it's all downhill from here

by fractiouscow

Summary

2018 Winter Olympics AU - Kara is a snowboarder with a bright future, Lena is a skier with a dark past, and present, and maybe future, though not if her Athlete's Village roommate has anything to say about it.

Notes

Chapter One was written in a day while sick on the couch. It is unbeta'd and I know f**k-all about the inner workings of the Olympic Games, the Athlete's Village, etc. Forgive...forgive...I mean no harm.
Chapter 1

Thursday, February 8, 2018

The check-in pavilion at the Athlete’s Village, PyeongChang, South Korea…

A bespectacled blonde woman wearing a penguin sweater, a red puffy coat, and flannel lined black jeans stands in line at the front desk, waiting for her turn with the afternoon’s final queue attendant.

Nervous and excited and frazzled from travel, she toys with her freshly minted athlete ID, replete with holograms and shielded RF chips and other sundry anti-counterfeit measures. She keeps glancing down at it and smiling at the sight of her photo, goofy grin and all, superimposed over the American flag. The phrase so fucking cool ricochets inside her brain like a happy little pinball.

She’s not alone; everywhere she looks, people from around the world are smiling like lunatics, chatting animatedly to each other and to their loved ones via mobile phone. Many are live streaming their first look at the Village to their social media accounts, or FaceTiming, or trying in their own ways to share the singular mania of Olympic anticipation.

For so many, this moment, milling around a crowded lobby strung with scores of international flags, is the cusp of a dream become reality, a culmination of lifelong dedication to sport. It’s a bit like they’ve all been accepted to Hogwarts, she reflects, so strong is the sense of anticipation and wonderment.

“Next,” the attendant calls, jarring her from geeky contemplation.

She steps forward, still has enough energy to bounce a little on her toes. “Hi! Good Morning! I’m Kara Danvers.”

The young woman at the credentials kiosk doesn’t look up from her computer terminal, just nods and asks, “Nationality?”

“America, USA. Or, umm, United States?” Kara laughs at herself when the girl glances up, frowning. “Sorry. I never know which one to say.”

“United States,” the girl replies. She types hurriedly, aims a laser scanning gun at Kara’s ID lanyard, and hands over a keycard and a sheaf of papers. “Athlete’s Village rules and regulations, Village map, venue maps, your practice and event schedules, and your rooming assignment. Twenty-fifth floor, Suite 259.”

Kara shoves the papers into her duffle and examines the black plastic keycard, emblazoned with five Olympic rings and the PyeongChang Games motto: Passion. Connected. She smiles at the young woman and says “Hanadoen yeoljeong!”

The girl gives her a half-smile in return, appreciative of the effort. “Close enough. Good luck, America USA.”

Kara beams and shoulders her bags. “Thanks!”
She crams into the elevator car with several other athletes, all freshly checked in, all lugging bags stuffed with competition suits and equipment. It’s a tight fit, but everyone is smiling and patient as Kara wedges herself into the last bit of available space.

“Sorry,” she says, squeezing her boot bag between her feet and hugging her snowboard sleeve and duffle to her chest.

As the car climbs, several passengers disembark and Kara shuffles to the rear so she can lean against the wall and shut her eyes for a moment. Exhausted from the trip, she’s already fantasizing about falling into bed and napping in her clothes.

“Long flight, Supergirl?” someone asks.

Irked, but unfailingly polite, Kara blinks herself aware and locks eyes with a vaguely handsome man, thirty-ish, scantily bearded and smirky. She can’t read the name on his ID, but she recognizes the flag of Liechtenstein, a renowned tax haven. Between that and his general air of lazy repose, she assumes he’s yet another wealthy playboy ski bum.

“Yeah. Multiple layovers.” She yawns so widely that her jaw cracks. Something about the guy’s relaxed manner and casual use of her nickname seems familiar, but his face is so generic that Kara can’t call up a name. “I’m sorry, have we met before?”

“Maybe. I meet a lot of girls,” he says with a shrug. “I just recognized your logo, is all.” He nods toward her equipment bag, covered with cartoon graphics of Kara copping big air while wearing a red cape. “It’s cute.”

He’s doing the whole ‘I’m too cool to be impressed’ thing, but Kara is too tired to play games. She sighs and shuts her eyes again. “Thanks for the feedback.”

The elevator stops and brownbeard steps out of the car, turns, smirks again. “Mickey Gand. I’m in 183, if you need help waxing your board or anything.”

Kara presses the button to close the lift doors in his face. “Okay thanks bye bye.”

The car jolts upward again and her lone fellow rider, a short and muscular guy with the tree trunk thighs of a speed skater, snickers.

“If you need help waxing your board…” he says, mimicking Gand and stroking an imaginary beard. “Wow. So sexy.”

Despite herself, Kara giggles. “I know, right?”

“And your little logo is cute, I guess, if you’re into things that are awesome…”

The funny guy - Winslow Schott, according to his ID lanyard - lifts his duffel and proudly displays the KD Supergirl logo embroidered on the side. Kara laughs in earnest and gives him a thumbs up. It’s becoming a more common thing, seeing boys and men using her branded gear, and it always makes her happy.

Dakine, her primary gear sponsor, crafted the iconic graphic from an image taken during her gold medal-winning Superpipe run in the 2016 X-Games. The photo captured Kara in the middle of a perfect cab 1080 double cork, her body rigidly horizontal, one arm straight ahead, fist closed. A commentator picked up on the visual reference and started shouting “Supergirl! Supergirl!!”
That spirited outburst paired with a fortuitous press conference afterward, where Kara staunchly defended a problematic teammate, Leslie “Livewire” Willis, who had recently failed a drug test.

“She doesn’t need drugs,” Kara had said. “When meth wants to get high, it smokes Leslie.”

The violation turned out to be a lab error. Kara got major props for defending the innocent, advocating fair play, and advising slow judgment rather than presumption of guilt. She and Leslie weren’t friends (still aren’t), but Kara chafes at the notion of any innocent person getting railroaded, bullied, slandered.

*Chafes* is perhaps too mild a word. She really fucking *hates* it.

Within six months, the “Supergirl” branding snowballed from t-shirts to gear to homologated pro tour equipment. Kara’s not rich, but if things keep going this well, it’s a distinct possibility.

“I have your new board on order at the ski shop back home in Vermont,” says Winnslow Schott. “The deck with the iridescent spectrum, looks like the Bifrost?”

Kara raises her brows. “You mean the sparkly rainbow one?”

Winn pulls a confused face. “Sparkly rainbow? Wait, so it’s not the Bifrost? It’s like…like a gay rainbow?”

Kara, who’s been out since high school and lovingly crafted the pride-themed board in question, replies: “Hella gay.”

Winn breathes a sigh of relief and delicately touches his chest. “Oh, thank god. I wouldn’t want to give people the wrong impression.”

Sucker and glad of it, Kara rolls her eyes and extends her hand for a chummy little ‘ya got me!’ fist bump. The car stops on the twenty-fifth floor and they both get out.

“I’m in 252, if you want to hang out sometime.” He flashes his ID. “Winn Schott, skater boy. But visualize it spelled like Avril’s song, okay?”

“With an 8 and an o-i?”

“Exactly.”

“Wow. Nerd.”

“Exactly,” he says, smiling warmly. “Really cool meeting you. If we don’t cross paths again, have a great games, Supergirl.”

Kara suspects she truly would enjoy crossing paths with this fella again. “Same to you. But if we’re gonna hang out, you’ve gotta call me Kara. I’m in 259. If you stop by, do a really gay knock so I know you’re not Mickey Gand.”

Winn looks surprised and delighted. He doffs his knit cap, bowing. “As you wish!”

Kara responds with a graceful curtsy and flounces off toward her suite, where it takes several swipes of the keycard to activate the lock… which feels slightly sticky, almost like someone spilled soda on it. She can’t tell if it’s faulty, or if she’s just so punchy that she can’t even manage a simple card swipe.
Either way, she wipes her hand on her jeans and tumbles into her suite room, which she’s relieved to find is empty, save for a pile of baggage heaped on one of the room’s two full-size beds.

She frowns. Her absent roommate has evidently called dibs on the bed by the window, a really nice eastern exposure that promises tons of early morning light, which would be perfect for her dawn yoga routine. Kara sheds her coat and drops her baggage, then takes a photo of the window with her roomie’s stuff strewn across the claimed bed. She checks the time - 4 pm, which makes it about 11 pm back home - and sends the pic to her sister. Alex responds within seconds.

Alex: Ha! Scooped! Beaten to the punch! For shame.
Kara: Four layovers! Not my fault! Why am I being punished??
Alex: Maybe she’ll trade beds. Ask nicely. Downhillers are mostly chill.
Kara: How can you tell her events? Her stuff isn’t even unpacked.

Alex sends back the pic Kara just sent, now with a circle drawn around a stray ski pole poking out of a partially zipped gear bag. Kara looks over at the item Alex deemed a clue, and sees the pole sports a curved hand guard, which slalom skiers use to knock aside gates as they hurtle down the slope. Leave it to her sister to pick up on such a small yet telling detail.

Kara: ur so fn smart
Alex: I’m a detective; I detect. Nuff about me — you’re at the MOTHERFUCKING OLYMPICS!!!! How are you not freaking out???? AHHHH!!!!
Kara: Who says I’m not? I’m totally freaking out!

She flings herself onto the bed and hollers into the pillow, then notices something wildly cool and sends another picture to her sister. The comforter atop the bed is covered in the PyeongChang Games logo, and it’s the most magical thing Kara has seen since her Britney Spears pillowcase from middle school.

Kara: Al omg!! Lookit my Olympic Games comforter!
Alex: OMG I love it pls steal it for me
Kara: I totally will. When are you getting here? I miss you!
Alex: I’ll be there in time for halfpipe qualifiers. Rest up and enjoy the opening ceremony. Send me lots of pics!
Kara: Tons, I promise
Alex:Love ya, sis!
Kara: Love to Maggie!

Alex: Love to your roomie! Hope she’s hot!

Kara: Hope she’s not! (ur an asshole)

Alex sends a line of kiss emojis and Kara feels warm, feels like she’s actually sharing this moment with her sister, who suffered through years of practices and injuries and travel right alongside Kara. Alex should be here, as an Olympian and not merely a spectator, and probably would be… if not for Kara, the adopted sibling who stole her thunder.

While Alex was a natural athlete who swam like a fish, ran like a greyhound, and carved through snow like a hot blade, her abilities were overshadowed by Kara’s almost superhuman facility for snowboarding. After Jeremiah Danvers died suddenly during Kara’s senior year of high school, family finances tightened up and Alex quit all of her sporting pursuits to focus on graduating college early and getting into the forensics unit of the Denver Police Department.

Between Alex and Eliza, the Danvers women scraped together enough money to keep Kara outfitted in top-notch gear, fly her to competitions, and cover the various costs of training. It’s because of them that Kara was able to stick with her sport until that X-Games breakthrough, where she made a name for herself and the sponsorship dollars finally started rolling in.

By the end of 2017, Kara’s prize money had paid off Eliza’s house, and her endorsements paid off Alex’s student loans, still leaving Kara enough to live comfortably. Her agent is already talking with Oculus and HTC about a VR snowboarding game, (which, Kara can’t even imagine how it would work, but whatever) and he says that if Kara makes a good showing here at the games, Red Bull will come calling.

There’s a lot riding on her performance here, and she thinks that’s the case for almost every athlete in the games. For some, a medal could dramatically improve their family’s standard of living. For some, a medal will catapult them into stardom. For some, a medal will be a mere shiny trinket to set on the mantel and show their grandkids someday.

Not all Olympians have the option to earn a good living at their sport. Kara knows she is one of the lucky ones, and she doesn’t plan to squander this opportunity. She rolls onto her side and runs her fingers over the games logo, touches each of the five rings and murmurs the Olympic motto, the hendiatris.


“I don’t think that’s what it means, but okay,” says a voice, weak and muffled, from across the room.

Kara whips upright, heart racing. She never heard the door open. The door didn’t open. Which means her roommate - if that’s who the voice belongs to - has been in the suite with her all along.

“Hello?” she hesitantly calls out. “Where are you?”

The voice takes a few seconds to respond. “Umm…on the floor, I think.”

Kara clutches her phone tight and creeps around the end of the other bed. Sure enough, there’s a woman lying facedown on the carpet.
The unidentified prone female is already dressed in her Team USA-issued Ralph Lauren gear (which Kara has yet to unpack), including suede mountaineering boots with red laces, slim cut jeans, a leather belt, and a patriotic knit sweater. The red-white-and-blue parka (with a built-in heater!) is under her tummy, perhaps as an ersatz pillow.

“Are you okay?” Kara asks, keeping her voice low. She suspects this woman has a hangover. Some people are afraid to fly and they drink a lot on planes. That paired with international flight can result in wicked disorientation and painful jet lag. Kara’s seen it happen and it can get pretty gnarly until they sober up and their bodies adjust.

The woman grumbles something that sounds like foreign cursing, and rolls onto her right side. Her long black hair is gathered up in a punishingly tight ponytail, giving Kara a clear look at her left profile: high cheekbones, strong brows, sterling jawline, jade eyes.

She’s also got a body like an 80s music video goddess, all hazardous curves and coiled muscle. That much is obvious at a glance, even with the Polo camouflage, and Kara is unaccountably mad at her sister.

Well, she’s hot. Goddamn it, Alex.

“Hand up, pal?” the woman croaks, and lifts her arm slightly.

Kara leans down, gets a firm grip on her forearm and helps the woman to her feet. She readies her best smile, because first impressions matter, but ends up gasping and blanching when she sees the woman’s face, the right side of which is streaked with dried blood.

“Sweet Christmas! What happened to you?”

The woman follows Kara’s eye line and raises a hand to her scalp, seemingly unsurprised when her fingers contact a fresh, wet wound.

“Oh, this, sorry,” she says, waving off Kara’s concern, utterly nonchalant. “It’s nothing. Some idiot bashed me in the stairwell.”

“On purpose?” Kara can’t conceal her dismay. Physical violence is not really a part of her world, and seeing evidence of it in person is unsettling. “Like, they assaulted you?”

She regards Kara with bemused patience, as if she fears she might be slow. “A man rushed down the stairs toward me, smashed a wrench against my skull, and fled. It is my interpretation of events that, yes, I was assaulted. On purpose.”

Kara is stunned silent, mouth open, watching on mute as the woman rounds the bed and heads into the ensuite. How someone could remain not only sanguine but fiercely lucid after taking a whack to the dome, she cannot fathom.

She hears the sink run for a few seconds, then the shower turns on, and Kara finally jolts into motion. Getting in the shower is probably not safe for someone with a head injury.

“Hey, you need a doctor. And some cops. So…I’m gonna call for a doctor and some cops, okay?” she rambles, hovering at the ensuite doorway.

The woman is seated on the toilet. She’s already cleaned most of the dried blood from her face, unlaced her boots, toed them off, and shimmied out of those slim-cut jeans. Now, she’s trying to shuck her sweater without brushing the collar against her bloody scalp.
“Help me with this, would you?” she says. “I don’t think there’s time to get it dry cleaned before the Parade of Nations tomorrow night.”

Kara just blinks at first, certain the woman is in shock. But then she waves her semi-trapped arms, sweater sleeves flopping impotently, pokes out her lips and pouts so fetchingly that Kara, weak fool that she is, can’t not help her.

Carefully, they inch the sweater over her head without staining it, and Kara pulls it the rest of the way off, leaving the woman in a sleeveless black tee and pink cheeky briefs festooned with penguins.

“We match,” Kara says, as she neatly rolls the sweater KonMari style.

The woman’s ample brows furrow. “Sorry?”

Kara points at her own black and white sweater, then the woman’s cute undies. “Penguins.”

It takes a moment or two of glancing back and forth, but then she smiles and its nothing short of dazzling. She laughs once - just once, a baby hiccup of a laugh - before her smile crumples and the tears start to roll.

“Hey. No. Hey, you’re okay,” Kara says, immediately opening her arms and easing them together in a gentle, comforting embrace. “You’re okay. We’re gonna get you a doctor and call the police and we’ll catch whoever did this. You’re going to be safe and well and totally good in no time flat. I promise. I promise.”

Her arms, curled around Kara’s waist, tighten briefly. Then she lets go and steps back, leans against the sink, whispers a small word of thanks, her voice swamped by the warm susurrations of the shower. She looks embarrassed, as if she wolfed down her designated ration of comfort and is still starving. Kara’s instinct is to reach for her again.

But they’re essentially strangers. And this is a very weird, potentially volatile situation. Kara takes a step back, to give her space.

“No,” she says. “You’re very sweet, but no. No doctors, no police.”

“Are you sure? Whoever hurt you is still out there,” Kara protests. “What if they attack someone else?”

“It’s not like that. He was after me, specifically,” she says, sniffing and wiping at her eyes. “Another of Lex’s crackpot acolytes, trying to honor his memory by killing his apostate sister.”

*Oh. Oh, shit.*

Realization crashes over Kara with all the subtlety of an Ice Bucket Challenge. The wounded woman who was just crying in her arms is Lena Luthor, sister of Lex Luthor.

Lex Luthor, the billionaire scion, founder of the Singularity cult, multiple murderer, terrorist, and self-styled martyr. Convicted largely on testimony from his younger sister, Lena. Condemned and executed three years ago. Reviled by those he victimized, revered by those who believe he found a path to eternal life through technology.
Kara stiffens, and it’s perceptible. Lena casts her eyes down, takes a shaky breath.

“You didn’t know,” she says. “That I’m…me.”

“No. No? No, it’s just that you don’t look…” Kara fumbles and shrugs. “In all the news footage from the trial, you had your hair down and wore those big weird glasses. And in competition-”

“Goggles. Big weird goggles,” Lena says, nodding. “Okay, feasible glitch in your facial recognition software. But didn’t they give you an info packet downstairs? Roommate’s name is the first thing listed.”

“I didn’t read it.” Kara shrugs, again, and winces. “I’m sorry.”

“God. You poor thing. Look what you’ve stumbled into.” She makes a tut-tut sound and shakes her head. “Well. Not to worry. It’s early going, so you can still get reassigned to another suite. I’m sure they can find you a roomie with less drama.”

Kara opens her mouth to apologize again, but Lena just chuckles and flicks her fingers, as if it’s no big deal.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me, I really need a long, hot shower and a deep, restorative nap. Weed and red wine would be better, but a girl makes do.”

Kara has been politely dismissed, and relieved of the guaranteed massive distraction of rooming with a notorious personage. If she gathers her things, marches downstairs and asks for a different room, she could be unpacked, fed and asleep within a couple of hours.

Yet Kara finds herself reluctant to go, and so she sits down on the edge of her bed and gives the whole mess a bit of a think.

She feels certain that if she leaves - when she leaves, she has to leave - Lena Luthor will be all alone. Which, truth be told, would be nothing new.

Lena was alone during the trial, which had to be the most traumatic period of her life. Kara remembers that Lex’s little sister, the Fed’s star witness, walked into the courthouse everyday unaccompanied by family or friends, escorted only by two U.S. Marshals who apparently did a shit job of protecting her.

During the trial, Lena Luthor survived three attempts on her life.

Over her eight days of testimony, Lena showed up first with bruises visible on her throat and jaw, then with a cast on her left hand, and finally - on the last day of the trial - with a blood-speckled bandage on her forehead and a gauze-wrapped upper arm.

Some speculated that the Luthor heiress highlighted her injuries to garner public sympathy. Others suggested she chose not to cover them with makeup or clothing as a show of defiance toward Lex and his followers.

Either way, her resilience earned the grudging respect of her fellow athletes on the FIS Alpine Ski Tour, as well as a discerning sector of the general public. People started hash tagging Lena Luthor’s social media mentions with the letters HTK, meaning Hard To Kill.
Still applies, Kara thinks.

As far as Kara knows, Lena granted only one interview after the trial, and that resulted in a sometimes combative, sometimes revelatory 10,000 word tour-de-force written by media maven Cat Grant. In a nifty show of journalistic craftiness, Grant managed to wheedle more information out of Lena Luthor than most folks ever wanted to know, thereby slaking the world’s thirst for her blood, her secrets, her tears.

Kara had read that article several times. It almost made her want to study writing, just so she could augment her painting hobby with artful words. She loves to paint and draw people, to encode her impressions via pencil and brush, imbuing each portrait of Alex or Eliza or Jeremiah, or their beloved Malamute, Krypto, with vibrant love.

Cat Grant’s article made Kara want to explore the nuances of stories people often overlook, those behaviors and choices that lead us toward darkness, or into the light. Grant made it clear that Lena Luthor had deliberately chosen her path, knowing full and well the terrible consequences she could suffer.

Two months after publication, Lex Luthor was executed with only his mother, Lillian, in attendance. By then, Lena had fled to the remote Lauberhorn in Switzerland to resume her World Cup training. Public appetite for Luthor gossip died down, and Kara assumed that people had moved on, were trying to heal and forgive, if not forget.

Apparently she was wrong. People still bear ill will toward the Luthor name, or toward Lena for delivering Lex to his just end. Someone out there is still angry enough to invade the safe zone of Olympic games, seeking vengeance. They rushed an unsuspecting young woman and tried to crack open her skull.


She sits quietly, stewing in the injustice of it all, for an undetermined stretch of time. Eventually, the ensuite’s pocket door slides open and Lena emerges, wrapped in a towel.

She pauses, clearly surprised to find Kara still here, then turns away and starts unpacking clothes from a battered leather Hermes travel case.

“Are they arranging a new suite for you?” she asks.

Kara looks up and, unbidden, her eyes light on a rough band of scar tissue around Lena’s right bicep. It looks like a burn of some sort, and matches the location of one of the wounds she allegedly suffered during Lex’s trial.

Heat creeps up the back of Kara’s neck. She’s angry. Though she has virtually no right to be, she is. Angry that someone hurt Lena over things someone else did. Angry that people still want to hurt her.
“It’s not fair,” she mutters.

Without dislodging her towel, Lena slips on pair of fleece pants and a fresh black t-shirt. She turns and faces Kara. “Sorry, did you say something?”

“There’s no more rooms,” Kara says. “Though I’ve got an open offer to bunk with Mickey Gand.”

Lena’s green eyes widen. Her jaw flexes, then she essays a strained smile. “God, what a choice. Me or gonorrhea.”

Kara groans. “Hard pass. Guess you’re stuck with me.”

Lena merely nods. If she suspects Kara is lying, she’s apparently not going to say so. “Thank you, for earlier. You really are very sweet.”

“I didn’t really do anything,” Kara insists.

“Which is exactly what I asked you to do,” Lena points out. She sits on her bed, across from Kara, and regards her with a calm sincerity.

“My goal here is to qualify in four events, and I don’t even care if I win. I just want to compete. Skiing is maybe the only thing in my life that still makes me feel normal. On the course, I’m no one’s sister, no one’s daughter, no one’s betrayer… I’m just another suicidal dolt hurtling downhill, trying to beat the clock. It’s simple.”

“Pure,” Kara adds, nodding, understanding.

Lena smiles. “As the driven snow.” She claps her hands against her thighs, signaling that their sensitive chat is over. “So. You’re my roommate.”

“I am,” Kara confirms, without elaboration.

“Huh. Never had a roommate before.” Lena’s face scrunches in amusement. “I’m not sure what the protocols are.”

Kara realizes it’s not so strange that she didn’t recognize Lena. Her face in person is so animated, so expressive, that it bears little resemblance to the stoic mask she wore during the trial. Kara thinks it might be fun to put that face through its paces, to see how many times she can make it laugh or smile or squish into silliness.

“I don’t think there are protocols, per se. How ‘bout we make it up as we go along?” Kara suggests.

Lena seems to like this idea. Her eyes are practically twinkling. “So if, for instance, I asked you to help me glue my scalp back together in exchange for unlimited pizza tonight at the dining hall…”

Now Kara’s eyes are practically twinkling. “Not a soul could stop us.”

“Fantastic!” Lena bounds off the bed. “I’ll get the glue!”

TBC
Chapter Two

Within ten minutes, they’ve turned the ensuite into a makeshift treatment room. Lena settles on a chair in front of the sink, with Kara standing behind her, and cautiously shifts her hair to expose the cut.

“No bleeding,” she notes. “Always did get top marks for clotting.”

“The queen of hemostasis,” Kara quips.

Their eyes meet in the mirror, and Lena sticks out her tongue. “Not as sexy as flight, I know, but it’s a useful superpower.”

Kara pinks lightly at the reference to her nickname, which indicates that Lena (unlike Kara) didn’t walk into her rooming situation totally uninformed.

“I googled you this morning, just after check-in,” Lena says, seeming to relish Kara’s embarrassment. “Do you think they were having a laugh? Forcing the heroine and the villain to share a suite?”

She tamps down her impulse to say that she’s no heroine, any more than Lena is a villain. But Lena is obviously joking, trying to keep things light, so Kara rolls with it.

“Maybe we’re on Big Brother: PyeongChang.” She leans over Lena’s shoulder and taps the vanity mirror. “There’s probably hidden cameras everywhere. Bunch of sweaty voyeurs watching our every move, praying that we start fighting.”

“Or making out,” Lena suggests, smirking. “Olympic viewership has been declining of late. We’d be ratings gold.”

In the safe remove of the mirror, their eyes meet again, and hold. Lena shrugs a shoulder, bites her lower lip, and says nothing more. Kara goes blank for a beat, then coughs out a short and nervous laugh. Knowing she’s being teased, she shakes her head and wags a reprimanding finger.

“Save it for sweeps, Luthor,” Kara says, drawing a toothy smile from Lena. “Let’s get you patched up, okay?”

“Yes, please.”

The cut on Lena’s scalp is mercifully shallow and only about four centimeters long. With literally no fuss or whining, she squishes the edges of the wound together and signals Kara to paint on the first
layer of skin glue. Kara does this with a touch so deft and steady that she surprises herself.

“I think I have a future in art restoration,” she says. “Or upholstery repair.”

Lena hums softly. “So am I a damaged masterwork or a ripped ottoman?”

Kara leans down and blows cool air across the wound, thinking to hasten the drying process. She glances at Lena’s reflection, sees her eyelids flutter closed, and takes the opportunity to study her face at rest.

Lena Luthor must be almost twenty-six by now, and while her pale skin still holds a dewy youthfulness, stressful years have etched lines between her brows and around her eyes and mouth. Her cheeks and nose, bare of makeup, are embedded with a faint rosiness. Kara recalls that Lena began skiing at age five, just after the Luthors formally adopted her, so that’s two decades of well-earned windburn.

More recent additions are the two small and deep scars that pit her forehead above her right brow. A third is visible just at her temple. They’re barely noticeable, except up close in this harsh light.

Kara wonders what caused them. Glass? Gravel? Shotgun pellets? Alex might be able to calmly guess, but Kara feels herself getting upset imagining how it happened. Lena has never discussed the details of the assaults or her injuries publicly, and that means it’s no one’s business.

Scarred or not, she’s lovelier than any art model Kara has ever seen. She wonders if she has the skill to accurately replicate Lena’s face, to render her shadows in a truthful light. She knows Alex packed her sketchbook and pencils, so maybe (if things keep going well) she’ll have the chance to try.

“Your face is a textbook example of bilateral symmetry,” Kara finally answers. “Your features are bold, but wholly proportional, and your coloring reminds me of Rossetti. So…definitely not an ottoman.”

Lena’s expression turns quizzical, then relaxes into amusement. “Sorry. I forgot that you’re actually an artist. Was that your major?”

“Yeah.” Kara wets the applicator and brushes on the second coat of skin glue. “I’ve always liked painting and drawing, but just my family and our dogs and stuff,” she demurs. “Not sure that makes me an artist.”

“Well, I think it does. If you can take an experience or concept and transmute its values into imagery, music, words, food or whatever - you’re an artist,” Lena pronounces. “I’m envious. I can’t draw, or cook, or play an instrument. Also, I’ve been told I’m profoundly tone deaf and should never sing in public unless the room needs clearing.”

Kara pulls a frown. “That’s just mean. I think whoever said that was a pent-up, miserable person who probably needed a good screw.”

The laugh Lena lets out is so abrupt that it’s half-snort, half-giggle. She leans forward and braces her elbows on the sink, shaking in mostly silent shortcites for several seconds. When she looks up, there are tears in her eyes and her smile is cranked up to 11.

“I’d pay real money to hear you tell Lillian that,” Lena says. “God, just to see the look on her
Kara is brought up short by the name Lena used. “Your own mother said that to you?”

Lena nods. “In the Luthor home, that qualified as constructive criticism.” She checks the glue with a fingertip, deems it dry enough, and arranges her hair to hide the wound. “Perfect. Thanks very much.”

She stands and turns around, eyes bright, looking so grateful for basic compassionate care that Kara’s urge to hug is burbling up again. Instead, she sets the glue on the sink and jams her hands into her pockets.

“I didn’t really do anything,” she says, glancing down and shaking her head. Her glasses slip down her nose, and Lena quickly reaches up to ease them back into place.

“You keep saying that, and yet you keep doing exactly what I need. Just let me be grateful?” Lena asks. “Just say ‘you’re welcome’ and let me spoil you with pizza and beer.”

Kara folds her lips into her mouth, rocks back on her heels. “Okay. In the interest of peace and pizza…you’re welcome.”

“There! Wasn’t so hard, was it?” Lena claps her hands onto Kara’s upper arms, intending perhaps nothing more than a friendly pat, but her hands linger and probe lightly at the delineation of deltoid and biceps. “Good heavens. What’s going on, here? Wow.”

Kara squirms away from her, laughing and blushing hotly as Lena walks out looking smug. She looks at the mirror and speaks to the imaginary reality show camera that just might be hidden on the other side.

“If this goes badly, I’m coming for you, Julie Chen.”

Dressed in their Ralph Lauren red, white & blue finery, they head out just before six on a quest for pizza. In the hallway, Lena chats excitedly about the elaborate new sporting venues constructed by the host nation, and Kara can’t help but feel caught off-foot again. Half the things Lena references are literally new information.

“Thirteen billion dollars?” Kara repeats, more than once. “They spent that much to import a bunch of freezer-burned jocks to play games and get swanky jewelry?”

“Mmm-hmm. About one-point five of that went to build the Alpensia Ski Center, where I shall vanquish my competition and secure mad bling.”

Kara rolls her eyes. “I just met you and I already know you’re not cool enough to say ‘mad bling.’”

“Point of order,” Lena calls out, “mad bling has long been stricken from the lexicon of cool euphemisms, therefore any goober is free to say it without fear of recrimination.”

“Right. ‘Kay, goober.” Kara says, and bumps their shoulders together. Lena just smiles and looks at their snazzy matching footwear.

“I love my new boots,” she says. “But I’m not wearing the cowboy gloves.”
“Oh, come on! They’re fun!”

Kara reaches into her parka pocket and removes the gloves in question - oversized brown suede jobbies with a fringe and beads, the stars-and-stripes, and the Olympic rings. Secretly, she thinks they’re a bit much, but Lena had such a visceral reaction to them that Kara can’t resist taunting her.

“The design evokes Lauren’s classic western ethos!”

“The design evokes Liberace at a dude ranch.”

Kara laughs out loud, from the belly, laughs and slaps at Lena with a tacky fringed glove, and gives up. She likes this girl, this woman, this flippant, flirty, clever, hazardous creature. Kara feels bubbled-up, nervous and exhilarated in a way she hasn’t known since those good early days with Lucy.

Lucy Lane, who she met and charmed (or was charmed by, whatever) and bedded within thirty-six hours. A poor precedent, perhaps, seeing how badly things ended, but enduring proof that when Kara is fully smitten, she needs a chaperone.

Alex won’t be here until Monday morning, so Kara needs to recruit a pinch-hitter, and fast. She asks Lena to wait a moment by the elevator and sprints back down the hall, knocks on the door to Suite 252.

Winn Schott answers the door, fully dressed in his Lauren gear - including the gloves.

“Hey! Twinsies!” he shouts, gesturing at their matching duds. “Guess the novelty of that’s gonna wear off quick, huh? Since everybody on Team USA is wearing -”

“Come get dinner with us!” Kara interjects. “We’re heading down to the cafeteria, then maybe out to see some of the venues. It’ll be fun.”

Winn breaks into a broad smile. “You’re asking me to hang out with you. This is happening? This is happening!”

“This is happening,” Kara confirms, bolstered by his enthusiasm. “Let’s do this, skaterboy with an 8 and an o-i!”

“Let’s do this!” Winn almost yells, slamming his suite door and earning a shouted reprimand from his roommate. “Sorry, James!” He calls back, then leans in close to Kara as they walk and talk.

“That was James. James is my suite mate. James is James Olsen, and he’s like this huge, muscular, beautiful man. He’s on the hockey team, but he’s an alternate like me and somehow we wound up rooming together. It’s been very awkward in there, like he’s marooned on the Island of Misfit Toys or something.”

Newly able to relate to roommate awkwardness, Kara slings an arm across Winn’s shoulders, gives him a squeeze to calm him down. “You’re not a misfit toy. You’re a handsome little devil with killer legs and a lantern jaw. And you’re spending the evening with two of most awesome chicks in this thirteen billion dollar joint. Hockey Jim can watch porn on his phone and jerk it.”

Winn perks up almost instantly. “You think that’s what he’s doing? Like, right now?”

Kara shrugs. “Isn’t that what all guys do the instant they’re alone in a hotel room?”

Winn shrugs in return. “Fair cop.”
When they reach the elevator, Lena has already caught a car and is holding the doors open for them. At first sight, Winn freezes in place and points at her, gaping.

“You’re Lena Luthor,” he announces. Then he turns to Kara and whispers confidentially. “That’s Lena Luthor.”

Kara nods patiently. “We’re roommates. I know who she is.”

“Told you a hot minute, though,” Lena mutters.

“You, be nice,” Kara tells her. “Winn is obviously quick on the uptake.”

He stumbles into the elevator, still staring dumbly at Lena. “I’m at the Olympics, about to have pizza with Supergirl and Lena Luthor. What even is my life.”

Lena glances from him to Kara and nods. “Rocket scientist.”

“Systems engineer,” Winn corrects. “I work for Hydronet in Burlington. So, technically, since you own the majority share of Luthor Corp and we’re a subsidiary... you’re my boss? Right?”

For once, Lena is at a loss for words. Kara watches her face rotate through a series of expressions, until she finally settles on something that conveys ‘impressed and aloof.’

“I suppose so,” she replies, voice neutral, eyes focused on nothing in particular.

Kara can’t stand not knowing about this unexpected connection between her new friends, and she guesses that Lena will be less forthcoming, so she taps Winn’s arm to get his attention. “What’s Hydronet?”

“Oh, only the coolest, most karmically positive place I’ve ever worked,” Winn raves. “We make a line of AWGs, or atmospheric water generators. They extract water from ambient air via pressurization and render it potable, totally safe to drink. We’re shipping the first thousand units to aid stations in the Middle East and Africa in the spring. It’s pretty fucking cool, if I do say so myself.”

“Uh-huh,” Kara says, nodding. “And how long has Hydronet been in business?”

“I don’t see where that’s relevant- ” Lena begins.

“Almost two years,” Winn answers.

Kara runs through the series of extraordinary events that must have led to this moment: after his arrest, Lex’s assets were seized by the government and put into receivership; then the execution; then the receiver gives Lena her brother’s shares of Luthor Corp; then majority owner Lena starts making magical water machines to help people in crisis.

She can’t help herself. Kara smiles, then snickers, then laughs. She stares at Lena until the woman finally looks up and meets her eyes. “Villain, my ass,” she says.

Lena lifts one shoulder in a half-shrug. She looks down, aside, then back at Kara. “Bit soon to say, isn’t it?”

Kara shakes her head, throws up her hands. “Fuck it. I like a good snap judgment.”

“Me, too,” says Winn, gamely chipping in despite a lack of context. “Keeps life interesting.”
Lena takes a deep breath and sighs, apparently resigned to the way the narrative just leaped ahead at random. She eyes Kara, gives her a cautious smile, then turns to Winn all steely and stern.

“Take off those gloves or you can’t sit with us,” she states.

In a flash, Winn shakes the gloves off and shoves them into his parka pockets.

Kara shoots her a ‘why are you picking on him?’ look. “She’s kidding, Winn.”

“The fuck I am,” says Lena, arms crossed.

Just to be an asshole, Kara takes out her own gloves and puts them on. “C’mon, Luthor! They’re fun! And they’re super warm!”

“They are super warm,” says Winn, sneaking his gloves back on behind his back.

“No,” Lena insists. “This is the hill I will die on.”

The elevator dings and the doors open onto the lobby, and the three drift out into the crowded courtyard, following Kara’s finely calibrated sense of smell (and Winn’s map) in the general direction of food.

