel like she’s soaring miles above fluffy white clouds excites her. She loves reciting poems. She loves telling stories, and she adored that one time they had to act out a small play. She’s never tried to dance, but one of the girls in her class does ballet, and Maggie can’t take her eyes off her when she shows off during recess. It sounds amazing. And too good to be possible.

As if hearing her internal worries, Miss Wilbur chimes in. “I know it’s kind of far away, but your
parents can drive you, maybe?” Miss Wilbur looks at her face, and then continues. “Or perhaps you and your mom can take the bus down to Beatrice and then Lincoln from there? If you bring a good book with you, that hour will fly by.”

Excitement builds in her, threatening to bubble over like one of those liquid volcanoes they’ve made in science class.

“I’ll have to ask my dad first,” she says, and then bites her lip. “But Miss Wilbur…” she looks back down at the paper, running her fingers lightly over the smiling photos of the children. “Do you really think I’d be allowed in?”

“Maggie, sweetie, they let every single kid join in. And you’re not just any kid. I think a place like this would do wonders for you. You’re bigger than all this,” Miss Wilbur says, and Maggie doesn’t know what she means, as she faintly waves at the space. Is she bigger than the classroom? Bigger than the school? Bigger than...Blue Springs?

“Okay...”

“Maggie,” Miss Wilbur reaches out to touch her gently on the elbow. “You’re special.” Maggie smiles. “And you know what the best part is?” she asks, and Maggie shakes her head. “I work part time at the Boys and Girls club in Lincoln, so I’ll be there if you need anything.”

“Really?” she asks, eyes lit up and lips spread in a wide smile. Maggie likes doing new things, but she doesn’t always like meeting new people.

“Yes. So tell your parents, see if you can make it work. I really think it would do you a world of good. All the info about the fees is on the back of the flyer, so just hand that to your mom and dad, okay?”

Maggie nods excitedly.

She leaves the classroom with a spring in her step, feeling as light as a feather.

She’s been walking home on her own since she was 9, and if before she found it scary, now she finds it fun. It’s half an hour of walking if she hurries, but she usually takes her time, unless it’s her daddy’s free day—then she runs.

She runs today.

Because even though her daddy is working, she can’t wait to get home and thoroughly read the flyer scrunched inside her backpack. She wants to tell her mom what Miss Wilbur said, that she’s special, that she’s bigger than all this. Maggie doesn’t understand it, but she knows it would make her mom happy to hear. She wants to tell her daddy, too. He’ll be able to take her, he can do anything.

Maggie gets home in 15 minutes.
“There’s one in Omaha.”

“That’s almost two hours away—”

“But there’s one in Lincoln, too!” Maggie throws her trump card down. She knows her daddy would never agree to Omaha, but Lincoln is a far better bet. “It’s only one hour away. And if you have to work on the weekends then I can get there by bus. I can take the bus down to Beatrice, and get another bus there to Lincoln.”

She takes a breath, mentally patting herself on the back for reciting from memory the speech she’d prepared during the afternoon, while she waited for him to come home. And although she had prepared for this situation, her daddy not being too excited about it like he always was about new things, she hadn’t expected him to be so against her going. That’s her mom’s role, usually. Her daddy is the one who’s always on board with her stuff. But maybe this is like the park a few months ago. He’d been really worried when she wasn’t where he told her to stay—this could be the same thing. She’s a big girl now though, that’s what her mom always tells her. He doesn’t need to worry anymore.

“You’re ten years old Margaret, I don’t want you in a city by yourself,” he daddy says, confirming her suspicions. “And taking so many buses like that.”

“I’d just go to the club and come right back,” she pleads. “And one of my teachers works at the club in Lincoln!” she says, using Miss Wilbur to back her up. “I can ask her to pick me up if you want?”

“Your teacher won’t do that,” he replies, turning around with a deep sigh and running his hand through his hair.

“But she will! She was the one who told me about it! And she said it’s perfect for me.” Maggie doesn’t want to fight her daddy about this, but she also doesn’t want to back down. She wants this, more than she ever wanted ice skates or a puppy even.

Her daddy looks at her dubiously.

“It’s only ten dollars—”

“And we have to pay for it!” Maggie flinches at her dad’s tone. He sounds like her mom, and Maggie has never heard him sound like that. “And how much will the bus be?” he asks, and Maggie is stumped—she doesn’t know. “And every weekend? Maggie, we can’t afford that.”

Her heart sinks. She hadn’t even thought of the bus costs, just the fee for the club, and 10 dollars didn’t sound like a lot in her mind.

“But daddy—”

“Your mom is having a baby.”

Maggie sputters, her brain blanking out at the sudden sentence.

“I—what?”
Her daddy turns back around to look at her, hands resting on his belt, a tired expression in his eyes.

“You’re gonna be a big sister, Maggie.” Her daddy sits down on the couch, gesturing for Maggie to join him. “And with the baby we can’t afford any of what you’re saying.”

“Oh.”

The butterflies in her stomach wilt, one by one. A stifling feeling of loss threatens to pull her under. She’d already imagined everything she might learn and get to do at the club.

“I’m sorry,” she says, not really knowing why. But then she identifies it. She feels...selfish. “I didn’t mean-”

“You don’t have to be sorry, kid,” her dad says, and Maggie believes him, like she always does. But she’s still sorry she won’t get to go to the club, and feeling sorry for herself is somehow worse. But then, a single thought fights its way through the dark clouds of disappointment.

“I’m really gonna be a big sister?” she asks.

She’s never even thought about her mom having another baby, about her getting a little sibling. The thought stops her in her tracks. It’s not something she’d hate. In fact, a glimmer of happiness is born in her, out of the ashes of her dream about all those art and dance lessons, at the thought of a baby sister or brother. She thinks she might like that.

“Yeah,” her daddy says. “Your mom wanted to wait to tell you. She was gonna write it in a note and give it to you as a present and everything.” Her dad says it like he thinks that’s silly. Maggie thinks it would have been nice.

She crosses and uncrosses her ankles, staring at the floor as she thinks. Finally, she looks up at her daddy.

“Is it a boy or a girl?”

A slow smile spreads across her lips, mirroring the one appearing on his face. It’d be nice to have someone else to play with and show the best spots around their house to catch grasshoppers in the summer. She could even help her little sister or brother with their reading, just like she vaguely remembers aunt Gabriella doing with her when she was in first grade.

“We don’t know yet,” her daddy says. “Why? Which one do you want?”

Maggie suddenly knows she doesn’t have to think about it. The answer slips out easily.

“I’d like a sister.”

Her dad nods. “Well, I want a little man.” He chuckles, and pats Maggie on the head as he stands up. “We’ll see who wins, kid.”

Her parents have a fight that night.
The first thing Maggie had done after her conversation with her daddy had been run to her mom and hug her, and then touch her stomach. Maggie hadn’t noticed she was kind of fat, or at least, that there was definitely something hard low in her stomach. She hadn’t hugged her in a while. Her mom had gotten mad about her daddy telling Maggie already, but Maggie had yelled at them to stop as soon as they started. She never raised her voice, but she felt like she had to. Maybe fighting would make the baby upset. Her parents must have thought so, too, because they both had stopped, even her mom.

She thinks if she’s going to be a big sister, she might as well start now.

But as the excitement of the news settles in, later that night as she gets ready for bed, Maggie starts thinking about something she hadn’t given much thought to before.

Money. Or rather the lack of it.

She’d never thought they were...different. That they didn’t have as much as other people. But when she thinks about it, she knows that Molly at her school has two older brothers, and they both go to soccer class in Omaha on Sundays because Molly always complains about having to go watch them play. Molly’s parents can afford to have all 3 of them—she thinks—and pay for classes too. And Maggie can’t join the Boys and Girls club because there’s going to be a new baby in the family. She thinks about those ice skates she had loved so much last year, and about the fight she’d overhead about them. They couldn’t afford those, but her daddy probably bought them just to make her happy. It makes her feel kind of sick in her stomach.

She thinks about her mom complaining about them never getting to go out, and she’d always thought it was about her dad being too busy but now she thinks, what if they can’t afford it? When there’s a sleepover, and Maggie gets invited, her parents always hand her a $5 dollar bill and tell her it’s polite to chip in. Maggie realizes her parents had always walked her to school on the days after every sleepover, and Maggie begins to connect the dots and wonder if they’d used gas money for it.

She thinks about a lot of things as she tries to fall asleep that night. She begins to think that it’s not fair that she doesn’t help them out. And then realizes that if she could, then maybe she could help herself. She could start working to earn some money. She knows Mrs. Jackson, their closest neighbor down the street, has a son who’s just starting 1st grade, and Mrs. Jackson works so she’s usually not home—that’s what she overheard her mom saying to Nonna one day. (Maggie isn’t sure where Mr. Jackson is, maybe they’re un-married too.) Maybe she could babysit him on the weekends or right after school for the two hours it takes for Mrs. Jackson to get back. She’s 10, and he’s 6. He’ll have to listen to her.

Or maybe she could sell some of her lunch. Toby, a boy from her class, had once offered her a quarter if she let him have her Nonna’s lasagna, and she’d agreed to let him try a bite without him paying anything. It had seemed rude to take his money. But now she wonders if it’d be smart. 4 quarters are a dollar, and 2 dollars buy half an hour of ice skating. 10 dollars pays for the inscription fee of the Boys and Girls club. She’s not sure how much the bus is, but she could find out and-

A slight creak breaks through her busy thoughts as her bedroom door opens and her daddy steps inside. Maggie closes her eyes. She knows she should be asleep as soon as the lights are out.

She hears her daddy walk to her window and pull the latch closed, and then she feels him beside her, doing something on her nightstand. Maggie opens one eye and sees him depositing something there. It’s a $20 dollar bill.
“Daddy?”

“You’re awake.”

“What are you doing?”

“That should cover the bus and the inscription, right?” he asks, instead of answering—but his actions are answer enough. Hope flares up in Maggie’s chest, and a smile spreads across her face as she sits up. “And I’m gonna want to talk to that teacher of yours,” her daddy warns. “Ask her to pick you up at the station. And Maggie, when the baby comes, you might have to stop going. You need to help us with the baby-”

Maggie launches herself into her daddy’s arms.

“Thank you.”

Maggie holds her breath as she straightens her back.

She struggles as she tries to position her shoulders in the mirror in front of her just like Jenny—that’s what her dance teacher told her to call them—is showing the class. She extends her left leg and curls her toes over just like Jenny told them to. It kind of hurts her feet, but she figures that’s probably just because she’s new at this. She wishes she could have ballet slippers on like the girl in front beside Jenny, copying her moves for the class to see, but her white socks will have to do.

Not everyone in the class is in proper ballet attire though. Not all of them look like Caroline—she remembers the girl’s name—with her very pink ballet tights, black leotard, and slippers, hair drawn back in a high bun. Some kids in the class wear normal everyday clothes like her: shorts and a comfy shirt.

“Now remember,” the teacher says, “you want to be pulled up like you’re a puppet.”

She draws an imaginary line from her head up to the ceiling and lifts her body up onto her tiptoes as her arm moves upward. Maggie follows her movement, but her ankles wobble as she rises up. She stumbles forward, cheeks flushed with embarrassment and eyes averted from the teacher’s. She hates messing up, but the mistake just makes her want to do better.

Jenny smiles at her. “As our newest student just showed, it can be difficult to stay balanced on relevé.” She walks over to her and touches her elbow gently. “It is alright if I use you to show the class the proper way to do it?”

Maggie nods her head eagerly, only slightly nervous to be the class guinea pig.

She enjoys the one-on-one attention, though. The classroom is cold, but her teacher’s hands are always warm and gentle when she pats Maggie’s head, or positions her arms the right way. She always has a smile on her face, and it’s very, very pretty. Maggie is especially eager to be an example if that means the teacher might like her the best out of the whole class—and if it’ll help her improve faster, of course.

She sees Molly in her mind’s eye again, twirling and leaping on the playground during recess with
a group of girls around her, their attention entirely focused on her. Maggie wants that too. She wants to prove that she’s worth looking at.

“Right,” the teacher nods. “So, in order to balance properly, it’s kind of like playing Jenga, but with your own body parts. You have to make sure everything is stacked up properly so nothing falls over. Let’s start with the shoulders.” She adjusts Maggie’s shoulders, pulling them up and back slightly. “After that, you have to make sure your hips are right underneath your shoulders too. But it’s your stomach that pulls it all together. It has to be firm, like a rock.”

She taps Maggie’s stomach, and a jolt goes through her.

Maggie tries her best to do everything her teacher says, and she must do a good job because after a few moments she steps back, smiling. And suddenly Maggie finds she’s balancing on her own, for just a moment longer than she was able a second ago—a spark of joy shoots through her, lighting up her whole body.

“Good job, Maggie,” the smile on her teacher’s face only makes the one spreading across her own face even bigger.

She loves it here.

Spring gives way to Summer, and her mom balloons with each passing day.

Maggie is equally amazed and weirded out by the process as she watches her stomach get bigger and her cravings get weirder. But Maggie loves how much softer her mom is now.

She wears loose, flowing clothes that blow in the wind instead of her stiff secretary clothes. Maggie will sometimes hear her humming under her breath while she cooks dinner. She even lets her get away with way more stuff than usual, which she especially loves. She tracked dirt into the living room the other day, after playing ball with their closest neighbor’s nephews, and she didn’t even say anything. Maggie wonders if this is how her mom was when she was pregnant with her, and what caused her to change so much after that.

She hopes her mom will stay like this even after her sister is born.

Maggie presses her ear up against her mom’s stomach, trying her hardest to listen for her baby sister. Her mom has been saying that she’s active today, and Maggie wants to see. Silence greets her ears though. She steps back from her mom, looking up at her with a pout.

“I still don’t hear anything.”

Her mom laughs gently, smiling, “and you won’t for a while still, if you can at all. Your father swears he could listen to you, but I’ve always thought he was lying.”

Maggie tries one last time, the large belly no longer foreign to her. She presses one hand carefully to it. Even now, for some reason she expects it to be hard, but it’s soft.

“I have to make dinner now, Margaret. You can try later.”
She wonders what it’ll be like to be a big sister, since it’s been only her for so long. She’s even heard Nonna joke with her mom that she won’t be the apple of her daddy’s eye anymore. Maggie knows her dad’s heart is big enough to love both her and her new sister, though. Meredith at school has an older sister in high school who picks her up after school ends sometimes. Maggie used to watch them with an uncomfortable curl in her stomach, and it’s only recently that she’d realized it was jealousy. She’d wanted what Meredith and her sister have—the teasing, playing, and friendship. And now—she looks over at her mom, standing at the sink washing vegetables—she’ll get that. The thought warms her body all over, more than any furnace or fire could.

She’s not exactly sure what big sisters do, but once she finds out, she’s going to make it her sole mission in life to be the best big sister ever.

“Maggie,” her mom sighs, “if you’re just going to stand there you might as well help with dinner.”

“Right,” she rubs the back of her neck sheepishly. The pregnancy softness only goes so far.

Her mom directs her to the potatoes in the pantry, and Maggie’s body kicks into autopilot, as her mind roams a million miles away. Despite her best efforts, her eyes keep landing back on her mom’s ballooning stomach.

She’s going to be a big sister. She can’t wait.

The studio reeks of sweat, which is only made worse by the heat wave Nebraska is currently facing.

Maggie picks up her bag from the floor, swinging it over her shoulder and walking to the front door. Miss Wilbur greets her with a smile and opens the door for her to begin the short walk to the bus station in Beatrice. It’s an arrangement her daddy and Miss Wilbur had worked out, for when he can’t pick her up from class. Her teacher walks the few blocks to the bus station, and the Maggie takes the bus to Beatrice, and from there, the bus to Blue Springs. She’s done it a few times already, and travelling on the bus by herself is no longer scary.

The sun blinds her for a moment when she steps outside, leaving her vision speckled with black spots.

“Maggie -”

A loud honk cuts off Miss Wilbur’s voice, and Maggie blinks her eyes furiously to see. A blur of blue and white registers in her brain, and it quickly comes into focus to form the image of a police car—a familiar one at that.

“Daddy!”

She rips open the back door, throwing her bag on the chair before hopping into the front seat to ride shotgun—a new thing her daddy has let her do ever since he’s been driving her to and from the boys and girls club, but he made her promise not to tell her mom about it because she’d get mad.

“I thought you couldn’t come today,” she says, hugging him.
“I swapped my shift with Smith,” he says. “Thank you, m’am,” he says, and Maggie looks up from his chest to see him waving at Miss Wilbur.

“It’s no problem, Maggie is a sweetheart.”

Maggie smiles to herself, pleased. She waves at Miss Wilbur before she goes back inside the building.

“How was class today?” her daddy asks, waiting for her to buckle in.

“We started doing jumps today, daddy, and Miss Jenny said mine were the highest, even though I’m the smallest in class,” she rushes out in one breath in her excitement to tell him about her day. It makes her feel important, like an adult, like how her mom will ask her daddy the same question when he gets home at the end of the day. But daddy actually looks interested in what she has to say, not like her mom whenever she watches them—eyes peeking out over the top of her book.

He reaches across the console to squeeze her knee. “Of course you’re the best in class. You’re a Caivano.”

“Theater class was cancelled today because the teacher for it is sick, but she’ll be there next week. That’s the one I’m waiting for the most.”

“Why? You gonna be a big Hollywood actress one day?” he laughs, but Maggie doesn’t—the idea gives her pause. The possibility had never even crossed her mind. Whenever people asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, she’d always told them she wanted to help people and be a cop just like her daddy. Most people never take her seriously when she’d tell them that, but that’d never dampened her resolve. But now...Maggie thinks of going to the movie theater with her Nonna on Saturday afternoons, head craned up to see the giant screen. She thinks of getting lost in the fantastical world of Harry Potter and wishing she could somehow transport herself to live in that universe.

She thinks of that rush of excitement she feels every time she performs in front of people—the weightlessness lifting her to new heights.

Getting to experience that every day, and be paid for it too, would be beyond her wildest dreams, but it sounds too impossible. She’s never even been outside of Nebraska. Her teacher and daddy tell her she’s a good performer, and Maggie knows they wouldn’t lie to her, but could it be enough? And she....she looks nothing like any of the girls she sees on television. They’re all tall, blonde and blue eyed with pale, creamy white skin. Maggie knows she doesn’t look like that. There’s also the matter of money. She’s not sure how much it’d cost to go to Hollywood, where all the stars are, but she knows it’s a lot of money—way more than how much she spends on the bus every weekend. They’re studying the American landscape in Geography class, and Maggie knows a bus from Nebraska to California would take ages. She briefly thinks about her aunt Gabriella—she lives in Los Angeles. Maybe instead of her visiting them for winter break, they could all go to her, and Maggie could make a movie.

“Do you really think I could do that, daddy?” she asks, as he starts the car and they make their way back to Blue Springs.

“I think you can do whatever you set your mind to.”

Maggie smiles, letting her head fall against the car door. A cool breeze washes over her sweat stained forehead, and her eyes close to the lull of the humming car.
Her daddy’s words echo in her mind.

Francesca is born in the fall.

Her mom doubles over one morning while she makes breakfast, clutching at her large stomach, and Maggie knows to run to her parent’s bedroom to get the bags—one for her baby sister and one for her mom. She loads them in the back of her dad’s car, and after her dad helps her mom in, she watches them drive away. Maggie goes back inside and turns all the pans off.

Half an hour later, Nonna is dropped off at their house by a car she’s never seen before, and Nonna tells her she hitchhiked her way to the house. Maggie was told at school getting in stranger’s cars is dangerous, but she thinks it’s such a small town maybe no one is really a stranger.

She and Nonna spend the morning watching TV and waiting for news, and around 11 they get a call from her daddy telling them that her mom has a hospital room and they’re waiting for the baby. Maggie hopes for it to be fast after then, but it’s not. She eats Nonna’s Alfredo pasta for lunch, and then she works a bit on her homework. She’s finished before they gets any news, and she plays with her ball inside —which her mom hates— until it gets dark. It’s nice spending the day with Nonna, but she misses her daddy, and her mom, and she can’t get to meet the baby.

She falls asleep around 2am that night, still waiting for news.

Maggie sits up in bed somewhere around 8 AM, bypassing the waking up process completely.

She springs up and jumps out of bed, running to the living room to see if her parents are home already. They aren’t. Nonna sits at the table, a cup of coffee in front of her, and Maggie wonders if she slept at all. She climbs into the chair beside her, eyes wandering around the room. It’s quiet except for the relentless, steady tick of the clock in the kitchen.

“What do you say?”

“Huh?” She turns her head toward her grandma.

“You just woke up, what do we say?”

“Oh! Good morning.”

“Good morning, sweetheart,” she says. Maggie looks to the door and huffs. Nonna chuckles. “Patience, Margherita,” she says, using what Maggie knows is the Italian version of her name. “These things take time.”

Maggie looks at her grandma, and she nods, but it doesn’t change anything. She’s too impatient. The house is too quiet. But soon enough, it will be filled with noise and new life. She knows babies are loud and cry a lot, but oddly enough she doesn’t think she’ll mind it too much. It’s just not
happening fast enough.

Nonna stands up and tells her she’ll fix some toast and tea for her. Maggie doesn’t know how she always knows what she wants before even Maggie herself knows, but she’s grateful for it. She bounces her leg up and down on the chair, causing the table to jerk slightly at her motions. The surface of Nonna’s coffee ripples under Maggie’s watchful gaze.

She pulls her eyes up to the clock, trying to will the little hand to move by faster.

Her toast is buttered up and crunchy almost to the point of burnt just how she likes it. Nonna surprisingly lets her watch TV while she eats, and she sits with her legs curled up beneath her on the couch. The addition of another member to their family seems to be throwing everybody off center—even herself. She barely pays attention to the National Geographic channel and the cute baby elephants bathing on the screen. All she can think about is when her parents will get home with her new baby sister.

Finally, just before it gets dark, and as Maggie is helping Nonna wash their dishes from dinner, she hears the faint sound of a car driving up to their house. She almost fumbles the plate in her hand in her haste to dry it off as quickly as possible, but Nonna doesn’t notice because she’s already hurrying out the door. Maggie follows suit, depositing the plate on the counter, and running past her grandma’s slower steps out the door into their driveway.

Her daddy gets out of the car first, looking tired but happy, and walks over to get the door for her mom. Her movements are slow as she gets out, holding a small bundle wrapped in a light pink blanket.

Maggie’s body jolts to a standstill, but then her she feels her legs start to move forward—only to be stopped by a warm hand on her shoulder.

“Why don’t you wait inside for us all,” Nonna places her other hand on her shoulder, turning her body back around to the house. “We don’t want to crowd her.”

Maggie feels a protest spring up on the tip of tongue, but she swallows it down, complying with her grandma’s wishes. But it doesn’t stop her from pressing her face up against the cool glass window, eyes wide and bright as she watches Nonna greet her new sister. Finally, they all traipse into the house, and her mom walks right over to her, looking happier than she’s ever seen her.

“Her name is Francesca,” she says, showing her the bundle in her arms. She’s small, downright tiny, with a pink face and a tuft of dark hair on her head.

“Her full name is Francesca Margaret,” her daddy says. Maggie looks up.

“Like me?”

Her daddy nods, and pulls her into a hug. “Exactly like you.”

Maggie hovers around her mom as she walks around the house, marveling over the tiny scrunched up face swaddled in pink. The large bulge in her mom’s stomach is now a living breathing human being. She’s read about this in science class, but nothing could’ve prepared her for seeing it happen in real life.

When her Nonna tells her it’s the miracle of life, Maggie believes her. It does feel like a miracle. Like magic.
Her mom goes to bed after putting Francesca down on the crib inside their bedroom. Her dad goes to the station after lunch, saying he has missed too much work already. Maggie wishes he could stay.

She tiptoes into her parent’s bedroom, and spends a lot of time looking at her, not daring to touch her. She’s so small and fragile looking—precious, would be the work her English teacher would use.

Soft footsteps behind her alert her to Nonna walking into the room. She comes up behind Maggie, her warmth spreading across her back, and Maggie thinks she could stay like this forever, sandwiched between her Nonna and her new baby sister with the afternoon sun streaming through the window. Even the dust particles visible in the rays of light seem mesmerizing.

“Maggie,” Nonna turns her around by the shoulders. “You understand how big an honor it is to have someone named after you, don’t you?”

Maggie shakes her head. She hasn’t given it much thought beyond the initial bubble of excitement that her parents used her name for Francesca’s middle name.

“It means she’ll have you to look up to. You’ll be her role model.” Her Nonna taps her chin. “Means you have to protect her. That’s your job now. You’re her big sister.”

Maggie nods solemnly. “You promise, don’t you?” Her Nonna asks.

“I promise.”

Maggie holds Francesca as much as she’s allowed to. After a few weeks, when she shows her parents that she won’t drop her, they trust her enough to carry her around the house. She’s so very tiny.

Her hands are so small she can only wrap them around two of Maggie’s fingers at once, and her tiny fingers have even tinier fingernails. She never liked babies much, they were always loud at church and she was sure their diapers stank, but she likes her sister.

Her mom changes all of her diapers anyway, Maggie only holds her when she’s happy or when she needs to be burped.

Nonna moves in with them to help with Francesca, too, while her parents are working.

She actually tells Maggie that they had lived together before. In her house on the hill for a few months after Maggie was born, before they bought their house. Maggie wishes she remembered that.

Her daddy assembles Nonna’s bed on the other side of Maggie’s room, and Maggie doesn’t mind
sharing at all. She knew she was going to be sharing with Francesca already, and she likes the idea. It can get awfully quiet at night, and when she can’t sleep every branch sounds like a monster. Now, she won’t ever have to be by herself again.

Nonna stays home with Francesca while her parents are working and Maggie is at school.

It only takes her a few days to get used to the new routine, and then she doesn’t remember what it was like before Francesca was born and Nonna lived with them. The house is so much louder now and Maggie likes that. After she gets out of school she runs home, and she helps her grandma take care of Francesca during the afternoon, until her parents get home.

This afternoon, her grandma takes a nap on her bed, while Maggie plays with Francesca on her own bed. Nonna already fed her and burped her, but she’s still awake, and Maggie grabs her little hands and feet and laughs when Francesca—who’s gotten chubby now—kicks her feet at her.

“You’re so much fatter now,” she tells her. “It’s not a bad thing, Nonna says babies should be fat. Do you even know you’re a baby?” Maggie asks. Francesca drools. Maggie smiles. She likes talking to her, and she does it in her normal voice, not a shrill, high voice like her mom does.

“Huh, Francesca?” she asks. The baby looks the other way. Maggie frowns as she picks her up and sits her against her legs, holding her up with her hands. She can hold her own head now, but she still doesn’t know how to sit. “You know, nobody calls me Margaret. It’s too long. Francesca is long, too. Would you like a nickname?”

Francesca reaches for a piece of her hair and tugs. Maggie softly pries it out of her tiny, tight fist.


Franky drools, and Maggie thinks that’s as good a sign as any.

Her parents get home from work early that day, and Maggie rushes to the front door, ready to update them on Franky’s status. Her daddy told her both she and Nonna were in charge of her, and it’s a task she takes seriously, one she has to as Franky’s appointed protector.

“Franky is asleep in her crib,” she says by way of greeting as her daddy and mom take off their shoes in the front hall.

“Franky?” her mom asks, frowning.

“Francesca is too long,” Maggie explains, shrugging slightly. Her mom hangs her coat on the rack, the frown on her face only deepening. Maggie doesn’t like when she looks this, she’s normally so pretty, and the wrinkle between her eyebrows and the downturn of her lips ruins that.

“Her name is Francesca, I named her that for a reason,” her mom says, voice terse. And out of the corner of her eye, Maggie sees her daddy roll his eyes. He catches her gaze for a second and shares a small smile. It takes everything in her to stifle the laugh tickling her throat. Her daddy understands her, he always does.
“Yes, because your mother told you to,” he chimes in before walking over to Maggie and leaning down to kiss her forehead. “I like Franky.”

“It sounds like a boy’s name,” her mom complains.

“I like Franky,” her daddy repeats, and then the discussion is over.

Maggie’s eyes fly open, her body seemingly knowing exactly what day it is.

Instead of leaping out of bed like she normally would, however, she just slips further under her covers, burrowing into her mattress. She’s not celebrating her birthday this year. Her mom had told her earlier in the week that she was too old for parties now. There’s no cake this year, not even homemade, no presents, nothing.

If this is what growing up is like, Maggie isn’t sure she likes it.

Maggie flings the covers off her body abruptly, sitting up straight. She can’t stay in bed all day. She has class at the boys and girls club today (and that’s looking like the only highlight of her birthday).

She trudges to the kitchen, yawning widely.

“Maggie,” her mom’s sharp voice cuts through her morning fog. “Close your mouth when you yawn, and be quiet getting breakfast, Franky is sleeping.”

Maggie smiles involuntarily at the use of the nickname she came up with. Despite her mom’s earlier complaints, she eventually joined the entire family in calling her little sister by the name. She tiptoes over to the table, bending down to kiss Franky lightly on her sleeping head—enjoying the sweet smell only babies have.

“What’s for breakfast,” she asks in a whisper, leaning back and smiling at her sister’s scrunched up sleeping face.

“I didn’t have time to make anything so you’ll have to do with cereal or toast.”

“Oh. Okay.”

In the past, her mom had always made her some sort of hot breakfast for her birthday—chocolate chip pancakes, waffles with sliced bananas on top, and her personal favorite: croissants and Italian hot chocolate. That’s gone now though, along with everything else she used to do on this day. Her mood drops, and she turns around to survey the small kitchen for something to eat.

“You must be thinking about something serious with that expression on your face,” her daddy chuckles from behind her.

“I’m just trying to-“ she stops as her eyes land on the small paper bag in his hand, a doughy, icing covered pastry peaking out. Her eyes light up. “Is that for...”

“It’s your birthday, of course it is.” Her daddy scoffs, and her spirits rise with each word falling from his mouth. “Happy birthday, Maggie.”
Out of the corner of her eye, she sees her mom gaping at their exchange, as if she’d completely forgotten it’s her birthday—but she wouldn’t do that, Maggie thinks. She’s not...entirely sure. She’s slowly come to realize there’s a distance between her mom and herself, especially compared to her daddy. She’s a daddy’s girl, that’s what she’s heard her Nonna say. But that doesn’t mean her mom loves her any less, or that she doesn’t love her in return. Her mom just shows her love in other, stricter, ways—and sure, sometimes it feels like swinging on jungle gym bars trying to please her mom, but that’s not bad. It’s just...different.

“You shouldn’t be giving her so much sugar,” her mom huffs out at her daddy. Maggie pauses her hand, pastry already halfway to her mouth—eyes darting back and forth between her parents.

“Giorgia, it’s her birthday.”

Her mom only shrugs, waving him off, but Maggie takes that as a sign of approval and bites into the dough—strawberry jelly, sweet and tangy, gushing over her tongue.

Maybe the day won’t be so bad after all.

She arrives early at the boys and girls club, as usual.

She doesn’t like to be late. She’s not the only one who came early today though. Some of her friends are lolling about the waiting area through the glass doors, and her feet speed up, eager to join them.

The room falls deathly quiet as she enters, causing her steps to falter. But then Jessica springs up from her chair, bounding over to her and grabbing her hands.

“Maggie,” her serious tone is opposite her near vibrating body. “We heard from Miss Wilbur that today is your big day, and we wanted to do something special for you,”

“Yeah!” another voice chimes in. “You always help me with my turns. You’re the best.”

Maggie feels an odd heat rush over her body, prickling her skin almost uncomfortably, that radiates most from her cheeks.

“We all chipped in to buy it,” one of the boys says, walking forward with small plastic container in his hand. She takes it in her hand carefully, smile wide and both dimples present as she looks down at a large, rainbow sprinkled cupcake.

“I...uh...” She’s at a loss for words as she feels all their eyes on hers. It’s easy to talk when she’s thought about what to say, but now, it’s harder. “Thank you,” she settles for, and turns to look at each person in the newly formed circle around her. She’s not sure if she should hug them all or shake their hands like her daddy does when he runs into people he knows on the street. Her decision is made for her by the shouts from the group telling her to eat the cupcake before class begins.

Jessica stops her, wondering out loud if they have any candles. They don’t, and Maggie is still not allowed to handle fire, but maybe that will change now that she’s 11. They decide to sing her Happy Birthday anyway. When they’re done, one of the boys tells her she’s entitled to make a wish
for every year, and that seems more palatable to Maggie than a single wish per birthday, so she takes it to heart.

There’s no candle but Maggie pretends to blow it out in her mind.

Most of her wishes are for Franky.

The summer of 2006 is dry, hot, and dusty.

Maggie gets her period that summer.

She only knows what it is because of natural sciences class at school, and she only knows to ask for pads because Molly had gotten her period a few months ago, and she’d shown the other girls the brightly colored packages that they all giggled when they held, huddled together in a corner of the girl’s bathroom.

She tells Nonna, her cheeks flaming, and her grandma goes into their parent’s bedroom and comes out with a purple package. She hands it without looking at her, ushering her into the bathroom. When her parents come home, Maggie hears them whispering in the other room. Her dad acts like nothing is different. Her mom and her don’t really talk about it, but she pats Maggie on the cheek when she sees her, and that’s it.

Her grandma, however, does talk.

Nonna explains all she already heard at school, about how it happens because her body gets ready to welcome a baby every month, plus more stuff that she didn’t hear at school. Stuff about being a lady now, not a child, and how there are things she’s old enough to hear about. She tells Maggie that periods are God’s punishment for all women because Eve bit into the apple when she wasn’t supposed to (Maggie thinks it’s just downright unfair her stomach has to hurt—her mom tells her it’s cramps—because of what Eve chose to do). She says that this means Maggie can be a mom now, and Maggie tells her grandma the truth: she can’t, she’s 11. But Nonna still tells her how she needs to preserve her purity until marriage because it’s what God wants. (Maggie isn’t entirely sure what any of that means. What purity? She’s always dirty, as her mom often tells her.) And then Nonna talks about how she’s going to be thankful for the periods she’s decided she hates when she gets married to a nice man and has his babies.

Maggie wishes she could stop thinking about it but she can’t.

The following afternoon, she helps Nonna with Franky as usual, but her thoughts are anything but. She ruminates over what Nonna said, and as she bounces Franky on her hip, she imagines the future. What if Franky wasn't her sister, but her daughter. What if she was married to some man and had his babies and stayed at home taking care of them until he came home from work. (That’s what her Nonna says a perfect life would be like)

The idea makes her stomach hurt.
Franky’s first real word comes a few weeks before her first birthday.

Her dad says Franky will speak when she’s ready, while her mom is always trying to get her to say something, slowly saying the names of everything she touches. Maggie doesn’t bother her sister. She believes her dad, she’ll speak when she’s ready.

Ready ends up being a normal afternoon, right after they have lunch.

Her mom is holding Franky, when suddenly she starts kicking and squirming, and saying something over and over again. The usual senseless babble gives way to words, a word in particular that they can all understand.

“Was that mommy?” her mom asks. “Did you say mommy, Franky?”

Maggie’s dad shakes his head.

“She’s saying Maggie.”

She doesn't get to go to the Boys and Girls club that summer, and it’s an entire 3 months where Maggie does nothing but help her parents around the house, get her Nonna to tell her stories, play ball with some of the kids down the street, and get Franky to say her name.

Middle school is different than elementary school, in that Maggie has a locker now, and she has to walk from class to class, but also that everyone seems to have crushes.

It was pretty much a rule at her old school that boys hung out with boys and girls hung out with girls, Maggie being the rare exception who was sometimes allowed to play ball with the boys during recess, but in 6th grade...it’s different.

It all starts when Molly drops her books on the first day of class, and Drew picks them up for her, and it spirals from there. During the second week of class, everyone says they’re dating. Maggie thinks it’s weird.

Molly is probably the prettiest girl in their year, but Drew always smells like sausages, and she just doesn’t get it.

“Don't you have a crush on anyone?” Leah asks, and Maggie shakes her head. She’d met Leah last year, after the girl just walked up to her one day on the playground and declared that they’d be friends. She’d just moved to Blue Springs, and Maggie had been chosen for some reason for the part that she needed. Leah can be bossy like that, but Maggie doesn’t mind too much. She’s always nice to her, and she likes the way her red hair looks in the sun.
“You’re lying,” Leah accuses. “Come on, please, tell me.”

“I don’t,” Maggie continues to insist. She’s never thought about it. It’s stupid.

“Maggie,” Leah whines.

“I don’t think I even know what that feels like.”

“It’s like butterflies in your stomach. Or like a zap of something right here.” Leah touches two fingers to the pit of her stomach, right below the training bra her mom and Nonna took her to buy before school started. Maggie swallows.

She steps away from Leah’s fingers.

“I don’t..think so,” she says.

But then she remembers her ballet instructor last year, and how she had felt when she so much as smiled her way, or touched her elbow. It sounds just like what Leah is describing, but Maggie knows there’s something wrong with it. She was a woman, for one. She can't possibly have a crush on a girl, can she?

“I’m your best friend,” Leah states, planting her feet in front of Maggie. “You have to tell me.”

Maggie feels a smile spread across her face at the name, as a pleasant warmth fills her stomach. She likes that Leah calls herself her best friend. She’s always had friends, but having a best friend feels like...more. She’s not sure what of, but it’s nice.

“Let me think about it,” she finally concedes, and smiles at the whoop Leah lets out.

Maggie thinks of all the boys in her class, and then the boys in 7th grade. She’s never looked at them twice, nor felt all those nice things Leah mentioned for any of them, but she knows it’s what she’s supposed to do, so she resolves to do it, and give Leah—her best friend—what she wants.

They haven’t been at school for very long, but a few faces pop into her head.

She picks one almost at random—Brandon, a boy a year ahead of them that her daddy mentioned during dinner one night. He’s the son of one of her daddy’s coworkers, and her daddy likes his dad, although Maggie has never met either of them in person.

She decides right then and there he’s the boy she’s going to have a crush on.

“Brandon,” she says.

“I knew it!” Leah tells her, and the answer seems to satisfy her.

She hooks her arm on Maggie’s, and together they make their way towards the classroom.

They do a Secret Santa in their class that year, and Maggie gets Molly.

She has a week to put together the present before she’s supposed to deposit it in the Christmas sock
they’ll hang from each of their desks, and Maggie thinks that’s not enough. She spends the better half of the week thinking about what to make her, and then realizes that would be lame, and resolves to buy her something. Molly deserves it. She gave Maggie a tub of lipgloss for her 12th birthday a couple months ago, and she’s always nice, even though she’s been sad lately.

Drew and her are no longer dating, and Maggie knows that Molly has been down about it. They only talk briefly, they’re not really close friends, but it doesn’t take a genius to figure out she’s beating herself up over it. It makes Maggie inexplicably mad. Molly is sweet, kind to everyone and also such a pretty dancer—Leah calls her a show off—and she doesn’t deserve to look so sad over some boy. If she was Drew, she would’ve never broken up with Molly. If she was a boy...she would offer to carry her bags every day, and go to her ballet academy just to watch her practice, and try to make her smile every morning. But she’s not. She’s just her Secret Santa.

She decides to write her a letter that might cheer her up, and misses a weekend of her dance and theater lessons at the Boys and Girls club so she can use the bus money to buy her a chocolate. It’s a good sacrifice.

The day finally comes to deposit their gifts on their respective socks, and Maggie positively buzzes as she drops her in Molly’s sock when she’s not looking.

Molly looks excited when she reads her card, and she shows the chocolate to all the girls in the class, including Maggie herself. She’s proud of her idea. Miss Davis gives them the chance to present their gifts to the class one by one, and then see who their Secret Santa was by having them raise their hand.

Molly’s row is last, but Maggie waits patiently. When the time finally comes to reveal who the Secret Santas were, and Maggie raises her hand when it’s Molly’s turn to stand up—half the classroom laughs.

“Kids, stop,” Miss Davis says, trying to quiet down the snickers. “Maggie was very kind.”

Maggie lets her hand drop down, no longer feeling proud of her accomplishment.

“Did you say thank you, Molly?” Miss Davis asks.

“Thank you,” Molly says, but she looks like she’d rather die.

Maggie walks with Leah during lunch hour, their steps slow unlike everyone else rushing to get to the cafeteria.

Neither of them is going to buy deep fried corn dogs and french fries the school has started selling. Leah’s parents don’t let her eat junk food, and Maggie doesn’t have the pocket money after buying Molly’s gift. She brought her own lunch anyway.

“I still don’t get it,” Maggie says, mostly thinking out loud. Leah turns to look at her, and holds open the door of the cafeteria so Maggie can pass through.

“Get what?” Leah asks, and Maggie feels an unknown stab of fear as she says it out loud. It’s silly. She has nothing to be scared of.
“Why Molly acted like that,” she tells Leah, as they walk to their usual seats on the far corner of the cafeteria.

“Maggie,” Leah says, looking around before sitting down. “She thought it was from someone who liked her,” Leah says, her voice dropping to a whisper. She goes so far as to roll her eyes, and Maggie swallows the uncomfortable knot in the pit of her stomach. “You called her pretty,” Leah says, and it sounds like an accusation. “I mean I like her dresses too, but I wouldn't have written it like that because she really thought the letter was from someone who had a crush on her. That’s why people laughed.”

“But...what if I did?”

Leah gives her an odd look. “What? Have a crush on her?”

Maggie nods.

“Are you kidding?” Leah bites out. “Don't say things like that.” She shakes her head as she pulls out her lunch, and Maggie mimics her, her mood soured. “Sometimes you're really strange Maggie.”

The topic quickly passes, and they start talking about the math homework they were supposed to do, but every once in a while she sneaks a peek up at Leah to see what she’s thinking. She eyes Maggie weirdly, like she’s waiting for her to do or say something she doesn’t agree with.

Maggie feels like she’s done something wrong.

Winter break creeps on Maggie surprisingly quickly.

Time seems to move faster the older she gets. She’s doing the assigned reading over break, arms propped up on a pillow as she lays on the ground, when her Nonna walks in. Her parents are both out today running errands, so it’s just her, Nonna, and Franky—but her sister is napping (she does that a lot).

Her grandma is the smartest person Maggie knows, after her daddy, and Leah’s confusing words from a few weeks surface in her mind again. Maggie’s own confusion at what her feelings might be haven’t left her alone, and she’s spent most of the break so far reading and thinking about it.

“Nonna?” Maggie rolls over and sits up, legs criss cross beneath her. “What happens if a girl has a crush on a girl?”

“And where did you hear of something like that,” Nonna puts her own book down and fixes a serious gaze on her, “pray tell?”

Maggie shrugs. “At school...?” she lies, sensing that if she told her grandma it had been her own idea she’d be in trouble.

“I don't know what’s wrong with kids these days.” She shakes her head disapprovingly. “It’s those cellphones, I know it is.” She clicks her tongue. “Your parents have you too sheltered. You should watch the news, see what that sort of people are trying to do with this country…. ” Nonna leans
down, placing her forearms on her knees so she can look Maggie straight in the eyes. “Listen Margherita. Only one thing awaits women like that, and it’s hellfire. Don’t let your parents hear you talk about those hideous things. And don’t be friends with whoever you heard it from, okay?”

A rock seems to sink in her stomach, the sudden weight making her want to throw up. Maggie tries to swallow, but her throat suddenly feels tight, the air in the room too thin. Outside, a snowfall begins to coat the bare trees. Inside, her little sister naps, and Maggie’s world cracks with a hairline fracture.

She nods, keeping eye contact with Nonna.

“Good,” she says firmly, and sits back up.

Maggie focuses her attention back on her book, but the words blur in front of her eyes.

The cold air bites her face as she trudges through the snow to the school doors. Winter has been mild this year, and Maggie had decided to walk the 30 minutes to school even though her dad offered to drive her.

She feels way colder inside anyways.

As she walks through the hallway towards her locker, she notices a few pointed stares from her fellow classmates. She spots Molly at her own locker just a few down from her own, but she quickly averts her eyes, making an effort not to look at her. She wishes she had never given her that chocolate. She didn’t even know it would be weird, that it was wrong, but she feels it now, and she hates it. She should’ve just gone to her theater class and not been that stupid.

The days go by, and people forget. By Friday that week it’s like Secret Santa never happened, but Maggie isn’t the same. A spark of curiosity has been lit in her brain, now that she knows and has an inkling that she might be different. She doesn’t forget.

She tries not to look at Molly for the rest of the school year.

She’s not even mad, she’s just hurt. She had liked her, even if they didn’t talk a lot. Her smile is pretty and she’s a beautiful dancer, and Maggie realizes with a start that she never wanted to be like her. She just...liked her. She couldn’t help the way she stared when she walked by, her blond hair bouncing in a ponytail.

Her grandma’s words resonate in her head, and Maggie forces herself not to look at her anymore. She resorts to only talking to Leah, and sometimes Roy, a boy from their class.

As the year draws to a close however, Leah talks to her less and less. They stop sitting by themselves, and join the bigger groups, sitting with all the girls in the class. Maggie tries to participate, but she’s never liked talking to so many people at once. She doesn’t mind reading a poem in front of the class, or performing in front of the kids at the Boys and Girl’s club. She’s in control then. She knows what to do. But here...as all the girls laugh and scream and talk, Maggie feels like she doesn’t fit in. When not even Leah answers her, she feels invisible. She still tries to be friends with them, but more often than not she takes her lunch on the far edge of the table, there but not really.
On the last day of 6th grade, Maggie spends recess with only Roy. He’s funny, and nice, and he brings his ball to school everyday so Maggie can play with it, because after her last one deflated, her mom wouldn’t let her daddy buy her a new one. She likes him, but she still misses Leah.

As they leave after their last class, everyone excited about the prospect of summer, Leah happily bounces around the classroom, hugging all her friends—but Maggie isn’t included.

Maggie wonders what happened to them being best friends.

School lets out for the summer, and Maggie finds herself spending most of her free time with Roy.

He lives on the other side of town, but he doesn't have a dad and his mom doesn't mind where he goes, so he’s almost always around. He’s a year younger than her at 11, but the fact that he is a boy has her dad narrowing his eyes whenever he comes around. She tells her daddy they’re friends, that she’d never like a boy, and he chuckles and kisses her forehead. “Still my little girl,” he says, and Maggie is pleased. But more and more she begins to think maybe she means what she’s saying, in a way that her dad doesn’t understand. Could she ever like a boy? The way Molly liked Drew?

She’s not sure of anything, apart from the fact that she feels different. But her summer is so busy she pushes it down, where she doesn’t have to think about it.

She and Roy go fishing to a lake by her house, and he teases her when she has to throw the fish back because she can't bear to see it die. He asks her to go hunting with him and his uncle when he visits, but Maggie refuses to. She can’t imagine shooting a defenseless animal for fun. It’s perhaps the one thing she doesn’t like about Roy.

She likes everything else.

He’s funny. He makes her laugh so hard she snorts and her stomach hurts. Apart from daddy and Franky—when she misuses a new word she’s learned—nobody makes her laugh like that. He plays soccer with her, and football, and he doesn’t care about hurting her when he has to tackle her. He feels like a best friend, even if they don’t say it, more than Leah ever did.

Maggie tries to have a crush on him. She tries really, really hard. But it’s nothing like what she felt in school before summer break.

His hair isn't soft like Molly’s, and even though her Nonna called him dashing, Maggie can’t see it. He’s not pretty the way Molly was pretty. He doesn’t smell sweet like she did, because she was allowed to wear her mom’s perfume to school. He smells like dirt and sweat, and the only reason Maggie doesn’t mind it’s because when they’re playing, she probably smells the same.

And Maggie would never, in a million years, want to kiss Roy.

But she’s imagined...things.

She’s imagined Molly not getting mad over her card, not getting disappointed it was Maggie and not some boy, and instead thanking Maggie for spending her bus money on her chocolate. She’s imagined Molly rewarding her with a kiss.
Maggie starts to think about hellfire.

As Franky careens into turning two years old, she doesn't listen to anyone but Maggie.

Secretly, Maggie likes it that way—although she’d never tell her mom. It makes her feel important. Whenever Franky has a tantrum, she’s the person to call to reason with her, as much as a toddler can be reasoned with.

Maggie stretches in bed for a few moments, and then relaxes, the knowledge that it’s the weekend, that it’s summer, seeping into her every bone. Suddenly, there’s a quiet whine. She sits up, eyeing the crib a mere two steps in front of her bed. Franky is up, kneeling in her crib, her hands clutching the bars like a tiny prisoner. Maggie chuckles to herself. Franky blinks her eyes slowly, eyes focusing on Maggie now that she sees she’s awake. She stands up.

She knows how to get out of her crib now, but Maggie puts her hand up.

“Don’t. You’re gonna hurt yourself.”

Franky raises her arms. “Up! Up!”

Maggie sighs, but as Franky bounces on the balls of her feet, she chuckles.

“Shhh,” she tells her, briefly glancing at the other bed in the room, where their grandma sleeps.

“Maggie, up!”

Maggie takes her out of her crib, hoisting her up on her hip, and then walks back to bed. It’s summer, but the mornings are still chilly.

Franky curls up around her under the sheets, and Maggie rubs her back, hoping this Saturday is one of those Saturdays where she’s tired and goes back to sleep.

“Maggie.”

“Yeah?”

“Maggie…”

“Go back to sleep,” she tells her softly. Franky listens. Clenching and unclenching Maggie’s nightgown in her small fist, she slowly falls back to sleep. Nonna snores on the other side of the room.

Some mornings Franky wakes up crying for their mom, but when she wakes up like this, she always calls for Maggie to get her out.

Maggie thinks about who she loves, and Franky comes out on top. She feels almost guilty when she thinks about it, but she loves her even more than she loves her dad, and before Franky learned to speak, she loved him more than anyone. But she hadn't counted on what having a sister would be like. Franky toddles after her whenever she’s doing anything, trying to copy her. She asks Maggie for water, and—most of the time—listens when Maggie asks her to stop crying so she can fix
whatever is wrong.

She sees how Roy is with his sister, who’s 6 and goes to the elementary school they all went to. She walks with them until they pass by the building, and then Roy drops her off, handing her her backpack and her lunchbox and telling her to, “behave, dummy”.

His sister always looks miffed, and sticks her tongue out to him before she grabs her stuff and runs to her friends. Roy is always saying she’s a pain in his ass, but Maggie doesn't believe him. She knows he doesn't have to carry her lunchbox and backpack all the whole way.

She can’t wait ‘til Franky is that age, and she actually gets to teach her stuff.

She won’t be like Roy, and call her a dummy. She’ll teach her to be a badass and help her with her homework. They’ll be friends. They already are, sort of. She knows Franky loves her, and when Maggie thinks about the future—about being older, an adult—about her parents getting old, she sees Franky there. Even after Nonna is gone, after her parents are gone, her sister will be there.

Maggie scoots away, looking at Franky’s sleepy brown eyes.

“Franky?” Her little sister looks up, her thumb making its way into her mouth as she dozes. Maggie clears her throat and lowers her voice. “Would you love me anyways if I liked girls the way I’m supposed to like boys?”

Franky just stares at her, eyes blinking owlishly as she fights sleep. Maggie’s throat feels tight.

Maggie hugs her, seeking solace in the purest person she knows. Franky, always sweet, hugs her back.

Maggie hopes the answer is yes.

The school bell rings, alerting Maggie to the start of first period.

It’s the first day of school, the official start of 7th grade, and her body buzzes with nerves. She stares up at the building, the sign reading Southern Middle School bringing back memories of how embarrassed she felt, how hurt, just a few months ago during Secret Santa. Like clockwork, Roy jogs up to her, and Maggie is thankful for the reminder that things are going to be different this year. She’s done being stupid, and Roy is really her best friend, and things are going to be fine. He falls in in step beside her as they walk to first period math class.

“Maggot,” he greets, elbowing her side. Maggie pretends to sigh.

“Rat,” she responds in kind. Roy smiles.

“You ready for this, Maggie?” He asks, nudging her shoulder playfully, and she shrugs in return.

“Ready as I’ll ever be.”

She’s glad she has Roy by her side, even if she still can’t bring herself to like him that way. He’s her best friend. Maybe there’s something wrong with her that she can’t like boys properly, but it hardly matters right now. She’s starting a new year of school, trying to teach Franky new words,
and her life doesn’t have space for all those questions right now.

It can wait.

On her 13th birthday, Maggie doesn’t receive any gifts or sweet pastries—just one lavender colored letter placed neatly on her pillow.

She comes out of the bathroom, her wet hair dripping on her shirt as she tries to squeeze the water out with a towel, and finds the envelope on top of her bed, when it wasn’t there 20 minutes ago. She walks over to it, taking it in her hands with barely contained curiosity.