About five minutes into the ten minute trek to the cafeteria, Lena puts the gloves on. Kara snaps a photo on her phone of Winn and Lena chatting over the map. She thinks it might be important later, as evidence that common sense trumps fashion sense. She then snaps a photo of Lena smiling and shooting her the double bird.

By the time they hit the cafeteria, Kara’s phone vibrates and she sees that there’s a new text from Alex. It’s a quarter past one in National City, which means Alex is probably up waiting for Maggie to get home…which means Alex probably got an alert that Kara had added new photos to their shared cloud… which means…

Alex: Kara, you monumental dumbass!! What are you doing palling around with LENA GDMF LUTHOR?!

_Huh, she thinks. Apparently everyone else’s facial recognition software is working just fine._

TBC
I can’t even explain myself at this point. This story is just falling out of my brain like confetti. Don’t wanna jinx myself but at this rate the story could be done before the damn Olympics even get started. WTF, cow?

Kara doesn’t have much time to worry over Alex’s angry text because the cafeteria is absolutely busting with noise and color and large adult people (mainly dudes, natch) running about like unleashed toddlers at a shopping mall.

She pauses by the entrance and dumps a stream of nonsense emojis from her ‘frequently used’ stack - mostly smileys and food - in a reply to her rude sister. Then she powers off her phone, which is hovering around 8 percent battery, and belays the reckoning until later.

“Pizza!” Winn shouts, pointing across the room at a familiar red and white logo. He gives Lena a quick thumbs up and scampers away, dancing through the crowd with surprising grace.

“Did he just ditch us?” Kara inquires.

“We have a game plan,” Lena says, as her eyes suddenly go wide and she grabs Kara’s arm. They stumble sideways, just barely dodging a stampede of scowling Irish lads giving chase to a single laughing Scotsman bearing what is likely a purloined bottle of whiskey. “Plan is moot if we get trampled. Let’s go.”

They make their way to the juice bar, which is mercifully quieter than the cafeteria at-large. Lena orders three large citrus smoothies and pays by waving her empty hand over a credit card terminal at the checkout. Kara is curious about the transaction, but the smoothies arrive fast and they smell nice, like oranges and lemons and candied ginger, so she gets distracted.

She gets even more distracted when Lena asks her to hold the drinks while she discreetly spikes each with a mini bottle of Grey Goose. Kara’s eyes bulge. She titters.

Even though they’re legal adults standing literally thirty feet from a beer vendor, the notion of sneaking booze still gives Kara a naughty thrill, just like the first time she and Alex sneakied Jack Daniels from Jeremiah’s liquor cabinet. The lightweight teens got so plastered and laughed so hard, they almost slid off the roof.

It happened more than once. Tenth grade was terrific.
“I like you so much. Why do you think that is?” Kara asks.

Lena responds with a slow, caramelized grin. “Because you’re easy.”

Kara broadly pantomimes ‘offense’ by gasping and clutching at her chest, then admits that yeah, it’s probably true. Lena smiles and smiles as they walk along, stirring their drinks. She watches with obvious apprehension as Kara takes her first sip…which turns out to be really delicious.

“Oh, this is the bomb-dot-com,” Kara declares, then quickly raises a finger to cut off any smarty-pants response. “Yes, I know bomb-dot-com isn’t cool. But I’m not cool, which means - by your own logic - that I can say it all I want.”

When she stops defending herself and actually bothers to look over at Lena, she finds the woman calmly watching her. Not smiling, not pensive. Relaxed face. Blinking slowly. Nodding, as if to herself. Lena licks her lips, lowers her eyes. Catches her straw between her teeth and nibbles, gently.

It occurs to Kara that maybe she’s not the only one who’s easy. It occurs to her that, if they ran, they could be back in their suite in about seven minutes. Under the covers in less than ten.

“Pizza,” Lena says, seemingly apropos of nothing.

“Mmm-hmm. That’s good, too,” Kara responds, as if she’s being asked to rank her favorite things.

Lena stops walking, rolls out that molasses smile again, and points ahead to where Winn waits with their dinner. “Pizza,” she repeats. “Hope you brought your appetite, Supergirl.”

God help me, thinks Kara. Also, hooray and hot damn! But mainly, god help me…

Winn scored a short table near the back of the dining hall, safely out of the traffic patterns and horseplay zones. Kara, heartened by his choice, reflects that her friend-making instincts are pretty damn great. Further proof comes when she notes that he has filled their three trays with six different kinds of pizza.

“Schott for the win!” Kara crows, giving him a fist bump and tucking right into the pan-crust pepperoni and black olive.

Lena takes the chair to her left and studies her options before selecting a slice of cheese and tomato, which she folds and devours with aplomb. They chat a little as they eat, discussing schedules and events, venues they’d like to visit, competitions they want to see as spectators, just to root on their fellow Team USA members.

As Kara and Winn geek out over souvenirs they want to collect for loved ones back home, Lena quietly studies her half-empty tray. Kara notices and thinks to change the subject.

“Back at the smoothie stand - how did you pay?” she wonders. “Because it looked like you pulled a Jedi mind trick on the cash register.”

Lena brightens a bit and gives a silent thumbs-up, drawing Kara’s attention to her thumb ring. On
closer inspection, it’s a braided black silicone band webbed with fine green inlay.

“New wearable tech for tokenized NFC transactions,” Lena explains. “Encrypted, waterproof, and no battery required. Charges are trackable via smartphone app, which can also deactivate the ring if it’s lost or stolen.”

“Witchcraft,” Kara hisses with narrowed eyes.

Lena giggles sweetly. “Shut-up. You want one.”

“Of course I want one,” Kara grudgingly admits. It’s a scandal in her family and among her teammates, the number of times she’s been caught out with no cash or plastic and a dead phone. This gadget might be a great safety net for the absent-minded Supergirl on-the-go. “Where can I buy it?”

“Nowhere. But…” Lena fishes around in her coat pockets and produces a tiny plastic box. From the box she draws another braided ring, this one webbed in shiny blue. She takes Kara’s left hand, bats her lashes, and says, “May I?”

*God help me. She may be legit evil.*

“This is so sudden!” Kara gamely coos, fanning away a fit of the vapors before extending her thumb. “But…yes. Yes! A million times, yes!”

Lena’s smile is all teeth and squinty eyes as she rolls the rubbery ring onto Kara’s finger. Winn eeps with delight and reaches for Kara’s hand, then displays his own thumb - which bears a similar ring, only wider and with red filaments - next to hers.

“We’re sister-wives!” he proclaims.

“You’re beta testers,” Lena corrects. “This is a trial run, so I need a broad and varied data set to give R&D. Your job is to use the ring for any purchases in shops, restaurants, or anywhere that has a near field communication terminal.”

“So how does the magic happen?” Kara raises her hand, makes a few stock comedy gestures (karate chop, hang ten, live long and prosper) “Does it matter how we do the thing at the thingy?”

“I did this one when I got the pizza.” Winn points his thumb down slowly, like an emperor condemning an unlucky gladiator. “The cashier was not entertained. She told me to go have sex with myself.”

“Don’t overthink it,” Lena advises. “Just spread your fingers about a quarter inch apart and wave your palm across the NFC terminal. Optimal read time is .04 seconds, but a smidge longer is fine, too.”

She demonstrates by passing her hand at moderate speed over a half-eaten slice of veggie delight. Winn and Kara replicate the gesture as ineptly as possible; too fast, too slow, with their thumbs tucked into their fists.

“I maybe can’t make do this thing,” Kara grunts.

“It hard,” Winn grumbles.
“Fuck you both,” Lena says, and crosses her arms.

They giggle like idiots and Kara leans against her, dropping her head onto Lena’s shoulder and choking out apologies, until she thaws with a sigh and a put-upon grimace.

“So how do I attach this to my Visa card?” Kara inquires, while drying giggle tears from her cheeks.

Lena waves her off. “It’s all expensed to the company as part of the R&D process.”

Winn’s eyes flutter in confusion. “So everything I pay for with this is…free?”

“Basically. I mean, don’t go charge a Lamborghini on it or anything,” Lena says. “But meals, clothes, massages, gift shop crap for the family - go nuts.”

Kara wonders if this is too good to be true. She wonders if Luthor Corp will use their purchase data to formulate some kind of targeted algorithm capable of manipulating their shopping habits. She wonders if there’s a Terms and Conditions document they should ask to read, as if she’s ever read one of those in her life. Click ‘agree’ and get on with it, that's her motto.

Then she wonders if this is a Luthor Corp project at all. Maybe it’s just Lena being generous, being nice to her new friends…so that they’ll be nice in return. Then she wishes she hadn’t thought such a terrible thought, because the very idea of someone this sweet being forced to buy friendship makes Kara want to scream bloody murder.

“Will you show me how to use the app? In case I lose my ring?” Kara asks, thinking she’ll disable hers, or link it to her own Visa, or some third thing that doesn’t involve mooching off Lena. “Not saying it will happen, but I once lost three pairs of glasses within a school year. So it’s probably gonna happen.”

Lena looks relieved. And, sadly, grateful. “Of course. Tonight, if you like.”

Winn bounces in his seat and gives Kara a sappy smile. “Supergirl is my sister-wife!”

The Luthor’s face turns stormy in warning. “If you say Lena Luthor is my sugar daddy-”

“Lena Luthor is my sugar daddy!” he shouts, shamelessly, and launches across the table to hug her tight. “Thank you, heavenly father!”

Kara is too busy losing her shit to intervene, but she figures a lovey-dovey ambush from an effusively affectionate gay speed skater is the least Lena deserves.

They agree that they’re all too tired to visit any venues tonight, but the walk back to their building is a lively, noisy, half-hour dawdle. Turns out Winn Schott on 50 ml of quality vodka loves 80s music almost as much as Kara Danvers on 50 ml of quality vodka. They trade verses of “Cruel Summer” and “Take on Me” while 50 ml Lena Luthor pretends she does not know them.

“What a nice boy,” Lena says, flopping fully dressed onto her bed after Winn bid them goodnight. “Where did you meet him?”
Kara shucks her coat, gathers her toiletries and sleepwear. She really needs a cool shower before bed to wash off the lingering jet lag, and any residual nonsense from earlier tonight when certain parts of her body assumed she might get laid.

“In the elevator,” she answers. “We mocked Mickey Gand together and bonded or something. You know, like ya do.”

“Hmm. Sounds nice,” Lena murmurs. “Meet cute, like in the movies.”

Kara chuckles. “Sure. If we weren’t both exemplary gays.”

Lena sits up, bleary-eyed and scowling. “So… you’re like…a _lesbian_? Or whatever you call it?”

Every hair on Kara’s body stands up, chilled and rigid with terror at having misread literally _every signal_ Lena Luthor sent since they met. How could she have been so wrong? She thinks she might vomit. Her tummy clenches and, yep, vomit is a definite possibility. She’ll have to call the team rep and arrange to trade rooms with someone. Maybe she can sleep with Winn tonight, maybe tomorrow, she can -

Slow as damnation, that cold honey smile creeps onto Lena’s face again, and she starts laughing.

“Your face,” she wheezes. “Oh, Kara, your little face…”

The power of speech eludes Kara for several seconds, and when it returns, it’s only a litany of imperatives and non-sequiturs, like “stop!” and “mean!” and even “pizza!” for some unknown reason. She grabs a pillow and hurls it into Lena’s face, a direct hit that barely makes a dent in her righteous anger.

Lena starts apologizing, but Kara displays her palm with the classic instruction for her to ‘talk to the hand, ‘cos the face ain’t listening.’ She plugs in her near-dead cellphone and flees to the shower.

Even over the water, she can hear Lena laughing. By the time she finishes and is toweling her hair dry, Kara is laughing, too. She honestly didn’t think Lena capable of selling such a bald-faced lie - even as a prank - but maybe it’s time to admit that she doesn’t really know Lena Luthor at all.

_Yet_, she qualifies. _One sure-fire way to fix that._

Dressed in her pajamas, the soft ones with the smiling dim-sum pattern, teeth brushed and ready for some honest conversation, Kara enters their shared sleeping area to find Lena already tucked in bed.

Her lamp is dark. Her covers are pulled high, up to her cheeks, and she’s facing the window.

_Oh. Oh. Okay. Okay._

Kara sits heavily on her bed and begins brushing out her damp hair. She tries not to look at Lena’s profile, tries not to wonder if she’s already asleep, but it’s damn near impossible. She stares so hard
that Lena stirs, turns, and lays face down. Her voice, when it comes, is muffled and thick and palpably sad.

“Your phone came on. It buzzed so much I thought it was an emergency or something,” Lena says. “You got a bunch of messages.”

Kara turns slowly toward the nightstand, where her phone lays dark and silent. She starts piecing it together. When she plugged in the charger, the phone probably powered on, and all of Alex’s angry, worried texts flooded onto the lock screen. Lena must have seen them, some of them. Enough of them.

Nauseated, she picks up the phone and starts reading.

Alex: Kara do not ignore me! WTF u doing with that woman?
Alex: do you even know who she is or what her family has done? I know u hate homework but u need to google that crazy bitch and RUN the other way!!
Alex: Her brother killed 11 people, incl 3 cops — this is serious, K
Alex: ur phone is off okay, I get it. But please call me when you wake up cos we need 2 talk
Alex: Sorry. Maggie says I am going too hard, but I know you. You look for the best in people even when there is nothing good to find. Lena Luthor cannot be one of your fixer-upper projects, K.
Alex: She’s dangerous. Cut her loose. I love you, little sister.

By the time she finishes reading the last text, Kara’s face is streaked with tears and she feels like she’s choking. She sniffs, wipes her runny nose. Clears her throat. Calls out softly.

“Lena?”

Her roommate sighs and rolls onto her back. “I’m really too tired to deal with anything tonight,” she says, voice steady and dry as stone. “We’ll work it out in the morning, okay?”

Kara feels like something is eluding her, escaping her, something that matters, but she’s so tired and sad and sick to her stomach, and Lena may feel much the same. They need to rest. They’ll work it out tomorrow, just like Lena said.

“Okay,” she says. She cuts her lamp and curls onto her side, clutching a pillow to her chest. “Goodnight, roomie.”
Lena doesn’t respond immediately, and when she does, her voice doesn’t sound right.

“Goodnight, Kara,” she says, only it sounds like goodbye.

Exhaustion of varying types combine to knock Kara out for almost eleven hours. When she wakes up, yawning and blinking, she knows before she even sees the empty bed, the utterly barren eastern half of the room, that Lena Luthor is gone.

Kara stays in bed for a while, swaddled in her colorful Olympic comforter, just thinking, just letting the tumblers click until the lock opens and she makes a decision.

She whips out of bed, dresses and nearly rips her phone out of the wall in her haste to get downstairs. In the elevator, she sends a text to her well-meaning but disaster-fomenting sister.

Kara: Alex, I won’t be calling today because I don’t like it when we fight. Lena, my roommate and new friend (!!) saw your texts and moved out. I know you want to protect me but I really like this girl and I think she likes me back and you know that just DOESN’T HAPPEN for me where it’s BOTH, so I’m going looking for her today and you better hope I find her. Otherwise I will not be happy to see you Monday…might only hug you once. Please wish me luck!!!

She sends the message and watches for what seems like forever as the response window shows that Alex is typing her reply.

Alex: Fuck. Okay. I gotta catch a plane. You go get your girl.

Kara yelps and jumps and fist-pumps so crazily that she cracks the light fixture on the ceiling. Also her glasses fall off and she steps on them and they break cleanly at the nosepiece. She still feels like a world-beater, a Supergirl on a mission.

“First things first,” she says squinting at her bisected and totally necessary glasses. “Tape. Or glue. Probably tape.”

TBC
Chapter Four

Kara Danvers is notoriously hard-headed, in both the literal and metaphorical sense.

She’s tumbled badly while snowboarding and surfing, while biking and motorcycling, even once while showering (with a friend, so that wasn’t entirely her fault), yet has never sustained a serious concussion.

Teenage smart-ass Alex used to joke that her sister has bubble wrap inside her skull. Mature science nerd Alex recently speculated that Kara’s hardiness comes from living mostly at high elevation, which increases the brain’s physical volume and leaves less room for it to slosh around inside the skull.

For whatever reason, this woodpecker-like tolerance for bashing her head against things manifests in her personal character as a dogged devotion to lost causes, and a refusal to acknowledge defeat when she believes she is right. Once triggered, her obstinacy is legend.

Pulling that trigger, though, is not easy. Kara is also notorious for passivity in the face of conflict, for agreeing to things she doesn’t want for fear of hurting someone else, for swallowing her feelings and shuffling her own needs to the rear of the queue.

As a consequence of these latter traits, she often finds herself playing catch-up, working hard to square a deficit that wouldn’t exist had she acted sooner, decisively, in her own interest. Fortunately, thanks to the former traits, she usually matches up to the challenge.

Take the events of Friday, February 9, 2018 as an example.

Kara’s morning tested both her constitution and her ingenuity, but she made steady progress toward her goal of finding Lena Luthor. First, she begged and harangued the residential committee liaison until the poor man confirmed that, yes, Lena had been “re-roomed” in one of the Village’s eight apartment complexes, though security protocols prevented him from revealing where.

Then she moved on to Village staffers, showing Lena’s picture to every concierge and clerk at six of
the eight towers until she found the building Lena had moved into that very morning. No one would say which of the fifteen floors she was on, though, so Kara hung out in the lobby for nearly an hour praying to spy a wild Luthor.

While she waited, Kara ate two Oatmega bars from her backpack stash and stalked Lena’s teammates on Instagram, hoping to see her with them at a recognizable Olympic venue, or catch mention of a team activity Lena might attend.

Despite several deep dives, all she learned was that Lena herself has no social media accounts, and when her teammates catch her in the background of group shots, they tag her only as #HTK.

However, Super G standout and selfitis sufferer Veronica Sinclair routinely tags these happenstance inclusions of Lena with #exmachina, implying that Lena is a robot, or Veronica’s ex lover, or both. Kara couldn’t say which possibility irked her more.

(It was the middle one.)

All Kara knew about Veronica “Roulette” Sinclair was that early in her career, she was suspended from international competition for two years after getting snared in a Marseilles gambling bust with members of the Corsican mafia. Kara remembered this because it surprised her that such an elite member of chalet society got her kicks through rough trade.

*Sketchy hottie. Rarely a good combo.* Kara planted a mental warning flag on Sinclair.

Even with all the stalking, Kara didn’t really strike Insta gold until she found the page of head coach Jean Jolves, the French ex-pat who’s taken the US team to new heights and who - evidently - is unafraid to take candid shots of Lena Luthor. He has a keen eye for framing and light. In each of his pics, Lena looks nothing less than amazing.

Kara flicked through perhaps two dozen of his photos from the past year: Lena fixing a snapped boot binding; sipping coffee while reviewing a trail map; looking pretty comfortable with her legs at 180 on a Blitz stretcher; lying corpselike in the snow with her skis akimbo; steely and tensed at the Piz Nair starting gate during 2017 Worlds, where she took silver in the Giant Slalom.

It didn’t register at first - due partly to the dumbstruck minute she spent staring at the Blitz stretcher pic - but Kara gradually noted that in all of Jolves’ photos of Lena, she is alone. No teammates at her side, no managers fussing with her equipment, no physio helping her work out a charley horse. She’s on her own during every phase, from training to prep to race day.

Never had a roommate before, she told Kara. That means while she attended boarding school in Zurich, sped through her master’s program at MIT, and toured with the ski team, there was never someone there to talk to at day’s end, to cheer her up after a bad dream, or a bad date, or a fight with family.

Kara was her first, and Kara let her down. She should have pushed through her own fears and exhaustion and forced a conversation last night, made sure Lena knew that Alex does not speak for the entire Danvers Nation…but she didn’t. Her passivity let them both down, Kara thought, and she needed her hard damn head to set things right.
While glancing from her phone to the lobby exits and back again, hoping for divine intervention or inspiration, Kara saw that Jolves posted a new image: a whiteboard with the words “THE TARDY WILL BE FED TO BRUNO” printed in red. Bruno, she had learned, is Jolves’ much-loved Basset Hound. In his pics, the good boy’s ears looked velvety soft and Kara wanted very much to pet him.

But tardy for what? And where?

She adjusted her taped-up glasses and let her eyes go out of focus for a moment. Then she looked at the picture again with fresh eyes, the way Alex and Maggie do when they’re searching for clues in crime scene photos, teasing out points of contrast.

At the left edge of the picture was a sliver of window. Kara homed in on that detail.

In the distance, cast in sharp relief against the pale blue sky, was a grouping of three cables. She recognized the arrangement as the support and propulsion system for an aerial tramway…like the one Lena told her they have at the alpine center.

She whooped and did a little dance in appreciation of her own detective skills, then hit the door all afire, knowing exactly where she had to go. Then she backtracked into the lobby and asked a friendly attendant exactly how one might get to the Yongpyong venue at Alpensia.

A quick sprint and frustratingly pokey shuttle ride later, Kara found herself at yet another reception desk asking yet another hyper informed concierge where she might find her team meeting. She flashed her ID badge real quick, hoping they wouldn’t ask to scan it, and boldly proclaimed herself a skier.

“I am a proud member of the United States of America Team…of ski.”

The concierge gave her a funny, pitying look. Kara figured it must be the broken glasses, because her undercover infiltration spy game was smooth as fuck.

“US Ski Team?” the concierge asked, for clarity.

“Indeed, madam. Skiing is awesome. And not at all inferior to the amazingly fun and totally rad sport of snowboarding,” said Kara, nailing it again.

“Oh. Very nice. Well, the schedule says they began at 10, so you’re a bit late, dear,” the kind woman warned her. She handed Kara a paper box and pointed toward a snack table laden with croissants, danish, cinnamon rolls, and various healthier breakfast treats. “Perhaps if you arrived bearing food, it would soften the blow?”

“You? Are an angel,” Kara said. “Which room was it again?”

And so Kara found herself holding a box of pastries (light one cherry and one lemon danish, because detective work is a caloric drain) in the hallway outside Conference Room 6 in the clean and airy
Yongpyong Alpine Center… receiving a death stare from a pixie armed with an Otterboxed tablet.

“I know who you are,” said Eve Teschmacher, tiny-yet-fierce PR rep for the US Ski Team and, apparently, aspiring bouncer. “Supergirl can’t ski. Beat it, boarder.”

Mildly confused by the hostility (and insulted by the notion that she can’t ski, she just doesn’t see the point of skiing) Kara reconfigured her expression to convey Linus van Pelt-like sincerity. She offered the simple paper box with a flourish, as if it were the Magna Carta.

“Behold, the pastries of peace, Miss Teschmacher. Too long have our peoples been in conflict. And for what? Two skinny little skis, good? One bigger and much cooler ski, bad? What nonsense!”

Eve harrumphed. “That’s exactly what I was thinking.”

“Yeah, I mean, we’re not the Rockers and the Mods, right!”

“Stop it. Quadrophenia sucks,” declared Eve. “And you, Miss Danvers…oh, just go away!”

Kara tried for a ‘charmingly befuddled’ look while waggling the free pastries. “But why? Is it the gluten?”

“No! Gluten is not inherently bad! Now would you stop auditioning for UCB and listen to me?” Eve pleaded. “Lena has a real chance to medal at these games, maybe even four times, and she does not need the distraction of another mean girl playing games with her heart. So take all this -” she gestured at Kara’s body with flicky, angry fingers “- back to Tinder and leave her be.”

The implication that Kara was a slutty heartbreaker barely landed. At the mere mention of Lena’s name, Kara dropped all pretexts and started firing real questions: is Lena here? is she okay? can I please talk to her? for a minute, a few seconds? will you pass her a note? please? please?

Eve refused to answer, or to budge, and Kara felt her sweet disposition start to curdle with anger. She considered how much Eve might weigh, and how much effort it might take to physically lift her and deposit her elsewhere. Kara was about to give it a go when she heard the thunder of heavy boots running up fast behind her.

Leslie Willis, of all people, was suddenly there, grabbing Kara by the elbow.

“Last one in’s a rotten twat, blondie!” she said, cackling and dragging a shocked Kara away from Eve, away from Lena, and into the friendly confines of Conference Room 5…

…where the entire US Snowboarding Team sat around a giant oval table, ready for their morning meeting, which Kara had no idea was taking place. Her schedule, unread and unknown, was still in her suite. And yet, through divine providence or good karma, she ended up exactly where she needed to be.

_Sweet Christmas! Holy shit, holy shit, that was close. Kara, get your head in the game…_

“Ten-fifteen on the dot. Just made it, kids,” said Coach Sara Lance, smiling, as always, as if she knew secret things. She thanked Kara for the pastries, took the box and slid it precisely to the center
of the table, then told the team to get out their schedules for Q&A review.

Kara took the seat beside Leslie, her unlikely savior, and pretended to read her teammate’s itinerary. She reminded herself that the Lena situation could wait. She would find her, today, and make amends. But she had to remember why she was here in the first place, and take it seriously. Kara wasn’t about to trash her lifelong Olympic dream by going low-key co-dependent bonkers over someone she just met.

*Even if she’s kind. And smart. And pretty. Especially then. Re-rack your focus, dipstick.*

She managed to listen as Coach Lance covered the women’s competition schedule and practice sessions, but Kara zoned out when they began discussing the men’s events in detail. With her sketch pad hidden in her lap, Kara let her mind wander and started doodling with colored pencils.

After a few minutes, Leslie leaned close and whispered, “So, teammate, one night in Korea and you’re already pulling. Even with those pitiful Harry Potter glasses.”

Looking up from her mostly finished doodle, the ‘huh?’ face Kara made was almost audible. Leslie raised her a ‘duh’ face and displayed an image on her phone: a Snapchat screenshot of Kara in the dining hall last night, laughing, head on Lena Luthor’s shoulder. Lena’s smile was squinty, toothy, and purely happy. Kara felt her heart stutter at the sight.


“Let me see.” She took Leslie’s phone, adjusted her glasses, looked closer.

On second inspection, Kara saw that the pic was captioned “PyeongChang is 4 lovers!” and it bore several little stickers, including sushi, tacos, a rainbow flag, and the Olympic rings. The post was made by Mickey Gand.

“Fuck me,” Kara muttered. “Who else has seen this?”

“Most of the team. Probably all the ski dorks, too,” said Leslie. “Fapmaster Gand didn’t tag either of you, so it probably won’t go viral anytime soon, unless somebody in the loop leaks it.”

That explained Eve’s hostility; she saw the picture, saw Lena happy last night with roomie Kara, and then this morning she’s all packed up and fleeing to new digs. The idea that her teammates saw Lena out of sorts, hurt, or vulnerable deepened Kara’s guilt. She felt like crying again, for all the good it would do.

Instead, she finished her drawing. She left the meeting, allegedly for a pee break, and made another run at Eve Teschmacher. This time, she took a direct approach.

“Give this to Lena Luthor,” Kara said, forcibly pressing the folded sheet of drawing paper into her hand.

Eve leveled a glare and made to speak, but Kara cut her off with gently raised hands and gentler words.
“I didn’t want her to move out. It was a misunderstanding, one I would do pretty much anything to fix. But to do that, I have to be able to talk to her and we didn’t even exchange phone numbers before she left.”

“Well that was stupid,” Eve grumbled.

“I know! Everything just happened so fast, and we were getting along so well, and then it all fell apart in, like, seconds. I was in shock, I think, and I chickened out,” Kara admitted. “She should know that I’m sorry, at least, even if she doesn’t want to move back in with me. But I hope she does because I really like Lena. I think we could be friends, and I think we could help each other have a really good games.”

The tiny blonde gave an exasperated eye roll. “That’s what I thought when I booked her with you!”

“You…you…” Kara didn’t, couldn’t quite…

“Lena’s under a lot of pressure, more than most people know, and the last thing she needs right now is to be stuck alone in a room with that viper Veronica,” Eve explained. “I saw how you defended Leslie Willis. You seemed reluctant to judge her until the facts were in; that’s a mercy Lena hasn’t been granted very often. I thought you might actually take the time to get to know her.”

“I want to,” Kara insisted. “Believe me, I want to.”

Eve gave a decisive nod. “Okay. I’ll pass her the note. I assume your phone number is included?”

Kara shrank and shrugged. “Actually, no. Gimme that back for a sec.”


After her team meeting ended, with instructions to arrive at Olympic Stadium for the Parade of Nations no later than 7:30 pm, Kara waited an additional forty minutes in the lobby for the ponderous ski confab to break up. From her post, she could see a portion of the second floor hallway through a glass wall, and she watched as Eve Teschmacher, true to her word, delivered the missive directly into Lena’s hands.

After a confused pause, Lena unfolded the paper and peered at the cartoon of five anthropomorphic Olympic rings. Kara had drawn the blue ring as braided, similar to the smart ring on her own left thumb, and it had a goofy little grin and spindly arms and legs. Braided Blue Ring was placing a call to the very pretty Braided Green Ring, which was holding its phone but unable to answer because it was wearing awesome fringed cowboy gloves.

Kara could see the exact moment Lena got the corny joke, because she smiled, touched her mouth, and shook her head as she disappeared down the hall.

*She smiled. Oh, gosh. That’s a good sign.*

Kara leapt to her feet and waited for Lena to emerge from the stairway or elevator, but minutes passed and she never showed.
“Excuse me, is there another exit from the second floor?” she called to the friendly concierge.

“Yes, dear. The second floor has a direct walkway to the parking garage which you can -”

Kara was already out the door. She rushed into the front parking lot just in time to see the ski team’s shuttle bus vanish around the bend at the end of the Alpine Center driveway.

“No, no, no!”

She was twenty steps into a sprint before she realized she’d never catch them. Her heart sank. She laced her fingers on top of her head, pushed her navy USA beanie down over her eyes and barked a curse at the pavement. Kara stomped around the parking lot and literally kicked rocks until she calmed down and remembered that her efforts weren’t for naught. Lena now had her number, and she knew that Kara was waiting to hear from her, when and if she wanted to talk.

Apparently, Lena was in no hurry to talk.

Hours passed. Kara sat on her bed and waited with the phone plugged in and charging. She read her schedules and studied the Olympic Village maps, memorized venue locations and shuttle schedules, and firmed up exactly where Team USA would be marching in that night’s Parade of ninety-one teams.

Twenty-sixth, between Mongolia and Bermuda according to Korean alphabetical order. Huh. Cool.

Around 4, hunger became a real concern. With her fully charged phone lying face up on the bar, Kara shared a late lunch with Winn at a swanky lounge in the Dragon Plaza. He proved a patient and pragmatic sounding board as she sang her song of woe.

“She’ll forgive you,” Winn assessed, with confidence. “I mean, Lena obviously likes you. She was giving you mirrorball eyes all last night, even when we were singing.”

Kara knit her brows and stifled a grin. “Really?”

“Please. Her thirst was so intense it could disrupt weather patterns,” Winn said, crunching down the last tempura veggie fry from their massive appetizer tray. “But more importantly, forgiving you is the logical thing to do.”

“Logical.” Kara nodded her head. Then Kara shook her head. “Explain, please.”

“Okay, like, so many stupid people still hold Lena responsible for her brother’s crimes, even though she took action to stop him and bring him to justice. So it would be stupidly hypocritical for Lena Luthor - of all people - to hold someone responsible for their sibling’s behavior. So she won’t do that to you.” He paused and gave her a tender look. “Plus, she smiled at a cartoon you drew for her. You’re a sweet pea and she knows it. Just give her some time.”

Kara found his theorem and gentle presence actually made her feel better. “Skaterboy, how it is possible that one so handsome is also so wise?”

“We all have our gifts,” he replied, pink cheeked and smiley. “Tis true - my sagacity is outstripped
only by my animal magnetism. And my final lap kick in the 1500.”

Kara leaned sideways and hugged him, then pulled out her wallet to pick up their check. Winn declined and reminded her that they were supposed to be paying with their smart rings as often as possible, as part of their informal beta test agreement with Lena.

“I’ve wondered…do you think these rings are a real Luthor Corp project?” Kara asked. “Or just something she’s playing around with?”

Winn fiddled with his black and red smart ring, gave the query due consideration. “Well, for a beta test, the tech is unusually sound. I’ve used mine over a dozen times and haven’t hit a single glitch, and the monitoring app works great. Lena messaged me through it a few hours ago and said my purchase data was coming through clean and fast. So…”

“Wait - Lena can see what you’re buying?”

“Of course. It’s a monitored beta test, with real-time relay to her collection program.”

“Huh.” Kara had an idea. “Interesting.”

“Uh-oh,” said Winn. “I can almost see the light bulb over your head. What are you thinking?”

Kara was thinking something like this: she wasn’t going to chase after Lena anymore, since the woman now had her number and could reach out when she was ready… but being resigned to waiting didn’t preclude her from sending along bits and bytes of encouragement, just to bolster Lena’s confidence and remind her that she had nothing to fear from Kara Danvers.

This thought was what led Kara to the SongShare interactive jukebox in the Silver Flame lounge. She waved her smart ring over the payment terminal and paired her iPhone with the jukebox to share her tuneage - song by song, for .99 each - with the bar patrons. She fired up Apple Music and began to assemble one of the most eclectic and irrational playlists in the history of popular music.

Winn begged off and ran away about midway through. But he did wish her luck.

Kara’s fried scrapple opus was titled “I like you_do you like me_check yes or no” and her song purchases were as follows:

**Sorry So Sorry / Howie Day**

4:34

**She Don't Know My Mind / Tampa Red**

2:59
I Can Talk / Two Door Cinema Club
2:57

All for Myself / Sufjan Stevens
2:57

I Think You're Awesome (feat. Scott Westh & Jens Bang) / I Think You're Awesome
8:54

You Make Me Feel... (feat. Sabi) / Cobra Starship
3:35

Happy / Pharrell Williams
3:52

Comfortable / Lil Wayne
4:25

Ready for Anything / Landon Austin
4:27

I Bet / Ciara
4:47

It Ain't Easy / 2Pac
4:53

Being You (feat. Phoenix Pearle) / Gelka
4:24

You Got Class / Slaughter & The Dogs
3:15
Hard Headed Woman / Cat Stevens
3:50

Tougher Than the Rest / Bruce Springsteen
4:35

Kill Em With Kindness / Selena Gomez
3:37

Color Me Impressed / The Replacements
2:27

I Really Wanna Know You / DJ Clue
6:12

Do You Feel the Same? (Extended Club Mix) / Hercules & Love Affair
6:30

Say Yes (feat. Beyoncé & Kelly Rowland) / Michelle Williams
4:12

Please Say Yes / Brian Kennedy
2:51

I Gotta Feeling / The Black Eyed Peas
4:49

You and Me Together / Hannah Montana
3:46

Winning Combination / Max Groove
3:54
24K Magic / Bruno Mars
3:46

Am I Crazy / Little Fish
4:19

I Think Not / The Apocalypse Blues Revue
4:00

Please, Please, Please / James Brown & His Famous Flames
2:46

Meet Me Tonight / Freddy McGregor
3:38

Step to the Rear / University of South Carolina Marching Band
1:03

I'll Be There / Jackson 5
3:57

Your Friend / T-Pain
4:05

Supergirl (feat. Alle Farben & Younotus) [Radio Edit] / Anna Naklab
3:32

P.S. / Ash B
4:02

I'm So Excited / The Pointer Sisters
3:53
After her purchases were made and this message in a bottle was hurled through the Internet toward its sole intended recipient, Kara, being merciful, suggested to the bartender that he unplug the machine or reboot it or something, because it was gonna be a wild mess for about two and a half hours.

Thrumming with energy about her smart ring gambit and the official kickoff to her first Olympic games, Kara went back to her suite, showered, dressed in her Team USA gear and headed out for a long walk through the bracing evening air toward the bright lights of Olympic Stadium, where she hoped to see the one person who could make this singular night even more special.

Along the way, she ran into several international snowboarding buddies pre-gaming with a Dasani bottle full of silver tequila. Kara joined them and took a swig, took some ribbing over her janky taped glasses, then took some more ribbing over the Snapchat shot of her with Lena Luthor, but it was lighthearted teasing - much like Leslie’s reaction this morning. Kara wondered if her teammate was responsible for that screen shot getting wider play among their circle, since Livewire loved to gossip.

Kara wasn’t bothered; she told anyone who would listen that Lena was great, that she was really happy to have met her and hoped they stayed friends after the games. Some shrugged, some nodded, some clapped her on the back and lauded her courage. All in all, Kara departed their company feeling heartened, hopeful. It was nice.