Across the top of it, ‘From Franky, To Maggie’ is scrawled in big fancy letters that she recognizes as her mom’s handwriting. She opens the letter, catching a faint whiff of perfume. There’s a single piece of paper inside, holding only one lone sentence.

Now we can be big sisters together.

Maggie looks up, realization dawning on her, and turns around only to meet the eyes of her parents as they stand in her doorway. Her daddy holds Franky, who seems to be just as excited as Maggie feels.

“Does this mean that...Daddy, is mom...?”

He nods, and her mom smiles.

“We’re having another baby.”

Three months into her pregnancy, her mom gets laid off from work.

There were two secretaries at the high school she worked in, a town over in Wymore, and the other girl that had started working with her mom last year is the one chosen to stay when they start cutting staff. Her mom says it’s because she’s pregnant, while her daddy says it because the entire country is in a recession, but all Maggie can selfishly think about is what it means for herself.

When they tell her she can’t keep going to the Boys and Girls club, she expects it.

She mourns the loss of it, the dance classes and the theater workshops, all the weekends that she spent there learning things that she’d never see in school, but she expected it, so it doesn’t hit her as hard.

What she doesn't expect is that since her mom is going to be home now, they don't need Nonna, so she’s moving back to her own house.

Maggie had gotten used to sharing her room with Nonna. She’d become accustomed to having her
around during the week and eating lunch at her house every weekend, the only day where they still visited the little cabin on top of a hill. She’d liked sharing a room with her grandma. Despite some things that Nonna said, that still buzz around in her head, Maggie loves her, and she can’t imagine not having her around anymore. It feels like a rock in her stomach, sloshing around and scraping her from the inside out.

She overhears her daddy saying that with the baby they can’t feed another mouth, and Nonna did just fine before on her own.

Maggie helps her pack her things, the whole side of her room she made her own for the past 2 years, and a few days later her daddy drives her back to her house, and Nonna stays there.

Maggie cries, but she doesn’t let anyone— not even Franky—see.

Christmas rolls around, and Maggie still hasn’t gotten used to the emptiness on the other side of her bedroom.

They still see Nonna almost every weekend, but it’s not the same as having her sleeping a couple of steps away. The holidays begin to lift her spirits, however. Even as measured as the festivities are, and even with how the only special thing they do this Christmas is go to mass together, Maggie likes it. There’s something hopeful in the air that she can’t ignore.

When it’s time to open their presents, she lets Franky go first.

Her little sister rips open a small bundle and finds a lovely stuffed Panda inside. When it’s her turn, she receives a small, heavy box, and she frowns. She didn’t expect anything, let alone something so heavy.

“What’s this?” she asks, shaking it beside her head.

“Mine!” Franky pipes up, still hugging her new stuffed animal. Maggie chuckles.

“No, that’s your sister’s,” her daddy gently corrects. “You’re too young for it anyway.”

Maggie frowns.

She hurries to open the present, only to lay her eyes on a...cellphone?

She looks up at her parents, amazed, and then her fingers fly as she rips open the box and the shiny black and blue object finally touches her hands. She turns the smooth, thin flip phone over and over in her hands, marveling at how cool and slick it is. It’s the most expensive gift she’s ever gotten.

The thought suddenly makes her feel guilty, like she doesn’t deserve it. But her parents are looking at her like she does.

"Dat? Dat?" Franky asks, in her approximation of ‘what’s that?’, and Maggie smiles, letting herself enjoy the moment. She has a cellphone.

It’s amazing, that’s what it is.
Maggie pads out of bed that night, intent on getting a glass of water, when she realizes the kitchen light is on.

Her dad sits there, writing police reports, like he sometimes does when everybody else has gone to bed. Maggie watches him for a moment, in the low light of the single light bulb. He looks tired, and older than Maggie remembers him. She hasn’t noticed that before. The guilt slowly makes its way back into her, and she feels the brand new cellphone currently charging in her nightstand like a weight inside her ribcage. She turns back on her feet and heads back into her bedroom. She walks back out a minute later, and walks up to him.

She puts the box in front of her daddy.

“I don’t have to keep it.” Her voice is quiet, but Maggie doesn’t think she could get this out any other way.

“What do you mean?” her dad frowns, sitting back and crossing his arms. “Don't you like it?”

Maggie shakes her head. It’s not that at all. “Yes, but dad,” Maggie insists, trying very hard to be grown up. “Mom isn’t working right now, and the new baby—“

“But nothing,” his tone is firm, indicating the topic isn’t up for discussion. “You’ve been great Maggie,” he says, softer. “‘Helping your mom with the house, taking care of your sister...and your grades are good. I’m sorry you can’t go to the dance classes anymore—“

“It doesn't matter,” she tells him, and she means it. She does miss going to classes, especially the theater ones, but she’d give it all up two times over so Franky can get new winter clothes, or so that her parents can have money to prepare for her new brother or sister.

“You're a really great kid,” her dad says. “I’m proud of you.” He steps to her, hands firm on her shoulders and a small smile curling his mouth upwards. “I did a couple overtime shifts the past month, Maggie, it’s not gonna put us out. It’s a Christmas present. You deserve it. Keep it.”

Warmth spreads across her chest at the words, and finally, she starts to believe them.

“Thank you, daddy.”

She steps forward to hug him, and he tucks her into his side. Maggie breathes in, feeling for just this moment in time that everything is going to be fine—with the phone, the new baby, school, and even herself, when the time comes.

Because she believes her sister will always be there for her, but she knows her daddy will be too.

It all starts with a winter coat.
Her daddy gets it for Franky so she can come with him to run errands, this cozy, dark purple waterproof coat. Franky is 2 and half years old, and she and Maggie spend nearly every moment together. Even when she’s tired, and just wants to be alone, Franky will bang on their bedroom door until she opens, and it almost never takes her mom yelling for her to take care of her sister for her to let her in. She offers Franky one of her earphones and then lays back down, listening to the radio through her cellphone, at least whatever station she can get.

Their mom starts ironing and sewing clothes for their neighbors as a sort of new job, and Maggie re-doubles her efforts to help out with Franky as she sees her mom’s growing belly. The news had taken her by surprise, but with how much she likes having a little sister, she’s excited for the arrival of the new baby. She knows there are going to be a lot of sleepless nights again, and she worries about Franky, who gets irritable when she’s woken up at night, but having two siblings could never sound bad.

The house still gets stuffy and quiet, as it always does during winter break—her mom and her never seem to have much to talk about—so Maggie decides to play outside. The snow looks perfect for building snowmen, and Roy called and told her he’d come over tomorrow to build a snow fort, and she thinks she could get started on that. She dresses in layers, and right when she has a foot out the door, something tugs on her jacket. Or rather, someone.

“Where you goin’?” Franky looks up at her, barefoot and still in her Bugs Bunny pajamas, and Maggie closes the door so the cold doesn’t get in.

“I’m just going outside for a minute, go with mom-”

“I wanna go,” she pleads.

"Franky-"

“I wanna go, I wanna go!” Her sister pulls on her hand, pouting, and Maggie sighs.

So be it. She thinks it’s high time that her little sister learned how to make a snow angel. And that she developed the thick skin that she needs ward off the cold. She goes back into their bedroom and dresses Franky in layers, grabbing Franky’s shiny new winter coat and putting it on her over everything else. Maggie peers at her mom on the couch, intent on telling her where they’re going, but she’s asleep, one hand protectively draped over her belly. Maggie shrugs. They’ll be right outside.

Franky happily jumps into banks of the freshly fallen stuff, giggling as it disperses when she touches it. Maggie asks her to follow her a bit deeper through the trees at the back of their house, until they reach a clearing, near the pond.

She scours the ground beneath them, hand holding tight onto Franky’s, for the perfect fluffy snow she knows from experience she’ll need to execute this perfectly. (She’d trying doing it in wet snow once, and all she’d gotten was a soaking wet back and exhausted limbs).

Finally, just a few feet in front of the thicker section of trees, she finds what she’s looking for. Maggie let’s go of her sister’s hand.

“Franky, watch me.”

She lays herself out on the ground, hood pulled up to keep her hair dry, and relishes in the small poof of powdery snow that floats into the air upon the weight of her body impacting the ground. Her arms and legs shoot out, and then she swings out her limbs in wide arcs, repeating the motion
over and over. Franky tilts her head, looking confused.

“Maggie!” her high-pitched chuckle breaks the silent winter air, causing a few birds to abruptly leave their havens in the treetops—their sudden flight causing chunks of snow to fall from above. “What you doin’?”

She sits back up, shooting her sister a matching grin, and carefully stands, making sure as few of her footsteps as possible marr her creation. Maggie pulls up just behind Franky, hands on her shoulder as she leans over her.

“Look at the ground and tell me what you see,” she points one finger to direct Franky’s eyes.

Franky squints her eyes, causing her nose to scrunch up in the process. “Ow!” she squeaks, what Maggie knows means ‘snow’. She laughs.

“Look closer,” she says. Franky does, but after a moment, she just shakes her head—a small pout tugging at her lips. She looks up at Maggie like she has the answers to every question.

Maggie drops to her knees so she’s eye level with Franky, planting a small kiss on her cool cheek. “It’s a snow angel,” she tells her. “Do you see it? Like the angels God has, but just, in the snow.” She guides Franky closer to the angel. “See, that’s one wing, and there’s the other. That’s her head.” Franky watches her explanation with rapt fascination, eyes darting to her face and the snow creation. She still looks a bit confused, and Maggie isn’t entirely sure if she grasps the concept, but she smiles up at her and nods vigorously.

“Me!” she yells, plopping down on the snow. She squeaks when the snow touches her head, and Maggie laughs, kneeling in the snow to pull her hood up. Franky’s lip trembles, and Maggie shushes the crying away.

“It was just a bit of snow,” she tells her. “It’s not a big deal. We don’t have to cry about it, okay? Do you want try making a snow angel?” Franky nods, the clouds passing.

Maggie lays back down on the ground, and Franky—as always—copies her motions dutifully, if a bit more messily. Whereas Maggie’s strokes are wide and measured, Franky’s movements are short, fast, and all over the place. Maggie’s fairly certain her snow angel will end up looking more like a snow monster, but it’ll be the best snow monster anyone has ever made.

A stray clump of snow kicked up by Franky’s furious movements slides down Maggie’s neck, and that signals the end of their activities. Once Maggie hoists herself into a standing position, she turns around, hands outstretched, and latches onto Franky’s smaller hands, pulling her little sister back up.

Two small shapes in the ground meet their twin brown eyes. One larger, and one smaller—side by side. How they’ll always be, Maggie thinks, a face splitting smile taking over. At least, she hopes. Hopefully Franky won’t be taller than her when she grows up.

Franky claps her hands in joy. “‘Gain!” She exclaims.

“I don’t wanna do that again,” she tells her sister. “I have a better idea.” Franky looks up at her. “Snowballs,” Maggie chirps, tugging Franky to a new, undisturbed patch of snow. Franky grasps making snowballs much more quickly than snow angels, though she isn’t very good at it either, more content just flinging scoops of snow at Maggie. But she laughs the whole time, cheeks rosy in the cold morning air—and Maggie counts this as a successful outing. She still needs to get started on her fort, however. Roy is coming over tomorrow, and if she has any hope of winning
against him in an all out war, she probably needs to start getting ready now.

She begins piling snow to one side, and briefly wonders if she can get one of her dad’s shovels to help it along. She decides not to, and kneels as she starts to dig. Franky doesn’t seem very interested in helping her, as she plops down and makes another quasi snow angel behind her.

“Don’t go far, okay?” she asks Franky, and then focuses on the task at hand. She starts building the walls first, grabbing fistfuls of snow and packing it on. She’s not sure how big of a fort Roy was talking about, big enough for them to hide behind during snowball fights—which would take her quite some time to build—or like a copy of the sandcastles they used to make in the playground. (And that’s a funny thought, that she and Roy have lived here their whole lives, and gone to the same schools, and it’s only now that they’re friends.)

She settles for a happy medium, and the building quickens considerably now that she has a goal in mind. Maggie gets lost in the fort, mind creating fantastical scenarios of high stakes adventures. Privately, in the comfort that it’s just make-believe, she imagines herself as the knight, off to save a damsel in distress.

After some time though, she slowly realizes it’s been a while since she’s heard Franky. She turns around, and can’t find her anywhere in her line of sight.

“Franky?”

“Wight here!” she says, and Maggie runs the short trek to where she can hear her voice.

She’s skating. Her snow boots sliding on the shiny, crystal surface of the frozen pond near her house.

“Franky, come here!” Her sister is startled at her loud tone of voice, but she obediently runs back to Maggie, tucking herself against her side. Maggie picks her up with effort, the bulky clothes making her bigger. Her eyes fill with tears. “Sorry, it's fine. It’s just- I told you not not to move.”

She walks back to the clearing, thanking the winter for being as cold as it’s been. She can remember the story her mom used to tell, about her falling straight to the ice, and her whole stomach sinks at the thought of that happening to Franky.

One thing she knows though, if it had, she would have jumped in after her like their dad jumped after Maggie herself.

They go back to playing, subdued, and Maggie forgoes the fort in favor of making more snow angels with Franky. When her nose turns red from the cold, though, she decides it’s time to go back inside. She’s helping Franky out of her winter clothes by the fire when she hears footsteps approaching.

“Where were you?”

“Mom! Franky and I-”

“Where did you take my daughter?” her mom asks, and Maggie takes a step back.

“We were just outside,” she tells her quietly. “We were just-”

“Getting soaking wet in the snow?” Her mom’s eyes are stormy, matching the razor sharp edge of her tone.
“I made sure to put her winter coat, mittens, hat, scarf, and earmuffs on,” Maggie protests, not sure why her mom is so upset anyways. She’s far more wet than Franky is.

“Ow!” Franky’s childish high voice chimes in, bending and unbending her legs in what Maggie suspects is her version of a jump. She babbles, but Maggie catches “Ow Angel” near the end.

“See mom? She’s happy, we had a good time.” Maggie smiles up at her mom tentatively, trying to swing her mood back to the good side, and if the slow disappearance of the tell tale forehead wrinkle is anything to go by, it’s working.

But then Franky coughs. And that’s when the yelling begins.

“Margaret Ellen Caivano,” her mom’s voice pierces through the silence of the room like a poisonous arrow, its volume only increasing with each word tumbling from her lips drawn in a thin line. “This has to be one of the dumbest, most irresponsible things you’ve done! What if Franky gets sick? Did you think about that? What if we have to take her to the doctor? How will we afford that? Did you even stop to think about any of that before you decided it was a great idea to traipse through the snow with your two-year old sister?”

Maggie stays silent, knowing from experience that if she speaks up it’ll only incur more of her mom’s anger. She thinks her mom is overreacting, but it’s pointless trying to argue with her when she’s on one of her rampages. Despite her best efforts, Maggie’s self assurances do nothing to stop the sting at the back of her eyes and the thickness building in her throat as her mom’s words rain down on her one by one.

“As Francesca’s big sister, you’re supposed to protect her Margaret!”

A dark, unfamiliar emotion bubbles up in Maggie—heavy and thick as it courses through her veins.

There are a lot of things she’ll let slide off her back, but accusations about her ability to be a good sister to Franky isn’t one of them. She made a small mistake today, but the pond was frozen, nothing bad could have happened anyway. She’s always been a good sister. And she’s never raised her voice against her mom, but there’s a first time for everything.

“I didn’t do anything wrong,” she spits out, eyes darkening in anger. “We were just playing in the snow, and she got a little wet, so what? It’s not a big deal!”

“Don’t you talk back to me, Margaret!” Her mom raises her hand, and Maggie flinches as she takes a step back. It’s been years since she last got hit for misbehaving. Her mother doesn’t touch her though. She simply turns away from her in exasperation, tilting her head up at the ceiling for a few moments and breathing deeply. Maggie holds her breath, subconsciously shrinking closer to her sister as she waits for the next shower of verbal blows.

Her mom sighs, her entire body seemingly sagging, and she suddenly looks 10 years older.

“Maggie, what will you do when you’re married and have your own kids?”

Nonna’s words about what a perfect life would look like come back to haunt her, and everything she’s made an effort not to think about does as well.

“Who says I even want to get married and have babies?” Maggie shoots back without even thinking—anger clouding her judgement. “Maybe I don’t want that! Maybe I want to do more! Maybe I don’t want to be like you, just sitting here and sewing and being pregnant. At least my daddy is a cop! What are you?!”
She regrets the words as soon as they come out of her mouth, not because she didn’t mean them, but because of the hurt now glistening in her mom’s eyes. She opens her mouth, an apology prepared, but her mom cuts her off, taking a step toward and grabbing her face in one hand.

“I’m your mother, Margaret,” she says haltingly. “The things that I gave up to have you…”

She lets go of her, and turns away, shaking her head—arms wrapped around her waist like she’s hugging herself.

Maggie feels even worse.

“Go to your room.” Her mom’s voice is subdued, like she’s speaking around a mouthful of cotton balls.

It’s deadly silent as she walks down the hallway—even Franky has gone quiet, a rare occurrence. She tries to get a look at her mom’s face as she leaves, but she turns her head away.

Maggie climbs onto her bed, feeling as if she’s somehow separated from her own body. A smattering of pings against their roof starts beating out an unsteady rhythm.

She looks out the window and notices it’s hailing.

She doesn’t know how long she sits there, a small figure alone in the dying winter light, but when she reaches up to touch her face, she’s surprised to find it’s wet.

The house remains eerily quiet.

Sofia is born a month early in February, and she’s even smaller than Franky had been.

Maggie loves her new sister the second she sees her.

As soon as Sofía starts sleeping through the night, her parents put her in Maggie and Franky’s room.

Franky moves into Nonna’s old bed permanently, and Sofía starts sleeping in Franky’s old crib, which her dad moves into their room.

The space between their two beds that seems so small during the day feels like an insurmountable chasm during the night, and when Maggie hears, “Maggie, come. Please,” she jumps out of her bed and gets inside her sister’s.

Franky clutches her pajamas.

“Monsters,” she whispers, and Maggie shushes her.
“The monsters won't get you, not with your big sister here. I’ll fight them all. You know I will. There won't be a single monster left to bother you in all of Blue Springs. Lincoln too. All of Nebraska.”

“You’ll fight them?”

“I'll punch them all right in the nose. Roy taught me how to throw a punch. They’ll never see it coming. Not a single monster is getting past Maggie Caivano.”

She speaks nonsense until Franky falls asleep.

Their school is hosting a winter formal.

All the kids in their grade are desperate about who they’ll be going with, while Maggie and Roy think the entire thing is stupid.

Maggie thinks it wouldn't be so stupid if she was allowed to be the one to ask someone she liked, if it was okay if she wanted to go with a girl, but she’s trying to get those thoughts out of her head. She knows she can't say them out loud.

Not even to Franky because she’s starting to repeat everything Maggie says.

Her mom certainly doesn’t think the event is stupid though. She’s been asking her about it since Maggie brought home the flyer for it, and today is no different. She’s just dropped her backpack on the couch and settled onto the floor to play with Franky when her mom starts a renewed round of questioning.

“Do you have a date for the dance?”

Maggie doesn’t even look up at her, selecting to keep her eyes focused on Franky as she scrunches her face in concentration at the dolls in front of her, looking like she’s trying to figure out the most difficult math problem ever.

“I'm not going.”

“Maggie, come on. I could lend you one of my old dresses. I think we’re about the same size now. There must be some nice boy-”

“There is not,” she replies calmly, grabbing one of the dolls and walking it up Franky’s chubby arm, which causes her sister to break out into peals of laughter. She hopes that’ll be the end of the conservation. She hears her mom mutter to herself, the swish of her skirt turning away music to Maggie’s ears. It’s only the familiar whiff of cologne wafting up her nose that finally causes her to look up, smiling at her dad as he enters the living room.

“Leave the girl alone, Giorgia,” he says, on her side like he always is. “She’ll date when she wants to.”

Her mom doesn’t even bother to hide her eye roll. “When I was her age, I already had my eye on you.”
Maggie’s dad laughs.

“And that’s how we got her.” He shrugs unconcernedly, swirling his scotch around in his glass before taking a sip. “Listen here, she’s gonna be the first in this family to go college, I know it.” Maggie smiles to herself at that, taking comfort in the confidence her dad has in her—confidence that her mom has never seemed to possess. “She’s gonna make us proud. Can’t do that with a baby.”

“What exactly are you saying about me?” her mom replies, eyes flashing in forewarning.

“I ain’t said nothing about you, woman,” he throws back the rest of his scotch in one gulp.

“And my sister went to college, however stupid her degree was. Maggie wouldn't be the first. Gabriella is—”

“I meant our family. The Caivanos. Is your sister part of my household now?”

They bicker, like they’re wont to do, but her dad winks at Maggie in the middle of her mom’s rant, and then kisses her forehead.

“My little girl.”

This year, it seems like God decided to make Nebraska punishingly cold, and Maggie isn’t sure what she did to deserve it.

This fall is the coldest she’s felt in a while, and they work double time at home to keep the house in good shape. Her dad teaches her how to chop wood for the fire, and she’s in charge of Franky all by herself more often as her mom takes up part time work as a cashier at the supermarket a couple days a week. Sometimes, Nonna comes over to take care of Sofia. A few times, Maggie is trusted with looking after the baby.

Taking care of both her sisters is an exhausting juggling act, and she begins to develop a deeper understanding of what her mother does every day, on top of making dinner and cleaning the house. It only serves to cement in her the knowledge that this isn’t what she wants. She doesn’t want to be a housewife. She’s not even sure if she wants to be a mom. And she knows she doesn’t want to marry a man. There’s not a sudden realization. There’s degrees of understanding that grow over time, and it’s a fact that she cannot ignore or avoid thinking about any longer. She likes girls.

She likes girls, she likes girls. She repeats it in the privacy of her own head, a fact hidden from everyone. She holds it close to her chest—the mantra beating in rhythm with her heartbeat. It doesn’t feel like something to be proud of though, like her award for academic excellence that hung on the fridge months after she received it, quite the opposite actually.

She feels like she’s done something wrong. It eats at her until she feels like she doesn’t deserve her mom cooking for her or her grandma making her favorite dessert when she visits. Like she’s an impostor. She’s lying to them, to the world, and she’s old enough now that she can’t just write it
off as play pretend. If they really knew what she was like, she doesn’t think Nonna would smile at her like she does when Maggie plays with Franky (her words about hellfire have never left Maggie’s head) and her mom wouldn’t let her sneak bites of food while she was making dinner (one of the rare times she smiles at her and calls her a bottomless barrel).

Her dad…he was the one who taught her to always be honest and direct, and now she’s doing the exact opposite. It feels like she’s betraying him more than anybody else. The thought bounces around her head, leaving bloody, jagged edges in its path.

What would he do? She doesn’t think he’d be like her mom or Nonna. They go to church every time they can, and they’re strict, but her dad…he takes her with him when he has errands to run on Sunday, so she won’t be stuck at church for 2 hours, and he never gets too angry at her. She thinks if everyone else hated her, her dad would still love her, and she’d be fine. But she’s not sure of anything because she doesn’t know how this goes. She’s never met anyone like her. She’s never known of it apart from Nonna’s words, and a brief mention last Sunday at church, during the priest’s sermon. Homosexual. Is that the word for it? Is it really as bad as he says? She’s never doubted what she hears at church, never had any reason to, but she can’t help doubting this. She doesn’t feel heinous. She just likes girls.

It sounds so simple to her ears, but three words have never weighed her down more.

Maggie goes over to Roy’s to use his new computer one afternoon, and she itches to use the internet to search about girls who like girls.

Maggie knows now it’s not just her who feels like this, but she can’t begin to understand it without anyone to ask. She’s thought about the library in Lincoln, but she doesn’t know if there are books about it. So the internet is the next best thing, and when Roy gets a new computer from one of his late dad’s army friends, she thinks it’s the perfect chance. But fate is not in her favor.

Even when Roy goes to the store to get them junk food, leaving her alone on the computer, his little sister flutters around Maggie, and she doesn’t want the talkative girl to repeat anything she might read on the screen—if she even knows how to read yet. She doubts she’d have the nerve, anyway. It feels like such a bad thing, like such a secret, dirty thing, and she instinctively knows she has to keep it hidden. She can still recall the sound of her classmates laughing at her during that secret Santa reveal. She hadn’t understood it then, innocent as she had been, why Molly had been so upset, and why Leah had drifted away after she voiced that maybe she had a crush on Molly. ‘Sometimes you’re really strange, Maggie,’ she’d said. Was that what she was? Just strange? Or was it worse?

Her grandma’s words echo inside her, only half a beat after each repetition of this new truth she’s accepted about herself. Hellfire. Hideous. That’s what awaits her and that’s what the world will view her as if she ever had the courage—or perhaps stupidity—to announce what she felt like to them. Except more and more it doesn’t seem to be something she feels, but rather something she is. She and all the girls in her grade…they’re not that different apart from this one detail—but she knows it’s not a small detail that separates them. It’s not something like her having a different favorite actor or food.

She is a girl who likes girls. And that makes her feel like an alien amongst her peers. Like
something else.

She likes girls.

Maggie wonders if the words are meant to live inside her head for the rest of her life.

“Hand those balloons over here, will you?”

Maggie nods and pulls the bobbing balloons behind her. They’re helium balloons, which means they actually float on their own, not like the balloons she and her mom blew up for her birthday parties as a kid. Maggie tries not to be jealous, especially when she knows Franky deserves this, but it’s hard.

Her mom positions the balloons at each side of the kitchen table, twin tails hanging down in a spiraling curl. The vase of hand picked flowers—courtesy of Maggie’s morning walk in search of them—rests as the centerpiece of the table. It’s the nicest she can remember their table looking except for on holidays.

Franky turns 3 today.

A loud, insistent beeping fills the air, and her mom rushes to pull the lasagna out to cool off. There’s cake—a circular store-bought cake with Franky’s name spelled out in chocolate icing—sitting on the counter next to the stove as their dessert. Her mom even bought candles for the occasion, though her sister only needs 3 of them.

Franky’s largest birthday gift, a lion pillow pet, stares at her from inside its golden, shimmering bag—the lights overhead reflecting in its glassy, black eyes. Maggie’s never had a party quite like this, but she’s glad her sister is getting one. She wants her to have the best.

Her mom gives the room one last sweeping survey, eyes like a hawk’s, before nodding to herself, seemingly satisfied.

“You can wake up your sister now, and get your father too.”

Maggie nods, making the short walk to her room. A tuft of dark, curly brown hair peeks out from out a lump of covers, and Maggie is brought back to the moment she first saw her sister, swaddled in her mom’s arms.

“Franky,” she whispers in a hushed voice, nudging her gently. “Wake up, we have a surprise for you.” Her sister’s big brown eyes blink slowly up at her, her small mouth opening wide in a yawn that inflates her entire body. She lifts her arms up, not even bothering to say anything, and Maggie scoops her up, her small hands automatically curling around her neck.

“Today’s your birthday, Franky. Do you know what that means?”

Franky just looks at her, still blinking owlishly and only half awake. “Today is my birthday?” she asks around a yawn. Maggie chuckles. Her sister had gone through a spell last month of asking if tomorrow was her birthday every single day for a week, and now that it is she doesn’t seem too excited.
“Yes. You were born today three years ago. Franky. You were so small then, your hand was barely as big as my thumb.” She grabs Franky’s hand, uncurling her fingers and pressing their hands together palm to palm. “And now look, your hand is half my palm.” Her sister just smiles and giggles, her eyes making little half moon smiles.

“I’m big!” Franky states. “I’m big now.”

“Yes, you’re a big girl now.” She hums to herself—bouncing Franky up and down slightly, knowing she finds it soothing—as she walks to her parent’s room.

It seems like only yesterday her sister was a newborn, unable to even talk or stand on her own two feet. And now she’s been with them for 3 whole years. Maggie can barely remember what it was like without her around, and she wouldn’t want to either.

Maggie can’t wait to celebrate more birthdays with Franky.

Maggie wakes up early the morning of her 14th birthday disoriented.

A dream she can’t remember still has her heart racing, and she kicks off her second blanket as she suddenly finds it too stifling. She turns around in bed, and sees Franky asleep in hers. She sits up, and notices Sofia is also asleep in her crib. She rubs her hand down her face, trying to figure out what woke her so early.

As the fog of sleep dissipates however, a single thought pierces her mind, and excitement beats against her rib cage fighting to burst out. It’s her birthday. She’s 14 today.

It’s raining, just the way she likes it. She loves the way the rain makes the earth smell sweet the next day. The days have been so cold it’s almost strange it’s raining, but Maggie takes it as a good sign. She pushes aside the curtain to looks outside the window above her bed frame, the sky is still dark. A quick glance at the clock tells her it’s not even 5 AM yet, so she has a good while to sleep before her mom wakes them up for church.

She wants to go back to bed, but her bladder has other ideas.

She walks barefoot through the darkened house, goosebumps rising in her arms at the temperature. They should turn the heater up, but she knows they’re saving by keeping the house mildly chilly and wearing sweaters rather than trying to get it to be warm throughout.

On her way back from the bathroom, she bumps into a warm body, one she immediately recognizes as her mom’s.

“Maggie,” her mom looks at her, really looks at her in a way she almost feels like she never has before, and it makes Maggie want to squirm. “It’s...it’s four AM, what are you doing up?”

“Had to pee,” she says, her mouth still thick with sleep.

“Right. Right.” Her mom looks past her, then her eyes slide back towards Maggie—remaining steady. “It’s your birthday,” she states suddenly.
Maggie nods.

Her mom’s face changes into an expression she can’t quite discern.

“You’re a teenager now,” her mom says thoughtfully. Maggie shrugs. She doesn’t feel any different. For the most part, she still feels like a girl. She still loves playing ball with Roy and she doesn’t mind sitting down with Franky to play dolls. The crying and screaming of teenagers she sees on TV is completely...foreign. Maggie doesn’t want to grow up. And she hopes her mom isn’t going to start treating her differently just because she’s 14, which doesn’t feel any different from 13. She even wears the same size of bra. But that’s not what it is about, she quickly comes to learn.

“I’m thirty two years old and I have a teenager…” her mom mumbles to herself. Maggie watches her as she does the math in her head. She had never...thought about it. Her mom was just her mom, she doesn’t think she even knew how old she was. She doesn’t look that young. 32 years old. So she was 18 when Maggie was born? As a child she’d never thought about it, but now, just 4 years shy of being that age, the magnitude of it falls upon her. She thinks about her mom’s birthday and her own, and quick math brings up a number: 17. Was her mom really that young when she was pregnant with her? How could her parents have had her that young? How could have Maggie never realized that?

She remembers her last big fight with her mom, right before Franky got a cold because of playing in the snow. “All the things I gave up to have you,” her mom had said. And Maggie had never thought about it. Guilt seeps into her. Her mom keeps looking at her, and Maggie finds she can’t keep staring back. She takes a step back.

“I’m...I’m going to go back to bed, mom.” She starts walking towards her bedroom, passing by her mom.

“Did you ever call me ‘mommy’?”

The question is sudden and quiet, and Maggie stops, turning around slowly. A conflicted expression pinches her mom’s face.

“I had just graduated when you were born. When you were Franky’s age....I still didn’t know what I was doing. Maybe I never taught you.” Her mom shrugs, and an inexplicable knot forms in Maggie’s throat. “I didn’t feel like a mom, I guess that’s why,” her mom says. “I...I think I never did, not really, at least until Franky was born. I wasn’t ready.”

Her mom takes a step closer, and brushes a piece of disheveled, sleep tossed hair behind her ear with a tenderness that Maggie hasn’t felt from her for as long as she can remember.

“You deserved a better mom than me,” she says, and Maggie’s throat hurts. She thinks of all the times she was punished for things her younger sisters receive nothing but laughter for, how strict she was, how far away she felt. She waits for an apology that never comes.

Her mom’s thumbs grazes her cheek, and Maggie leans into the touch despite herself.

“Happy birthday, Margaret,” her mom says, and then takes a step back, wiping a fallen tear with her thumb. She goes to turn around, but Maggie grabs her wrist—one of the few moments she can remember deliberately grabbing for her mom.

“When I was little, I did call you mommy,” she tells her, and then her feet are moving of their own accord as she steps up to wrap her arms around her mom. They’re the same height now.

“Oh.” Her mother’s arms tighten around her as she hugs her back. “I love you, Maggie.”
Maggie nods, and her next words are muffled by her mother’s sweater.

“I love you too.”

When she get up properly a few hours later, the first thing she notices is the flashing of her phone alerting her to a new message. It’s Roy, as she expected—he’s the only person she texts—wishing her a happy birthday. She smiles at the small screen, the bright white light illuminating her face in the dimly lit room. She throws the covers off her legs, ready to start her day.

She walks into the kitchen to find her mom, any remnants of their earlier conversation gone. But she does smile when Maggie sits down for breakfast, and gives her the biggest pancake, usually reserved for Franky.

“Francesca, wish your sister a Happy Birthday,” she tells Franky, and her sister runs into the kitchen from the living room to greet her.

“Happy Birthday!” Franky is happy to yell, as she climbs on Maggie’s lap and hugs her. Maggie chuckles. Franky slips down to the floor after a second, and Maggie turns her attention to her other sister, happily seated on her cozy high chair.

“Can you say ‘Happy Birthday’ Sofia?” she asks, knowing her sister hasn’t quite mastered sitting up by herself, and she’s nowhere near close to learning how to speak. Maggie chuckles at her drooling, and Maggie’s mom smiles.

And then she slides a small square black velvet box across the table.

“Your dad had to leave early this morning, but he wanted me to give this to you.”

She raises her eyebrows in surprise, but smiles nevertheless as she runs her finger over the soft velvet.

“Do you know what it is?”

“I didn’t even know he was getting anything for you. We agreed not to, you know, save it for Christmas. But you know how your father is.”

The ‘when it comes to you’ goes unspoken. Maggie opts not to respond to that comment, knowing how sensitive her mom is about the topic, and instead busies herself with opening the box.

It’s a simple silver necklace with a single sapphire charm looped through the chain. Sapphire is her birth month stone, she remembers telling her dad that, but she didn’t think he would remember it. There’s a small slip of paper resting beneath the necklace too, and she pulls it out carefully.

For Maggie. You’ll always be my little girl no matter how old you get. Happy birthday.

Maggie almost likes the note more than the actual gift. She knows her daddy will always be there for her, no matter what, but it’s nice to have written confirmation.
Halloween rolls around, and it only takes a little convincing for her mom to allow Maggie and Roy to take Franky trick or treating.

Her dad, of course, says yes without hesitation when she asks him about it. In the back of her mind, she thinks her mom might have let her because she wants her and Roy to date, but she pushes that unsavory thought away for another day. They’re best friends, and regardless of whatever Maggie might feel—or not—towards boys, Roy doesn’t even think about her that way.

It’s Franky’s first Halloween where she dresses up and goes trick or treating, and Maggie is excited to take her into town.

Most people in their grade think dressing up is stupid, but Maggie loves it, loves becoming someone else for one night. And so she dress up like Wonder Woman, Roy is a ghostbuster, and Franky is a little witch. Even Sofia participates, bouncing in their mom’s arms. Their mom sews her a black dress from one of Maggie’s old, long church skirts (Maggie doesn’t miss the irony of reusing her church clothes for Halloween) and dresses her baby sister as a small black cat, after gluing green eyes to the garment. Her dad buys a disposable camera for the occasion, and they take a few pictures wearing their costumes. And then off they go.

She teaches Franky how to ask for candy, and Roy and her hold out their ziploc bags shamelessly even at the people who give them a second look. This feels like her last Halloween trick or treating, because when she thinks about it next year she’ll be 15, and in high school, and probably not even Roy will want to come with her. So she decides to enjoy it.

They race from one house to the other on the edges of town, where the houses are very far apart, and she carries Franky when they walk by the forest, her little sister spooking from the night alone. They fill their plastic bags to bursting after hitting every house in Blue Springs. It’s the most fun Maggie has had in years.

The temperature is already hovering around freezing by the time they start to walk back. Her mom had insisted they all wear jackets, even despite Maggie’s protests that a jacket would ruin her Wonder Woman costume. As they walk down the crowded sidewalks though, Franky sandwiched between them with a hand clasped in each of their own, she appreciates the barrier against the cool night air.

Still, Franky’s small hand in hers is better at fighting off the cold.
It starts and ends with a question.

One bright November morning, Roy asks if she can follow him up the stairs of the school and leads them to an empty classroom. Once there, he plops down on one of the small wooden desks, gesturing for Maggie to sit beside him. She doesn’t know what he’s up to. She expects that he’ll tell her he’s skipping school today, as he’s wont to do sometimes. Or maybe—she thinks in one crazy, ridiculous moment—he’s going to tell her that they found his dad. Maybe Roy, Sr. is no longer MIA, but coming home after all that time in the army. She expects a slew of things.

She doesn’t expect what happens next.
His lips are on hers.

Maggie is too shocked to react at first, but when she does, she pushes him away, hard—maybe harder than she should have. Roy sits up and stumbles back a few steps, his eyes brimming with the worst hurt Maggie has seen in them.

She sputters, searching for a question, but Roy gives her an answer without her even asking.

“I like you, Maggie.”

A million words spring up in her mind, trying to fight their way out, but her tongue suddenly isn’t working. It’s thick and uncomfortable in her mouth, and Roy is still looking at with that sad, hurt expression painting his eyes. She has to do something. She may not like him that way, but he is her closest friend—her only friend besides Franky. She doesn’t want to lose him. And she can’t like him the way he wants, the way he apparently does like her already. She needs him to know.

“Roy...I,” she cuts herself off, taking a deep breath and shifting her body slightly away from his. She doesn’t have the courage to look into his eyes while voicing the secret she’s been harboring for months now. A secret that she’s sure will turn him against her and cause that disappointment on his face to quickly turn into disgust.

Either way, Maggie doesn’t see this situation ending well for her. And yet she knows prolonging it won’t make things any better. Better to rip off the band aid in one go, as her Nonna would say (and upon thinking of her grandma, hellfire starts ringing in her ears louder than ever). She pushes through the noise, focusing all of her attention on properly formulating how to tell her best friend she’s different—strange.

“I don’t like you...like that. I can’t.”

“What do you mean you can’t?” he asks, his voice hurt. “I know we’re friends but-”

“It’s not that.”

Maggie runs her hand through her hair, dizzy with the way her heart beats so loud inside her chest.

“...I just don’t like boys the way the other girls in school do.” She chances a shaky glance up at him, hoping he understands what she’s saying, but he just looks confused. Maggie swallows through her parched throat and takes a deep breath. “I like girls the way you like girls,” her voice is quiet as she speaks, and he has to lean closer to catch her words. “I like girls the way you like me.”

A beat passes, and Maggie doesn’t dare look at him now, the overwhelming fear leaving her paralyzed and hard of breath.

“Oh,” Roy exhales, finally getting it.

“Do you understand?” she asks, desperately.

“So you...like like girls?”

His voice echos slightly in the empty classroom, and Maggie slaps a hand over his mouth, eyes darting to the half open door to the side. It’s one thing for her best friend—soon to be former best friend, her brain reminds her—to know about her….thing, but she doesn’t want the entire school to know too. Ever since her gift to Molly, her classmates have slowly but surely been distancing themselves from her.
She knows that rumors spread like wildfire, and nobody in Blue Springs takes well to people outside of the norm. This particular rumor could destroy her if it ever got out.

“Maggie,” his voice is muffled against her hand, and she quickly snatches it away, wiping his saliva off on her jeans with a slight grimace. “Are you...sure?”

She looks at him, his clear blue eyes full of worry and none of the disgust she was expecting. 

Maggie closes her eyes, tight—taking a deep breath—and then opens them.

“Yes,” she tells him, with certainty born out of months of looking into herself, despite what everyone else might think. Every sleepless night and worry filled day finally finds its way out into the open.

“Oh.” Roy doesn’t look away, and Maggie feels a slight twinge of relief when he doesn't immediately tell her to go. “You know what the church says-”

“I know.”

“My mom would-”

“I know. I know all of that, okay?” She’s spent countless nights with those exact thoughts swirling through her head, keeping sleep at bay.

Maggie stares at him, waiting. Her heart lives in her throat as she looks at the boy she called her best friend, wondering if this is it. This is where she loses him, and even worse, if this is where he tells everyone and the entire school shuns her. It’s all in his hands.

“I don’t- I don’t understand why you’re the way you...are-”

Maggie swallows, and nods. She doesn’t understand it either.

“But I don’t care,” Roy says simply.

Relief coupled with pure disbelief washes over, and the combined effect produces a deliriously euphoric happiness that starts behind her rib cage and spreads from her head to her toes. Her best friend knows she’s...different, but he doesn’t care. He accepts her as she is, and that means more to Maggie than she can put into words.

Maggie walks into school the following day with a spring in her step, feeling as happy as she ever has entering the big, blue double doors.

The halls are quiet as she walks to her locker, and she feels a few stares tracking her movements, but no more than usual. The rest of the day passes by in its normal fashion, but by lunchtime Maggie notices the lingering stares and whispers are, in fact, far from normal. They’ve increased in frequency, and some of the kids don’t even try to hide that they’re clearly talking about her in undertone breaths.

The weightless feeling that’d carried her home yesterday and stayed with her up until this morning vanishes, and she plummets back down to earth. The only thing that changed from yesterday and
today is that she told Roy her secret. And he wouldn’t have told anybody. He wouldn’t. She clings
to that belief like a drowning woman holding a piece of driftwood, desperately kicking her legs in
the water while her hands scrabble to grip onto the wet, soft wood, but knowing all the while that
the end is near.

She’s terrified.

There are two possibilities presented before her: either Roy told the school about her, or someone
overheard their conversation and then they proceeded to tell everyone. At this point, it doesn’t even
matter how the news got out because either way she’s screwed. And she knows it must have gotten
out, because she can feel the stares like daggers on her back. They all know, and they’re all judging
her for it.

She was lucky with Roy’s reaction, but she knows her classmates won’t view her in such a kind
light. She’s marked now.

Nobody has approached her about it though—not yet. Maybe they’re all scared she’ll taint them, as
if who she likes makes her sick and contagious. The scene from English class in second period flits
by her eyes, how that one girl sitting at the desk next to her scootched her chair as far away from
her as possible.

Maggie hadn’t given it much thought at the time, brushing it off as odd but no more than that. Now
though, all the pieces click together, creating an image that has her fighting to fill her lungs with air
and gulping repeatedly in an attempt to swallow the gagging urge tickling the back of her throat.

She needs to find Roy and see what he knows, or ask if he told anybody. She pulls out her phone,
doing her best to quell the shaking in her hands and types out a quick text. She fidgets nervously
waiting for his reply, but thankfully it only takes a moment for the incoming buzz alerting her of a
new message. Her eyes scan the message briefly, and then she’s off, legs carrying her to an empty
classroom.

She makes sure to close the door behind her this time.

“Maggie, I didn’t tell anyone! You have to believe me, and I’ve asked around the school to try and
get more information, but no one will talk to me anymore and-“

“I believe you, Roy,” she utters weakly, back hitting the door as she slides down it, not even caring
that the floor below her is filthy. She drops her head in her hands, rocking her head back and forth.
This can’t be happening to her.

“So what should we do about it?”

Maggie groans. “I could transfer schools?” she offers up, hearing to her own ears how implausible
the idea is, but she continues on, feeling the need to be doing something—anything—to fix this
mess. “Maybe to one in Beatrice or Lincoln. I know the bus routes to both, and I’m fourteen now, I
can get a job to pay for bus fees. It might take awhile to convince my parents, but-“

“Maggie.”

“I know. I know I’m being ridiculous.”

She sighs, meeting his serious, pained gaze, so much like the one yesterday but for an entirely
different reason now.

“I don’t know what to do,” she tells him in a quiet voice, almost a whisper.
All she knows right now, all she can feel, is fear.

It starts and ends with a question.

For the first time in her life, Maggie doesn’t want to go home. Her footsteps drag on the cement as she walks. She lives in a small town, and she had always liked it, but she also knows that when Robbie got appendicitis, her mom knew about it before she ever said anything. And that she knew Roy’s dad had been a soldier before Roy ever told her, because her dad knew. Everyone knows everyone. What’s happening at school won’t stay in the school.

The rumor is bound to find its way back to her parents, if not today, then the day after, or the next day.

She tiptoes through the door of the house, wanting to avoid her mom’s all-knowing eyes. She can’t imagine telling her mom the truth. She thinks she’d rather die than see the expression of disgust that she’s sure will be present there when her mom finds out she birthed a child destined for hell. And she can’t even imagine how Nonna will react.

Maggie will be grounded for the rest of the year. They’ll bathe her in holy water.

“Margaret.”

She jumps with a small yelp, tripping over the shoe half dangling from her foot. Her mom doesn’t even mention her clumsiness.

The minute she lays eyes on her mother, Maggie knows. She knows they know, and her world starts to collapse.

“Do you remember my old-coworker at your school, the secretary?” Her mom’s eyes are tired and red—like she hasn’t gotten enough sleep—and Maggie sees a sheen in them she doesn’t recognize, but it almost looks like...sadness. “She called me up earlier today to tell me something—about you.”

Maggie stays stock still, as if daring to move would shatter every bone in her body. And she wants to reply to her mom, she wants to defend herself somehow, but her voice is gone.

“Kids are mean Maggie, I know that better than anyone. When I was pregnant with you...” she shakes her head. “What they’re saying about you... we can talk to the principal. We can fix this.”

There’s nothing to fix, Maggie doesn’t tell her. They’re not lying to be cruel. Maggie is the one who seems to be wrong.

“Your father wants to speak to you,” her mom says suddenly, as she jerks her head in the direction of the living room, and Maggie’s eyes land upon the hunched over figure of her dad sitting on the couch. He must have heard their entire exchange, but he’s remained silent.

She can’t see his face from here, only the stretch of his denim button up across his broad shoulders. Maggie is unsure of what to expect when she steps over the threshold, but the last thing she expects to see is the pure fury dancing in her dad’s eyes.
And all of it is directed at her.

She falters, physically taking a step back from the anger radiating from the man she’s looked up to her whole life. It’s pouring off of him, so visceral it’s like she can see it, red and jagged floating in the air—sinking into her skin and burrowing into her heart. She’s felt sick to her stomach all day, and the relief she was expecting—the relief she’d thought she’d get when she saw her dad and told him everything—is nowhere to be found.

She doesn’t know what to do. Whether she should run or fall to her knees and beg forgiveness for her sins. All of her preconceived ideas about how her dad would handle finding out her secret vanish. She was clearly wrong, and now she has no idea how to navigate the situation.

“Margaret,” his voice is rough when he finally speaks. “Sit down.” She does as he asks, the slight chill of the house amplified by a hundred. “Have you heard what the children at school are saying about you?” he asks simply.

Maggie nods.

Her dad looks at her, finally, his dark eyes trained on hers.

“It’s true, isn’t it?” he asks.

Maggie doesn’t dare answer.

Her dad doesn’t say anything for a long moment, but then he speaks.

”Do you have any idea how hard it was for my parents to come here? To make a life for themselves?” The tension running through his body only increases, but he keeps his gaze glued to the ground, refusing to look at her face again. Maggie can only hope that it’s because this conversation is as hard for him as it is for her, and that he doesn’t want to punish her, but feels he must as a good parent.

The best parent. The best daddy a girl could ask for. That’s how he’s lived in her mind since she can remember. Her hero. The knight riding in to protect her.

Her guardian angel.

Maggie wonders if he wishes she had drowned when she was a toddler.

He stands, starting to pace, and continues. “Do you know how hard it was for your mom to move as a child? You say you love your Nonna so much! Well she brought your mother and her sister here and she didn't speak a lick of English. She had to make do how she could after Giorgia’s father died.” His movements still, voice dying in his throat. She notices his hands are balled in trembling fists.

Her dad rounds on her, eyes blazing with a dark fire. Maggie feels like her chest is collapsing in on itself under the force of his scrutiny.

“I’ve broken my back day in and day out at the precinct for you. Every extra shift I could, I took, for you! And you do this to us?” He steps closer to her, finger pointed like a weapon aiming straight for her heart. “You’re spitting on your family's name!”

Maggie can’t speak. The fear stabbing every inch of her skin paralyzes her. The lights and noises in the house have dimmed, and there’s a blackness creeping up on the edge of her vision. Her lungs hurt, and it takes a moment for her to realize it’s because she hadn’t dared to breathe during her
dad’s tirade.

“I’m going to ask you again, and I want to hear an answer,” he says slowly, measured.

It starts and ends with a question.

“Is it true that you are a homosexual?”

Hearing the word fall from his lips shocks her, her heart lurches in her chest—consumed with panic. With fear. Tears stain her cheeks, and she’s not sure when she started crying.

Maggie doesn’t have it in her to use her words. She just nods.

And that’s how it ends.

It happens in a rush.

Her dad grabs the corner of the coffee table in front of her, and flips it, until the wood lays splintered and broken on one side of the living room. Maggie can’t breathe.

It sounds like water rushing through her ears, and she doesn’t hear a word of what her mom and dad talk about as she sits on the couch, frozen. Sofia starts crying. For a wild, confused moment, Maggie searches the room for Franky, before she remembers that she’s with Nonna, running errands.

As her head clears, she can faintly hear her mom talking to someone on the phone in quickfire Italian. For a split second, she’s taken back to her Nonna’s house high on the hill, her mom and Nonna trading Italian back and forth like a beautiful song. She’d always enjoyed the sound of the language, but what she hears issuing forth from her mom sounds ugly, twisted. And it’s not so much the actual words as it is her voice—and the utterance of a language she’d associated with family and long, warm nights being transformed into something violent and tainted.

A slight gust of air hits her face as she sees the back of her dad rapidly walking away from her. Her feet carry her after him automatically, as if an invisible string attaches them together and to stray too far would be to rip her soul in two.

He flings open the closest in his room, and the resulting bang of the door slamming against the wall almost sounds like a gunshot. He reaches inside, pulling out the can she’s never allowed to touch—their savings—and dumps it on the bed, a small pile of twenty dollars bills falling out.

Maggie takes a step back, not knowing what exactly he’s going to use that money for, but an instinctive part of her telling her that the outcome won’t be in her favor. She immediately thinks of Sofia, sweet Sofia who was sleeping in her crib unaware of anything and who is now crying, with nobody coming to get her.

The thought drives her to her room, and she scoops Sofia out of her crib, hugging her—terrified—like it’s the last time she’ll get the chance. She shushes her sister, and Maggie thinks it would be more effective if she wasn’t also crying.
The previously burning anger in his face settled into a stony countenance—eyes unreadable and mouth set into a thin line. He has a backpack slung over his shoulder, and he ignores her frightful eyes tracking his every move as he starts ripping her drawers open, pulling out clothes haphazardly and shoving them in the backpack.

Her dad grabs her by her upper arm, his grip punishing in its tightness. “Put her down, we’re leaving.”

“Franky, she’s with grandma,” she gasps out, voice frantic and shaking. “What about Franky?”

“She doesn't have an older sister anymore.”

Her dad drives for ages, the landscape she knows like the back of her hand blurring by them. She’s too scared to speak, to ask where they’re going, but soon enough, she recognizes the tell tale signs of an airport.

A wild idea springs into her head as they pull up by the curbside, that they're sending her back to Italy. The thought extends, penetrating her mind, and for a terrifying moment she thinks that they're sending her back to get married.

Her dad throws the backpack at her as soon as the car stops, and then grabs her by the arm, effectively dragging her through the automatic doors. He frantically pulls out the crumpled bills at the ticket counter. Maggie’s blood freezes when he asks the woman for a one-way ticket to California.

She doesn’t understand what’s happening.

She looks around at the strangers, her mind assaulted by a myriad of noises and smells. And then she focuses. She grabs her phone from her pant pocket. She tries calling her mom. She doesn't answer. She tries calling again, and either her mom’s cellphone is dead or has been turned off. She tries to call Nonna, but she never answers the landline. Desperately, she tries to call Roy, to get just one second to talk to her best friend—but her phone stops working. Did her mom cut her service?

“Let’s go,” her dad says roughly, and before she has time to ask why—he’s grabbing her by the wrist, pulling her along. Maggie has the urge to fight against him, to stop walking and let him drag her if he wants her to move so much, to push her feet down like when she was little and knew she was in for a spanking. But her body won’t cooperate with her brain, and she lets herself be numbly dragged through the airport, up a flight of stairs and past rows of chairs.

They finally stop in front small area in the far corner of the upper level. It’s crowded with people standing in a long line, and he pushes her into the pool of people, thrusting a piece of paper into her hands. The board at the front above the counter reads ‘Los Angeles’.

She doesn’t even have time to process that piece of information before his voice pierces through her conscious.