She wondered what Lena’s teammates and competitors were saying to her about Kara, if they brought up the photo, or if they spoke to her at all. Something about that last thought made her break into a jog, and she arrived at the bustling plaza outside the stadium - just where Coach Lance told her to be - almost five minutes early.

“The hell’s gotten into you?” Sara asked, checking Kara’s name off the attendance sheet. “You normally fly in at the last second.”

“I’m happy! Joy makes me punctual!” Kara shouted, practically bouncing in place.

She watched as athletes from around the world streamed into the plaza, waving their flags, embracing, and singing lively songs. Thinking of Alex, missing her sister, Kara took out her phone and shot a few photos and short videos for their shared cloud.

Wish you were here, Al. Wish you could feel this energy. It’s beautiful, she said, narrating the scene. I wouldn’t be here without you and Eliza and Jeremiah. I won’t waste this chance. Thank you. I love you.

Minutes after all 243 members of Team USA were present and accounted for, the air above the stadium exploded with color as fireworks streaked across the night sky. Music boomed and 35,000
people cheered as the Olympic flame was lit and the 2018 PyeongChang games officially opened.

Kara Danvers watched all this from the rear of the pack, a good six feet behind the closest member of Team USA, beaming and clapping and feeling like the luckiest dumb jock on Earth. With her eyes dazzled by the glittering sky, her ears ringing with anthemic K-Pop, and her feet shuffling her toward the stadium entrance like a patriotic zombie, she still knew the very moment Lena drew near and stood beside her.

Her arm hair stood on end and her chest went sort of concave and a funny giggle-sob lurched up from her throat. It was a strange and stumbling happiness Kara felt, as when a fledgling flutters into flight or a foal tumbles into a run. It felt like the start of something wondrous and terrifying, a great leap forward into the magical unknown.

“Golly,” she said.

Watching the pyrotechnics, Lena stepped closer and spoke toward Kara’s ear. “It’s really something, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. Sure is.” Kara looked at Lena’s profile, aglow from the fiery sky, and sighed a plume of frosted breath. She felt herself relax. Felt her face warm and melt into a smile. “Hi.”

Lena’s hands were stuffed in her parka pockets, her black hair half spilled across her shoulders and half tucked inside her navy USA cap. The apples of her cheeks glowed rosy red. She hiked her shoulders up to her ears and smiled. “Hi.”

“You read my playlist,” Kara surmised.

“Obviously. Very clever, if somewhat…dissonant,” Lena said, smirking. “I couldn’t bring myself to listen to it. Please, never make me a mix tape.”

Kara laughed while secretly vowing that she would do exactly that on her next visit to Eliza’s house, where there was a turntable, cassette deck, and treasure trove of 80s vinyl in the attic. Lena would rue the day.

After a minute or so, they turned toward each other and offered simultaneous apologies.

Kara swore that she never wanted Lena to move out, that she wasn’t scared of being her roommate, her friend, her whatever, despite all the drama that might entail.

Lena said she only left out of worry that being her roommate, her friend, her whatever would distract, exhaust, and endanger Kara, possibly sabotaging her shot at Olympic gold.

The music and cheering amplified as they neared the entrance to the stadium.

“Okay so if you didn’t want to leave and I didn’t want you to leave, will you please move back in with me?” Kara shouted.

Lena nodded violently. “Yes!”

“Tonight?”
“Yes!”

“Cool! Cool! Cool!”

Kara smiled so hard her cheeks ached. She wondered if there were stretches she could do to make being so happy less of a physical strain.

They walked side by side, the 242<sup>nd</sup> and 243<sup>rd</sup> members of Team USA to enter a packed and raucous Olympic Stadium. They looked to each other, laughing as their nation was announced and all their teammates began shouting, waving at the crowd, and mugging for the cameras. Kara raised her hands and waved hello to the world, but she noticed Lena did not join in.

“You don’t have to cut a somersault, but you could at least wave a little!” Kara chided.

Lena displayed her bare hands and made a sheepish face. “Can’t! Forgot my rodeo gloves!”

“Oh, for pete’s sake!” Kara removed her left glove and gave it to Lena. “Put that on right now!”

Thwarted and grousing quietly, Lena slipped on the glove and raised her festively fringed cowgirl hand in a prissy royal wave. Kara laughed. Lena rolled her eyes.

Before she could sneak her bare right hand back into her pocket, Kara nimbly intercepted it and laced their fingers, drawing their warm palms tightly together.

Television cameras and photographers circled around the team and approached the rear of the phalanx, advanced on their position. Glowing LED banks bore down like spotlights, threatening attention, exposure on a global scale.

Lena squeezed Kara’s hand and visibly gulped, swallowing what appeared to be a painful lump of fear at the prospect of being on the world stage again. At the last moment before the lights hit them, Kara made a heroic gesture: she took off her taped-up black rimmed glasses and slipped them onto Lena’s face.

“Now no one will recognize you!” Kara asserted. “Just please don’t let go of my hand, ‘cos I can’t see a fucking thing!”

The last thing she heard before the lights blinded her, before Kara utterly spazzed out waving for the cameras and blowing kisses to all the folks back home, was the sound of Lena laughing.

TBC
Chapter 5

It’s near eleven-thirty. Stray packs of Olympians wander between residence buildings, laughing and talking, huddled together in the dreamy afterglow of celebration. The moment feels impossibly ripe with promise, like all their dreams could still come true, like maybe there’s a way for everyone to win.

Kara likens this mellow, hopeful vibe to the comedown after a good party, where the music has stopped but your ears still ring, your buzz hovers in the optimal range, you’ve danced and laughed ’til feet and lungs are crying uncle. And, best of all, you’re not going home alone.

Lena and Kara cross the plaza at a light run, aiming to sneak into her suite, pack all her belongings and escape before her soon-to-be ex-roommate Veronica Sinclair returns, thereby avoiding what Lena fears would be a “sordid contretemps.”

Kara’s not one-hundred percent sure what that means, but it sounds like something Bravo execs would say about a “Real Housewives” throwdown. Lena concurs with this assessment.

As they enter the suite and are greeted by the sight of a stunningly naked Veronica kneeling on the bed with a red rose clenched between her teeth, Kara realizes that “sordid contretemps” might be an understatement.

Blushing scarlet, Kara adjusts her glasses and helplessly gapes at yards of perfect bronzed skin, tattooed from shoulder to ankle with writhing, hissing serpents.

She looks away, but it’s hard to find a safe place for her eyes to land. Her focus bounces around the room and keeps hitting hot spots: a purple McQueen skull scarf draped over the lamp, a silver bucket loaded with ice and Belvedere, a bottle of Sliquid on the nightstand beside a red T-ball bat…

*Oh. That is not a T-ball bat.*
On realizing what it is and what it is for, Kara feels a sympathetic twitch downstairs. She wonders if maybe she’s punching above her weight with Lena Luthor. Hell, if she and Veronica do this sort of thing on the regular, maybe Kara’s not seasoned enough to be on the fight card.

Meanwhile, Veronica, completely unabashed, slides the rose from her mouth and points the bloom at Kara. “Hi, cutie. You lost?”

“She’s my suite mate,” says Lena, closing the door and sighing like she’s beyond over this whole scene. “I’ve been reassigned.”

“Again? Christ, Lena, who did you piss off?” Veronica scowls, slumps onto her heels. “Let me guess - turns out Lex uploaded the son of a residential committee member’s dentist or something?”

“Hey,” Kara says, and bows up a fraction at the low comment. “Not cool.”

“Don’t interact,” Lena warns her, launching into a speed packing routine so smooth and so organized, she must have done it before. Maybe a lot. Maybe just this morning.


Kara understands that as a ‘sorry, my bad’ type of thing, but Lena offers no response. There’s a nude goddess lounging on the bed behind her, apologizing in French, and Lena is methodically stacking her luggage on the floor. Maybe she really is a robot.

The cold shoulder has an effect; Veronica’s placid expression falters. “Lena? If this is about what we discussed earlier, just forget it,” she says. “I shouldn’t have asked. I’ll find some other way out.”

Kara thinks the woman sounds anxious, worried, but that seems unlikely. Peeved? Thwarted, maybe? Eve did call her a viper, and she worried about leaving Lena in her company.

Long moments drag by with no response from the Luthor. Veronica drops the rose and draws her knees against her chest. Shuts her eyes and rocks like a wobbly egg.

“That’s everything,” Lena says, and buckles her battered Hermes clothing case. She hoists her luggage and Kara gathers most of her ski sleeves and gear bags. At the door, she pauses and speaks to Veronica without turning around.

“Don’t call it off. It’s a slim chance, but if it works out, I’ll help you.”

Lena walks out. Kara glances back as Veronica Sinclair thumbs away a tear and whispers ‘thanks’ to the closing door.

They don’t talk about it in the quiet hallway. Or the quiet elevator. It feels like the whole encounter needs some space to land, to settle. In the lobby, though, Kara screws up her courage and thinks to inquire -

“We’re not seeing each other,” Lena offers, a clean interception.

Kara takes a deep breath, feels something ease in her chest, and admits it. Sort of. “Good,” she says. “You can do better.”

Lena scrunches her forehead, curious, and Kara scoffs. “I’m serious. She’s not all that.”
A thoughtful pause later, Lena continues. “Anyway. When we did get together, it was casual and not particularly friendly. Stopped altogether last year, so I did not expect to find her…you know.”

“Naked and DTF?” Kara provides.

“Mmm. Also, in case you were wondering, it’s hers,” Lena says. “The red menace? Hers, not mine.”

“Ahh.” Kara was going to ask about the mysterious favor Sinclair referenced, not the unnerving dildo. But it’s good to know. About the dildo. Still unnerving, though. “Quick question: how is she not incontinent?”

Lena cocks a brow. “Kegels. Constant, vigorous kegels.”

Now they’re crossing the plaza from Lena’s second-and-former room to her once-and-future room, where she will hopefully bunk the full fortnight with Kara. Though she’s laden with the majority of Lena’s ski equipment, Kara moves like she’s tethered to balloons. Being with Lena makes her forget that this has been a very, very long day. She feels light in both body and spirit, and the idea that they’ll have at least two more weeks together is a hit of pure helium.

*It’s gonna be good,* she thinks. *This is gonna be so good.*

They’ve already hurdled several obstacles that often trip up new friendships-slash-relationships: an awkward meeting, a physical injury, an identity reveal, a disapproving relative, various communication problems, social media exposure, a lusty ex with designs and secrets. Kara thinks they’re due for some smooth sailing.

“How are you still smiling?” Lena asks in the elevator. “Doesn’t your face hurt?”

“Little bit,” Kara admits. “I’m a world-class athlete, though, so I can handle it.”

“Not me. Consider this a tap-out.” Lena yawns and leans against the car wall. “Frowning hours start now.”

Kara’s expression dims a few watts, maybe from tiredness, maybe from feeling called out. Lena hadn’t said as much, but Kara knows that people sometimes find her sunny disposition exhausting or weird. She knows she is routinely happier than most people, but becoming that way wasn’t effortless.

She was sad for a long time after her parents died, sad that her lame and selfish relatives wouldn’t even try to take her in, sad that her adoption threw the Danvers family into conflict.

It took work, every day, to find hope and humor and comfort, to let herself feel good again. Over time, that daily work became a habit and, eventually, second nature. But it’s a flame that requires tending.
Happiness is a discipline, Kara thinks, and the more she smiles and laughs and projects good cheer, the more she internalizes that feeling. It’s just another form of greasing the groove, really, like repeating Wounded Peacock pose until it encoded as muscle memory, or torquing her body in aerial spins until she mastered her fear and dizziness.

Thing is, when she looks at Lena, the smile just…happens. Spontaneously. The muscles of her eyes, mouth, nose, and forehead contract heroically for another big rep, heedless of the burn. It’s already second nature.

“God. Pardon my sourness,” Lena says. She gazes at Kara, sober and sincere, from beneath her long lashes. “Please keep smiling, Kara. I don’t ever want to be the reason you stop.”

Kara feels heat lick at her nape, her cheeks, across her chest. She points at her foolish, patently happy face. “Lena…don’t you realize most of this is your fault?”

The elevator dings and the doors open and they stand there for a while, staring, mute and dozy, until the car doors begin to close again. They both startle into motion and reach out to block them.

As Lena unpacks, Kara sends a summary text - no response required - to Alex.

Kara: She’s back! (copious heart emojis) It’s all good. C U soon! (kissy-kissy)

Lena changes in the bathroom and Kara in the bedroom. Pajamaed and barefoot and hushed, they meet at the sink to brush their teeth. There are sly, foamy glances, hip checks to demand faucet access, calves and forearms and shoulders brushing and pressing together in a way that seems designed to drive Kara mad. It’s an ordeal, and she is proud of herself for not dribbling toothpaste down her shirtfront.

Finished and rinsed first, Lena catches Kara’s eye in the mirror.

“You chased after me,” she says. “I got scared and ran away, and you came for me. Nobody’s ever done that before. Except, like, the FBI and a handful of crazy people, but that doesn’t count. So… thank you.”

Haltingly, she leans in and presses a damp, deliberate kiss against Kara’s cheek, by her ear.

Kara’s hands drop to rest against the sink. Her knees are a little rubbery. Toothpaste bubbles over her lips.

“I didn’t really do anything,” she mumbles around her toothbrush.

“Stop with the modesty. We’re not doing that part again.” Lena takes a hand towel, dampens the corner, and wipes a dash of foam from Kara’s chin. “Clean up, and come to bed.”

She smiles, wolfishly, all pale red lips and sharp teeth, and saunters out.
Kara can scarcely hear her own thoughts above her thundering pulse, which is just as well because her thoughts are all variations on the theme of *hot diggity dog*. She rinses her mouth, and shuts off the water so hard that the faucet handle snaps off in her fist.

Water arcs up from the busted fixture and spatters the ceiling. Kara gasps, stumbles, and drops the faucet handle in the toilet. In a panic move, she smothers the geyser with a towel, then gathers her wits enough to find the feed lines and use the manual cut-off. With a vow to call maintenance in the morning, Kara dries off, calms her tits, and exits the ensuite with as much swagger as she can muster.

The sleeping area lamps are off, the room cast in satin darkness. Lena stands by the window, her black hair dappled with bits of stray light as she looks over the Olympic Village. Kara goes to her, unhurried, and shares the view.

From their suite, they see a few late stragglers in the plaza. They see windows going dark as their fellow villagers call it a day. In the distance are the moonlit white-cloaked mountains where, in the coming days, they will match skill and spirit against the best athletes in the world.

Lena checks her watch, a beefy Tag Heuer Monaco that looks like something Steve McQueen would wear. It shows the time as about ten past midnight.

“When is your first event today?” Lena asks.

Kara squints a second, calls up the data. “Slopestyle practice at 3. You?”

“Slalom training run at 1:30.” She turns, angling her body against Kara’s side. “Factoring in for sleep, I figure that gives us a good three hours for mischief. What do you say?”

Kara doesn’t say anything. She faces her, and smiles. She lays one palm against Lena’s cheek, slips the other hand into sable hair and kisses her, warm and soft and deep, ripe with sweet intention and the promise that all their dreams might come true. Maybe everybody wins.

TBC
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

This chapter is my way of pouring one out for Leslie "Livewire" Willis. May she live on in fic forever.

Chapter Six

The afternoon sky is cornflower blue, warm sun filters softly through candy floss clouds, and the Slopestyle course at Bokwang Phoenix Park awaits below. Gazing down from the starting line, Kara Danvers thinks it looks like a playground designed by whimsical Germans who cross-bred the wet dreams of boarders and skate punks. She awaits her turn at the hilltop, giddily shimmying in place.

What a glorious day, she thinks. This is a very cool time to be me.

She’s not exactly well-rested, but her energy level is off the charts and her mood is stratospheric. As it happened, Lena Luthor’s very practical suggestion of ‘three hours of mischief’ became four hours, then five, then a shared shower and breakfast in bed, with naps interspersed here and there.

Their sex, as she predicted, was nothing short of sublime. And considering it was their first go, Kara expects it will only get better, though she’s having a helluva time imagining how.

“Earth to Danvers!” Sara Lance shouts, clapping Kara on the ass with a clipboard. “You’re up! All good?”

“Yep!” Kara flashes a double thumbs up, fastens boots into bindings, adjusts her goggles, and lights out for the first rail section.

She hops onto the arced rail, slides a simple 50-50 along the kink and dismounts clean. It’s a good start, a momentum builder.

The second section is even better, and she goes for a trifecta: reverses onto the high right side feature, drops down and zips a 5-0 along the left feature, and kicks big off the down bar’s cannon. Just for shits and giggles, she gives the cannon a little bonk with her back hand on the way up.
She lets out a little yelp. The course feels awesome, abnormally so, as lively feedback ripples up her springy legs and settles in her hips. It occurs to her that her hips are probably so open and loose because of last night. And this morning. It then occurs to her that the hiss of snow under her board sounds almost sensual, like a sharp, wet inhale between clenched teeth.

Her thoughts - focus Kara focus - are starting to stray and suddenly the image of Lena’s open mouth, panting, strands of silken black hair clinging to her lips, asking for - three use three oh god kara yes - fingers and - bite my neck - teeth and pressure - tighter hold me tighter let me feel how much you want me - takes over her awareness like she’s in the front row at a goddamned IMAX movie.

She’s sliding fast toward the bowl portion of the third rail group, and Kara realizes she has no idea how to attack this section. Her eyes go wide, her heart thunders in panic, and her instincts take her along the right slope. She coils her legs and leaps up onto the curved rail, grinds a quick nose press and finds herself sailing through open air. With nothing better to do, she executes a frontside spin, lands, and rockets into the jump section.

Okay. This is going better than it has any right to, you horny dingbat.

She thinks of the intermissions next, the soft pauses between full-contact rounds, where they talked about what they liked in bed, in sport, in life. These were short conversations, mostly arranged so they could catch their breath, drink some water, gather their wits. They allowed each other a question per intermission. Answers were optional, but truth was required.

What favor was Veronica talking about? / I would say, but that’s not my secret to share.

Fingers or mouth? / Mouth. Fingers are pretty great, too. You? / Fingers, friction, mouth. / Toys? / I’m not averse. Within reason. With the right partner.

The first jump section offers a quandary: a traditional kicker in the middle, flanked by two flared takeoffs. The center promises big air, while the angles offer a jump start for her trademark spins.

Do you still talk to your mother / We haven’t spoken since Lex died. It’s better this way.

Do you like being called “Supergirl?” / Not at first, but now… I kinda dig it.
Fuck it. I’m going in.

She veers right and shoots into the sky, already halfway into the first of two rotations, and she manages a late backflip to make it a full rodeo combo. In the second section, she sticks with the middle kicker and stretches for max air and two spins while grabbing the heel edge and bending her knees until the board is level with her head. Kara hears someone (probably Leslie) shout ‘Woo! Method, bitch!’ as she lands, and her face splits into a wide smile.

What’s the smart ring about? It’s cool, I just don’t see the through-line from water machines to these little doohickeys. / Honestly? I don’t even know if it will end up being worth the trouble, but I’m pitching them to education departments in the ten poorest states as a way for low-income kids to buy food over the summers when school is out -

That question, their last question, Lena didn’t finish answering. Because Kara was already kissing her again. Because she deserved to be kissed.

The third and final jump - the money booter - is where Kara shines. She opts for the bigger of two ramps, slides from snow to blue sky, and spasms into two inverts and three full rotations - a double cork 720 - and rumbles to a clean stop on the flat bottom. Her teammates rush up and batter her with high-fives and hugs. Even Livewire offers a fist bump.

“Looking good, kid, looking strong,” she says. “You like the course?”

“That was…wow. Wow! I wanna go again!” shouts Kara.

Coincidentally, she spoke these exact words last night, as Lena nibbled Kara’s hipbone after a round of transcendent cunnilingus, though her volume was somewhat lower.

“You’ll get your chance at qualifiers tomorrow,” says Coach Lance. “You all will. Now get yourselves warm and fed and rested; it’s a long road to the podium, ladies.”

Kara unclips her board and drops onto her butt in the snow, laughing. Oddly, Leslie doesn’t mock her; she sits down, takes out her phone, and chidingly clicks her tongue.

“What?” Kara asks, wary already.
Leslie just hands over her phone, cued to a Twitter account called “TeamUSA Fails” with an @ that’s only a string of alphanumerics and the sinister anon egg where a photo should be. The account seems to be a photo stream of embarrassing pics from the few events that have already begun.

Kara cringes in sympathy at the pics of Nathan Chen falling in his short program of the figure skating team event, captioned with the anti-witticism ‘he faw down go boom.’ She cringes again at shots of a US women’s curling team member upchucking on the plaza - probably a victim of the horrid Norovirus that’s already sickened over 130 people in PyeongChang, captioned with ‘someone call an exorcist!’

But when she reaches the photos Leslie wants her to see, several shots of her and Lena at the Opening Ceremony last night, she turns gooey and says “Aww! Cute!”

Leslie balks and yanks back her phone. “No, dum-dum! Did you overdose on pussy already or something? Look at the caption!”

The font is smaller, the caption longer, so Kara squints at the phone. She hates her competition contacts, but they work better than glasses when executing explosive force movements. Anyhow, she’s stuck with the contacts for the time being, since Lena took the broken glasses with her today. She said she had a fix-it idea that would work better than tape. Kara can’t wait to see what it is.

“Are you still going?” Leslie huffs. “You read slower than my stepdad on the toilet.”

Kara glares at her, kind of, and reads “don’t drink the tea, supergirl!” aloud, sans exclamation points. She folds her lips into her mouth, gingerly, because they are still swollen and tender, and frowns. “What is that supposed to mean? What tea?”

Leslie thumps the back of her skull, hard. Kara grunts and retaliates with a whack to her boob. Thanks to a safety helmet and a padded ski suit, neither blow really hurts, but the intent to injure is present and genuine.

“The tea, Danvers! Remember? The special calming tea Lex Luthor gave people before he zapped them into his fucking afterlife computer? Where everyone is young and healthy and you listen to Belinda Carlisle forever? Which…just fucking kill me, okay?”

Kara had, in fact, forgotten about the sedative tea Lex administered before his so-called ‘upload process.’ But that was Lex, not Lena. She says as much to Leslie Willis, who almost throws her phone at Kara.

“I know it wasn’t her, nimrod,” Leslie moans. “Look, she’s hot, obviously, and you’re sweet but not too bright - it’s a classic combo. I get it. But have you really thought about how this looks for you?”

“I don’t…”

“Nope, scratch that, never mind, of course you haven’t thought it through. You just want to kiss the sad, pretty girl and make her happy, right?”

“No! No, I…” Kara pauses in her denial, because that was her primary goal over the past day and a half.

She’s been so wrapped up in making things right with Lena, so intent on showing Lena that she likes her so damn much, that Kara hasn’t spared much thought for the reality of their situation: they are two public figures (Lena more so) at the locus of world media attention, essaying romance. People gonna talk. More specifically, people gonna talk shit.
“You’re golden right now, blondie. You’re a human snickerdoodle,” Leslie continues. “But when you start fucking the wrong person, their stank just clings to you. If John Q. Public starts to link your name with shady shit, your warm cookie smell will be a sweet memory.”

Kara gets the point. It stings, and she’s surprised to get this kind of ‘look after yourself’ advice from Leslie Willis, of all people. But she gets it.

“People wouldn’t think that stuff about Lena if they knew her,” Kara says. “She’s not a cookie - and I loathe you for making me crave cookies, by the way - but she really is sweet. And complicated. Like mille-feuille.”

“Whatever the fuck that is. Sponsors prefer snickerdoodles, babe. Take it from a burnt gingersnap.” Leslie gets to her feet, brushes snow off her butt, and stalks off. “Hope she’s worth it.”

“She is!” Kara sings out. “I’ll tell the world!”

And that’s how Kara gets the idea for her next Supergirl mission: a covert public relations campaign to repair the public’s misconstruction of Lena Luthor. It might take some time, and it might require a more meticulous approach than she normally employs, but Kara thinks she’s up to the challenge.

When she returns to their suite about an hour later and smells the takeout Lena brought back from the Silver Flame (jesus wept, she brought potstickers!), and sees that Lena has moved the nightstand from between their two full-size beds and pushed them together to maximize their playing surface… well.

“Failure is not an option,” she says to herself.

Lena exits the ensuite with her hair in a black microfiber towel turban. She’s wearing a baggy white US Ski Team hoodie, black leggings, and red fuzzy socks. She’s the cutest, sexiest thing Kara Danvers has ever seen in her life.

“Hey,” Lena says, heading to the kitchenette. “How was the course?”

“I love it.” Kara drops her gear by the front door and sets about stripping off her gloves, parka, cap, boots. “Way funner than advertised.”

Lena’s eyes flare with amusement. “Funnier than advertised. Sounds better than my day.”

Socks, sweater… “Why, what happened?”

“Lost a pole. Wound up shinning the last three gates really hard.”

Kara pauses, hisses in sympathy. “You hurt?”

“Nothing but my pride.”

Belt, jeans… “We have a fridge and a microwave, right?” she asks.
Lena stops unpacking their food. “Yes. Why do you ask?”

“I want to go out tonight.”

By this point Kara is bare-assed and standing two feet from a huge bed.

Lena pointedly looks from Kara to the bed and back again. “Really?”

“Really. I know you’re open tomorrow, and I have qualifiers at 1:30, and then our schedules really start to tighten up.” Kara walks over to the counter, reaches across and takes Lena’s hands. “I want to go out and have some fun, see the sights, just...be here before it all gets nuts, you know?”

Lena hesitates. Kara flexes her arms, tenses her abs, makes puppy dog eyes. And watches as Lena’s resolve melts.

“Okay,” she says, relenting. “You’re a filthy cheater, but okay. Where do you want to go?”

Wherever there are the most people and cameras, Kara thinks. “Anywhere with you,” she says.

“Except curling.”

“What do you have against curling? It’s a game of strategy where women in tight pants yell at each other to ‘hurry hard,’” Lena argues. “Where’s the crime?”

“It’s boring. It bores me and I get bored,” Kara shrewdly rebuts. “We might as well drink some Baileys and milk and go straight to sleep.”

Lena stows the food in the fridge, rounds the counter, gives Kara a little peck on the corner of her mouth as she breezes past. “You’re a snob. Baileys and milk is delicious.”

“No! Curling and Baileys? You’re a hundred years old!” Kara whines. “I’m dating a centenarian.”

“We’re not dating,” Lena says, snickering. “And we never will be if you keep being mean to me.”

Kara stomps off to shower, smiling to herself. “Commence Operation Mille-feuille.”

TBC
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Between the weather delays, rescheduling and such at the real Olympics, I’ve decided henceforth to play fast and loose with the days and timing of events in this here fake Olympics. Which kills my soul, because I am an anal-retentive freak.

Chapter Seven

Saturday night was a blitz of handshakes and high fives and fist bumps with dozens of spectators and athletes from the far reaches of the planet - the best bits of it carefully documented on Kara Danvers’ Instagram via pics and stories, with obligatory Facebook crossposts.

She drafted Lena for half the camera work and claimed she was recording their adventures for private sharing with Eliza and Alex. Lena didn’t love the idea of horning in on her family time, but Kara pouted and promised sex yoga if she helped.

That brought a swift and successful close to their negotiations.

They hit three gift shops on their way to the shuttle. Kara used her smart ring to pay for everything and Lena seemed pleased… at first, anyway.

By the time Kara had stuffed her backpack to bursting with souvenir pins, hard candies, a dozen pluses of PyeongChang’s official mascot - a white tiger called Soohorang - and tagged the little cats’ ears with Team USA ski and snowboard pins, Lena was looking at her kinda funny.

“Whazzit? Too much?” she asked, around the stem of a sour melon whirly pop.

Lena gave a quick head shake. “You must have a lot of friends back home.”

Kara took out her lolly and hooked her arm with Lena’s, tugged them together at the hip. “These aren’t for home friends. They’re for friends we haven’t met yet.”

“Is that why we’re trotting around in this wretched cold instead of warm in bed?” Lena hiked a querulous brow. “A goodwill tour?”

_Uh-oh. She’s onto me._

A fidgety beat later, Kara blew a raspberry and leaned into the obviousness of her ploy.
“Duh. It’s part of the Olympic tradition to meet people from around the world and swap cool shit with them. Trust me, plenty of people will be totally stoked to meet two rockin’ babes from Team USA,” Kara claimed.

Lena looked dubious. “Maybe when Obama was in office,” she rebutted. “Now? I don’t know.”

Kara conceded that point with a heavy nod. “That’s valid. And I know dolls and candy can’t make up for our president being a psychotic wang, but we’ve got to do our part for America’s public image. It’s our patriotic duty, Lena.”

She remained wary, made a *hmph* sound.

“Don’t make me start singing ‘God Bless the USA.’ Because I will,” said Kara, brandishing her sucker like a microphone. “If tomorrow all the things were gone, I’d worked for all my life…”

Lena, being a prudent and sane woman, pressed a gloved hand over Kara’s mouth and begged her to stop.

At the Olympic Sliding Center, they mingled with friends and family of the luge teams and screamed themselves hoarse as Chris Mazdzer won the first men’s singles luge medal in U.S. history. They fangirled over members of the Nigerian women’s bobsled team, and met some super friendly moguls skiers from Australia.

Soon, Kara’s slouchy linen duck backpack was studded with pins from eighteen different countries, and she made sure to get selfies of her and Lena with every. single. person. they met.

Phase Two of the Operation involved Kara handing out plushes and candies to several children on the Olympic Plaza, and though many of the English-speaking kids already knew her name, she always introduced herself as if she weren’t famous.

“Hi! I’m Kara Danvers. I’m with the U.S. Snowboarding Team!” she said, every blessed time. “And this is my friend Lena Luthor. She’s with the U.S. Ski Team and is probably going to win a bunch of medals or whatever, so she thinks snowboarding is dumb.”

“That is not true! I love snowboarding!” Lena protested from behind the camera.

“But I keep telling her skiing is dumb and snowboarding is rad! What do you think?” Here, Kara would produce a Soohorang doll and wiggle his ears, displaying each team pin in turn. “Skiing? Or snowboarding? Which is cooler?”

Depending on the child’s answer, Kara would do a victory boogie or turn the camera on Lena, who usually just gave a smug nod, flashed a lazy peace sign, or gave an awkward two-eyed wink.

They were rushed at one point by two knee-high Korean boys whose parkas were absolutely covered in Olympic pins. The kids seemed rocket-propelled toward the American girls, powered by fervent lust to grab up every possible souvenir pin in existence. They chattered excitedly, bounced on their toes, and offered up for trade some pins of which they had multiples.

Kara got swept up in their excitement and started bounding around like Tigger. She couldn’t
understand much of what they were saying, but she was instantly willing to give them every pin she had collected, along with the remaining plushes and all the candy, too.

Camera operator Lena begged her to calm down, to no avail. Kara dug into the backpack slung reverse-style over her stomach and produced the last two Soohorang dolls. She gestured with the ski and snowboard pins and tried asking the boys which sport they preferred, but they looked baffled by her earnest attempts.

“Eotteonge deo joh-a?” Lena called out. “Seukiga choego!”

The boys laughed and both pointed at the skiing pins, shouting “Seukiga choego! Ye! Gomabseubnida!” as they grabbed the dolls and ran away.

Kara whirled to the camera and tried to sound stern, even though her expression had gone stupidly moony. “You cheated.”

Lena giggled. “That’s a matter of perspective.”

“Slippery,” Kara muttered. “You speak Korean?”

“Just enough to get myself in trouble,” Lena said, as a leering Kara stalked toward her.

She hit ‘stop’ perhaps a second before Kara launched a hug attack, crushing Lena against her flattened backpack belly. Kara just held her for a bit, seemingly heedless that they were in public. Extremely in public. She nuzzled her warm lips against Lena’s chilly earlobe.

“How do you say ‘take me to bed’ in Korean?” she whispered.

Maybe half an hour later, Kara found herself arched in a modified backbend with Lena beneath her, digging two fingers into her G-spot and pressing firm downstrokes along her clit. The pressure and rhythm built slowly, utilizing finger strength, then wrist leverage, then elbow power. When Lena finally worked up to pulling her hooked fingers with the V-twin engine of her shoulder, Kara’s eyes rolled back in her head and she shouted profanities at the ceiling.

The orgasm seemed to go on forever as she trembled and babbled and flexed her core, trying to drive her hips down onto Lena’s cruel and crafty hand. Then there was…something odd. A small gush, of sorts, a spasming release that was new and hot and wet and -

“Oh, no. Ohnonono…”

Kara leaned forward on her knees, slapped both hands over her crimson face, utterly convinced she had just had an accident on Lena, an accident of the sort she hadn’t experienced since mean Mrs. Lemke wouldn’t let her go to the restroom in kindergarten.

She wanted to vanish, to dissolve into smoke and escape through the HVAC ducts, to transmute into light particles and beam herself into deep space. Most of all, she wanted to time travel back twenty minutes or so, with the foresight to put down a goddamned towel.

“I’m sorry, oh god I’m so sorry, I can’t believe I did that,” she murmured, palms locked over eyes.

“Hey. Hey.” Lena eased her hands free and traced fingertips along Kara’s collarbone and chest, held
her loosely by the waist. "Please look at me. Kara? Please look at me.”

Her voice, soft and warm as fleece, soothed Kara enough to peel her hands up - just a little - and glance down through her fingers. Lena didn’t look upset or embarrassed. Actually, she looked rather proud of herself.

“You’re amazing,” she said. “You’re the most beautiful person, by every metric, that I’ve ever met. I am so happy that I can make you feel this good. It’s a privilege.”

Kara sniffled, dragged her hands across eyes damp with tears. “So you don’t think that was…you think that I…?”

“Came. Ejaculated. Hard,” Lena confirmed, nodding. She peered down at her chest and touched the milky white fluid tracking over her breast. “Remarkable.”

“Really?” Kara squinted, eked out a small grin. “You really don’t think it’s weird?”

“No,” Lena said. “Scientifically speaking, all women are capable. We’re just not propelled to that peak very often.”

Kara huffed. “Guess that means I’m special.”

Lena smirked. “Actually, I think it means I’m special.”

Though she chuckled and leaned down for a kiss, Kara suddenly felt very tired. She crawled off the bed, staggered to the bathroom and returned with wet washcloths. After a quick mutual cleanup, she methodically collapsed on top of Lena, nesting their breasts and hips and thighs together with the tender pressure Lena claimed to enjoy.

“Lemme know ‘f I’m squishing you,” she mumbled against her neck.

“You’re not,” Lena sighed. “You’re better than any weighted blanket I ever tried.”

“Hmm?” Kara managed, already drifty.

“Something my therapist recommended. I had anxiety, insomnia. During the trial, and after, for a while.” Lena tightened her arms around Kara’s back. “Doesn’t happen much anymore.”

Kara angled her head back, watched Lena’s profile as she stared toward the window. “Did it help?”

“Some. The blanket was not great for my self-esteem. But the whole ‘wear a towel into the shower’ thing was even more pathetic.”

“What’s that supposed to do?” Kara asked, her voice a feather.

Lena paused, closed her eyes. Laughed softly at herself. “It’s supposed to feel like a hug.”

Kara didn’t ask any more questions. She squirmed onto her elbows, hovered over Lena’s face, and kissed her, kissed her mouth and chin and cheeks and ears and eyes, kissed her until exhaustion won out, fell asleep kissing her.

In the morning, she kissed her awake. They ate leftovers for breakfast. There was a long, hot shower with some grooming and many hugs.
Kara took the shuttle to Phoenix Snow Park and scored a 98 in slopestyle qualifiers. Somehow, it was only the second best part of her day.

TBC
On the bus ride back from qualifiers, Kara powers up her phone and starts gauging the general response to the previous evening’s social media blitz. It’s early going, but she’s glad to see that many of her followers (450k and growing) have liked the videos and photos she posted.

Kara doesn’t read many comments - doesn’t as a matter of course, because her feelings are easily hurt - but it’s discouraging to see the first few responders question her sanity for tootling around with the sister of a mass murderer.

She tries to shake it off and focus on the positives: the video of her and Lena talking with the two cutie-pie Korean boys has over 130,000 likes already, and several pics of them with international athletes have at least 50,000 likes each. Kara’s insta has never pulled numbers this fast before, not even for ab workout pics.

And Lena Luthor is clearly identified and tagged in *everything*, so there’s no way that many people tapped the little ‘heart’ button blindly. They saw her smile, they heard her laugh, they acknowledged, even in this very small way, that she’s a likable human being.

Alex Danvers, if she’s seen any of Kara’s posts, is apparently choosing to ignore them or to reserve her commentary until they meet in person. At last word, her flight had departed National City on time and should arrive this evening at Incheon Airport. Kara is curious, and a tad fearful, to know her sister’s thoughts on this impromptu ‘hearts & minds’ campaign. Alex’s approval means the world to Kara, and she hopes to gain it for her friendship-slash-whatever with Lena Luthor.

*The op is off to a good start, though, she thinks. Phase One complete. Good job, Agent Danvers.*

Eve Teschmacher seems to agree, and has sent Kara two heartening texts:

*Your SM is priceless - ever considered doing PR?*

and

*LL still keeping to herself, but seems happy. Strong runs today!*

The idea that her company is (maybe possibly) having a positive effect on Lena’s mood *and* her skiing makes Kara so giddy that she drops her phone, grabs the headrest of the empty seat in front of her, and gives it a grizzly bear shake while going *mmm-mmm-MMM!* with her mouth closed.

On the third shake, the two plastic support posts pop cleanly, broken at the base.

Shocked, Kara blinks and blushes. Slumps low in her seat with the detached headrest in her hands.

“You’re gonna have to pay for that, Supes,” Leslie says from somewhere behind her, drawing laughter from a few teammates who witnessed Supergirl’s latest adventure in klutziness.
Kara acknowledges this and adds it to her ‘PyeongChang trail of destruction’ list, which now includes a pair of glasses, an elevator light fixture cover, a sink faucet handle, and a bus seat headrest.

When it hits Kara that all of these spasmodic outbursts were concurrent with Lena-related happiness, her guilty shame just sort of…evaporates. She hugs the headrest like a teddy bear and smiles behind her hand, pondering what it all means.

Her keycard isn’t working. The suite’s door lock is sticky again. Just like the day she checked in, it’s damp with traces of clear, syrupy liquid.

*What the snack is going on with this thing?*

She checks the ceiling and sees no signs of a leak that could have dripped on it, and she really can’t imagine Lena dumping Sprite on an electronic thingy and blithely fucking off to her training session. Maybe some doofus is playing a prank, but it’s not funny and there’s no one around to witness her reaction, anyhow.

At a loss and burdened with heavy gear bags, Kara stands there muttering expletives and repeatedly swiping her keycard through the unresponsive lock. She’s ready to concede defeat and call maintenance again when the stairwell door at the far end of the hallway opens, so slowly it’s almost silent.

A man in a Village maintenance uniform steps out and softly clicks the door closed. Though his cap bill is pulled low over his brow, the man does not appear to be Korean. He doesn’t have a toolbox, just a long screwdriver and a claw hammer. Eyes down, he walks in Kara’s direction. Swiftly, with purpose.

*That’s not the same guy who fixed the faucet. Lena was attacked in that stairwell. Yun-Bok fixed the faucet. That’s not Yun-Bok. Lena was attacked in that stairwell. Oh…oh, god.*

Kara feels her hackles rise. Her instincts are telling her to drop her shit and run. But at the same time, her reflexive politeness keeps her rooted in place, tells her this is a worker doing his job and it would be rude to act as if she were scared of him.

Only she *is* scared. So she compromises. Kara drops her gear to free both hands, and calls out to get his attention, to make him look at her.

“Sir! Hey, sir! Hello?” she says, loudly, even though her voice quavers. “I need some help with this lock, if you can spare a minute?”

He stops dead, maybe fifteen feet away. Glances at her from beneath his cap bill. His hand flexes around the hammer’s yellow and black handle. “Sorry, miss. Wrong floor,” he says, in a cracked
whisper. He turns and walks back the way he came, disappears into the stairwell with barely a sound.

Kara’s stands there for a while, frozen and dizzy. Her heart thumps loud, pulse a klaxon in her ears. Sweat trickles down her sides. Both hands are tight fists, which is strange because she’s never punched another person in her life. Her body, it seems, was ready for a fight.


Somehow, Kara knows she is not overreacting, knows that nothing happened to her only because she is not Lena Luthor. She can’t imagine what might have happened if the man had found Lena instead, alone in the hall with a sabotaged lock and her arms loaded with baggage. He had a hammer and (christ, fuck) a long screwdriver. She won’t imagine such a thing.

Kara’s legs wiggle and she crashes back against the wall, slides down to sit on the carpet.

*Think. Think. What would Alex do? Think like Alex…*

Alex would call downstairs and ask whether a maintenance man of that description works here, alert security that there may be a trespasser in the Athlete’s Village. Alex would call Lena and ask her for a full description of the Singularity cultist who attacked her while her own recall is still fresh. Alex would pop some magnesium and Vitamin C to help recover from the adrenaline rush.

*Who are you kidding? Alex would have kicked that guy in the face. Maggie would have kicked him someplace lower. Lena managed to get away from him somehow, even after he hit her with a wrench.*

Kara concludes that she, relatively speaking, is a sheltered little rabbit. So there she sits, queasy and sweaty and ashamed, on the verge of tears, wondering how the hell Lena lives like this.

On a whim, she picks up the keycard and gives it another go. The green light blinks and the lock opens.

Ten minutes later, Kara has reported her concerns to the building manager and security director, without mentioning Lena’s name. They promise to look into the matter, double guard presence and patrols until the man is found, and install a new lock for her suite.

They are polite, serious, reassuring, and apologetic. They vow that such an intrusion will not recur. It doesn’t make her feel any better.
Five minutes after that, Kara is in the shower with a thick towel wrapped around her body. It is warm and heavy and clings to her with palpable pressure, but it doesn’t feel anything like a hug.

Lena returns just before sundown. She trundles into the room, burdened with her usual equipment load, plus three bags of food and a wide, flat cardboard box.

“Hey, they gave me a new key card downstairs. Was something wrong with the lock?” she asks.

Kara sits against the headboard near the window, sketching by fading sunlight. “Yeah. Sticky.” They can get into the details later.

“I brought cheeseburgers. No onions on yours,” Lena calls from the kitchenette. “Fries, too, and that weird cola you like because your taste buds are broken.”

“My taste buds are not broken,” Kara grouses back. “It takes an evolved palate to appreciate mango Diet Coke.”

Lena just shudders in response. “Your glasses should be here tonight. The front desk will call when they arrive.”

“What did you do to them? X-ray vision? Laser beams? She inquired, hopefully.”

“Would that I could,” says Lena. “It’s more of an aesthetic upgrade.”

She stacks her gear against the far wall and drops the box on the bed. Kara lays her sketch pad face down and canters her head toward the box, still sealed with shipping tape.

“Competition suit,” Lena says in answer. “I’m scared to open it.”

Glad for the distraction, Kara knee-walks across the mattress and shakes the box. “Seems harmless enough. What’s your worry?”

Lena sits beside her, sighs heavily. “I would have been happy with a regular stars-and-stripes theme, but apparently Spyder decided to make us… super hero suits? Or something?”

“What? Awesome! Awesome! Oh, boy!” Kara’s mood elevates instantly, and her mind boggles with possibilities. “Is it DC or Marvel? Did you get to pick the hero you want to be? Or which one of their costumes you prefer? Because sometimes the old ones are way better than the new stuff, like Jean Grey’s classic yellow and green dealie was so much cooler than the dull black jumpsuit she -”

“Sweetheart, I have no idea what you’re talking about!” Lena interjects. “I’m wildly ignorant about the genre, so I just told Eve to pick something for me. I have no clue what’s in the box.”

Kara bites her lips and whimpers. “Can I open it? Please?”

“Knock yourself out,” Lena says, and heads for the kitchen.

In a flash, the box is busted open and tissue paper flung four different ways. Kara yelps and laughs and bounds off the bed, waving a blue, red, and gold ski suit like a battle flag.
“You’re Captain Marvel!” she shouts, holding the suit against her own body to display the design. Lena fishes a fry from a brown paper bag, bites it. Shrugs. “Okay? She’s good?”

“Well, she’s no Supergirl, but she’s pretty boss,” says Kara. “You can fly -“

“I wish.”

“You have super strength and durability -”

“Debatable.”

“And you can shoot energy bursts from your hands!”

Lena’s brows go up. She looks intrigued. With little warning, she cocks her wrist and flicks the last bite of her fry at Kara, who jolts forward and catches it in her mouth. “So I could do worse.”

“You can’t do much better. Within the constraints of the Marvel universe, anyway.” Kara holds the suit out and gives it a look-see. It’s good replica, a strong character choice, and it makes her like Eve Teschmacher even more when she remembers Captain Marvel’s real name. “Hey, you’re a Danvers now!”

There’s a long pause where Lena holds a bite of cheeseburger in her mouth, without chewing, without breathing. She can’t speak, but her eyes say ‘wtf?’ pretty clearly.

“Captain Marvel’s real name is Carol Danvers,” Kara says, without further comment.

“Oh,” says Lena, a hard swallow later. “Eve and I are going to have a little talk tomorrow.”

“Psshh, don’t be mad at her. And don’t act like you didn’t put a ring on it the night we met,” says Kara, wiggling her smart-ringed thumb.

Somehow, Lena manages to smile and scowl at once. “You were an impulse purchase.”

“No exchanges or returns,” Kara says, darting in to peck her mouth. She pulls back, smacks her lips and wrinkles her nose. “You’re all onion-y.”

With a chuckle, Lena grabs the drawstring of Kara’s sweatpants and pulls her close. “There must be a dozen legitimate reasons why you shouldn’t kiss me, ever, and you’re going with onion breath?”

This vague allusion to her hazardous proximity to Lena Luthor, writ bold and italicized, brings Kara up short, because it’s no longer an abstract concept. Being with Lena could mean more than getting rude Instagram comments, or being chastised and cautioned by teammates and family. Lena might be right. Alex might be right. Kara might be standing at the outer ring of a target.

She’s already made up her mind that she will not run away, and she will not do anything to make Lena push her away. So Kara does the only thing she can imagine will make her feel strong and in control again: she moves even closer, takes the bullseye in her arms and hugs it against her heart.

“Onions are my Kryptonite,” she says, and kisses her sad, sweet, dangerous girl. “But you’re worth
the risk.”

TBC
Still with me? Awesome! Thanks for the kudos, notes, and feedback - it really helps. Writing is super damn difficult some days, you know? I forget that bit when I don't try it for a while. Anyways, things should tumble right along toward the close from this point.

Chapter Nine

The new glasses frames are one of a kind, custom turned in the 3D print lab at Luthor Corp’s Seoul facility. They are, in Kara’s words, “totally bitchin’”

Though shaped in the same squarish style Kara prefers, they’re constructed from a dark wood-grained material that feels super rigid and super light. On the left temple is an eye-catching detail: an inch-long row of modular blocks colored blue, yellow, black, green, and red - like the five Olympic rings.

“Lena, this is so rad! I love them! Thank you!” Kara squeals and crawls across the bed, intent on hugs, but Lena holds up a ‘wait, wait’ finger and tosses her a small plastic baggie of modular blocks colored bronze, silver, and gold.

“The right temple has three removable pieces,” Lena says, “so you can replace them to correspond with the medals you win.”

Kara gazes at her, quieted by the sweet gesture, by her confidence that Kara will win medals, by the renewed awareness that Lena’s clockwork mind ticks in such gentle, generous rhythms.

“You imagine all these neat things,” she says. “How does that even work?”

Lena shrugs. “Wish I knew. The idea hit me sometime Saturday morning, so I drafted a model on my tablet and sent the specs to the lab. No pun intended.”

_Specs. Heh._ Kara strokes the temple, the colored bands, the dark wood-grained…whatever it is.

“What’s this material?”

“Balsa wood.”

“Like in model airplanes? But it’s so…” Kara gives the frames a good crank and fails to bend them. “Yeah, okay. _How?_”

Lena sits by her, already smiling at the prospect of discussing her work. “When you remove the lignin and treat wood - even soft lumber like balsa and pine - with pressure and mild heat, it tightens the cellular structure to the point where it’s almost as strong as titanium and nearly as light as carbon fiber. My hope is that this process could increase usage of faster-growing, renewable woods and curb deforestation of slow-growing hardwood forests and old growth trees. Oh, and it has applications in construction and engineering as a clean, carbon-neutral replacement for steel - “
Just there, world-class skier and inventor Lena Luthor was tackled by an inflamed snowboarder who feared spontaneous combustion would occur unless they kissed that very instant.

“You have, like, the best rack ever.” Kara utters this gem while cradling said breasts, her hands gentle enough to catch soap bubbles. She licks a kiss onto Lena’s sternum and presses the soft globes against her cheeks, trapping her face in Eden. “Ever ever ever ever…”

Spread-eagle and limp beneath her, Lena trembles with laughter at this dippy bout of mammarian reverence. “Good thing you’re a boob girl.”

“I’m an everything girl.” Kara glances up, smiling. “And girl, you got everything I like.”

More laughter follows. More kisses. More tangled limbs and ow-you’re-on-my-hair and clumsy, earnest tumbling from one edge of the supersized mattress to the other. They’re probably not going to fuck again tonight, but taking their hands off each other just seems like a really dumb idea.

“I want to sketch you. Like, try to draw a picture of you? Is that okay?”

“… … … sure.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes.”

“Yes! When?”

“Umm. Two and a half minutes.”

“Highly specific. I love it.”

“That’s specifically how long it takes me to pee and wash up.”

Kara snickers and lifts her arm, taps an imaginary wristwatch. “Ready. Set. Go!”

Lena pinches her side and races away. Kara does some speedy set dressing. She turns on the lamp and lays it on its side to cast shadows at the bed. Rucks up a craggy landscape of sheets and pillows and two Olympic commemorative comforters for Lena to recline amid. Fetches her Team USA beanie. Thinks about fetching the gloves, too, then thinks better.

She flips her Stonehenge spiral drawing pad to a clean sheet and picks out a new Faber Castell 9000 pencil. Wipes her damp palms on her bare thighs.
Lena emerges from the ensuite, pads across the carpet, biting her smile and ducking her head. She hikes up a shoulder in question. Kara hands her the beanie and she tugs it on, intentionally crooked, while rolling her eyes and blushing from cheeks to chest.

Kara looks toward the bed and Lena nods, crawls into the sheets and makes herself a nest from soft things that smell of their bodies. She looks at peace there, eyes calm and clear as a reef lagoon.

When Kara sees her, there’s naught in her mind but a curved Mobius strip of sound, the word beautiful sung on an endless loop. She sinks to her knees, lays the pad on the bed, and begins.

“That’s not…is that…is that me?” Lena asks, just over two hours later. She holds the drawing pad on her lap and touches a fingertip to the paper, traces lightly over this recreation of her body, this interpretation of her face. She looks up with wet rimming her eyes. “Is this how you see me?”

Kara breathes shallow, shifts foot to foot. Beads of panic sweat bloom along her hairline, down her spine. “Yeah,” she whispers. “That’s you. As seen through me, I guess.”

“Oh. Well. It’s very beautiful. Excessively so, I fear.” She wipes her eyes. Laughs wetly. “Rose colored glasses, maybe.”

“Says the woman who made my glasses,” says Kara, smirking.

Lena smiles at that. “Touché.” She flips back to the first page of the drawing pad and her smile gets even bigger. “Your dog?”

Kara sighs in relief. The Lena sketch is maybe the best portrait she’s ever done. It’s certainly the fastest, and maybe the most terrifying projection of her desires she’s ever committed to paper. Talking about her dog is a respite from big, scary feelings.

“Krypto! My handsome baby boy,” she coos. “Eliza got him for me last year after X-Games. He splits time between Colorado and California, depending on my schedule and the season.”

“Sounds nice. You know, when I was little, I desperately wanted a dog, but that was a non-starter with Lillian. From those first few years with my birth mother, I remember clinging to the fur of this incredibly tall grey dog. Possibly a deer hound, but who knows? Maybe I dreamed him up, like an imaginary friend,” Lena says, looking wistful. “Do you miss Krypto?”

Crazily charmed by the idea of big-eyed baby Lena harassing a giant, docile hunting hound, it takes Kara a second to hear the question. “Oh, yeah! Like crazy, sometimes. Not so much when he chews up my boots. He is, however, an excellent mountain hike partner and top-notch napping companion. And he sings, too!”

Lena’s smile is tender, her voice sincere. “Of course he does. Why wouldn’t he.”

Too busy gazing at the line of her jaw, mapping the web of fine lines that radiate from her smile, Kara doesn’t notice Lena has stopped flipping through the book. Has stopped, and stares coldly at the sketch Kara did late that afternoon - a sketch of the man from the hallway.
“The fuck is this?” Lena asks, sounding baffled more than hostile. “Some kind of joke?”
Wrong-footed, Kara just blinks and tries to catch up. “No. What? No, no, see…”
Lena holds up the tablet and punches at the man’s face with a single, accusatory finger. “Kara, why in god’s name are you drawing pictures of Morgan Edge?”
“I…I don’t know who that is?” Kara answers, and grimaces as a plea for patience. “That guy in the picture? I saw him today in our hallway and got a funny feeling, I guess. I reported it to security and emailed them that sketch, just in case he’s a trespasser or the guy who attacked you -”
“Oh. Oh. No, this isn’t the man who attacked me, but if he was here, he is most definitely trespassing.” Lena’s sitting ramrod straight and gripping the drawing pad with white knuckles. When she notices this, she exhales hard and hands the book to Kara. “Sorry.”
“It’s okay.” Kara wants badly to touch her, but doesn’t dare. She looks like a guitar string wound too tight; a single strum may trigger a cutting snap. “Who is he? And why was he lurking in the hall dressed like maintenance?”
Lena takes her time, breathes slow and deep until her posture eases and she can speak without spitting nails.
“Morgan Edge is a business rival, an amoral raptor who devours innovation and shits out regressive flotsam,” she begins. “We’ve beaten him in six bidding wars for small companies with bleeding edge tech. I want Luthor Corp to develop these ideas to their best ends, quickly; he wants to sit on their patents and strangle out a hundred bastardized junk products to maximize profit.”
“Gosh. He sounds -”
“I hate him,” Lena hisses.
“Wow. Wow.”
“I mean it. I utterly despise the man.” She pauses, taps a rapid tattoo on her legs. “I’m suing him. Or rather, Luthor Corp is suing him for patent infringement. We will win, and he will be ruined, and he has threatened me with violent reprisal.”
“Oh, man. Do you think he sent wrench guy that first day?” Kara inquires, gaping. “Maybe that wasn’t a Lex Luthor thing, it was a you thing. Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck, Lena, we’ve got to call the cops!”
“And tell them what? That one sleazy American billionaire industrialist has perhaps sneaked into the Olympics to assault and intimidate another -“
“Do not call yourself sleazy.”
“…another problematic American billionaire industrialist because he wants to re-deploy cancer-fighting medical nanobots to grow bigger dicks? Who would believe such horse shit?”
Kara boldly raises her hand. “Me, for one.”
“Why? Do you not see the inherent lunacy of this situation?”
“Yes. Of course I do.” Kara chances it, reaches out and lays her hand on Lena’s shoulder. “But I believe you. I believe in you, whatever that’s worth.”
It’s like watching a fire hydrant drain down, seeing the geyser of anger diminish to a trickle, then dry
up completely. Lena stares at Kara for a bit, mouth working soundlessly, until she just…stops. Shakes her head. Smiles. “It’s worth a lot, Kara. More than I can say, actually.”

“Oh, Okay, good.” Kara stretches her arm around Lena’s shoulders and gives her a squeeze. “So what do we do now? If Village security can’t find him and stop him - ”

“I can’t count on that. He may have bribed them. Cops, too. He’s done it before.”

“Right. What’s our move?”

Lena sighs heavily. “Well, first of all, you need to move out.”

Kara shakes her head. “No.”

“It’s for your own safety.”

She puts her other arm around Lena. “Nope.”

“Kara, he’s not above harming you to gain leverage over me.”

She edges behind Lena and clings with arms and legs, koala-like. “No siree Bob.”

“If something were to happen to you - “

“My sister would kill him and no one would ever find his body,” Kara proclaims.

Lena’s breath bleeds out slowly. Her head drops forward, back slumps back against Kara’s chest. “Please,” she says. “Please go?”

“Stop asking.” Kara rests her forehead against Lena’s nape. “You’re stuck with me, ‘member?”

She says something under her breath, something Kara hears as ‘hush now, girl,’ and lays her hands on Kara’s knees. “Alright. I have to make a call.”

“You’re not calling to have me evicted, are you?”

“I am not,” Lena says, chuckling. “You win.”

“Damn right, I win.”

Reluctantly, Kara unlocks her limbs and sets Lena free.

Immediately, she vaults off the bed, grabs her phone and places that call. Kara spies the ID and area code, wonders why Lena is phoning someone named Sam in Metropolis, where it’s not even six in the morning. A selfish little sliver of Kara wants to know if Sam is a lady Sam, and how Lena knows maybe-lady Sam wakes up before six in the bloody morning.

She doesn’t get to ask. Lena slips away to the restroom to talk in private. Through the closed door, Kara hears her voice - tight and high - peaking on certain phrases: sore loser, and not dropping the suits, and scaring me off, and fucking well mistaken.

While Lena is occupied, Kara tries to calm down by texting Alex again to see how her travel is
going. Her flight was scheduled to land hours ago and Kara’s messages have been ‘read’ but received no replies. She’s getting anxious to hear that her sister is safe and sound.

Kara: Can’t wait to see you! So stoked for tomorrow! You down yet?

Again, her message is marked as delivered and read. After a bit, the response dots start pipping.

Alex: I’m down! My flight was delayed for weather, but I’m in Seoul (finally! holy shit!) Bad news is the Hyatt canceled my reservation and gave my room away.

Kara: Noooo! Fuckery!

Alex: I know right? Sorry for no call/text. Didn’t want to worry you till I found solution.

Kara: Roger that. What’s the plan, stan?

Alex: Checking online options, no luck yet. Stuck in hotel bar for now, drowning sorrows :-(

Kara grumbles something about rotten luck as Lena jogs back in and dives under the covers. She seems oddly energized. Borderline happy.

“Uhhh…Everything okay?” Kara asks.

“Everything will be okay,” Lena replies, wiggling into the warm space by Kara’s side. “I’m taking steps.”

“Steps.”

“Steps. Overdue steps. I’m taking them. I will enjoy taking them.”

Kara waits for more of an explanation, but that’s all Lena gives up. She takes note of Kara’s frown and peers over at the texts, reads the saga of roomless Alex. Then taps Kara, tentatively, on the leg.

“Remember the training sessions held here last year?”

Unsure what that has to do with anything, Kara gets a smidge defensive. “I’m aware of them, but I didn’t come because I had an injury.”

Lena’s eyes go so wide, her forehead furrows. “Injury? You told me you were depressed after a summer break-up with a girl named Lucy.”


“I accept. Anyways, I’m all good now. Better than ever.” Kara pauses, considers how that sounds, and wonders if she should backtrack. She chooses to let it lie, because it’s true. She feels happier, more alive, than she has in years. It would be deceptive to disavow Lena’s part in that.
Lena seems to notice her nervous moment and opts to swerve around it. “My point was that I did come to the training period, and I got an apartment so I could work some lab hours at our Seoul office. Do you think your sister would stay at my place?”

“You’d do that? For real?” Kara’s frown softens. She regards Lena, who has every right not to be nice to Alex, with moo-cow eyes. “Yes, please and thank you!”

“No big deal,” Lena says, shaking it off. “I’ll make the call.”

She slides out of bed again (again! god kara let the woman rest!) and takes her phone into the kitchen. Kara watches her walk away, buttocks and hips all smooth power, flexing and swaying. Watches the muscles of her back lengthen and contract, from trapezius to Venusian dimples, as she stretches both arms overhead. Kara’s fingers itch for pencil and paper. Now that the ice is broken, she wants to draw Lena over and over, draw her laughing, and drinking coffee, and on the phone…

_and skiing! Oh, god that must be a sight!

Kara realizes she’s never watched Lena ski and vows to make that happen. Soon. For the moment, she’s got a stranded sister to help rescue.

Kara: Hang on. May have a place for you in town.

Alex: How? Oh nvm - the billionaire gal pal :-

Kara: Hey I told you she’s nice.

Alex: You held her hand & eyefucked her on world tv. She better be nice.

Kara: She is dammit! And they aired eye sex on NBC??

Alex: Sweet summer child, that was ground zero. Those cutesy stuffed tiger vids hit .5 million views, CatCo picked it up now ur all over their gossip blog.

Kara: CatCo is writing about me and Lena?? Cat Grant’s CatCo? That CatCo?

Alex: Stop saying CatCo. Yeah, tho. U been living under a rock & by rock I mean girl?

Kara’s tummy cramps up with worry. Okay. Here we go, she thinks.

Kara: So is it mean or ???

Alex: Shockingly, no. Blogger (Smythe?) says the games make strange bedfellows, low key sympathetic to LL, thinks u r cute together. *barf*
Kara: We ARE cute together. Smythe is clearly a genius

Alex: More like Cat Grant still soft for your ladyfriend. Social at large is split btw Luthor hate and wlw thirst.

Kara: Thirst? OMG! Already?

Alex: Internet lesbians are early adopters.

Kara: True, true, lol

Alex: You laugh but I have stumbled upon some XXX scenarios and I will never feel clean again.

Kara doubles over laughing at the karmic justice of this development, and lets her sister know it.

Kara: LMFAO!! This is payback for when I heard you & Vicky punch each other’s v-card on senior trip! Suffer as I have suffered and know that the debt is paid!

Alex: Fuck off that took like 5 mins & this is so much worse! You already have a 'ship name.

Kara: HAHAHAHAHwWhaaaaaat!?

Alex: No.

Kara: WHAT? IS? IT?

Alex: Nope. It’s too gross.

Kara: TELL ME you inHUMan MONster!!

Alex: #Seoulmates … *double barf*

Kara splutters and gleefully kicks her legs in the covers. Never mind that it’s geographically errant; it’s corny and terrible and fantastic. Lena shoots her a questioning look as she ends her call, but Kara waves her off. She’s already got enough on her plate without a heaping helping of ‘net nuts.

“Okay, it’s all set,” Lena says. “A driver will meet your sister at the Hyatt bar within the hour. I’ve asked that the building manager freshen the place up, pop some food and drinks in the fridge.”

Kara blinks at her. Smiles from the inside out. “Are you sure this is okay?”

“I am sure this is okay. The place is empty. It’s no imposition.”

She starts typing, sending her sister the news that help is coming. “You should know, Alex is gonna want to pay you for everything.”

“That’s fine,” Lena says, tucking under the covers beside her. “I figure she owes me anyway.”

Kara cocks a brow. “For the mean texts?”

Lena shakes her head, leans in close to Kara’s ear. “For nearly costing me the chance to know you.”
She lays a small kiss on her temple. “Missing out on this would have sucked.”

Kara’s eyes flutter closed as she leans their heads together. Her chest feels warm and broad, and something like a purr rumbles behind her ribs. Her phone vibrates with a new text.

Alex: She’s gonna make it hard for me to hate her, isn’t she?
Kara: Impossible, even.
Alex: Damn. Please be careful, K. Tell her I say thanks.
Kara: Will do. You know by the time you see me tomorrow I might have an Olympic medal? What madness!
Alex: I know! Go BIG tomorrow! ILU!

Kara signs off with Xs and Os and powers down her phone. Then she takes Lena’s phone and shuts it off, too. In the warm dark, cuddled up and huddled together against whatever may come next, one thing is still bugging Kara.

“Who’s Sam?”
“Go to sleeeeeep.”
“Please? I must know.”
Lena groans pitifully. “My chief operating officer. Runs things while I play hooky.”
“Boy? Girl? Non-binary?”
“Girl. We went to MIT together. Never fucked,” Lena says, skipping ahead for the sake of getting to dreamland faster. “Ruby, her thirteen year-old daughter, calls me Aunt Lena and I would kill for her.”
“Awww! I want a murder aunt!”
“No, you don’t. We’re very high-maintenance. Go to sleep, Kara.”
“Mmm-kay.”

Ten minutes pass and Kara, still wide awake, asks if she can come see Lena ski this week.
“Hmm,” she replies, essentially asleep.
Kara takes that to mean ‘yes, please, I would love that so much,’ and falls asleep grinning.
Next morning, Kara has solid grinds on all the rails and nails a backside 1080 double cork on the last jump. She takes gold in Slopestyle and cries like a baby, falls on her knees in the snow. Faintly, over the cheers and chants of “USA! USA!” she hears a familiar voice calling her name.

“Alex?” She stands up and wipes her snotty nose on her fleece neck gaiter.

“Alex?” She unclips her board and jogs toward the spectator corral.

The voice is louder now. “Kara! Kara!”

“Alex? Alex!” She can’t get around the TV cameras, so she drops her board and vaults the fence, pushes through the crowd until she sees her sister. She rushes Alex and tackles her to the ground, laughing and sobbing into her scarf.

“You made it! You’re here! Did you see? Did you see me go big?”

“I did! I saw you go big! You were so good, Kara!” Alex tells her. “God, dad would be so proud of you.”

They sit up, still clinging to each other’s arms. “Are you?” Kara asks, wiping her eyes and blinking owlishly at her big sister. “Are you proud of me?”

“Oh, dum-dum.” Alex clunks their foreheads together. “I have always been proud of you.”

TBC
Kara had no idea the media obligations would take so long. She’s incredibly nervous to start, and ends up clutching her Soohorang plush (a gold-hatted critter adorned with a colorful usahwah paper flower) so hard, he goes flat as roadkill. The doll is a placeholder or sorts, a token to tide athletes over until they receive their medals in a formal ceremony at day’s end.

By the time Kara has finished gushing about her supportive family, her badass coach, her inspiring teammates, and her all-around wondrous Olympic experience for the tenth interview, she barely has time to go pee and down a bottle of water before half-pipe qualifiers begin.

Her sister remains by her side for as long as she’s allowed, and when it’s time for them to part, Kara gives her stuffed tiger to Alex for safe keeping.

“My contacts itch,” she says, just a touch whiny.

Alex snorts. “Of course they do. You been crying like a little bitch all morning.”

Kara slaps at her arm. Hugs her, spontaneously and with power, and Alex wheezes something about broken ribs. When Kara finally gets her fill of sibling affection, they step apart and Alex starts digging in her purse, a soft leather cross-body bag that always seems to contain necessary supplies.

It’s a joke between them that Alex bought the bag in Diagon Alley, before Hogwarts expelled her for being too awesome. Like magic, she produces a fresh set of contacts and some eye drops.

“The Bag of Requirement comes through again!” Kara crows. “Jeez, I’m so glad you’re here.”

“Me, too, kid.”

Alex gives her the smile, the one that made her feel like the Danvers house was her home, too; that made her comfortable enough to come out as a teenager; that makes her - to this day - try crazy things to impress and dazzle, to remind Alex that Kara learned to fly while sheltered beneath her wing.

“I love you.”

“I love you. Go big.”

“Go big.”

“Go big!”

“GO BIG! WHOOOO!”
Prior to her first run, Kara looks down the 600-foot halfpipe and visualizes her routine. She has big plans, and wants to utilize those 22-foot walls to generate speed fast and keep the pendulum swinging, launching herself as high as possible from the first trick to the last.

She centers herself. Breathes. Drops in.

Hears the snow scratch her board, faster, faster. Feels the wind press against her chest as she plummets down the wall at speed. Coils her legs and hips as the first ascent begins. She crests the knuckle, and takes flight.

Some eighteen feet in the air, Kara hits a sky-high method - well over the heads of a dozen photographers - and finishes with a true and straight kick-out. Lands it like silk.

Speed builds. She climbs and flies again, feels like higher, and turns a gigantic 1080 frontside. Smooth touchdown, good momentum.

Backside 900 next. Hits it, puts all her focus into a clean landing, drives that speed even faster into the final trick - a double cork 720 with indie grab to finish.

She rumbles to a stop on the flat bottom and rips off her goggles, turning frantically until she locates the scoreboard. She hops along on her board for a bit, then cautiously bends down to unclip her boots, eyes locked on the scores all the while.

When the 94.10 appears by her name, she whoops and hollers like a cracked-out cowgirl, throws her beanie in the air, drops to her knees to kiss the snow. Crying all the while.

Music pours from the speakers. The park announcers are having a proper shit-fit. The cheers wash over her like a warm wave. Kara knows her sister is close by, watching and probably weeping. She wonders if Lena saw what she just did. She wonders if she knows Kara took gold just a couple of hours ago.

Before the reporter comes over, Kara bites off a glove, digs her phone from her coat pocket, and sends Lena a quick smiley selfie, captioned with the number 94.10.

Within seconds, Lena responds with a photo of herself and Eve and Jean Jolves giving a big thumbs-up. The telecast of halfpipe qualifiers is showing on the giant flatscreen behind them. Kara sees herself on her phone, on their TV, staring at her phone, at the Olympics.

“This is a trip,” she says, and laughs and laughs.
Her score holds first place through both qualifying rounds. After Kara is done with the media, the Danvers girls agree to decompress with snacks and beverages in a Plaza cafe. Kara texts Lena the location and invites her to meet them, though she receives no response.

“This is my treat,” says Alex, who opts for a tall coffee, flat white.

Kara, meanwhile, tests her current invincibility delusion with a 40 oz blue raspberry Slurpee and a strawberry jelly donut. Alex finds her choices repugnant, as always, and Kara braces for a lecture.

“You know, there’s a ton of sugar and dye in that stuff.”

“I do know. Those ingredients factored heavily in my selection.”

“Jesus. Are you trying to give yourself purple diarrhea?”

“Bitch, I might be.” Kara sticks out her blue-stained tongue.

Alex rolls her eyes. “You’re a role model now. You need to start eating like a grown-up.”

“I will.” Kara bites the donut. Red jammy ambrosia tickles her tongue. She moans. “Once I’ve lost the capacity for joy.”

Flappy hands and a sour puss (the traditional ‘I give up!’ signals) follow, and Alex snags them two seats facing the cafe’s front window. Kara likes it for people-watching purposes, but she knows by now that her sister always sits facing the entrance for tactical reasons.

She wants to tell Alex about Morgan Edge, about the attack on Lena, and get her perspective on how best to protect her. Only she knows what her sister’s reaction will be: a firm and loud “get the hell away from Lena Luthor.” And that just won’t do. Kara needs a subtle way to broach the topic.

“So Lena has two slalom events and two downhill events coming up. Do you think she has a chance to medal?” Kara asks.

Alex shrugs, a little too fast, a little too casual. “I dunno. Everyone has a chance, don’t they?”

“So you don’t have an opinion? An informed opinion?”

Again with the blasé shrug. Kara narrows her eyes, scoffs. “Stop it.”

“What?” (offhand, mild, an Alex classic)

“Just stop.”

“Stop what, exactly?” (innocuous, open, oh she’s good)

“Stop acting like you didn’t research the hell out of Lena once you knew we were roommates.”

Alex opens her mouth and looks like she’s going to deny it - just for a second - but she can’t. Kara
knows her too well.

“You know me too well,” she mutters. “Fine. I may have done a little digging.”

“Uh-huh. Are we talking hand auger or track-hoe?” Kara asks, trying to gauge the scope and depth of this inquiry.

Alex waggles her hand. “Power trencher, maybe?”

“So just middling invasive,” Kara says, easily calling the piece of equipment to mind. “Side bar: is this the most lesbian conversation we’ve ever had?”

The elder Danvers arches a brow. “Women, sports, and power tool metaphors? Possibly. What was your original question?”

Kara explains, in a roundabout ramble, how Lena is fighting a court battle against the villainous Edge and how he might be at the games to try and intimidate her into dropping the case. She explains this to Alex purely as context for her query about Lena’s chances to medal, and not because her sister abhors a bully and might have helpful thoughts.

“So she’s distracted, see? And I can’t tell if it’s affecting her skiing, because I -“

“Don’t know jack shit about skiing,” Alex finishes, uncharitably. “Well, keeping Edge at bay could only improve her focus. I know the Athlete’s Village is off-limits, but does she have private security at her events?”

Kara shakes her head. “I haven’t asked, but I bet not. She doesn’t like to make a fuss.”

“Fuck’s sake, why not? When someone’s trying to hurt you, it’s crucial that you make a giant damn fuss! Scream, shout, call people out!” Something occurs to Alex and she pauses her rant for a second. She’s wearing what Kara has come to think of as her ‘insightful paranoiac’ look.

“You’ve had a bad idea,” Kara notes. “Share, please.”

“It’s just…I wonder if that’s what Edge is counting on,” Alex begins. “I read about this patent infringement suit. In interviews, Edge says the whole thing is predicated on Lena’s personal hatred of him. He implies she inherited Luthor madness and is just as delusional as her brother.”

The penny drops and Kara starts nodding. “Maybe he wants Lena to panic and publicly accuse him of stalking her. A guy that rich probably has multiple alibis, so it makes her look crazy and that hurts the lawsuit.”