“Your aunt lives in Crenshaw,” he tells her roughly, eyes averted, taking a step back and turning away. He’s only taken a couple of steps when he pulls up short. His shoulders rise and fall as his lungs contract and expand.
He whips back around, long strides quickly eating up the space between them. And for a singular sliver of time, she thinks he’s changed his mind, that he’s taking her back home to Franky, Sofia, Nonna, and her mom. That he was just trying to scare her, and it worked, but now the tactic is played out, and it’ll be over.

That he’s going to hug her, and tell her again that she’ll always be his little girl, no matter how old she gets.

It doesn’t happen.

His eyes bore into her own, a relentless avalanche of contempt.

“You shame me.”

Words try to claw their way free, digging hooks into the pink walls of her throat, but nothing comes out. Faintly, she notices a metallic taste permeating her mouth.

Her dad gives her one last look, and then his hand swings out. She feels, as if in slow motion, his fingers curl around the birthday necklace he’d given only months ago and form a fist.

He tears it off.

The jolt of stinging pain at the back of her neck hurdles her to the present so fast that it leaves her winded. He turns around without so much as a glance back.

She watches him walk away, the strong set of shoulders that she had always trusted to carry her disappearing in the crowd.

Maggie knows deep inside it’ll be the last time she sees him.
Chapter End Notes

This incredibly long chapter was a labor of love from both of us. We’ve been working on Maggie’s Interlude since the fic started, and this was the culmination of all the hints we dropped through the first 14 chapters of the fic. I—anddirtyrain—actually call this chapter my baby. I’m ridiculously attached to it, and we’re both so happy it’s finally out there. We’d love to hear your thoughts about it, comments motivate us and speed up our writing. Thanks for reading!
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Acerrima proximorum odia: The hatred of those closest to us is the bitterest of all

The air in the room is thin, but sharp with the sting of a thousand needles prickling her skin.

It’s been 14 minutes since Maggie stepped outside with that man—family of hers, Alex assumes. After all, he had said ‘this is why you can’t be a part of our family anymore’. Something had bristled up inside of Alex upon hearing that, an undercurrent of violence that so far only paparazzi have been able to incite. She closes her fists, anger about the disdainful way that man had talked to Maggie still flowing through her. She looks towards the door, wondering how Maggie is holding up.

Maybe that asshole is her father, or perhaps an uncle. The last option seems better, because no child should have that amount of pain in their eyes upon seeing a parent. Maggie hadn’t called him dad either. Alex had only caught the man’s name fall from Maggie’s lips right before she closed the door. It had sounded forced, like the two syllables held more pain than Alex could comprehend. Oscar.

Since then, she hasn’t heard any raised voices coming through the door, but then again, that could just be due to her position seated on the couch—the leather beneath her feeling as cold as the room itself once Maggie left.

As soon as she’d stepped out, throwing one last look over her shoulder at her, Alex had been sorely tempted to listen at the door to try and catch any fragments of conversation. But then a rush of guilt had washed over her at the thought. It’d be a gross violation of privacy, and to someone like Maggie who valued her privacy so much, that could spell out the end of their friendship, or at the very least put them back on square one. And Alex can’t—won’t—let that happen.

The quiet click of a door opening breaks Alex out of her reverie, and she looks up.

It’s Maggie, alone.

She looks just as pale and small as before, but now it’s like the weight of the universe—of multiple universes—is resting on those lithe shoulders. A stab of guilt pierces Alex as she looks at her. She was here thinking about protecting their friendship while Maggie was seemingly out there fighting a battle, and a losing one at that. She doesn’t know what’s going on, but she’s never seen Maggie like this, and she can’t handle it.

Alex stands, movements unsure but driven by an aching desire to comfort Maggie, to wrap her
Alex takes a few stuttering steps of her own towards Maggie, but the woman shies away immediately, arms crossed and shoulders hunched. The tangible rejection to her unspoken attempt at comfort stings, but Alex understands. It’s too soon. She might not know what happened out there or who that man was, but she can sense that the wound is too raw.

Alex has been there. Right after her dad died, she hadn’t let anyone in—not even Kara. She hadn’t wanted sympathy or pitying gazes for fear that the moment anything of that nature was directed at her, she’d shatter into a glittering mess of sharp edges, which at the time, wasn’t something that she had the luxury of doing.

And Alex knows that her own experiences don’t allow her to fully grasp the breadth of whatever Maggie is going through right now, but she does know that when the time comes and Maggie is ready to accept her help, she’ll be waiting for her—always. She stills herself, one arm wrapped around her other in order to physically stop herself from reaching out.

“Maggie—“

“That was,” Maggie halts, face pinched and body thrumming with tension. She opens her mouth. Closes it. Opens it once again.

She turns away, starting to pace—hands fidgeting nervously—and then back around. Her eyes search out Alex’s for the first time since she’s entered the room, and the depth of pain Alex sees brimming in her wet eyes has her own heart wailing against her rib cage in protest. It takes everything in her to respect Maggie’s physical boundaries and not close the chasm existing between them. But she desperately wants to take Maggie’s agony—so potent it’s a living, breathing thing she can feel in the atmosphere with them—as her own. She’d carry every demon plaguing Maggie on her own shoulders if she could, if it’d give Maggie a respite.

Maggie takes a deep breath, chest rising slowly. “That was my dad,” she utters with an exhale, voice shaky.

“What’s...wrong?” Alex ventures quietly, testing the waters. She doesn’t want to jump the gun, a tendency that has gotten her into more trouble than she’d like to remember. Was there a death in the family, she wonders. Or perhaps he did something that Maggie has to fix now. Alex had done that to her own family more times than she can count. She quickly runs over his words—the way he had stared at her—and another, more likely possibility rears its ugly head, but for Maggie’s sake, she hopes it’s not true.

“Nothing,” Maggie bites out, and then stops herself, closing her eyes and rubbing her forehead lightly. “It’s just,” she grimaces, but as if catching herself in the action, immediately wipes her face of any expression seconds later. “I haven't seen or directly talked to him in ten years,” she pauses, eyes cast to the ceiling like it holds the mysteries to the world, “just over ten years now, actually.”

Shock is the first thing that registers in Alex’s mind.

More than a decade. Maggie hasn’t had a relationship with her father for that long.

Her brain works overtime to understand the implications of that, and a quick mathematical equation brings forth a realization that breaks her heart. When their relationship had soured, Maggie had only been a child.
Her stomach bottoms out at the confirmation she’d been hoping wouldn’t come.

The words he’d said echo in her mind in a whole new light. They’d been a jarring clash of disdain. Contempt. Maybe even hate. And all of it had been solely aimed at his own daughter. The child he was supposed to love unconditionally. Had he abandoned her? Was Maggie raised by a single mother because her father was too homophobic to stick around? She remembers a small fact she read in an interview, about Maggie being “out” ever since she was 14. It fits with the timeline of her estrangement with her dad. Did embracing she was gay cost Maggie part of her family? (Deep down, Alex selfishly wonders if doing the same will cost her hers.)

Alex feels sick, but the nausea is warring with a different, stronger emotion: an unabashed loathing towards Maggie’s father.

Alex briefly wonders how far he’s gone from the apartment and how long it’d take her to track him down and unleash her building fury on him. She’s familiar now, with how good it can feel for her hands to connect with someone—she’d slapped away more than one paparazzi, and though she’s not proud of it, in her darkest moments she can remember how satisfying it was. An insidious thought fleets through her mind like a passing storm cloud: she’d like 5 minutes alone with Maggie’s dad.

She shakes her head, tampering down the simmer of anger threatening to burn her body from the inside out. There are more pressing matters at hand right now. She looks at Maggie, only her side profile visible, but though her body is physically present in the room with Alex, it’s like her spirit, her essence, has departed the corporeal plane, leaving only a poor imitation of herself behind. It scares Alex to see Maggie like this, and that fear spurs her to action.

She carefully steps closer, but this time Maggie doesn’t even react to her, too lost in her own head. Alex takes it as a sign of encouragement though, slowly easing herself into Maggie’s orbit while simultaneously trying to draw Maggie back into the world of the living—with her.

“And what did he want?” she asks gently, injecting her words with all the care she won’t allow herself to show Maggie for fear of overwhelming her.

“He came to talk to me about my sister,” Maggie says. Her voice wavers, and it’s as if the hesitancy spreads throughout her body because her knees hit the back of one of the pillars in her living room. She fumbles for a moment—hands shooting behind her for purchase, a grip to steady her amidst a storm.

“You have a sister?” Alex tries and fails to keep her voice even—surprise colors every word. Maggie's never mentioned any siblings.

She’s shied away from any discussion of her family, now that she thinks about it, apart from Gabriella; but Alex had never thought she could have a sister she never spoke about. In fact, she hasn’t even read about siblings in any interview. Maggie’s wikipedia page is absent of those facts as well. Her confusion only grows.

“Two sisters, actually.” Maggie smiles weakly at that, a glimmer of sun on a dark day, eyes a million miles away. But the smile fades as quickly as it had appeared. “And a baby brother too. He’ll be three soon.”

Alex frowns. The world tilts, as she suddenly feels like she doesn’t know Maggie at all. She thought they were...close, by now. But Maggie has hid an entire family from her. She’s spent almost every waking moment by Maggie’s side for months upon months, but she never knew about her siblings, never heard a single story about them. The realization hurts her more than it should.
Are they really friends, like she thought they were? Does she know Maggie at all?

A thought fights its way through the disappointment, and it completely changes the direction of Alex’s thoughts. Now that she thinks about it...neither James nor anyone on set has mentioned Maggie’s siblings, or parents. A million questions race through her mind. Does anybody know?

“Maggie, I don’t...I don’t understand,” she tells her, taking a step closer to her. Her hands itch to touch her but she presses them against her side. “Why have you never mentioned them?”

Maggie looks upwards, and Alex follows her gaze, glancing at the high beams and elegant, yet rustic light fixtures. Her eyes rove over the staircase, the high steps and thin railing intimidating even for her. Maggie’s apartment is definitely not kid friendly. Has her 2 year old brother been here more than Alex has? How has she never met him? Any of them?

A bitter, sad smile paints Maggie’s lips.

“That would be because I haven’t seen any of them in that same amount of time, Danvers,” she spits out, her voice a wretched, miserable copy of its usual warm tone. She takes hurried steps to her couch, unceremoniously sinking into it.

She runs both her hands through her hair, fingers catching in some strands, and Alex wants to untangle it in a way she seldom has wanted anything in life. It’s a strange thought, something she definitely has never thought about with anyone else she’s ever liked, but Maggie is a first in so many ways. Maybe it’s the surprise, the cold shock as she begins to comprehend, that pushes her brain to think of such things. She wants to brush Maggie’s hair for her, she wants to whisk her away on a plane to the other side of the world, where this sadness can’t reach her.

The pain in Maggie’s voice vibrates inside of her, as Alex finally processes the words she’d just uttered.

She hasn’t seen her siblings in over 10 years. Alex can’t imagine a month going by without seeing Kara, at least through Skype. She can’t understand what would make Maggie—good and warm and kind to a fault Maggie—miss out on so much of their lives. But then a terrible thought forms as she remembers Maggie’s father’s face—that maybe she didn’t have a choice.

Alex swallows through the knot in her throat, and walks closer to Maggie. She looks so torn, so hurt.

“I don’t...” She takes a breath. “I don’t really know what’s going on, but I want to be here for you,” she pleads, hovering around Maggie without a single certain thought of what to do. She settles for tentatively sitting beside her, the space between them carefully considered in her head. She feels like Maggie is a fawn, liable to run at the first sign of unexpected movement.

Maggie doesn’t run. She does look up, however, and her eyes are a raging river about to overflow. She shakes her head.

“Alex-”

“You’re my friend,” she tells Maggie earnestly. “My best friend, if I’m being honest, right up there with my sister.” She cringes at the implication that Maggie is anything like her sister, but she didn’t know what she was going to say until she said it. She just can’t help herself around Maggie, and much less like this.

Maggie meets her eyes, and for the first time since that man—since her estranged father—showed up at the door, Alex feels like Maggie is really here, like she sees her.
“I want to be here for you,” she repeats, laying a tentative hand on Maggie’s knee. “Please, let me.”

Maggie seems to gravitate towards her touch.

But just as she thinks that Maggie will finally open up to her, or at least take the comfort she’s offering, her face shutters closed again.

Maggie stands abruptly, legs quickly carrying her towards the door.

“I appreciate that, Alex, but I just- I can’t do this right now. I’m sorry.” She opens the door, a clear gesture for her to leave. And Alex wants to respect Maggie’s wishes, but for a wild moment, she imagines herself staying and fighting for Maggie to finally let her in. She imagines taking Maggie into her arms and holding her as tight as she might need, until she stops looking like the world is imploding. But she can’t do any of that, and defeated steps carry her over the threshold of Maggie’s apartment.

“I’ll, uh, I’ll talk to you later,” Maggie says. Alex nods. “Oh, and Alex-”

She looks up, a spark of hope that Maggie’s changed her mind.

“Don’t tell anyone, please. About my...my father showing up, or about my siblings. Please.”

“Of course,” she tells her, pressing her lips together in what she hopes is a comforting smile.

Maggie’s expression remains impassive, except for the glint of heartbreak running deeper than even she can hide. Maggie is an amazing actress, but in this moment Alex can see right through her, as if she was made from nothing but cellophane. And all she can do is watch.

Alex hates feeling useless. She’s always hated feeling useless, and in the position she is now, she can’t do anything to help beyond offering kind words.

But words are just letters strung together, they’re not actions. They’re not tangible objects that people can cling to in times of need. Not in the way that truly matters. But either way, Maggie doesn’t want that sort of comfort from her. One look at her closed off face shatters any passing thought Alex might have had that she was welcome here.

The click of the door shutting behind her is quiet, but it resounds deafeningly loud to Alex’s ears.

A painful numbness courses through Maggie’s body.

She forced herself into the closest thing to a detached state of mind she could achieve the minute she saw him again, and it had carried her through their conversation without her breaking, but her determination begins to shatter.

As the door clicks closed after Alex, the sad approximation of composure swiftly disappears.
She drags in a lungful of air as her forehead fall against the door. The cold, dark grain of the wood against her forehead clears her head, but barely. It’s hard to focus when she’s still reeling from the fact that her father was on the other side of the door mere minutes ago.

When she’d first laid eyes on him, her initial thought had been one of panic. The shock of it had been fleeting, only to be replaced by pulsating worry. She’d imagined he was there to deliver bad news, to let her know something terrible had happened to Franky, Sofia, or even little Charles. (She wonders for a moment if he would even think to tell her, if something happened. If he or her mom would bother. Or if she’s just good for her monetary support and nothing else.) But then, as the words started falling out of his mouth, she’d understood the motive of his presence.

She takes a couple of steps back, away from the transient relief of the different temperature against her forehead.

When she was young and she had a stomach ache, she used to curl up on the cold bathroom tiles. It made her feel better. Now, Maggie senselessly has that same urge. She just can’t believe he’s back.

Maggie had stopped hoping she’d see him again after she turned 15. It had taken an entire year of radio silence to accept that she was out of their lives for good, but she finally had, and with it had come a certain freedom. She’d allowed herself to feel at home with Gabriella, to build a new home with her.

She’d accepted she’d never see him again as a kid, because she had to, but she had reveled in the fact as an adult. She didn’t need to worry about him, about either of her parents. Gabriella had been supportive of her every move, and even on the rare occasions that they’d fought or disagreed, there was none of the fear or resentment she’d felt when her mother chastised her. Nor a thought spared for what her father might think of whoever she was seeing at the moment. Even after they’d gotten into contact with her again, it was made clear that they didn’t want her back, they just needed her help. The lines had been solid, defined as if drawn in concrete.

Now, it seems like they were drawn in the sand, and a wave finally washed them away.

Maggie just never expected it would be in the form of her little sister.

She takes a few steps back to her place in the couch. She should have guessed their father knew about Franky contacting her. Nothing ever got by him.

She remembers growing up, how he took pride in keeping his home running like a well oiled machine. Even when Franky had been a fussy toddler and Sofia a colicky baby, she can’t ever remember him raising his voice. When things got too loud, he would step out to have a cigarette, instead of fighting with her mom in front of the three of them. Maggie doesn’t think she saw him smoke more than a dozen times in all the years she lived with him. And she doesn’t remember stepping out of line more than twice.

She’d had no reason to. He’d been her daddy and Maggie had thought he hung the moon.

That visage is broken now, marred by the knowledge of his intolerance, which ultimately proved stronger than his love for his daughter. But if there’s one thing that hasn’t changed, even after all these years, it’s the kind of father he is. He knew Franky found out about her. Of course he did.

She shouldn’t feel as surprised as she does that he actually flew here to tell her to stay away to her face. He’d always moved heaven and earth to protect his daughters. Now it’s just Maggie is the
monster they seemingly need protection from, or so he’d made it seem.

She’d been silent the whole time, receiving the words he threw without so much as an answer or a flinch.

He didn't tell her to be quiet. He didn't need to. As a little girl, the same deep, commanding voice that made her feel so safe had also instilled in her a sort of loving discipline. She almost never stepped a toe out of line because she loved her dad, but the minute she did his voice would put her in her place better than her mother spanking her ever did. It was painful, to a degree Maggie didn’t want to think about, how that was still true 10 years later.

Maggie hadn’t had it in her to raise her voice at him, even as anxiety rolled in her gut. She hadn’t managed more than a couple words, in fact. Maggie remembers how as a teenager, once she started getting roles, she’d fantasized about going back to Blue Springs to rub her success in his face. She’d imagined confronting him, and saying a few choice words in his face. Sometimes, even now, she's still guilty of imagining how satisfying it would be to snap and curse him out. To stand up to him. But those imagined daydreams didn’t come anywhere close to how she really acted when confronted with the exact situation in real life.

The minute she’d laid eyes on him, all she was had disappeared. She’d suddenly been 14 years old all over again, broken and hurt. The feeling had only briefly receded upon seeing Alex's face and how frantic she looked. That had made her move.

That made her ask him why he was here, and lead him outside to talk. Maggie could deal with him, but she wouldn’t let Alex do it. Alex didn't deserve to bear witness to that, didn't deserve to take the brunt of his anger—his disgust. And she certainly didn’t need to see her falling apart.

She thinks back to their conversation, her dad’s words melding together until all she can hear is her blood rushing in her ears. His voice had felt like shards of glass, like lancets thrown at her, piercing her skin. She’s still reeling, in the aftermath, and only one thought surges through the chaos in her head, although it feels more like an instinct at this point than a thought at all.

She needs to talk to her aunt.

She’d needed it back when she first landed in LA, a call born out of desperation and sorrow. But through the weeks and months and years that followed, she came to rely on Gabriella to be her safe port in the thick of the storm. She still is. Maggie grabs her phone, dazed, and types 1, Gabriella’s speed dial.

Her aunt answers on the third ring.

“Hey, Maggie!” her aunt greets, and her voice is like a balm. “The lunch rush is being a bit crazy, do you mind if I-”

“Aunt Gabriella?” she asks quietly.

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“Aunt Gabriella?” She can hear the frown in her voice, can almost see it right in front of her, and a stab of longing spears through her. She misses her aunt. She wishes she was here with her, not on the other side of the country. She’s painfully aware of how alone she feels, how vulnerable. It’s as though his presence has ripped away all of her armor. “You haven’t called me that in years.”

It takes her a moment to realize she’s used ‘aunt’, called her the same title she did for months after she arrived at her apartment, and that Gabriella had to train out of her. Her mom had drilled into her that calling adults by their given name was disrespectful. Gabriella had thought it was pointless,
“It’s my dad,” she says through a parched throat.

She was planning on having a drink with Alex along with dessert. She has the bottle of Vin Santo in one of her drawers. Gabriella had brought it for her the last time she was here, smuggled into her bag. Vin Santo was a dessert wine through and through, and Maggie had always thought of an elaborate dessert as part of a celebration. She didn’t see the point of drinking it alone.

She was supposed to have dessert with her friend, to share a glass of that golden, sweet Italian wine she’d been saving for a while, and enjoy her night.

She considers cracking open the bottle anyways. Or maybe a quart of scotch.

“Maggie? What’s going on with Oscar? Are you okay-”

“He showed up here.”

“Oh my God. Fuck. Hang on.” She hears a clatter in the background, and then the noise of the kitchen is gone. “What did he want?” Gabriella asks. “Are you okay? Is it about Fran-”

“Yes. It is.” Maggie pushes her hair behind her ear, a nervous tick that flares up whenever stress overtakes her. Never has it been more potent than now. “Of course it is.”

Through the pain and the grief and the shock of seeing her dad again, worry begins to emerge. What is she going to do? What has he told Franky about the reason she didn’t grow up with her? With them?

“He found out she got in touch with us. He wasn’t-” She swallows, and finally sits down on the couch. Without Alex here, it feels less crowded. She feels less exposed. She can’t afford for anyone to see her like this. “He wasn’t happy about it.”

“Of course not, that bastard.”

Even with the passage of time—the space and years that separates her from that girl her father abandoned—the insult still makes her uncomfortable. She doesn't know if it’s leftover Catholicism, or a disciplined upbringing, but she’s never been able to insult him without guilt. At the beginning, Gabriella refrained from doing it too, in deference to her. 14-year-old Maggie would have never called her father a bastard.

24-year-old Maggie still flinches.

She hates that she does, that she can’t just cleanly hate him. It would be easier. It would hurt less.

“What do I do?” she asks, begging for guidance. “He wants to talk to me, he asked me to meet him at his hotel on-”

No,” Gabriella says fiercely. “Not if you don’t want to.”

“I don’t think that matters,” she tells her. “The only reason he didn’t stay is because Alex was here. He probably didn’t want to make a scene.”

It would be just like her father to keep arguments behind closed doors. He’d always waited until they were home to argue with her mom, the few times they did. He’d always kept up appearances, she can see that now. She can’t help but wonder if that, more than anything, was the reason why he
threw her away the way he did.

He’d never liked church the way her mother did, never proclaimed the homosexuals were going to hell the way her grandmother had. In fact, he’d been the one to get her out of waking up early and going to church—he’d taken her with him to run errands instead. They’d poked each other to avoid falling asleep when her mom dragged them both to some special mass or another. Her dad wasn’t religious, not in the way the women in her family were. It’s why Maggie never thought he would hate her. The few times she’d fantasized about coming out to them, it was always her mom who yelled, her nonna who cried, and her dad who stood between her and the world, protecting her.

She’d never imagined the way it actually went down (and that seems to be the recurring theme with her and her dad). She was blindsided.

She feels the same way now, and it’s his fault all over again.

“Maggie?” Gabriella’s voice brings her out of her reverie. “What did he tell Franky? Do you want me to try calling her?”

“No,” she says instantly. “And I don’t know...He just said-” she drags her hand down her face, surprised to find it wet. “He just said she knows what she knows and I don’t need to confuse her by getting in touch with her. That I’m...still not welcome.”

“Maggie-”

“I wanted to call her, Gabriella. That’s the worst part. It took me too long to decide, but I finally did. I want to get to know Franky. I want to talk to her again. To all of them.”

It seems so simple she thinks maybe M’gann was right, and it was always what she was going to do. There’s no way she can go back to her life without thinking of her siblings knowing about her but not being able to reach her. Not knowing how much she cares. Thinking she’s ashamed of them, or that they’re a burden. She would never be able to live like that.

“Then that’s what you’ll do,” Gabriella says without hesitation, a stark contrast to the feeling bubbling up in Maggie’s chest.

“My dad-“

“Franky might be his daughter, but she’s your sister.”

Not anymore. The words die in her throat, as she remembers what being someone’s sister entailed. She thinks of all the mornings she’d comforted Franky, of crossing the space between their beds to keep her company. Of helping her put on a winter jacket and teaching her how to secure the velcro on her pink, light up sneakers. She’s 14 now, and there’s a decade of moments she’s missed out on between them, a tangible separation. Maggie wasn’t there to take her ice skating in Omaha, or to teach her how to read her favorite book by herself, the one she made Maggie read to her when the grown ups had gone to bed and she still couldn’t sleep. Maggie wasn’t around to help her adjust to middle school, or to give her the birds and the bees talk because their mother won’t.

She doesn’t even know what Franky looks like now. In her lowest moments, she’d scoured Facebook and Instagram for anyone in Nebraska with her name, and she hadn’t found anything. She’d even asked her new school, the one she pays for, only to be told she needed to be a parent to get a copy of the yearbook sent to her.

Maggie’s not her sister anymore. Their father made sure of that, and she isn’t sure she can undo the damage he’s done.
“Your dad has nothing to do with this,” Gabriella insists.

“She’s still a kid,” Maggie says. “So it has everything to do with him. When we talked…” Her throat constricts.

“Sweetie?” Gabriella asks softly. “Hang on. I’m catching a plane.”

Any protests she could’ve had wither in her throat. She wants her here, with her.

With a lightning bolt of clarity she realizes that she doesn’t know if Gabriella has chosen to go to Argentina or not. She doesn’t know whether she and Chris have something planned for tonight, or whether the restaurant requires her around right now—she just needs her aunt here. She needs someone in her corner, needs to feel like she has a corner at all.

“Okay,” she says, accepting her selfishness in the same breath that she embraces it.

“Okay,” Gabriella repeats, and if she’s surprised that Maggie accepts so easily, she doesn’t mention it. “I’ll be there as soon a possible, okay? I love you.”

”Me too.”

“I’ll call you on my way to the airport,” Gabriella tells her hurriedly, and the line goes dead.

Maggie puts her phone down, some of the tension lining her shoulders loosening now that she knows Gabriella is on her way, and she’s not alone in this. She sits back, lost on what to do now, except for wait.

Something heavy presses swells inside her chest, restricting her breathing.

Maggie looks around her apartment, the loft she’s so proud off. She almost wishes she’d been alone, so she could’ve invited her dad inside, so he could’ve seen it. She would’ve liked to see him squirm, see him look around and sink his hands in his pockets the way he did when he was somewhere he didn’t feel he fit in. She wonders what he would think about this, the home she made for herself.

Two beautiful bonsai trees proudly decorate her coffee table and her breakfast island. The one in her bedroom is older than herself, and it cost more than her dad makes in three months. She remembers asking for ice cream cones as a child, and getting them—or not—depending on the date. Her fridge is now permanently stocked with six different flavors of vegan and non vegan ice cream depending on what strikes her fancy. She didn't even do the goddamn grocery shopping herself, her assistant did it for her when he last visited. Twice a week, a cleaning lady stops by her apartment while she’s at work. It’s the life she didn’t even know she wanted as a child, a life filled with privileges that have somehow become normal now.

She remembers ice skating in the pond in her backyard, and now she could buy an ice rink if she wanted. Hell, she could tear down her old home and build an ice rink on top of that very same pond. If she was a different person, she’d probably do it.

She’s at the top of the hill now.

It’s where she never thought she’d get after that first small role as a witness on Law & Order. She’s the lead of a film that grossed millions at the box office. She won a Golden Globe. She’s successful, by whatever measure one can use.

So why does she feel so empty right now? So...lost.
As she looks around her apartment, feeling like a stranger looking in, Maggie begins to ask herself what has she really accomplished. Past the bank account and the public recognition, what does she have? She doesn’t have friends other than her aunt, who is coincidentally one of only three people Maggie trusts in this world, and the only one she confides in. The other two people she trusts are on her payroll. Not a single relationship she’s had has ended well, or even that amicably. She’s in a freaking fake relationship, for crying out loud.

What is she, really? Successful can’t describe a woman whose youngest sibling hasn’t ever been in the same room as her. Whose sisters don’t know her. It’s miracle enough that Franky managed to get in touch with her.

She has two sisters and a brother but she doesn’t, not really. She might as well be an orphan too for how much her parents care about her. Her closest relationship is Gabriella, and their bond was born of the forced separation that ended her childhood and dropped her on her aunt’s doorstep.

Every woman she’s ever dated has told her that it was her emotional unavailability that doomed their relationship—that she never actually included them in her life. And maybe she didn’t. Maybe there’s something intrinsically broken within her, something that was irreversibly shattered that day when she was 14 years old. A haphazard spiderweb of cracks threaded through her life that nothing—not the money or the recognition or the awards—will ever fix.

When she looks at her life, the bare bones of it, there’s nobody but Gabriella—and M’gann and Winn hovering on the sidelines.

It’s only recently that she’s felt she can add one more person to that list: Alex. Only a few minutes ago, she’d called Maggie her best friend, had said she wanted to be there for her, but their friendship, much like what she has with Winn, will never go beyond the surface. Not when they don’t know everything that’s happened to her, all the details of her past that are carefully concealed from the public eye.

(Alex knows about her siblings now, Maggie reminds herself, a side effect of her shocked blabbing and her father’s sudden appearance, but she pushes that particular thought down. She can’t deal with Alex right now. All she can do is trust that she won’t say anything per her request. After she deals with all of this, she can figure out what to tell her. How to tell her.)

Maggie sighs. When she thinks about it, her aunt is the only person she really has, and that is all of her own doing. Gabriella isn’t here right now though. Nobody is here, and the unoccupied space—the weight of its emptiness—presses down on Maggie in a way that it never has before.

She can’t help but wonder what’s keeping any of them with her.

M’gann is her manager and Winn is her assistant. As much as they’ve grown close over time it all started as a business relationship, they’re both on her payroll. Alex is her co-star, and they’re both locked into a contract that forces them to spend time together. Gabriella is her blood. And she knows, keenly, that blood doesn’t mean much, but to Gabriella she knows it does. She put her own life on hold to finish raising her because Maggie was her niece.

If she took all of those descriptors away, where would that leave her? In her lowest moments, she can’t help but wonder...if they weren’t obliged to, would anyone stay?

Maggie runs her hand down her face, a stifling feeling prickling and pulling at her skin. The temperature in the room seems to plummet, and she shudders. An unsettling energy darts through her body, wreaking havoc on her nerves. It’s as if her body is too weak to hold the brewing tempest rolling through every inch of her.
The pressure builds in her chest, rattling about with each fortifying breath she takes, until it breaks, messy and unsightly in its carnage as wave after wave of emotion—buried for so long—spills forth.

The sob that escapes is bitter and wretched, ripped from deep inside her, carving a bloody path in her throat. She isn’t entirely sure why she’s crying, or if there are too many reasons to enumerate, but between ragged breaths she thinks she’s only cried like this once before, when she was 14 years old. Because every time after, she had Gabriella, she had someone. After her first girlfriend broke up with her, after everything that happened with Emily, it was never like this. She can’t believe it’s been 10 years, and seeing him again can still break her.

And that she feels just as small, alone, and broken as she did back then.

Alex takes the elevator down to her apartment in a daze.

As a child, she’d always prided herself on how quickly she grasped information. When she was in elementary school, it had felt good to be constantly used as an example, to be first in class, the only one with her hand up during difficult questions. She’d thrived on it. Hell, she’d even skipped a grade. And then when her mother started homeschooling her, that only translated into Alex learning subjects more advanced than those her age called for.

Alex’s mind has always been razor sharp. She prides herself of it. It’s the one thing she knows she can rely on.

Suffice it to say, she’s not used to this feeling.

Her brain works fast, trying to make sense of the last half hour, but it’s difficult. They ordered tiramisu. She’d asked Maggie what she thought of dating a costar, and she’d said it was a terrible idea. Maggie’s estranged father had shown up after a decade away, and Maggie has an entire family she has never heard of. She can’t make sense of it. Not Maggie thinking it’d be terrible to date her (she can extrapolate from her answer that that would be her response) because she can fully understand that. But the guy—her father—and the siblings she mentioned. What in the fucking hell?

She reaches her floor, and steady steps—far steadier than how she feels—carry her to her apartment. Every single one, however, feels like a furthering of this newfound chasm between them. There’s so much about Maggie she doesn’t know.

She’d always known she was a reserved woman, but Alex didn’t realize the extent of it until now.

All the moments Maggie’s sidestepped her family questions rush back to her in a deluge. She didn’t visit them at Christmas last year, and Alex remembers thinking that was strange, but writing it off due to the distance and their short break period. Then there was the time at that hospital after her aunt’s fall. Maggie had been so shaken by that, even going so far to stop shooting—the first time that had happened according to Mary and Louise. Maggie had told her that Gabriella was the
one who raised her in all the ways that mattered, and the comment had barely registered in her brain in the moment, her only focus had been comforting Maggie. But now, it makes all the difference.

Alex mentally flicks back all those months ago when she’d first looked into Maggie before ever meeting her. From the few articles she’d scanned, the only thing she’d learned was that Maggie left Nebraska at the age of 14 to pursue modeling in California and moved in with her aunt. There weren’t any photos of her with her parents, and there certainly weren’t any mentions of siblings. It’s a PR miracle that she’s kept her family so hidden, now that she thinks about it.

The entrance to her apartment gradually comes into focus, and Alex operates on autopilot unlocking the door, kicking off her shoes, and settling onto her couch. She feels like she’s in a state of shock, which is laughable considering that she’s not the one who had to confront her estranged father for the first time in 10 years.

She can’t even imagine what Maggie is going through right now, or what she suffered during her childhood. She can’t go more than a couple of days without talking to Kara, and they’re constantly texting. Maggie said she hasn’t seen her siblings in 10 years.

An image suddenly springs to Alex’s mind. Her 14th birthday—in France. Kara had arrived that week, and adjusting to a brand new sister had been one of the roughest periods of her life. Compared to what she can only imagine Maggie had been going through at the same age though, her own struggles are nothing. When she was 14 she’d been throwing fits over accommodating her life to Kara, but at that age Maggie had left everything she’d ever known and been thrust into an entirely new environment, likely because her father hadn’t approved of her sexuality.

It’s the one thing that makes sense, if she takes into account the way he’d looked at her, and how exactly at that age Maggie had cut off contact with her siblings and moved in with Gabriella. Alex’s brain finally catches up, neurons firing rapidly as she puts together the missing piece of the puzzle that is Maggie Sawyer.

But knowing does nothing to help her, and it’s the one thing Alex wishes she could do. Maggie’s never been one to show weakness to others, though. Alex realizes that now. Instead, she seems to hide it with deflections, an easy smile and distracting dimples. She thinks back to the shadow that fell over Maggie’s face at every inadvertent mention of her parents she’d made—and she can easily recollect how adeptly she’d been able to shift the conversation. Today, she’d simply brushed her off and sent her on her way. It’s a coping mechanism—Alex is well versed in those—and from the looks of it, a mechanism she’s hard far too much practice perfecting over the years.

Alex’s heart clenches for that little girl who grew up without her parents, sisters, and a brother she never got the chance to meet.

She can’t help but wonder though, about the reason for those lost years. Did Maggie just...up and leave? She imagines Blue Springs wasn’t the best place for a young, gay girl to grow up, and her father was certainly a part of that. If she had the chance to go somewhere better, it’s entirely plausible she’d choose that route. Perhaps that’s the reason Maggie was so shaken when her father showed up, and why he’d looked at her with such contempt. Her protectiveness over Maggie immediately led her to paint Maggie’s father as the bad guy, but maybe she had it all wrong. What if Maggie had just left them all without looking back? Her dad is an asshole, that much is clear, but her siblings shouldn’t pay for his mistakes.

It’s difficult to reconcile the kind, endlessly caring woman she’s come to know with a person who could...abandon her own family. It’s too difficult. A flush of shame washes over her at even thinking such a thing, as if the subject of her thoughts would know. Maggie is the best person she
knows, besides her sister. She doesn’t have it in her to perform such an insidious act, and the more Alex thinks about it—sinking into her couch with a deep sigh—the more confident she is on the matter.

Maggie actively chooses to be a good person every day, she can attest to that having witnessed it first hand. She’s a remarkable person. Her emotional resilience alone—bravery in its purest form—leaves Alex in awe. And it only makes her fall for her that much more. Maggie seems to be this...unfailing beam of light piercing through the darkness that her days used to be, and she’s thankful for every moment with her, in whatever capacity she can have her. Maggie’s the sun, and Alex is Icarus, destined to burn but flying closer and closer regardless—desperate for the warmth. And how could she not?

It’s Maggie.

Warm brown eyes and dimples fill her mind, and the usual twinge in Alex’s chest follows, only for her to frown. There is this...huge thing...that she didn’t know about Maggie until a few minutes ago, and of which she still doesn’t know all the details, what actually happened. She can imagine Gabriella swooping in and offering to take Maggie in after her coming out to her parents didn’t work out, can picture her parents making her choose between living with her siblings or living with Gabriella. She can even imagine Maggie’s dad not giving her a choice, which would explain more thoroughly all that happened. But she doesn’t know, and it itches at the back of her brain.

She feels only mildly guilty as she pulls out her laptop, a determined set to her shoulders. She’s always been good at conducting research—thoroughly searching for facts—and she’s never been more consumed with a burning desire to know more than she is now.

It probably won’t be online, but she’s hoping if she finds anything, any reference from Maggie or about her with regard to her younger years, she’ll be able to piece together everything with what she knows now. Maggie doesn’t want her downstairs, with her, and Alex hates feeling useless. This is one way she can feel useful, even if it is intrusive. To help her, she needs to know, she tells herself. It’s an excuse she can live with.

The usual articles pop up first, Maggie’s Wikipedia page, her IMDB, recent interviews and some paparazzi photos, most of which feature her. She sets a few parameters in Google to find the oldest links possible, and then decides to hit the earliest interviews first. Best to start with the primary source. She doesn’t expect to find a scintillating scoop, but at the start of her career Maggie would have been less averse to the media, which means a slip up could’ve occurred. Half an hour later though, her conjecture is proved wrong. Apparently, Maggie’s manager taught her well, and she’s always had a knack for deflection and charm—unlike Alex.

Video interviews offer just as little insight, other than confirming that Maggie’s always been pretty. Her eyes rove over any other relevant information she can find, the bright screen of her laptop burned into her retinas, but the official sources are all dead ends. And that leaves the world of unofficial, gossip fueled fodder—which she’d desperately been trying to avoid. The number of articles and discussions dedicated to analyzing and dissecting every aspect of Maggie’s life from her dating life down to what she smells like—it varies actually, depending on the day she’s noticed—are endless. And make Alex feel uncomfortable. None of it even touches on Maggie’s family beyond a throwaway line about Nebraska though, and that fact tugs on her mind.

One of the few mentions she can find of Maggie’s family comes in the form of a back and forth on one of her fan forums. She’s not the only one who’s noticed how little Maggie divulges about her family. The discussion is quickly stifled by a handful of fans though, as if they’re soldiers protecting their leader. The next post down is a gif of Maggie—looking only marginally younger
than she does today, though that may just be her lack of makeup—talking about how her parents were fine with her coming out.

She studies the image intently, trying to suss out whether Maggie was lying or not. It didn’t look like a lie, but Maggie is a fantastic actress. And she wonders, for a moment, if part of her skill comes from lying about such a huge part of her life since the tender age of 14. For Maggie’s sake, she does hope that her mom at least is better than he is.

She searches keywords in the site as a last resort, and finds a thread dedicated to Maggie’s childhood. There’s nothing more than a few likes and dislikes they must have gathered from various interviews—Maggie liked ice skating as a child, her aunt Gabriella once gave her a Tamagotchi as a present—but one thing does pull Alex’s attention. It’s a photo—grainy and obviously taken with something ancient—depicting Maggie the youngest she’s ever seen her. It was apparently posted by a now deleted Instagram account, and the Maggie in the picture is supposed to be 14. She looks happy, adorable. (About 12, actually, Alex briefly wonders how old Maggie will look when she’s 40.) But otherwise...fine. But she knows photos are misleading.

Alex runs through everything she’s absorbed from the past few hours. The lack of information on Maggie’s family, across multiple platforms and sources, is too wide sweeping to be a coincidence. It’s as if someone, and she’d wager whoever hypothetically did so is on Maggie’s payroll, wiped the internet clean of any mention of them, or maybe simply avoided any information from being put out there in the first place.

Alex has to commend Maggie’s, or her manager’s, foresight. There’s nothing online anybody could use to link Maggie to the angry, deranged-looking man that showed up at her door. And it’s as though her sisters don’t even exist. Alex closes her laptop. If only she’d figured out that particular fact sooner. All she has to show for her “research” is a sore back and burning eyes.

She’s no closer to finding answers than she was when she started, and that failure—coupled with the impotence of having to sit this out—burrows into her brain, eclipsing everything else.
I think her parents are hardcore homophobes. Rural Nebraska? Please!

It would explain why she's so close with her aunt but we've never seen her with her mom. She's close with Gabriella because she lives in LA like her and they used to live together. Her mom is in Nebraska.

Also remember in that interview (I can't find it right now) where she said her parents were accepting? She wouldn't lie to me.
Maggie is woken by her cellphone.

She doesn’t know it’s her cellphone at first. The incessant music seeps into her dreams, the background soundtrack to her walking through her childhood home—inexplicably wearing her character’s clothes, badge and gun—and that is what mercifully wakes her from her dream. Maybe she ought to call it a nightmare. Her eyes open, but the room she shared with Franky is still present,
details she’d forgotten fresh in her mind.

She doesn’t get to the phone in time to answer it, but soon enough another noise starts up, unrelenting. A knock at her door.

Gabriella.

A quick glance at the time on her phone lets her know it’s 10 PM. She can’t believe how long she slept, but then, as she fully awakens while walking to open the door for her aunt, she realizes maybe her body thought being asleep would be better than being awake.

The weight of seeing her dad again seems to fall upon her as soon as she sees her aunt, and before she even registers stepping forward she’s in her embrace, inhaling the sweet scent of spices and sweetness that seems permanent thanks to her job.

“Oh, sweetie,” she says softly, rubbing Maggie’s back, petting her hair. “Oh, piccola,” Gabriella says even softer, and that more than anything makes tears spring to Maggie’s eyes. She thought she was all cried out earlier, but she was wrong. Tears slip out of her eyes, her breathing growing erratic. She feels like a child who’s scraped her knee, but waited to wail at the top of her lungs until she knew her mother was close enough to comfort her.

She clutches Gabriella tighter, and soaks in that comfort.

“Let’s sit down,” her aunt says after a while, and gets her bag from the hallway. Maggie roughly wipes away the wetness under her eyes, embarrassed at her outburst. She didn’t even let her get inside the door.

“Sorr-”

“I don’t want to hear a single apology from you, all right? Not for anything at all.”

Maggie smiles faintly. “What if I drop that bottle of wine you got me? The Italian one.”

“You can throw it against the wall if it will make you feel better,” Gabriella tells her, fierce. It makes Maggie’s eyes sting even more. “We should talk,” she says finally, sitting down on the couch, and Maggie nods and joins her.

And she talks.

She starts with her lunch with Alex, because somehow it seems important enough to mention. She tells Gabriella about the wine she was going to get out—thanking her again for getting it here for her—and cracks a joke about Alex never having had tiramisu before. It gives the atmosphere some levity, lets her get enough distance to be able to talk about everything that happened next.

It’s easier the second time around. She can think and not just react, and so she tells Gabriella how her dad found out Franky was in contact with them, and how they weren’t to answer her back. He’d thought it fitting to speak directly to her to establish again the rules between her and his family, and Maggie lets out a bitter chuckle even as Gabriella’s cheeks go ruddy with anger.

“And I gave him my number, he said he would let me know where to meet him tomorrow,” she tells Gabriella finally. It’s a miracle her aunt has remained quiet for so long. “It’s on him to call me now.”

“Not unless we do it first,” Gabriella says, and pulls out her cellphone. Maggie can recognize in her the jittery energy that invades her whenever there’s stress. Gabriella looks through her contacts and
dials a number, and Maggie’s suddenly afraid that she’s calling her dad. But the person she’s calling answers seemingly on the first ring, and it’s certainly not her dad.

“What is Oscar’s number?” Gabriella asks firmly. The person on the other line starts to talk, but Gabriella cuts them off. “Giorgia, your husband is here, in New York, harassing your daughter, so you will give me his number.” Gabriella’s voice leaves no room for discussion, even against what Maggie knows now to be her mother.

She scoots back on the couch, nearly subconsciously.

She can’t listen to her mother’s voice too, not today. It’d be the last straw on the proverbial camel’s back.

“I don’t care,” Gabriella says firmly before closing the call. She rapidly types down a new contact, and then shows the phone to Maggie. “Now we get to talk to him first, whenever you decide to. He doesn’t get to boss you around.”

Maggie nods. She logically knows having the upperhand is a good thing, but the anxiety at having to wait for his call increases tenfold when she realizes she’s going to have to reach out and tell him where to meet, and she’ll have to attend that meeting.

She wishes she could be 14 again, and leave Gabriella to deal with the brunt of his anger. She’s a coward.

“We need to call M’gann too,” Gabriella mentions, and Maggie nods. It’s so easy to let her take over, and she’s thankful for it. She listens to Gabriella relay everything to her manager, an odd acceptance coming over her as she listens. This is the situation they’re in now, all of them, and they have to deal with it. And they will. She’s not alone. Gabriella is already admirably taking charge of the situation, and Maggie has half a mind to hide behind her skirt and let her have at it with her father, rip him a new one in the way she knows her aunt would die to do, and that she isn’t capable of. But she knows she can’t.

She has to face him by herself.

“Maggie…” Gabriella looks at her after the call is closed, her expression an obvious invitation to talk. “How are you feeling?”

She shrugs, her eyes still stinging.

Gabriella puts her hand on Maggie’s knee, and Maggie looks away. How to put into words the way her chest constricts every time she remembers Franky, or how it still hurts that her mom and dad could so easily throw her away, like garbage. She can’t.

“Don’t wanna talk about it,” she manages, a step above the ‘I’m fine’ she would’ve tried for if it weren’t painfully obvious she isn’t.

“Okay,” Gabriella tells her. “M’gann’s in the city already so she’s gonna come over tomorrow, and if your dad calls I’ll handle him, okay? You don’t have to do anything right now.”

Maggie nods. Gabriella opens her arms, and Maggie falls into her embrace all over again. The strong arms around her got her through her first heartbreak, and received her when she graduated high school. She’s safe here, safe enough to tell Gabriella what the single worst part is.

“He still wears the same cologne,” she whispers—and cries.
We're back! And the aftermath of Oscar showing up has just begun to unravel...

Thank you all for your patience while waiting for the update. I (anddirtyrain) have been going through some personal situations that didn't let me write for a long time, but I hope to be back now. Sorry about the wait.

If you liked the chapter, let us know in the comments! We love hearing from you all regarding any of your thoughts whilst reading, and it's a great motivator. Thank you so much for reading and sticking with us on this unexpectedly long journey! We really do appreciate every person who's commented, given us kudos, bookmarked, and subscribed 💘
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Non bis in idem: an issue once decided must not be raised again

“Want me to make you some dinner?”

Gabriella’s voice cuts through the silence.

Maggie doesn’t really know how long it’s been, has started counting the passage of time by measuring her own heartbeat, the noise of Gabriella’s footsteps, or the clink of the ceramic pieces she cleans up from her floor.

Her aunt held her until she was all cried out, and has since tidied up her apartment and brought her two glasses of water that have gone untouched. She’s constantly walking by her to make sure she’s okay. She’ll touch her hair, or squeeze her shoulder. She’s giving her time, and Maggie takes it. The shock of seeing her dad—and she realizes it was shock—has lessened by now, and having a clear plan in place for the near future makes it easier to breathe. She’ll go to work tomorrow as usual, they’ll talk to M’gann tomorrow night and they’ll decide what to do about her dad. Gabriella got her her dad’s number, and she’s taken ownership of her cell phone so Maggie won’t have to answer in case he calls, and it all makes her feel more in control, which she’s found she sorely needs.

“How about I make you some dinner?” Gabriella calls out. “Do you want me to make dinner?” She asks—again, Maggie realizes. She takes a quick look at the clock.

“It’s 1 AM,” she says, her voice rough from lack of use.

“The perfect time for comfort food,” Gabriella tells her with a small, encouraging smile. “Come on, I heard your stomach growl,” she says, before Maggie can rebuff her again. “Put some water to boil and set the table, I’m gonna get changed.” Her tone of voice doesn’t leave room for an argument, and Maggie recognizes the voice Gabriella would use to reprimand her when she was a kid.

Five heartbeats later, she feels a warm, familiar presence at her back and catches the faint whiff of lotion her aunt always uses. Gabriella moves around the table, plates and silverware in hand. Maggie glances down at the table, surprised to find she’d only managed to put placemats down in the time Gabriella was gone. The pot isn’t even on the stovetop yet.

Maggie wills herself to turn towards the kitchen, for her heavy limbs to cooperate, but a clatter of metal and her aunt’s back at the sink alerts her to the fact that Gabriella has already taken care of that too. She stays rooted to the floor, closing her eyes and letting the the noises and smells she’s
come to associate with her aunt blanket her in comfort. The hot flush of tears prickle at the back of her eyes—again—and she can’t tell if they’re born from pain or gratitude towards the woman currently holding her life together.

“Maggie?” Her aunt’s quiet voice, underlyed with concern, draws her out of her own head. She shakes her head, brushing off Gabriella’s unvoiced question, a watery attempt at a smile flashing across her face. Wordlessly, she allows Gabriella to lead her to the table and sit her down, like a child. On a different day, in a different situation, she’d protest the gesture. But today is not that day.

The hard surface underneath grounds her, and she welcomes the edges of the chair biting into her palms. The pleasant noise of Gabriella cooking comforts her, the chopping of garlic and stirring of sauce harkens back to images of safety and happiness. She takes hold of her cellphone, which Gabriella left on the table, and briefly checks her texts. M’gann says she’s on her way, the cast’s group chat sends jokes as usual, Alex was the last person to text her. Anthony has texted her as well, for whatever reason. Maggie ignores all of them. It’s enough to know the world hasn’t fallen apart in her brief absence, and she trusts that Alex will keep her promise and not tell anyone about her family issues, so it’ll be fine. She puts her phone back down, and goes back to being lulled by the sounds—and smells, now—of her aunt’s cooking.

By the time the food is done she feels more like herself than she has all day.

Three bites of Gabriella’s simple, yet decadent spaghetti bolognese (which has far more cheese than the recipe calls for) and she begins to talk.

“I wasn’t thinking about it anymore, you know?” She says absentmindedly, swirling the noodles around her plate.

“About?” Gabriella keeps her eyes on her own plate, and Maggie feels another rush of gratitude for her aunt. She doesn’t like being observed when she’s vulnerable. If Gabriella was staring at her every expression, she wouldn’t be able to get two words out.

“About meeting Franky again, or Sofia.” She shrugs. She realizes her thoughts are mostly on Franky, the eldest of her two sisters, but the truth is she and Franky had talked, as much as you could hold a conversation with a toddler. They’d shared things, and played together, and had far more of a relationship than she did with Sofia, who was still confined to a crib when she left Blue Springs. Franky hurts the worst. “And I never thought about meeting Charles, not really. Not for a long time.”

She looks up at Gabriella, who looks back at her with eyes that mirror her own pain.

“I’d started to think that was all future Maggie’s thing to deal with,” she utters wirily, twirling more pasta on her fork. “I always thought when Sofia turned eighteen I would gather up the courage to talk to both of them. When they wouldn’t have to depend on our parents permission. I’d pay for whatever college they wanted, get them an apartment together like how we used to live together at first. Save them from sleeping in dorms. And we’d be sisters again. And if not, at least friends. I never prepared for this to happen now. I always thought it would be my choice when to tell them.”

She hadn’t foreseen that the truth about her would be aired so early, and though a part of her—that until now has been too concerned with possible repercussions and talking to her father to come out—is thrilled...she’s mostly just scared. Franky is 14, her very age when her dad kicked her out. Sofia is just 11. Charles is a baby, still. She doesn’t know how she fits in their lives, especially when her dad is doing his damn hardest to keep her away.
“I don’t know what to do next,” she finally tells Gabriella, unashamed of how she keeps sounding ridiculously young. She can be an adult tomorrow.

“We’ll figure it out, okay?” Gabriella tells her, squeezing her hand. “Together.”

She stands up, putting her empty dish in the sink.

“Now finish your food and go to bed, you have an early day tomorrow.”

Maggie smiles faintly. Gabriella knows she won’t let her father get in the way of her filming her show. *Nightingale* is her first priority, after her family. Gabriella, Franky, her other siblings—her dad lost the privilege of being part of that list. She knows that, logically.

She just hopes her heart catches up to her brain in time for their next conversation. He won’t have the upper hand, she’ll make sure of that. And with Gabriella here and M’gann on the way, she feels strong enough to fight for her sister.
Danvers  
12:41 AM
I understand if you don’t want to talk, but I’m here for you. I just want you to know that.

Nightingale

11:27 PM
Attachment: 1 image

Gabriella

Yesterday
I’m boarding. I’ll text you when I land, love you.

M’gann

Yesterday
Your aunt called me. I’m on my way.