Alex points at her and grins. “Now you’re thinking like a Danvers.”

Proud of herself for earning such a compliment, Kara puffs up like a toasted marshmallow. “So how can I help her? I can’t do anything about the lawsuit, and our schedules are wack so I can’t watch her back all the time…”

“Kara, stop. You’re already doing what you can. You’re supporting her, letting her vent, giving her a safe place to rest and regroup. Lena has resources and agency for miles. She can fix her own problems.”
“Doesn’t seem like I’m doing anything.” Kara slumps in her chair, clutching her Slurpee. “Wish I could beat him up.”

“You probably could, with a little training,” Alex tells her.

Kara brightens. “Think so?”

“You kidding? When the heat is on, you’re strong as a draught horse,” Alex says, grinning proudly. “Pair that with a good joint lock and you might just rip his arm off.”

Kara sits up straight, beaming with hope. “Will you show me how to do that?”

“Fuck, no,” Alex spits. “I need my arms. If you’re serious, though, I’ll find you a proper teacher back home. Someone with good insurance.”

“But Alex, what if I need to -”

“You need to focus on your events. Once they’re finished and you’re all buff from toting around three gold medals, we’ll revisit this. Okay?”

Kara chews on her straw, sulking. “Okay.”

“Okay.” Alex sips her coffee. Takes her tablet from her bag. “You were asking about Lena’s medal chances?”

“…yeah?”

“Actually, I think they’re pretty good.”

“Yeah? Really?”

Alex pulls up a spreadsheet - an actual spreadsheet - listing Lena’s events, results, rankings, and course information for the past year. She reviews data from slalom, downhill, Super G and Giant Slalom and voices her belief that Lena’s best chance for gold is probably in that last event.

“For Giant Slalom, she’s ranked fifth in FIS with 2.91 points.”

Kara has a vague notion of what that means. “That sounds pretty good to me.”

Alex does the ‘so-so’ hand waggle. “On paper, she’s in contention. Paper is not snow.” She searches up a video of Lena at the 2017 Worlds in St. Moritz, where she took silver by finishing .09 seconds behind the formidable Italian victor.

The video runs straight through without comment. On the second play, Alex starts pausing it to make observations about form and action, just like she always has for Kara’s boarding runs.

“Her stance is athletic, consistent,” she begins. “Shoulders over knees, but mobile through the rough patches. Loose joints, good flexibility.”

“Attest.” Kara nods, giggles naughtily.
Alex sneers. “Yuck. Don’t interrupt.” She hits play. “Piz Nair had hard snow last year, just like Yongpyong does now, so this is relevant. See her balancing heavy on the outside ski and curving her upper body into a ‘C’ shape? That helps her get more angulation and bite into the hard surface. Her form is perfect here; really tight core, loose legs.”

Kara raises her right hand, lays her left on her iPhone like a Bible. “Attest.”

 “… … so help me god, Kara.”

“I’ll stop! I’ll stop. I will stop.” She grins and takes a deep pull off her Slurpee.

The video starts again. “Strong carving. Not much chatter around the gates. See here, though - I’m gonna play it half-speed.” Alex stares intently at the screen. “Look at the back of her skis.”

Kara leans in and watches as Lena drives into a gate, barely using the ski pole to clear it. Her angle is practically head-on, and there is almost no snow thrown up in the turn.

“There! There!” Alex points as the back of Lena’s ski clips the outer gate pole. “That’s how she made a race of it, picked up good speed in that section. She juices the poles.”

“She does not,” Kara murmurs, and sticks out her blue tongue.

Alex is not amused. “You are so obnoxious when you’re getting laid.”

“I’m happy!” Kara chirps. “That doesn’t mean I’m not paying attention.”

“I think it does. I think your mind has switched hemispheres,” Alex says, gesturing vaguely at northern and southern Kara.

Kara winces, realizing she might have goofed off a bit too much. “Sorry. I know I’m being silly. I am listening, though.”

“Sure you are.” Alex slides the tablet onto the table, sips at her cooling coffee. “How’s that Slurpee, nympho? Enjoy getting brain freeze in your ladyzone.”

“Oh. Rude.”

Butthurt and out to prove herself capable of cogent analysis, Kara sets aside her delectable drink and picks up the tablet. She watches the rest of Lena’s run, notices the precision and control Alex cited, the bold attacks and flowing rhythms. When it ends, Lena cuts loose with one (1) single fist pump at the finish, when she sees her time and realizes she’s done well enough to medal. Then she walks away from the cameras, head down, without lowering her gaiter or removing her goggles.

“It’s not fair. She tried so hard and did so good, Alex, and then it was just…over,” Kara observes. “I wish she had let herself enjoy it.”

“Maybe it’ll be different here,” Alex offers.

“Yeah, maybe. Because it’s the Olympics, right? You win, you’re supposed to lose your shit and celebrate! Party like it’s nineteen ninety-nine!”
“Tackle your loved ones in the snow, snot all over their best scarf…”

“That’s gold medal snot. Your scarf is a collector’s item now.”

Kara and Alex trade skunk faces and lean against each other, gazing out the window as throngs of people stroll the plaza. Couples link arms and hold hands. Families cluster together. Friends lean close to take selfies, share jokes.

“What I meant was…maybe it’ll be different here because Lena’s not alone,” says Alex, stroking Kara’s arm. “She’s got someone pretty special in her corner.”

“Awww.” Kara smiles and lays her head on her sister’s shoulder. “You’re getting so mushy in your old age. I love it.”

Alex snorts and knocks her skull against Kara’s. “Tell no one. Remember, I know where you live.”

Several minutes pass with companionable chatter about Alex’s work, Maggie’s family, and Eliza’s improving health. Kara is heartened to learn that she’s feeling better after a severe case of influenza, though she is still not well enough to fly.

“She’s loving all the photos and videos in the cloud,” Alex says. “But mom’s withholding judgment about Lena until I report back.”

Kara smiles at this, knowing that Eliza will probably give her a fair shake, no matter what Alex says.

“Well, well, well. Speak of the devil.” Alex points toward the entrance where Lena Luthor stands, scanning the room, frozen like a cat caught on the freeway.

“Hey! Over here!” Kara calls, standing up and waving.

Lena catches her eye and nods, weaves slowly through the tables and chairs and diners, eyes focused on Kara all the way. She stops beside their table, a few feet away. “Hello, gold medal winner,” she says with a breathy laugh.

Kara, never one to underplay a scene, throws her arms around Lena and lifts her off the floor, squealing softly against her neck. “I won a gold medal! I am a gold medalist!” She sets Lena down and they lock eyes. “That’s my new first name: Gold Medalist Kara Danvers.”

Eyes wide and almost teary, Lena looks like she wants to kiss her - god, Kara wishes she would - but such a blatant PDA would be a big step. Her discomfort is probably amplified by Alex watching them with her chaotic-neutral energy.

Lena smiles and steps back. “You’ll have to change your monogram.”

Kara snickers and touches her face, slides fingertips along her cheek; a pale substitute for a kiss, perhaps, but she has a big need to season this moment with a dash of intimacy. Every instinct tells Kara that this is right and real, that Lena is her girl, and this moment belongs to her, too. Fuck, she really wants a kiss.

“Skiers have monograms,” Kara replies. “Boarders have logos.”

“Oh, because you’re too cool for monograms?” Lena teases.
“Because they don’t understand why the surname is in the middle,” Alex chimes in. She stands halfway up and offers her hand. “Alex Danvers.”

Lena swallows hard. Meets her mid-stretch and shakes firmly, two pumps. “Lena Luthor.”

Alex gestures for Lena to sit opposite them and she obliges. Kara notices that she’s almost trembling with nervous energy, more obviously once she’s seated. Her leg pumps like she’s playing kick drum in a metal band. Under the table, Kara extends her legs and brackets them around Lena’s ankles.

She looks up with wide eyes and a strangely happy expression. Kara remembers this same near-manic state from last night, after Lena called C.O.O. Sam and ‘took steps.’

“Thank you, for the use of your apartment,” says Alex. “It’s pretty spectacular. The views, the infinity pool. The fully stocked fridge and pantry - that was very thoughtful.”

“You’re quite welcome. Please make yourself at home while you’re there.” Lena’s chest shakes, almost as if she were trying not to laugh.

Alex shoots Kara a questioning look, which she ignores, because she doesn’t know what’s going on either.

Her sister then does exactly as Kara predicted and offers to pay for her stay at Lena’s unused apartment. At this, Lena does laugh - a sputtering, snorting laugh that leaves her cheeks red. She covers her mouth and nods at Alex.

“I’ll take you up on that. As it turns out, I might need the money.” Lena collects herself and absently reaches for Kara’s Slurpee. She takes a sip, looks disgusted, then sips again. Takes a deep breath.


Kara’s mouth falls open. Alex gasps and repeats the sum, twice, just to be sure. Lena nods to confirm it.

“What the red hell costs eight hundred million bucks?” asks Alex.

“I bought Edge Corp.” Lena takes another pull off the Slurpee and grimaces through a sudden bout of brain freeze. “The fuck am I drinking?”

TBC
I don't have the words to convey my gratitude for the kind reception and soft landing you've given this nitwitted Olympic fantasy of mine. Thank you, thank you.

As the fitful laughter and jumpy leg syndrome continues, Alex suggests that perhaps Lena is experiencing a good old fashioned panic attack after having yeeted nearly a billion dollars to win a one-percenter grudge match. Lena haltingly agrees, and admits this has happened before, under similarly stressful circumstances.

Turns out, the night before Lena was set to compete at the 2015 FIS World Championships in Vail, Lillian Luthor FedExed her a gray plastic box filled with her brother’s ashes. Lena relays the story between bouts of humorless, suffocated giggles.

“Her note said that since I killed Lex, I could damn well bury him,” she explains. “That’s the last communication I received from her. Possibly the last thing she’ll ever say to me.”

“Oh my god. Lena.” Kara sighs, deflates, stunned at this keenly timed act of sabotage perpetrated by someone who was supposed to care for her.

She remembers that Vail event, because of course it made the news. Lena scrubbed the whole first week and only raced GS and slalom in week two, where she faltered on the Raptor course and hit the fence twice. Sport journos had blamed the recent execution of her brother, which was awful enough, but the full backstory compounds that hurt to a hellish degree.

Kara wants to cuss out Lillian Luthor. She wants to climb over the table and hold Lena - tightly, the way she likes - for about a week. But Alex’s vise grip on her elbow reminds her that this is not about what Kara wants, but what Lena needs.

She reins herself in, steadies her voice. “Lena, I am so sorry. Your mom sounds like a hateful hag.”

“Kara.” Alex squeezes her elbow - right on a pressure point, apparently.

“Ow! Shit! Ow!”

“No, please, she’s right,” Lena says, with a soft snort. “Please don’t hurt her for speaking the truth.”

Alex’s brows go up. Her grip relaxes. Miraculously, Kara resists the urge to gloat.

“So, then. After that really shitty thing was done to you,” she continues, like a sensitive adult person with strong communication skills, “how did you deal with it?”
“Not well, I’m afraid. I flew to Lausanne, locked the cremains in a safety deposit box and threw the key in Lake Geneva.” Lena looks ashamed of herself for admitting this; she shrugs and mumbles with fingers gating her mouth. “Typical. I never knew what to do about Lex. My default setting was denial for so long... by the time I did anything, there was only one thing left to do.”


This feels like a very old, heavy stone that needs overturning, but she knows better than to try and dismantle Stonehenge in a busy cafe. Kara glances around and notices a few people looking at their table and pointing. She deems this unimportant. What matters is Lena, and since she doesn’t know what to say, she offers her hand, open and still, on the tabletop.

Lena meets her eyes and reaches for her, quickly, like she’d been waiting and didn’t want to ask. Her hand is clammy, from the Slurpee cup or frayed nerves or both, so Kara sandwiches it between her own warm palms and applies firm, soothing pressure.

It works like a tonic. Under the table, still encircled by Kara’s calves, Lena’s drumming leg slows to a 12/8 beat. Fittingly, the backbone of slow rolling blues.

Breaking the silence, Alex clears her throat. “How’d you handle the panic attack?”

“Better than the ashes.” She gives a wan grin, snickers. “I drank a 1990 Domaine Leroy Grand Cru and skied a double black diamond by moonlight.”

“Well, shit,” says Alex. “That might be the classiest suicidal gesture ever.”

“Alex!” Kara shoots her a blowtorch glare.

Lena, however, regards her with curious calm. “Do you think that’s what I was doing?”

“I’ve worked a wide range of suicide scenes.” Alex raises her hands, palms out, conciliatory. “What you described sounds like a jazzy way to get dead.”

Lena smiles, with teeth. Her laugh, when it comes, is not manic at all. It’s positively arid. “Fatalism does not equal suicidal ideation,” she says.

“Fatalism?” Alex scoffs. “Okay, James Dean.”

“I don’t say that lightly. Fatalism and peritraumatic dissociation, most likely caused by surviving multiple violent assaults. That’s a diagnosis from my actual therapist - the one doctor who was trying to help me, unlike the nine mental health professionals who profiled me before and during my brother’s trial.”

“Nine?” Alex asks, clearly perplexed by this number. “Only two shrinks testified during the trial - one for the defense and one for the prosecution. What gives?”

Kara, meanwhile, is just trying to follow along, not sock her sister in the tit, and not interrupt, because Lena can obviously speak for herself.
“Few people know this,” Lena says, “but the FBI wanted to prosecute me along with Lex. I came to them with evidence, in good faith, and they actively sought to jail me for crimes I didn’t commit. They hounded me for weeks, dogged my every step. Once they vanished me to a basement somewhere in Gotham and questioned me for over thirty hours without an attorney, without food or water, without sleep.”

Lena pauses for a breath, renews her grip on Kara’s hand. Alex is stock-still. Listening, watching.

“When at last they conceded my innocence and agreed to work with me, my brother’s hired guns had a go. During a month of interviews, they tried painting me as unstable, jealous, deviant, suicidal - anything to exclude my evidence and impugn my testimony. They, too, failed. Some of the world’s top psychiatric specialists and behavioral analysts have attempted to vivisect my mind, and the worst they could say was that I’m an affection-starved egoist with a messiah complex.”

Lena lifts her chin, throwing her jawline into sharp relief. She appears to be considering whether to merely bite off Alex’s head or devour her entire soul. She looks to Kara, squeezes her hand again, and sighs.

“I understand your worry at having Kara stand so close to a lighting rod. But if you have specific questions or concerns, ask me; I won’t lie to you. Just don’t try to profile me, Inspector Danvers. After what I’ve endured, it’s a bit like being nibbled at by a duck.”

After a moment, once the concussive wave of don’t fuck with me has dulled to a ringing in her ears, Alex folds her arms and smirks. “Okay. If you weren’t trying to off yourself…?”

“Simple answer? When I feel threatened and out of control, I focus on my abilities. I drank the wine because I don’t take prescription drugs and I had no weed. I went skiing because when the run is engrossing - or dangerous - I can’t think about anything else. I needed to calm down and get focused.”

“Did it work?” Kara meekly asks.


She means me. I’m her better thing. I’m helping. Oh, that’s so cool…

Once Kara has this realization, her mental engine stalls out. There’s music in her brain, and her thoughts bog down in the melody like wheels in mud. It might be a song from Jeremiah’s vinyl collection - a Brit band from the 80s, silly boys in suits, horn section…fuck what’s the name of that song?

“Oh, soulmates! Hello! Hello!”

As she emerges from her stupor, Kara thinks that Alex is mocking them to soothe her bruised pride.
But when she pries her eyes off Lena’s face, she finds a thirty-something blonde woman in Team Norway livery watching them with clear adoration, like they hung the stars, then the moon, and then painted a ginormous rainbow across the lunar surface for good measure.

“You are the favorite! Ooo-tah-poh!” she says, and giggles at herself. “Is this right? I don’t know! Ha-HA-ha!”

Kara has a panic flash, thinking she’s about to have to rush-explain the whole social media / CatCo / ‘Seoulmates’ thing to Lena, but before she can get too worked up, her friend-roommate-whatever takes over. Lena kindly smiles back at the woman, shakes her hand, points at her uniform and (probably?) asks her about her job with Team Norway. In Norwegian.

The woman claps her hands, delighted, and they begin to chatter and chitter and Kara thinks it sounds super cute, so she takes out her phone and starts recording a video.

Alex looks alarmed, then skeptical, then amused. “Any idea what they’re saying?”

“Nope, but I love it.” Kara beams at the woman, winks at Lena, then whispers to her sister. “Sounds like woodland elves planning a tea party.”

“Think bigger,” says Lena. “Berit here says that when you and I get married, we should consider a destination wedding in Hemsedal.”

Kara’s eyes go wide. Her pulse flickers, then instantly turns thunderous. “Huh, huh. Married?”

“Married!” Alex caws, driving an elbow into her ribs.

“Married,” Lena deadpans. “If it’s a summer wedding, we can see the waterfalls and go paragliding.”

Maybe she’s in shock, or maybe Alex stopped her heart with that elbow and her brain is starved for blood, but Kara thinks that sounds really really nice. “Where exactly is Hemsedal?”

“Central Norway, in the Scandinavian Mountains,” says Lena.

“Okay. I mean, I’ve heard of it but I’ve never been there before, you know? But I don’t hate a waterfall, and I love paragliding.”

“It would be a joyful time!” claims Berit.

“I bet!” agrees Kara, nodding like a bobblehead. “Do they have an airport nearby?”

“Hey, Britney, please slow your roll,” whispers Alex, and moves to dig the elbow in again.

Kara has had enough of that. She braces her boot on the floor, grabs Alex’s armrest and shoves her chair. It slides about five feet away, with Alex aboard and agog. Lena damn near guffaws.

“Can I snowboard there?” Kara continues, as if nothing happened. “Or is it too fancy?”

“Snowboarding is very good!” Berit insists. “Thirty pistes, I think are there. Three parks also, and two pipes!”

“Ballin’!” Kara shouts. “I wanna go!”

“Come come!” Berit opens her arms and Kara leaps up to hug her. They take a few selfies, the three of them, and Berit wishes them love, glory, and victory - except when they’re competing against Norwegians.
Kara shuts off her recording, catches Lena’s eye, and gives her most seductive eyebrow waggle. “We’re her OTP,” she says. “We’re gonna have such toit nups, babe!”

Lena strikes back with a million-watt smile. “The toitest nups, babe.”

She thought they were a good match before, did Kara, but swapping Brooklyn Nine-Nine jokes with Lena just sealed the damn deal. Like, hermetic-styles.

Making a passive aggressive amount of noise, Alex scoots her chair back to the table. “Right, then. Am I invited to the wedding?”

“I dunno,” Kara replies. “Can you quit bein’ a hyper vigilant twat for five minutes?”

Alex pauses, considers. “No. I cannot.”

“We cannot be but what we are,” says Lena, giving Alex that funny two-eyed wink. “I don’t mind if you come.”

“Title of your sex tape!” Kara yells.

Alex groans and Lena laughs and Kara laughs and they all decide to move their increasingly blue comedy act to a more adult-oriented locale. Lena says Coach Jolves never travels without a stash of good wine, and she knows where he keeps the best bottles.

On the shuttle to Jeongseon Alpine Center, the discussion mellows to a decent volume, and the subject matter matures accordingly.

“Do you enjoy wine?” Lena asks Alex.

“I’ve never had a bottle that cost seven grand like that Grand Cru you mentioned. But yeah, I like my wine.”

Lena nods. “And you ski, don’t you?”

Alex slits her eyes. “Yeah.”

“She’s really good,” Kara adds. “Alex won the NCAA slalom title her sophomore year at CU.”

“I preferred speed events,” Alex adds. Then tucks her chin, looking confused as to how they got onto this topic. “What’s that got to do with - ”

“I want to get sozzled and ski, but I have a race tomorrow and I’m not sure I should go alone.”

“I’ll go with you!” Kara yelps.

“You can’t ski,” Lena and Alex say, nearly in unison.

Kara affects a look of epic betrayal. She is Caesar, kicked in the dick by Brutus. “Lies! I can so ski! I
“so, so can!”

“You can, so-so,” quips Alex.

“Shut up.”

“You have so many other talents, sweetheart. Leave something for the rest of us,” says Lena, patting her leg, kissing her cheek.

And suddenly Kara isn’t ticked at all. It’s like Lena poured a mug of cocoa with mini marshmallows directly into her brain. Funny trick, that. Insidious, really.

“I know the men’s downhill practice today at Jeongseon was canceled,” Lena continues. “Jean can probably sneak us out there as scouts before the plows go through tonight.”

A shot of fear jolts through Kara. “But my medal ceremony is - ”

“Five hours away,” Alex interjects. “We’ll be quick, K, I promise.”

Lena is smiling at Alex and Alex is smiling back, which sort of dries up any fears Kara has about being late to receive her *first* and maybe *only ever* gold medal. This is a pretty bomb-ass turn of events.

“Are you certain you want to go with me?” Lena asks.

Alex is eyeing Lena like a co-conspirator, the way she does when she and Kara get up to no good. “Like I’m gonna pass up the chance to ski an Olympic course,” she says. “Let’s do this.”

Jean Jolves is a stern-looking man - muscular and flinty-eyed and prone to standing with both hands on his hips, like a grumpy police lieutenant in the movies - but his demeanor melts like butter around Lena Luthor. Based on this alone, Kara suspects he might be wonderful.

“I will give you a Marselan,” he says to Lena. “The Syrah is for me.”

“Please? The Syrah is the *best*,” Lena wheedles.

Jolves shakes his head, once, firmly. “If you take bronze, you may have one glass. Two for silver, and a bottle for gold.”

“Fuck, Jean, it’s not *that* good.”

“But you are.” He chucks Lena under her chin. She rolls her eyes, smiles at the ceiling. “Take the Marselan and go. The plows begin at sundown.”

Armed with vino and a corkscrew, Lena takes Alex to the locker room to change and fit up some skis. Kara sits in a glassed booth overlooking the course, accompanied by Jolves and his super cuddly Basset Hound, Bruno.

His ears are as soft as Kara imagined. She loves him immediately and forever.
“Would you join me?” Jolves asks, displaying a bottle of Syrah.

“But I thought - ”

“We ‘ave the gold medals!” he notes, tapping his chest and pointing at Kara. “We deserve the good stuff.”

“Honors and benefits already. Count me in, buddy.”

The Syrah goes down like a midnight tango, all dark berries and spice, and Kara is denting her second glass when Jolves perks up, directs her attention to the course.

Just coming into view, Lena skis at about 2/3 pace, easily dancing inside the painted blue arcs marking the downhill course turns. Trailing behind about thirty yards, Alex follows her sweeping, graceful line, but carves her edges in just a bit to ride the corners and test the snow.

Jolves stands. Smiles. “She could win this, you know.”

“Downhill?” Kara asks, brows crinkling. “I didn’t think the speed events were her strongest.”

“Most often, no, but this course has few teeth. It rewards form and consistency. Racers will find it difficult to accelerate. They will fight the hill and lose time. Lena does not ski this way; she makes herself a stone, and she rolls.”

Eyes fixed on the two figures disappearing down the slope, Kara sees what the coach means. Where Alex is pushing hard, throwing up curtains of powder in the turns, Lena slips along like mercury, her tuck tight and her line so quiet it’s almost meditative.

“This course is good for Lena,” says Jolves. He turns to Kara and raises his glass in a toast. “To things that are good for Lena.”

Kara blushes. Her shoulders shake in a weird, nervous little laugh. She touches her glass to his and the crystal sings, bright and true. “Cheers to that.”

On the bus back to the Olympic Village, wine-warmed and tired, arm around Lena’s shoulder, Kara’s curiosity finally slips the leash. Even if she can’t understand all the business lingo, she really wants to hear how Lena managed a hostile takeover of a rival company.

“Bribes,” says Lena, quietly, behind her hand.

Kara makes a shocked face and looks across the aisle to her cop sister. “Alex, earmuffs.”

Alex yawns. “Unless it’s a crime as defined by the State of California, I can listen without being obliged to rat on you.”

“No worries,” says Lena. “Giving venal old white men things they want might be detestable, but it’s not criminal.”
With a canny lack of insider-speak, Lena explains that Edge Corp is privately owned, and due to a series of poor investments and product failures, Morgan gradually sold off the majority of his company. He now holds only thirty percent of voting shares, having sold the remaining seventy percent to three horrifying humans: an oil baron, a fracking magnate, and a logging tycoon.

“There is no loyalty at that level of industry, only self-protection,” Lena observes. “So that’s where we exerted our energies, finding out what they needed more than their shares of Edge Corp.”

She explains that this trio’s faith was already shaken by the patent infringement suit, so she and her right hand - Samantha Arias - enticed full sellouts by offering much-needed carbon credits to the magnate, assuming cleanup responsibility for the baron’s polluting of the Niger Delta, and contracting with the tycoon to supply Luthor-patented superwood at a deep discount.

“They bit. One after the other, they agreed to sell. I own seventy percent of the company, as of…two hours ago,” Lena says, glancing at her Tag Heuer. “Today, Edge Corp will convene an emergency board meeting and Sam will have my proxy. She’ll issue a vote of no confidence and remove Edge as CEO, effective immediately.”

Alex gives a dampened smile and appears ready to offer a fist bump. Kara, despite being impressed at such maneuvering, chafes that these men are getting off the hook for doing some very gross things to the environment. She marshals her courage and says as much. Lena, to her credit does not become defensive.

“You’re not wrong. If I made the rules, they’d go to prison for what they’ve done. What I can do is position Luthor Corp to clean up their messes, and incentivize them toward better corporate practices in the future.” She takes a beat, nestles deeper under Kara’s arm. Breathes soft and warm across her collarbone. “Wish I had a magic wand. Or superpowers.” She pats Kara’s stomach. “All I have is money and ideas.”

“At the rate you’re spending, you’re gonna run out of cash before you get all those ideas off the ground,” Alex observes.

“Mmm. Probably run out of time first.”

She says this casually, indifferent to the weight of her words. Kara’s throat goes tight, her eyes burn. She swallows hard, kisses Lena’s hair. Asks the universe to please, please be kind, and not to hurry in reclaiming this particular streak of stardust.

Kara cries all through the medals ceremony - during her introduction, while singing a full-throated version of “The Star Spangled Banner,” while waving to the cameras and pretending to bite her gold medal. Even through all the tears, Kara can’t stop smiling because off to the side of the podiums, her amazing big sister and her amazing girlfriend are clapping and jumping and screaming their damn heads off for her. Cherry on the sundae? They’re hugging it out.

Right then, the song, the truth, the reality, the fucking fact of the matter…it hits Kara all at once, and it feels like touching a frayed electrical cord.

TBC
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Short one here. Got work for the next several days, but the next update will cover several ski and board events as we roister along toward the finish. This here is just mush, really.

At Kara’s insistence, they stick around to enjoy the K-Pop concert after the ceremony, though Kara is waylaid from her dance-and-party mission by a number of young boarding fans eager to meet her and offer congratulations. One after another after another, bouncy-footed and starry-eyed kids from the U.S. and Japan and France and China and Spain and Australia and all over rush up with Sharpies and photos and phones at the ready.

Because Kara is a sucker, every time (literally every damn time) she sees a happy face - aglow with hope and wonder and one day I’ll be an Olympian ambition - she takes off her gold medal and slips the ribbon over the kid’s head.

Aside from having a blast taking requisite comedy selfies - LOL! I stole Supergirl’s gold medal! - Kara wants each of these aspiring athletes to actually feel that gleaming talisman laid over their heart, to know that their dreams can come true.

“Now when it’s your turn for real, you can act like you’ve been there before,” she tells them. “Some of these nerds get their medals and start crying like babies! Can you believe that? How embarrassing!”

Eventually, Alex takes the initiative and pulls Kara away from her “adoring public,” and down toward the front row of the crowded amphitheater. Just ahead, she spies Lena and Winn leaned together by a railing, bopping their heads as a pink-haired Korean heartthrob dances and raps onstage.

Winn speaks into her ear, then points at the crazily pretty guy while biting his thumb. Lena throws her head back laughing. She pinches Winn’s bottom and he jumps like a startled bunny. She laughs harder, doubles over against the rail. Kara imagines she is snorting, which happens when something trips all her circuit breakers and overloads her with delight.

That’s her, right there, Kara thinks, that’s the girl you love.

Stealthily, she creeps up behind them and drapes her arms around their shoulders. After a shout of shock and amazement, Winn gives her a bracing hug, then reverently touches the gold medal. The
music is too loud to hear what he’s saying, but his eyes have gone misty. She gets the gist, nods, kisses his cheek.

Lena slips an arm around her waist, gives Kara a twinkly smile that cleaves her heart slap in two.

*Dude. You never stood a chance.*

Post concert, it’s a mostly quiet walk out as they amble toward the shuttle which will take Alex to the high-speed train which will take her to a luxury penthouse in Seoul.

Lena has turned on her parka heater, and Kara’s gloved hand, resting against her back, is warm as toast. She doesn’t understand how such a small, mutually comforting gesture could make her feel so grounded, so rightly placed in the universe. It does, though.

“The concert was more fun that I thought it’d be,” admits Alex. “Real high energy music.”

Winn, bounding along beside her, links his arm with hers. “That band is one of my favorites!” he says, and begins peppering the group with NCT-127 trivia. By the time they reach the bus depot, everyone knows Taeyong (the hot rapper) loves swimming and photography and strawberry macarons and Drake.

“Oh, and he has Type O blood!” notes Winn. “Is it weird that I remember all that?”

“No!” says Kara. “Maybe a little,” says Lena.

“Absolutely weird, no doubter,” says Alex. “But it was nice meeting you anyway, stalker boy.”

“Skater boy,” Winn corrects.

“I said what I said.” Alex deals him a playful poke to the chest, and he recoils in what appears to be genuine pain.

“Jesus Anabolic Christ,” he mutters, clutching his pec. “What did Mama Danvers feed you two Amazons?”

“Mostly mac-n-cheese and hot dogs,” Kara replies, always happy to discuss food. “And cereal!”

“Vegetables and lean protein,” says Alex, speaking for herself. “The human garbage disposal here somehow skirted by on Nathan’s, Kraft macaroni, and Count Chocula.”


“Witless,” Alex coughs, trading sneers with her sister. She smiles, slides her bag to her hip and pulls Kara in for a tight, protracted hug. “I knew you could win, thought you would win. But *seeing* you do it? It’s just so much better than I imagined.”

Kara tucks her face against her sister’s shoulder. “So glad you’re here.”

“I’m so proud of you, Kara.”

“I’m so proud of you, too.”
Alex pulls back, giggles, wipes her eyes. “Me? For what?”

“I don’t know, I just am!” Kara shrugs, smears tears down her cheeks with her cowgirl gloves. “I don’t know. I felt so lost when I first came to live with you guys. But you listened to me and you took me boarding and you were so good and I wanted to be good like you, I just…I wanted to be good. Like you. I still do, Alex.”

Bottom lip trembling, Alex raises a finger of warning. “Stop. I need you to stop talking, because if you don’t I’m gonna ugly cry on the train and that is *not* my brand.”

Verging on ugly cry-face herself, Kara zippers her mouth and nods.

“I’ll be back tomorrow morning. Try to get some sleep.”

Kara curls her lips and tilts her head, making no promises.

“Eww, yeah, no. Goodnight, Lena.”

“Goodnight, Alex. Thank you for trespass skiing with me.”

“Anytime,” says Alex, with a serious nod. “I’m your huckleberry.”

She feints a punch at Winn, who scampers backward yipping and grinning, and boards her bus to the rail station.

“Wish I had a sister,” Winn says, as the bus pulls away.

“That’s too general.” Lena stands close by Kara, sighs wistfully. “I wish I had an Alex.”

*You do, Kara wants to say, you just don’t know it yet. The Danvers girls are a package deal.*

Fighting to prevent herself from crying for the twentieth time today, Kara takes a deep breath, stamps her feet, and declares herself ready to call it a night. Winn congratulates Kara again, wishes her and Lena luck in their events tomorrow, and heads off to meet some friends for a drink.

Kara holds out a hand and Lena takes it. They walk back to their building in relative silence, only stopping a few times to trade hoo-rahhs with some of Kara’s Team USA acquaintances, or to accept gifts of enamel pins, or to take pics with random nice people - several of whom request that Lena get in the photos, too.

Though it’s obviously a little awkward for her at first, Lena never declines. She stands where they ask and smiles for the camera, returns their hugs or handshakes, and accepts their best wishes for her GS runs tomorrow. Kara thinks she looks like a kid who expected socks for her birthday and got a kitten instead. A skittish kitten, maybe, with nipping teeth and needle-like claws, but still…*a kitten!*

“I know what you’ve been doing,” Lena announces, once they’re cleaned up and turning down the bed. “The social media campaign.”
Kara whispers ‘oh, jeez’ to herself and readies her argument, which still consists mainly of one premise: you’re great and everybody should agree on that and those who disagree are wrong and also stupid. She looks across the bed and finds Lena smiling, softness in her eyes.

“It’s working, maybe better than you expected,” she says. “Sam said two of the three Edge stockholders voiced a clear preference for me over Morgan, as a business associate.”

“Really?” Kara, though relieved, cannot hide her puzzlement.

“Mmm. One said ‘at least Luthor’s human enough to ditch the office and chase pretty girls through the snow once in a while.’”

“Ha! Funny.” Kara starts crawling across the bed, eyes fixed on Lena with a predatory gleam. “The venal old white men think you were chasing me?”

“It could happen,” says Lena.

Kara laughs at her. Holds her by the hips and twists at the torso, tossing Lena onto the bed with peculiar ease.

“Damn, baby,” she gasps, bouncing on the mattress, half breathless and fully eager. “Bully for Nathan’s and Kraft mac-n-cheese.”

“Don’t forget Count Chocula.”

It’s the last thing Kara says before spreading Lena open, lowering her mouth, and beginning the most heartfelt, tireless, ravenous session of steam-driven head either of them has ever experienced.

Kara gets her off the first time with basic flat massage and suction, the second time with her tongue undulating slowly inside, and the third time with an inspired improvisation.

Riding the downslope of her third climax, Lena moans and yelps when Kara kisses her clit as a prelude to round four. She lays a trembling hand on Kara’s head and pushes, weakly.

“Marauder… please… let me live.”

Kara snickers, puffing cool air over Lena’s sex; her whole body shudders. “Enough?”

“Yeah, yes, fuck…”

“Good?” She lifts her brows, looks up Lena’s body to meet her eyes.

Wrung-out and hoarse, Lena chuckles and pats her hair. “Unprecedented. What was that last thing? I tried to pay attention but I got this weird taste in my mouth and lost track.”

“Tip, flat, side, turn, repeat,” Kara reveals, kissing her hipbone, wiggling up to lay by her spent, drowsy lover. “I need a name for it.”

“Montmorency twist,” Lena suggests, without pause.

“Is that a physics thing? Because I took chem and astronomy.”

“Not physics; fruit.”
“Takes one to know one.”

“God, please, Kara, I’m too tired…”

“Sorry, sorry. You were saying?”

“I was saying that when the orgasm started, I tasted tart cherries - Montmorency cherries. Like, really strongly.” She licks her lips, hums. “Still there, a bit.”

Curious, Kara angles in and kisses her. Though her lips are soft, her mouth sweet and wet, there’s no trace of cherries. “Huh. What’s the word for when you hear colors or see sounds?”

“Synesthesia?” Lena squints, looks mega skeptical. “What, you think you fucked me so good, I could taste my own orgasm?”

Kara’s response is to stand up on the bed and strike a heroic pose: fists at her waist, chest out, steel-blue eyes staring into the middle distance. “No need to thank me, madam. It’s all in a day’s work for…”

“Don’t say it.”

“… Supergirl.”

The Luthor death stare goes on for a while. Unblinking, judgmental, terrible.

All of a sudden, Lena grabs Kara’s ankles and tugs her feet right out from under her, dropping her on the mattress, on her heroic ass.

Lena doesn’t stick around to gloat or mock. She rolls out of bed and very gingerly walks to the ensuite, cradling her vulva and muttering under her breath.

Kara hears her, and stuffs a fist in her mouth to keep the squee inside. What she hears is:

“This is who you fall in love with? Oh, god help me…”

TBC
Kara is up before the sun. She can’t wait to get this day started.

Slithering out of Lena’s arms at five-thirty wasn’t planned, but once she realized it’s Halfpipe Day! and also that it’s Giant Slalom Day!, Kara felt like someone injected nitrous oxide into her engine. And so, brimming with stupid-high energy and not foolish enough to initiate sex, she leaves a still-recovering Lena snoozing on her side, cuddling a Soohorang plush.