Winslow

Sunday
I’ll get on that asap let me kno if there’s anything else

Anthony King

Saturday
Okay? Please let me know you read & agree

Olsen

Friday
I’m taking my bike so I’m not drinking tho
A loud crash joins the cacophony of sounds lilting through the dinner. A sudden round of clapping and cheers abrupts immediately after and Blake grimaces. She’s never understood that particular tradition, but her tablemate apparently does because she’s clapping along just as enthusiastically. If she weren’t in such a good mood, she’d probably find that annoying too. But she’s finally off desk duty in a couple of days—nothing will dampen her high spirits. And in the privacy of her own mind, Blake can admit that it’s been a long time since she’s been annoyed by anything Claire has done.

Every defense she’s put up against Claire has fallen before her bright smile and determined optimism (she used to think it was blind optimism, but she’s come to realize that Claire chooses to be optimistic in spite of everything she’s seen, and she can’t help but admire her for that). Blake’s made it a habit to keep everyone in her life at a distance for the sake of her own personal fears of getting hurt—a pain that would be deeper than any bullet wound could inflict—and them too. She couldn’t bear hurting someone she cared about it, and it seems like everything she touches is left bloody and damaged in her wake. She refuses to do that to her partner too.

“So what’s the best item on the menu?” Claire’s chipper voice floats out from behind the large menu covering half her face. “Seeing as how you suggested this,” she stops herself, casting a glance around at their fellow diners—an assortment of truck drivers, stragglers, and people who look like they should be in one of their holding cells back at the precinct—and raises her eyebrows, “fine establishment.”

She shrugs. “Found it one night after a drug bust. The food is passable and the staff don’t ask questions, which makes it great in my book.” The waitress hadn’t even asked any questions the night she’d shown up with blood stains on her jeans. She knows it’s not what Claire is used to, but it’s become a sort of haven for Blake to lick her wounds away from wandering, judging eyes. It’s got a decent view overlooking a neighborhood park too—she spots a few kids playing ball, creating a serene picture untouched by the horrors of reality.

It’s a completely mundane scene, but with a life like hers, she’s come to appreciate the quiet, uneventful moments.

The morning sunshine slants over Blake’s face, turning her usual dark irises to honey soaked light brown. A small smile plays on her lips, forcing the appearance of a dimple. It’s criminally unfair, Claire thinks, that a woman who smiles so little was given such blindingly bright dimples. Although as Blake’s freedom inches ever closer, her smiles have grown increasingly more frequent. And it’s no wonder, Captain Ellis had her pouring over the most menial casework usually reserved for rookies—like herself.

Blake’s punishment for the incendiary incident, as she’s come to call it in her head, did accomplish
one good thing: it’d exposed the amount of people in their precinct gunning to push her partner out of the force. Claire isn’t stupid, she’d quickly realized that Blake’s unorthodox methods and cool confidence in her abilities rubbed some people the wrong way—her mocking attitude did nothing to help either. But if any of those cowards had bothered to look deeper, they’d learn Blake’s relentless pursuit of justice, in whatever form she could get it, was driven by her deep empathy for others. They’d realize that while she didn’t always adhere to the standards, she did have an unbreakable personal moral code. And they’d realize that Blake Davenport was a damn good person, better than any of them could ever hope to be.

Claire misses her.

The Captain has her out in the field more than ever, partly due to the natural increase of responsibility given with more experience, but mostly to make up for their best detective being desk bound. And Claire was, is, her partner so that made her the best substitute. The next two days can’t come faster, especially since the replacement officer they’ve saddled her with is more infuriating with each passing day. Blake would know what to do about him, she has a knack for putting pompous, self-inflated assholes in their place.

“Blake, question.”

“I may have an answer,” she nods, folding her hands on the table.

“How can I get Thompson to stop mansplaining to me every time he breathes? Not only that,” Claire rolls her eyes with a huff, “he keeps invading my personal space whenever he talks. And his breath is the worst, which makes it doubly bad.”

“You’re too nice,” Blake scoffs, the words rolling off her tongue easily. It’s something she’s been telling her partner since she arrived, but the message hasn’t gotten through. (And at this point, Blake is unsure whether she wants it too. Claire’s inherent kindness is one of her favorite qualities.) “Look,” she leans over, pushing their menus out of the way, “Thompson can’t get you demoted or fired so you can afford not to be Miss Congeniality around him. He’s an asshole yeah, but he doesn’t like rejection. He’ll bother some other poor woman if you make it clear you won’t entertain his foolishness.”

Claire looks at her dubiously, most likely sparked by her suggestion she dial down the niceness. Blake hasn’t had the chance to meet her parents, but they must have been militant when it came to hammering in social decorum.

“At this point, I’ll try it. And you know,” she lowers her voice, looking furtively around the diner, and upon verifying that nobody is paying attention to them, continues on, “we are working that trafficking ring case together. I can’t afford to have any tension with my field partner.”

“About that,” Blake smiles and leans back in their booth, arms crossed and tongue sticking out between her teeth, “you don’t have to worry. No need to shout it from the rooftops, but Ellis told me he’s putting me on that case once I’m off desk duty.”

Claire’s eyes widen, hands shooting out to grip Blake’s forearms tightly. “I could kiss you right now,” she breathes out reverently. Seconds later, she turns bright red as the words register in her overstuffed brain. She looks frazzled. It’s endearing.

“So you’re saying you missed me?” Blake gets out around a chuckle. “I’m positively touched.”

Blake expects her to laugh it off or act mock offended, as has been their routine for the past few months, but Claire just looks at her with impossibly soft eyes.
“Yeah, I really did.”

_Cut!_

The sounds of the crew rush around her, waves of noise ebbing and flowing as she floats adrift.

“Stays!” the director—Jeremy McDonald, a long time collaborator of the show—yells, and Maggie sighs in relief. It’s over. At least, today is. It couldn't come soon enough.

Despite her best efforts, she hasn’t been able to focus all day. Her dad’s appearance yesterday threw her world off kilter, and as much as she wishes she could, she can’t turn it off for 10 hours. Everything she’d spent years building for herself, every wall she’d constructed to protect herself, all of it had crumbled the moment she’d seen his face again. She was transformed back into that scared little girl at the airport, the ground beneath her fissured and threatening to swallow her whole.

She hates herself for it. She hates that he still has so much power over her. And just like all those years ago, she’s left scrambling to pick up the pieces left behind.

Maggie can’t help but draw parallels, unfolding the criss crossing patterns of her life. If she allows it, history will repeat itself. And she can’t let that happen. She has a chance to see Franky again, to talk to her—something she’d only ever envisioned in the most hidden recesses of her mind. And it’s not just Franky, it’s Sofia and the baby brother she’s never even laid eyes upon. She can at least still remember what Franky sounded like and how her small fingers curled around her own as she’d follow her around the house. She knows what Sofia looked like as she dozed in her arms—heavy with sleep, her blonde curls tickling the bottom of her chin.

But she doesn’t have any of that with Charles. The only reason she even knows his name is because Gabriella passed the information along to her. The day she’d told her about him stands out in stark colors in her memory. He was the living proof of how easily they’d moved beyond her, seemingly out of her reach with their perfect little family—her mom had always said three was the perfect number and she knows her dad’s wanted a son since he’d learned of her mom’s pregnancy with Franky. With her out of the picture, they’d gotten everything they wanted.

The possibility of seeing them all, of being a part of their lives, is so close she can reach out and grasp it. It’s pushing everything else out of her mind, and the impending meeting with her father only worsens the situation. She’s forgetting lines she should have remembered in 5 minutes. She’s missing her marks and more often than not just completely spacing out. Her poor performance is clear to everyone—not just Alex now—to see.

Jeremy takes a few firm, heavy steps toward her.

“Maggie, I’m gonna need you more focused, okay?”
“Lay off her,” Alex says suddenly, and the both turn to look at her. She’s never heard her speak like that to a director. Alex isn’t the most affable person, but she’s always professional and polite to the crew. Maggie halfheartedly wonders what’s caused the change. “It’s been a long day,” she continues, softer now—eyes trained on her.

Jeremy nods, backing down. “Good work today.” He claps Maggie on the shoulder, giving her a reassuring squeeze, though it barely registers in her fog filled mind. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Hey,” Alex takes a few steps before turning her body fully, standing directly before her. “You okay?” The full force of her concern is on Maggie now, and she can feel the waves of pity radiating from her, leaving her skin prickly and too tight for her bones.

Maggie detests being pitied. She can’t really blame Alex for it though, not after she saw her fall apart when her dad showed up. It’d be the reaction anybody would have, but that doesn’t stop the spike of annoyance bubbling up.

“Of course,” she nods, shrugging off the pity with a pointed expression. “Always am.”

Maggie turns to leave, raising her hand slightly to Alex in a form of a goodbye, but then pulls up in her tracks.

“Jeremy!” she calls. The director swings his head around to her direction and raises an eyebrow. “I’ll be ready next scene, promise.”

She walks off the set with a renewed spring in her step, determination etched in her every move. She won’t be that stupid little girl anymore. It’s one thing for him to push her out of his and her mom’s lives, but she’s let him keep her out of her siblings lives for too long.

Things will be different this time around, she’ll make sure of it.

Alex hates the feeling tugging at her chest as she watches Maggie walk away.

She knows Maggie is probably just returning to her trailer, but every step feels heavier than that. It feels like she’s walking further and further away from her—and she can’t do anything about it. Her feet are glued to the ground.

The distance between them since Maggie’s dad appeared yesterday remains, and Maggie hasn’t made any attempts to lessen it. If anything, she’s widening the gap with her clear rebuffs of Alex’s proffered help.

It hurts.

She knows that it shouldn't, not in this way, and that Maggie doesn't have time to worry about her nor does she have any reason to—she knows she’s alone in this, the only one with this feeling blossoming in her chest every time she looks at Maggie. For someone who has always prided...
herself on her brain, she concedes it’s doing a lousy job of controlling her heart. Maggie doesn’t have to accept her help, or her offers of comfort. She doesn’t even have to consider her a friend at the level Alex does now. Those are facts. But facts do nothing to convince her to stop trying. Her brain wrestles with her heart, and the stubborn muscle wins.

Maybe she just needs to try a different approach. She’s probably coming on too strong for Maggie, who’s always been reserved. Her onslaught of messages would send anyone running. She needs to be more subtle, much like the woman she’s trying to comfort. Outright gestures of sympathy clearly aren’t working, and at this point, Alex isn’t even sure they’re the right thing to do.

She’s never been here before. She’s never had a friend like Maggie, someone she wants to spend her days with, that cheers her up by simply being around her. All of the people she considered friends were actually more like acquaintances, just people to fill a car with on the way to the club—except Vicky, but that friendship soured quickly. The only experience she has with trying to cheer up someone is Kara, and if it were her sister, she’d just order a double helping of potstickers and watch one of the cheesy romances Kara loves so much. But with Maggie, she just doesn’t know. The worst part is that if the shoe were on the other foot, she’s sure that Maggie would know just the right way to make her feel better. It’s her lack of social expertise that’s the glaring problem in this situation.

A million different options run through her mind as the rest of her day drags on. She wishes she had more scenes with Maggie today after their diner scene so could she at least gauge her mood, but she’s forced to settle for just seeing Maggie passing by her across the set—always out of reach.

It’s only as she’s being driven home that an idea pops into her head, sparked by a passing building that catches her eye.

The book she’d bought Maggie during her sister day still lies on her breakfast island, collecting dust. She could start up their gift war again, which Maggie is currently winning. It’s casual enough not to scare Maggie off, but that very same quality works against her favor as well. It’s too casual a gesture for something as life altering as an estranged father showing up after 10 years bearing news of your equally estranged siblings. Extending such a paltry gift could very well insult Maggie. She might think Alex wasn’t treating the situation without the gravitas it deserved, and based on face value, she wouldn’t be unjustified in that line of thought.

Or perhaps, picking up their gift war, an entity that is uniquely theirs—a symbol of the friendship they’ve built over these past months—could serve as a reminder to Maggie that Alex cares about her, and has for some time. She could use it as an opening to something more, like dinner too, and hopefully conversation after. It’s a simple idea, but the offer of dinner and companionship gives it more weight than if she just gives her the book.

She’s probably overthinking this, measuring and calculating friendship like it’s a chemical formula, but she doesn’t know a different way.

And it seems the universe has aligned in her favor just this once too. Tomorrow, they’re wrapping up James’ big storyline, and since Maggie has already finished all of her scenes for the episode, she has the day off. Alex herself expects to be done my midday. It’s the perfect opportunity to set her plan in motion.

Alex smiles to herself as she breezes through her apartment lobby. The headache prickling at the back of her skull is suddenly gone. Mere moments prior, it was as if she was operating in the pitch dark, unsure of which direction to head in and bumping into furniture at every turn—an awful position to be in. But now the lights are on and her mind is clear, sharpened with purpose.
“Kevin,” Alex waves down the doorman, who rushes over, looking more harried than usual. “Could you let me know tomorrow if my girlfriend leaves?” Referring to Maggie with that title still causes a slight flush to spread over her body, but what she initially pegged as unpleasantness at the thought of such a thing being reality, she now knows is far from it. A warm buzz settles over her. In a perfect world, she’d be lucky enough to have the right to call Maggie her girlfriend—beyond the confines of their contract—but this is New York. And Kevin is looking at her expectantly.

“I’m planning something for her, but I’m not sure if she has plans with her aunt or anything else. She’s busy tonight though, and I’ll be busy tomorrow too so we won’t be able to talk then,” she rushes out, belatedly realizing that as Maggie’s girlfriend that’s knowledge she should be privy to.

“Busy with that man, yes?”

Alex has to stop herself from doing a double take. “Excuse me?”

Kevin casts a furtive glance around the lobby, stepping closer once he decides the coast is clear. “A delivery man went up yesterday with tiramisu for Miss Sawyer, but he came down a few moments later with the food still in hand because he saw her arguing with an older man.” A sheepish expression overtakes the doorman’s face as he scratches the back of his neck. “Then he gave the tiramisu to me to deliver, but I haven’t had the chance to catch Miss Sawyer.”

“Right,” Alex fumbles for words, absorbing the shock that two more people know of Maggie and her dad, or rather that she was at least arguing with an older man. And the more people that know, the more likely a leak to the press is. It was just a delivery man though, he might not have recognized Maggie, and it’s unlikely he’d care regardless. It was just another delivery in some fancy New York apartment.

“But I can give you the tiramisu to deliver to Maggie,” Kevin says over his shoulder, already rushing off to retrieve it. He shoves the plastic container in her hands, its perfectly fluffy brown and white layers mocking her. It’s a symbol of what their night could have been, if not for Maggie’s father showing up to ruin it. She almost wants to toss it in the trash and dispose of all reminders of that night, but Maggie probably would enjoy the sweet dessert. She could use it to entice her to join her tomorrow too.

She smiles, tucking the cake under her arm. “I’ll be sure to deliver it. And Kevin, if you could be discrete about what you heard...”

“Of course,” he nods vigorously. “And I’ll let you know if Miss Sawyer leaves tomorrow.”

“Thanks, much appreciated.”

She leaves him with a small wave, the elevator music matching the tune she’s humming under her breath.

The leather creaks slightly as Gabriella settles next to her, the natural depression of her weight on
the couch sliding her even closer to Maggie. She appreciates the tactile comfort. Her aunt’s presence has been her only constant since her dad arrived, and she needs Gabriella’s steady hand tethering her to a guise of normalcy more than ever now.

“M’gann is 10 minutes out,” Gabriella announces, her voice echoing in the large, empty apartment, and sounding as strained and tense as Maggie feels.

She nods stiffly, subtly taking a deep breath in preparation for the calculated onslaught she’s sure M’gann has ready for her. Her manager is a pragmatist with a razor sharp mind, and that’s what makes her one of the best in her field, but it’s also the cause of the turmoil of nerves living in her stomach right now.

“Maggie?” Two sharp raps fill the air, the noise so emphatic and solid that it’s a tangible entity surrounding them, expanding between the walls and pushing up against her lungs. She swallows, trying to wet her parched throat, before standing—feet dragging along the floor.

“Well, don’t look too excited to see me.” The doorway frames M’gann’s placid expression, an eyebrow cocked slightly.

“Sorry, it’s just...”

M’gann’s face shifts, demeanor softening and a sympathetic smile appearing, followed by a tight hug seconds later. Maggie sinks into it.

“I know.” She pulls back, nodding over Maggie’s shoulder at Gabriella in greating. She gestures towards the table, all business once again. “Shall we?”

Her ever present laptop takes residence in front of her, and the stage is set, lights beating down brightly against Maggie’s back. It’s a scene she’s become all too familiar with since hiring M’gann all those years ago, but they’ve never had to discuss something of this importance—to her career potentially, but more importantly, to her personal life. Not until now.

She’d thought what happened with Emily was the biggest scandal M’gann would have to prevent, but she was sorely mistaken.

“What do you want, Maggie?” M’gann fixes her with a steady, inscrutable gaze that easily penetrates all of the meager defenses she’s attempted to rebuild after her dad’s appearance. Maggie has an inkling that M’gann already knows what she wants, but she did always like verbal confirmation, or better yet written.

“I just,” she studies the smooth cherrywood of the table, thumb brushing over a faint water ring in a ploy to buy some time for her mind to sift through the pandemonium, “I want things to go back to normal.”

Unbidden, an old memory—frayed at the edges, but crystallized at its core, clear as the day it happened—materializes at the forefront of her thoughts. Sofia playing on the living room floor gurgling happily, her chubby legs warm against Maggie’s lap and the sound of the radio floating through the dry summer air. Franky dancing to the music as freely as only a very young child can. She wants every moment that could have been, the small and the large life events.

“I think that ship might have sailed,” M’gann says, far from unkind in her intent, but her words cut nevertheless. “It was never going to be forever. Your siblings were always going to grow up and at some point know about you. Even if your dad disappears again, there’s the matter of your sister, and there’s no guessing what might happen in the future if we don’t take action now.”
“I know.” She knows it’s impossible to reclaim what’s passed—it’s akin to trying to hold onto sand in a windstorm. She can’t wish this away and hope she gets another 4 years to prepare herself to talk to Franky, to no have to talk to her dad at all. She doesn’t really want that, deep down. She still has a window of opportunity to grasp every moment that could be, and that is what she actually wants. She just wasn’t prepared for that chance at reconciliation to arise so soon.

“So I’ll ask again,” M’gann says, tone firm. “What do you want?”

Maggie raises her eyes from the table, determined to hold her ground, and resolutely ignores Gabriella’s stare burning a hole into her shoulder. This is between her and M’gann. She needs to do this by herself, as much as possible. It’s her career on the table. Her siblings.

“Franky already knows about me. My father obviously doesn’t want-“

“I’m asking about you.” M’gann sets her laptop aside, forearms clasped atop the table. “I’m your manager, not your father’s. I don’t care about him. What do you want? That’s what I work with.” Her eyes are understanding, but the unwavering gleam remains. She always did find one way or another to get to the bottom of a situation, Maggie vaguely recollects.

A twinge of defensiveness bubbles up, but Maggie does her best to smother it. M’gann is just doing her job and staying focused on the business aspect of it all. Try as she might though, her private assurances don’t stop the unease prickling her skin at her manager’s easy oversimplification of the situation in her single minded pursuit of a clean fix. (Sometimes she wonders why someone who seemingly possesses such a love of neat, bow wrapped solutions chose such a messy industry.)

“This isn’t as easy as getting me a role or an interview I wanted,” she argues, careful to keep her tone light and free from the annoyance creeping upon her.

M’gann sighs, the breath expelled from her body deflating her countenance. “I know. But I need you to tell me what I’m gonna be working towards. Do we try to send your dad back to Blue Springs, make him sign an NDA? Pay for your sister’s silence? Do we tell the public about all of them before he has a chance to?”

Maggie nods, understanding. It’s just hard to say out loud exactly what he wants, to put her thoughts, her feelings into words.

“I want...to talk to Franky again. And Sofia. I want to be their sister again, if that’s even possible.”

M’gann props her chin in her hand, fingers rhythmically drumming against the table as she looks everywhere but at Maggie, which is an immediate warning sign that she’s not going to like what M’gann is about to say.

“Having a relationship with your siblings is easier said than done, you do realize that yes?”

Maggie nods automatically, feeling like a child being lectured. But a warm pressure on her leg bolsters her flagging confidence. She squeezes Gabriella’s hand in thanks. Her aunt never fails to know just what she needs.

“Considering we’re dealing with minors here, it’d be difficult—and that’s putting it lightly—to get visitation rights without your father or mother’s consent.” M’gann stills her movements, tension carved in every line of her body. “Parents have the right to choose who their child can interact with. This is just my guess, but I imagine Oscar and Giorgia would argue that your Hollywood lifestyle
isn’t what’s best for your siblings.”

A protest surges to the tip of her tongue, but Gabriella’s hand on her leg tightens, almost painful in its grip, killing the words. Now isn’t the time to argue with M’gann, and it’s not like she’s wrong. Her parents would pull that defense, and the worst part is, there’s some truth to it. Hollywood is a beast of its own making—destructive and dangerous—ready to sink its claws into the first unsuspecting victim it can find. Maggie would never let any of that get close to Franky, or Sofia and Charles though. She’d protect them, somehow.

“Of course,” M’gann continues, pausing with a grimace and finally swinging her focus back to Maggie, “we could take them to court about that. They have the right to have a relationship with their sister. But that opens up a whole new can of worms.”

“Court cases can drag on for years,” Gabriella interjects, casting a worrying glance at Maggie. “And while we could afford the costs that’d come with a drawn out legal battle, my sister and Oscar couldn’t.”

M’gann nods in agreement, pulling her chair closer to the table and leaning forward.

“Isn’t that good for us?” Maggie asks, excited about the prospect. If a judge said she had the right to see her siblings, there would be nothing her father could say or do to prevent it.

“It could be, but we also have to take into account that the press would definitely find out about this whole situation if it was dragged out in court, which wouldn’t benefit any of the parties involved. Every big role or award Maggie gets would be shadowed by this family drama. Paparazzi and reporters would descend upon Blue Springs. Your dad would get his side of the story out there. The truth about what happened when you were young would come out. Considering nobody knows about your siblings, and you’ve said publicly that your parents were accepting, it doesn’t look good for you.”

Maggie bites the inside of her cheek. She hadn’t thought about that, and it’s the last thing she wants.

“Maggie could win if it goes to court though.” Gabriella’s eyes flash, but her voice remains carefully measured. “We can make the case that they’re not good parents. Look at what they did to Maggie, they abandoned her as a child—”

“In the eyes of any judge, they didn't. I talked to a lawyer on the plane here, Gabriella. They sent her to you, and made you her legal guardian. That’s entirely within the law.” She sends an apologetic look Maggie’s way, mouth twisting into an uneven line, but Maggie brushes it off. She’s not paying her manager to treat her with kid gloves.

“I asked them to make me her guardian!” The slap of her aunt’s hand against the table cracks through the room, almost startling Maggie. “They didn’t do anything for her after she came to live with me,” she bites out, teetering on the edge of full blown anger. Maggie has first hand experience with the full wheel of her aunt’s emotions, but it’s rare for her to be truly angry. She can only count a handful of instances when Gabriella’s lost her temper, and more often than not, her parents are the gasket that sets her off.

Even now, she still feels torn between appreciating Gabriella’s ardent support of her, at the cost of her own family—and that thought increasingly weighs down on Maggie, especially given her current situation—and wincing at the criticism of her parents. It’s true, but it still hurts.

“Gabriella,” M’gann says, a warning laced in each syllable of her name. Her chest rises and falls
slowly, fingers steepled in front of her face—a picture of concentration. “What they did to Maggie, while horrible, has no relevance regarding their parenting of their other children.”

“Well it should,” Gabriella fires right back, hand curled into a tight fist. Maggie’s hand on her forearm halts her building diatribe.

“I don’t have an opinion on that,” M’gann says, measured. “But if you could even prove they’re not good parents to their other children, we’d be looking at positioning Maggie, or you, as a likely candidate for a legal guardian. It’s not that simple. And while you did a great job with Maggie, I doubt you want to raise the rest of her siblings. You’re barely, what? Twenty years older at most than Francesca? No judge would go for that. And as long as they feed and clothe those kids, there’s not much else a judge will look at to declare them unfit. Being homophobic is sadly not listed as an illness anywhere. But taking them is not what we want either, is it?”

Maggie shakes her head. Gabriella was more her mother than the woman who gave birth to her, but she was still ripped away from her parents in the blink of an eye. She won’t let her siblings grow up orphans because of her selfishness. The beginnings of a headache pound at the back of her skull. She sighs, rubbing her temples gently and trying to clear her mind.

“Going to court is off the table, I agree,” she says out loud. M’gann nods in approval, and out of the corner of her eye she sees Gabriella crossing her arms, but conceding defeat all the same. “Let’s go through the other options then.”

M’gann relaxes, now free from her aunt’s onslaught, the left side of her mouth curling up—eyes calculating and steely. “We break the story about your siblings—and what came before your forced separation—all of it, ourselves. Get a jump on the narrative before anybody else, including your father, can start speaking to the press.”

Reflexively, she feels a twinge deep in her gut curl uncomfortably. Ever since M’gann initially raised the idea of telling people about her past, she’s been turning it over and over in her mind, looking at it from all angles. The only conclusion she’s come so far is that if she’s ever ready to come clean about her childhood, it’ll be her own terms. She refuses to be pushed into it as a last ditch effort against her father. He’s taken so much from her, she won’t let him steal this too.

“I don’t see Oscar pulling his skeletons out for the world to see like that,” Gabriella scoffs, pulling her out of her head. “He’s nothing if not proud.” Maggie is inclined to agree with Gabriella’s assessment. The man she knew wouldn’t have dared to breathe a word of such private matters to anyone. But she hasn’t known him for the past 10 years. Time changes even the most stalwart of rocks. She can’t be sure of anything about her father anymore, except for his continued insistence to keep her out of their lives.

“Money talks, and selling exclusives—particularly of the scandalous nature—to the rags, is a lucrative business.” M’gann shrugs, “I’ve seen more than my fair share of estranged relatives make a living in such a way, or through tell-all books.”

“If it’ll provide enough money for her children, I sadly can see my sister on board with that,” Gabriella says.

“No. I won’t— I can’t,” her voice cracks, despite her best efforts, fear splintering through. Vaguely, she feels her aunt’s arms slip around her, warm and safe as always. She blindly raises her hand,
trying to quell the tremors running through her veins, and curls her fingers over Gabriella’s hand—taking strength in the touch. “I can’t just...make a press release and tell everyone I was outed, that my parents kicked me out. I talked such a big game....it’d be pathetic...I can’t.”

Brave. That’s what they call her: the fans, the press. Alex. She calls her brave too with that soft, far too soft, shine in her gray eyes. If only they all knew what a fraud she was. A coward hiding behind a mountain of lies, towering ever higher with each passing year until it’ll inevitably crush her.

The suggestion of exposing every ugly part of herself for all to see has her fighting the urge to dash to the bathroom and puke. She squeezes her eyes shut, inhaling through her nose and out through her mouth. She pinches her nose between her fingers, feeling the beating pain of a headache finally sink its claws on her skull.

She’s not sure how much time passes by the time she’s calmed herself down, but when she opens her eyes—black spots momentarily populating her vision—it’s to the concerned faces of Gabriella and M’gann, now standing by her shoulder.

“We’ll figure this out,” M’gann says, and Maggie wants to believe her, but she doesn’t know how they could. It doesn’t depend on them anymore. It’s on her dad.

Maggie’s been running from the past since the whir of the plane leaving for California masked her stifled tears, legs pumping a mile a minute and lungs gasping for air.

But she’s been fighting a losing battle—exhaustion driving her into the ground—and deep down she’s always known that.

She’s tired of running.

The bowl of rice and chicken balances precariously on her knee.

Alex pops open her laptop, starting up Skype. With Kara busy shooting in Kansas, their sister nights are more difficult to get in, but months of practice navigating their individually busy schedules has made them both pros at it. Before, she’d used their schedules as an excuse to be able to escape her sister. Her life was a mess, and she didn’t want Kara around to see it. But now...well, she’s in a better place than she’s ever been, save for when her dad was alive.

“Alex!” her sister’s voice bursts from the screen with its usual enthusiasm—dispelling the progression of that particular train of thought—but the smile on her face lacks its normal brightness. Kara’s never been good at hiding when something is bothering her. It looks like she’ll be playing therapist tonight.

Alex doesn’t mind though, dealing with her sister’s problems is a good distraction from her own Maggie-related problems.
“How’s Kansas treating you?” she asks around a mouthful of rice. “Tip any cows lately?”

“Alex,” she admonishes, but the twitch of her lips gives her away. “It’s not nice to tip cows just minding their own business.”

“So it’s fine to tip nosy cows then?” she shoots back, aiming to turn the ghost of a smile into a full fledged one. She succeeds, watching in satisfaction at Kara throws her head back with a laugh.

“So you’ve won that one,” she says with a good natured roll of her eyes. “And Kansas is good. Great. The food is nice, and the servings here are so large,” her face lights up as it does when she’s on the subject of food, “not like in Los Angeles.” Kara goes quiet for a moment, face falling again. She plays with the tassels of the couch pillow resting in her lap, eyes cast down. Her chest expands with air, and Alex can feel her sister’s tension through the computer screen. “Mon-El came to visit me.”

“Oh.” The pieces click into place. “And how’s that going?” she asks, keeping her tone carefully free from any judgement.

“We’re still together, if that’s what you’re asking,” Kara huffs out, overly defensive, tripping a number of Alex’s internal warning signals.

“I wasn’t,” she quickly backtracks, not wanting Kara to get into one of her sulky, obstinate moods. “It’s just, last time we talked about this you seemed pretty sure you had feelings for—”

“No. Nope!” She shakes her head, and then deflates. “Okay, maybe I did.” She sighs. “I...I love Mon-El, Alex. We’ve been together for so long now.” Her voice is imploring, as if she’s trying to convince not only Alex but herself that what she’s saying is true. She’s looking to her for support, but that’s not something Alex can give. Hell, she doesn’t even think a year is long in the grand scheme of things. The best she can do is guide Kara to the truth she’s unwilling to acknowledge.

“And your...friend?”

“My friend...He’s my friend,” she shrugs helplessly, but Alex takes note of the soft shine in her eyes—something she’s never seen when she’s with Mon-El. “And he’ll still be my friend, regardless of what happens. At least,” she pauses, voice soft, “I hope so.”

“If he’s a good guy, like you say he is, then—”

“He is! He’s so sweet, and he said it was an honor to be my friend.” Kara lights up, like she always seems to do when this friend of hers comes up in conversation. She’s secretive in a way she’s never known her to be, but considering that she still hasn’t told her sister that she’s...inclined towards women, or that she’s crushing on Maggie, she lets it slide. “We had...a moment, I guess,” Kara says. “It was a while ago, the last time we met up. We were just talking and we, like, leaned closer and he...he smelled so nice.”

A stupid smile stretches Alex’s lips, and she’s surprised at how unaware her sister is being, talking about how much she loves her boyfriend with a straight face while she smiles like this when mentioned her friend. Alex wishes she could slap her arm through the screen.

“And he took a step back and he said that he was honored to be my friend. He knows about Mon-El and he’s not that kind of guy. But that moment...I didn’t think I was that kind of girl. But...” She shrugs. “I don’t want to be.”

“The kind of girl who falls out of love with a guy? And meets someone else? Because that just sounds human, Kara.”
Her sister bites her lip. “We’re so different. I’m afraid it won’t work out and then I’ll have...ended things with Mon-El for nothing.”

“If you don’t feel the same way about Mon-El, it won’t have been for nothing,” she tells her. She has no idea what would make her sister—or any woman, really—stay with someone they don’t love. Seems like a waste of life. “You don’t need to have a boyfriend all the time, Kara. I don’t know why you think you do.”

She wasn’t expecting to say that, but she finds it’s true. Kara can live in the clouds a lot of the time, always crushing on someone, seeing the world through rose tinted glasses. Alex had never seen the appeal of such nonsense—well, until now. She’d be lying if she said she hadn’t imagined she and Maggie strolling along in Central Park, holding hands, together for real. Still, doing that 24/7 does seem like a waste of time.

“I know,” Kara huffs, looking vaguely insulted. “I mean, I look at you and- I mean-” She stutters. “No offense, Alex. Oh my gosh. I know you don’t like dating, that’s not a bad thing. It’s just not your thing. That’s okay.”

Alex rolls her eyes. “It’s fine.” Turns out men aren’t her thing either. “But I mean, you said you love Mon-El, right? So is it fair to be with him when you might have feelings for someone else? Or when you don’t love him as much as he loves you? I’m not an expert here, but I think maybe you’re staying with him because you feel guilty. Or because you’re scared to try things with your friend.”

Kara sighs. She can’t really escape it when she’s spelled it out for her.

“What if we try and it doesn’t work out? We’re so different, and even my friends think I’m crazy.” She bites her lip again. “He’s older.”

Alex frowns. “How much older?”

Kara’s head suddenly resembles a bobblehead toy. “He’s twenty-nine. And before you say anything, I know seven years sounds like a lot, but Mon-El is two years older than me, and that’s just, what? Five years of difference? How much is five years, really?”

“He’s almost thirty,” she tells Kara, matter of fact. Her sister’s crush suddenly seems to her far more dangerous. She doesn’t want anyone to take advantage of Kara. “You’re twenty-two.”

Kara huffs. “See? I told you it wasn’t that simple. And one of my friends was teasing me because he’s...African American-”

“Oh.”

“But Eliza is not like that, and who cares what people say, anyway?”

“A thirty year old black guy, mom is gonna have a field trip.”

“Alex!”

“I’m joking! You know Mom isn’t like that, and you’re right, who cares what idiots think?” She briefly thinks her sister is going to have a hell of a hard time fighting off paparazzi and the public’s terrible comments, but she knows that will barely register if she likes this guy as much as she seems to. “But Kara...he really is a lot older than you. If you try things out with him, you have to be sure you’re in the same place...if you want things to be serious. He might want a wife, kids. Things you’re not ready to give him, you know?”
“Who says I don’t want to get married and have cute little babies?”

“Okay, God. That’s a conversation for another day,” she huffs. “But think about it. And if you think it’s worth it, go for it. Break up with Mon-El and see where this takes you.”

Kara looks unsure. “I don’t know if I can break up with him, Alex.”

“Then you’re in deep shit,” she says, done walking on eggshells. Sometimes she forgets Kara is a grown woman, and still treats her the way she did when she was just as scared little girl afraid of thunder. She should tell her the truth more often. Perhaps if she’d mentioned how annoying Mon-El seemed instead of being supportive because he was what she wanted at the time, they wouldn’t be here.

“I know,” Kara says finally. “Is it too much to hope that these feelings just go away and Mon-El and I can continue being happy?”

Alex won’t answer her. Kara isn’t happy, but her sister seems too in denial about that. Besides, Kara’s young, she has time to figure it out. Secretly, Alex does hope she’ll figure it out sooner than later, she doesn’t want to spend even a second more with Bore-El. Sure, she’s done some less than exemplary things in her life, but nothing so bad as to warrant having him shoved into her life. She doesn’t know who this friend is, but he’ll surely be an upgrade.

“You have to figure things out, Kara,” she says simply.

“I know.” Kara nods emphatically, reassuring herself as much as she is shelving the topic. “Is that a lion behind you?”

Alex recognizes a forced change in topic when she sees one, but the reminder of the stuffed lion living in her bedside table only serves to bring up the woman who gave it to her in her mind.

“Yeah,” she scratches the back of her neck lightly, suddenly finding her now empty bowl incredibly interesting. “Yes, huh...it was a Valentine’s day gift. From Maggie...” She desperately hopes that Kara doesn’t point out the obvious flush painting her face red.

“You still keep it there?” Kara tilts her head, a questioning smile accenting the movement. “I thought you vowed to hate lions forever after what happened when we were-”

“Not a word.”

Kara mimics zipping her mouth, and Alex smiles, the somber mood already lightening up.

“So, how are things with Maggie?”

The simple question casts another type of shadow. A cold feeling slithers down her throat at the thought that Kara might know how she really feels. Alex takes a sip of her drink to stall.

“What do you, huh, what do you mean?”

“I mean, you’re all ‘besties!’ now so,” Kara explains. “Just curious.”

“We are not,” Alex pauses, toying with her cup, “besties.” She sighs, placing her cup down and wiping her suddenly clammy hands on her jeans. “We’re just friends, good friends if that.” She told Maggie she was her best friend along with her sister, and fat lot of good that did her.

“I’m just saying. Did you finally get that book to her?”
“No. I...forgot, actually.” She opts not to tell Kara about her plan to finally deliver the book. It’d sound wholly inconsequential, stupid, spoken aloud. If she and Maggie really were that close, she wouldn’t need an entire plan to get her to talk to her, to accept her support.

“Is everything okay?”

“Yeah. Yes, everything’s fine,” she squares her shoulders, breathing deeply.

“Really? Because you don’t look like everything’s fin-”

“I said its fine, Kara,” Alex bites out, her tone of voice harsh even to her ears. “Leave it alone.”

Kara raises her hands in surrender, her eyes gleaming with just a bit of hurt. Alex swallows down the guilt but any further words get stuck midthroat. A painful silence grows between them, disrupted only by the drops of rain she can hear pattering against the window of Kara’s apartment. She has half the mind to end the conversation and deal with the consequences later when Kara, as she has a talent of doing, saves the day—easily shrugging off the past few minutes.

“So have you caught up with *The Crown*?”

Their conversation settles onto meaningless, safer, topics from there. All the episodes of *The Crown* that Alex will be forced to watch when they meet up again. Kara’s stunt training. The fast approaching day Alex will finally get her license reinstated (Kara vows to fly over to celebrate that with her). Their mom’s work in the lab, and the possibility of her getting another paper published.

It’s hardly the most exciting exchange, but she can’t think of many better ways to spend her night.

She’s in the middle of listening to Kara recount her riveting tale of visiting a farm when a knock on the door interrupts their conversation.

“Hang on,” Alex holds up a hand to pause her sister, standing from the couch with a stretch, “let me see who it is.” She wasn’t expecting any visitors tonight, and for a passing moment, she entertains the thought that it’s Maggie finally seeking her comfort—but she knows life is never that easy.

She rests her hand on the doorknob, the metal beneath her hand cold, and peers through the peephole. The vision that greets her is even more unexpected than she’d anticipated.

“J’onn!”

Stillness blankets the air, its weight pressing down on Maggie’s shoulders.

Gabriella and M’gann’s stares only serve to exacerbate the tension thrumming through her body. It seems like everyone’s looking to her for answers, but she’s as lost as they are. She’s slowly accepted that she won’t know what to say or do until she talks to her father. Whatever he says to her will decide her course of action.
Every option they’ve talked about has a different outcome depending on her father’s reaction, and there’s not much they can get done without knowing what he’ll do.

It’s expected that he’ll fight her about contacting Franky again—he did fly all the way from Nebraska to New York just tell her to back off—but she hopes, perhaps in vain, that he won’t force her to take extreme measures against him. She can tell herself it’s because she doesn’t want the repercussions to affect her siblings, but the truth is, even after everything that’s happened, she doesn’t want to hurt him. She doesn’t hate him, though it’s not due to a lack of trying. She hates what he did to her, but she can’t find it in herself to hate the person who nurtured her world for 14 years. The person she loved so much.

Too many view the world in black and white, but if there’s anything Maggie’s learned in her time alive, it’s that the world is a symphony of colors—bursting from every crevice, peak, and dip of the earth. And humans are its most complex inhabitants.

She can’t forgive him, she wants nothing to do with him at all. But she can’t wish him harm.

In all her fantasies and daydreams, she rubs in his face how successful she became without him, makes him see what he’d given up. But she never hurts him. She just wants him to be sorry for what he did to her. She wants—still—for him to apologize. Even though she knows it’s never going to happen.

She can’t get back the father she loved, isn’t sure if he even existed at all, but she still has a chance to get her sisters back, and to know her brother.

She stands, fidgeting with her hands, mind made up.

It’s high time she live up to the perception so many people have about her. High time she honors the 14 year old girl left behind at an airport, without even getting to say goodbye to her sisters.

“This would all be easier if my father was on board with letting me talk to my sisters. I could be a part of their lives, and we could slowly...I don’t know, let the press know that I have siblings, and I was just too private about since they’re so young. Keep them out of the public eye until they’re eighteen.” She shrugs, looks at Gabriella and then at M’gann.

“That certainly would be ideal, but would your father be open to that?”

She knows the answer to that, but she has to try.

“Let me talk to my father first, and then we can go from there?” Maggie asks tentatively, slowly raising her eyes to their faces and hoping her aunt and M’gann won’t be disappointed with her cop out answer.

“Sounds like a plan,” M’gann smiles, pulling her in for a parting hug. “I’m staying at the Grand Hyatt for the next few days, call me when you’re ready.”

Maggie nods into her shoulder, hands clutching the material of her shirt.

“I’ll draft an NDA anyways, I think it’d be good to have that on our side regardless of the outcome, okay?”

She nods, trusting M’gann in this.

It’s dark by the time she departs, the city outside coming alive with the encroaching night.
Maggie peers out the window and wonders if her father is looking at the same view.

“Sorry, it’s a little messy.” Alex says as she guides J’onn inside, haphazardly tossings a few books and magazines to the side. She makes space on the couch for J’onn to sit down. What with work, and pondering over the best ways to approach Maggie, she hasn’t had much time to clean. Though she’s self aware enough to admit that even without those extenuating circumstances, it’s still unlikely she’d clean. As long as she can find what she’s looking for, she doesn’t mind a few clothes strewn here and there—or some dishes in the sink.

“Alex,” Kara’s voice pipes up from the laptop screen, “who’s that?”

“Kara,” J’onn walks over, bending down to peer into the web camera and waving. “Nice to see you.”

Her sister’s face lights up, smile stretching across her lips. “Hey J’onn! How’s it going?”

“Good, I was just in the area so I’d thought I’d check up on your sister, but if you two are in the middle of something,” he trails off with a vague gesture of his hand.

“No, it’s fine,” Kara laughs, setting aside her empty plate. “We were running out of topics to talk about anyways, and I have an early day on set tomorrow.”

“Should I be offended at how quickly you’re ready to exit our beloved sister time?” Alex arches an eyebrow, lips pursed, her finger already hovering over the end button.

Kara just shrugs, rolling her eyes. “It’ll do you some good to talk to someone besides me, Maggie, and mom—occasionally.”

“Thanks for the love, Kara.” Her sister sticks her tongue out, nose scrunched up, and Alex blows her a mock kiss in return. “Talk to you tomorrow.”

She closes the laptop, turning to J’onn, who’s currently shaking his head lightly with a chuckle.

Alex takes a good look at her manager, they’ve only communicated through phone for quite a few weeks now. She’s not even sure what’s he’s been up too lately, but he looks good—freer, somehow. The cynical part of her brain tells her that it’s because he no longer has to clean up her messes 24/7—being relieved of such a burden would leave anybody feeling and looking like the first green of spring, instead of the slushy snow trampled underfoot by too many people. Not that J’onn ever looked like that. She wishes she could hit 50 looking the way he does.

“You two never fail to amuse me,” J’onn mentions, sitting down. He runs a finger over the coffee table, picking up a thin film of dust. Alex winces, expecting a reprimand, but he just smiles—brushing his hand off on the couch. “How are you doing, Alex?”

“Me? How are you doing, is the real question,” she throws over her shoulder, walking to the
kitchen, intent on making some tea for him.

She should still have some of the tea Maggie gifted to her a while back, which reminds her, she needs to schedule that ceramic mug making class she wanted to do. A handmade gift would get her to the front of their little gift war, good luck topping *that*.

“What do you mean?” J’onn throws over her shoulder.

“You look...different. Good different. Happier.” She dumps a tea bag in a mug, putting it under the hot tap faucet. “Did I give you a raise I was unaware of?”

“It’s not that,” he says. J’onn twists his body around, bringing his arms up to rest on the back of the couch. That gentle gleam in his eye she’d noticed when he’d entered her apartment even brighter than before. “I’ve started...seeing someone.”

“Ah,” she nods knowingly. The glow of a new relationship. She’s familiar with the concept, having seen Kara go through it numerous times over the past years, but she’s never had the chance to experience it herself. The few relationships she did force herself to endure during college left her looking worse for wear. The closest thing she’s had to what J’onn is going through right now is the PR relationship with Maggie, which is pretty damn depressing now that she thinks about it. She’s happy for J’onn though, especially considering all the pain he’s suffered in that aspect of his life.

“How long has that been going on?” she asks, but one look at J’onn lets her know he’s not quite ready to talk.

“A little while,” he says simply. She nods, walking over with the tea and handing it to him. He accepts it with a grateful smile, wrapping his hands around the mug. She passes him the jar of sugar, and watches as he sweetens the beverage to his liking, all the while humming lightly. It’s a tune she swears sounds familiar, but can’t for the life of her remember the name of.

Alex changes the subject. “You said you were in the area? When did you fly in?”

He looks up at her, and Alex detects a hint of gratitude in his eyes.

“We landed a couple hours ago,” he says. “Came here straight from the airport.”

Alex nods, and then pauses. “Wait, we?”

J’onn nods. “I flew in with M’gann.”

“Oh. I see.” She makes her way to the kitchen, wondering if he’ll tell her off for serving herself a glass of rum. Maybe she should keep some organic juice around for moments like this. “I forgot M’gann and you are *buddies* now.” There is just a hint of good natured teasing in the word, a verbal roll of her eyes. “We never talked about you giving M’gann my location, so she could give it to *Maggie* -”

“You needed that,” he says, and Alex huffs.

She remembers the hole she was in, right after the Oscars, and how Maggie had shown up to take care of her at just the right time. She was a godsend, or rather, a J’onn send.

“That’s true.” She pauses to gather the right words, but as usual, comes up short. In an exchange with a pushy paparazzi she has no shortage of choice words to hurl, but in the face of people she actually cares about, she tends to be tongue tied. “Thank you.”
“My pleasure. And also my job.”

“Well someone’s in a good mood,” she says teasingly. A wry smile spreads across her face. “It’s a good look.”

J’onn nods, but there’s a hint of sadness to the smile that stretches his lips.

“I just…” he shrugs. “I never thought I’d feel like this again. Not after Mariah.”

Alex nods, and squeezes his shoulder. She’d been young back then, but she remembers being shocked that the woman who had visited her home a few times, and the two little girls who had played with Kara while she rolled her eyes, could just be…gone. Dead. Just like that. Kara had cried, as empathetic as she’d always been, but Alex had been shocked. Their mom and dad had left for a few days to accompany J’onn and attend the funeral. Alex doesn’t think she saw J’onn again until…her dad’s own funeral. Life is sickly ironic sometimes.

“As I’m sure you aware of, after my wife and daughters passed,” he pauses, the light in his eyes dimming slightly, “it was a difficult period in my life.”

“I remember my dad told me you quit the business after that—understandably so.” Back then, J’onn had just been her parent’s friend. She hadn’t even attended the funeral, regulated to watching over Kara instead. If she’d known what an impact the man sitting beside her now would have on her life, she’d have insisted she pay her respects to his late family too. “I wish I could offer more than just my condolences but-”

“Alex,” J’onn set his tea aside, laying a warm hand on her knee. “You’ve done more for me than you know. You were the reason I got back into the business.”

“I…I didn’t realize,” her voice catches in her throat, the telltale burn of tears pricking the back of her eyes. The day J’onn had showed up on her doorstep is scarred into her brain. She’d been jumping from one low moment to the next—fueled by alcohol and a careless disregard for life—with alarming alacrity. If J’onn hadn’t shown up when he did, she knows her life would’ve taken an even deeper nosedive.

“You were an unexpected gift, Alex, one that I didn’t know I needed,” he tells her. Alex thinks about it. He lost his daughters, and she lost her father, and they ended up here. Life has a way of working itself out sometimes, too. “Watching your progress these past few months has been nothing short of remarkable.”

“Yes, well,” Alex clears her throat, averting her eyes and cursing the beginning heat creeping up her face. “You’ve played a big role in that.” She shrugs uncomfortably in an attempt to brush off J’onn’s praise, swiveling to a new topic as quickly as possible. “Now what’s this about the person you’re seeing?”

It’s J’onn’s turn to look slightly awkward now, and Alex has to stifle a laugh at the sight. Her manager is usually the picture of composure, but it looks like talking about his personal life is the trick to breaking that calm surface.

“You’ve met before, I believe, briefly.” He clasps his hands in his lap, leaning back into the couch and turning his head slightly to look at her. “It’s M’gann, actually.”

Alex fears her eyebrows will arch so high they fly off her forehead. “M’gann as in Maggie’s manager? That M’gann?”

“Well, I reckon there aren’t a lot of M’ganns in Los Angeles. Plenty of Megans, very few
M’ganns,” he says awkwardly, scratching the back of his neck. He forces out a laugh. “Yes.”

His dark eyes are serious, almost nervous, as his gaze lands on her. For the first time, the thought that he actually values and cares about her opinion in matters outside of her job flits across her brain. It’s a jarring role reversal, but not unwelcome. It makes her feel like they’re on equal footing now; she’s graduated from troublesome burden to mature adult—finally.

“J’onn, that’s great.” She puts every ounce of happiness and support she can into her smile, wrapping her arms around him in a hug. A stray question nudges her periphery though. She detaches herself from his grip, pulling a leg up beneath her on the couch. “That isn’t a...conflict of interest, right?”

The corner of J’onn’s mouth lifts, eyes gleaming with laughter. “Only if you two go to court or end up in a public spat, which from what I’ve heard, is the farthest thing from likely.”

“Oh?” Alex’s voice rises two decimals higher than is normal. The loose thread on her couch cushion suddenly looks incredibly interesting. “Who are you hearing from exactly?”

“You, namely, and some stuff from set.”

“Mhm,” she purses her lips, fingers drumming against her thigh. If people on set are noticing her embarrassing infatuation with Maggie, it’s only a matter of time before the object of her affection catches on too. Receiving a subtle, unknowing rejection from Maggie was bad enough, but facing the real thing would be ten times worse. It’d completely ruin their friendship too, and she can’t bear to imagine that happening.

As if reading her thoughts, J’onn reaches out, saving her from a depressing mental spiral. “Don’t worry, Alex. Everything will be fine.” She doesn’t particularly believe his assurances, but she appreciates the effort. She squeezes his hand, a soft smile gracing her face.

“Enough about me.” She stands and gathers the now empty mug, making the short journey back to the kitchen. “I really am happy for you, J’onn.”

“I’m happy for me too. And Alex,” she stops, turning towards him with a questioning gaze, “you deserve good things too.”

She knows he’s talking about Maggie, offering up his support, and it warms her from the inside out. But deep down, a small pang of loss rips through her body for something she knows can never be.

Maggie wakes up early, even without her alarm.

If it was any other day, she’d roll around and go right back to sleep, aware that days off are few and far between when they’re shooting. Today, however, she has to meet her dad. It’s too early even for that, but she knows she won’t go back to sleep, so she gets up and pads downstairs to
make some coffee. She takes a look at Gabriella’s door from her place in the kitchen, thankful for the second floor’s balcony and the open plan of her loft, but the door is still closed. Gabriella has a proclivity for leaving it ajar when she’s not in the room, so she must still be asleep.

She’s finished her cup of coffee by the time Gabriella comes down the stairs, and her aunt gives her a hug as soon as she’s close enough.

“Good morning,” she tells her. “Are you sure you don’t want me to go with you today?” she asks, for the upteenth time since M’gann had left last night.

“I’m sure,” she tells her. “I have to do this by myself.”

Maggie walks through the door and nobody looks up.

She feels stupid for a second, because for some reason she expected somebody to. The feeling that someone would recognize her, record her, post it online and blow this out of the water—it had been with her ever since she called an Uber to drive her to the hotel her dad is staying at, even though it’s only 6 blocks away. She’s been waiting for something to justify the feeling filling her chest, threatening to burst.

The feeling that she’s sneaking in, that she’s unwelcome. She hadn’t looked her driver in the eyes once, had paid with cash, in an absolute show of paranoia, and she’s only allowing herself to take off her sunglasses now.

She’s also wearing a beanie that’s inappropriate for the weather, and her baggiest jacket. She doesn’t get recognized often, not in a city like New York, but she doesn’t want anybody stopping her, or God forbid paparazzi photographing her with her dad.

She can’t afford for anyone to know she’s here. She doesn’t want to be here, either, but she doesn’t have much of a say about that.

Maggie looks around, her eyes taking in the pale walls and the harsh, fluorescent light. It’s a cheap hotel, and nobody is at the front desk. It serves her purpose just fine. She sees a few people milling about near the back, paper cups in their hands, and recognizes the space at the back, just after the one elevator, as the hotel’s restaurant.

Her hands grow cold. It’s as though she can feel the blood leaving her extremities, redirecting its flow to her heart, beating like a drum inside her chest.

Maggie takes tentative steps to the restaurant, and then forces her feet to keep moving.

He’s not here yet. It’s the first thing she notices when she arrives. She knows with a strange certainty that she’d be able to pick him out of a crowd even after all this time, so the 10 or so people milling about for the complimentary breakfast aren’t a challenge. She seeks out an empty table and sits down to wait.

He never liked tardiness. She remembers that keenly. He didn’t like going to church, but they were never late. She never walked through the doors at school after the bell had rung. It’s the first inkling she has that even on the most minuscule level, talking to her again might be affecting him
to. It’s a sad comfort. A reminder that he did care about her once upon a time.

The elevator doors open a few feet away, and she recognizes him by the shoes that first walk out. Sensible black shoes, cop shoes. She used to put her tiny feet in them when she was a toddler and try to walk around wearing them. Her mom has the pictures, or at least, she did. Gabriella wasn’t able to retrieve them when she was younger, so they’re probably gone now.

She looks up at him, and he looks just as he did when she last saw him, if not more tired. Maggie swallows down the latent desire to get out of her seat and run out of the hotel, to escape this. Escape him.

He walks to her table.

It’s showtime.

A sharp rap on her trailer door startles Alex, causing her to fumble with her bag of pretzels—one of the few snacks she’s allowed to eat—and subsequently ram her knee into the couch. The curses that fall from her mouth are as colorful as they are profuse.

Her phone buzzes immediately after, and she picks it up on her way to the door. She puts her pretzels down. She’d expected for the doorman, Kevin, to be calling her again, after he’d just called to say that Maggie had left their apartment building, but it’s not him. It’s a message.

From King.

She reads his text with a roll of her eyes, and then gears herself up to follow the simple instruction. ‘Open up’.

Alex lets out another string of curses internally, briefly contemplating making up some excuse to get out of talking with him. She wasn’t even aware he was coming to set today, but considering that the whole crew was relaxed and joking around today, it’s likely no one else knew of his visit either. Alex closes her eyes, breathing in deeply and counting to 10—a technique J’onn suggested after yet another paparazzi blow up. She only gets to the number 3 before King interrupts her.

“Miss Danvers, I’m a busy man!”

She switches to a new technique, completely of her own making: imagining the subject of her annoyance stuck in a shitty situation of their own. It never fails to cool her mood, in addition to providing immense satisfaction. With King careening off a cliff into a mountain of shit fresh in her mind, she yanks open the door with an artificial smile plastered on her face.

“A surprise visit? Who should I be thanking for that?”

King stalks in, pushing past her without a glance and pushing the door closed behind him. He surveys her trailer with critical eyes, his mood radiating off of him like crackles of lightning.
“Our favorite leading lady,” he says with a shallow laugh, swiftly turning around to pin Alex under his steely gaze. “She’s not answering her phone, so I had to come down here and talk to you instead.”

Her eyebrows twitch ever so slightly, but that’s as far as she goes in allowing her irritation to show. She wonders, for a moment, that if he did know what Maggie was going through if it would change anything in that frozen, seemingly shriveled heart of his. Likely not, despite the fact the he clearly favors Maggie over her, but she’d bet her entire salary that Maggie’s value to him only extends as far as the amount of money she makes him.

He makes her sick.

She wants nothing more than to wipe that ugly pinched look off his face, not only for his tone while speaking about Maggie, but also for the downright disregard he’s displaying towards her, which is entirely unprofessional—and more importantly in her mind, insulting. The worst part is there’s nothing she can do against him, not if she wants to keep her job. It’s just her luck that the show that revived her career and introduced her to the woman who indelibly changed her life for the better is also run by an asshole.

“It’s her day off,” she says, defending Maggie.

“And saying you had to come down here is a bit of a stretch,” Alex averts her eyes, examining her nails nonchalantly. “I know for a fact your phone is working just fine.”

King smiles, a slimy thing—petty and unbecoming—and strolls over to the couch, sinking into it like he owns the place.

“You caught me there, Danvers. I do have an ulterior motive for being here. I’ve heard...murmurs, shall we say, that Maggie hasn’t been performing at her best.”

Alex stiffens as he flicks his eyes up to her, that smarmy smile still present.

“You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, would you?”

“Quite the contrary, actually.” She straightens her shoulders. She’s not sure what’s more insulting, his initial behavior or the fact that he thinks she’d rat out Maggie like that. He’s even stupider than she thought. “If anything, she’s been better than ever. Emmy-winning material.”

“Is that so?” King’s expression is inscrutable, but he merely nods, brushing off an unseen speck of dust off her couch armrest. “Because this whole show hinges on her, if there’s something going on, something I should know about, that could affect the show…”

“Nothing,” she says firmly, and then decides to butter him up. “Maggie cares about the show more than anything, if there was anything going on you’d be the first to know.”

King chuckles. “Down, guard dog. She’s a big girl, she can defend herself. I was just...asking.” He shrugs, and then eyes Alex’s face. “You’re not really getting the hots for her, are you?”

Alex feels her face flush, and she suddenly feels terribly cramped and trapped inside her trailer. She’s sure a question like that veers on sexual harassment.

“My other point of business for being here,” he says, once he realizes Alex isn’t going to dignify that with an answer, “and why I was calling Maggie to begin with, is your next contract assignment.”
Alex relaxes, taking heart in finding herself back on familiar ground. She’s dealt with this particular aspect of her life for 6 months. (The mere fact that a fake relationship is now part of what she considers her norm is a topic she’ll handle another day). The only good thing King has ever done for her is bring Maggie into her life.

“Tomorrow night. I already made the reservations and arranged the car to pick you up at your apartment building. It’s all very routine, but there is a small matter,” he clears his throat, standing abruptly. “I’ve been fairly lax in allowing you two some leeway in the amount of PDA you engage in,” he pauses, as if waiting for Alex to thank him for that.

She remains silent, crossing her arms and swallowing down the building wave of apprehension. It’s clear where this conversation is headed, and it leaves a bad taste in her mouth—as always.

“The people want more. The GLAAD win helped, but we live in a 24 hour news cycle. The kiddie kisses were fine for awhile, but at this point, you’re both supposed to be madly in love—at the peak of your honeymoon stage. Last good thing we saw was months ago, at that club. Nowadays you usually have about a feet of space between you two. Don’t.” King starts walking towards the door, leaving her with only half hearted wave. ‘Give the press something to talk about.”

The door slams shut behind him, ushering in a gust of warm spring air. Alex exhales—closing her eyes—letting out the tension that inevitably appears whenever he’s around. It’s bad enough having to deal with him at all, but on top of that now he’s trying to use her to get information about Maggie. She’d rather he confront her about the situation than Maggie though. She has more than enough to deal with right now, and Alex can manage King’s tantrums if it means Maggie doesn’t have to.

It seems all she can do right now is be a good friend, especially since Maggie has all but confirmed there isn’t a chance in hell for them to be a real thing. Friendship is all they’ll ever have. (It’d been a terrible lapse in judgement to even consider that they could be anything else.) And even though it hurts—scraps at a deep, delicate place deep inside her chest that Alex didn’t even know she possessed—it doesn’t make her angry. She understands what Maggie means. Maggie had said it was a bad idea because the hypothetical two people would have a tense workplace when they broke up—not if, when—but Alex knows that would only be one challenge. The other one is her. What could Maggie possibly see in her?

Her words from earlier echo in Alex’s mind, their reverberations leaving her feeling sick and slightly shaky. The hot flush of shame coursing through her veins outweights all else though.

She should’ve never said anything. At least before, she could’ve remained content living in her Schrödinger's state of ignorant bliss where the possibility of Maggie reciprocating her feelings was just as alive as the possibility of a rejection. But now, that’s gone. She took a running leap—the kind Kara would’ve been proud of—without even looking down and fell flat on her ass.

Perhaps the only good that came out of it, if it could be called a good, is that now she can move on from her... crush. A harsh chuckle claws its way out of her mouth at the thought. As if Maggie Sawyer was the type of person anybody could just get over. She’s fucked—and not in the way she wants to be, for the first time she can remember. She can’t pinpoint the exact moment the flurry of butterflies in her stomach that erupted every time Maggie smiled at her morphed into something more. Something visceral and desperate low in her stomach whenever Maggie gave her a tired, raspy chuckle at the end of the day. Despite her best attempts, Alex fears she’ll never be able to shake off her embarrassing infatuation.

She feels like an asshole for feeling the hurt and disappointment of Maggie being so dismissive about dating a costar when Maggie herself is dealing with something monumental, but her feelings
are a beast that Alex has never quite learned how to tame. And by now, there’s probably no point in trying.

All her attempts at moving on will be pointless, considering she still has to pretend to be in a relationship with Maggie for 6 more months.
It’s quiet. Strange. Maggie doesn’t know what else she expected.

She hasn’t seen him in 10 years. He left her speechless the last time they spoke, 2 days ago. He left her alone and broken at an airport a decade earlier. Without the rawness of anger or the immediate, freezing shock, how do they start a conversation?

They’re strangers.

“A couple years ago…” Her father clears his throat. “When your mother called Gabriella, about Sofia’s medical bill…that was me. I’d told her to. She didn’t, huh...she didn’t know about you. ‘Bout all this.” He waves at her clothes as though there’s physical evidence of...she’s not sure what. Her wealth? Her celebrity status?

“Oh,” she says. She isn’t quite sure what to answer. She didn’t know it had been his idea, and she’d simply...assumed they knew all along. That maybe they’d seen her first commercial on TV, or seen her face on a movie poster. She knows there’s a movie theater in Omaha that’s big enough to have played all her wide release films. Seems she was wrong.

“She didn’t get out to the city much,” he says. “I’d never told her about your movies or what you were up to. I didn’t see the point.”

“How did you know?” she asks, finding her voice. She wants him to tell her that he kept up with her life, to give her some inkling that he still cared about her after she was gone.

“I saw the poster for this film they were showing in Omaha. You were in it. I could tell it was you, you still looked the same. I went in and saw the movie, too. I watched it and thought, that looks just like the little girl I used to make up bedtime stories for because she didn't like the way I read.”

He looks disappointed, and Maggie hates him for it.

“I knew you weren’t that girl anymore, though, so I didn’t even think to call. I wouldn’t have told your mother to if it hadn’t been for Sofia.”

She nods. She knows that.

Maggie understands now, how hard it always was for him to ask for help. She looks at the way she grew up, at the way her family worked, and she sees how proud he was, how set in his ways. He was the man of the house, the breadwinner. The head of the household, as he used to say. Maggie had always felt protected, somehow, when in an argument with her mom her dad would silence her with a simple ‘I’m the head of the household’. He never failed to remind her mother of her role as the wife, as the woman. She sees so many things now that she didn’t back then, because she didn’t
know better.

She never thought her dad would have been one to ask for help, and least of all from her. She guesses he didn’t, in a way, since he got her mother to do it, but all the same. She doesn’t understand why he’s telling her now.

“I knew you’d help your sister. That’s who I raised you to be,” he says. “At least you didn’t throw that away.”

You didn’t raise me. It’s on the tip of her tongue, but she can’t manage to get it out. He walked with her on her first day of school, carried her on his shoulders, but he wasn’t there her first day of high school, out of his own choice. He didn’t help her with algebra, he didn’t take photos of her in her junior prom dress. He was only there for half her life.

He goes quiet. Pensive. Maggie stares. The waiter serves them both glasses of water and leaves menus in front of them quietly, as if sensing the less than pleasant atmosphere.

“It wasn’t meant to be permanent, Maggie. You know that.” She looks up at him, frowning. “You were supposed to come to your senses, and we were supposed to bring you back when things had calmed down,” her dad says. “Tell everyone we got you fixed up. Your aunt wasn’t supposed to support this foolishness—”

“Did you ask me here just to judge my life?” She says, finally finding her voice. She’s not 14 years old anymore. She’s a grown woman, and she owes him nothing. “A life you chose not to be a part of?”

He stares at her silently, as if surprised she’s talking back at him. She never used to.

“You lost the right to have an opinion about my life when you abandoned me.”

He looks away. “I didn’t abandon you, Margaret. What happened...what we had to do? You did that to yourself.”

She grinds her teeth, blow after blow digging into her flesh, each cut stinging worse than the last.

“I packed my own bag and decided to leave? I drove myself to the airport?” She asks, her voice growing in strength. “I was barely fourteen. You abandoned me, and you don’t get to deny that. I don’t care what you’ve told yourself to be able to live with yourself,” she spits out. “If it even bothers you that you threw one of your kids away like it was nothing.”

He shakes his head. “Don’t make me the bad guy. You had a choice. I thought you’d choose your family and instead you chose to live this...deranged lifestyle.”

She sees red. “You didn’t give me a choice, you put me out in the street like a dog—”

“I used our savings to buy you a ticket to LA, I sent you to that aunt of yours,” he says, mouth twisting out her title with pure disdain, making it clear just how much he appreciates Gabriella for raising his child. “I thought some time away from home would make you see reason.”

“Some time away? You kicked me out!”

“Gabriella knew to send you back once you’d left behind this...homosexual nonsense. It wasn’t meant to be permanent. You made it permanent,” he spits out. “You chose to stay away from your sisters so don’t come begging to be part of their lives now.”
Maggie frowns. She doesn’t understand his words, and she doesn’t believe him to be lying. Gabriella had to send her back?

“I didn’t…”

“You honestly didn’t know? Gabriella didn’t tell you? I just wanted to get you fixed up, Maggie. I needed you out of town to protect my family’s name, but I also thought time away would help you see reason. If you’d just chosen to be normal and forgotten this…unfortunate phase of yours, you could’ve come home. Your mother and I would have put it past us.” He takes a drink of water, and then procures a handkerchief to dab at his forehead. “But what’s done is done,” he says. “And I have to worry about the children I have left.”

His words bring her back to the present, and Maggie lets go of thoughts that are 10 years too late.

“I know Franky called you first, and I will apologize on her behalf about that. She shouldn’t have bothered you.”

Maggie is less shocked by the fact her father is apologizing, than by the way he’s switched to treating her like a stranger again. Like Franky’s call would ever bother her.

“She’s my sister,” she says numbly.

“She should’ve talked to us first, and we would have told her the truth. You have your life and she has hers, and they don’t mix.”

“It doesn’t have to be that way,” she says, introducing her objective into the conversation as subtly as she can manage it. Her father meets her eyes, finally, and Maggie realizes in that moment that he’s never going to agree.

“They have good, simple lives back home,” he tells her. “They don’t remember you. They don’t know about you—”

“They didn’t,” she corrects him. “Franky knows about me now.”

“And she will forget as soon as you tell her that you don’t want anything to do with her, that you left this family ten years ago. She’ll let it go.”

The waiter stops by, but her dad waves him away. The small restaurant around them has begun to empty out, and only a couple tables are occupied with what seem to be tourists. Maggie hopes they don’t recognize her, or don’t understand English, because the conversation veering towards Franky makes it difficult for her to keep her voice down.

“Is that what you told her? That I chose to leave?” She imagines the moment Franky found out about her, and all the things that could have run through her mind regarding the reason for her disappearance from her life. When she first saw her dad, she’d been too shocked to react, but over the next day she’d started to fear the worst, that her father had filled Franky’s head with garbage about her. It was her initial fear, when Franky first contacted Gabriella. That she’d be just like her parents, still too young to make her own judgements and as such would just parrot back every single homophobic thing she’d heard at home. “Couldn’t bear to be honest and say you kicked me out?”

She hadn’t wanted to ruin her siblings’ image of their parents, but Maggie is selfish enough to prefer that over this, over Franky thinking she didn’t care about her. Her sister was the best part of Maggie’s life. It’s sacrilegious that her dad would ever claim otherwise —she would’ve never chosen to leave Franky.
“I sent you to your aunt,” her dad says. “I could’ve put you on the street and I didn’t.”

“Father of the year,” she spits out.

“And we’re not gonna rehash this,” he speaks over her, clearly ignoring her dig. “It’s final. I want the best for my children and that’s not you in their life-”

“I am your child too ,” she says earnestly, before she knows she’s going to say it. But his reaction destroys the last, minuscule hope—that she wasn’t aware she still harbored—that he saw her as his daughter, as part of the family.

He looks away. “Not anymore.”

Anger grows in her, taking up all the space in her ribcage and obliterating anything else she might have felt for the man in front of her. She hates him.

“I pay for Franky’s school-”

“Because you wanted to. You were the one that asked to put my little girl into that academy for stuck ups-”

“It’s the best private high school close enough to the shithole you choose to live in,” she tells him firmly.

She’d written him and her mother a letter in which she stated her reasoning for paying for a better education for Franky, and for eventually paying for her college education, which she knew they wouldn’t be able to say no to. She’d already covered Sofia’s medical bills, and had committed to paying for the rest of her orthodontic treatment—however long it lasted—so she knew it would be easier for them to take what she offered. She hadn’t thought about being a part of Franky’s life back then, or Sofia’s, but she had everything she could want...she just wanted to give that to them too.

“Mind your words,” his voice is rough, and she realizes it’s the first time she’s ever cursed in front of him. Maggie falls silent by force of habit. “Franky was doing just fine in her old middle school, ain’t nothing wrong with public education. She can go to the high school in Wymore. Your mother still works there. She’ll be just fine. And Sofia is getting the spacer and the braces removed next month and I can pay for that retainer thing she’ll need next. We can save up for whatever else she’ll need when she’s older,” he tells her, and Maggie is both hurt and amazed that he so clearly knows every step of the treatment. “We don’t need you anymore.”

She’s losing her hold on them, on him, so she tries another tactic. She doesn’t feel even an inkling of guilt for holding money over his head.

“If I took you to court over visitation rights, what do you think would happen?” She asks, aware that it’s a flimsy defense and that she probably wouldn’t be favored in court solely for not being their parent. But she’s counting on her father to ignore the legalities of it. He’d made detective, but he’d never cared about trials and court, the world after the offender was caught. “Being a lesbian isn’t-”

“Lower your voice.”

“-a valid reason not to see my siblings, and no judge will side with you on that.” She does lower her voice, but it only sounds more menacing. “I could bleed you dry just from lawyer costs alone.” She wouldn’t, for Franky’s sake, but he doesn’t know that.
Her dad looks taken aback for a second, but he quickly schools his face into perfect neutrality. As if he knows she’s full of shit.

“You wouldn’t do that to your siblings,” he says. “I see your face. Remember who taught you to bluff playing cards.”

Maggie swallows.

“They’re my sisters,” she insists, aware that she’s 3 steps away from sounding like she’s begging. “Charles is my brother.”

“We call him Charlie. Which you wouldn’t know because you’ve never met him,” he scoffs at her. “He ain’t your brother.”

“You learn that one in church?” she asks, hating the way her voice wobbles. Her throat aches, and Maggie sinks her nails into her palms to force herself to reign her fucking feelings in. She won’t cry in front of him.

He picks up his handkerchief from the table and stuffs it in his pocket, obviously getting ready to leave. “If that’s all you have to say, I have to go,” he says, with all the gestures of someone who already knows they’ve won. “Don’t talk to Franky. She’s already got it in her head that you don’t care about her, and you left for a reason. She won’t call again.”

“I didn’t leave her,” Maggie says, quiet. “I didn’t leave her,” she repeats, raising her voice. “It took me years to understand that.”

“She knows what she knows and she doesn’t need.”

“She’s still my sister!”

Someone from an adjacent table looks their way, Maggie can see it from her peripheral vision, but she no longer cares. She feels Franky slipping away from her the same way she did when she was a child.

“And I’m still her dad,” her dad says firmly. “At the end of the day it’s my call, and you know it. And you also know that your life, with all the cameras and the fame and the drugs...there’s no place for children there.”

She doesn’t even correct him, doesn’t tell him that she’s never touched drugs a day in her life. She knows it’s hopeless.

“Don’t pretend it’s because of that,” she tells him bitterly. He surely would prefer she was a drug addict rather than a ‘homosexual’.

“I need you to stay away from my family. Stop helping them if you want, but stay away. Understood?” He stands up, and takes a step towards the door. But this won’t be how this ends. He already chose the last time he left her, as a child, and Maggie gets this one.

She stands up and grabs him by the sleeve, stopping him in his tracks.

It’s the first time she’s touched him in 10 years. She half expects him to turn to dust and slip through her fingers, but he doesn’t. He just looks at her, eyeing her like something wild, like she’s finally done something he did not expect. Serves him right, she thinks. He didn’t raise her. He doesn’t know her like he thinks he does.
“Franky will be eighteen in four years,” she says carefully, “and if she’s anything like me and Gabriella—and she managed to find us so I bet she is—whether you want to lose another daughter is up to you. Because the minute she turns eighteen you can’t stop me from seeing her, and I can offer her everything that you can’t. A life that she could only dream of.” She lets go of his shirt, but he doesn’t leave. He just listens.

“You said you gave me a choice, so I’m gonna give her a choice too. And we’ll see what she’ll choose.”

This time around, she walks out on him. And she feels his eyes burning into her back as she leaves, but she doesn’t turn around, keeps her chin held high. This time, she’s the one who chooses when the conversation ends, the one who gets the last word. She’s not a little girl anymore, and she’s finally proved that to herself—and to him.

She doesn’t let the tears fall until she’s inside the cab, and they’re as victorious as they are heartbroken.

Chapter End Notes

So Oscar hadn’t meant to kick Maggie out permanently? And what does it mean for her and her siblings that he’s so against them ever speaking? Plus Alex is holding down the contract fort all by herself while Maggie deals with things. A date is on the horizon!

We’d love to hear your thoughts about all of it. Please leave us a comment and feed the muse!
“Miss Danvers?”

“This is she,” Alex fumbles with the phone, putting down the bag of groceries in her hand.

She isn’t one to cook, for the sake of conserving her own health and those around her, but the idea struck her on the way back from set, and she had the driver make an unplanned detour. As she listens to Kevin, she grabs the single cookbook—a gift from her mother—coated in a foreboding film of dust, from where it fell behind her bookshelf. There must be a simple enough recipe for chicken and pasta somewhere in the red binded behemoth of a cookbook.

“Miss Sawyer just returned.”

The book slides out of her grasp, hand dropping limply at her side, all thoughts of cooking vanishing.

“Oh.” Alex rubs her forehead subconsciously, accidentally leaving a smear of dust. Even though she’d planned what to tell Maggie well in advance, actually seeing her wasn’t something she could really prepare for—even though they’d been together all morning. Being on set offered a distance that being inside this building—their home for their time in NYC—didn’t. Alex finds it harder to keep her walls up here, and she’d be willing to bet so does Maggie. Not to mention more often than not Maggie makes her breathless.

“She’s paying her taxi right now,” Kevin tells her. “Is there anything you’d like me to say to her?”

“No!” Alex clears her throat. “No, I mean, it’s okay. Thank you, Kevin.”

The call ends, and Alex fidgets with her phone, chewing her lip absentmindedly.

She could make her way down there right now, and catch up with Maggie on her way up to her apartment, or she could swing by her place later in the afternoon. It’d be easy to procrastinate, the groceries still need to be put away, and her apartment could use a good cleaning—regardless of whether she has company over or not.

Her father used to tell her she just needed more faith, to trust that the universe would unfold itself exactly as it was supposed to for each person. And then her mom, always the more scientific of the two, would argue that faith had nothing to do with a person’s life trajectory. Life wasn’t beholden to some abstract higher power or order in the world. Privately, she’d always agreed with her mom,
not that she’d ever let her know. But in moments like these, she really wishes she could throw logic out of the window and subscribe to her father’s worldview. It’d probably add at least 10 years to her life—and ease the knot in her back too, which twinges violently as she sits down, trying to decide between one course of action and the other.

She remembers Maggie’s shell shocked face when she saw her dad again, and the decision is made for her.

Memory informs her that Maggie tends to take the stairs over the elevator, and so she barrels out of her apartment and down the steps, building up enough momentum to carry her into an impressive leap over the last four steps of her floor—and crashing right into a warm body.

Soft locks of hair feather across her face, an achingly familiar scent of cherries and spices enveloping her. If she concentrates hard enough, she knows she’d make out the hint of sweet, decadent wine. She squeezes her eyes shut, relishing in the proximity after the sudden lack of any contact—physical or otherwise. Maggie’s never been the most tactile person, but she was never shy to offer Alex small gestures—a touch at her elbow, a light pressure on her back for a second. Not until now.

She opens her eyes just in time to see Maggie swiftly stumble away from her, as if she’d been burned. The moment of pure contentment vanishes, driven away by the wraith of reality breathing down her neck. Embarrassment quickly replaces its place, the dimly lit stairway compressing and rising several degrees in temperature. For perhaps the first time in her life though, Alex doesn’t even mind that much. All that matters is Maggie, and that she finally has the chance to talk to her, really talk to her, not just unanswered texts and fleeting words on set. The nerves thrumming through her battle the growing sense of elation.

“I’m so sorry,” she lets out, taking a step back, but Maggie waves her apology away.

Her clothes are slightly rumpled along with her hair, like she was running her hands through it. It’s clear she’s been crying recently, even in spite of her equally clear efforts to disguise it. The sight lances through her heart, leaving her breathless in the worst way possible. But what really catches her attention is the renewed vigor staring back at her from Maggie’s face. Her eyes are clear—focused—for the first time Alex can remember since her father arrived. The signature sparkle and magnetic charm is still absent, but so is the downward slope of her shoulders and the melancholy fog that’d shrouded her from the world.

“Maggie,” she breathes out reverently, eyes roving over her—continuing to take in every detail.

“Danvers,” Maggie quirks an eyebrow in question. “Did you need something? Because I’m kind of in a-“

“I was hoping to run into you, actually. You’re headed up to your apartment right? I’ll walk with you.” Alex turns her back, glancing over her shoulder to check Maggie is catching up to her. She’s learned that the best way to acquire a desired outcome is by phrasing it as a foregone conclusion rather than a question. She has a chance to prove to Maggie she meant what she said, and she’s here for her. All she needs is a few minutes alone with her.

She keeps her gaze studiously glued to the floor, only looking up and beginning to speak when she can feel Maggie’s warmth at her side.

“Feels like we haven’t talked in ages,” Maggie says. “How are you? How’s Kara?”

Alex is surprised Maggie is opening the door towards a conversation, but she doesn’t like the way
she’s seemingly pretending nothing’s wrong. She’s never been able to dwell on small talk, it’s the part of being an actress she dislikes the most, actually.

“I’m good, Kara’s good. How are you, Maggie?” she asks earnestly. Maggie falters a step but Alex barrels on. “I mean, I probably shouldn’t be asking. I know you’ve been going through a lot with your...family situation, and like I’ve told you—and texted—I’m here for you.”

“Right. Huh, thanks.” Maggie at least has the grace to look guilty at the mention of those unanswered texts, and she up small sheepish smile. “Sorry about not getting back to you yet. It just slipped my mind given everything.”

Alex shakes her head, “No need to apologize, I understand. I just wanted you to know that my apartment is always open to you too, anytime you want to drop for anything. In fact, I’m throwing together a little dinner tonight that you’re free to join.”

She exhales—shoving her shaky hands into her pocket—feeling like she just moved her pawn forward two spots to start the most complex, high stakes game of chess she’s ever played. It’s now or never. She’s shown her hand, put her chips in the center of the table. She can’t take back what she said, just now or in the past few days, nor would she want to. The most she can do is hope that Maggie is receptive to her support.

She tries to catch Maggie’s eyes, ducking her head slightly to compensate for the height difference. Maggie isn’t wearing her customary black heeled boots today, which puts her a good 3 inches shorter than Alex. And she can’t help but notice how that simply accentuates her charm. Now is hardly the time to get lost in her looks though, again, and she mentally slaps herself—bringing her full focus back to the situation at hand.

The silence between them—intermittently broken up by the sound of their footsteps—stretches, bends, and almost reaches its breaking point by the time Maggie replies to her.

“Listen, Danvers, thanks for the offer, but I’m busy tonight.” The smile slips off Maggie’s face, the slightest of creases marring the smooth skin of her forehead. She stops abruptly, turning to face Alex with a determined expression. “Actually, I’m not. Busy that is. Sorry. You at least deserve honesty. I just don’t...feel like being around anybody tonight.”

The traitorous muscle in her chest whispers that it’s her specifically she doesn’t want to be around, and Alex is tempted to rip the annoying thing out. The pesky organ is the entire reason she’s standing in an empty stairway with the knowledge of what it’s like to be rejected by Maggie, three times—Alex honestly isn’t even sure what the count is now—within the span of mere days. The chess pieces lay scattered, swept off the fallen board. She can see her window of opportunity disintegrating before her eyes, slipping out of her grasp—quite literally. Maggie’s half a flight of stairs ahead of her.

Her long legs eat up the distance quickly as she runs through a million ways to salvage the shipwreck. She’s been called a lot of things, many less than savory, but a defeatist isn’t one of them. Her mind settles on the catalyst of her plan.

“If you don’t want to stay for dinner, that’s fine,” she hurriedly interjects. “I do have, um, a gift for you at my place though. I bought it awhile ago when my sister visited, but I kept forgetting to give it to you. I remembered that you like mystery novels and I saw the latest Grisham book.” She forces an awkward chuckle. “Gotta keep our gift war alive.”

“That’s great, Danvers, I’ll pick it up later—tomorrow maybe.” Maggie’s pace quickens as she speeds up the stairs, going surprisingly fast for someone of her stature. If Alex thought for a second
that Maggie would actually swing by the next day to pick up the book, she’d allow her this transparent brush off, but while Maggie finally looks more like herself today, she certainly isn’t acting like it yet. If she lets Maggie off the hook now, nothing will change and they’re liable to be stuck in an endless, frustrating circle always orbiting each other but never intersecting.

“Maggie, listen.” Alex takes the stairs two at a time, landing directly in Maggie’s path and barring her from the entrance of her apartment. “Can you just stop and listen for a minute.” She shoots her a thinly veiled impatient look, but stops all the same. Alex breathes deeply—thinking of laughing smiles and deep dimples—and takes the plunge. “You’re clearly not dealing well with your dad showing up out of the blue. Everybody on set has noticed, even King popped into my trailer this morning sniffing around.”

Alarm flashes across Maggie’s face. “King knows-”

“No, he doesn’t. He just heard you’d been off on set the past couple of days. And you have. We’ve barely talked, and we work together, we live in the same building! Maggie...I know you’re a strong person, but even you can’t do this alone. Whatever’s going on, I want to help you, but I need more,” she pauses, the adrenaline draining out of her. “A chance, just one. I won’t let you down. Promise.”

Any hope pushing its way through her chest that she finally got through to her stubborn costar is swiftly crushed under the heel of Maggie’s flashing, steely eyes. Alex feels herself involuntarily take a step back. The only time she’s witnessed that expression on Maggie is on set when she’s playing Blake, but this time it’s real. And directed fully at her. Right after the contract begun, when they’d both been testing the waters with each other, she was subjected to Maggie’s annoyance, but never the cold ire she’s seeing now.

It’s a wholly unsettling feeling, and a sharp reminder of how easily everything she’s built with Maggie can disappear.

“Did you ever stop to think, Alex, that I don’t want your help nor do I need it?” Maggie spits out, advancing on her. “Maybe if you weren’t so concerned with what you want, you’d have seen that.”

“You think I’m doing this for myself? Maggie, have you looked in the mirror lately? You’ve been nothing but a shadow of yourself since your father showed up.” Maggie recoils at that, some of the fire draining from her eyes. She suddenly looks very small—and tired. The bags framing her eyes stand out in stark relief. The flush of anger splashed across her cheeks is unnaturally bright against her usually darker skin. Alex fights against two warring instincts: the need to comfort Maggie as one would an injured animal backed into a corner and the desire to lash out in turn. She’s spent days worrying over Maggie because she cares about her—more than she should—and it sickens her that she could ever think she was doing it for her own peace of mind. That she could ever be so selfish.

Alex is used to the people she cares about expecting the worst of her—in fact, she’s an expert in it with her mother—but Maggie had been different. She’d made her feel like she could be more. Be better. Like she was someone worth believing in.

Guess not.

“You don’t know anything about what’s going on with my father,” Maggie tells her steadily. “You don’t know what-”

“Because you won’t let me-”
“Because it’s private! Do you know the meaning of that word? With how your whole life used to be splattered on the cover of cheap magazines I doubt it, but it means it’s mine only. It’s my problem!” Maggie takes a breath, but she doesn’t look anywhere near done. Her voice drops down to what she’d call a whisper, if there wasn’t such intensity behind it. “We might pretend to be dating for the cameras but I’m not yours to worry about. I get it, you’re curious about how my ‘perfect’ life is falling apart at the seams.”

“Maggie, that’s not why…” She casts her gaze around the hallway, clenching and unclenching her hands unsteadily, looking anywhere but at Maggie. The white of the walls hurts her eyes, or maybe that’s just the telltale burn of tears creeping up on her. The air is too stuffy, too thin. The atmosphere simultaneously unbearably hot and toeing the line of freezing. She wants to speak, to defend herself more, but she doesn’t trust herself to do so without her voice cracking mid sentence.

“But you don’t know! Your mother loves you! You can talk to your sister whenever you want! You don’t understand,” Maggie says, seemingly running out of steam. “Can you just leave-”

The opening of a door cuts off the rest of what Maggie was going to say, but Alex doesn’t need to hear more.

“What’s going on?” Maggie’s aunt asks, peeking out of her apartment. She’s on a call, and after looking at the both of them with a frown she walks back inside. But it’s enough to break the tension that had taken hold of their conversation.

There’s nothing left for her to do here. A waft of sweet cherries catches her nose as she pushes past Maggie and perhaps one of the most dismal notes of her life.

“Alex, wait-” Maggie takes hold of her wrist, but Alex doesn’t turn around. Maggie lets go.

Alex numbly finds herself treading the exact same steps she was walking with Maggie a few moments ago. Her footsteps drag as she buys more time to collect herself—to fight back the growing lump in her throat and the hollow ache burning in her chest. She hadn’t expected Maggie to readily accept her invitation, but she’d been completely unprepared for the stinging barbs Maggie had lobbed at her like grenade bombs.

She’d thought their friendship afforded her a modicum of respect, kindness, but once again, Alex is wrong. Obviously, she’d been the only one in their friendship who’d elevated it to a higher, non existent level. Her emotions muddied the rational part of her brain and now she’s left reeling, the rug swept out from beneath her and arms wind wheeling furiously to regain her footing—like a fool. Being around Maggie has the tendency to do that to her, a fact she’s reluctantly come to accept, and she has yet to find a way to counteract the effect she has on her. The best she can do is attempt to mitigate the sudden onset idiocy Maggie elicits out of her from a mortifying situation into an only slightly embarrassing one. Though she clearly hasn’t succeeded in that area either.

Alex Danvers. Colossal failure.

Her current predicament should just be another obstacle to outsmart, but she hadn’t taken into account the biggest obstacle of all: Maggie herself. All of her experience at Stanford, her top standing freshman year, never taught anything about the field of human relationships. She realizes now that she’s never even dated someone she actually likes. All her friends in LA stuck to her like glue because of her last name and her money. Kara has to put up with her because they’re sisters. What does she really know about people?

She shoves her apartment door open, the door knob slamming into the wall with a satisfying bang. The book she’d bought Maggie stills rests on her kitchen counter, as if mocking her, the stupid red
gift bow she’d bought plastered in the top right corner. A steady melodic beep tone fills the air and a quick survey tells her it’s coming from her laptop. Alex has half the mind to ignore the incoming call—already feeling a dull throb start behind her eyes at the thought of speaking with her mother and sister now of all times—but they’ve had this call planned for awhile now. She can’t possibly back out of it now, not without getting an earful from them both, and her sister and mother teamed up are a formidable foe.

She’d been hoping to avoid by answering the call with Maggie there, and letting them know she was busy. They both held Maggie—Maggie Sawyer, Golden Globe winner—in high esteem.

Alex sighs, throwing her jacket on the table and dry swallowing an aspirin on her way to the couch, laptop in hand. The mouse pointer hovers over the accept option for a few moments before she finally presses on it, squaring her shoulders with determination.

“Nice of you to finally join us, Alex,” Eliza greets her with a tight smile on her face and that familiar disapproving glint in her eyes. Kara winces slightly, a look of pity sent her way.

“Care to tell us why you were late?” Her mom arches an eyebrow, resting her chin in the palm of her hand and looking like she has all the time in the world to hear whatever flimsy excuse Alex comes up with.

“Package,” she blurs out, mentally berating herself a second later, but sticking to her guns. “I was waiting for a package downstairs that I needed to sign for. Sorry,” she shrugs apologetically.

“Well now that you are here,” Kara lights up, pointedly ignoring the tension ricocheting between Alex and Eliza, “let the planning for the annual Danvers family vacation begin!”

She walks back into her apartment, quiet save for the noise of her footsteps.

She can’t get Alex’s face out of her head, and she has half a mind to run downstairs and bang on her door until her co-star—her friend—opens up and accepts her apologies. But the biggest part of her is still running through too many things to focus on the words she threw at Alex. A thousand images run in an endless loop behind her eyes, and her chest tightens painfully.

Gabriella is standing by the large, floor to ceiling windows, and Maggie is taken aback by the hot flash of anger that she feels at the sight of her aunt.

“I’ve gotta go, Maggie is...yeah. I love you too. Have a good flight.” Her aunt sniffs, and Maggie frowns. “Right, right. Have a good flight next week, then.” She listens to whoever is on the other side of the call, and then keeps talking, not having noticed Maggie yet. “You can leave her with Mrs. Foust, I’ll pick her up as soon as I’m back. I might move back, yeah. I’ll bring her with me.” She finally looks up, and raises a finger to Maggie to wait. “Okay. Okay. I love you. Bye.”

“What’s wrong?” she asks, as soon as Gabriella puts the phone down.
“I should be asking the same,” Gabriella tells her, her voice rife with avoidance, and Maggie notices the tears clinging to her eyelashes.

“What was that about?” she asks again, but Gabriella shrugs it off. It makes Maggie even more upset, the knowledge that—once again—Gabriella is hiding something from her.

“It was nothing,” she insists. “How did it go? And what on earth was going on with you and Alex?”

Maggie shakes her head. She can’t pretend everything’s fine when it isn’t any longer.

“My dad, he was...he was himself.” She doesn’t know how else to explain it. He was a mountain, an unmovable mountain, set in his ways even if it kills him, but that’s not what’s important right now. “What did he mean?”

“What?” Gabriella asks, taking a step closer. Maggie takes a step back. The images in her mind grow less faint, picture perfect Christmases, taking Sofia trick or treating for the first time, all the things she should have gotten to do as a big sister that she didn’t, because she was in LA with Gabriella, because she thought she couldn’t go home anymore.

“What did my dad mean when he said….that me coming to live with you...that it wasn’t supposed to be permanent?”

“Oh.” The single sound tells Maggie everything she needs to know. Her father wasn’t lying, wasn’t making up one final disgusting lie to make her feel worse, to be the nail in her coffin. She should’ve expected it, for all the things he wasn’t and was, he was never a liar. He always told the truth, even if it was only within the limits of how he saw the world, his twisted version of what was fair.

“I could’ve gone back,” she says more than asks.

“No,” Gabriella says immediately, blinking. She runs her hand through her thick dark hair as she sighs. “We’ve never talked about this. I never thought...I guess I didn’t see the point.” She nods toward the living room and heads there, and Maggie is hot on her heels. “Sit,” she says, and Maggie obliges.

“At first he just said he needed you away. At least, that’s what your mom said. She didn’t give me a timeline or anything, just kept spouting bullshit and saying how she needed me to take you.” Gabriella bites her lip, and she’s not meeting Maggie’s eyes. Her eyes have watered when she finally does look at her. “I remember she didn’t say I should take care of you, just that I had to take you for a while. And then a week went by and she called again, said Oscar was hoping you’d...see reason. That’s how he put it.” She huffs. “To tell you that you could go back as soon as you put the “homosexual” thing behind you. I didn’t say anything. I was out of my depth there. And work was insane, and I was taking extra shifts because I couldn’t keep feeding you Cup Noodles.” She shrugs. “And then a week turned into two and your dad was the one that called. Asked if I could put you in conversion therapy.”

The words send a shiver down her spine. She’s not unfamiliar with the concept, nobody in the gay community could be. She’s heard countless fans tell her about, how their parents threatened them with it, or how some of them actually went through it. She’s cognizant of the violent shaming administered behind closed doors, the self-loathing and trauma, all in the name of curing the sin of homosexuality, but her awareness of it has always been removed. Detached. It was never something that could happen to her. Even now, she still can’t wrap her mind around it. She can’t fathom anyone trying to rewire her system, trying to change a part of her that is so important, so fundamental to her person that she isn’t really sure who she’d be without it. She loves women.
Only women. That’s as true for her as that her eyes are brown.

“Not the words he used but that was the gist of it. He said he would send money. Asked if there was any church group, any doctor...somewhere I could take you to that would fix you. That there was nothing in Nebraska and your mom came around to thinking she didn’t want you near your sisters when you were like this, that’s what he said. I said no. That’s when I stood up to him. I told him I’d die before I let anyone do something like that to you. I told him there was nothing wrong with you, and he and my sister were just stupid and too brainwashed to see it. And then I sent your dad the papers to make me your legal guardian.

“You could’ve told me,” she says firmly, her brain stuck on the same heart wrenching image. Sofia, crying in her arms as her dad asks her to put her down. She doesn’t remember what Franky was wearing the last time she saw her. She doesn’t really remember what the last thing she said to her was. How could she forget? And to think that she could’ve been with them all along...There was a chance. However twisted, there was one.

“What good would that have made?” Gabriella asks, frowning. “You were fourteen and scared-”

“You could have lied! I could have lied.” It seems so simple, so stupidly simple, that she can’t believe the choice was there and she wasn’t given the chance to choose it. “I could’ve told them I was straight and gone home, and been with Franky and Sofia-”

“Maggie-”

“You didn’t think about that? I could’ve grown up with my sisters!” Her voice breaks, as she once again thinks of all the missed holidays, of all the times Franky woke up from a nightmare and she wasn’t there, on the other side of the room. Did they cry for her? She can’t help but wonder how long it took for them to forget her. “Getting to be out was never worth my sisters.”

“You didn’t tell me they would have taken me back! How could you not...” She stands up, beginning to pace. “You didn't give me a choice.”

“I didn’t- I was twenty-four” Gabriella exclaims, following after her. “I got a kid dropped on my front door and I did the best that I could. I never thought about sending you back to them. How could I? When I knew how much they hated that you were gay-”

“I…”

“I did what I thought was right,” she says. “You were a child, Maggie. Asking you to lie...for years? It never crossed my mind. You shouldn't have had to do that, lied just so your parents could tolerate having you around? What kind of life is that?”

“One with my sisters! I would’ve been with Franky and Sofia and then left for college, or...or-” She runs her fingers through her hair, a trait that she isn’t sure if she picked up from Gabriella, or if they both inherited from someone else. The possibilities are as endless as they’re excruciating to think about. “I should’ve known!” She repeats. “I could’ve...fuck, gone to church more often. I could’ve become a fucking nun. Anything. They didn’t have to know.” She would’ve put up with anything, any amount of lies and sacrifice to just...be there. To not have that empty hole in her chest every time she thought of home. “But I would’ve seen them grow up Gabriella.”

The first tear rolls down her cheek, and she angrily wipes it away.

“Didn’t I do good enough?” her aunt asks. “You grew up with me-”
“Yes! I did! I was with you when I would’ve preferred to be with them! Even if I had to lie!”

Gabriella looks as though Maggie has punched her, as she takes a stumbling step back. Guilt is sharp and quick, but quickly overpowered by the rolling inferno of her anger.

“Look around, kid. Where do you think you would be if you’d never left Blue Springs?” Gabriella tells her, and Maggie huffs. The money, her job...she’d give it all up, no questions asked, if she could turn back time and just be there for her sisters.

“This was never worth them—”

“You wouldn’t have left, either,” Gabriella continues. “You would’ve waited until Franky was eighteen, and then until Sofia was eighteen, and soon enough you would have found yourself believing all the shit your parents believed about yourself,” Gabriella says. “Do you have any idea how many stories I’d read about gay kids killing themselves because their families wouldn’t accept them? How could I have sent you back to them? Lies or no lies. They wouldn’t have changed.”

“It should’ve been my choice,” she insists, her voice now emptied of strength.

Gabriella looks at her with pain shining in her eyes, and something in Maggie’s chest aches endlessly. She hates this. Every single wretched part of it. She wishes she could turn back time to a week ago. Hell, she wishes she could go back 10 years and just say no to her dad’s fucking question.

“They didn’t want you back, Maggie, they wanted the idea they had of you back. You would’ve never been happy if you’d gone back to Blue Springs.”

Gabriella directs a sad look at her, the tears now overflown her eyes as well. She squeezes her shoulder on her way out. Maggie can hear her footsteps carrying her across the living room, and the tell tale click of the door opening.

“Me being happy didn’t matter,” Maggie tells her, before she can leave. She looks towards the door only to find a pair of mirror brown eyes staring back at her.

“It did to me.”

Alex forcibly pushes some of the stress out of her body—unclenching her jaw and leaning back into the couch—watching her mom swallow the swelling berating she’d been prepared to inflict upon her.

In moments like this, she is indescribably grateful to her sister’s talent of adeptly diffusing simmering tensions between their mom and herself. It’s something she unfortunately foresees Kara will be doing all too much this June.
Unlike last year, their summer vacation tradition is going forward, full steam. Alex can barely believe how quickly the months have passed, and how much has changed from then and now.

Professionally, she went from being a virus nobody in Hollywood would touch with a ten foot pole to starring on one of the most successful shows and morphing back into a sought after actress. And in her personal life...well, Maggie happened to her. There’s really no other explanation than that, to the crux of it. She walked into that audition room and shattered every perception Alex had held about herself.

It’s like she’d been going through the world half asleep—in a muted haze—but then Maggie shocked her awake. Every sensation she’d been half heartedly experiencing had hit her with the impact of a speeding train, leaving her sore and bruised. Even now, it’s still a struggle to accept this as her new normal—especially when she spends so much time around the cause of her breakthrough—but despite all that, she still prefers it to the dreary shades of gray of before.

She realized something monumental about herself thanks to Maggie, and Alex realizes now that’s even more important than her career rising from the ashes once more. She’s...gay. The word is daunting to even think about it, but it fits. And Maggie was the catalyst that opened that door for her.

Her relationship with her sister and mom has changed too—the former more than the latter—for the better.

Before Nightingale, she’d been content to let everything but alcohol fall to the wayside. It’d been difficult, and shameful, to face her mom as an unemployed college dropout—a failure—while her younger sister was just starting to rise in her career, so she’d avoided her whenever she could. For awhile there, she’d tried to maintain a good relationship with Kara, but as time wore on, spending time with her sister had just served as a reminder of the pathetic state of disarray of her own life. And that’s when the resentment had started. The first time she’d named the ugly emotion rearing its head, it’d sparked one of her worst bouts of self loathing—which in turn made her pull away even more. She’s never wanted to think about her sister in a negative light, not after their initial rough patch as children.

Their relationship isn’t perfect, not where it was before the drinking started, but they’ve slowly been rebuilding into something entirely different than what they once were. She and Kara feel like equals now, in a way they never did when they were young. Alex isn’t one to enjoy change, but she doesn’t mind this new chapter of their lives.

With her mom though, she’s never quite sure where they stand.

The gut reaction to simply avoid her altogether for fear of disappointing her is still present. They have their good days and their bad. Today just so happens to fall squarely into the latter category.

“I think we should pick somewhere close by this time,” her mom says, pulling out some sort of travel destination book from what Alex can see. “We’re all busy these days, it’s not really conducive to a month long vacation.”

“Not New Zealand then,” Kara pouts. “Alex, we wanted to show you some of the fun spots we found while I was shooting there last year.”

She shrugs, but deep down she’s glad. Going down under, while nice, would be too far away. The time difference would be a pain too, she’d have to coordinate with people back home what times they could talk. And by people, she realizes she means Maggie.
“What about Mexico?” Kara recovers quickly, face brightening once again.

Alex tries to hide her grimace. “That’s a bit cliche, isn’t it?”

“No need to be a downer, Alex,” Eliza is quick to interject, flipping through her book. “There are lots of interesting things to do in Mexico, not just beaches filled with other Americans. For instance,” she pushes a page of the book in front of her screen, obstructing the view, and jabbing a finger at the top of the page.

Tulum, Mexico. One of the last cities the Maya built and inhabited, the book tells her. The ruins in the city are one of the most popular tourist destination sites in the country. It’s close to Cancún too, so while she’s immersing herself in the years of history and culture of entrenched in the town, Kara and their mom can spend the day shopping in Cancún.

A quick google search shows her picturesque beaches, blindingly blue water, and the famous ruins. A glimmer of excitement flares to life in her chest as her eyes rove over more information on the town.

“If Kara isn’t opposed to it…” Alex keeps the excitement out of her voice, the childish part of her not wanting to give her mom the satisfaction of being right. But judging by the small smirk tugging at the corner of her mom’s lips and Kara’s knowing expression, she failed miserably.

Her sister, thankfully, opts for silence—giving an enthusiastic thumbs up in approval.

“It’s decided then, I’ll call the travel agent and get him to set it up.” Eliza declares. “Nice job picking the destination, Kara. And with that done, I’m going to make some dinner. Love you both.”

“You too,” Alex and Kara chime in unison.

Once their mom signs off, she breathes a sigh of relief, only to be stopped midway through when she notices the scrutinized gaze Kara’s aimed her way.

“Are you gonna tell me why you blew me off yesterday?”

Her first instinct is to play dumb, but Kara has that dogged gleam in her eyes—like a reporter determined to get the scoop. A notepad and pen, flickering across the paper, wouldn’t look too out of place in her sister’s hands. She sighs, knowing she’s lost the battle before it even started.

“I just had a lot in my mind,” she says simply. Kara’s expression lets her know she’s gotta give her more than that. Thing is, it’s not her story to tell, and Maggie did ask for discretion, but Alex...she just needs her sister right now. She hasn’t been able to talk to Kara about everything concerning her own feelings for Maggie—the mere thought is daunting—but maybe she can pick her brain about this.

“Maggie’s going through a...rough patch with her family,” she says carefully. It’s the understatement of the year, but it’s the best way Alex can tell Kara about the situation without betraying Maggie’s trust. “I’ve been trying to help her through it but it hasn’t gone so well. The opposite of that, actually.” Alex averts her eyes, swallowing thickly. The scene at the staircase left a bad taste in her mouth she doesn’t think she’ll be able to wash out.

“And by that you mean…” Kara quirks an eyebrow, interest blooming across her face. Alex hums, drumming her fingers against her thigh as she contemplates the best way to give her sister what she wants while painting a picture that is far less sad and pathetic than the reality of the situation.
“You know that book I bought for Maggie when you were here? I hadn’t given it to her, still haven’t actually, but I caught her in the stairway earlier and thought I’d invite her to my place to give it to her. As a way to cheer her up, right? And then I thought I’d ask her to dinner too, to give her a chance to talk about what she’s going through.” She sucks in a breath, cracking her knuckles in a repetitive motion, her next words dying in her throat. She’s not keen to relive Maggie’s harsh words.

“What’s the bad part?” Kara smiles encouragingly, treading lightly—for good reason. Alex knows her sister has been on the receiving end of more than her fair share of her outbursts. She groans, grabbing the nearby pillow and shoving her face in it, a childish act more suited to Kara, but she knows her sister won’t judge her for it.

“She turned me down, soundly—and it wasn’t the first time this week.” She peeks out over the pillow—voice muffled—heat crawling up her neck. Kara’s open demeanour quickly shifts, lips pursed and a crinkle of distaste decorating her brow.

“I got a bad feeling from her the first time we met,” she shakes her head disapprovingly, and Alex doesn’t even try stifling her laughter, better to fall back on humor than soul wrenching despair. “What?” Kara huffs, crossing her arms. “It’s true, I just didn’t want to tell you because you like her so much.”

Her laughter gets caught in her throat, leaving her spluttering on her own saliva. She coughs weakly into her elbow, viciously shoving the knee jerk reaction of panic down. “I- I like her a perfectly reasonable amount,” Alex croaks out, trying her hardest not to sound like an avid chainsmoker.

Kara shoots her a peculiar expression, eyes widening infinitesimally, a hint of a smile tugging her mouth into a lopsided half smile.

“You’ve been all Maggie this and Maggie that for months now. Mom thought she was good for you.”

“What did mom say?”