That’s the girl you love. And she loves you back! How lucky is that? Four-leaf clover lucky. Lottery lucky. Ladybugs and horseshoes and elephants and peaches and fuck look at that woman ...

Since first sight, Kara found Lena beautiful, delicious to the eye, even. But with mutual feelings in the mix, delicious has become scrumptious, like when you grill a PB&J or salt watermelon.

Skin creased with sheet marks, silken licorice hair clinging to her cheek, mouth a frowny pink crescent, faint vertical ridge along the glabella - an indicator that she’s liable to wake up cross. God, Kara loves it all.

She wants to take a picture, just for her private folder, and gets as far as opening the camera app before her self-preservation instinct starts whinging, all like, please no this is ill-advised and other killjoy stuff.

Whatever, her heart blusters back. YOLO. The virtual shutter clicks.

The resulting photo reminds Kara of an Eric Zener painting she likes, where a slumbering dark-haired beauty, clearly beloved, lies draped in linens and moonlight. She taps the little heart and saves it to her favorites album, too.

She throws on some clothes and scoots out to the dining hall, where she purposefully avoids the cereal bar - wow Lucky Charms would be really good right now - and purchases a wholesome and delicious breakfast for two grown-ups.
Lena’s still asleep when she gets back. Kara changes into shorts and a tank and does yoga near the window, quietly, by cathedral gray morning light. She times her movements to coincide with Lena’s rhythmic breathing.

Several beats in downward dog, several more in warrior three, on to half moon - **oh this feels good** - back to warrior three, half moon again, ease back to downward dog, transition to plank - **wow the floor is cold** - then cobra, then - **ouch careful hello hamstring** - royal pigeon - **good, good job hamstring** - release back bend onto knees, dolphin pose - **flat feet, feet flat** - cat-cow cat-cow - **ha that sounds like CatCo** - and upward facing plank.

When Kara rocks up to her feet, she finds Lena awake, watching her with a faint smile.

She props up on an elbow, clutches the white tiger to her chest. “Morning people are the worst,” says Lena.

Kara knows this voice, reedy and rough from sleep, is a sound she could get used to. She crawls onto the bed, lays beside her grumpy paramour, and boops her nose. “There’s coffee, omelets, and croissants in the kitchen.”

“Oh. Well, obviously I didn’t mean you,” Lena says, softening, smiling. “Hi.”

“Hi.”

A chuckle, a smooch, a nuzzle. A good start to their first day in love.

“Big day,” says Kara, over coffee, once all her food is but memory and burp.

“Mmm. Big day.”

“Got a good feeling.”

Lena tears off a croissant corner, pops it in her mouth. “Do you really.”


“Gold? Not silver, not bronze…”

“Gold, little mama. Like the ‘Coast’ and the ‘Fish’ and the… …Schläger.””

“Hey, good scramble,” Lena says, snapping her fingers. “You’re fast today.”

“Faster than a speeding bullet.” Kara makes an ‘ooh!’ face and mimes dropping the mic.

Lena sips her coffee, looks solemn, as if pondering deep math. “You know, if you were twenty percent less kind, ten percent less talented, and five percent less attractive,” she asserts, “you would be genuinely insufferable.”

Kara pauses, weighs out those ratios. “Thank you?” seems like the right thing to say, even if she can’t edit the question mark out of her voice.

“You’re welcome.” Lena checks her watch and hops off the kitchen stool. “Gotta go.”
“So early?” Kara looks at her phone; it’s barely six-thirty. “GS doesn’t start ’till noon.”

“It’s Luthor Corp business. Sam arranged a satellite interview with Bloomberg TV so I can discuss the Edge acquisition. Morgan may Skype in, if his side gig as a maintenance man permits,” Lena explains, sounding utterly unperturbed.

Kara is beginning to appreciate that when Lena makes a move, she goes full speed and damn the torpedoes. It’s kind of a turn-on. “When’s it start?”

“I’m due at the Alpensia press room in an hour.”

“Are you gonna be okay talking to Edge before you race?” Kara wonders. “I mean, what if he tries to upset you or something?”

“Honey, I just snatched control of his company, including over eighty high-potential tech patents, right out of his hands. He will definitely try to upset me,” says Lena, “but I believe taking that IP and putting him in check is worth the risk.”

Out of her element, Kara decides she’ll have to trust Lena’s judgment on the issues of business and Morgan Edge. She comes close with arms wide and gives her a hug/back rub combo. “I was gonna wish you luck on the hill, but it sounds like skiing Olympic Grand Slalom might be the easy part of your day.”

Lena returns the hug, rocks them side to side a little. Kisses Kara’s ear. “This was the easy part of my day. Thank you for the nice breakfast.”

“No big. I wanted cereal, but for you, I will endure eggs.”

“Your sacrifice is duly noted,” Lena says, kissing her cheek, pecking the corner of her mouth, giggling as Kara shuts her eyes and soaks up the affection like a photovoltaic cell.

“Have fun today. I’ll watch as much as I can on TV. Wish I could be there, though.”

“Me, too,” Kara says, nodding. “I’m gonna try some crazy shit.”

Lena’s eyes go wide. “You mean the…?” she says, rotating her finger in the air multiple times.

“Yup. I’m gonna land it, or go out on my shield,” vows Kara. “Someone’s going to do it eventually and I wanna be first. That way they’ll name it after me.”

“You, dear heart, are a bonafide lunatic.” Lena kisses her again, firmly, and once more for good measure. “Please don’t hurt yourself.”

“I’ll be fine, even if I miss.” Feeling sappy and brave, she looks Lena in the eyes, tries to fashion her expression into an airbag, a jump cushion, a pile of feathers - a guaranteed soft landing. “I’ve gotten pretty good at falling lately.”

Kara’s just slid an unmarked red envelope across a table. Judging by her thoughtful hesitation, Lena knows there’s a valentine inside. Not that silly drugstore mess like “i love u more than Kanye loves Kanye” or “is your name wifi cuz I’m feeling a connection.” This is heavy linen paper and silk ribbon and Pablo Neruda quotes in calligraphy - the real real, like $10 on Etsy.
“I’m pretty good at crashing,” Lena responds, matching her tone. “That doesn’t mean I’m not afraid.”

“Hey, me, too! Crashing sucks!” Kara huffs a nervous laugh. “I’m willing to risk it, though. If you are.”

“You…” Lena trails off. Cants her head, arcs a brow. “Are we on the same page?”

Kara nods and nods and nods. “Same page.”

Same sentence, same word, Kara thinks, and smiles, and waits for Lena to take the leap.

Lena opens her mouth, starts to speak, then pip. Her words prove prophetic as Lena crashes like an overtaxed MacBook. As Kara watches, her eyes essentially become spinning rainbow wheels.

Yeah, she’s not ready. And since Kara doesn’t want to scare her by waving a rococo Etsy valentine in her face, she decides to climb out on the ledge and wait with Lena instead. When they’re both ready, maybe they’ll jump together.

“You wanna make out a little before you go?” Kara offers instead.

With a relieved sigh, Lena shuts her eyes and pitches forward in blind trust. Kara catches her like she was born to it.

Alex meets her at the Phoenix Park entrance, looking well-rested and nattily attired. She’s wearing a sleek Bogner ski coat and matching insulated pants in her favorite color: matte black.

“Fancy! Did you go shopping?” Kara inquires, as they walk in together.

“Yeah, in your girlfriend’s closet,” Alex says, twirling once to show the full outfit. “Since the airline hasn’t delivered all my bags yet, Lena said I could borrow whatever I liked. And I like this.”

“You would. If you’re here to kill James Bond, he went that-a-way.”

“Fuck off. This might be the most expensive outfit I ever wear and you’re killing my buzz.”

“Sorry, jeez,” says Kara. “Honestly, I’m surprised her clothes fit you. You’re not exactly proportioned the same.”

Alex sneers, but concedes the point. “The chest is a bit roomy, I’ll admit, but everything else is right on the money. Plus, Lena has terrific taste - no! stop!”

Kara bites down on her tongue to halt the naughty joke. “But I -”

“Shush.” Alex points her index finger in sharp warning. “I’m trying to be supportive, but I need boundaries. I need to see her as an actual person, not just someone who’s hot for my kid sister.”
Seeing the logic and appreciative of the effort, Kara agrees to cool it. She bumps her sister’s shoulder, smiling as she imagines Alex and Lena becoming friends. They are perhaps the two smartest people Kara knows, and she suspects that their mutual love for science and tech would provide a basis for Kara-free bonding, if they gave it a chance.

“Lena was on Bloomberg this morning,” Kara says, angling toward this goal. “Isn’t that the business channel you like?”

“Yeah. I watched the interview,” says Alex, holding up her phone.

“You saw? How did you know? I didn’t even know till she told me, like, an hour before!”

“Google Alerts.” Alex smirks at her, all haughty smarty. “I know you only use yours for talking dog videos, but you can flag humans of interest, too.”

“Yeah. Uh-huh.” They both know Kara isn’t going to do that. “How’d she do?”

Alex runs the flat of her hand through the air, level and easy. “Pretty smooth. Talked about her goals for developing Edge Corp’s medical patents. Also a bunch of stuff about blockchain, which I didn’t fully understand.”

“What’s blockchain?”

“Decentralized information technology, I think? Supposed to be really secure and fast for financial transactions.”

Kara nods. She wonders if her smart ring uses blockchain, which would make it significantly more secure than her credit card or phone. “Did Edge show up?”

“Via Skype, from his pimped-out mansion in St. Bart’s - which means at least he isn’t here at the games anymore. Maybe Lena’s tactical strike sent him running for cover?”

“Maybe. Hope so.”

Kara wants to believe that’s true, that Edge just pulled up stakes after the takeover, once those contentious lawsuits became moot. She wants to believe, but it’s hard to reconcile with her memory of him - the pure menace he radiated in the hallway, clutching tools like deadly weapons. A man that tightly wound is bound to snap at some point. She asks Alex for her impression of Morgan Edge’s demeanor, a threat assessment of sorts.

“Well he’s definitely an asshole. Arrogant, interrupts a lot, always trying to reframe things in his favor,” Alex recounts. “He kept calling the buyout a merger, which was hilarious. Lena asked him at one point if he thought of Quint and Jaws as a merger, too.”

“She did not!”

“Oh, yeah. She mostly ignored him, though. Said some guy named Jack Spheer is gonna run the day-to-day, and she sees Morgan’s role as - I’m quoting, here - strictly advisory and subject to Mr. Spheer’s discretion.”

“Whoa. Whoa.” Kara stops and stamps her feet in the snow. “My girl is bad!”
Alex snickers, pulls her along by the arm. “She’s done her best to neuter him, that’s for sure. Let’s hope he spends the rest of the games cloistered on Rich Prick Island, licking his wounds.”

“That would be awesome.”

“Know what else would be awesome?”

“Another gold medal?”

“Another gold medal.”

Kara winks at Alex and looks up the hill, toward the halfpipe. “I’ll see what I can do.”

Olympic Halfpipe offers boarders three runs to get their act together, to soar high, rip their best tricks, and stomp their landings.

When scoring each run, judges consider several factors, like amplitude (sheer pants-pissing height), execution (did you land your tricks or not? hmm?), variety of tricks (vanilla ≠ gold), utilizing the full pipe throughout your run (spread out and use the space), and combining difficult tricks back-to-back rather than alternating something tough with something easy (no slackers).

Runs are scored on a scale from 0 to 100, and your top score sticks. If you can’t get it right in three tries, you’re shit out of luck.

Kara hopes to separate herself from the pack through a scoring criteria called ‘progressing the sport,’ which requires boarders to successfully land new tricks that have never been completed in competition.

Because she placed first in qualifiers, she will go last in these final rounds. Her nerves hold up pretty well as her chief competitors make their first runs, mostly shaking the rust off and trying to lay down a solid base to build on. Only Zhi Ruo of China tries something truly audacious: twin 1080s, both landed clean. She earns a 91.45, making her the clear early frontrunner and the woman Kara has to catch.

Kara Danvers really has her work cut out for her! says the park announcer, and that’s the last thing Kara hears before she pops in her earbuds and cranks up the volume.

Then it’s just Kara, her board, the snow and air, and Janelle Monae reminding her to tip on the tightrope.

She drops in. Slipping down the left wall, there’s an obvious difference in the snow today; it feels hard, slick and quick. Maybe this is why the other boarders were taking it easy, trying to find their legs. But it’s perfect for what Kara has planned.

Acceleration happens fast and she readies herself, breathes deep on the vertical, crests the lip and pushes toward the sun, grabs the front edge and turns, turns, turns, turns.

There’s a moment of celebration, a flash of - hey I did it! - which immediately becomes - hey where’s
She wakes up on the flat bottom, lying on a plastic stretcher, with a medic shining a flashlight in her eyes. Her earbuds are still in and Janelle Monae is still on the tightrope, so she hasn’t been out long. Kara takes a quick inventory of her limbs, lifting one after the other, flexing and rotating.

*Everything feels okay. So that’s awesome.*

The medic has a conniption, yells at her to be still. He’s trying to fit a stabilization collar around her neck and Kara does not want that so she puts a hand on his chest and pushes. He stumbles backward, lands on his butt several feet away.

Kara sits up. The other medical aides beg her to lie down. She stands up. Looks around for her board. Spies it at the first right wall transition…with the front quarter snapped off.

*Oh, no. I loved that board. I must’ve landed really hard.*

She jogs over and gathers the busted pieces. Over Janelle, she hears a funny fuzzy sound and wonders if her ears are okay. She slips out the earbuds and hears maybe 15,000 people clapping, whooping, and chanting “Su-per-girl! Su-per-girl! Su-per-girl!”

It’s fucking surreal.

Kara takes off her goggles, finds the nearest television camera, smiles and waves into the lens.

“I’m okay,” she says. “Alex, Mom, Lena - I love you! I’m good! Fucked up my board, though!”

She blows a kiss to the camera, then to the spectators, who seem intensely delighted that she isn’t dead. Kara walks off the course and heads back up the hill. Her score for the first run is a dismal 25.85, and she probably only scored that high because she managed a full 1440 in the air.

*I got the rotations. Just need to stick the landings.*

She has a spare board and two more tries and she’s determined to make it work.

Kara has no memory of her second run.

She scored an 88.95 and is in second place behind Zhi Ruo, whose first run score remains the day’s highest. She is guaranteed a silver medal, even if she scrubs her third run…which really doesn’t seem fair. She doesn’t even know what she did, for pete’s sake!

On the drop-in hill, she opens Apple Music and searches for Madness. “It Must Be Love” accompanies her third run. She feels calm. Loose. Smiles all the way down the drop, through back-to-back cab double cork 1440s and a sweet 1080, laughs in mid-air during a 20-foot Method.

Kara realizes at the end of a backside double cork 1620 that she looked into a TV camera and called
Eliza Danvers “Mom” for the first time ever, and also told Lena Luthor she loves her.

*Good job, dummy. They’re all gonna be so mad at you! You and your big stupid mouth.*

Kara doesn’t remember landing, or taking off her board, or finding her sister. She sorta wakes up standing against the wall of the spectator corral with Alex grasping her shoulders, looking like she wants to slap the taste out of her mouth.

“Please don’t hit me,” Kara says.

“I’m not gonna hit you.” Alex is crying. Messy. Distraught. It’s so *weird*. “You scared me. Jesus, Kara, you scared the living shit out of me!”

“I didn’t mean to! I’m sorry I messed up. But I did better, right? I did better?”

“Fuck me.” Alex sniffs, wipes her eyes. She’s looking over Kara’s shoulder. “You did perfect.”

“Huh?”

“You did *perfect*. Look!” Alex releases her and points at the scoreboard.

Kara turns and sees her name and picture and her bib number - lucky #7 - beside a one and two zeroes. That number doesn’t make sense. She wants to ask for an explanation but the crowd has erupted into thunder and the music is blaring and here come the cameras again and they’re asking Kara if she’s okay and what she did and how she did it.

“I’m okay,” she says, shrugging and grinning. “I think I scared the hell out of my sister here, but I feel pretty good, considering.”

They ask Alex for a comment. She dries her tears and declines. They ask Kara about the 1440s - first time a woman has landed those in competition - and the double cork 1620, which is an entirely new achievement. What are you gonna call it, they ask.

Kara had a name all picked out, something clever and funny. For the life of her, she cannot remember what it was. And so, with feigned conviction and certitude, she says this instead:

“The Montmorency Twist.”

TBC
The women’s Giant Slalom event takes place at the Yongpyong Alpine Center, on the dream-busting Rainbow 1 slope. Harsh winds and brutal temps have made the snow really ornery, and it’s been chewing the edges off slalom skis right and left, making the pursuit of speed extra dicey.

Just to soothe their nerves, Alex keeps up a steady chatter on the bus ride to Yongpyong. Just in case Kara didn’t already know, Alex explains that GS is a highly technical race, where the difference between the medals stand and the back of the pack could be a matter of one misplaced ski, or one clipped gate.

“The vertical drop for this GS course is only about four hundred meters, so it’s a lot slower than that eight hundred-meter drop men’s downhill course me and Lena skied at Jeongseon. But it’s still a bitch of a bear. Keep that in mind.”

Kara nurses a hot chocolate and listens carefully. She wants to understand what Lena’s up against, and she also wants to make sure her own cognitive function is returning to normal. The post-halfpipe interviews were sort of all over the place.

Yeah, when I came away from the wall, I didn’t know where I was, or how I was gonna get down from way up there! I know, right? Why is gravity is such a hater?

That medic was just doing his job. I wish I hadn’t wigged out like that, but I just…yeah. I’m sorry. I’m really sorry, dude! If you see this, I’m really very sorry for pushing you.

The trick name? Oh, that’s…that’s a funny story. See, I tried this thing and…uhh…wow. Standards and practices, standards and practices. Hey, you know what? Cherries are delicious and full of healthful antioxidants. Eat up, y’all!

“In summary: It's what she deserves.

400 meter drop. 51 gates, 49 then 47 turning gates. Two runs under 1:11 or a combined time under 2:22 might get her a medal. What’s the capital of Vermont? Burlington! No. Montpelier? Shit.
“What’s the capital of Vermont?” she asks sister know-it-all.

Alex worries her bottom lip between her teeth. “What do you think it is?”

“Montpelier.”

“Okay. How about North Carolina?”

“… Raleigh?”

“You sure about that?”

Kara nods. “Raleigh.”

Alex nods, too, breathes shakily. “How many gates?”

“Fifty-one. Run One has forty-nine turning gates. Run Two has forty-seven.”

“Vert drop?”

“Rainbow One’s vertical drop is four hundred meters for GS. Men’s Downhill at Jeongseon is over eight-hundred meters.”

Alex smiles, baby punches her arm. “Correct. Very good.”

“And I still say I could have skied that course with you guys, but you left me behind like I’m asthmatic Cousin Kyle or some shit.”

“No, no. Listen to me, boo-boo. I know you’re concussed -”

“I am not concussed!”

“- and your ego is off the chain right now, but you cannot ski Olympic Downhill. I could barely hold it together out there, and I’m a really fucking good skier.”

“And so modest.”

“You’re one to talk. You just fell almost forty feet onto hard-packed snow and you won’t see a doctor because you think you’re goddamned invulnerable! Guess what, Kara? You’re not. You’re not and you could have died.” Alex stops cold. Turns and looks out the window. Her shoulders tremble - minutely, just enough to betray that she might cry. “Please let me take you to the clinic.”

Her voice has that heart-piercing little squeak in it, and Kara almost gives in just to make Alex feel better. But she knows her own body, and she believes really strongly that nothing serious is wrong. Her back is sore and her ass will be eggplant purple within a few hours, but there’s no headache, no more mental fogginess, and all her senses and physical faculties are operating at regular levels. For now.

“Ask me again after Lena’s race,” she offers. “If I start to feel weird or have any symptoms, I promise I will tell you.”

“Oh, a concession to sanity! At last!” Alex laughs bitterly, dabs at her eyes. “God, why must you be such a profound and ceaseless pain in my ass?”
Kara lays her head on her sister’s shoulder. “I had a good role model.”

“Fuck you,” Alex says, and steals her hot chocolate. “Damn woodpecker head.”

A volunteer greets two-time gold medalist Kara Danvers at the gate and ushers her (and guest) to a spot at the front of the friends and family section. She isn’t sure if it’s because she’s kind of a big deal at the moment, or if Lena left instructions to this effect.

Whichever way, it’s a pretty cool spot. They have an excellent view of the last few gates and the giant screens that live-stream races from starting gate to finish line.

They arrive as the twenty-first skier - a hotshot Czech snowboarder, Alex notes - clatters to a stop amid a cloud of powder and a smattering of applause.

They wanted to wait until they reached the course before checking the Run 1 results, and now Kara’s eyes are drawn to the leaderboard. She reads off the top three, the top five, six…and there she is. With ‘USA’ and a red flag marked ‘6th’ by her name.

LUTHOR Lena - 1:11.06

“She’s due up soon. Twenty-three in the start order,” says Alex.

Kara fixates on that board, repeatedly reading her position and time and wondering if Lena saw her fall, if that put her off her game. “Can she make that up?”

“Gonna be tough.” Alex hums, breaks out her ‘math squint’ face. “Most everyone who goes later can’t hit those times. I’d say Lena needs a 1:09 or better to crack the top three.”

“No way Luthor hits one-oh-nine!” a man interjects from down the fence.

Kara leans out, peers around a few other spectators to locate the speaker, intending to call him a loudmouth dumbass. Lo and behold, it’s Mickey Gand, the Liechtenstein party boy, the elevator flirter, the covert Snapchatter, and probably other creepy stuff Kara doesn’t know about.

“Hello, loudmouth dumbass,” she says as they lock eyes.

“Hey, easy, easy!” He raises his hands, palms out. “I didn’t see it was you talking. Actually, I assumed you’d still be at the clinic.”

“You’d think,” Alex mutters.

Gand pushes through the crowd to stand by Kara, uncomfortably close. He leans his forearms, casual-cool, atop the fence. “Are you feeling okay?”

“I was. I’m just now getting a headache,” she says, pointedly.

It goes right over Gand’s head. “First of many, I’d wager. That was one hell of a fall! They kept showing it on the stadium screens between GS runs, like BOOM! SNAP! CRACK! Over and over.”
Well, that settles that. Even if she missed the telecast, Lena has definitely seen Kara’s fall. Larger than life in sparkling HD, crashing into the vertical, breaking her board, smacking her head on the flat. Boom, snap, crack. Over and over.

“If you were my girl, I probably would have scrubbed my race and gone to take care of you,” says Gand. “But not Luthor, right?”

“Who is this idiot?” Alex whispers.

Kara shrugs and grinds her teeth and reminds herself that violence never solved anything.

“Nah, Miss HTK stayed right here and took care of business, for all the good it’s gonna do her. She can’t hit one-oh-nine.”

“Wanna bet?” says Veronica Sinclair, slinking up on Gand’s other side.

Because of course she’s here, too. Of course she came out to watch Lena race. This is how it works in the comics, right? When Supergirl looks weak, the Legion of Doom assembles and plots mayhem.

Gand spins toward Sinclair and sizes her up. Noticeably pulls back when he recognizes just who is inviting him to gamble. Roulette’s reputation still precedes her, it seems. “What kind of stakes you got in mind? No cash! I don’t want to get in trouble. If I get suspended, my mother will kill me.”

“Fine.” Veronica pauses, mulls it over. “How about this: if Lena hits the mark, you throw one of your legendary parties, in Seoul - someplace nice - for the U.S. ski and snowboard teams.”

He instantly agrees. “And when she doesn’t hit the mark…” Gand turns back to Kara, all white teeth and beard. “You promise to come watch me at ski cross next week.”

“She’s not part of your dumb bet!” Alex snaps.


“What? Kara - ”

“Fantastic!” Gand claps his hands and rubs them together. “I guarantee you’re gonna have a great time.”

“At the all-expenses-paid party in Seoul, he means.” Veronica winks at her, looking surefire cool. She moves to stand behind Kara, drops her voice. “Lena will thunder down that hill; she knows you’re here.”

“How? She never takes her phone up to the - ”

“I know. I texted Eve, she passed word.” Veronica takes a deep breath, exhales softly over Kara’s shoulder. “She might not admit it, but Lena’s afraid of flying, so… hold her hand, okay?”

Before Kara can turn and ask what she means by that, Roulette has withdrawn, vanished into the crowd. The PA system announces the next racer.

“Number sixteen for the United States, Lena Luthor.”
All eyes fly to the stadium screens. Lena moves into the starting gate, crouches, catlike. Shins almost touching the timing wand, skis pointed toward the first gate.

Her face is obscured totally by large mirrored goggles and a blue Smartwool gaiter pulled high over her nose. Kara imagines her eyes wide, mouth sealed, jaw flexing - focused and ready. The *one two three go* countdown begins, and Lena springs forward onto the course before the second beep.

“Here we go.” Alex slips her arm through Kara’s and pulls her close. She keeps up a low, comforting running commentary, geared toward a very nervous audience of one. “That’s a fast start.”

Lena hits the first few gates hard, like they’ve been talking smack about her momma. Or maybe that’s a bad analogy; she hits them like they’ve defunded Girls in STEM programs.

“Hands forward. Calm upper body,” says Alex.

She’s laying so much pressure on her downhill ski and carving so deep, twin ruts appear in her wake.

“Railroad tracks. See ‘em?”

“Yeah. That’s good?”

Alex nods. “It looks good.”

The screen flashes Lena’s first interval as 16.92. Before Kara can ask if that’s a strong time, the crowd lets out a collective ‘ohh!’ and Alex squeezes her arm.

Lena careens through a series of deviously positioned gates, requiring ankle-breaking, knee-punishing shifts in direction. Each time, she leans forward, *forward*, then - at the last possible moment - stomps her mid foot down at the outer pole, cutting deep into the powder and all but boomeranging her body toward the next target.

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“Her ACLs must be like bungee cords,” Alex comments.

Kara has no filthy retort because Kara is finding it difficult to breathe. She’s white-knuckling the fence rail, leaning forward as Lena does, shifting her weight and stamping the snow right along with her. “Come on. Come on.”

“Second interval.”

The numbers appear - 34.50 - and the spectators ‘whoa!’ as one. Kara forces herself to inhale and feels like she’s gonna hurl. “Come on, baby.”

Blue gate, way way left, skis up on the edge, chattering hard. Lena picks up her chest, spreads her arms, gets it back under control. She’s off her line for a split-second, nothing more, but it’s costly.

“Slowing down,” says Gand. “Get ready for ski cross, Supergirl.”

“Be quiet,” says Alex. “Kara might not hit you, but I will.”

Third interval comes up 52.15 and the crowd noise settles into a constant murmur of speculation: *Can she hang on? Finish strong? She’s slow to the line. Gonna need a wicked final push. Her...*
girlfriend nearly got killed this morning. Yeah I saw that. We all saw that. It’s gotta mess with your head.

“Don’t listen.” Alex tightens her grip.

“Okay, okay.”

“Eyes up. Here she comes.”

Lena cuts through the last gates at an angle and stays on that line, practically falling forward across the finish line on an extreme tangent, nowhere near the well-worn snow at the center.

“OH! OH!” Alex shouts, before the time even comes up.

Kara feels her spirit rise; Alex recognized something good in that awkward-looking finish, something that might have shaved -

“Holy shit! Holy shit! HOLY SHIT!”

Her sister is screaming in her ear, pointing at the Omega timer that reads: 1:08.83

The scoreboard wipes to black, reconfigures, and spits out the news that LUTHOR, Lena - #16 - USA - has vaulted onto the podium and taken over first place with a combined time of 2:19.89.

A shameless Ric Flair “WOOOOO!” leaps from Kara’s mouth, followed by another and a third and maybe about six or eight more. She and Alex lock up in a pogo stick hug, hopping around and bouncing off their fellow spectators like loud, shiny pinballs.

Gand slinks away without a word.

Out in the finish area, Lena is bent double, catching her breath. She hasn’t even looked up at the scoreboard. She drops her poles, unhitches her skis, and walks behind the high fence.

Kara stops bouncing. Her smile becomes a soft ‘O’ of confusion. “Where did she go?”

“Uhh, I…wow.” Alex is similarly at a loss. Lena very likely just had the race of her life, and she still didn’t take even a moment to celebrate her achievement. She just dropped her gear and ducked out.

“I’m going to find her,” says Kara, who takes maybe three steps toward the athlete’s exit before something snags her coat and she jerks to a stop. Thinking it’s Alex, she whirls around ready to put up a fuss…and there is Lena. Wearing a long, nondescript cream parka, giant sunglasses, and a “Ski France” beanie. Kara readies to grab her and screech, but Lena presses a finger to her lips, takes Kara’s hand and leads her out of the stadium.

Alex tags along, a few steps behind, and doesn’t ask any questions. Which is weird.


Lena glances back, shakes her head. Tugs her forward through the crowds.

“Oh, I get that we’re going somewhere, but where? Where are we going? Don’t you have to stay and talk to the TV people? Do they even give you your medal if you don’t do that part, because I thought I had to talk to everybody or else they wouldn’t - ”
“Over there,” Lena speaks, at last, and points to a large black SUV parked near the venue entrance.

A uniformed driver opens the back double doors and Alex shoots ahead, jumps into the front-facing rear bench seat. Lena gestures for Kara to climb in to the seat opposite, and she belts in beside her.

“Where are we going?” Kara asks again, anticipating fun and adventure. She’s giddy just to be near Lena right now, feels that painful smile biting into her cheeks again.

Lena, however, is not smiling. She taps the glass partition and tells the driver to make haste. They dodge and weave through traffic for a few minutes and come to a screeching stop beside a wide grass clearing. A white Airbus H160 emblazoned with the “Luthor Corp” logo waits on the pad, rotors whirring. The driver opens the SUV doors and Lena rushes them into the helicopter’s warm, quiet cabin, where they belt into plush cream leather seats.

As the chopper lifts off westward and PyeongChang drops away fast, Lena goes ghostly pale. Remembering Veronica’s oddly timed advice about Lena being afraid to fly, Kara takes her hand and laces their fingers tight.

“It’s Edge, isn’t it? He’s done some awful revenge thing and now you’re really in danger. That’s why you couldn’t stay.”

Lena sighs heavily. Gives Kara’s hand a good squeeze. “You’re right.”

Kara punches the air, stamps her foot. “I knew it! What’s the slimy bastard up to now?”

Alex and Lena exchange a funny look. Alex shrugs and looks out the window.

Lena turns in her seat, fixes Kara with a serious expression. “Morgan has developed a weather machine. He’s threatening to hit PyeongChang with a heat beam and melt all the snow unless I give back Edge Corp immediately.”

“A weather -”

Oh, no. Oh, god. Oh, shit.

Kara wilts in her seat. “You’re taking me to a hospital.”

“I’m taking you to a hospital.”

“But why?”

Lena leans over, kisses her temple. “Because I love you, too. Idiot.”
TBC
Dr. Seo seems nice, Kara decides, even though he handed her a hospital gown and hustled her into a MRI suite the minute she walked through his door.

Sixtyish, slim and greying, wearing a zip-up navy cardigan, he reminds Kara of Mr. Rogers. His Seoul office, an elegant neurology practice overlooking the Cheonggyecheon River, is open by appointment only.

So Lena evidently found time to book a driver, summon a helicopter, enlist the aid of a coach and a PR flak and an ex-lover, demolish the GS course, and bribe-beg-coerce South Korea’s top brain doc into seeing a new patient on short notice. ‘Efficient’ seems a bitch-ass descriptor for such a person. Little wonder Kara’s nuts about her.

Lena is watching her now, through the window of the control room, accompanied by Alex and the MRI technologist. Lena looks worried. Alex looks worried.

Kara gives them a thumbs-up and relaxes her head in the support cradle. The narrow motorized bed rolls backward into the scanner, a large white circle that reminds Kara of one of her favorite foods.

“This thing looks like a donut,” she says, giggling.

“You always say that,” Alex says, over the intercom.

“Because it always looks like a donut, derp lord.”

The tech reminds her to please remain still and quiet during the test.

“A-okay, bud.” Kara takes a deep breath, exhales slowly. “I’m ready when you are.”

The detector rotates around her - whirring, buzzing, clicking, collecting images of the potential disaster zone between her ears.

The scan only takes a few minutes, but it’s long enough for Kara to wonder what it may reveal. She genuinely was not concerned about her brain at all until maybe forty minutes ago.

Maybe forty minutes ago, while fleeing Gangwon Province in a posh helicopter, Lena explicitly told Kara that she loves her.

In a perfectly sensible reaction, Kara unbuckled her safety belt, climbed onto Lena’s lap and kissed her face. Many, many times.

“You love me.”
“I love you.”

“That’s very convenient! I love you, too!”

Lena’s eyes flash a panoply of emotions; luckily, she settles on affection. “And you said as much on live television.”

“I did! Because it’s true.” (Kiss, kiss.) “Please don’t think that was ‘cos I hit my head.”

“Hmm. While we’re on the subject - did you choose that name for your landmark new trick because you hit your head?”

(Pause. Squirm.) “Yes. The name. That was a hundred percent because I hit my head.”

(Whipcrack eyebrow raise.) “Really.”

“Really! I had another name picked out, but I forgot it. The love thing was different; that’s just the truth. I know I got sideways for a bit, but I couldn’t have lied if my life depended on it.”

(Eyebrow drop to half-mast) “Really.”

“Mmm-hmm. It was weird! I just knew it and felt it and it jumped out my mouth! Hey, maybe they can start using concussions like truth serum? For when they interrogate bad guys?”

“I think they already do that,” says Lena. “It’s called torture.”

“Oh. Yeah. Nevermind.” (Kiss, kiss, kiss.)

“So are you admitting that you might have a concussion?”

“I never said that.”

“Only you did. Just now. Concussions as truth serum?”

(Kiss! Subject change!) “Wow. This is happening fast, right? Does it bother you? How fast?”

“Seems I’m acclimating to higher speeds; I just clocked the fastest GS run of my life.”

“And you were amazing!” (KISSL!) “You’re gonna win gold. I just know it. I know it.”

“Well. I didn’t come here expecting to win anything, so a medal would be a nice surprise. Though I must admit, I was uniquely motivated to get down the hill today.”

“Yeah, umm…sorry? If I worried you?” (Bit of space, eye contact, true-blue smile, kiss.) “I really am fine, though.”

(Skeptical hum, in B minor.)

“I am! I promise. I promise.”

“Kara, I believe that you feel alright, physically. But the girl I love lives in here.” (Tap to the temple, watery smile.) “I’m not taking any chances with her.”
“…Oh.”

“Yeah. So if you feel the least bit guilty for scaring me, you’ll let me fuss for a bit. Okay?”

“Okay.” (Kiss.) “Fuss.” (Kiss.) “Fuss away.” (Kiss, kiss.) “Fuss me right in the fussy.”

About then, Alex started fiddling with the door and threatening to jump from the helicopter.

While they await the MRI results, Kara sits on a padded exam room table while Dr. Seo straps a neoprene Cryohelmet stuffed with frozen gel over her head and neck - to reduce inflammation, he says. Then he runs through a familiar series of questions and exercises: the Glasgow Coma Scale, or GCS.

It doesn’t really help determine the severity of possible concussion, but Kara knows it’s something docs do to rule out more serious brain injuries. So she plays along with the motor response and verbal response and eye opening tests, and gives herself a high-five when Dr. Seo announces her GCS score is a perfect 15 out of 15.

Alex is not impressed. “So you’re not in a coma. Congratulations.”

Kara sighs, points at her fly new headgear. “You so jelly.”

“Wrong,” says Alex. “That is not cute.”

Dr. Seo gathers Kara’s attention and asks several more questions - Can you tell me about your fall? Did you find yourself unable to summon familiar words, or names? Are there stretches of time where you cannot recall what happened? Have you had a headache, or become sensitive to light or sound? - using such a soothing voice and calm manner that Kara winds up spilling her guts.

Some of her responses (I don’t remember my second halfpipe run. Like, at all.) make Alex clench her teeth and glare.

The revelations come a little easier because Lena isn’t in the exam room. She’s in the hallway now, on her phone, negotiating with games officials. Lena wants Kara’s medal ceremony (and, if necessary, her own) pushed back as late tonight as possible, and Lena wants the IOC Medical Commission to use Dr. Seo’s evaluation in determining whether Kara should compete in her final event - Big Air - next week.

Based on recent evidence, Lena will get what she wants.

Through the narrow window in the door, Kara sees her in vignettes: gesturing emphatically; rolling her eyes; chewing her bottom lip; running a hand through her hair. No one should look that hot arguing with bureaucrats on the phone, Kara thinks. Maybe it’s another one of Lena’s oddball superpowers, like hemostasis and multitasking and virtuosic fingering.