“Mom thought your friendship might make you, I don’t know, better? About the partying and the...drinking,” Kara trails off. The surprise at her mom having such an opinion of her life, and discussing it with Kara, quickly burns out and is replaced by the shame that she wasn’t able to shield Kara from her worst choices as well as she thought she had. “So,” Kara continues, “that makes the way she treated you even worse,” she declares, self righteousness radiating off her in waves. If Alex squints, she can just make out the high horse her sister has made her throne.

“It’s not like that Kara,” she insists, tossing the pillow aside. Maggie certainly hasn’t been kind to her pride these past few days, but she doesn’t deserve for Kara to think any less of her. Even when she feels so hurt at Maggie’s outburst at the stairs, she can still remember the warmth of her hand on her wrist, and how torn her voice sounded when she called out to her. If she’d stayed, she’s sure Maggie would have apologized. She’s hurt, and she’s mad, but Maggie is a good person. The best person. That hasn’t changed for her.

“What she’s going through right now...Remember how I was after dad died?”

“I remember,” Kara says, almost in a whisper, and now it’s her turn to look anywhere but at Alex. “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize it was that serious.”

Alex blows out a breath, idly watching stray fly aways flutter in the air, pushed by the synthetic puff of wind. She remembers a lot of things from that period of her life, including Kara and her
mom’s attempts to draw her out from her self-imposed prison into the light, where she could deal with her problems. It hadn’t worked, of course. It’d only made her more hellbent on staying on the destructive path she’d carved. What’s to say her own efforts won’t produce the same results?

A shiver runs through her, as if someone had just doused her in freezing cold water. She can’t afford to think like that. While it is easy enough to draw comparisons between her emotional state then and Maggie’s now, the deciding difference is that Maggie is a better person than she ever was or could dream to be. Their last conversation nearly shook that belief, but she knows that wasn’t really Maggie. She just pushed her too hard. She’ll come around soon, Alex has to believe that. And she has to believe this isn’t just her being stupidly besotted.

“From my experience,” Kara’s subdued voice draws Alex out of her revere, her eyes focusing back on her sister, “the best you can do is offer your support, and hope that she’ll accept it at some point.”

That’s what Kara did with her, but her sister deigns to keep that part unspoken, twisting the hem of her sweater and self consciously pushing her glasses up the bridge of her nose. She spends so much time wearing contacts for the cameras that she forgets she needs them. The image only serves to remind Alex of when they were younger. The uncomfortable twinge of guilt she’s come to associate with that period of her life twists her stomach into knots. Now is hardly the the time to divert any of her focus to dredging up old demons though.

“I’ve been trying,” Alex lifts one shoulder on a halfhearted shrug, “but even that is proving to be easier said than done.”

“Well there’s not much else you can do apart from that.”

“Right.”

“You can’t force people to want your help, Alex.” Kara sighs, settling her roaming hands in her lap. “I’m sorry, I know that’s not what you wanted to hear, but-“

“It’s fine,” Alex musters up a faint smile as a show of appreciation. It’s nice to finally talk to someone about her Maggie situation, even if the advice isn’t particularly good. She doesn’t know what else is there, however, and she’s never been good at just waiting. “I’m going now,” she tells Kara. “I think I’m gonna take a walk, clear my mind a little. It’s been good talking to you, Kara.” She smiles. “Thanks for listening.”

“You never have to thank me for that. I’m your sister, it’s part of the job description.” Kara’s eyes brighten, and the cloud hanging over their conversation dissipates—chased away by her innate brightness. Alex let’s the warmth wash over her—a welcome respite from the stress driving her every action these days—lingering even after she signs off.

The Skype window closes, and Alex is alone with her thoughts.
Maggie watches the play of shadows dappling her bedroom floor as the sun disappears behind clouds, only to reappear moments later.

She isn’t quite sure how long she’s been lying there. Gabriella left, and then she carried herself up the stairs and into her bedroom. She could’ve been lying there for hours or mere minutes, staring at the floor without actually seeing it. Time holds no meaning for her right now. She hates it, actually. She wishes manipulating it was as simple as that film that she went to see last year with...with Gabriella. (Every recent memory she has is peppered with her aunt. She’s filled up every crevice and crack in her life for so long that she isn’t quite sure what her life looks like without her.)

She feels like the Chris Pine in that film, tucked away in a different world while the people she cared about grew up. Now that she thinks about it, Franky did come looking for her now, in her own way. And now her dad is standing in the way of them reconnecting again.
Gabriella stood in the way 10 years ago, too. Maggie’s wrapped her head around it, and it only hurts the more she keeps dwelling on it.

She would’ve been fine back home. She doesn’t care how her parents would have treated her, at least she would’ve been with her sisters. She doesn’t care if she had to be closeted, that would’ve only been temporary. Gabriella was wrong. She wouldn’t have believed any of the horrible things her father believed about herself. But she wasn’t given the choice. And now her sisters don’t know her, and she’s never met her brother. How could this have been the better option?

She rolls over, facing the ceiling. The exposed beams in the rest of the apartment had charmed her when she first moved in, making the entire space seem large and modern, with just the right amount of rustic. She’s glad her rooms don’t have them, the simple cream colored ceiling making her room seem cozy. She doesn’t think she’d deal well with the extra space, considering how empty she feels now. How...detached.

She knows what she has to do, but she doesn’t get farther than reaching for her phone and lighting up the screen. Gabriella’s face stares back at her. Maggie remembers the day they took the photo that graces her lockscreen.

It was a couple years ago, the day she’d finished moving into her house in LA. They’d decided to meet up for lunch, and when she they got there, they had quickly realized they were both wearing incredibly similar outfits, black leather jackets included. They’d looked like sisters, and she remembers telling her she was her aunt-sister-best friend, all rolled into one.

She can’t talk to Gabriella right now though, she doesn’t want to, and so she can’t make this decision with her. She isn’t sure she can make it at all.

She feels as though she’s looking at her fight with her aunt from a great distance, from the end of a tunnel, the anger and the hurt reaching her is only a gentle echo, and not the crashing wave of emotion it was when Gabriella was here. It’s the same way she’d felt when Emily and her fought, or when they broke up, or when a role she really wanted got ripped away. And she knows the only way to fix is to take a drink to her lips, the alcohol unwinding the tightness inside her ribcage and allowing her to feel.

She has a choice to make regarding her father, and it’s not one she can make without feeling all the consequences of it. She drags herself out of bed and down the stairs towards her liquor cabinet. The moonlight filters through her wide windows—the only source of light in the dark room—and reflects off of the glass of the cabinet. The haunted, drained face she sees interposed over the liquor bottles merely fuels her desire to drink—to surrender herself to the punishing sensations only alcohol can inflict.
The lobby is clear at this time of the day, and Alex makes a beeline for the door, just managing to pull up short at the last second when she catches a glimpse of a familiar face through the glass.
Maggie’s father. *What the fuck is he doing here?*

She recognizes his sharp profile and the seemingly permanent look of displeasure at the world etched into the lines of his face. Her legs take on a mind of their own, and she’s out the door before her brain catches up. He’s arguing with the doorman, she realizes as she exits the building.

“I have a right to-“

“I’m sorry, sir,” Kevin tells him, standing in front of him and directly blocking the doors. “But I can’t grant you access to the building.”

“Nonsense,” he says. “My d-“

“You’re not welcome here,” she tells him viciously before he can finish his sentence. For a second, she doesn’t recognize the venom in her voice. “You can leave on your own or we can have you removed by security.”

“Don’t *you* dare talk to me,” he tells her, and Alex notes the inflection in the sentence. It barely rattles her. She’s been dealing with aggressive men yelling in her face since she was a child. This asshole doesn’t even have a camera, and she doesn’t need to hold back. She’s in control, and the surge of power and simple inclination towards violence that floods her would worry her if she didn’t find him deserving of it.

He’s the reason Maggie is in the state she is right now. Hell, he’s guilty too, in a way, of how her last conversation with Maggie went.

“Kevin, I’ll take it from here,” she tells her doorman, who simply stares.

“Ma’am-“

“Go inside, that’s where your job is,” she says firmly. She feels a slight twinge of guilt, but it quickly disappears as he nods and goes back inside, and she’s left alone with Maggie’s dad.

“What do you think you’re doing he-“

“I have *nothing* to say to you, you disgusting *dyke,*” he spits out, and turns on his heel before Alex can say another word. He walks down the steps and into the throng of people walking down the busy Manhattan street, probably coming home from their 9 to 5 jobs and oblivious to the world she lives in.

And all the while, Alex is frozen, the words reverberating inside like she’s hollow.

Hot anger and shame burn through her, and she’s certain she’s never felt her heart pound so violently inside her chest. She feels guilty, though she hasn’t done anything wrong, but that does nothing to deter the overwhelming sense that she should be apologizing for something. Senseless tears well up in her eyes after the moment of shock, and they bring her back to the present. But she fights off the vicious reaction as she follows after him. Now isn’t the time to have a breakdown on the middle of the sidewalk.

She pushes past through the sea of bodies—deaf to the grumbles and yells at her—trying to find a glimpse of him in the growing crowd. A flash of blue catches her eye across the street, but it’s rapidly swallowed up by the stream of cars rushing by.

Blood pounds in her ears, drowning out the noises of the busy New York day. An insistent tinkling of a bell finally breaks through her daze, and Alex steps out of the path of a biker just in time. She
blinks, taking stock of her surroundings and situation.

She’d just chased after Maggie’s dad like a lunatic. She hadn’t had any plan in mind, just a burning energy to give him a piece of her mind—and maybe a kick in the ass too. The sheer ridiculousness of it all makes her want to laugh, and bang her head against the wall—repeatedly.

She sighs, turning to trudge back up to her apartment, the appeal of taking a walk completely gone.

She can’t get his face out of her mind. She’s not quite sure how Maggie could stand someone like that being her father. For all of her mother’s faults, Alex can admit that she’s never insulted her. She’s used hurtful words that cut to her core, in the worst of their fights, but she’s never made Alex feel like less of a person. She can’t imagine Maggie putting up with her father now, let alone when she was younger. Kara’s words reverberate in her mind as she opens her door, shadowing her steps from the living room to her kitchen. For a less determined person, it’s quite possible there isn’t anything else to be done—she tried to give him a piece of her mind, and failed—but Alex has never placed herself in that category.

For better or worse, once she sets her mind on something, she’ll exhaust every route available to secure her goal. Her chest is incensed as she remembers the word he threw at her, but even worse is the fact that he most likely would’ve said the same to Maggie had he been able to get inside. She straightens up, anger propelling her every move. Running after Oscar on the crowded sidewalks was a fool’s errand, but the general gist of tracking him down holds some merit.

She leans back against the counter, closing her eyes to block out any visual stimuli that could distract her. Maggie’s father was wearing worn blue jeans, scuffed up brown leather shoes with visible crease marks, and a faded light blue button up. A simple, stainless steel analog watch had flashed in the lights of Maggie’s apartment, when she’d met him that first time. He’s from Blue Springs, Nebraska, home to around 300 people give or take, her mind quickly supplies. It’s the epitome of rural America, with a per capita income of less than $20,000—she recalls. It’s an incredibly low figure, until one takes into account the markedly lower cost of living in the town compared to the average.

Maggie’s dad wouldn’t be able to afford anything more than a cheap hotel, and likely close by, in order to cut down on the costs of transportation.

She whips out her cellphone, and a quick search on hotel sites narrows her list of possible locations down to 10. New York City is crawling with hotels, but their area is more residential. There’s still an hour or two before it gets dark—it’s entirely doable. She still doesn’t have her license to drive herself around the city, and an Uber would take too long, but her mind flashes back to the biker that almost ran her over a few minutes ago. During one of Maggie’s speeches about the greatness of New York city, she had mentioned a popular bike rental program.

A smile creeps up on her, its sharp edges pulling at her cheeks. She feels like a predator, and her only intent is to make Oscar feel the same shame and guilt that he inflicted upon her, and most likely Maggie. Maggie deserves to have someone else in her corner against Oscar and Alex will gladly be that person.
She downs another shot, the burn in her chest a stark contrast against the cold that had taken up residence inside.

Her dad won’t budge, she realizes that. She’d played all of her cards, perhaps foolishly, and he’d been able to call her bluff every single time. She’d never stop helping her siblings. She’d never take things away from them to force their father’s hand. Even now, like an idiot, she wonders how he’d paid for the plane ticket here, and if she needed to refund it to keep Franky, Sofia, or Charles from being deprived of anything, in any way, even if it was just a box of fucking crayons. Did they even use crayons? God, Sofia was 11 now. She certainly didn’t.

Maggie drags her hand down her face as she downs the last of the shots she’d served.

There’s not much she can do legally, since Franky, Sofia and Charles—Charlie, she corrects herself—are minors. Her mom was fucking useless, Maggie could realize that much. She’d be on her father’s side ‘til the end of time.

She grabs the book to her right, and opens the pages to the small stack of photographs it holds. There’s only one she remembers with perfect clarity. In one, she’s a little girl and Franky is just a baby, and she doesn’t remember anything about it. Inane childhood days have faded with the years. Another one, she wasn’t around for at all. Gabriella took it for her when she went back home for Nonna’s funeral, and it’s the oldest she’s ever seen her sisters. She’d rejected Gabriella’s offers to go back to Nebraska just to check on them in person—every single time. She wasn’t welcome either, and it wasn’t worth the fight or the confusion to be introduced as their mother’s old friend. Sofia is 2 in that one, her blond hair the longest she’s seen it, her features changing from a baby’s to a little girl’s. And Franky is 4, what looks like a dimple forming a divot in one of her cheeks. Does she have dimples now? Or was it a trick of the lighting? She doesn’t know, and that’s what pains her the most.

The only picture she clearly remembers is the colorful polaroid she holds now in her hands.

It had been taken just a few weeks before everything went to shit. Roy’s mother had gotten a polaroid camera a a gift, along with the cheesiest paper covered in pink flowers. Roy had borrowed it for an afternoon to take a picture of her, and had let her use it to take a picture of her sisters. (In retrospect, it’s unbelievable she’d been so blindsided by his feelings. She’d been living in willful denial of so much. She’s spent so much time wondering what she could’ve done differently to alter the course of that day, but it only ever ends in her drinking).

How had she been so dumb to be blindsided by his feelings? What could she have done differently to avoid the entire school finding out?)

Maggie runs her thumb over the photo, the immortalized memory of the last time she’d seen her sisters. Her dad had been visible on the top right corner of the picture, sitting on the couch with his feet propped up, and Maggie remembers the day she’d taken a sharpie and scribbled him out, too angry and hurt to look at any part of him. She still is.

And she doesn’t want her siblings to become ghosts that haunt her like her father.

She has an idea of what to do, but without Gabriella here, she doesn’t have anyone to act a soundboard. It’s all the same. It’s about time she started making her choices by herself.

She sits up and reaches for her phone, easily dialing Winn’s number. He answers on the first ring.
“Maggie! I thought you’d never get back to me about Buzzfeed—”

“It’s not about that,” she says, trying to remember his last texts. “I need a favor,” she tells him, and then lets him know what she means. With the promise that she’ll see him soon, she closes the call. Her next call will be harder, and in a strange second she realizes that Gabriella isn’t by her side when she turns to talk to her. Like going down the stairs in the dark and expecting another step to be there when you’ve already reached the landing.

This is up to her, and her choice is made. She calls M’gann. Her manager answers even faster than Winn had.

“Maggie, yes?”

She swallows, looking out the window. “Did you draft that non-disclosure agreement?”
Alex readjusts her grip on the handlebar, glancing down at the piece of paper clutched in her other hand. A light sheen of sweat covers her face, causing her sunglasses to slowly slide down her nose. She rises off the bike seat, pumping her legs to give herself some more power. Glimpses of the city whiz by in her periphery vision, an assortment of people taking advantage of the warm April day.

The first hotel on the list enters her line of sight, the knot of nerves heavy in her stomach pushing her forward—pedals a whirl of motion. She pulls up breathless, parking in the bike rack out front. The incongruous hotel looms before her, looking impossibly large. In the comfort of her apartment, she’d been confident in the merit of her idea, but in the light of day, it’s looking more and more ridiculous—stalking down her crush’s father to give him a piece of her mind. It’s something
straight out of a cheesy romcom, and Alex has always prided herself on being above such theatrics.

Growing up behind the camera disillusioned her of any of the manufactured love stories Hollywood spit out on a regular basis. She can’t count the number of times she’s complained about useless, over the top gestures riddled with impracticality. While others twisted themselves into deformed pretzels all in the pursuit of romance, she’d scorned them from the sidelines—alone.

Always alone.

Her self-imposed isolation saved her from acting like a fool, but it’d also deprived her of any happiness beyond the professional and familial realm. Too scared to even try.

The distant sound of a dog barking reaches her ears, carried by the breeze ruffling the smattering of trees lining the sidewalks. Alex rests her forearms on the bike handlebars, head bowed—soaking in the varying noises and smells. Out of the corner of her eye, she notices a flash of color, cautiously coming closer and closer until it lands only a few inches from her. She idly gazes at the butterfly, one of nature’s many symbols of transformation. In order to change, one must first accept that something is wrong.

Alex sits up abruptly, blood rushing back to her head. Her legs feel like jelly as she dismounts, but she resolutely strides towards the automatic sliding doors. A blast of cool air settles over her sticky skin as her eyes adjust to the dim exterior. The lone woman at the desk startles to attention as Alex clears her throat, fixing a welcoming smile on her face.

“I was wondering if you could help me with something,” she leans against the desktop, aiming for a casual air. “I’m looking for an individual by the name of Oscar Sawyer. I’m Alex—”

“Danvers,” the woman quickly finishes, eyes lit up in recognition. “My mom’s favorite show is *Body of Medicine* .”

“That was a great time in my life,” Alex lies through her teeth, forcing out a chuckle. “Now as for my question,” she trails off, watching the woman jump into action with no small amount of satisfaction. Being a celebrity certainly does have some perks.

Rebecca, she notes from the nametag pinned to her jacket, clacks away at the computer.

“Oscar Sawyer, you said?”

“It’s business related,” she nods, offering up an explanation. “For a new project I’m working on. I lost the contact information my manager gave me.”

“Most celebrities would get an assistant to do this, but I always knew you weren’t stuck up like the media claims.” Rebecca winks at her, in what Alex assumes is meant to be a comforting gesture, but just has her grinding her teeth. Even if she did have an assistant, she wouldn’t trust anybody else to handle such a sensitive case. She fidgets impatiently, casting her gaze around the small lobby to stop herself from jumping over the front desk and looking for Oscar’s name herself.

Finally, the receptionist’s typing stops, her voice reaching Alex’s ears a second later. “There isn’t anybody by that name checked in, sorry.”

Alex swallows down her disappointment. It’d have been too easy if she’d found him at the first hotel she checked. She has 9 more places to investigate. With a sigh, she turns to leave, stopping only upon Rebecca’s request for an autograph.

The bike ride to the next hotel passes by in a blur—as do the next three rides. She can’t decide
which is hotter, the sun beating down on her back or the frustration blazing a path through her body. The combined effect of both leaves her irritable, which has proved detrimental to her efforts. She’s snapped at more people today than she’d like to admit, and she’s half convinced the last front desk clerk didn’t even bother looking for Maggie’s father in their database simply to get her out of the doors quicker.

She speeds by a fellow biker, almost close enough to clip him, and ignores the resulting curses aimed her way from behind. Any patience she has left for niceties is reserved for the hotel clerks. She spots the next location, hopefully her lucky number 6, in the distance—a small spec that rapidly grows as she pedals furiously. She unceremoniously shoves the citibike into the bike rack, grimacing in distaste at the strong scent of trash wafting from the nearby alleyway.

Alex doesn’t even wait for the man at the front to acknowledge her, cutting straight to the chase. “I’m looking for someone named Oscar Sawyer. I have some business with him, but I lost his contact information. It’d be greatly appreciated if you could help me.”

The man gapes at her, quite stupidly she thinks to herself, looking like a clownfish—emphasis on the clown. He fumbles with the phone in his hand, trying to hang up. She feels sorry for whoever’s on the other end, but now that the fog of annoyance has slightly cleared, she recognizes the man’s bumbling for what is is: excitement. He’s obviously a fan, and a big one at that.

“You’re- you’re,” he jabs his finger at her in the air, arm quivering. She nods steadily, a perfunctory smile gracing her lips, willing him to use his words properly. “I’ve been a fan since your first role in your dad’s movie, this is—”

“Amazing, right? Now if you could just help me, I’m sure I could sign something for you.” Alex doesn’t think about how she was a preteen the first time she appeared in one of her dad’s films, and how this guy is twice her age. She needs him right now.

The man’s eyes dart from her face back to the computer screen as he works, fingers still shaking. His brows scrunch up in confusion as his typing peters off, their breathing the only noticeable sound in the lobby for a moment.

“There isn’t anyone with that exact name booked in, but we do have two people whose first name is Oscar here. An Oscar Jameson and an Oscar Caivano.”

The possibility that Maggie didn’t share the same last name with her father never occurred to her, though in hindsight it should have. If Maggie’s parents shared her last name, then it made sense why it was so difficult to find information online about them, not even in public records. Given everything she’s been able to ascertain, the lengths that Maggie went to cover her past doesn’t surprise her. But it does sadden her, thinking of a teenage Maggie changing her last name in order to cut ties with her family. It angers her too, that she was ever felt the need to take such an action.

“Caivano,” she picks easily, of the two choices, it’s the only one that sounds remotely Italian. “I just got the last name wrong.”

“Shall I call him to come down to the lobby?”

“No need, I’ll surprise him.” The smile blooming across her face is real this time, though far from friendly in nature.

In the faint recesses of her mind, Alex registers a sting of pain, the source of which she discovers is coming from the twin balled up fists at her side—nails digging into the flesh of her palm. She forces herself to relax, uncurling her fingers one by one. As much as she’d like to storm into his
room, guns ablaze, he seems the type to categorize any woman showing even a hint of anger as hysterical, and she actually wants the man to take to heart what she has to say—for Maggie’s sake, if nothing else.

Room 303.

Alex squeezes her eyes shut, centering her thoughts. Unbidden, Maggie’s smile floats before her—matching dimples framing her face—eyes gleaming with a laugh, happiness draped around her like a blanket. It’s a memory kept close to her heart, taken out only in moments of solitude.

She raises her hand, Maggie’s smile still at the forefront of her mind, and knocks.

Three raps.

The muffled sound of a bed creaking reaches her ears. She squares her shoulders, an odd sense of calm washing over her.


“What are you doing here?”

She meets Oscar Caivano’s dark eyes head on. They’re so similar to Maggie’s, and yet they don’t hold the same warmth.

“I wanted to talk to you.”

The words are simple enough, but they seem to catch him by surprise.

“I said I have nothing to say to you,” he tells her in an even tone, and pushes the door closed once more. She keeps the door from closing with her boot.

“I don’t care,” she tells him firmly. The anger that drove her forward had been steadily depleted in the hour it took to find him, but it comes back now, as he so easily dismisses her.

“Who do you think you are?” he asks her, and Alex almost huffs.

“I could ask you the same thing,” she tells him. “You can’t just show up at Maggie’s home and-”

“I don’t know what you think your relation to Maggie is,” he says slowly, “but I don’t recognize it as anything but an aberration.”

“Do you even care about her?” she asks, before she’s sure what she’s saying. She’d been planting to insult him, to rip him a new asshole, what she really wanted was to knock his teeth in—but that’s what comes out. “She’s your daughter. How can you...how can you say those things about her?”

“Margaret stopped being my daughter a long, long time ago,” he tells her.

“I don’t expect you to know shit about the world, but that’s not how it works,” she says through her teeth, her hands balled into fists at her sides.

“You think it’s all biology, eh?” he asks, and lets the door swing open. “I bought her her first ice skates,” he says, his pointer finger sinking in his own chest. “I took her to those stupid dance lessons she liked so much. I sacrificed everything for her. And this is how she repays me? By acting like... a degenerate.”
Alex strides inside, her boots loud against the cheap linoleum floor. “She’s your daughter,” she tells him, her jaw aching from the force it takes to keep her words down. “She was a child the last time you saw her.”

She doesn’t know the details, but she believes Maggie, and she sees it all confirmed as Oscar seems to waver, the accusation digging in deep. So it’s been 10 years since they last saw each other, and he thinks he can waltz into her life and turn it upside down?

“She’s nothing to me now,” he says, meeting her eyes. Alex is pleased to see they’re roughly the same height, and as she straightens up she feels like she’s towering over him. “We have values, in my family. I don’t know who raised you or how-”

“I was raised by good, loving parents,” she tells him. “I had a good father. Which is why I can see that you’re not one.”

“You don’t know anything about-”

“I know enough!” she exclaims, walking into his space. “I know you’re stupid enough to show up at Maggie’s like she doesn’t have a world of people backing her up. I know you’re cruel enough to call her terrible names.”

“Don’t get in the middle of things you know nothing about, girl. It’s not your place,” he tells her, lifting his chin, as if the words should mean anything to her. They don’t. “And I’ve entertained you enough now.”

He walks the few steps towards the door, holding it open. But Alex isn’t done.

“You don’t deserve her,” she tells him simply. “You don’t deserve her in your life. Maggie’s a good person. You’re too fucking stupid to see it, but she’s the greatest woman I’ve ever met. She’s kind, and she’s caring, and she’s smart, and she’s all those things despite whatever hell you put her through.” She takes a step closer to him. "You don't deserve to have her as a daughter."

His dark eyes zone in on her, nearly black in the poor light of the cheap hotel room. Alex has never seen a more despicable sight.

“So Maggie picked a cunt to shack up with,” he spits out. "She isn't as smart as I thought she was. All these years she's been a thoughtless, selfish little worm but I didn't think she'd grown up to be stupid, too.”

Her blood runs hot at the slight against Maggie. She nearly ignores the insult he throws at her, far too focused on the way this man, who somehow helped create Maggie, can so easily say such things.

“If my job wasn't on the line here…” she trails off, and then shakes her head. She has too much at stake, and she’s grown too much. But if she was the same woman she was a year ago, her knuckles would already be bloody.

“I’m going to call the cops-”

“Call them! Let’s see who they believe,” she tells him menacingly. “You’re nothing.”

“I'm a father who's only doing what's best for his-”

“Your kids would be better off without you,” she fires back. “You lost the best thing you had because you’re too small minded to accept her.” Even in the worst case scenarios, she knows deep
down that her mother will never react like this. This man is the lowest of the low. “Maggie is a hundred times better than you’ll ever be, and you know it.”

“Get out,” he spits out. “With God as my witness I’ve never hit a woman, but you’re testing me, you foul mouthed whore.”

“Is that why you insist on calling her those names? Or me? So you feel like more than the piece of shit you are?” She relishes in his increasingly red face, the anger blistering in his eyes. It feels like revenge, like power. But she knows nothing could ever erase the damage he wrought on Maggie.

“Get out!”

“I will. But I can see that you know I’m right.”

She strides out of the room, but as she heads towards the elevator she doesn’t hear the door close. She hopes he’s too stunned to do it.

Chapter End Notes

Alex did what we all want to and confronted Oscar, but without Maggie's permission or knowledge—and through questionable means too. Maggie’s world tilted even more during her fight with Gabriella. And what did she need Winn to do, what did she choose to do about her father? All will be answered next chapter!

We'd love to hear your thoughts on it all! Do you think Alex was right to track Oscar down? Who do you think is in the right in Maggie and Gabriella's fight? Comments are always appreciated and great motivation tools.

Thank you for reading!
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ex imo corde: from the bottom of the heart

She’s late.

She has to find a pair of shoes that can handle the afternoon, and she’s not sure where she put her keys, not to mention she’d like to put on some eyeliner at the very least. She’s stopped on the way to her bedroom by a blur of brown hair and overalls bumping against her before continuing her mad dash around her apartment.

“Sorry!” a voice squeaks, and Maggie turns around to watch as Franky finally catches up to Sofia, sending her little sister tumbling down. Sofia laughs, her chubby toddler legs kicking as she gets up and sets off again.

“Franky, be nice,” she half-heartedly admonishes, before going inside her bedroom. She quickly finds a pair of flats, suitable for running after two little girls under the age of five. If the laughter and the ruckus coming from the living room are anything to go by, she’ll be doing a lot of running after her baby sisters.

Maggie stands in front of the mirror, intent on doing her eyeliner. There’s something wrong nagging at the back of her head as she looks at herself, but she can’t quite put her finger on it. She’s looked the same since high school. Coincidentally, she learned how to do her eyeliner in high school, after moving in with Gabriella. Maggie frowns. She’s never lived with Gabriella, has she? She shrugs and goes back to painting two even, black lines around her eyes, briefly thanking whoever is listening that she doesn’t need much else to look like she put in some effort.

Now she just needs her-

“Looking for this?” A voice asks, and Maggie looks up to find her key chain dangling from Alex’s fingers.

“Yep,” she tells her, grabbing the keys from her hand as Alex steps behind her, her arms winding around her waist.

“Are you ready to go?” Alex asks softly, a second before she presses her lips against her neck. Maggie looks at the image they make on the mirror, and it looks right, but feels...strange. Her sisters are still screaming in the other room, but her bedroom is so quiet.

“I am,” she says, or tries to say, but the words don’t come out of her mouth. She’s not sure if she
spoke and lost her voice somehow, or if her brain isn’t listening to her and she never opened her lips in the first place.

“Maggie?” Gabriella asks, suddenly popping her head inside her bedroom. “Oh, Alex. Are you girls ready to go? Sofia is going to have a meltdown if we’re not in the car in the next five minutes.”

“We’re good,” Alex tells her aunt. “We’re right behind you.”

Gabriella smiles, and picks up Sofia, who’s ran straight into her legs.

“Are we ready for the park?” she asks her baby sister, who nods and squeals her assent with a resounding, if mispronounced, ‘let’s go’.

“Alex, hurry,” Franky says, as she steps inside the room. And far from the tiny space feeling cramped, it feels more like home than anything Maggie can remember. But she can’t say it out loud. As she tries to take a step forward, she can’t move. She watches in silence as Franky grabs Alex’s hand, and her sisters, her aunt, and her girlfriend all file out of her room.

Maggie is left behind.

She frowns. Her girlfriend? Alex isn’t...she yelled at her. She needs to apologize. And Franky...Alex has never met Franky. When Franky was that small Maggie was still a kid herself. She shakes her head, her distress growing as the sounds of her family float further away. They’re leaving, and they’re leaving her behind. She tries to move, but she can’t.

Desperate, she tries to yell, but no sound comes out of her mouth. Until it does.

Maggie jerks awake, her pounding heartbeat quickly dispelling any last traces of sleep. Her mouth feels like it’s been stuffed with cotton balls, the effects of her earlier drinking setting in. She’s hungover, and she just had a hell of a dream. She can’t classify anything including her sisters that clearly as a nightmare, even if the tendrils of her dream make her overtired eyes water.

She should’ve realized it was a dream right away. She was 14 when her sisters were that size, and she was dating Alex, who has never met them. Maggie sits up. She guesses she is dating her, even if it’s for the cameras. She chalks up her appearance in her dream to the simmering guilt over the way she’d talked to her yesterday. She was on edge about her conversation with her dad, and Alex’s support—insistent, probing, intrusive support—pushed her even more in that direction. She owes the woman an apology. And she owes Gabriella...Maggie can’t even begin to think about talking to her aunt.

Her dream fades, and with it the image of her sisters, happy and healthy, running around. Maggie thanks her subconscious for providing her with the image. Sofia hadn’t yet mastered walking when she left.

A loud buzzing by her bedside table draws her attention, the bright screen of her phone the only point of light in the hazy, faint dawn of morning.

She wasn’t expecting M’gann to get back to her so soon, but a quick glance at the screen shows her it’s not her manager, but rather the front desk calling. Immediately, a sense of wariness settles over her. The doormen and receptionists rarely need to call her, and she can’t help but think this has something to with her dad. It’d be just like him to march all the way to her apartment so he can get the last word in. The determination she’d always admired in him as a child is working against her now.
She swallows down the worry as best she can, answering the call right before it ends.

“Hello?”

“Good morning Miss Sawyer,” Kevin says, his usually cheerful voice muted, due to the time or the nature of what he’s about to tell her, she isn’t sure. “I was hoping I could reach you. A man came by yesterday asking for you. Older guy, blue button up and jeans. He claimed he was your father!” he says.

A shiver runs down Maggie’s back at his words. She thinks of her dad, showing up and announcing their relationship to anyone who would listen. Now that she thinks about it, she’s not sure how he gained access to her floor the first time, and attributes it to Kevin maybe taking a smoke break, or leaving for lunch. No such luck this time. She doesn’t think she could have handled him twice yesterday, but that surely wouldn’t been better than someone else knowing. How many NDAs would M’gann have to draft before something slipped out?

“He was...very aggressive, so I didn’t let him in. But that part where he said he was your father made me pause. It sounded suspicious to me. Were you expecting a visit from your father?”

Maggie sighs in relief. She shakes her head, catching herself mid motion when she realizes Kevin can’t see her. Her dad is predictable as ever, but that at least makes it easier for her to guess how he’ll respond to the NDA she serves him. Having her fears confirmed slowly becomes soothing in a way too. She’s been stumbling in the dark on uneven ground ever since her showed up. Nothing turned out like she’d predicted, and the unknown ranks pretty high on her list of dislikes.

“No, no, I’m not expecting my father,” she quickly replies. “He’s in Nebraska, last I heard!” She injects a forced laugh to the end of her statement, and Kevin chuckles along with her. “You did everything right, don’t worry,” she reassures. “Was there anything else?”

“No, that’s all. These paps are getting more creative each day aren’t they?”

“They are,” she agrees. “Thanks, Kevin.”

She closes the call soon after, feeling irrationally guilty for lying in the exact same way M’gann suggested her dad might accuse her of when they first spoke about this a couple days ago. She knows what the press would say, what her qualifier would be. Maggie Sawyer, who abandoned her family. Maggie Sawyer, who is so ashamed of her family she’s hidden them from the public. She can see the headline now, ‘Maggie Sawyer may not be in the closet but her family sure is’.

Her train of thought goes back to Gabriella the more she thinks about her family. She can’t do anything about Franky and Sofia, right now, but she can do something about her aunt. She turns the phone over in her hands. She ought to give Gabriella a call.

They weren’t exactly on great terms when she left, and though she’s not worried—Gabriella always rents a car as soon as she lands, and her apartment is nearby—she doesn’t like this. Not talking to her feels as unnatural as not using her hands, even though she’s still upset. In the early morning light, she’s more sad than angry however.

Outside, even from 6 stories up, she can hear the familiar sounds of the New York City morning rush float in. The city never stops for anybody, not even on a Saturday. It’s been ages since she’s had a long weekend while shooting, but she adds not being able to enjoy it to the long list of grievances that make her crack her neck so early.

She knows she and her aunt need to have a long conversation. The words she said yesterday come
back to her, and Maggie feels her chest heat up with shame at some of them. No matter how angry she was, or how sad she still is, she doesn’t remember ever speaking to her aunt like that. She blows out a breath, and gives her a call.

It rings and rings, and then goes to voicemail. Maggie wonders if her aunt is still asleep, if she’s skyping her boyfriend—the boyfriend she swiftly left to be here with her, the boyfriend with whom Maggie still doesn’t know if she’s going to move to another country with—or if she saw her name on the caller ID and decided not to answer. She briefly wonders if she got on a plane back to Los Angeles.

Maggie texts her aunt, checks in with Winn and M’gann, and then lays back on her pillow, nothing left for her to do but wait.

A stray tear slips down her cheek as she finds herself alone in her king sized bed, wishing her dream had been real. She wishes her aunt was here, she wishes she could take her sisters to the park, she wishes somebody loved her like her dream girlfriend, wearing Alex’s face, did.

The world blurs in front of her and her throat thickens.

When she’d first arrived in California, the tears had flowed easily in the safety of that small, poorly lit apartment. Her aunt hadn’t been home often then, her shitty job stealing her away for hours on end, which had given Maggie the comfort of crying in solitude. But life, as it always does, inevitably went on and soon enough the tears had dried up. She’d buried the pain so deep it couldn’t touch her anymore, or so she’d thought. It’d partially been a self-preservation technique and partially to stop her aunt from shooting her worrying glances whenever she’d thought Maggie wasn’t looking.

But now her dad has dredged up all that pain again, and it’s as stinging now as it was 10 years ago—maybe even more so because now she knows the extent of what she’d lost, the chance to watch her sisters grow up.

Another tear falls down her cheek, and Maggie feels like she’s spent the last few days crying for everything she didn’t let herself cry about back then.

Alex desperately tries to sink back into a dreamless, deep sleep, but to no avail. The damn city won’t shut up and let her.

In moments like this, she misses the peaceful remoteness of her childhood home; the only noises that would wake her up were the crash of waves against the shore, and the sound of her dad making pancakes and Kara asking to help him. Her mom going to work. A particularly loud honk blasts through the air, and Alex groans in despair, flopping back on her bed. Black beady eyes stare back at her, a stuffed heart nudging her nose.

The adrenaline rush from confronting Maggie’s dad was exhilarating, like nothing she’s felt since that time she punched a paparazzi. But the morning light, as she’s all too familiar with, exposes the
events of last night for what it was: stupid.

Utterly moronic and ill-planned.

It’s evident her common sense decided to take a vacation yesterday. What’s to say any one of those front desk clerks hasn’t run to the press already to sell the bizarre story of Alex Danvers searching for a man who just so happened to have her co-star’s last name.

It’s perhaps the worst decision she’s ever made, right up there with—coincidentally—punching that paparazzi. (J’onn about had an aneurysm trying to clean that mess up. She stills feels bad—about giving J’onn more trouble, not about punching the guy). Her heart says she should tell Maggie about the ‘meeting’, assuming her father hasn’t already called Maggie up to complain about her crazy girlfriend barging into his hotel room, but her brain argues otherwise.

Maggie’s made it explicitly clear that her personal life is off limits, only for her eyes and knowledge, and with what Alex knows now, she fully understands why. Logic follows that if someone were to insert themselves in any way into said personal life, Maggie would not be pleased by it. In fact, in all likelihood, she’d be royally pissed. It’d be the stairway incident but cranked up to 11, and despite all the progress she’s admittedly made, she doesn’t think her ego could handle that type of battering again.

The best policy is honesty, that’s what they teach in schools, though she’d bet her entire Nightingale salary that no teacher ever envisioned having to apply that policy in a situation as sticky as hers. Maggie would want her to be honest, but Alex’s mind is quick to whisper that Maggie never told her the full truth either. Then again, no solid, lasting relationship was built on lies. Although in some cases, it’s in both parties’ best interest to conveniently bend the truth to fit a certain narrative, and it’s not like Maggie doesn’t have enough on her plate with her dad in town. Conceivably, one might even say she’d be doing her a favor by holding off on unleashing such a bombshell.

Given enough time, Alex knows her big brain could argue her way out of telling Maggie the truth, but when she gets down to the bare bones of it, she knows exactly what she should do—and what’s keeping her from doing it.

Fear.

She’s scared of what her slipup will do to whatever remnants of her friendship with Maggie there are left. Right now, she’s walking a tightrope suspended 100 feet in the air, a yawning black hole below, and at the end of the line is Maggie, or at least, their friendship surviving unscathed. The slightest misstep could ruin her precarious balance and knock her off, plunging her downwards.

If she were a braver, better person, she’d march up the stairs and come clean. If she had less to lose, she’d already be out the door. But Alex has never laid claim to either of those descriptors, and she can’t afford to lose Maggie—the first real connection she’s felt with anybody outside of her family and J’onn. The thought of that scares her more than anything.

Alex exhales deeply, rolling over to peer outside. The bright sunlight seems to mock her. A quick glance at the clock on the wall lets her know it’s already close to 11am, and she’s effectively slept in without even meaning to. It’s Saturday, and she already knows what awaits her this afternoon. She has a date with Maggie, another one of their King-mandated, photographed dates, and that won’t be the best place to let Maggie know she met with her dad face to face. She should head down there earlier.

She knows what route she’d like to take, but ultimately this isn’t about her. The only person who
really matters is Maggie. She realizes now, that for the last few days she hasn’t had that at the forefront of her mind. She’s been so desperate to be there for Maggie that that overpowering feeling took a backseat to what Maggie really wanted, and if it’s not her support, then she should’ve taken a step back a long time ago. Certainly before she’d stalked down her father and yelled at him.

Alex drags her hand down her face, stress wrapping itself around her ribcage like vines, hindering her breathing. The tightrope wavers, bending under her weight. She doesn’t want to hurt Maggie further, but she deserves to know what Alex did, the truth is the least she could give her—especially when Maggie will most likely already know.

Only the noises of the city accompany her as she stumbles toward an unknown fate.

A noise at the door takes Maggie’s attention away from her morning coffee.

She puts down the agave nectar and heads toward the door, only to stop at the sound of a key scraping the lock. Only a single other person in the world has keys to her apartment.

“I was about to call your apartment in LA,” she says when Gabriella walks in. Her aunt gives her a look.

“I wouldn’t leave without telling you,” she tells her, and Maggie feels a stab of guilt for implying it. “Besides, I’ve been staying with Chris for a couple weeks. My apartment was more or less storage.”

“You’re living together now?” she asks, feeling like the biggest, most selfish idiot. She hasn’t even asked once about her aunt’s boyfriend, who she’s been seeing for 8 months now. When did she become so self centered?

A broken smile twists Gabriella’s lips. “Well, not anymore.”

Maggie’s stomach sinks.

“What?” She asks dumbfounded. She remember the phone call her aunt was on yesterday, that clearly seemed to be upsetting her, and she damn herself for letting her anger take center stage. “No...you and Chris.”

“Chris and I broke up.” Gabriella shrugs, even as she presses her lips together.

“What-when?”

“When I told him there was no way I could go with him to Argentina, and I didn’t want us to have a long distance relationship. I couldn’t hold him back like that.” Gabriella says, in what sounds to Maggie like a practiced speech. “My life is here, with you, with the restaurants…”

“When?” she asks again, hoping against hope that she didn’t walk in on what she thinks she did
yesterday. If her aunt had just gone through that, and on top of it she’d unleashed all her frustration out on her...She feels like shit.

“Yesterday,” she says, confirming her thoughts. “That’s when we made it final. I love Chris but leaving was never an option-”

“Not for me,” she says softly.

“It’s not for you. It’s for me. I’ve been a shoulder to cry on since you were fourteen, and I couldn’t live with myself if you needed me and I wasn’t here.” Gabriella gives her a watery smile. “Even if you don’t particularly like me right now.”

Maggie’s words are lodged in her throat, along with the tears that she keeps swallowing back.

“How come you didn’t let me know? I got home and you were-”

“I was on the phone with him,” she says. “He’s leaving next week. He’s leaving me his cat, you know? She liked me more than him and he says it wouldn’t be fair to her. So I have a cat now.”

“I’m-”

“You were upset yesterday, you’d just talked to your father for the first time in ten years. That takes precedence over my relationship issues,” Gabriella rolls her eyes half halfheartedly, but the hurt shining in her eyes completely ruins her attempt to downplay the situation.

Maggie shakes her head. She doesn’t deserve this.

“You know, when you were born…” Gabriella trails off, finally taking off her jacket and toeing off her shoes. “Well, you know Giorgia lived with us at the time. You didn’t move out and into the house with Oscar until you were like two. First of all, you were a really loud baby.”

A wet chuckle leaves Maggie. She’s thankful that even in moments like this, Gabriella is finding ways to cheer her up. She doesn’t deserve that either. Not when she’s only been thinking about herself ever since her dad showed up, maybe since long before that. She lost the chance to grow up with her sisters, but what had Gabriella lost? She was 24. She’d sacrificed her 20s, the supposed prime of her life, all to take care of her. There’s a reason Chris was the first boyfriend she’s ever met. She was too busy taking care of Maggie to ever do things like date seriously. She wouldn’t go out to parties or hang out with her friends on the weekend because that was the only free time she had to spend with her. School supplies, trips to the doctor, lunch money—her aunt had handled it all a mere three of years after leaving college.

Gabriella had worked so hard to leave Blue Springs—she was the first in their family to even go to college—and then Blue Springs had turned up on her doorstep. She didn’t have to take her in. It would’ve been so simple to send her back, but she didn’t.

And even if going back is what Maggie thinks she would’ve chosen instead—although the more time that passes from her conversation with her dad, she begins to doubt it—Gabriella took care of her at her own expense. Maggie feels uncomfortable hot shame flood her chest as she remembers her words from yesterday.

“Your mom...she was young,” Gabriella says. “You know that. She’d just finished high school. I tried to help out as much as I could, but I was ten. Just wanted her to have a break, get used to it.” She shrugs. “I don’t know if she ever did.” She walks to the kitchen. “I’m making lunch,” she says. “Sit down.”
Maggie obediently sits on the breakfast island while Gabriella begins to rummage through her refrigerator.

“You were my favorite person, even back then,” Gabriella says. “And then you moved out and I became a teenager and we weren't that close anymore.”

“Having a teenage aunt is confusing for anyone,” Maggie says. Her first year of school, her aunt had been a freshman in high school. Not old enough to be an adult that she had to be quiet around and respect, but not young enough to be a kid she could play with.

“Well…” Gabriella shrugs. “Do you still have that salmon?” she asks suddenly, and Maggie nods. She takes it, putting it in a bowl of water that she then pops into the microwave. “I’m getting hives using the microwave to defrost salmon. It itches.”

“Snob,” she teases softly, unsure for the first time how it will be received. If she was Gabriella, she’d be pissed at her. And instead she’s making lunch. Maggie watches as she mixes soy sauce, balsamic vinegar, and olive oil in a bowl. She drops the defrosted salmon in it, and then puts it back in the fridge.

“I can chop some veggies,” she offers, getting up from the chair.

“Broccoli,” Gabriella says. “And asparagus, if you have some.”

Maggie nods. Her mind is on Gabriella’s words as she goes through her fridge. Gabriella seldom mentions their life before Maggie was 14, out of deference to her she guesses, and she’s never heard this before. Maggie stays quiet, in case she’ll keep talking.

She does.

“You know, after I left for college, when I came back and visited and saw you with Franky...it reminded me of us. Of me as a kid, looking after you. Except you did way more than I ever did. And then Sofia was born. I looked at you, and you were what, thirteen years old and carrying both your baby sisters around.” Gabriella stops chopping a carrot, and Maggie looks up at her. “You looked so much like your mom, Maggie. I didn’t want that for you. Getting pregnant in high school and never reaching for more.”

“Well, that was never gonna happen,” Maggie says, taking the vegetables to the breakfast island.

“I know that now,” she says. She finishes up with the carrot and grabs the broccoli next. “I wanted you to be like me instead of your mom,” Gabriella tells her. “I wanted you to leave that town and go to college and see the world. I didn’t want you to have a kid your senior year and never do anything with your life. You were always so smart, Maggie, so talented. It would've been a waste if you ended up like your mom. Harsh but-”

“True,” Maggie finishes for her. She never had the easiest relationship with her mother. She can still remember the difference between the way she’d treated her little sisters and the way she’d treated her. She was sweeter, with Franky and Sofia. Kinder. There were less screams and she doesn’t think Franky ever got a spanking like she did, though that might just have been her age. Maggie wonder if her mom had finally gotten used to being a mother when Franky was born.

“My sister had a lot of dreams,” Gabriella tells her. “I think she never really tried because she was scared, not because of you. She could’ve moved to the city with you, but she didn’t want to leave our mom. And Oscar would’ve never wanted to move. And she would never have divorced him.”

Maggie is oddly shocked at the words. She never thought of her parents getting a divorce, but now
that she sees things through older eyes, she understands how their relationship worked. Her dad was always right, even when he was wrong. Her mom was meek. She'd always swallow down her words and let things go, all in deference to her husband, the man of the house. Maggie remembers her mom coming home exhausted to cook for him, while her dad put his feet up because he’d worked all day. She didn't see it then, she didn't like her mom and certainly doesn't like her now, but she can see it. The unfairness of it all.

“She could've gone to college and found someone to take care of you, or asked mom to. There were ways, but being a mom became all she was. She gave up on everything else. And I can't help but wonder if it was an excuse not to try.” Gabriella meets her eyes. “I never wanted that for you.”

Maggie understands there, what she was too hurt to accept before. It wasn’t just not being to be out in such a small town and with such homophobic parents. Her entire world...high school, college, the knowledge she’d sucked up like a sponge from the second she had landed in LA...everything that made her the woman she is would be gone. She wonders if with the years she would’ve become her mother. The prospect terrifies her.

Gabriella gets the salmon from the fridge, placing it along with the chopped carrots, broccoli and asparagus onto a pan she places in the oven. Lunch was prepared in less than 15 minutes. Maggie has been watching her cook for the last 10 years, and she’s still amazed. Maybe she could do it, but she has the feeling it wouldn’t taste the same.

“Is that why you didn’t tell me anything of what my dad had said?”

“I was getting to that,” Gabriella tells her. “One day I just got a call from my sister saying something had happened and you needed to stay with me for a few weeks. That your dad was already driving you to the airport. And I didn’t mind, but when I asked why...I saw red, Maggie. All I wanted was to have you with me and protect you. And that was why.”

Gabriella sits across from her at the breakfast island, and the knot in her throat only tightens.

“You deserved to be who you are,” Gabriella tells her earnestly. “And your parents would’ve never loved every part of you, just the idealized parts they deemed acceptable. If you’d lied, who’s to say they’d have believed you? Who’s to say they wouldn’t have sent you to whatever deranged church program they saw fit anyways or reminded you of how wrong your sexuality was every day? There were a thousand possibilities and they were all shit. You deserved, and still do, better than that. You were just a girl. I had to look after you, to choose for you, and I’m sorry if you think I chose wrong, but I don’t think I did. I don’t think there was even a choice at all.

Maggie’s beginning to see that.

She wants to apologize, to tell her aunt that she’s sorry for taking it out on her. She wants to thank her for taking her in, for accepting her when no one else would, for fighting tooth and nail for her. She wants to ask about Chris, about the pain in her eyes. But it’s always been so hard to get the words to leave her lips.

“I didn’t think about telling you to lie and sending you home with your parents at the time,” Gabriella says. “But if I had? I don't know that I would have told you about it anyway, Maggie.”

Her aunt pats her leg and stands up, heading to the oven.

“Now, we’re going to eat lunch, and we’re gonna talk about what went on with your dad yesterday, okay?” She states more than asks. “Have you decided what to do?”
Maggie nods, everything she wants to say still lodged in her throat.

Alex’s eyes narrow as she scrutinizes herself in the mirror, looking for even a tendril of hair out of place.

It falls like two curtains on either side of her head, the ends just below her jaw. It’s getting longer. She almost can’t remember what it was like for her hair to end at her waist, and although the lack of tangles is a big bonus, the best part is how she feels like a different person now. She also hasn’t gotten vomit in her hair since she cut it, another plus. Then again, she hasn’t been in that bad of a place since she started working on Nightingale. Oscar night is the closest she can remember getting, and Maggie had been there.

At the thought of Maggie, she smooths down the front of her shirt, the white material cool underneath her hands—a refreshing contrast to the date jitter clamminess she’s developed.

She’s getting ready a bit early, but due to the long weekend, she really had nothing else to do. She’d just talked to Kara and her mom yesterday, and J’onn is doing...whatever he’s doing in New York with M’gann, his girlfriend. (She wonders if Maggie knows that their managers are dating). And she didn’t have any training this weekend. Her only other friend is Maggie, though at this point even that fact is debatable, and she’s seeing her tonight—for their fake date.

In the mirror, Alex’s reflection winces at the sad state of her social life.

The most exciting personal affair she has going on is a contractually mandated PR relationship. And even after all this time, her body still hasn’t gotten the memo that it’s all artificial. Her hands still sweat, her heart still races. If before it was with the uncomfortable realization that she liked women, now it’s with the nerves brought on by knowing she likes Maggie.

It doesn’t help that King has them going to textbook romantic places either. Le Bernadin is their destination tonight, and it’s all too easy to draw parallels with the first official PR date and tonight’s.

Their relationship is basically at the same level it was back then, and Alex isn’t sure whether to laugh or cry in frustration. After tonight, it may fall even lower than that. She still isn’t sure how or when to break the news to Maggie about her little chat with her dad. Most of her hopes that Maggie knows already, and the only thing she’ll have to deal with is putting back the pieces of their friendship—and her pride—to the best of her abilities. Hearing it from a secondary source would rob her of the chance to defend herself though, which is hardly ideal either.

Alex swipes her phone from the counter, googling her name for anything new and breathing a sigh of relief when nothing pops up—besides an unflattering photo of her mid-jog in US Weekly, but that just proves it’s been a slow news day in tinseltown. She wishes she could call J’onn to do preventive damage control, but now that he’s dating M’gann, she can’t be sure that anything she tells him won’t trickle its way down to Maggie’s ears.
She sighs, mind wandering back to her current dilemma. Telling Maggie about her visit with her father at the start of the evening definitely isn’t a viable option, that’d just ensure that the whole affair is miserable for them both. Holding off until the end of the night really wouldn’t hurt anybody, just delay the inevitable for a short time—and it’s not like she’d be backing out of it. Maggie may very well bring it up first thing though, if she already knows about it.

She’s boxed into a corner, and there’s no one to blame but herself. Whatever happens tonight will be of her own doing, and the only thing she can do is face it head on.

Alex does one last cursory check of herself before walking to the door, trepidation shadowing her every move. She isn’t used to being the proactive one in their relationship.

It’s always been Maggie steering the ship, hand outstretched towards her own—pulling her forward through sheer force of will. It’s only in the past few weeks that it’d felt like they were finally walking side by side in tandem, but now Alex finds herself alone again, grasping at air in the emptiness around her.

It’s not an unfamiliar feeling, she just never thought Maggie would be the one to elicit it in her.

“M’gann says she’s coming with the papers tomorrow morning,” Maggie lets her aunt know, closing the call.

She feels drained, physically and emotionally, but oddly calm too. Talking with Gabriella about everything that had happened with her dad lifted a huge weight of her shoulders. It’d clarified the jumble of thoughts bouncing around in her head and instilled more confidence in her plans moving forward. Getting to talk to M’gann and ensure that she’s almost finished taking care of the legal aspect of things also lets her breathe easier.

That’s not so say all of her worries are gone now, there’s still the matter of actually going through with it all and she knows how easily things could take a turn for the worse, but with her aunt by her side, everything seems less daunting. She doesn’t know how she didn’t see that yesterday.

“And Oscar said he’d meet with you tomorrow night,” Gabriella says, toy ing with her work phone. “We should be fine.” It had been nerve wracking to be in the room while Gabriella called her dad earlier, but after letting her aunt know that he’d showed up to her apartment, she’d thought it prudent to let him know when he could meet her. “Has Winn gotten back to you?”

“No yet, but I know he will. I just need to give him a little time.”

Gabriella nods, but uncertainty is clear as day in her expression.

“Are you sure about this?” Gabriella asks, voice laced with concern. “Because I still think-”

“It’s my only chance. We both know my father…”
Gabriella nods begrudgingly, and the room settles into the type of unsettling stillness she’d only ever associated with her mother, which immediately makes her wince internally, to think that anything about her aunt and mom is alike. She needs to apologize properly, but she can’t even begin to think of how to make up for the words she’d hurled at Gabriella yesterday. And Gabriella has subtly ensured that their conversation has stayed focused on her, and by extension not herself (Maggie wonders if she inherited that same trait from her aunt.)

She’s briefly confused by Gabriella’s doubts regarding what she plans on doing, considering how her aunt had always felt about her relationship with her sisters, but then she realizes her aunt is just looking out for her. She’s always wanted what’s best for her.

Maggie swallows, running a hand through her hair, and opens her mouth—an apology on the tip of her tongue—when a faint noise from the door breaks her focus.

Her legs move automatically, the noise quickly registering as knocking on her door. She’s not expecting anyone else tonight, unless M’gann got the papers ready faster than she’d anticipated. She’s suddenly worried it might be her dad, ignoring Gabriella’s firm request he not show up at her apartment again.

She looks through the peephole, balancing in releve, and the sight that greets her banishes any of her worry, but it’s quickly replaced with confusion.

“Alex?”

She’s the last person Maggie expected, but she has been meaning to talk to her—more specifically, apologize.

“Maggie,” Alex’s expression mirrors her own confusion as she flicks her eyes up and down her pajamas, which just baffles Maggie more. “That’s—”

“Wait,” she holds a hand up, cutting her off. “I need to apologize for what I said yesterday. You were only trying to help, and you didn’t deserve—”

“It’s fine, really,” Alex shrugs, eyes focused on a point just past her head, but Maggie can spot the deflection a mile away, and it makes her stomach fall. She hardly has the right to feel any sort of disappointment, not after the way she’d treated her. She’d wanted Alex to be less intrusive—to stop acting like she could understand or feel Maggie’s pain. And yet the second she’d turned around she’d been ready to apologize. Now, seeing Alex again after a full 24 hours without, she recognizes an odd sense of loss in herself. Did she really want Alex gone?

And now that she’s here….Maggie wants to reach out.

She knows Alex is the type of person to value actions over words, but her body can’t seem to move. Ever since her first big role, she’s been praised for her physical awareness of her body—it’s what critics said set her apart from her peers at the time—for the effortless way she maximized every expression with laser precision. But here, in real life, she can’t seem to do anything right, not when it comes to the people that matter.

She feels like a failure, and the worst part is that her shortcomings are hurting the people around her. First Alex, then Gabriella. Who’s to say if she’d immediately gotten back to Franky after she’d reached out to Gabriella, things wouldn’t be different now.

“Look, I didn’t come up here expecting an apology or something,” Alex says, still looking vaguely uncomfortable. She adjusts the collar of her jacket, an expensive looking dark thing with a leather
belt looped at the waist. She must be going out somewhere, Maggie thinks, and it makes her glad that at least her co-star’s personal life isn’t in shambles. “It’s just that we have, you know…” she gives her a knowing look and a tight smile.

Maggie tilts her head, quickly going through the internal calendar she has of every big hollywood event—award shows, film festivals, panels—but nothing big is happening until May with the Cannes Film Festival. She doesn’t remember Anthony contacting her in the past few days either, although her head has been elsewhere, thousands of miles away in a small town in Nebraska.

Realization dawns on Alex’s face, along with a hint of disbelief. “I’m…guessing you haven’t checked your email or gotten in touch with King. We have a date scheduled for tonight,” she pulls her phone out of her pocket, glancing at the screen, “that we’re probably going to end up late for.” She looks her up and down. “That’s kind of casual for Le Bernardin.”

Maggie tugs down the bottom of her old gray sweater, the motion stretching out the small holes dotted on the hem. An unidentifiable, long worn stain is clearly visible in the hallway lights. The contrast is made even more pronounced with Alex standing right across from her. She’s struck with an unusual bout of embarrassment, firstly for forgetting the date altogether and secondly for looking like she’d rolled out of bed wearing the first thing she could find—which is exactly what happened, but Alex didn’t need to know that.

“Shit. I did forget, sorry, I just-”

Alex waves her off, nodding her head towards the elevator. “I’ll be waiting downstairs.”

The door clicks shut behind her, and Maggie rushes towards her phone, immediately opening her email and looking for Anthony’s name, and there it is—sent days ago. A date at some swanky restaurant tonight with a ‘romantic’ walk afterwards and, in italics for emphasis, a ‘KISS’ that a paparazzo stationed in Central Park will conveniently catch and send straight to the press.

She groans, cursing herself for ever signing that piece of paper. Of course he’d spring this on her now, while she’s right in the thick of dealing with her dad—and ever getting to see her sisters again, and a fight with her aunt to boot.

Absolutely fucking fantastic.

“That was Alex, right?” Gabriella looks over at her from the kitchen, toweling off her hands. “Whatever she said must have been pretty bad if that expression on your face is anything to go by.” She walks over, perching herself on the couch armrest.

Maggie wordlessly hands over her phone and watches as Gabriella’s brow rapidly furrows, eyes simultaneously darkening with annoyance and concern.

“I could call Anthony-”

“No, this is my job. I have to go.” If there’s anything she can be proud of, in the fuckery that is currently her life, it’s that she’s good at what she does. No amount of terrible fathers or heated words in the middle of a fight can take that from her. “Besides, it’s Alex. I’ll be fine.”

She imbues every ounce of confidence that she isn’t feeling into her words, as if she can speak it into existence. Her life didn’t stop just because her shitty dad showed up, even if that’s what it felt like. She’s spent too long wrapped up in her own head and her problems, letting everything else fall by the wayside. She won’t let that happen tonight.

The PR relationship is an extension of her job. And no one could ever say Maggie Sawyer is bad at
The restaurant is just like any of the other fancy places Alex has dined in over the years—elaborately designed dishes with little in the way of actual food adorning the plates. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Maggie pick at her salmon half heartedly, fork scraping unpleasantly against the plate. Alex sighs quietly, taking a bite of her Dover sole. It tastes like cardboard.

Their table is tucked away in the far corner, giving them a semblance of privacy from prying eyes. She’s surprised King allowed them that, but their planned Central Park outing post dinner should give him enough fodder to keep him happy—like a child with a toy, except it’s their lives he’s playing with. Maggie’s seemingly been operating on autopilot since she’d arrived, greeting her with a perfunctory glassy smile and striking up meaningless conversation when others were watching. And when that sixth sense they’d both acquired through their line of work told them they were free from scrutiny, she’d settled into a state of stillness.

They’re on the main course now, and nothing has changed. Every attempted light comment and joke she’s proffered has fallen flat, met with a fake chuckle or short responses laced with a sardonic undercurrent that’s wholly foreign to anything she knows about Maggie.

It’s unnerving.

It at least confirms that Maggie doesn’t yet know about her meddling and the resulting conversation—if one could call it that—she had with her dad, but she doesn’t like seeing Maggie so downtrodden. She now knows better than to ask, or to even mention she’s there if Maggie wants to talk, however.

The arrival of the waiter with their dessert halts any more deliberation on the matter. He whisks away their plates, uncaring of their half finished state, and quickly deposits their dessert in front of them. They have a schedule to follow and a camera to pose for.

“Is it good?” Alex nods at Maggie’s peach mousse, biting into her own brandied cherries with relish. Maggie glances up at her, expressionless, but a mere second later a laughing smile cracks her face—so wide it causes her rarely seen third dimple to pop out.

“Here,” she leans across the table, spoon in hand heading straight for Alex’s mouth. The transformation is so startling all Alex can do is open and close her mouth automatically, swallowing the mousse without tasting it.

“May I top off your water?”

She snaps out of her stupor, looking up at the arrival of a busboy. Of course. Maggie was just acting, and doing a damn good job of it, but she can’t deny how good it felt to have the full force of those dimples directed at her again, even if it was fake. She’s become all too accustomed with the plethora of Maggie’s fake smiles and laughs ever since her father showed up. A bolt of anger strikes her as his face flickers to life in her mind's eye. If he hadn’t showed up, none of this
would’ve happened. He ruined everything for them—for her.

The busboy’s footsteps are barely gone when Maggie’s lips fall into a straight line, as if the effort of her earlier act took all the energy out of her.

The lighting in the restaurant seems to dim suddenly, and Alex thinks it matches the mood at their table. She considers striking up more conversation, but it’s likely she’ll just end up with more fast dying sparks. The dinner is clearly unsalvageable, and if there’s anything she’s learned in life, it’s when to pick her battles.

They finish their dessert in silence.

Maggie has always loved acting.

She didn’t recognize it as such, back when she was just a little kid acting out a poem or reading aloud a story for her class, but even back then she’d had it in her. An elementary school teacher recommending dance and theater lessons might have been the catalyst, but Maggie thinks maybe she would’ve always ended up here. (Unless she’d stayed with her parents, a small voice suggests. Without her aunt cheering her on, perhaps she would’ve become a cop, like her dad. Or given into the societal expectations Blue Springs pushed on her and become a kindergarten teacher, even if she didn’t particularly love children. A secretary, maybe, like her mom. A mother who didn’t deserve that title, of course-)

Maggie shakes her head, picking up her pace to keep up with Alex’s longer strides.

She’s been doing a great job of focusing on making this date perfect for the cameras—she’d read Anthony’s email on the drive over, and knew just what his expectations were—and she’s not about to ruin it now by thinking. She sighs. She does love acting, the way it allows her to slip into someone else’s skin and out of her own, and this is a form of acting. Oddly enough, maybe this is what she needed, after the last couple of days. It had taken her a while back at the restaurant, to exit her own head and become the person the public expects, the woman who’s happy and in love and successful, but she finally feels like she’s back in her rhythm.

And now it's like...floating in a pool. Once she really believes in her role—finds her zone—the effort it requires from her is close to insignificant. She’s not there tonight, but she is somewhere in the middle, in a place that allows her to put her more acute worries on the backburner and focus on her current task. She's good at compartmentalizing.

The walk from the restaurant is short, and only a few people give them the customary second glances when they notice who they are. Soon enough, Central Park is in her field of view, and Maggie takes a breath. The night is at the same time almost over, and far from over, and considering the respite from her own life it provided, she’s not entirely sure how to feel about it.

But regardless of what she feels, it’s showtime.
The towering skyscraper lights gimmer down on them in a poor imitation of the stars that stretch for miles and miles back in Malibu.

Alex has learned, however, that the city lights have their own unique, synthetic beauty to them. Only the faintest hint of orange caresses the horizon, painting the sky a gradient of dark purple with the dying remnants of the sunset. No beauty, natural or synthetic, can compare to the woman beside her though—face partially hidden by shadows.

She sighs, half in frustration and half to prepare herself to produce enough enthusiasm for the both of them tonight, just like she’s been doing since their date began—apart from Maggie’s sudden outbursts back at the restaurant. They cross the street side by side, and then they’re standing on the sidewalk, an entry point to Central Park spiraling open in front of them.

“Ready for a romantic walk under the stars?” Alex ventures—careful to keep her tone light and joking—making a sound at the back of her throat. A less dignified person would call it a snort, but Alex Danvers does not snort.

“Under the smog and over the trash?” Maggie asks with a shrug. “Lead the way.”

Alex frowns. Maggie is the one usually romanticizing the city and going on tangents about all its charms, from the crowded streets to the useful but stinky subway stations. It’s just another thing to add to the long list of things her father’s sudden appearance took from her.

Maggie hooks her arm in hers, their first contact of the night—she is not counting Maggie feeding her a bite of her dessert—and Alex unintentionally shivers.

“You okay?” Maggie asks. “Cold?”

“No,” she responds rapidly. “I’m good.”

Maggie nods. “Let’s get going, then.”

And so they do. Central Park empties out as the sun goes down, and they encounter quite a few people on their way out as they walk further and further inside, arms still linked together. Tourists and families with children walk away, protecting themselves from the slight chill of the night, but they continue on further between the trees and manicured grass. Thankfully, none of people notice them, and if they do, they don’t care. That’s perfect in Alex’s book. She’s not in the mood to entertain strangers—albeit well meaning—nor watch that plastic smile, a grotesque caricature of the real thing, stretch over Maggie’s face.

They walk for a few minutes, until the ever present crowd of people thins to leave only a few individuals in their path. Maggie lets go of her arm, and Alex feels the loss of warmth. Maggie pushes her hands deep into her pockets, as she stays looking at the ground.

“I really am sorry about last night,” she tells her suddenly. “I shouldn’t have spoken to you that
Alex’s eyebrows rise almost of their own accord. Maggie had already tried to apologize once, and she’d waved it off. Alex had thought that would be it. That Maggie is still thinking about it proves to Alex that she cares, and she feels warmth at the thought. It makes her be all the more lenient. She already knows who to blame, and he doesn’t look anything like the beautiful woman walking beside her.

“It’s fine, I understand,” she tells her. “Families can be stressful.” She’s careful with that last part, and doesn’t even look at Maggie as she says it.

“That’s not an excuse,” Maggie retorts.

“It’s in the past,” Alex insists. “I’m over it.” And she is. She can hold a grudge like the best of them, but she knows how much stress Maggie has been in, and she can recognize perhaps she was a little pushy, so she’s not holding the digs she made against her. (Although the reminder of her terrible choices and her life being splattered across trashy magazines still stings.)

Maggie smiles softly at her, with gratitude, and Alex smiles back. Maggie playfully elbows her side as they walk further into the park, and Alex thinks that single moment is worth all the forgiveness in the world.

Soon enough they’re close to the designated spot King wrote about in his email. Alex is almost expecting to see the spot marked by a red ‘X’, but there’s nothing but the large tree he mentioned. They walk across the pathway, finally standing still directly in front of the tree. In front of them, a gorgeous pond sprawls out, illuminated by the moonlight and the lamp posts. To their left and right, the path is empty, apart from two people walking their dogs. Alex hesitates to give any credit to King, but she has to admit the place is gorgeous.

Her heart picks up its pace as it fully dawns on her that they are exactly where they’re supposed to be, and she knows exactly what’s next in the script.

“Is the guy there already?” she asks, more because she needs something else to think about rather the inevitability of having Maggie’s lips on hers in the near future. Maggie briefly looks to her right and the treacherous breeze rolling over the pond carries the sweet scent of her perfume—the one she wears for special occasions.

It’s 10 different kinds of weird and desperate that she knows that.

“I can’t see him,” Maggie says.

Alex shrugs. A thought slithers into her mind as she remembers King’s words. “Maybe we’re not supposed to.”

“Maybe,” Maggie repeats absentmindedly.

“It’s better this way though, isn’t it?” Alex stutters, trying to put into words the way she feels. King obviously doesn’t really care about them, but it takes some of the pressure off, not knowing where the pap is. It almost feels as though they’re alone, and the prospect is at once calming and exhilarating. Maggie’s turning her entire limbic system out of whack.

Maggie seemed distracted, but her words bring her focus back to Alex. Brown eyes—black from the lack of light—look up at her. “Huh?”

“I mean, feeling like we don’t have an audience,” she tries to explain. “We can just...take our
“time.” She cringes, and hopes Maggie doesn’t notice. “I mean, just...whenever we’re ready.” A nervous chuckle escapes her. Maggie focuses on her now, and Alex sees a hint of her earlier playfulness as they walked through Central Park and she fully put their argument outside Maggie’s apartment behind them.

“Right,” Maggie says.

“I mean, we don’t have to do it right now if neither of us wants to. We can choose-”

“I’m pretty sure the guy behind the rocks over there is our guy, so I’m choosing to kiss you now, okay?”

Alex gulps, but the words are out of her mouth as easily as breathing. “Yes.”

And then Maggie’s hands are on her. She holds her cheeks, her hands impossibly soft yet strong, and takes a breath that ricochets off Alex’s lips before pressing their mouths together. Everything else falls away, and then all she knows is just that sweet, warm pressure. They’ve been here before, but not for a long time. Alex can’t help but sink into it, her arms hanging at her sides.

Maggie pulls away, and Alex is breathless.

She looks at her, her brown eyes gleaming under the New York City lights and her lips pink and glistening, and she dives in again. She captures Maggie’s lower lip between her own, her hands coming alive as she holds Maggie by the waist. Maggie responds in kind. She makes a sound when Alex releases her lip, and it sends electricity shooting down her extremities.

The tip of Maggie’s tongue runs across the seam of her lips and Alex gasps, but that only serves to welcome Maggie into her mouth.

She whites out.

Everything in her world is reduced to the heat of Maggie’s mouth, the warmth of her body below Alex’s hands. Maggie kisses her with renewed vigor, and Alex isn’t just along for the ride, she pulls her in closer. Her fingers dig into Maggie’s jacket as she presses her body tightly against her, almost dizzy with want.

A single quote comes into her mind, from a long since forgotten poem. ‘*My blood approves, and kisses are a better fate than wisdom.*’

Alex had been appalled at the line as a teenager, rolled her eyes at it so far back they hurt. Her dad had laughed and told her that she’d understand when she was older, before turning around and kissing her mom. Alex hadn’t thought so. She’d loved E.E. Cummings, and it had seemed almost a betrayal that he would exalt romance the same way ridiculous YA books did, but she understands it now.

Her blood doesn’t just approve, it *sings* with every touch of Maggie’s tongue or exchanged breath between their lips.

Alex has never had a kiss like this. She’s vaguely aware of her surroundings, of the breeze ruffling her hair or the sharpness of the fence around the pond against her back. All she knows is Maggie, how small her waist feels, how her thumbs rest on her jaw, then make a sweeping motion over her cheek. It almost feels like she’s caressing her face, and Alex squeezes her eyes tightly, never wanting it to end.

She’s never kissed anyone like this. She’s never wanted to.
And as she tastes the coffee on Maggie’s tongue with her own, she can’t believe it took her so long to realize she could feel like this.

Maggie drags in air through her nose, unwilling to part from the kiss even for a moment.

The heat from Alex’s body seems to burn away the tension in her bones, the worry in her mind. The stress from the last few days floats away as she gets lost in the woman in front of her. Hands tighten on her waist, and it sends lightning bolts through her body. She sinks her fingers in silky, soft waves, as an exploring tongue pushes delicately against her own. It feels as natural as breathing. As good as the triumphant moment when she reaches the last mile of her run, her lungs on fire and her heart threatening to burst, but gloriously alive.

She can’t help but moan as she tastes brandied cherries, the sweetness of the fruit with the depth of the alcohol still on her tongue. It’s what Alex had had for dessert, and she’d offered Maggie a taste but she had declined. She’d already fed her for the cameras-

Maggie stops, and the following second she’s pulling away.

The kiss had been comfort, and passion, and a welcome distraction that still sings in her veins. But it hadn’t been real. This is Alex, her co-star, her *friend*. The woman she’s supposed to be in a fake relationship with—except she’d forgotten about the cameras altogether for the past few minutes.

She licks her lips, still wet from Alex’s kiss. She’s a good actress, but in those precious, sacred minutes that felt like a balm against the anxiety of her father’s return—well, she hadn’t been acting at all.

Alex meets Maggie’s eyes, breathless.

She’d chased after her when Maggie had pulled away, and she can only hope now that Maggie didn’t notice, but strangely she looks just as dazed as Alex feels. Every nerve ending in her body feels alive, little aftershocks that carry over as she replays every second with perfect clarity.

Her phone rings, and they both look to her purse, breaking the connection.

It’s a text from their driver, with the exact place where he’s parked, waiting to take them home when they’re ready. Alex tells Maggie as much, her tongue slow and stupid—though it certainly
hadn’t been that way a few minutes ago—and Maggie nods.

They’re ready. They did their jobs, didn’t they? And now all she has to do, in the privacy of her own head, is find a way to stop her heart from careening down the path it’s already chosen to take. One where she dreams of doing this—of being kissed like this—every single day. Where it’s not a contract that binds her actions but the feelings, strong and undeniable, that she has for the woman in front of her. She already knows that can’t be.

They walk back to the car in silence and head on home.
Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers can't keep their hands off each other

MAGGIE SAWYER AND ALEX DANVERS
STEAMY KISS

Maggie Sawyer and Alex Danvers certainly weren't shy about showing off their relationship on their date tonight.

The two took their PDA to a whole new level, as you can tell from these loved up shots of them on a late night stroll. The steamy makeout session carried on for some time, and the two didn't even care about who could see them!

As we've reported, the couple has been inseparable for months now and there are rumors that they've moved in together too.

We'll admit we weren't sure if anybody could tame Maggie, but looks like former wild child Alex was just the right cure.
it's blake bitch
@dawson gays

ladies im prepared to walk over to the tmz offices and prostitute myself to for that high quality kiss video i know they have ur welcome

4/12/18, 1:11 AM
50 Retweets 119 Likes

@dawson gays

Repeating to @dawson gays
thank you for your service brave warrior
#ProstituteForSanvers
1 Retweets 5 Likes 12 Loves

@awesominaesthetic

Repeating to @dawson gays
OH MY GOF WHY ARE YOU LIKE THIS BITCH ADLKJ I CANT STAND YOU
I go to bed early one (1) time and miss the Sanvers kiss alkdfjaklf im enver sleeping again fuck that
y’all….they were about to fuck right then and there oh my god…..

4/11/18, 11:37 PM

25 Retweets 43 Likes

caitlyn
@dawsonlgbt

Replying to @lesbianmaggie

It was a cute kiss can you not make it weird please? They’re real people

1 Retweets 1 Like

saint margaret patron of the lesbians
@lesbianmaggie

it’s a joke susan.
Maggie can see a sliver of light from beneath her apartment door.

It’s likely her aunt staying up to make sure everything went well. Warmth settles in her chest. It reminds her of the first few relationships—if they could even be called that—she’d had when Gabriella had still lived with her. She’d be waiting in the kitchen for her with a cup of tea, ready to celebrate the end of a good date or sympathize with her if the date had gone badly. Gabriella had been her biggest cheerleader every step of the way not only in her career but in her personal life as well. (She can’t believe she forgot that, even for a minute.)

The door creaks slightly on its hinges as she enters the apartment, kicking off her heels. The lights
over her kitchen island are on, and her aunt sits there just as she’d predicted, but the stove is empty.

“Hey,” Gabriella stands up, tiredness written in her movements, and Maggie feels a sharp pang of guilt at being the cause of it. “I just wanted to check up on you before going to bed. Everything good?”

Maggie pauses in taking off her jacket, a million words fighting to come out, but she just swallows roughly and nods. Gabriella has done more than enough for her just in the past day alone. She doesn’t need to deal with even more, yet alone the mess of her thoughts that she hasn’t had the chance to sort through. Besides, it’s not something she’d feel comfortable discussing with anyone, not even her aunt and especially not now given the current state of their relationship.

“Right,” Gabriella nods stiffly before brushing past her, leaving her with only a fleeting warm touch at her side. Maggie sighs, feeling like she’s disappointed her aunt somehow with her short, sharp answer, but she’s still processing herself. She tosses the jacket on the couch, her footsteps quiet as she walks up to her room.

The more she thinks about them, the less she likes her actions tonight.

The excuses she can make for herself pile up, but none of them are good enough. She’d still been overwhelmed by her conversation with her dad, her fight with Gabriella, the wait for Winn and M’gann...the stress of the last few days had taken its toll on her. And being physical with someone had always filled a void in her, had always felt like a good way to let go. But it had been Alex. It’s Alex. She isn’t just some meaningless one night stand that she’ll never see again. She isn’t a means to an end. She’s her co-star. Friend.

Shames washes over her, thick and hot—like nothing she’s felt since a rain soaked alley and bright blue eyes staring up at her from the inside of a cab all those years ago. Now, Emily isn’t the name on her mind, twisting her guts into knots. It’s Alex.

Alex is beautiful, yes, it’s hard not to notice that. The elegant arch of her neck, which Maggie knows exactly how soft it is, and the legs that on some days seem to go on for miles and miles. Her eyes are an enigma, that from afar look brown but up close are a hazel green of sorts that she still hasn’t managed to decipher. Just how incredibly intelligent she is shines through those eyes. Maggie’s always been attracted to intelligence—and that’s the crux of it, isn’t it? She has a thing for smart, beautiful women, for redheads particularly if she’s honest, for the tall, athletic type rather than for luscious curves...Alex fits that to a T.

She hasn’t been with a woman in months. Literally the longest she’s gone without sex since she became sexually active all those years ago. It makes sense her stupid brain would blank out and get lost in a beautiful woman the first chance it would get. It just so happens that this time that person was Alex. And now she’s afraid she might have just jeopardized their friendship.

She’d taken advantage of her, the situation, there’s no way around it. They’d had to pump it up to eleven for the cameras, so Alex had gone along with it, of course, but Maggie hadn’t been thinking of the cameras.

She hadn’t been thinking at all. It had just felt so good to feel...wanted, for even a minute.

She shakes her head. She knows Alex didn’t really want her. The woman is under a contract that borders on dubiously legal, and she’s straight for crying out loud. But Maggie has always confused opportunity with attraction, attraction with intimacy, and sex with love. Alex is her co-worker and she doesn’t get to push her problems onto her and muddle that. Tonight was on her.
She got carried away, for a second time, as she remembers kissing Alex’s neck in the dark, heated corner of a nightclub. She sinks down in her bed, not bothering to remove her clothes. A quick check of her social media lets her know they gave the cameras—and Anthony, by extension—everything they wanted, but it doesn’t feel like a win.

She’s still here, with the ghost of a kiss that didn’t really belong to her still on her lips, and craving to be touched. (To be wanted, a voice whispers, to be loved.) Maggie drags her hand down her face, and then kicks up her feet to lay in bed.

Finally, exhausted after the last few days and her unintentionally eventful night, she falls into a restless asleep.

Her clothes feel too tight.

Alex walks into her apartment on unsteady legs, wondering how she managed to withstand a car ride with Maggie after what happened at the park. She’d never felt something like that when kissing somebody. She didn’t know she was even capable of it.

She felt...alive in a way she’s never felt before. She wanted it to last forever, to keep feeling the strength of Maggie’s hands and the heat of her mouth and the stroke of her tongue inside her mouth. She wanted more. Alex stops removing her clothes, a heated thought making its way through her brain. Fuck, is this what wanting sex feels like?

Before, and she’s beginning to realize she can’t judge her current experiences and realizations against the few boyfriends she had when she was younger, it never felt like this. She knew her first time was supposed to be bad, and it was, but it had never gotten much better. She’d never felt the hunger those stupid romance novels Kara liked so much talked about, that passion had always escaped her.

Tonight though...Those few minutes had felt like she was surviving off of Maggie’s oxygen, like an interruption would kill her. Her lips had been so gentle yet unyielding against her own, and Alex has never kissed anyone that went toe to toe with her like that, that didn’t fight for control but didn’t allow their connection to die either from her lack of a response. And did she respond.

Even now, a steady, pulsating beat turns into an ache between her legs, and Alex isn’t dumb enough to ignore what that means. She’s so stupid. How did it take her so long to realize she’s gay? A kiss—Kara would probably call it making-out, if she’s honest—with the woman she has a crush on, and she’s reduced to a hormonal teenager.

She’s a lesbian. It’s so obvious now. She’s arrived at the conclusion she should have figured out a decade ago, like everyone else going through puberty. Lesbian. The word is daunting and terrifying, but she knows it in her heart to be true. She’s a lesbian, and with that acceptance comes the realization that she hadn’t wanted to embrace before. This is her new normal. This is who she
is, even after by some miracle she stops liking Maggie more with every breath she takes. She’ll always be a lesbian.

Thoughts about her kiss with Maggie burn like fire, scorching her brain and its sensible ideas, and she decides to take a shower—but this time, she doesn’t turn the dial to cold like so many times before.

No, this time, she just steps into the water, and gives in to the overpowering desire to touch her own body like it’s undiscovered ground. Her long used fantasy of a faceless man is banished, and she embraces wherever her mind takes her as it feels better, in less time than it used to take. A faceless woman whose hands feel a lot like Maggie’s touches her in her mind’s eye, but Alex doesn’t fight it. It’s not the first time she’s been here, but now she knows it doesn’t have to be her. She doesn’t try to course-correct her fantasies into something she deems acceptable, because she accepts this now. She lets herself picture long, beautiful hair, delicate hands, breasts and curves, everything that she’d been lacking before.

When she comes, a moan leaving her lips and her toes curling with the strength of her orgasm, she feels freer than she ever has before.

Maggie wakes up to repetitive tapping sounds.

She blearily opens her eyes. At least she’s not hungover this time, although the memory of her kiss with Alex the night before has left an aftertaste all of its own. A reminder of what her life was like. When was the last time she’d kissed a woman like that? She’s been so busy she’s told herself she doesn’t have time for dating, so the contract doesn’t affect her, but if her reaction last night proves anything it’s that she might be lonelier than she thought.

She’s not hungover but she still doesn’t feel rested. She thinks that might not happen until her dad is back in Nebraska. The annoying little clicks continue, and Maggie guesses Gabriella is on her laptop downstairs. Her aunt did say yesterday that she had to deal with the business side of things for La Nuvola Bianca now that she was back in New York. (She’d sighed when she said it, and Maggie understood. Her aunt loved to cook, but she didn’t care for doing taxes or managing the finances).

She stretches as she gets up, but stops in front of her door, as there’s a post it pasted there. It’s from Gabriella.

‘Had to head to the restaurant to deal with something, M’gann texted, she’ll stop by at 3. I’ll be back before that.’

Her aunt would usually end her notes with an ‘I love you’, or at least a little heart, and Maggie feels the consequences of still being on the outs with her. Guilt nags at her for her outburst days ago, and she promises herself as soon as Gabriella comes back they’ll have an actual conversation about it. Her mind isn’t clouded with sorrow right now, and after yesterday’s conversation she’s begun to see Gabriella’s actions in a new light.
Something falls downstairs. She’s suddenly worried about the noise in her apartment—her aunt isn’t here—until she looks over the railing to the landing below. Her assistant is camped out in her couch.

“Hey boss, Gabriella let me in,” Winn says. “I hope that’s okay.”

She smiles. “That’s fine.”

Maggie goes down the stairs, the cool marble steps below her bare feet further waking her up. She has half a mind to be embarrassed to be in her pajamas, but Winn has seen her in various outfits and states of undress through the years. Her ratty t-shirt hardly matters.

“Did you have breakfast?” She asks, a second before she notices the brown bag on her breakfast island.

“Yep. And I got you some bagels. I know you like them dry, but there’s some strawberry cream cheese on the bottom of the bag.”

“Thanks,” she tells him, but no sooner has she grabbed the toasted bagel than she remembers the actual reason why Winn is here, and she puts it down. She wouldn’t be able to swallow it anyways. Nerves roll through her stomach, a tight ball of them taking up residence in her throat. “Did you find what I asked for?”

If he didn’t, she doesn’t know how any of this would work. It’s her only chance to keep the status quo as is and still get what she wants.

“Yes ma’am!” Winn answers, immediately typing away at his laptop. Maggie lets out a sigh of relief, before a stronger, different kind of nerves take over her body. She takes a deep breath before heading over to Winn and sitting down next to him. He turns his laptop towards her.

“I put together a list of everything I was able to find, with sources, but the links at the end are basically what you wanted. Bless the 21st century.”

Maggie nods, skimming over the grades and school transcripts. She sees the links he’s talking about, but she doesn’t have it in her to click on them just yet, and much less in front of Winn. Winn who, uncharacteristically, is sitting quietly by her side. She looks up at him, and he’s giving her a look he never has before.

“What’s wrong?”

“These girls you had me find out about…” he trails off. “They aren’t your cousins are they?” he asks. “Or like, distant relatives…”

Maggie shakes her head. What’s the point of lying? Her siblings and her past were reserved for Gabriella, who had been there, and M’gann, who had to know. But now Alex knows, and if her dad can’t keep his mouth shut for another day then soon enough the rest of the world will know too. And Winn is...Winn. He’s been her assistant for years, and he’s nothing if not a good, honest guy. She’s sure of it if only for the fact that she knows he could’ve unearthed her past by now, and instead he took her words at face value and believed her—like everyone else has.

“Oh, Maggie-”

“Don’t.” The last thing she needs are questions, or worse, pity. He knows they’re her sisters, if he knows her at all he’ll be able to guess at the story there without her speaking.

“I’m not going to ask,” he says simply. Maggie nods.
“Good.”

“But I feel for you,” he says. He scratches at his barely there beard. She’s never seen him anything but perfectly clean shaven, and it’s proof of how he’s spent the past couple of days, investigating on her behalf and catching a 6 hour plane as soon as he had something. It’s not exactly in the job description of an assistant. “I’m gonna get super TMI now so feel free to stop me,” he says, forcing out a chuckle. “And I know it’s not the same thing, and I don’t know if M’gann told you—she said she wouldn’t—but…” He shrugs. “My dad is in prison.”

Maggie turns to look at him. She didn’t know.

For all that she was secretive about with her parents, Winn just...never mentioned them. She remembers him saying his mom was an amazing cook, and Gabriella’s food reminded him of her, but that’s all. His mom had passed away from an illness, but he hadn’t given details other than asking for that day off every year. She knows what god-awful anime shows he likes watching, and what his favorite food is—she’d made it a point to take him out for dinner for his birthday, give him a break from what can be a 24/7 job. But she didn’t know his dad was in jail.

“And not even for a not so bad reason like pot or stealing something.” He pauses. “Involuntary manslaughter. First degree murder.”

Maggie’s stomach falls. “Winn….”

“He killed his boss and then drove over two people while escaping his office.”

Winn bites his lip before directing his eyes to the floor, while Maggie just sits there, shell shocked. She had no idea. She would’ve never guessed that Winn, who’s always so chipper and eager to help far more than his job asks of him, was carrying such a burden.

“I was twelve,” he says. “My mom passed when I was nine, so I got bounced around foster homes until I aged out of the system. I went to college with a scholarship—on my last semester, that’s when you hired me, remember?”

She does. He’d attended night classes after leaving her apartment in LA, and he’d always shown up on time, even on the odd weekend she’d started needing him more. Then she’d moved from that apartment into the house she owns now, as her career had skyrocketed, and by the time he graduated his presence had been nearly constant.

“You looked like the energizer bunny in M’gann´s waiting room,” she tells him, her voice rough. “I remember thinking I wasn't going to get anyone who looked that happy to get to work.”

He looks up at her, his eyes two shining green pools.

“I was just happy to have a life for myself,” he says, his voice as rough as hers. “And I have you to thank for that.” She raises her hand to stop him, refusing to be given credit for anything, but Winn hushes her. “Okay, so I got myself into college, sure,” he says, rolling his eyes. “But I would’ve never found a more amazing job, and you treat me like a friend-”

“You are my friend,” she tells him, adamant.

“And your aunt cooks for me, and I play paintball with you and your friends. Do you have any idea how many actors do that? Not a lot. By the way, did you know I still keep in touch with people from set? I have like, actual good friends.” Maggie snorts. Even now, he’s so bright. He reminds her of her aunt that way. Of what she wishes she could be like. “This is the life I wanted when I
was a kid,” Winn tells her. “That I didn’t think I was going to get, especially with who my dad is.” He shyly, awkwardly pats her hand, and then straightens up. “So I’m just saying, I have experience with complicated family situations. And with shitty parental units.”

That last part makes her pause.

“You know.”

“I can guess,” he says. “I know the kind of woman you are. I know you wouldn’t just leave anybody behind.”

Maggie shrugs around the knot in her throat.

“You’re a good egg, Sawyer.” Winn says, and in the next moment Maggie is doing something usually reserved for award nominations and receiving calls about getting a great role.

She hugs him, tight.

Chapter End Notes

The long awaited date is here! And it went really well, which none of you thought would happen (we're not that cruel, c'mon). In that same vein, we agree that Maggie deserves a ton of hugs, and she got one this chapter, and another very comforting embrace from Alex too—on her lips.

This date was the catalyst for the story to start shifting into high, sanvers, gear after this chapter. Let us all know what you thought of everything that happened! Your comments are like fic currency, the more we get the more we write. ;)

Thanks for reading!
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Aut inventiam viam aut faciam: I will find a way or I will make one

Maggie makes lunch after Winn leaves.

She fries a chicken breast, boils some pasta, and then uses a jar of pre-made marinara sauce—that would make her aunt cringe—to pull it all together.

Then she calls Winn and asks if he would like to come back to eat before he flies back to LA, but he’s already on his way to the airport. His laptop rests on her coffee table, and Maggie is once again thankful that he—no questions asked—hopped on a plane just to deliver this. She’s probably being paranoid, but she doesn’t want a trace of information about her sisters on any cloud or sent to any email address. She’s heard too many stories of actresses having those hacked. It’s the reason why she’s never taken a nude photo. She takes her eyes off the laptop.

Since Winn’s on his way back to LA, she eats alone. And when she’s done with that, she takes a shower because she hadn’t had the time this morning. Then she thinks about dusting her bookshelves, even though the cleaning lady is scheduled for tomorrow.

She’s putting it off. She’s stalling, and she knows it. But she can’t really be blamed. She’s spent almost half her life wondering about her sisters, and now that what she wants is so close, she can’t help the nerves that overcome her.

Suddenly, a key scratches the lock of her apartment, and Maggie is thankful for the welcome distraction in the form of her aunt as she walks through the door.

Her aunt is quiet as she moves through her apartment. She’s careful, in the way she looks around, keen eyes taking stock of the place and noticing if there’s anything to be fixed. She’s thankful for her aunt, for everything she’s done for her. Maggie can’t believe she ever lost sight of that.

“Everything okay? You look...”

“Like shit,” she finishes for her. She drags her fingertips below her eyes, as if her shower hadn’t already removed all proof of her conversation with Winn. She guesses after so many days of crying, her swollen eyes won’t go away that easily.

“It’s been a tough couple of days,” Gabriella says, not contradicting her. Alright, so she definitely looks that bad. “Wanna talk about it?” Gabriella asks.

Maggie shakes her head automatically, but then sighs. “How do you do it?”
“Do what?”

“Just...be here for me. You just broke up with your boyfriend and you’re focused on my problems–”

“Unfortunately when my sister chose to marry Oscar, he became all of ours problem,” Gabriella says.

“You know what I mean.”

Gabriella squeezes her shoulder as she walks by in front of her. “I know. And you know what I’ll say. I’m the one that has to worry about you, not the other way around.” Gabriella shrugs. “My breakup will still be there once we deal with this. And we’re going to go drinking at somewhere that’s not La Nuvola Bianca afterwards.”

Maggie gives her a half smile. “Deal.”

She watches her aunt walk around her apartment, and for the first time this morning feels like things are the way they’re supposed to be. She’s in control with her dad, Winn delivered like she knew he would, and Gabriella is here. It makes it feel all the more necessary to apologize for her reaction over what happened when she was still a kid. She already apologized to Alex, and Gabriella is the natural next person on her list.

She takes a breath, putting her thoughts in order, making her words slot into place. It never gets easier, to talk about the way she’s feeling, but with Gabriella it’s easier than with most.

“Hey,” she says, and Gabriella looks up. “I’m sorry for flipping out on you back then, especially over something he said,” she tells her, then shrugs. “You were always okay with me being gay, and my parents weren’t, and I-”

“I wasn't always,” Gabriella tells her. Maggie frowns.

“What?”

“At first...I was uncomfortable. Not with you, but with the whole...concept, I guess. I mean, I knew a gay guy who sometimes worked at the hotel, but I didn't know any lesbians, and I was still very catholic, it just was...it wasn't...” She shrugs.

Maggie remembers Gabriella visiting her as a kid, and how her aunt not going to church every Sunday was categorized as terrible by Maggie’s mother. The devout, passionate faith her Nonna possesed made Gabriella look like a heathen. Maggie hadn’t thought about it at all, how she’d been raised with her own mother, subjected to the same beliefs. Her aunt had never been anything less than accepting towards her.

“I never noticed.”

Yeah, because it was my problem. I desperately wanted to be okay with it and I hated that I wasn’t. I guess I just...I didn’t know better.” Her aunt presses her lips together, an expression Maggie has never seen before on her face. It looks like shame. “And then a few days later I found you toying with that tamagotchi I got for you when you were little.” She walks over to the couch, taking a seat on its arm, and giving Maggie a soft smile. “I knew you were the same person. The same fantastic girl you’d always been. And if my faith told me there was something wrong with you, then there must have been something wrong with my faith. And if your parents didn’t want you anymore over that, then there was clearly something wrong with your parents.”
Maggie swallows. The conviction with which she says it makes her throat feel tight, as if there was no doubt in the world that Maggie was worth going against her family and becoming a pariah in her own home.

“Is that why you’re not religious anymore?” she asks.

“That and I was into casual sex back then, so…”

“Oh.”

“So now you know everything,” Gabriella tells her. “There’s literally nothing I’m keeping from you. Unless you want me to go into detail about my sex life and Chris’s seven inch d—”

“No! I’m good.” Maggie laughs, feeling strange and relieved, and Gabriella laughs with her, before her arms are around her again. Maggie closes her eyes. She’s so thankful for her aunt.

“You raised me when he wouldn’t,” Maggie says, muffled against Gabriella’s shoulder. “You took me in. His words shouldn’t matter.”

He shouldn’t matter, and she hates that he does. Legally, with her sisters, even emotionally, with her. He’s still the shadow in the deepest recesses of her mind telling her she isn’t worth anything. If her own parents couldn’t love her, then who will?

She has an answer already as Gabriella squeezes her tighter.

“He’s still your father,” she says, matter of fact. “Which I’m really sorry about.”

Maggie pulls away, shaking her head.

“Biology means jackshit. You were my father, and my sister, and more of a mother to me than my own mother was,” she tells her, knowing every word to be the truth. Her own mother forgot her birthday even before she was deemed a disgrace. Meanwhile Gabriella has woken up every year on that date before the sun is even up, ever since she was 14, to make her breakfast in bed. She is her real family, the only one that matters. “You were protecting me against him. I see that now.”

The sudden realization, after a decade, that she’d missed the chance to grow up with her sisters—to walk Franky to school on her first day, to teach Sofia to talk and read—had hit her like a 40 ton truck. And anger was a far easier emotion to embrace than the bitter pain and regret that’d threatened to overpower her. But now that she can think more clearly about it, she knows that that wouldn’t have been a life at all, not for her.

“I was just so angry...so sad. Because I miss Franky so much, and Sofia, but you protected me. You were the only one in my corner. You protected me even if it cost you a relationship with your sister and put you on bad terms with your mom.”

She still remembers the yelling, the words thrown through the phone in her defense across 1,300 miles all the way back to Nebraska. Gabriella had been an amazing daughter, the pride of her Nonna, the only one to go college. And Maggie had changed that by appearing on her doorstep. Gabriella had ruined it herself, by taking her side. She bites her lip.

“I’m sorry I yelled at you,” she tells Gabriella, and for the first time in a few days her tears don’t taste of pain. “I’m thankful I grew up in LA, with you. My sisters...that was my dad’s fault, not yours.”

Gabriella’s own eyes water as the first tear falls from Maggie’s eyes.
“I’m sorry,” she repeats. “Thank you for everything, zia.”

For the third time in the past hour, Gabriella hugs her tight. It feels like home.

“I’d do it all over again.”

Alex downs the rest of her water bottle, the cold rush of liquid quenching her dry throat. She reaches up to wipe off the faint sweat on her forehead, as her building comes into view, a block ahead.

She’d taken a shower at the gym after her kickboxing class finished—no need to give the press the opportunity to photograph her looking bedraggled and sweaty—but the sun is beating down particularly hard today. Oddly enough though, it doesn’t bother her.

She woke up today feeling lighter, happier, she would even venture to say—the result of yesterday’s acceptance. It’s unexpectedly liberating to have a term that’s entirely her own for this new—in the sense that she’s only recently acknowledged its existence—identity of hers. Putting a label to it is comforting to the scientist in her. It isn’t an abstract, potentially shifting thing anymore. It’s tangible, real, and that means it can be handled.

The word in itself feels right, even if the connotations it has make her vaguely uncomfortable. Porn, for one thing. She had her own research session during breakfast this morning, and several entries were devoted to that. Google images wasn't that very helpful, only leaving with her wondering if she should cut her hair—which isn’t happening. Either way, it's comforting just being able to do research, and so her run had been filled with ideas on how to expand her horizons. She’d never go to a public place lest the paparazzi catch wind of it; although the general public have seen her “date” Maggie for months now, and her reputation has never been better.

But going out to a public place would let the people in her life know, and that’s something she’s not ready to face yet. J’onn knows, at least, he was there through every single step when she’d tried to deny what she already knew about herself deep down. She remembers the near breakdown she had when Jonn first presented her with the option to audition for the role, and she mentally kicks herself for taking so long to just accept it.

It had taken her crushing on a woman, crushing hard and fast for a beautiful woman who upended her entire world, for her to finally come to terms with it, but she’s in a good place now.

J’onn should know that she’s finally come clean to herself. He’s in town, and Alex makes a mental note to give him a call when she gets home. The prospect of…”coming out” isn’t as heart-stoppingly, puke-inducingly terrifying with him, simply due to the fact that he was the one person who knew all along, but it does still feel big. Maybe they can have brunch. They could talk, and she could let him know. She needs to tell Kara, too—but that is a far more daunting task. On one hand, she can already hear her sisters feigned annoyance that she didn’t inform her earlier. On the other, she doesn’t want anything to change, especially when she’s just gotten their relationship back on track.
Up ahead, the traffic light countdown has begun and Alex quickens her pace to make it, weaving her way in and out of the sea of bodies. She’s only feet away from the white lines when an obstacle stops her, or rather bumps into her, a human obstacle in the form of a plaid blue shirt and messy brown hair.

“Alex, hey! Remember me? I’m—“

“You're Maggie’s assistant, yeah.” She waves half halfheartedly, not wanting to touch him with her sweaty hands. Seeing him reminds Alex of another train of thought she’d had this morning—she has zero gay friends. “How's it going?” she asks.

There’s Maggie, but she’s also her crush which complicates things. She’s realized that she just doesn’t really know any other gay people, which makes her running into Winn a stroke of good luck. Nothing like the present to get firsthand experience. Fieldwork is essential to any good research of this nature.

“It's going great!” Winn replies brightly, his open face and tone reminding her of Kara—they’d probably get along actually, although with her sister that’s not a hard thing to do. (Alex can’t say the same for herself). “I’m kind of in a hurry right now though, could you point me in the general direction of the subway station?” He places his hand over his heart. “Google maps isn't being helpful for the first time in my life, I feel betrayed.”

She smiles. He’s funny. “Maggie doesn't pay you enough for a cab?“

“Oh no, she does. But the subway is faster, and cheaper. Why pay fifty dollars in cabfare when I can just take the subway, you know?” He laughs with a shrug, rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet. He hasn’t stopped moving some part of his body since they’ve started the conversation, and she can’t tell if it’s because she makes him nervous—J’onn has mentioned to her, once or twice, that she can be...intimidating, though she’s never thought of that as bad thing—or if that’s just the way he is.

Winn pauses his rocking, blinking up at her expectantly, waiting for a response or directions.

Alex just barely stops herself from wrinkling her nose in disgust at the idea of anybody voluntarily choosing to take the piss-stained subway, packed in with the general filth of the city and all its people.

If she were Alex of a year ago, she’d likely flat out him tell him that no, she doesn’t really know what he’s talking about. She’d pay anything to stay away from the subway, and she’s never thought about objects based on their cost, but present day Alex has enough awareness of the gulf of differences that separate her and people like Winn to keep her thoughts to herself.

“Sure, I get it,” she lies, seeing her chance to enrichen her research and taking it. “Actually, let’s go. I’ll walk you.”

“Really?” His face transforms into a picture of shock, and Alex resists the urge to roll her eyes—her reputation precedes her, as always. She simply nods her head and sets off at a brisk pace towards the subway, Winn rushing after her.

They walk in silence for a few steps, but then Winn starts talking again. “You know, you’re nothing like the newspapers made you out to be.”

“Thanks, I think,” she frowns.

“I didn’t mean it like that sorry!” He speeds up so he’s walking in front of her, hands spread
imploringly while he turns his head behind him every few seconds to make sure he doesn’t run into anybody. “I meant it in a good way. Working for who I do, I know all too well how the press likes to exaggerate and lie.”

“Right,” she nods, brushing off his comment. It’s not like it bothers her anyhow, she knows what people tend to think of her. They spend the next few minutes in silence as Alex grapples with the best way to approach the topic. She doesn’t have experience with this sort of thing, but she’s been thinking about this particular matter all morning, and he’s right here. It’d be a missed opportunity. She decides to just go for it.

“So Winn...you’re gay, right?”

Winn sputters helplessly, mouth gaping. “What? No!”

She raises her eyebrows. “Oh.” She swallows down the ‘are you sure’, knowing that it would be less than helpful. With all the bowties and button up shirts tucked into tight fitting jeans she’d just...assumed. “Sorry.”

“There’s nothing wrong with being gay obviously, I’m just...not. Why do you ask? Trying to set me up with someone? Because I’m flattered but-“

“Oh, no, I was just, you know, wondering.” She scratches the back of her neck nervously, avoiding eye contact. It’d be a disaster of epic proportions if Maggie’s assistant somehow sussed out that she’s gay. Though considering he’s not, meaning he may not have the ‘gaydar’ she’d learned of during her research, perhaps she’s safe. Although, well, she’s gay and she doesn’t have it either. “I don’t really have gay friends is all, and with the show…”

He nods understandingly. “Right, most of the fandom is LGBT. And boy do they ship you two hard. You as in Claire and Blake but also as in, you know, you two. With the…” he lowers his voice, “the contract and everything.”

“Right.” She’s not entirely sure what ship means, but she can take an educated guess. The first thing that comes to mind with that word is the Titanic though, which she’s sure is what every fan prays doesn’t happen to their couples.

“But I mean, that’s not really accurate, is it?” He moves closer to her, presumably to bump shoulders or something, but something in her face must be setting off warning bells because he abruptly changes his course with a choked chuckle. Alex puts some space in between them though, just in case, focusing back on the conversation.

“What isn’t accurate?”

“Well, you have Maggie, don't you? You do have gay friends, at least one.” He shrugs. “Or do you mean like guys who are gay-“

“No. Pfft. You're right.” She shoves her hands in her jacket pockets, swallowing down the uncomfortable lump in her throat. Maggie is her friend, and she’s gay, and Alex is gay and starting to embrace that, and yet. She just wishes she had her in a different way.

Winn’s comment only serves to remind her of what will never be.