As Dr. Seo finishes his Q & A session, the tech brings in a tablet loaded with the MRI scans. Lena rejoins them and stands on Kara’s left. Alex posts up to her right.
“Though the lost time is troubling, your cognition is robust, as is your motor response. Your GCS score is 15, which is optimal. You do not exhibit any overt symptoms of concussion,” says Dr. Seo.

Kara exchanges smiles with Lena and ‘bleh’ faces with Alex.

“However,” he continues, “the MRI shows a small focal lesion, which indicates some microscopic bleeding in the brain has taken place. I believe you have sustained a mild traumatic brain injury.”

“Whoa,” Kara marvels, sighing in relief. “That’s all?”

“That’s all?” Alex sneers. “Your brain is bleeding!”

“Her brain was bleeding,” says Dr. Seo. “Briefly, and microscopically. But no longer.”

Kara sneaks her arm around Lena’s waist. “Ha. You’ve been dethroned, highness.”

“All hail the new queen of hemostasis,” says Lena, kissing her exposed, chilly ear. “Doctor, do you think she should remain overnight for observation?”

“No!” Kara looks up at Lena, implores with her eyes. “Please don’t make me stay here. You’re getting a medal tonight!”

“We don’t know that.”

“We kinda do.”

“If I may,” Dr. Seo offers, “Provided you can be closely watched for the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours, I don’t see any harm in releasing you. I would like to run some follow up tests prior to your final competition, to be certain you are completely out of the woods.”

Kara fights off a massive urge to do a cartwheel. She hops off the table and faces Dr. Seo. “I would like to hug you, sir. Would that be inappropriate?”

He blushes, laughs lightly. “Perhaps a handshake would suffice?”

“That’d be awesome,” she says, shaking his hand firmly and warmly. “Thank you so much for seeing me.”

“The pleasure is mine, Miss Danvers. I have watched the Olympic games with great interest, and was most dismayed to see you fall this morning. When Miss Luthor called, I felt honored that I might be able to help a visiting athlete during a time of need.”

A knock sounds at the door. A young man enters, hands Dr. Seo an iPad. He scans the screen and smiles broadly.

“It is also my great honor to inform you all that the fifty-eighth and final skier has finished at Giant Slalom. Congratulations, Miss Luthor. Your time held up.”

Alex quietly pumps her fist and Kara bites down hard on gleeful shouts.

Lena just scowls like she’s being pranked. “Are you certain?”

Dr. Seo hands her his tablet, nods once, and steps out. The three women clump together and read the sports column headline:

**Luthor Takes Gold in Giant Slalom, Flies ‘Supergirl’ to Hospital**
It’s a short story covering the basics of Lena’s rampage down the hill and her come-from-behind scramble onto the podium, plus a few lighthearted paragraphs recounting what happened afterward. The writer evidently spoke to spectators, along with Lena’s teammates and coach, and got the skinny on why she left the course all afire.

… Five-time FIS Giant Slalom World Champion Marina Cilic attended the event and witnessed Luthor’s finish, as well as her abrupt departure.

“She flung herself across the line, very far toward an unmarred edge. I believe this cut her time by a tenth-second, possibly more,” Cilic said. “I was impressed by the run, by the finish, and by her conduct afterward. I think nearly everyone in the stadium knew where Lena was going. Her priority was clear.”

Heaving for breath and without a glance toward the leader board, Luthor dropped her skis and reportedly frog marched the injured Danvers into a waiting helicopter. Then it was up-up-and-away for concierge medical care in Seoul.

“She would not be denied today,” said Jean Jolves, US Ski Team head coach. “When her heart becomes engaged, there is little beyond her grasp.”

Though scheduled to compete in Slalom, Super G, and Downhill (all events where she has struggled to crack the top tier), broadcast analysts questioned whether Luthor can repeat her golden performance when the stakes are mere awards and accolades. One US Ski Team member, who asked to remain anonymous, suggested that Luthor might not be done collecting precious medals.

“I wouldn’t bet against her,” the teammate said.

“Holy shit. You took gold,” says Alex, with a cool-cool nod.

“You won!” shouts bouncy-bouncy Kara. “Ohmygodthisisthebestdayever!”

“Marina Cilic knows my name,” says Lena, dreamily blinking. “I had her poster on my wall at boarding school.”

“Aww! That’s so neat!” Kara grins, grips her arm. “And also - you fucking won!”

“I won.” Lena raises her brows and shuts her eyes. Sways a bit. “This is…funny. How funny.”

Kara loops a steadying arm around her shoulders. “What? What’s funny?”

She sways a bit more. “It’s just so odd.”

“What’s odd?” Kara asks, guiding her into a soft armchair by the exam table.

Lena looks up, damp-eyed, laughing bitterly. “I have the strongest impulse to call my mother. How asinine is that?”

“No. Oh, no, no.” Kara crouches down, rests her hands atop Lena’s knees. “That’s not asinine.”

“Isn’t it?” Tears track down Lena’s cheeks. “I took gold. I beat Edge. I found you. I shouldn’t give a
pigeon’s puckered asshole what Lillian thinks of me!”

“A pigeon. But. Yeah. Okay.” What to do, what to say... “Your mom is not nice. That’s a given. But you? You are, like, textbook stupefying in a dozen ways. How could she not be proud of you?”

“Goodness. Thank you.” Lena sniffles, scoops up her hands, grips them tight and warm. “I’m just not sure any of this would matter to her. She wouldn’t understand. Lillian pushed me and my brother to achieve, but actively discouraged celebration of those achievements. She said a focus on accolades would lead to narcissism and atrophy.”

“So no pizza party when you won the science fair?” Alex chimes in, softer than usual.

“No pizza, ever.”

Kara chokes on air, horrified. Lena chuckles and chucks her chin. “I’m serious. Lillian said processed carbs were invented to anesthetize and sicken the poor.”

“Damn,” says Alex. “Your mama makes Ayn Rand sound like a pussy.”

Lena laughs into her hand. “Mother called Ayn Rand a proto-fascist closet case.”

Alex snorts and crumples into a squat, crushed with laughter, which causes Lena to laugh even harder. Kara, who never had much use for Rand and now has even less for Lillian Luthor, reaches out a hand to her sister.

“Al. Hey. Gimme your phone.”

With little hesitation, likely because she knows who Kara wants to call, Alex unlocks her phone and forks it over. Kara giggles at the home screen photo of Maggie stoically enduring a kiss attack from Krypto, then fires up FaceTime and calls Midvale, where it is just past one in the morning.

Eliza Danvers answers on the second ring. She looks tired, but her hair is neat and she is dressed in her day clothes. Olympics coverage plays on the den TV set behind her. She immediately covers her mouth and starts crying when she registers Kara’s face on her phone screen.

“Hi from Korea!” Kara sing-songs.

“Oh! Thank god.” Eliza’s smile is wobbly, teary. “Alex has been sending me updates, but I’m so happy to see you for myself. How are you, honey?”

“I’m good all over. I’ve felt fine all day, but I just had an MRI to be sure-sure.”

“Glad to hear it. Sure-sure is important when we’re talking potential TBI.”

Kara wrinkles up her nose. “I know. I’ve been getting lectured and nagged all day.”

“Excellent. I taught your sister well.” Eliza dabs her eyes, dry coughs into a tissue.

“Hey - how are you feeling? Alex said your flu was going away?”

“Flu’s almost over, hopefully. This season has been awful. Half the lab had to take sick leave.”

“Gosh, I’m sorry. I wish you felt better. I wish you were here! I’m winning, like, all the medals. It’s not even fair, really.” Kara waits as Eliza laughs and coughs, sips some tea, and calms again. “Even
better than all that Olympic stuff… I met someone really special.”

Kara glances at Lena, who is biting her bottom lip and nervously smiling.

“So I’ve heard, and seen,” Eliza replies. “I’ve seen quite a bit now, actually. My friends are sending links to articles and photos of you two almost every day.”

“Aww, jeez! I’m sorry if it’s a hassle- ”

“It’s not a hassle! I love seeing you look so happy, Kara. And she’s so, so lovely.”

“She is that. Plus also sweet and brilliant and badass and funny and she thinks I’m hilarious.”

Eliza pulls a face. “Well no one’s perfect, dear.”

“Haw-haw. Hey, she’s right here, if you want to say hello?” Kara springs up from the floor, stands over Lena’s shoulder, and lays the phone in her lap.

“Oh! Okay. Hi there, sweetheart!” Eliza grins up at her warmly, waving. “It’s a real pleasure to meet you. I’ve heard such good things from my girls.”

Lena, completely taken aback, fumbles for the phone. She rubs her eyes and clears her throat before addressing the camera. “Umm, thank you? I’m, uhh, I’m quite taken with them as well. Kara, mostly. Alex is proving an acquired taste.”

Eliza snickers, delighted. Kara snickers, also delighted. Alex gives her the finger.

“I just watched your race again on the DVR,” Eliza says. “You were astonishing! I cheered so hard during the live broadcast, I actually spilled my tea all over the sofa!”

Eliza smiles and laughs, emanating such warmth and kindness that Kara can see it reflected in Lena’s face. Her tears have dried, and she looks markedly more relaxed as she thanks Eliza for the support.

“On television, it looks so violent, all the collisions and direction changes,” Eliza continues. “If you don’t mind my asking - what are you thinking when you’re going that fast?”

Lena affects a thoughtful smile. “Not much, really. There’s no time. During an average race, I’m projecting three or four gates ahead, running through a series of ‘if-then’ scenarios. My reactions are almost pre-programmed. Today was different. Today, I just… I wanted to get to Kara as quickly as possible. Your daughter was at the foot of the hill and the course was in my way. So I kicked its ass.”

Kara woots and hops and smooches the top of her head. Alex chimes in with a ‘damn right you did.’ And Eliza? Well, she crooks a finger at the screen, motioning Lena closer, and blows her a kiss.

“Well done, Lena. May I say it was a real pleasure watching you work,” she says. “And thank you for taking charge of our little hellion. Sometimes Kara doesn’t know what’s best for her.”

Kara leans into frame and cuddles Lena’s shoulders. “This time I do, mom.”

Eliza pauses, cocks her head, and gives them a smile warm as Central Coast sunshine. “Come to Midvale soon. Both of you.”

“Hey! What am I, chopped liver?” Alex whines from across the room.

“You, too, my darling!” Eliza calls.
“Love you mom!”
“Love you too! My girls.” Eliza wipes a tear, waves her goodbyes. “My amazing girls.”

Kara hands the phone back to Alex and kneels in front of Lena, kind of abashed, kind of expectant. “So that’s our mom.”

Lena glances at Alex, fixes Kara with a sweet, wondering look. “So that’s a mother.”

“Dude, you can borrow her anytime you want,” Alex offers. “I’ll sell you part of my time share.”


Kara ducks her shoulder. “I didn’t really do anything.”

Lena just shakes her head, gives her a soft kiss on the lips. “You really must stop saying that.”

The helicopter lands at PyeongChang at seven-thirty, leaving them just enough time to rush to their room, dress in Team USA gear, and hustle back to Olympic Plaza for the eight o’clock medals ceremony.

As she mounts the podium to receive her Women’s Halfpipe medal, the reception Kara gets from the crowd is wild, elated, deafening. She doesn’t take it personally, knows there’s an aura of magic around people who survive horrifying accidents. But it’s pretty great to feel that crazy wave of love wash over her.

She cries and sings and poses for pictures again, and it’s just as exhilarating as the first time. Maybe more, since Kara is finally ready to admit that she could’ve died this morning. She could have died, and she’s so, so glad she didn’t.

Alive tonight, with heavy and hard-won gold against her chest, she gets to huddle against her big sister and hear the crackerjack emcee ramp up the crowd and introduce the 2018 Winter Olympics Women’s Giant Slalom Gold Medalist Lena Luthor…to a three-minute clapping and cheering and whistling ovation.

Lena steps onto the podium, stands there quiet and bare-faced and blinking as the medal goes round her neck. She looks absolutely shell-shocked by the reception. No goggles and helmet, no gaiter, no sunglasses, no U.S. Marshals, no Luthor Corp. Just a twenty-five year old girl who’s been orphaned, belittled, betrayed, slandered, threatened, and assaulted, yet somehow managed to crack the alchemical mystery of how to transform pain into gold.

She doesn’t cry during the anthem, or after the ceremony when children and teens and old folks politely ask ‘Miss Luthor’ if they can take pictures with her. Lena holds it together when Winn nearly squeezes her to death, when Alex whispers something secret and pulls her close before boarding the bus.

She keeps her composure all the way across the plaza and up to their room and into the steam and
fog of the shower, where she touches the angry bruises on Kara’s body and sobs so hard she loses her breath.

“Please.” Lena’s voice is a wrenching, splintered thing. “I need to slow down.”

“Okay.” Kara doesn’t know what she means, but she can’t deny her anything.

“I need this to slow down.”

“Okay.” Kara holds her face, catches her eyes. “Okay. Tell me how.”

“I need more time.”

“More time.”

“More time,” Lena repeats. “Before all this just... stops.”

Stops. Kara feels her heart crack wide open, feels all her blood fall out. Wonders if this is what Lena feels, an acute awareness that this very good thing they’ve found could be taken away in an instant. Stops. She wraps Lena up tight, tries to make a tourniquet of their arms and legs, their mouths, and their hands.

She wants to promise that all this won’t just abruptly stop, that she’ll never fall down or get hurt again. She wants Lena to promise that there will be no more men with wrenches in stairwells, no more angry rivals with hammers. But those promises would be soft-soap lies, an easy way down this treacherous hill. And they didn’t get to the Olympics by taking the bunny trail.

“I don’t know how much time we’re gonna get. Who does, right?” Kara kisses her mouth, leans their foreheads together. “But this, you and me…it’s so good. I want more time, too.”

“You do.”

“I do. I do. So I say we fight.”

Lena squints, frowns. Rubs her eyes. “Fight who?”

“Edge. Recklessness. TBI. Fear. Anybody or anything that tries to end us before we’re both good and ready.”

She wavers, almost smiles. “I can do that. I can fight.”

“I know you can. And maybe I’m not as tough as you, but I’m no cakewalk. I’ll fight, too.”

Lena does smile at that. “A Luthor and a Super. Sounds formidable.”

Kara mirrors her smile, hugs her up off her feet. “Best tag team since the Rock and Roll Express!”

“The floor is slippery! Please put me down! Thank you. Also, I don’t know who that is.”

“I figured, you poor deprived thing.” Kara reaches for the shampoo, turns Lena around and massages some into her hair. ”Tell you what - we’re gonna fire up YouTube and watch some classic wrestling before engaging in very, very gentle sex. Because my butt really hurts.”

Lena sighs and clonks her forehead against the glass door. “Wrestling? I’m ready to break up now.”

"Baby, no! Wait 'til you see their mullets!"
TBC
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

I promise this has an ending. I swear it on my dog’s life. I WILL get there, even if it kills Spliff the Corgi.

Kara leans on the kitchen counter with her morning coffee, watching Lena get ready. With no events or practices to attend, she’s at loose ends until Alex arrives mid-day, so she asks Lena if she can come to Alpensia and watch her prep for Slalom.

“Are you sure? It’s pretty dull,” Lena replies, gathering her locks into a snatched-up ponytail.

Kara’s eyes greedily track the sway of Lena’s silky hair. “You’re never dull.”

She rinses her coffee mug, turns and smiles crookedly. “I am frequently dull. You’re just easily entertained.”

“So sit me in the corner with a fidget spinner,” Kara offers. “I don’t want to get in the way. I’m just interested to see how you make the transformation.”

“Oh, this should be good,” Lena mumbles, then speaks up. “Transformation, you say?”

“Yeah, like, on the course you’re all titanium-laser beam-metric system. But when you leave here in the mornings, you’re all marshmallow-candlelight…American measurements?”

“Imperial.”

“Imperial! That’s you.” Kara reflects that if she has to start forgetting things, an archaic system of weights and measures is a fine place to start.

Lena sighs. “First of all, I am never Imperial.”

“Apologies. Retracted. Continue.”

“Second, it’s easy to begin my day with a sweet disposition when I wake up halfway to an orgasm.” She leans back against the counter, cocks her head. Brushes fingertips gently down Kara’s forearm. “That was awfully generous of you.”

As every single golden hair on her arms stands at attention, Kara sputters a nervous little laugh. “Well, Gandhi did say that service is the best way to find yourself.”

Lena hums, strokes the smooth skin in the crook of Kara’s elbow. “He was right. I’m a big believer in philanthropy.” Fingers glide under the hem of her t-shirt. “Any way I could pitch in?” Blunt nails scratch circles on her belly. “I don’t mind getting my hands dirty.”

Mesmerized by dancing green eyes and a wicked grin, Kara can’t find her words, not even the ‘yes’
she’s longing to say. Lena seems to understand that permission is implicit, and eases a hand along the 
flat plane of her stomach, into her sweats, into her bikini briefs.

Kara slides her feet apart, opens her legs. Slumps a bit as Lena palms her sex.

“Kiss me?” she asks on a shaky exhale.

Nodding, smiling, Lena comes in teeth first. Takes Kara’s bottom lip and bites down - ever so 
delicately - as a fingertip presses hard against her clit. The contrast is dizzying. As much as she wants 
to watch Lena’s face Lena’s arm Lena’s hand moving inside her pants, Kara cannot keep her eyes 
open.

Lena takes pity on her. Gathers her hair and pulls her head back. Kisses her with a wet, warm, 
coffee-clean mouth. Uses an elegantly composed morse code of pulses and rubs to deliver Kara a 
quick, trembly climax. She’s left standing, barely, gulping air between kisses. Lena slows and stops, 
cups her gently as the drumbeat pulse between her legs fades to a lingering heat.

“Even Steven?” she asks, and sucks softly at Kara’s throat.

“Ermagerd, yes.” Kara whimpers, works to level out her breathing. “Your hands, though. How do 
you even?”

“I’m an engineer at heart. Dexterity is a major advantage when one builds fiddly things.” Lena grins, 
wiggles her digits. Kara shrieks and jackknifes over, pleasantly decimated.

Lena’s race day prep is typically meticulous, and Kara sticks with her through the early stages. She 
oberves as skis are inspected, then waxed and edged according to the morning’s conditions. She 
joins Lena for a somewhat draining fifteen-minute session in the 200-degree Fahrenheit / 93 Celsius 
sauna, but hops off the support train when Lena goes directly from the hot sauna to a fifteen-minute 
icewater plunge.

Wearing nothing but a sports bra and briefs, she lays down in the ice bath - chilled to around 40 
Fahrenheit / 4 Celsius - without so much as a shudder. Only her head and forearms are not 
underwater.

Kara puts on a robe, crouches beside the steel tub and takes her hand, because some dumb instinct is 
telling her Lena needs an anchor of warmth. “Holy shirtballs. How can you stand that?” she asks, 
baffled and awestruck.

Lena squeezes her hand. “It’s no worse that one of Lillian’s hugs.”

“Ouch.” Kara kisses her knuckles. “Really, though. I wanna know.”

She nods, shifts a bit lower. The layer of floating ice bumps her chin, obscures the rest of her body. 
With her red cheeks and dark plume of hair, Kara thinks she looks like a cherry floating in a fancy 
cocktail.

“You know the fight or flight response? Where we encounter something awful and tend to run away, 
fight it, or freeze up?” Lena asks, and Kara nods. “When that happens, the limbic system takes over, 
rational thought becomes difficult. But I’ve found that if I expect things to hurt, if I just lean into the 
pain, my mind doesn’t shut down. I retain my ability to analyze and react.”
Kara feels a weird flare of comfort; she suspected this would make sense. Most everything Lena does has strong roots in logic. “So this is brain training more than physical therapy?”

“Both, I guess. The sauna creates heat shock proteins, which help fight infection and augment a dozen other helpful biological processes. The ice bath suppresses inflammation and also generates Norepinephrine, which increases vigilance and focus and improves mood,” Lena explains. “But I do both mainly for hormesis, to increase overall stress tolerance. So when fucked up things happen…”

“You know you can survive,” Kara finishes, beaming with pride. “You are so gangsta.”

Lena tips her head back and laughs, a bright, candied sound that bounces off the white walls of the training room. Kara just shakes her head, wonders what she did in her past lives that earned her such a confection, such a reward, as to be loved by this woman.

“Okay, I’m coming in.” She takes off her robe and steps into the tub, shuddering and gawping as she kneels between Lena’s calves. Lena cackles and opens her arms. Kara falls against her, goosefleshed and squealing, as ice water sloshes in waves onto the floor.

Alex meets her at the friends and family section, after Kara wades through a number of well-wishers and memento seekers. Several women carrying little rainbow flags convey how heartening it is to see Lena and Kara together, supporting each other, unabashed by fears of prejudice or hate. Kara doesn’t quite know what to say to them, other than ‘thank you’ and some trite platitudes, like ‘you can’t live in fear.’

She realizes their situation is unique; other than the overt threat posed by Morgan Edge and the lurking potential for Lex’s followers to harm Lena again, they haven’t really faced prejudice or hate, haven’t engaged with the world at-large as two women in love. They’re in the Olympic bubble for now, and they’ll figure out what happens next after the games are over.

Kara isn’t scared, though. And she knows Lena isn’t scared, either. Whatever happens when that bubble pops, she is certain they can deal with it, together.

“How’s your head?” Alex inquires, as soon as their hello hug breaks up.

“Empty, as usual. Feels good, though. No headaches.” Kara thinks for a second, then owns up to her memory lapse this morning. Alex doesn’t seem bothered.

“Honestly, I didn’t remember it was called the Imperial system ’till you just said it,” she admits, shrugging and sipping at a tall insulated steel bottle.

Kara rubs her hands together for friction and warmth. She eyes the hot beverage with obvious longing. “Coffee? Cocoa?”

Alex smirks. “Gugija-cha. Goji berry tea.”

“Sounds healthy.” Kara grimaces. “And yucky.”

“It’s actually delicious. I brewed it overnight in the slow cooker, in the modern kitchen of my luxury penthouse. Special billionaire genius recipe.”
Kara holds out her hand. “Well now I have to try it.” She takes a sip; it tastes of sharp red fruit, dates, and cinnamon. She takes another sip, and feels warm for the first time since her raucous ice bath adventure. “Shit, that’s good.”

“Yes, I know. Now give it back.”

She pulls the ace from her sleeve: a sad, pouty face and quavering voice. “I have a head injury, Alex. I need this. For my health and stuff.”

“You’re a manipulative little shit.” Alex deals a lightning quick fist-tap to her stomach. “You can have half.”

“Lulz.” She hops in place, sips tea, cuddles her sister. “How come you never told me being in love is this wonderful? Because it’s pretty goddamn wonderful.”

Alex rocks into her side. “You wouldn’t have believed me.”

As the skiers begin their runs, Alex gives another crash course on the rules.

Also staged on the Rainbow 1 slope, Women’s Slalom is a shorter, slower course than GS. With a start altitude of 1,169 meters and a finish altitude of 965 meters, the vertical drop is only about 204 meters.

It’s considered a technical event, with 63 gates total and 61 turning gates that racers must clear with the tips of their skis and both feet. Instead of dual poles bridged by flags, each gate line is defined by two separate poles in sets of alternating blue and red. The combined time of two completed runs determines the winner.

“Just like in GS, if you miss a gate, you’re disqualified. See how they’re all hugging the inside pole of each gate?”

“Straight line down is faster, I know,” Kara says. “And when they swing out to get through the delay gates, they zip back to center and try to get back on their line, ASAP Rocky.”

Alex chucks her shoulder. “Delay gates! Somebody’s been doing their homework.”

“I’m dating an Olympic gold medalist skier. I’m picking up the lingo.”

Lena goes fourteenth in the start order. On the stadium screens, she is anonymous again: black helmeted, mirror goggled, blue gaitered. She taps her ski pole guards together, steps into the start gate, and drops into her customary crouch.

Unlike some skiers, she does not boost herself out by using her poles, but trips the timing wand and jumps forward, only digging her tips into the snow once she’s a few yards onto the course.

She makes for the first red gate and sets a rhythm, smashing through poles and keeping a sharp central line. At the first hairpin - two sharply offset gates - she digs in hard, switches direction and dives back onto her line, preternaturally balanced as if by some internal gyroscope.

“First interval,” Alex notes, and clenches Kara’s arm as it comes up 12.10.

Lena carves a bold capital C into the snow, over and over. She’s pushing hard, leaving a mark,
making the snow say her name. Kara rocks back and forth on her heels, nerves frayed, eyes wide, cheering softly. “Go. Go. Go.”

Interval Two comes up 22.34. Alex nods steadily. “This is good. Clean as a whistle.”

Heading into the final flush, four offset vertical gates with an opening at the end, Lena’s hands stay high and she punches the gates fast and furious. Little powder flies from her skis; Kara thinks of high divers and small splashes.

Interval Three flashes on the screen: 35.81. The crowd cheers.

“That’s first,” Alex confirms.

“Oh, holy shit!” Kara shivers, leans forward, hangs onto the fence railing for dear life.

One more delay to go. The gates are staggered far left to change rhythm one last time before the sprint to the finish. Lena tucks, builds speed, dives toward the inner pole and presses hard on her right ski pole to make the turn.

It snaps in two. Breaks just beneath the handle.

Already committed to the turn, Lena barely has time to lift her chest and spread her arms before she goes down. Snow explodes beneath her skis, arcs high overhead as she slides downhill, off the course, and smashes into the barrier netting.

Kara doesn’t remember going over the fence. She comes to while running full tilt across the finish line and up the slope, with little conscious thought except how to reach Lena as fast as possible.

Medics breach the fence and begin crossing the course and somehow Kara knows that she needs to beat them there, to be sure they don’t hurt her. To be sure they are medics.

Aluminum ski poles don’t just snap. That’s why Lena doesn’t use carbon fiber. Lena checked her gear thoroughly right before the race. The pole just snapped in two.

This is wrong. This is wrong. Hurry. Hurry.

Kara is heaving for air, nauseated, and ready to hit someone by the time she reaches Lena. But she does get there first, moments ahead of the medical team. Lena is on her back in a soft bank, her skis tangled high in the netting.

Kara kneels at her side and touches Lena’s arm. With the goggles and such, it’s hard to tell if she’s conscious. Kara softly calls her name a few times.

Lena turns her head. Her voice, muffled and low, barely breaches the gaiter. “Well. That should not have happened,” she says.

Kara is apoplectic. Thrilled, yet verging on mania. “Oh, thank god. Thank fuck! Fuck! Are you okay?”
She sits up and trips the binding levers on her skis, lets her boots drop into the snow. Peels off her goggles and gaiter, smiles at Kara. “Hey, babe.”

“Fucking Christ! Hey!”

“Yeah. Hey. How did you get up here?”

Kara looks down the hill. It’s about 400 meters to the fence line. “Umm. I ran? Because that should not have happened?”

“You ran up the slalom hill,” says Lena, deadpan and chuckling as the medics swarm her and try to jostle Kara out of the way.

She is immovable. She lays a hand on one overly brusque man’s chest and considers a repeat of her halfpipe shove maneuver. He freezes, eyes wide, scared. She reconsiders.


And they do. They ask Lena some questions, check her out, and once they say it’s okay, Kara helps her to her feet. The capacity crowd in the stadium erupts into cheers.

“Can you walk?” Kara ducks down in case Lena needs to use her for balance.

“I can walk.” Lena says, pulling her up straight, pecking her cheek. She lays her arm across Kara’s back, grips her shoulder with only light pressure, and they trudge through chewed-up snow across the course. “So. You ran up the hill.”

Feeling defensive, worried she overreacted, Kara shrugs. “Sorry. I got scared.”

“Sorry I scared you. But that really should not have happened. Soon as I put some weight on it, I felt the pole give clean, right at the handle.” She raises her right arm; the hand guard and grip are still attached to her wrist by a strap. “Did you see where the rest of it went?”

Kara stops, scans uphill a titch. Spots the black aluminum shaft half-buried in the snow. “Be right back.” She pats Lena’s arm and sprints uphill, returns with the broken pole. This isn’t really how she imagined her Olympics; twice now, running around in the snow and fetching busted gear after bad crashes. “We’re hell on our equipment, huh?”

Lena examines the top edge of the ski pole, where the failure occurred. “Do you still have your board? The broken one from halfpipe?”

“I gave it to Alex. When a board fails, I ship it back to Lib Tech and they figure out what went wrong.”

“Has she sent it yet?” Lena has an intense brow furrow happening.

“I don’t know.” Kara looks ahead toward the medical entry gate. Alex is there, arms crossed, staring at her with a face like a storm cloud. “Maybe you can ask her?”

Lena does only the requisite interviews. She expresses regret that her Slalom run was going so well until the crash. She assures the reporters that she feels fine and should be ready for Super G tomorrow. Not once does she blame equipment failure.

She does these interviews with the broken pole handle hanging from her wrist.
Each time, Lena stares into the camera, as if addressing someone in particular.

“This isn’t the end,” she says, chin up, faint smile. “Watch this space.”

Lena sends for the helicopter and Alex retrieves the busted snowboard from Seoul, along with a tool bag from Lena’s work room.

That afternoon, in a conference room at the Yongpyong resort, Lena opens the shipping box and examines the board.

As Kara and Alex watch - Kara chewing on her thumb, Alex tracking Lena’s every move and offering forensic investigation suggestions - Lena pores over the board from tail to broken tip with an LED light, a jeweler’s loupe, a laser stylus, and a 1000x portable endoscope. She then repeats the whole process on her broken ski pole.

“Micro fissures,” she announces, after nearly half an hour of focused post-mortem study. “All through your deck. Ringed around the ski pole.”

Alex stands and takes the broken board front in hand. “Micro fissures?”

“Come. See.” Lena uses the laser stylus and endoscope to illuminate the edge of the snowboard. On her laptop screen, the highly magnified image reveals hundreds of microscopic holes bored clean through the deck, from edge to edge.

“Your board was basically perforated. Rigged to fail at the first application of high pressure - like when you touched the wall after your first jump. The pole is the same.”

“No fucking way,” Alex hisses.

“How?” Kara sits up. “How is that possible?”

Lena flings the laser stylus across the room. Scowls, lays her hands on the table. They are curled into fists. “Meso-machining,” she says. “Surgical and lab tools twenty microns in diameter, made of carbide and diamond. It’s one of the patented technologies Edge Corp stole from us, a prime reason I sued him.”

Alex punches the table. “Motherfucker.”

Kara can’t quite wrap her head around it at first. She understands the concept - that Edge sabotaged their gear in an attempt to injure or kill them - but it just doesn’t sit correctly in her mind. “How did he get hold of our things?”

“His hired men probably swapped them when we were distracted. Dressing, talking with coaches or scouts. There are volunteers everywhere; couldn’t be that hard to steal an ID and uniform.”

“Oh.” Kara does tend to lay her board down a lot in the locker room, on the start hill. It’s not that hard to imagine, actually. Swapping out Lena’s ski pole couldn’t have been much harder.

“I’m gonna kill him,” Alex swears. “I’m gonna fucking kill him.”

Kara reaches out to her, grasps her upper arm hard. “Stop it. Please.”

Alex pulls away, fire in her eyes. “This is no time for pacifism. You could have died. Lena could have died. That son of a bitch has to pay.”
“I know. I agree.” She looks to Lena. “Can it be proved? That Edge did this?”

Lena shuts her eyes. Shakes her head. “The tech is already on the black market. Anybody with eight grand can buy a similar tooling system now.” She jolts suddenly, brightens. Sits quietly, staring out the window, as whatever idea she’s formulating gels and cures.

Kara is getting whiplash from all these changes in emotional direction. Just looking at Lena as she formulates a plan is enough to make her hopeful, confident that something can be done.

“What’s going on?” Alex whispers. “Is she having a seizure or something?”

“She’s doing the genius thing. Shh.”

Lena stands, walks to the end of the conference table and retrieves her laser stylus. “I though putting him in check would be enough. I was wrong.” She looks at Kara, emanating regret in palpable waves. “I am so sorry you got hurt. I underestimated him. That won’t happen again.”

“I’m fine! I’m fine,” Kara insists. “Please don’t dwell on that. Just tell me, what can we do?”

Lena doesn’t answer right away. She takes a notepad from the table, turns the stylus up to its highest setting, and burns something onto the paper. This, she slides over to Kara.

On the paper is a chess piece, a king, toppled onto its side.

“I only have one play left,” says Lena. “I’m going for checkmate.”

TBC
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Discord and mush and justice and mush and technobabble and mush.

Lena says she needs time alone with her laptop and phone to arrange her next, and hopefully final, stratagem in this increasingly hazardous duel with Morgan Edge. She suggests the sisters keep their appointed date with Winn to see the Gangneung Oval, and she will rejoin them soon for dinner and a debrief.

Both Kara and Alex protest leaving her alone, but Lena argues it’s for their own protection. She hints that lawbreaking - or at least some Gumby-esque bending - might occur.

“Plausible deniability,” says Lena, ushering them out of the conference room with a half-hug for Alex and a swift kiss for Kara. They’re two steps into the hall when Lena slams the door and throws the deadbolt.

Kara startles, feels a tingle run down her spine. She looks back at the conference room, sees Lena’s silhouette through the smoked glass wall. Stalking back and forth, on the phone, plotting Edge’s doom. It gives her feelings. In places. She giggles.

“You find this funny, Miss Danvers?” Alex intones. “Please, share with the class.”

Discretion being the better part of not grossing out her sister, Kara fudges a little. “That dude is fiscally fucked,” she replies, “Lena’s gonna strip his house down to the studs.”

“At minimum,” Alex agrees. “Although, if she’s anything like her dad and brother, Edge will be lucky to come out of this alive.”

Bristling at the implication, Kara responds a tad harshly. “Watch what you say, okay? Lena isn’t like them.”

Alex shrugs, displays her palms as they enter the stairwell. “It’s common knowledge that Luthors don’t let their enemies off easy. Remember, Lionel was questioned in the disappearance of Simon Stagg, and he turned up dead in Thailand. Then Lex had that nasty feud going with Maxwell Lord, until his yacht mysteriously exploded in Monaco.”

“I don’t want to hear this.” Kara speeds up, jumps down two and three stairs at a time.

“Hey! Those guys died, Kara, and all they did was threaten Luthor Corp’s bottom line,” Alex continues, almost keeping pace behind her. “Edge took the fight outside the boardroom in a big way. Both of you could’ve been badly hurt! Do you really think Lena will let that slide?”

“Would you stop this? Please? God!” Kara bursts through the double doors into the parking garage and heads straight for the bus. She takes an aisle seat in the back - a signal she doesn’t really want
her sister close right now.

Alex boards seconds later and plants herself directly across the aisle. The strain of staying mum shows on her face, and Kara knows she won’t be able to hold out for long. Scant minutes later, as they’re chugging down the mountain toward the Coastal Cluster venues, she cracks.

“I’m not saying Lena will.”

A grumbly huff, a pleading look. “Alex.”

“I’m saying if she does, I will understand. And applaud. And make a sappy toast at your Norwegian destination wedding.”

Kara lifts her eyebrows and blinks, a twin-barreled blast of ‘did you say what you just said?’ Alex nods at the floor, offers no retraction.

“Gee. That’s nice and all, but is your blessing contingent on Lena arranging his dirt nap?” Kara asks. “How about if she proves that he sabotaged our equipment? Don’t you think Edge belongs in prison?”

“Of course I do, but how do we prove he did this? Anyone could have switched out your board. They could be out of the country by now. And even if someone were caught, what are the chances they’d implicate Edge rather than take a payoff, plead out, and serve a little jail time?”

Alex is probably right. Alex is usually right about crime stuff. But Kara can’t bear to entertain the idea of Edge going scot free, or of Lena using violence to square things.

“Besides,” Alex continues, “billionaire criminals don’t actually go to prison. They just flee to Russia or somewhere else with no U.S. extradition.”

“Lex was a billionaire. He went to prison,” Kara points out. “And who put him there? Oh, that’s right - Lena did. Because she is not like her family.”

“Fuck’s sake, Kara! Lex didn’t just go to prison. He was executed to stop him from wreaking more havoc. I know that doesn’t make sense to you -”

“I comprehend capital punishment, Alex, I just don’t agree with it, and I’d bet you everything I have that Lena doesn’t agree with it, either. If there was a way to stop Lex without involving the federal government and lethal injection, I am certain she would have done that instead.”

The fundamental difference between the Danvers sisters on this issue is the same as it’s always been: Kara believes that killing is always wrong, and Alex believes that sometimes it’s necessary to eliminate a predator to protect the innocent.