The subway station enters her line of sight, people bustling in and out. Men in suits as well as men in hoodies, a woman holding a dog inside a purse far too small for it, a guy dragging a bike behind himself and another one children. Even from here she can faintly smell that distinct New York City Subway Station scent. Her eyes flit over the scene, pulling up short on a pair of intertwined fingers
—and the women attached to them. They laugh together, and then one of them drops a kiss on the other’s lips.

A swirl of emotions bubbles up at the sight, regret and longing—sharp and vicious—battling it out in her chest to be crowned the winner.

She sighs.

“You’re right, I have Maggie.”

Maggie holds her breath when M’gann hands her the NDA.

She lightly runs her fingers over the smooth paper, treating it like something precious, and in a way, it is. It’s the key to ensuring her plan can be set into motion, and it’ll get her dad to finally leave.

Things will be better, easier, once he’s thousands of miles away.

She dives into the neat lines of black text. She skims over the legal jargon, only spending enough time on it to file away questions for M’gann to translate into plain English for her later, and focuses on the core of the contract. A non-disclosure agreement is a fairly common practice in her industry, and she’s signed employer-employee and personal NDAs before—her mind flashes back to a winter 6 years ago—but never as important as this. It’s definitely airtight, covering all the bases needed and then some. M’gann did a good job, as always.

“Thoughts? Questions?” M’gann stares at her expectantly, hands folded over her crossed legs.

Maggie glances back down at the contract, reading aloud one of the points. “Receiving Party shall return to Disclosing Party any and all records, notes, and other written, printed, or tangible materials in its possession pertaining to Confidential Personal Information immediately if Disclosing Party requests it in writing.” She quirks her eyebrows in question.

“I know they didn’t bother to...send you off with much, but I thought if they did still have any pictures of you, medical records, or anything you might want back, you could get it this way,” M’gann explains with a simple shrug—underplaying the personal intent behind the action, but Maggie understands it nevertheless.

It’s M’gann’s way of trying to allow her to reclaim the childhood ripped away from her by her parents. She’s reminded, once again, of how lucky she is to have a manager that not only cares about the success of her professional career but also her personal life.

Her dad showing up in New York, while definitely ranked in the worst moments of her life, did do at least one good thing. After the self-loathing thoughts that had invaded her at first, her eyes were opened to how much the people around her truly care. Her aunt had dropped everything to be with her, and stuck around even after their fight, and all that after suffering a break-up. M’gann
personally flew all the way across the country to deal with the situation and she’d drafted up the NDA in only a day. Winn had done her dirty work with no questions asked. And Alex…

Maggie sighs. She got it all wrong. Alex acted like a friend, if a little intense while doing so, but she didn’t have bad intentions. And Maggie had blown up in her face. It’s been so long since she’s had a real friend, probably since she was a child, that she just...doesn’t know what to do with her. She certainly hadn’t known how to accept her support, or open up, even slightly. She still isn’t sure if she’s capable of that, but remembering Alex’s kind eyes and earnest demeanor, she resolves to at least try.

Her eyes return to the NDA, and she shakes her head.

"We could take that one off,” she says. “They threw away everything.”

“It can’t hurt,” Gabriella pipes in. “Just in case.”

Maggie glances at her aunt, wondering if there’s any particular meaning behind her words. The chances of her dad keeping anything are zero, but maybe her mom had been more sentimental. Or maybe not. She hadn’t been the one to drive her to the airport, but she hadn’t done anything to stop it either. She’d just stood there and let it happen, a passive figure in her life until the end.

“Okay, if you think that’s best.”

“Would you like me to accompany you?” M’gann asks suddenly. “I could explain the-”

Maggie shakes her head. “I’m counting on him not understanding it.”

“He’s a cop. I wouldn’t underestimate him.”

She pauses at that. She’s never really thought of her father’s job—and all it entails. As a child, it’d just been the thing keeping him away from her during the day, and then later it’d been what she’d tell people she was gonna be when she grew up. There isn’t much crime in Omaha, or Nebraska in general, that she knows of, but as a cop he must have some experience with the court system, which means the playing field is more even than she’d thought. But that doesn’t necessarily change anything, it just means she has to adjust her expectations a bit, and she’s still determined to walk out of that meeting with his signature on the contract.

“Even so, I have to do this by myself.”

“I understand,” M’gann nods, eyes serious but warm. “Now there is another matter I needed to bring up, going along the lines of not underestimating him.” She rummages in her bag, pulling out what Maggie quickly discerns is another contract. She slides it over the table towards her, watching her carefully to gauge her reaction Maggie suspects.

She doesn’t even get past the first few lines when her stomach drops. This is exactly what she didn’t want: a contract with her signature on it saying that she isn’t allowed to approach her siblings in any way. Her immediate reaction is to reject it and just hope that her dad isn’t smart enough to bring the issue up—or realize that it could even be an issue—but as she reads the new contract more closely, an thought wriggles its way into her mind. It’s not ideal, morally or legally, but it’s not like her dad has any right to morality given what he’s done to her. It could very well work, though—and that’s all that matters to her. High stakes means high risks, and she knew that going into this.

“I know you said you’ll tell him all this, but it’s better to be prepared.”
“It’s fine,” Maggie says, and her answer surprises her manager if her face is anything to go by. “Better safe than sorry, right?” She keeps her own expression carefully neutral, free of any traces of what her true intent is in allowing the new contract to potentially go forward. It would’ve been too easy to tie her father’s hands without repercussions, and buy herself and her siblings all the time in the world, but she’s never had it easy.

A beat later, M’gann smiles, apparently satisfied about not having to fight her on this, but Gabriella’s gaze on her lingers—a question glinting in her eyes.

A sudden noise breaks the moment, an alien noise to be specific, the little tune that always plays when the green, big eyed aliens descend from their spaceship on to planet earth. M’gann hastily pulls her phone out, a small smile forming as she looks at whoever is calling her. “I have to take this, excuse me,” M’gann says, not even bothering to look at her as she stands up. “Hello, J’onn?”

Maggie isn’t sure who that is, probably another client. Though why her manager chose that particular ringtone for him is beyond her, but he must be pretty important for M’gann to interrupt their conversation. With her manager currently disposed, there’s no buffer to stop the sudden tension between Gabriella and herself from spilling over. It makes her skin crawl and her eyes itch. Her aunt has been trying to meet her eyes since M’gann pulled out the second contract, but she’s avoided it so far.

“He must be something if he gets a special ringtone,” she jokes with a light, forced chuckle—anything to divert her aunt’s focus. “I don’t get one.”

“Oh you do,” M’gann tells her, deadpan. “It’s a tornado warning.”

Next to her, Gabriella chuckles—though even that sounds worried. Maggie cracks a smile, a small reprieve right before the impending interrogation she knows she’s gonna get.

“Give me five minutes,” M’gann says, and then she steps away with her cellphone. Her voice fades into the background, growing more and more distant as she walks away. The moment she’s out of ear range Gabriella pounces.

“Maggie, this wasn’t the plan,” she says. “Are you sure about this?” Her aunt places a hand on her knee, leaning closer. “You said a verbal agreement of not approaching your siblings, because those types of things never hold up in court—but written contracts do. Are you sure-”

“I am,” Maggie replies, feeling a sense of calm settle over her. “If this is what it comes down to, I’ll do it. I have to.”

“And if he presses charges?”

“You’re assuming he will.”

“And you’re assuming he won’t. That’s a lot riding on an assumption.”

Maggie bites her lip. It is, but she has her hands tied, and this is the only solution she can see to keep things as they are.

“This is just in case,” she says, unconvincing even to her own ears. “But even if he signs it, he knows he can’t go to court against me.” He’d admitted as much when they spoke at the hotel. “This is how we get him off our backs.”
Gabriella gives her a look. “I really hope you’re right.”

Maggie nods. Gabriella squeezes her knee, and she covers her aunt’s hand with her own. While M’gann finishes her call in the background, her aunt grabs the second contract and starts reading it. It reminds her she’s not alone.

She has to do this last part alone, but they’re in this together. And it’s that thought that thrums through her body as she gears up to talk to her father one last time, on her terms now.
NONDISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

This Nondisclosure Agreement ("Agreement") is entered into by and between Margaret Ellen Sawyer ("Disclosing Party") and Oscar cameo ("Receiving Party") for the purpose of preventing the unauthorized disclosure of Confidential Personal Information as defined below. The parties agree to enter into a confidential relationship with respect to disclosure of certain proprietary and confidential personal information ("Confidential Personal Information").

1. Definition of Confidential Personal Information. For purposes of this Agreement, "Confidential Personal Information" shall include all information that identifies an individual, including an individual's photograph, social security number, driver's license number, name, address, telephone number, date of birth, e-mail address, any financial or credit institution, including any records of deposits, withdrawals, balances of any checking and savings accounts and loans and their respective numbers, and any personal identification number or password that would permit access to an individual's financial accounts, employment and pre-employment records, and personal property tax statements and records, conviction records for violations of the law, and any other personally identifiable information not lawfully accessible publicly available information.

If Confidential Personal Information is in written form, the Disclosing Party shall stamp the materials with the word "Confidential" or some similar warning. If Confidential Personal Information is transmitted orally, the Disclosing Party shall beforehand that such oral communication constitutes Confidential Personal Information and the Disclosing Party shall quickly put such communication in writing and stamp the materials with the word "Confidential".

2. Exclusions from Confidential Personal Information. Receiving Party's obligations under this Agreement do not extend to information that is: (a) publicly known at the time of disclosure; (b) is disclosed by Receiving Party with Disclosing Party's prior approval.

3. Obligations of Receiving Party. Receiving Party shall hold and maintain all Confidential Personal Information in strictest confidence for the sole and exclusive benefit of the Disclosing Party. Receiving Party shall not, without prior written approval of Disclosing Party, use for Receiving Party's own benefit, publish, copy, or disclose to others, or permit the use by others for their benefit or to the detriment of the Disclosing Party, any Confidential Personal Information.

3.1 Failure to comply with the Obligations can and will result in legal or equitable action against the Receiving Party by the Disclosing Party.

4. Time Periods. The nondisclosure provisions of this Agreement shall survive the termination of this Agreement and Receiving Party's duty to hold Confidential Personal Information in confidence shall remain in effect until Disclosing Party sends Receiving Party written notice releasing Receiving Party from this Agreement.
5. Relationships. Nothing contained in this Agreement shall be deemed to constitute either party a partner of the other party for any purpose.

6. Severability. If a court finds any provision of this Agreement invalid, unenforceable, or against public policy, the remainder of this Agreement shall be interpreted so as best to effect the intent of the parties.

7. Integration. This Agreement expresses the complete understanding of the parties with respect to the subject matter and supersedes all prior prior agreements, representations and understandings. This Agreement may be amended except in a writing signed by both parties.

8. Waiver. The failure to exercise any right provided in this Agreement shall not be a waiver of prior or subsequent rights.

9. Neither the Disclosing Party nor the Receiving Party may distribute information in written or verbal form to the press or public about the nature or existence of this Agreement. For the purposes of this Agreement, public is defined as anyone not related to the Disclosing Party and Receiving Party. However, the Disclosing Party and the Receiving Party are allowed to communicate about the Agreement with individuals representing the Party and/or involved in the process of drafting or authorizing the Agreement.

9.1. Were the Disclosing Party or Receiving Party to distribute information about Agreement to an allowed party and that party in question leaked the information to press or public in written or verbal form, such action would be considered a breach of the contract which the Disclosing Party or Receiving Party would be held liable.

This Agreement and each party’s obligations shall be binding on the respective assigns and successors of such party. Each party has signed this Agreement in its authorized representative.

Maggie Sawyer  Oscar Caivano
Signature of Disclosing Party  Signature of Receiving Party
MARGARET ELLEN SAUYER  Oscar Caivano
Typed or Printed Name of Disclosing Party  Typed or Printed Name of Receiving Party
Alex doesn’t answer the call at first.

She’s biting through a slice of avocado on toast when her phone lights up, and she hurries to brush the crumbs off her fingers before checking the caller ID. She doesn’t recognize the phone number. And since there’s a limited amount of people who have her phone number, she’s immediately suspicious.

Curiosity gets the better of her, however, and she answers before the next ring.

“Hello?” she asks, swallowing the toast, dry.

“Alex, hello,” a man greets. “I’m sure you don’t remember me, this is Steven Alterman, I was an associate of your father’s.” She vaguely remembers his name, probably one of the many people her father hosted at their house for 4th of July parties or Superbowl Sundays. He’d kept their favorite holidays just for them, as a family—Thanksgiving, Christmas—but he’d had his friends over every once in a while. They used to lock themselves in his study and talk about their next projects. Alex wonders which one of those projects Steven is calling about.

“Yes…” she asks, not unkindly.

“We worked together on Great Salt Lake, I produced it, that’s what I’m calling about. I have amazing news!” He sounds excited, but Alex rolls her eyes. Amazing news would be that her dad is somehow still alive and has been hiding for the past few years. “The National Film Preservation Board is considering adding the movie to the National Film Registry,” he says. “I have it on good faith that it’s almost a done deal. I’ve spoken to your mom already, she gave me your number. I hope that’s all right?”

She nods, dumbfounded, before realizing he can’t see her. “Yes, of course.”

“I wanted to call you first, Alex. You were in the film yourself! I still remember. Jeremiah loved that one, I still think it was his best...” Steven continues rambling about her dad’s films, but it falls on deaf ears, Alex too absorbed in processing the information. First, oddly enough, she’s pleased he wanted to call her first. She’s all too used to coming in second after Kara, and he has yet to mention her sister.

And then she allows herself to think of the enormity of the news.

Her dad hadn’t wanted to entertain for the sake of it, he’d wanted to make a change. To touch people. And he accomplished that, if this is any indication. It makes her glow with pride on his behalf, even as it hurts. Even in his death, one of his films will be recognized for the art that it was. But he won’t be there to receive the honor. She’s not as naive as Kara, she’s long since given up on any belief in a heaven. He’s not looking down at them, and he won’t know about this, either. He’s just gone.

At least the fact that his ashes were scattered in the ocean saves her from a less savory mental image.
“Alex, are you still there?”

“Uh? Yes. Yes, thank you for letting me know. Have you, huh, have you called my sister?”

“Not yet, I’m afraid—”

“Oh, that’s fine, I’ll call her. Thanks again.” She closes the call. It’s been a long time since she’s thought about her dad’s movies, or watched them Steven had reminded her of her part in the film, if it could be called that, and Alex vaguely remembers it as well. Her dad had thought of a transition on the spot, as he often did, and he had her run inside the shot and ask the lead to follow after her to help her with something or another.

He was always so passionate about his work, but never to the point where he’d neglect his family—not like the other parents she’d hear about from her classmates when she’d still attended school. His work wasn’t something that he kept isolated from her. He’d encouraged her foray into acting, albeit with the initial obligatory hesitation any parent has with their child. He’d let her be on set with him since she was a kid.

She can still see the huge, face-splitting smile he’d had on the red carpet premiere of the *Great Salt Lake* as if it’d happened yesterday, with her and her mom by his side. He’d insisted she came up with the title.

Alex smiles fondly at the memory. Kara hadn’t been around then yet—the movie likely doesn’t hold the same emotional weight for her—but she knows this news will still mean just as much to her. Although Kara never called him dad, but he was every bit her father.

Alex quickly scrolls through her contact list, tapping her sister’s name.

“Hello?” a man’s voice answers the call.

“Uh, is Kara around?”

“She’s filming right now,” the man says. After a second, Alex places him. Mon-El. “It’s Alex, right? Hi! We haven’t spoken in a while. Or at all. Do you—”

“Tell my sister I called, I’ll call her back later.” She closes the call, not wanting to have a conversation with a brick wall. She’s still rooting for her sister to break up with him and get together with the guy she actually likes.

Alex toys with her phone. She doesn’t want to call her mom to talk about this. Her dad is the one topic they’ve never quite been able to tackle together. Alex sits down. If Kara isn’t available, she only has her manager left to call. (And that seems like a special sort of sad.)

But her desire to call J’onn reminds her of something else. This recognition isn’t the only thing her dad will never know about.

There’s too many other things she’ll never be able to share with him. Her dad won’t know she’s gay, he won’t meet her wife, or her children (and it’s incredibly surprising how the prospect of being someone’s wife goes from unpalatable to wonderful when the other person in said marriage is also a woman). Her dad didn’t know—and now he’ll never know—this monumental part of herself, because she was too stupid to figure it out when she was younger, before he’d died.

The prospect makes her put her phone down, a sense of despondency settling in, and she fights the desire to call J’onn and once more infect him with her oppressive mood.
She should be celebrating right now, the mere prospect that her dad will be remembered in such an indelible way is nothing short of amazing, but all she can think about is everything that could have been—if only he were alive.

It’s easier, the second time she faces her dad.

It still feels like a punch to the gut, but this time, she’s expecting it. She isn’t caught off guard. It’s the difference between falling through the ice in a frozen lake and being pushed into a bank of freshly fallen snow by her best friend from childhood. It doesn’t feel any less cold, but at least she sees it coming.

What she doesn’t see coming is how easy it is to get him on board. He agrees to keep quiet about her if she stays away from her siblings. He does ask for “proof” that she’ll do as she says, just like M’gann said he would—she underestimated him by thinking he wouldn’t—but she’s ready with the contract M’gann drew up, and it’s smooth sailing from there. She signs the papers, and so does he, and then she hands him the NDA.

He’s almost eager to get it over with it seems, which is why the next words that leave his mouth make fiery anger flare up inside her.

“I really did want you back, Maggie.”

He says it quietly, looking straight at her, his pen hovering over the dotted line of the NDA he’s about to sign, agreeing to keep his mouth shut about her and her past. A past full of hurt that he caused.

“Don’t.” She raises her hand, as if she could physically block his words. “Don’t.” She breathes in, refusing to cower under his words or the weight of his stare. He might be her father, but he doesn’t hold any power over her, not anymore. She feels the strength in that start to course through her veins like a physical thing. She doesn’t owe him anything. Except the truth of the matter.

“You threw me away like garbage,” she tells him, or rather, spits out.

He shakes his head.

“It was never supposed to be permanent,” he says. “You were supposed to come back when you were better-”

“I’m not sick!” The words are more of a yell than she’s allowed herself all this time, a taste of what could have been, had she been a teenager under his roof, rebelled against his rules like she did against Gabriella’s at one point. He never knew this side of her. She was never anything but a little girl and then, a stain to be removed. But she’s neither that girl nor a teenager anymore, and she won’t allow herself to lose control.

“I’m not sick,” she repeats, her voice even. “And I don’t need your approval.” Her voice gets
stronger, the same righteous anger she’s felt before fueling her, except this time she knows she won’t break. “I might have died to you when you found out I was gay, but my dad? The...hero I idolized?” Maggie shakes her head. She remembers writing a story in elementary school about how her dad was like her guardian angel. She doesn’t remember what it was like to be so naive. “He died that day too. I don’t even know who you are, and you don’t know me. I’d say that you don’t get to judge me, but the truth is, you can judge me all you want. It doesn’t matter to me. You don’t matter.” She swallows, feeling as the words resonate through everything she is. It’s the truth. And she’s free thanks to it. “You didn’t even deserve to show up at my door, barging into my life like that-”

“Right, your perfect life with that whore you call a girlfriend. Who had the gall to-“

“Leave Alex out of this.” Poison seeps into her tone at the insult. She’s never heard him use that type of language. She’s quite sure he did when she was younger, but he was just careful to hide it, and the fact that he doesn’t care anymore is—although stupid—further proof that she’s nothing to him. “Just sign the goddamned papers,” she tells him, relishing his surprise.

He does, and before the ink has time to dry she’s getting up from the table and grabbing her copy out of his hands.

"Don’t contact me again,” she states. “I’ll keep paying for their schooling and if you need anything else you can have my mother message Gabriella. I won’t contact Franky.” Maggie levels a stare down at him, for once not feeling small in his presence.

“You better be a better father to her than you were to me.”
PERSONAL AGREEMENT

This Personal Agreement ("Agreement") is entered into between Margaret Ellen Sawyer ("Promisor Party") and Oscar Caivano ("Promissee Party") for the purpose of preventing the Promisor Party from approaching the children of the Promissee Party, Francesca Margaret Caivano Rossi (hereby referred to as Francesca), Calvano Rossi (hereby referred to as Sofia), and Charles Oscar Caivano Rossi (hereby referred to as Charles).

1. Definition of approach. For purposes of this Agreement, "approach" shall mean meeting with or requesting to meet with Francesca, Sofia, and/or Charles.


3. Time Periods. The provisions of this Agreement shall terminate on a party-by-party basis when each of the children reaches 18 years of age, or when they reach the legal age to make their own decisions, whichever comes first. To further clarify, the Promisor Party's obligations to Promissee Party's children shall only hold while the children are under the age of 18, or until they become legally emancipated minor as defined by U.S. law.

4. Failure to comply with the obligations of the Promisor Party may result in legal action against the Promisor Party by the Promissee Party.

5. Severability. If a court finds any provision of this Agreement invalid or unenforceable, the remainder of this Agreement shall be interpreted so as best to effect the intent of the parties.

6. Integration. This Agreement expresses the complete understanding of the parties with respect to the subject matter and supersedes all prior proposals, promises, representations, and understandings. This Agreement may not be amended except by written agreement signed by both parties.

7. Waiver. The failure to exercise any right provided in this Agreement shall not be a waiver of that right or a waiver of any other right.

This Agreement and each party's obligations shall be binding on the respective successors, assigns, and successors of such party. Each party has signed this Agreement and attached its authorized representative.

Signature of Disclosing Party: Maggie Sawyer
Typed or Printed Name of Disclosing Party: Margaret Ellen Sawyer

Signature of Receiving Party: Oscar Caivano
Typed or Printed Name of Receiving Party: Oscar Caivano
Alex wipes the pizza grease off her hands, staining the napkin, and deposits the dirty plate in the sink. She’s been trying to eat healthier, at the bequest of her trainer, but leftover pizza was all she had in the fridge and she couldn’t be bothered to call in healthier takeout. She doesn’t feel like doing much of anything, actually, thoughts of her dad still weighing heavily on her mind.

Even after all this time, anything related to him can still put her in a funk, which is why she tries to avoid thinking about him at all. It usually has the opposite effect, however, embedding even deeper into her mind all the memories she has of them together, and making them resurface. It’s a vicious cycle that she’s not quite sure how to escape.

Her buzzing phone saves her from any further spiraling, and a faint smile creeps up her face as she sees who it is. As always, perfect timing.

“J’onn! I was actually going to call you and ask you to come over,” she explains. “But I got the call about dad and it slipped my mind.”

“That’s actually what I was calling about,” he tells her. “Eliza told me about it earlier. I wanted to check that you were,” he pauses, only the faint background noises of what sounds like a park filling the speaker, “that everything’s okay?”

She’s not sure whether to wince or be grateful that J’onn can predict her so well, especially when it comes to her father. He’s had more than enough practice dealing with her various moods, but today, unlike in the past, she’s not looking to him to prop her back up on her feet and be her crutch. She can stand on her own, but it’s still nice to have him by her side.

“Everything’s fine,” she tells him, hoping it’s true. “Do you think you might still want to have dinner, even if the world isn’t ending?”

‘Yes, very much so.” Alex can hear the smile in his voice, and it helps chase away the cloud hovering over her.

“Good. Great.” She flutters with nerves, the thought of what she’d actually been meaning to talk to him about this morning making her nervous. “I’ll find a place for us to eat and text you the details.”

Her phone call with J’onn done, Alex moves onto the next task on her list.

Her sister picks up on the third ring, bright as ever.

“Alex! Mon-El said you called, but he didn't say why. What’s up?”

“Do I need a specific reason to call my sister?” Alex asks in a teasing tone.

“Well, no, but I don’t have too much time to talk right now.” She can hear the familiar sounds of a set in the background. “I’m just finishing up my lunch break.”

“So make it quick is what you’re telling me.”

“I’d have said it in a more polite way, but—”
“It’s about dad.” Alex doesn’t need to specify. “I got the call earlier today, but when I tried calling you Mon-El picked up,” she trails off, letting her sister discern the rest of her meaning.

“He’s not that bad, Alex,” Kara admonishes, but she doesn’t sound too offended by her continued apathy of him. Maybe her new “friend”—whoever she’s currently crushing on, which Alex has vowed to herself to stop mentioning, lest her sister stop talking to her—has changed her sister’s view of her boyfriend. Whoever he is, she needs to send him a bouquet or something as thanks for getting her sister to finally open her eyes to the fact that she can do so much better.

“‘Not that bad’ seems like an odd descriptor for someone you're in love with.”

“Ax...what was the call about dad about?”

“One of his movies is being considered for the National Film Registry.” She’s barely done speaking when Kara starts shrieking unintelligibly. Alex pulls the phone away from her ear, but even the distance can’t quiet her sister.

“Ax! Why didn’t you tell me earlier? I would have stopped shooting for something this big.”

“I don’t think the director would’ve liked that,” she replies drily. Kara’s reaction is just as she’d expected. It’s how she should be feeling, but the pit of discontent in her stomach just won’t go away.

“Is everything okay?” Kara finally lowers her voice, perhaps picking up on her lack of excitement. Alex is pleasantly surprised that her sister notices, because too often she's lost in her own thoughts to do so—not that Alex would ever call her out on it. “You sound...weird.”

“I’m fine,” Alex clears her throat, tapping into her acting reservoir, and looks out the window. The sky is a dazzling blue, so brilliant it hurts her eyes. It makes the fluffy white clouds floating by stand out in stark contrast. The idyllic image tugs at the back of her mind, dragging up memories of summer days spent reading on the couch—the same blue sky and clouds peeking through the large windows—with her dad in the chair beside her working on some script. Sometimes she can still hear his voice, asking her a question about a particular phrase or word. She’s always wondered why he’d sought out her opinion on his work, especially when she was only a child then, but thinking about it now, it was probably just his way of making her feel included. A sort of bonding ritual between them.

“Jeremiah would’ve been so happy,” Kara’s voice pulls her back into the present, crashing over her like a bucket of ice water, and all she can do is murmur an agreement, the sudden thickness in her throat impeding any further words from escaping.

He would’ve been happy, and now it’s up to them to be happy in his place.

The sunlight slants across the bed, just missing the solitary figure perched at the edge of the mattress. Maggie stares out the window, looking at everything and nothing.
After the stress of the past few days it feels wrong to be so calm, but here she is.

She passes her cellphone from one hand to the other, oddly at peace with what she’s about to do. She’s not even stalling. She’s just gathering courage.

“You okay?” her aunt peeks inside her bedroom, finding her in the same position she was fifteen minutes ago.

Maggie shrugs. “To be honest, I don’t know what I am.” She runs her fingers through her hair, trying to put it into words. “This is all done, and I know how things are gonna go, and what I’m gonna do, but still...I don’t know. I just feel...I have this emptiness in the middle of my chest.” It’s always there, living beside the voice that tells her no one would choose to be by her side, and although she trusts her aunt more than anyone in the world, she can’t say that out loud, not even to her. She looks at her bedside table, the information Winn got for her scribbled on a piece of paper, and feels the weight of her phone in her hand. What if this doesn’t change that? “I mean, I have you, and M’gann and Winn are always there and I do have...friends…” Alex’s smile and James’ infectious laughter come to mind. “But...I just feel kind of...lonely, sometimes. I guess,” she adds, trying to take off some of the edge of such a confession. Trying to diminish it. She waves her phone in front of Gabriella. “What if this doesn’t change that?”

“Not the first time I’ve heard that,” Gabriella says. Maggie frowns.

“Huh?” She’s pretty sure she’s never agonized this much over social media before.

Gabriella shakes her head. “That you felt lonely. I heard that exact same thing, when you first came to live with me. You’d been staying with me for a couple of days, and you still wouldn’t talk to me, or anyone at school. And I found you on the fire escape, crying, and you told me you felt empty. Lonely. But you wouldn’t let me be there for you, and you wouldn’t try to make friends at school. So.” Gabriella shrugs and enters her room, sitting down next to her. “God knows I love you more than anything in this world, Maggie, but have you thought about this-” her aunt taps her chest. “Being your own doing?”

Maggie raises her head, affronted.

“Gee, thanks. I really needed that right now.”

Gabriella squeezes her side.

“I’m here for you. M’gann is too. Your friends, Winn, Alex. We’re all here for you. We’re beside you but you won’t let us be there. You keep pushing us away. You pick fights with me. And yeah, I should’ve told you what your father said, but back then you were a child, and now...I didn’t see the point. These past few days...I wish you would’ve been mad at me later and just let me be there for you.”

Maggie swallows. She’s regretted getting pissed at Gabriella enough in the privacy of her own head, but the feeling comes back anew. She hadn’t thought about it that way. She remembers Alex offering to be there time and time again, and the way she’d rebuffed that with nothing but ferocity. She’s embarrassed of herself.

“Sweetie...I think sometimes you feel like this because you want to,” Gabriella tells her. “And you don’t deserve that.” She squeezes her knee. “You don’t have to go at it alone.”

Maggie swallows, recognizing the point her aunt is trying to make, but unsure whether she’s ready to accept it. There’s only so much introspection she can take before she needs a stiff drink.
“I have to do this part alone,” she tells her aunt, sidestepping the minefield she just exposed.

“I know,” Gabriella says. “But does that mean I can't wait for your downstairs with hot chocolate and dessert?”

Maggie smiles. “Yeah, you can.”

Her aunt exits her bedroom after one last comforting pat on her back, and Maggie finds herself alone with her cellphone, a post it, and a thousand doubts weighing on her mind. She’s curious, of course she is, she hasn’t seen her sisters in nearly a decade. She has no idea what they look like and she’s about to find out. She’s about to do much more than that, and the enormity of the situation almost has her calling Gabriella back for emotional support, but she wants to do this by herself.

She grabs her cellphone and the note, and carefully types in one of the usernames Winn found for her. Ridiculously simple, and yet, she never managed to find it. Not any of those times she scoured social media for any girl matching her sister’s names and location, or when she got copies of the local newspaper after Franky had her first communion, just in case her dad congratulated her in it. (He did, a small paragraph and no photos.) Sofia’s Instagram has a lot of photos. Most of them are blurry, or of pizza and sparkly nails—her youngest sister is 11, and it’s easy to see—but the others are of her.

She hasn’t laid eyes on her sisters in years, and the image of a blonde, blue-eyed smiling girl blurs as her eyes water. Sofia’s hair never darkened like Franky’s did, the girl staring back at her is just as pale and blonde as she was when she was a baby. She looks nothing at all like Maggie, or their father. She must have gotten her hair from their grandma, but she’s never known anybody in their family to have eyes like that. She’s beautiful. More than that, she seems happy.

Maggie scrolls through the account, her eyes roving over pictures of a puppy—it seems their father finally allowed them to have one—and good grades that her little sister has posted with the caption “yayy!”. She smiles, feeling like she’s catching up on some of the time she’s missed solely through her cell phone screen. And then her smile fades as she comes upon a picture that Franky must have edited herself, of a girl holding a baby, a big pink heart scribbled around them. ‘My brother and sister’ it reads, but Maggie doesn’t need the confirmation. She’d recognize Franky anywhere.

She looks like her.

She guesses they both look like their father, with their mother’s dimples, but upon looking at Franky, all she can think of is that her sister is a dead ringer for herself. They have the same skin and the same dark hair and eyes, and even mirror dimples, which she can see as Franky smiles down at a baby boy in her arms—Charles, their brother.

She’s so grown up. She doesn’t look like a girl anymore, and Maggie realizes she’s missed all of her childhood. She left her when she was a toddler, and the girl in the pictures is what her grandmother would have called a young lady. She reminds Maggie of herself at that age, and not for the first time she wonders how could her father send her away when she was still so young and vulnerable. Not a little girl, but far from a teenager. That age when she began to discover the world was bigger than she thought it was, while also knowing she was deeply unprepared to live in it—and then being forced to by her own father.

A fierce desire to protect Franky squeezes at her heart. She knows that she never could have kept up her end of the deal. Staying away from her siblings stopped being an option the second one of them made it clear she wanted Maggie in her life, or at the very least, needed an explanation as to why she wasn’t.
She’s lost enough time, and every minute that passes adds more weight to that already hefty bag. She’ll have time later, to go through all of her sister’s photos and discover the life that she missed, but for now, she enters Franky’s profile and sends her a message. She’s using the new account she made for herself under her middle name, Ellen, hating that she needs the layer of anonymity and plausible deniability should her sister show her texts to anyone. She snaps a quick picture of herself and sends it, typing the message quickly in case her sister is online and sees it right away.

‘Hi. This is your sister, Margaret. I go by Maggie. I know you don’t remember that. I know you probably don’t remember me at all, but I’d really, really like to talk to you. I know you contacted our aunt Gabriella, and she said you wanted to talk to me. I also know our dad got angry about it.’

She doubts for a second, wondering once more if it's worth it to make her sister keep secrets from their father, if she should put a kid through that, but then she remembers being that age, and thinks that Franky should have at least the right to choose. Maggie didn’t get that, not about leaving her home and not about possibly coming back, but her sister will.

I’m sorry about that, but I think that whether we talk or not is ultimately up to you. Nobody else should have a say in it. And I would really like to talk to you again. Our dad can’t know about it, but I would like to have a chance to explain everything to you. I’d like to be your sister again, but if I can’t be that, then at least a friend. So this is my number.

She sends the message, and a weight is lifted from her shoulders. The constant pain she’s learned to live, that aching emptiness inside her ribcage, is somehow transformed into an expectancy that she doesn’t know what to do with except breathe through it. For the first time in so long, she’s not only at peace with what happened with her father, but with the situation with her siblings as well. She has a chance.

She looks at the message she’s just sent, and then decides to add something more, as she stares at the icon of a girl with brown eyes and dimples so similar to her own. She sends her sister a picture she keeps on her cellphone, inside a password protected folder. It’s a photo of the 3 of them, a perfect moment captured in time when things were perfect, Sofia just a baby in her arms. She presses send.

‘This is how I remember you.’
Franky M Caivano 13 going on 30. I like to take pictures sometimes.
The walk back to her apartment is quiet, Alex lost in her own head and J’onn content to let the silence between them remain. Their dinner was nice, the food was delicious and the ambiance of the place has been calming. It’s been an all around great evening, except for one small caveat. She still hasn’t worked up the guts to officially come out, despite her earlier assurances to herself that she would. And it’s not like she hasn’t had plenty of chances to. She could’ve spoken up while they were waiting for their food, or on the way over to the restaurant, but frankly she just isn’t sure what to say—and that uncertainty is what’s keeping her tongue at bay. These are uncharted waters she’s navigating.

Ever since she got the call from J’onn about Nightingale, it feels like her life has been changing at a breakneck speed. At the most basic level, she’s living in a different city now—after calling California her home for more than two decades of her life. New York City took a bit of time to acclimate to, and there are still some things she doesn’t like about it, but some of the best moments of her life are associated with the city.

Maggie is indelibly associated with this city in her mind.

She sees her in the streams of crowds alive with movement and potential, in the bright city lights that illuminate the dark nights and reflect off the water. The gentle spring breeze that ruffles her hair while she’s jogging recalls memories of days on set with Maggie shooting outside. The Rockefeller ice rink was their first kiss. The Staten Island Ferry was the first kiss she initiated. She was riding along the streets of this city when she realized that she was actually falling for her co-star in a completely non-professional way. Los Angeles has her every career first, good and bad. Malibu has her family, her dad. But New York City has Maggie, and her biggest personal realization, or rather acceptance. She can’t exactly pinpoint the first inkling she’d had that she wasn’t as straight as she’d thought, but she’d immediately buried the mere idea of it until Maggie forced it to the surface.

Others, namely J’onn, had tried to encourage her to accept her sexuality, but Maggie was the first to succeed. Without even realizing it, she accomplished what no amount of ‘You can talk to me about anything’ from J’onn had.

Maggie won’t be the first one Alex comes out to though. She glances to her right, studying the man beside her—tall, broad shoulders, serious eyes, steady countenance.

All her life, she’s tried to plan out every detail, but some things just can’t be planned. And she’s come to learn maybe that isn’t such a bad thing.

“Do you want to come up for a nightcap?” Alex asks as they reach the entrance of their apartment. J’onn smiles with a nod, holding the door open for her before Kevin even has the chance to. The trek up the stairs seems short, J’onn always preferring them to the elevator, but the silence is pleasant, and she’s surprised her damnable nerves haven’t made themselves known yet.

That changes as soon as they arrive at her door.

She flicks the light on in her kitchen, pouring out a drink for the two of them with surprisingly
steady hands, the complete opposite of her insides right now. Wordlessly, she hands the drink to J’onn, settling beside him at the kitchen counter. She almost wishes her manager was the type of person to force her to start talking, but he’s never been one to pressure her.

Alex closes her eyes for a beat, gripping the glass in her hand.

“I had an ulterior motive for having dinner with you, besides to celebrate my dad’s film and catching up.”

“You don’t say,” J’onn replies with a hint of a smile in the corner of his mouth, and that steals some of the wind out of Alex’s sails. Here she was working up the courage to come out to him and he probably already knows that she’s going to.

She abruptly turns around, walking toward the sink and downing the rest of her drink in one gulp. “Well if you already know what I’m about to say, then I guess our conversation isn’t needed,” she says, voice coming out slightly higher than usual.

“Alex,” J’onn catches her by the arm. “What did you want to tell me?”

“Do you know what the general equation of a straight line is?”

J’onn peers at her quizzically, but plays along nevertheless. “Well, it’s been quite a long time since I’ve been in high school math, and the subject was never my strongest but—”

“That doesn’t matter,” she blurts out—cheeks flushing in mortification as she mentally smacks herself for digging herself into this horrendous, meandering transition. All that’s left to do is dig her way out as best as she can. “The answer is y equals mx plus b, but like I said, it’s irrelevant to the discussion. The second part is what matters. The straight line, except throw out the line part and instead of straight think of the opposite.”

“Bent?”

“Gay! I’m— that’s what I wanted to tell you. That’s what I am. Gay. A lesbian.” Alex swears that the words echoes around her empty apartment, and she’s sure even some of the people down below on the street heard her yell it out. She keeps her eyes glued to the hardwood floor, furiously trying to keep her breathing even. But a light touch under her chin forces her to look up, straight into J’onn’s warm eyes.

“Thank you.”

“Excuse me?” Alex looks at him incredulously. “For what? That had to be the most awkwardly painful coming out you’ve had to endure, don’t start lying to me now, J’onn.”

“It was certainly...interesting, and very you,” he replies with a smile. Alex isn’t sure whether she should take that as a compliment or a slight, though she’s leaning towards the latter. “What I mean by that is thank you for telling me. I know exposing yourself like that doesn’t come naturally to you. Thank you.”

“Oh. Well.” Her throat tightens, and she wraps her arms around herself, turning her attention to the window. She can feel the telltale prick of moisture at the back of her eyes, but she fights it as long as she can. “You’re welcome. But you already knew. You’ve always known.”

“I did.”

“I was just making it official I guess, if there’s such a thing.” She looks up at him, and his gentle
smile makes a similar one appear on her lips. “Thank you for everything you’ve done for me.”

“T’im so happy for you,” J’onn says quietly, his voice moving closer to her. “I know your dad would be too.”

And with those words, the dam breaks.

That’s the crux of it, isn’t it? Her dad. She wants to tell him. She wants to hear those words coming from his mouth. But he’s gone, and the closest thing she can get to him is the man across from her. The tears, and snot she vaguely notes, fall fast and furious.

She feels a pair of warm arms encase her, a familiar warmth that reminds her of home starting in her chest and spreading throughout her body.

She embraces the feeling.

Maggie doesn’t think she’s ever picked up her mail with quite as much energy so early in the morning, but it’s a good day for her. The high from her triumphant final conversation with her father hasn’t quite left her yet, and the hope from the message she sent her sister seems like it could sustain her for days.

A flash of red catches Maggie’s eye as she turns, mail in hand, on her way back up to her apartment.

Alex.

She’s next on her to-fix list.

The regret from the way she acted towards Alex is the only thing still soiling her good mood, and she knows she owes her a proper explanation, and an apology. She’s not sure whether Alex is the type to hold a grudge—although given the way she’s treated her so far, she wouldn’t hold it against Alex if she did. So she knows it may not be easy, but neither was setting into motion her Franky plan until she did it.

And actually texting Franky was exhilarating, and freeing, good, hopeful, every positive word she can think of. The small black words on her screen spoke of more than just reconciliation. This is her chance to get back all those lost years with her sister, little by little. She wants that same feeling in her relationship with Alex.

“Danvers! Wait up.”

“If your legs were longer maybe you could catch up,” Alex turns around, the hint of a familiar smirk on her face. “Sorry, was that-“

“No,” Maggie quickly brushes her off, relief flooding her after getting past the initial shock. This feels like being back on even footing again. She’s had enough tense, emotion-filled conversations in these past few days to last her a lifetime. She wants to return to normalcy, whatever that looks
like now that one of her sisters is potentially back in the picture.

Their banter is safe ground. Neutral.

“That’s fine,” she says. “It’s probably true.” She smiles, and Alex returns it, with a slightly raised eyebrow. “I just...I wanted to talk to you actually. I thought that I should apologize, again, for my actions lately. Who I was to you, what I said to you,” Maggie pauses, exhaling slowly and determinedly fixing her eyes on Alex’s, the speech she’s already practiced coming easily to her tongue, “that’s not who I am. It’s not who I want to be. It was wrong to take out my emotions on you when you were only trying to help. I’m sorry.”

Alex shrugs, eyes wandering for a moment before settling on Maggie. “Apology accepted, like I’ve already said. I can understand where you were coming from, what caused you to react they way you did. Sort of. Family tends to bring out the worst in me too.”

“I- thank you for being so understanding.”

Alex Danvers, predictably unpredictable as always. She thought they’d be back at square one, considering her actions in the staircase, but for some bizarre reason, Alex wasn’t rude to her. Maggie generally likes to take the high road, but she’s not even sure that she could so readily accept an apology with as much grace as Alex just did, not after what she’d done. A sudden rush of warmth towards the woman in front of her washes over her.

She can’t remember ever having a friend like Alex, besides her own aunt.

One of the things that’d hurt most about learning that Gabriella had lied to her, taken her choice away, was that it’d made her feel alone. The one person she’d trusted most in her life had betrayed her. It was like she was suddenly standing on a rocky cliff watching everyone she’d ever cared for separated from her by a gaping, insurmountable ravine. But the funny thing, what she’s finally realizing, is that she’s never been alone, not really. She had Gabriella when her parents kicked her out. Then M’gann came along, or more like power walked her way into her life. Winn followed shortly after with an ever present smile pasted to his face, eager to please. And now Alex.

She has at least four people in her corner rooting for her, through thick and thin. In this industry, it’s more than she’d hoped for.

“Was there anything else?” Alex’s question draws her out of her own head.

“What? I can’t just want to talk to you anymore, Danvers?”

“Ah, no, that’s not it.” Alex averts her eyes and stuffs her hands into her back pockets. “We just haven’t done much...talking lately.”

“You’re right,” Maggie says, and remembering her impulsive decision to trick her father and contact her sister, she decides to just go with her gut again. “And I want to change that. How about I take you up on that old lunch offer right now?” She nods her head towards the stairs, “We can go up to my apartment.”

The smile that breaks out across Alex’s face is blindingly bright.

“I’d love that, but how about my place instead? Your windows still kind of freak me out, even if I know now that they are one way.”

“Whatever you want, Alex.”
Maggie pauses in front of the white door, dessert wine tucked under her arm, a slice of tiramisu in one hand and her other raised to knock on the wood. It feels like ages since she’s been here, though it probably wasn’t that long ago in the grand scheme of things. Her dad showing up warped her sense of time, making a single day feel like a never-ending chapter of the longest book in history. If someone had asked her even two days ago if she’d be at Alex’s door, happy to be here, she’d have laughed in their faces.

Life is peculiar like that. It can change in a single moment, she knows that better than anybody.

She knocks, three sharp raps, and Alex opens it far too quickly to not have been standing behind the door waiting for her to finally come in. Maggie has to stifle a laugh, it’s such an Alex move. She’s missed this.

“I come bearing gifts,” she raises up them up. “Sorry it’s a bit late.”

“Enough with the apologies.” Alex ushers her in, motioning to her to set the tiramisu and wine down on the counter while she grabs some wine glasses from the cabinet. “I have enough from you to start a bank, the Sawyer Apology Bank catering to anybody with the right price.”

Maggie laughs, cocking an eyebrow. “What price might that be?”

“Mhm. I haven’t decided just yet.” She uncorks the wine and brings the bottle to her nose to smell. Maggie leans against the counter, simply savoring the moment. Alex’s apartment looks warmer—more lived in—then she remembers. She can see touches of Alex scattered around. The science magazines strewn across the coffee table with numerous coffee mug rings peeking out below the glossy pages. (She makes a mental note to buy her some coasters at some point, perhaps as her next gift). A Barenaked Ladies vinyl is propped up against her fireplace, and Maggie applauds Alex’s excellent taste. She remembers a while back that M’gann said she knew someone who worked for them. She could probably get them tickets if Maggie asked. Going to a concert with Alex sounds amazing.

A gold filled wine glass enters Maggie’s vision, and her eyes steadily trace her way up from the hand that’s offering it to the gray eyes of its owner. She accepts the wine glass, her fingers briefly brushing over Alex’s in the process. It’s sweet as expected, a great compliment for tiramisu. The wine makes her bold, and she blurts out the first thought on the tip of her tongue.

“You called me your best friend. Before, I mean. Do you remember?” Alex looks embarrassed. Maggie doesn’t want her to be. “You know, I’ve never actually had a best friend,” she mentions, aware that she called Elisa her best friend when she was 14, but also painfully aware of how badly that ended. “Apart from my aunt,” she corrects.

“It’s my sister for me,” Alex mentions, and they both crack a smile, breaking the tension. “I guess we’re more alike than we thought.”

“I’ve known that for a while now,” she confesses. Alex smiles.

“Sit down, please,” Alex says. “Let me get us some plates.”
The tiramisu Maggie brought disappears slowly but surely, between laughter and easy conversation. Maggie seems more relaxed, not only after the past few days, but the most she’s ever seen her save for when she’s been tipsy. It’s though as some great weight has been lifted of her shoulders, and Alex is glad to see it.

She doesn’t want to ruin her night by asking, but at the same time Maggie seems so happy and...light, that Alex doesn’t think her question will incur her wrath the way it did before.

“Did you manage to fix everything with your dad?” she asks softly, during a lull in conversation. “I mean...you seem better.”

Maggie sighs. “I don’t know if ‘fix’ is the right word, but I’m finally at peace with everything that happened there.”

Alex nods, and she blames it on the 3rd glass of wine she drank that she doesn’t leave it at that.

“What happened there?” She shakes her head. “Sorry, you don’t have to answer that.”

Maggie gives her a sad smile. “It’s been a long time,” she says, and then finishes her glass. She savors the last sip of wine, a melancholy coming over her that Alex doesn’t like to see. “When I was fourteen-”

“You don't have to tell me if you don't want to,” Alex interjects quickly, spurred on by Maggie’s body language that’s clearly telegraphing discomfort. Her shoulders have slightly hunched over, one of her legs folded underneath the other, hands clasped in her lap. It’s an image Alex recognizes, Maggie had looked the same when her dad showed up the last time they ate together. His mere presence seemingly diminished Maggie to her actual size, not the large image she normally projects.

“Thank you.”

For a moment, she thinks Maggie will leave it at that. She knows how much she values her privacy, and understands the obvious reasons why now, but Maggie surprises her as she seems to think about it.

Finally, she speaks.

“When I was fourteen, I had a friend...and he had a crush on me. And I told him I couldn’t like him that way, because I was gay.” Maggie stops, taking a deep breath—and then another. She fidgets with her hands before untangling them and bringing a hand up to push her hair back, eyes scattering around the apartment.

Alex just stays quiet, almost afraid that if she strings together too many words or makes any sudden movements she’ll scare Maggie back into her protective shell. She’s aware she’s seeing a side of Maggie that not many people are privy to, and she treasure it. At last, Maggie looks at her, her dark brown eyes piercing through Alex, and her next words come out slowly, carefully.

“Someone heard me. Small town, small school, news travels fast. My mom worked as a secretary at that school. It got to her. She told my dad. When I couldn't deny it fast enough to his liking he kicked me out. And he sent me to live with Gabriella.”
“Oh, Maggie...” Alex moves to reach out to Maggie but catches herself just in time. A million thoughts crash through her mind: sadness, pain, anger. Now she really does wish that she’d punched Oscar when she’d had the chance. It would’ve ranked high on her most satisfying moments in life.

Maggie was 14. Just a child fresh out of middle school. Her entire world was ripped apart, changed irrevocably, in one day by her father, the man who was supposed to love her unconditionally. Inevitably, she thinks of her own father, she could never imagine him doing something so heinous. The only good part of Maggie’s story is that Gabriella was there to pick up the pieces left in the aftermath.

It’s no wonder the two of them are so close. Everything about Maggie makes more sense now that she knows what happened to her. Why there’s hardly any information about Maggie and her parents. How she skirts past the topic of her parents in every interview. The general lack of knowledge about her life before Hollywood. The reason why she’s so guarded. Anybody would be in her situation. She’d confided in her friend and it’d ultimately lead to her being disowned. Alex had an inkling that Maggie was hiding something, but she could’ve never imagined something of this magnitude. It makes her heart hurt.

“My sisters...Sofia was a baby, and Franky was three,” Maggie continues, voice thickening. “I never got to say goodbye to her because she was, huh, she was with my grandmother.”

“I can’t imagine.” Even the thought of being separated from Kara without getting the chance to say goodbye sickens Alex. The fact that Maggie had to live through it is unspeakable. Not only was she robbed of years of her sisters lives, but in the worst way possible too. “You two were close?” she asks, already guessing the answer by the way Maggie is clenching her hands as if in an attempt to hold herself together.

“As close as you can be with a toddler. I helped her get dressed every morning, and held the brush when she brushed her teeth. I taught her how.” A small smile, the first since she began telling her story, graces Maggie’s face. “My parents were busy with the baby so she was my responsibility. I’d never loved anyone that much. Not even my dad, and I used to think the sun shone out of his ass when I was a kid.”

“Maggie, I- I’m so sorry that happened to you.” She wants to say more, like that she admires the strength it took for Maggie to become the beautiful woman she is today, but she doesn’t want to overstep her boundaries, not when Maggie’s finally opened up to her.

“It was a long time ago,” she repeats, crossing her arms. She shrugs slightly, but her glistening eyes undermine her act. “What’s done is done.”

“That doesn't make it okay. That doesn’t mean it doesn’t matter anymore. Especially if it still hurts.”

A stray tear slips out of Maggie’s eye and she bites her lip, taking a shuddering breath. “And what makes you think that?”

Alex tentatively squeezes her hand, her grip increasing when she sees that Maggie doesn’t pull away, rather, she leans in a little.

“It’s been years since my dad passed away, and I still miss him everyday, and I know it's not the same at all but...when something hurts this badly, I don't think it ever really fades.”

“The funny thing is, I thought it had,” Maggie says. “I thought I was past all of that. Stronger. But
then he showed up and I was a kid again.”

She scoots closer to Alex, her knee touching her thigh. Her eyes are still wet, but the emotion behind them is different. She turns their hands over, her palm beneath Alex’s now, and intertwines their fingers, squeezing hard. Alex swears her heart stutters to a stop right then and there, her breath freezing in her chest as she looks down at their hands.

If this is how she dies, so be it.

“Thank you, Alex.” Maggie's voice jumpstarts Alex’s heart. She snaps her eyes up to Maggie’s face, breathless.

“For what?”

“For being here. For...trying to be there for me. I wish I’d let you. I’m glad you're still here now.”

“There’s no place I’d rather be.” Alex debates her next move for a millisecond before just diving in, Maggie’s move seconds ago emboldening her.

She disentangles their hands and brings her arms up to pull Maggie into a hug.

As Maggie sinks in Alex’s arms, in the warm comfort she offers, she’s hit by one errant thought. She hasn’t felt like this since Emily.

Chapter End Notes

Guess who's back?

We apologize for the very long wait, but we hope you enjoy this new chapter. We are still committed to finishing this story, but we're not sure how long that will take. We're both entering transitional phases of our lives, so please bear with us.

The story is moving along! Maggie finally dealt with her Oscar problem (for now) in perhaps an unconventional way that could come back to haunt her. Were you surprised that she contacted Franky? She also made up with Alex and voluntarily, which is important for someone like her, told her how she was ousted. Alex took a big step by officially coming out to someone, and she had her past brought up with this honor her dad could be receiving—more on that later.

To all the readers who have stuck with us during this long journey, thank you for your patience and understanding. As always, we'd love to hear your thoughts on this
chapter.

Thanks for reading and happy holidays!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!