It remains to be seen what Lena will do about Edge, but Kara has faith in her judgment, and faith in her heart.

Quiet now, Alex looks like she’s losing the will to defend her position. Which is just fine with Kara, because she can hold the ‘Lena is good and decent’ line indefinitely, without reinforcements.

“I don’t want to argue about this anymore. Mainly because I know I’m right,” Kara says, and offers her hand across the aisle. “I trust Lena to do what’s best.”

Alex takes her hand, holds tight. “I think maybe I do, too. You and I just disagree about what the best thing actually is.”
She grins at her sister, heaves an affable sigh. “I wish I could bake a cake filled with rainbows and smiles…”

“And I wish I had an untraceable alien death ray pistol.” Alex shrugs. “Potato, potohto.”

Winn is waiting for them outside the entrance to the Gangneung Oval, pacing and fretting, eager for firsthand news about Lena. They catch him up while clearing a security screening, and once he’s assured that “La Luthor” is still “healthy, hot, and happy,” Winn takes them on an insider’s tour of the 8,000 seat speed skating venue.

After obtaining permission from his buddy, a day supervisor, Winn guides them around the two underground decks and two above ground floors, points out giant gleaming machines beneath the oval that keep the ice in premium condition.

Winn spends an inordinate amount of time talking about something called a ‘screw chiller’ with a charming lack of self-awareness. Alex gives her a ‘shh’ look and Kara doesn’t say anything dirty, though the effort sparks a war inside her very soul.

There’s a Women’s 5,000 meter event tonight, and spectators won’t be allowed in for another few hours. Once the walking is done, they park themselves in the blue zig-zagged seating area and kick back for a bit.

“The Oval is the largest pillarless structure in Korea,” Winn says, gesturing at the ceiling of curved steel ribs that stretch 240 meters across without vertical support. “And I love how they staggered the seats. No matter where you’re sitting, you can see the whole race.”

“Do they sell hand warmers?” Alex asks, slipping on her gloves and knit cap. “Kinda chilly up here, bud.”

“By design, dear lady. Temp is a comfy fifty-seven degrees, to keep both ice and athletes cool and silky smooth.” Winn runs a hand across his immaculately styled hair. “Fifty-percent humidity, too, so it’s always frizz-free and follicle friendly!”

“Neato! Screw humidity!”

Alex snorts and Winn looks amused, but Kara means it. She can’t hack humidity. Makes her feel sleepy and sweaty and plumps her hair from manageable Capellini to obstinate Spaghetti. During those last two weeks with Lucy in Florida last year, she came thisclose to buying some clippers and going full-on Furiosa.

“Excessive atmospheric water vapor can suck my butt,” she adds.

Winn yowps and offers a high-five. Alex notes how odd it is to see the rink empty, yet bustling with activity. Several workers are out on the ice, fanning fine sprays of warm, purified water onto the surface to build up perfect, slick layers for tonight’s race.

“There’s a five meter wide warm-up track right there, and two four-meter tracks - inner and outer - on the main runs. Having that extra space on the warm-up makes the track feel sharper, allows for more aggressive moves. Which can be a good thing, or a horribly bad thing.”
He explains there were a few bad crashes in last evening’s contests, and the tracks need some TLC before they are safe to use again. “They really chewed it up,” says Winn. “Three guys got tangled on a sprint lap and their blades just chop-chop-chopped! All the way across the lane. It was brutal.”

Kara’s eyes bug out. “Was everyone okay?”

He makes a twisted ‘eww’ face. “Nope. Kid from Denmark lost part of his calf. He was fighting for balance and slammed his skate downward…but his blade did not hit the ice.”

“Gshhshshyuuck! Gahh!” Kara gags and shudders. Her brain conjures images of a deli slicer working through a ten-pound ham. She feels sick.

Winn nods. “It was like Texas Chainsaw out there, girl. I got lightheaded just looking at the ice after they stretchered him away.”

“I woulda booted,” she admits.

Alex concurs. “The kid cannot handle gore. Slasher flicks are right out.”

“Glad you didn’t see it. That sorta thing doesn’t happen often, but when it does, it really brings home how dangerous winter sports are. I mean, look at you and Lena; both of you took major falls on successive days. Talk about a wild coinkidink!”

Kara and Alex trade a tense look. Thankfully, Winn misses it.

“But! But! Imagine you took those falls with meat cleavers strapped to your feet!” he goes on. “That’s why it totally ticks me off that they’re letting Kelly Nguyen skate again. That little jag could’ve gotten somebody killed.”

Not wanting to betray her ignorance of her new friend’s sport, Kara flares her eyes at Alex, who takes the hint and asks what he means by that. Winn explains that Nguyen is a US Short Track prodigy who admitted to tampering with an opponent’s skates last year during a competition. Nguyen said he was pressured to do so by a coach, but no criminal charges were levied against either man.

“The guy he sabotaged crashed out hard, tore up his MCL. US Skating banned Kelly for two years. He was supposed to miss the Olympics, but last month they let him rejoin the team like nothing happened,” Winn rails.

Kara’s sense of fair play is deeply offended. “A two-year ban? That they didn’t even enforce?”

Winn waves his hands around, rabbity and angry. “I know! It’s bull! Nobody’s looking out for us. The IOC just wants to make money. They ban athletes for doping, then overturn the bans. They suspend cheaters, then rescind the suspensions at the eleventh hour. If it makes the games look bad, they turn a blind eye.”

“Huh,” says Alex, glancing sharply at Kara. “Every man for himself.”

“Exactly!” Winn hollers. His voice rings across the ice. A nearby watering crew gives him a funny, suspicious look. “We’re good! Just...infected with the Olympic spirit!” He waves and grins until they turn back to their work, then picks up right where he left off. “And! And! You know what’s really effed up? They never woulda caught him if Kelly hadn’t confessed. If he hadn’t felt guilty - ”

“...No one would have ever known,” Kara finishes, catching her sister’s eyes. “They would have assumed it was an accident.”
“Hundred percent.” Winn nods sharply. “I may not get called up to race here, but you can bet your gold-plated booty that I’m keeping close watch on my skates, just in case there’s more sabotage afoot. You should do the same, Kara. Gremlins are everywhere.”

Kara groans and sinks low in her seat. “Why couldn’t we have had this conversation before halfpipe?”

“Kara? Seriously?” Alex sounds chippy; she’s white-knuckling her seat edge. “Ixny.”

“Ixnay what?” Winn perks right up, sniffing a secret. “Ixnay why?”

“Nothing. Kara, go on, tell him it’s nothing.”

She looks at her stern sister, then at her lively and curious and good-hearted new friend. Kara wants to read him in, let Winn know what really caused her and Lena to crash…but knowing might put him in danger. She consciously chose to stand near the Luthor bullseye; Winn would be blindly stumbling onto the target range.

“It’s nothing, Winn. I was a little careless with my board, is all. Won’t happen again.”

He looks at her, squinty, askance. “You can trust me, you know, if something’s wrong. Maybe I can help?”

More excuses at the ready, mouth open, Kara pauses. Her spidey sense is tingling; the little hairs on her arms and nape are rigid with static electricity. She stands up and scans the entrances until she spots her - Lena - descending the metal stairs above their section.

She’s got that look. The one that says ‘the die is cast’ and ‘oh fuck what have I done’ and ‘muwahahahahahahaaaa’ all at once.

Kara is out of her seat and rushing to meet her before she’s halfway down the stairs. She stops two steps below, anxious, hopeful, and says one word. “Checkmate?”

Lena’s eyes are practically glittering, like she’s about to cry anime tears. “Warrants have been issued by the U.S. And French governments for the arrest of Morgan Edge on charges of money laundering and tax evasion. Last I heard, St. Bart’s State Police were on their way to arrest him.”

The whoop comes first, then the holler, then the forklift hug that plucks Lena right off her feet. “CHECKMATE!” Kara stomps downstairs with a squirming, dazed Luthor in her arms. “Jail, Alex! Alex! Jail!”

“Kara please put me down.”

“Kara!” Her sister is approaching, hands making an air panini gesture, urging Kara to calm the shit down. “You must chill. You must chill.”

“Checkmate! He’s going to jail!” She’s reeling with relief and can’t stop laughing and she’s carrying Lena in her arms bridal style and it all feels so darn awesome. “Jail! In yo face!”

“Kara, honey, down. Down, please.”

“Yeah okay okay yeah.” Kara gently sets her down, supports her upper arms until Lena finds her balance. “Sorry I’m just so happy I’m just so freakin’ happy!”

“Really? You’re so hard to read sometimes.”
Kara blushes, chews her lips for a second, then just hugs her close. Lena laughs against her neck, and it’s not the panicky spasm kind like when she bought seventy percent of Edge Corp. It sounds authentically light, sincerely happy. Like a weight has been lifted. Kara almost doesn’t care how it’s happened. Almost.

“Will you tell me how you did it?” she whispers. “I’ll sign an NDA, if you want.”

Lena chuckles softly. “That won’t be necessary. As it turned out, I didn’t have to do anything illegal. Morgan did almost all the work for me… with a little help from Lex.”

Kara pulls back, hits her with a questioning look. Lena just flattens her lips and nods.

Alex, hovering by them on her phone, lets out a small gasp and displays the screen. A headline from Reuters - Billionaire Charged in Money Laundering Scheme - is accompanied by a harsh flash photo of a sneering Morgan Edge being perp walked out of his St. Bart’s mansion wearing an Ed Hardy t-shirt and cargo shorts. He looks half asleep, half crazed, and wholly suited to wearing handcuffs.

With a little hop, Winn peers over Alex’s shoulder. “That guy looks like a dick,” he says. “Who is he?”

“No one of consequence,” Lena replies, kissing Kara’s cheek. “Who wants a steak? I’m fucking starving!”

Over a bottle of red, a mountain of stir-fried cucumbers and zucchini, and perfectly seared ribeye steak at a Jinbu barbecue house, Lena tells the tale of how her brother’s aggressive paranoia saved the day, three years after his death.

“Lex and Maxwell Lord despised each other - that’s no secret. But while Max seemed content mocking my brother’s alopecia and his quasi-Oedipal closeness to Lillian, it wasn’t fun and games to Lex. Around 2009, he started actively tracking both Lord’s investments and his personal expenses, looking for some weakness to attack. Max was among the first to use cryptocurrencies for his shadier transactions, so Lex funneled considerable capital toward finding an exploit, but he kept failing. Until he asked me for help.”

Alex perks right up. “You found a way to track Bitcoin?”

“But I thought blockchain was supposed to be almost hacker proof,” Kara notes.

“Me too!” Winn leans on the wood tabletop, chin in hands, staring lovingly at Lena, like a Hogwarts nerd listening to J.K. Rowling read a new Harry Potter story.

Lena lifts a brow, sips her wine, savoring their anticipation. “Technically, this didn’t involve blockchain. Max used a virtual private network and an onion router to conceal his IP address, and he funded off-book ventures with Digital Bearer Certificates, which attach no personal user data to the transaction. You buy into a DBC and get fractions of cryptographically encrypted data, which can later be decrypted by the receiver and cashed in for a portion of the assets backing the certificate. All I did was tap into his VPN and tag the exploded data. The grunt work I outsourced to tracking bots, which pinged Lex when one of Lord’s tagged DBC fragments decrypted and went liquid.”

“You outsourced the best part to bots? Are you allergic to fun?” Winn squeaks.
Lena shrugs. “I was sixteen. I was busy listening to Metric and working on my senior thesis.”

That senior thesis would have been for her Materials Science and Engineering degree from MIT, Kara recalls. The air at this table is gosh darned rarefied, IQ-wise. She feels pretty lucky to be here, for a lot of reasons, and squeezes Lena’s knee under the table.

This earns her a dorky, red-stained grin. “Fortunately, Morgan is nowhere near as smart as Max was. He used Edge Corp servers to conduct similar illicit transactions. He was locked out of those servers before he even knew he was fired as CEO, so all his footprints were still intact. I just had to backtrace them and decrypt the associated DBCs.”

Once decrypted, the certificates clarified a pattern of failed personal investments and self-loans. Edge covered his losses by embezzling from his partners, then he loaned that money to himself through anonymous DBCs, thereby washing the stolen funds.

“And then he had the gall to claim interest payments on those bogus loans as tax deductible business expenses,” Lena finishes. “I think my FBI contact popped a boner when I sent the evidence. Between them and the IRS, the feds have been after Edge forever.”

“Now he’s their problem,” Alex raises her glass. “Good riddance to bad rubbish.”

“Cheers to Luthor ingenuity! May I never get on your bad side!” adds Winn.

Kara just looks at her, moon-eyed, feeling blissfully safe with her heart in this woman’s hands.

“Thank you.”

“I didn’t really do anything,” Lena cheekily replies.

“Ha ha. Shut up and eat your kimchi.”

Winn has a date. He will not say with whom. He gives Lena a full-body python hug, two gentler hugs for the sisters, and departs with a faux-generous offer to pick up the dinner check with his smart ring.

Still high on delivering Edge to his Waterloo, Lena suggests they all head to Seoul and decompress with a movie night at the apartment.

“All I want to do is snuggle up on the couch and zone out. Is that okay?”

Just when Kara thinks she can’t love her any harder.

Lena’s penthouse is sort of like Lena herself: a mixture of efficiency and comfort. There are commercial grade appliances in the kitchen, but all the furniture is squishy and dotted with pillows and blankets. The gray bamboo flooring is hard and smooth, but generously scattered with fluffy throw rugs. The terrace, surrounded by retractable glass, shows the cold, bright lights of Seoul, but the small infinity pool is toasty warm.

Also? There are books everywhere. Stacked on end tables, face-down on counters, and teetering in
Kara always thought that term was silly. Master bedroom. What was that even supposed to evoke? This is where Big Daddy sleeps! The master of the house! Hup-hup and whatever. But when she sees Lena’s cherrywood canopy king bed strung with white silk curtains, it makes considerably more sense. She can imagine all manner of mastery taking place in this room.

“Are the walls thin?” she asks, as they’re wrapping up the tour.

“They are not,” says Lena.

Alex turns on her heel and leaves at speed, muttering about earplugs.

Lena hits the wine fridge and starts them off with a casual choice: a 2016 King Estate Chardonnay with hints of lime and green apple. She gives everyone a double pour, almost filling the small white wine glasses to the brim.

“To comeuppance,” she offers, lifting her glass. The Danvers Sisters clink in, repeat the toast, and drink again to a rotten jerk getting what he deserves.

While Lena and Alex head for the home theater room to browse movie options, Kara hits the kitchen to make popcorn worthy of the occasion.

She heats coconut oil in a tall steel pot on the stove, test pops four kernels of Lena’s fancy organic popcorn, then dumps in the whole damn bag. She tends the kernels like a mother hen, listening closely and sniffing the air often for tell-tale signs of burning.

When the popping slows, she dumps the luscious puffs into two large wooden bowls and dresses them with a blend of melted grass-fed butter and sourwood honey, and a liberal dusting of Maldon sea salt.

“Wow! Kara that smells amazing,” Lena calls.

*Baby, you ain’t never lied,* Kara thinks while staring at the popcorn. It takes all her will power not to drop her face into a bowl and make crunchy-sweet mouth love with this idyllic creation.

“If you eat it all, we’re watching Phantasm!” Alex shouts.

Terror rushes down Kara’s spine. She flashes back to her first Halloween with the Danvers, when Alex tested her mettle with a gory 70s fright flick that gave her nightmares about a Tall Man and a face-drilling silver sphere for a solid fucking week.

She grabs the bowls and starts running. “NOOO! No Phantasm! No!”

Alex is curled up in an oversized club chair, sipping wine and laughing as Kara wheels into the room. Lena gives her a pitying look and pats the couch cushion beside her.

“No Phantasm,” she says, trying not to grin.

Kara remains wary, shaking a little as she sets the popcorn down. “Ever?” she implores.

“Ever.” Lena lays an index finger across each orbital ridge. “I swear on my eyebrows. If I ever try to
make you watch Phantasm, you can shave them off.”

Somehow, Kara finds this immensely touching. “But they’re one of your top five facial features.”

Lena waggles them fetchingly. “Guess I better keep my word, huh?”

“Guess you better.” Kara kisses her right brow, directly over the two pitted scars.

“Dude.” Alex groans and reaches for her bowl. “Movie.”

“Movie. Yes.” Lena smiles and punches a series of commands into the touchscreen remote. The room lights dim to one-quarter, the wood paneling on the feature wall slides open to reveal a 100-inch screen, and the surround sound system comes to life.

Kara sits back on the tobacco suede sofa, popcorn bowl in her lap and Lena tucked under her arm. The MGM lion roars, sinister synthesizer burbles forth, and a baritone narrator speaks over a black screen.

“Since before recorded time, it had swung through the universe in an elliptical orbit so large that its very existence remained a secret of time, and space…”

“Is this scary?” Kara whispers.

“No,” Lena whispers back.

“Are you sure? Because it already sounds scary.”

“You’re gonna love it. Eyebrow swear,” says Lena, resting her head on Kara’s shoulder.

With that, Kara is wholly reassured that this movie - ‘Night of the Comet,’ according to the title card - will not scare the mud out of her. She samples some popcorn, makes a yummy noise, and settles in for what she hopes will be the first of many movie nights together.

Two hours later, stuffed with exquisite popcorn and pleasantly wine drunk, Kara and Alex sit on the enclosed terrace with their bare feet in the infinity pool and discuss the film. Specifically, they argue about which of them would be the Regina Belmont (older sister, sardonic, slightly OC, nerves of steel) and which of them would be the Samantha Belmont (younger sister, cheerful, nigh indestructible, habitual wiseacre) in their own version of Night of the Comet.

It’s a toothless debate, since they both know Kara is the Samantha and Alex is the Regina, but trading insults and dialogue snippets gives them something to do while Lena checks in with her FBI contact. She wants to make sure Edge is denied bail.

“You were born with an asshole, Doris, you don’t need Chuck,” Kara drawls, for maybe the fifth time. It’s her favorite line.

“They said you were dead!” Alex throws out - a big-haired 80s drama reading.

“They were exaggerating, totally,” Kara rejoins, full-on Valley Girl, while kicking pool water at her sister.
Alex flicks water back, hits her right in the face. Kara sputters and flips her off.

“How did we miss that movie?” Alex wonders. “I thought mom and dad had all the good eighties flicks.”

“I blame you,” says Kara. “You were my pop culture curator, and you failed me. I may never forgive you.”

They hear a muffled, gleeful shout from inside the apartment. Maybe ten seconds later, Lena charges onto the terrace shouting “FLIGHT RISK! NO BAIL!” and cannonballs into the pool.

The splash absolutely soaks Kara, and partially drenches Alex. They look to each other, smile, and flop sidelong into the warm water.

Lena floats on her back, staring up through the glass ceiling, out toward the heavens. Kara lays her glasses on the tiled border, bobs over to join her. She links their arms, making a miniature flotilla that feels virtually unsinkable.

“The stars look so bright tonight,” Lena says, tracing a finger down the sliver of waxing crescent moon.

Kara tilts their heads together, reaches an open hand out toward the capricious and almighty universe. She doesn’t feel small or afraid; tonight, she feels cradled it its benevolent palm.

“Don’t see any planet-killing comets out there, do you?” she teases.

“Not a one.” Lena grins and grins, the firmament in her eyes. “Tonight, it’s all jake.”

TBC
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

The only thing I haven't worked out yet is whether or not they're married by the end of this story. Because my version of Supercorp is just love-dumb enough to do it.

There’s a knack to everything, Kara thinks, and she gets there much faster when she pays attention to what really works and commits to perfecting that action.

Like, dressing was de-stressed when she owned up to being a preppy nerd and bought a closet full of goofy sweaters, jeans, and tight chinos. Fashion, knacked. Tequila gives her a buzz without making her maudlin or hungover. That’s liquor, knacked. Working out got easier when she pared down her home gym to a yoga mat and a 35-pound kettlebell, which she painted to look like Jigglypuff. That’s fitness, knacked.

Sex was one area where the knack always kept shifting, evading her grasp like soap dropped in the shower. Things that felt nice with one girl felt frightfully awkward with another, leaving Kara in the unenviable position of apologizing for wanting “weird” things in bed.

But Lena doesn’t seem to think Kara is a weird lover. She’s game to touch and twist and taste and penetrate and say just about anything, eager to experiment and gather data on mutual enjoyment, quick to offer feedback or suggest a tweak. It might be too soon to say that’s sex, knacked, but they’re pretty damn close.

“Fuck, I’m close,” Lena says, clutching the sheets. She’s on her knees and elbows with Kara draped over her back, pressing six inches inside and rocking slow.

The soft garment leather harness rides low on her hips, rests snug and stable on her mound, yet it’s thin enough that Kara can feel the pressure shift when Lena tenses against the push, or relaxes into the glide. Her hips respond in kind with firm little repetitions, the rise and fall of short, jamming strokes.

She’s learning that Lena likes it this way, with the cock nestled mostly inside and their bodies locked tight, with Kara squeezing her breasts and pinching her clit as they sweat and sigh and pitch and climb together.

The bedroom walls may not be thin, but she comes quietly anyhow, gasping and grunting and biting her wrist as she clutches tight around the cock. Her legs quake as she comes down, and Kara wraps an arm around her ribs, eases Lena onto her stomach.

Kara stays inside, hovers over her back, inhales the gingery chlorine smell of her hair. Kisses the edge of her ear. “I love you.” Laughs softly against her neck. “Still feels so neat to say that.”

“Neat.” Lena cranes her head around, cuts an eye toward her lover. “I love you, too,” she says, smirking. “Not least because you use PG language when you’re still halfway up my ass.”
“I’m versatile,” says Kara, jogging her hips lightly as she withdraws. Smiling as Lena moans and snickers into the pillow.

“You’re subversive,” Lena retorts. “Sweet. Carnal. The contrast is fucking divine.”

The D-rings are easy to work so the harness is off in a flash, wrapped in a towel and dropped to the floor. She lies on Lena’s back, grinds a time or two against the length of her body, and stills in genuine contentment.

Kara doubts she’s ever been this comfortable with anyone; if so, she can’t remember when. She feels known, understood. Not merely accepted, but cherished in her quirky, goony totality. It’s a heady thing, and she wonders if Lena feels the same, feels safe enough to admit anything.

“My parents died when I was twelve,” Kara begins. “When the Danvers adopted me, I had this fear that if they didn’t like me, they’d send me back to the foster home, so I worked really hard to act happy. I cracked jokes and laughed, but I was sad for a long time. Just, inside, you know?”

Lena lifts her cheek from the pillow, nods a little.

“It stopped feeling like work after a while, once I understood that they loved me, that it was okay to love them back. But the happy stuff was a habit by then, so I leaned into it pretty hard. Maybe too hard, because when I get sad now, people look at me like I’ve grown a second head.”

With a bow of her back, Lena signals that she wants to roll over. She settles, pulls Kara’s head against her chest, speaks softly. “I hear you. Sometimes I think it would be easier to just take a pill and shave off the ends of my emotional spectrum, ditch the angry reds and the moody blues altogether. But then I wouldn’t be me, and I want to be me, now more than ever.” She presses a kiss to Kara’s hair. “So, I have a proposal.”

Kara smiles through her tears. “I’m gonna say yes. But ask anyway.”

“Mmm. Good to know.” Lena strokes her back, thinks for a moment. “When I’m wallowing in the 450 or 700 nanometer range, you don’t have to pull me back to center. If you’re around, I will come back on my own. For my part, I will do my level best to warm up your blues - but only if you want me to. Just know that it’s okay to be blue, or red, or cyan. You are lovely in every color.”

Sniffling, Kara lifts her head and smiles. “Just so you know, I bake when I’m sad.”

Lena raises a skeptical brow. “Are you a good baker?”

Kara grimaces, shakes her head. “Not so much.”

“Hmm. Me, either. Guess we’ll have to drown our sorrows in take-out cupcakes.”

Someone’s stomach grumbles at the very mention of cupcakes.

“Shower? Breakfast?” she suggests. “Big, big, big breakfast?”

“Ugh,” Lena says, and kisses her. “When we go off tour, we’re gonna get faaaat.”
Super Giant Slalom, or Super G, is a longer and faster alpine race than Giant Slalom, and is considered a speed event. Gates are widely spaced, allowing skiers to maintain high velocity through the turns. The course is set on the same Jeongseon slope as the even-faster Downhill, and includes 43 gates - 38 of them turning gates.

Unlike the other alpine races, skiers only get one chance to clock their best time, and there is no practice on the Super G course; athletes see the setup for the first time on race day. It’s an all-or-nothing, smoke ‘em if you got ‘em kinda deal, and every entrant will be busting ass down the hill at speeds of 80 miles per hour - possibly more.

Lena ordered all new equipment for today, and she got permission for Kara and Alex (as guest technicians) to join her in the locker room, to help unpack and inspect the gear. Skis, poles, boots, pads for arm and shin and knee, are checked over carefully and set up for conditions well before the noon start.

She foregoes her usual sauna and ice bath for time constraints, and instead chooses to dress out and warm up with her “technicians” while watching the first few runs on television.

“Most of the time, I’m lucky to net forty points in Super G,” Lena tells them, explaining that her best finish this season was a third place run last December in Val d’Isère. “Speed isn’t really my strong suit.”

Kara swallows a smile, thinking back to Jean Jolves’ contrary opinion. Lena’s coach believes that this might be the right hill for her disciplined, fluid style. Granted, he meant the Downhill race, but Super G is sorta like Downhill’s butch girlfriend, so whatever. Lena can charm this bitch, too.

“Just ski your race,” Alex offers, pointing at the TV monitor.

Onscreen, an early racer hits an unseen bump and springs up like a Jack-in-the-Box, wrecking her tuck and losing time. The snow is hard today, and the temps are hovering around -9 Celsius / 16 Fahrenheit.

“This course is a bully, so don’t fight it,” Alex adds. “Your speed is economy of motion; use that and you’re gonna slay.”

Lena just laughs, but her sister’s words trigger a memory in Kara, something Jeremiah Danvers used to tell them when they were floundering in practice, when his two wickedly competitive snow devils needed to regroup and calm down.

“What was it dad used to say? That thing from SEAL training?”

“Slow is smooth and smooth is fast.” Alex nods, offers Lena a fist bump. “You got this.”

“We shall see.” She knocks knuckles with Alex, then gives Kara a bracing hug and a quick peck. Stoical, she dons her helmet and sets out for the start gate.

The sisters take the lift downhill and assume their usual VIP positions in the spectator corral. Camera shutters are clicking all around them. Kara tries hard to keep her face neutral, watch the stadium screens, and ignore the attention focused on her, all the people desperate to capture her reaction. But it ain’t easy.

The start order has Lena going thirteenth, and with the average run timing out at around a minute and twenty-two seconds, they don’t have to wait long before the PA blares out her name.
“Now starting for the United States, number thirteen, Lena Luthor.”

She slips into the chute, drops low, stares out at the course. Black helmet. Blue mirrored goggles. Scarlet red gaiter pulled high over her nose.

“That’s new,” Alex says, tapping her own nose. “Nice palette.”

Kara smiles. “Lovely in every color.”

Lena absolutely catapults onto the course and immediately establishes a velvety line, partners with gates in an upbeat, flowing Foxtrot, and rolls through the bumps and jumps with an imperturbable balance. Her split times come back strong: 6.08 in the first interval, and 40.81 in the second.

“Lena looks very confident today,” says a woman to Kara’s left, in a suggestive tone. All Kara can see from the corner of her eye is giant Jackie O. sunglasses, platinum blond hair and a fuzzy white fur hat. “One of the nicer side-effects of **forelsket**, as our Norwegian friends say.”

Kara bristles. Clears her throat and stares hard at the screen. Leans forward on the fence and aims every good vibe she can muster at Lena. “Slow is smooth and smooth is fast. Slow is smooth and smooth is fast…”

Lena rounds a wide delay gate and uncoils into a soaring jump. Lands with barely a crunch beneath her skis. Slick, slick, quick, quick down the curve, hardly brushing the painted blue lines that grab and slow with hidden friction.

To her right, Alex is quiet, nodding, eyes glued to the clock for the third interval time.

1:03.70

She bites back a shout. “Silver,” she hisses, rocking excitedly. “Could be silver!”

Kara breaks into a toothy grin. “Oh, god. Oh, god. Please, please!”

Silky and sinuous through the last gates, Lena’s speed tuck is unbreakable. Head down, poles back, she rockets across the line and sweeps into a dashing, powdery parallel stop.

The scoreboard displays a final time of 1:21.09 - good enough to take over first position. Kara erupts into jubilant screams, and the Danvers Sisters do their dead level best to turn the spectator corral into a mosh pit.

For perhaps the first time in her career, Lena Luthor stands amid the cheers of 6,000 people and savors that immediate and irreplaceable moment of achievement. Her time may not hold, but for now, she is the woman to beat - by a margin of nearly half a second.

She unclips her skis, takes off her goggles, pulls down her gaiter. Finds Kara in the crowd. Waves at her, beaming and euphoric.

Kara leans out over the rail and Lena walks over, into her arms, and kisses her.

The crowd goes **bananas**. Apeshit. Buckwild. It’s pretty damn great.
Kara can’t hear herself think, which would be a problem if she were thinking anything but ‘you deserve this’ and ‘I love you.’

Lena lays her mouth against Kara’s ear. “I am intensely uncomfortable right now.”

“You’re doing amazing, sweetie!” Kara yells in reply.

“Supergirl is correct!” shouts the woman in white. “You are doing amazing, as I predicted!”

Green eyes sparkle and Lena laughs, high and bright, obviously delighted to see this presumptuous, intrusive person. She breaks off from Kara and gathers the small-framed fur-hatted interloper in a warm, familiar embrace.

Jealousy burns through Kara’s brain like green dragonfire. Who is this person? She’s way, way too teency to be Lillian Luthor. Plus, Lena is actually happy to see her. Elated, even. Kara crosses her arms and stares daggers at that stupid dead possum hat, while Alex lays a consoling arm around her shoulders.

“Like they say, we should never meet our heroes,” her sister says.

Kara gives her a sharp, querulous look. Alex laughs, and whispers in her ear.

“Cool your jets, Maverick. That’s Cat Grant.”

TBC
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

The die is cast, what the fuck have I done, muwahahahahaaa, etc.

One one-hundredth of a second.

That’s the margin of victory, the difference between gold and silver in Women’s Super G. Every journalist, every games official, every network talking head points this out to Lena Luthor. Some bear down with obvious malice, as if they’re hoping to provoke a poor reaction.

Lena, though, remains a study in good sportsmanship and never reduces the race to mere numbers. She smiles and laughs and validates the victor - a young dual-sport phenom from the Czech Republic - as a pioneer, the first athlete to compete at the Olympics as both a skier and a snowboarder.

Kara is offended on Lena’s behalf, but she has to admit that the woman disarms those media jerks with mad aplomb, sometimes via zippy little double entendres.

“Does it not trouble you, this result? Being bested by one who is not even a full-time skier?” asks a rather prissy Swiss skiing writer.

Lena gives an innocent half-shrug. “I have no problem being topped by a snowboarder.”

That comment makes Kara hoot so loud that Alex grabs her by the parka hood and drags her from the press room.

Once Lena completes her requisite media chores, she runs a veritable hug gauntlet in the hallway. Coach Jolves and Miss Teschmacher and bronze medalist Veronica Sinclair and spectator/guest Winnslow Schott and A. Danvers and K. Danvers all get theirs in, and E. Danvers even provides a cyberhug from her couch in Midvale.

As the hubbub bubbles away, Cat Grant’s field general personality takes over. She insists on celebrating Lena’s outstanding result with a late lunch at some fancy-schmancy joint in Seoul. She’s already reserved a table.

Alex immediately opts out, claiming she and Winn have tickets to women’s short track this afternoon. Kara pouts hard, gives her best ‘scared puppy’ face, but her sister is a grinning, heartless knot of schadenfreude. Alex throws her to the wolves with only these words in parting:
“That lady may be scary, but she’s been in Lena’s corner since the trial. This could be the closest you get to a ‘meet the parents’ situation. But, hey, no presh! Just remember how nice you weren’t when you first met Maggie and try not to worry about karma. Buh-bye.”

She evades Kara’s grasping, slapping hands and fucking skips away. Kara feels sweat trickle down her sides. She tunes back in to the Grant/Luthor confab, which is running about 80/20 in favor of the loquacious Grant.

“Space isn’t my first choice, but the food is better than anything near the Village, and I’d prefer more controlled environs to converse with you and your…” Cat pauses. Tips her sunglasses down and scrutinizes Kara with what feels like X-ray vision. “Roommate? Social media strategist? Muse? Bodyguard?”

Kara can feel those shrewd brown eyes judging her right down to her bones and, apparently, injecting her with paralytic venom. She wants to respond, but the words just won’t come out.

“Girlfriend,” Lena provides, laying an arm across Kara’s shoulders. “The word you’re looking for is ‘girlfriend.’”

“Already?” Cat scoffs into Kara’s impotent, mute face. “Is there no intermediate signifier you could use until you at least know each other’s middle names?”

Oh, boy. Here we go. Here we go.

“Hey. Hey. You know what? Miss Grant? I am her girlfriend. You might be thinking that this all happened pretty fast -”

“Try light speed, Miss Danvers.”

“Yeah, okay, granted. Heh! Grant-ed?”

Cat does a full-body eye-roll. “Terrible.”

“I know and I’m sorry! But - but! We’ve been real and honest with each other from the jump. Our coordinates were right on target when the FTL drive engaged -”

“Oh god she’s a nerd, too?”

“So light speed isn’t a problem when you arrive safely at your appointed destination.”

Cat rotates her hand in the air, asking for a quick resolution. “Which is…?”

“Emotional intimacy, mutual trust and respect, shared interests, ethical compatibility.” Kara takes a breath, feels her spine lengthen as she stands up tall. “And, pardon my bluntness, but the sex is practically radioactive.”

Color blooms on Cat’s cheeks. She almost smiles. “The girlfriend speaks.”

“She speaks the truth,” Lena adds, with a squeeze and a proud grin. “Although if you plan on subjecting us to your usual velvet-gloved inquisition, I would advise you to feed her and soon. Otherwise, I cannot guarantee your safety.”

Kara nods. “She speaks the truth.”

“Well, then.” Cat adjusts her fur hat, taps her shades back into place. “Let’s away.”
Kara gets the feeling that Lena isn’t up for a fancy dinner and would rather grab some burgers and chill out before tonight’s medals ceremony, but she’s being very agreeable and rolling with Cat’s suggestions. Not that explicitly objecting would do much good, as Ms. Grant has a sort of screen in her ears that filters out stuff she doesn’t want to hear.

Exhibit One:

_I’m bringing in one of my art directors, Julia Freeman, to photograph you after the ceremony tonight. Enough with these sports hacks; you should be lit by someone who can actually comprehend the geometry of your face._

_Cat, that’s not necessary…_

_Shush. This occasion merits quality commemorative images and you will have them._

Exhibit Two:

_*Sigh* Okay, just please don’t make a fuss. I feel conspicuous enough already._

_Modesty is for Mormons. You’re a genius billionaire philanthropist and two-time Olympic medalist, involved in a lesbian romance with an indestructible hottie who’s won two golds. These circumstances entail a baseline level of fuss._

_… … You may have a point._

_I often do. Although you should have two golds and a silver, in my opinion. Are you planning to sue Leki over that defective slalom pole?_

Exhibit Three:

_No, Cat._

_Lena! Of course you’re going to sue! You were robbed of an extraordinary thing, and you’re due a healthy expiation. They’re probably expecting it, anyhow. Punitive lawsuits are as American as giant cheeseburgers and Shark Week._

_I’m not going to sue Leki. But I would love a giant cheeseburger._

_The brasserie serves a delicious shark carpaccio with smoked strawberries._

_How is that anything like a cheeseburger?_
It’s better. Few things in life are more satisfying than grinding a predator between your teeth and chasing it down with a nice glass of wine…though I doubt any vintage could have made Morgan Edge palatable. Good thing you didn’t bother to chew.

Lena blushes, and Cat reaches across the limo seat to pat her knee. As much as Kara does not like the location of the pat, the intent was clearly platonic and Grant’s expression is pure ‘Great job, kid; I knew you had it in you’ and nothing more.

Maybe Lillian Luthor doesn’t care about the amazing feats her daughter is accomplishing, and maybe Lena is right that her mother’s parental affection is a dry well. And maybe the way Cat Grant looks at Lena could be misread as sexual interest (it’s an easy mistake, could happen to anyone, Kara is not an insecure nutcase) at first glance.

On deeper inspection, that interest takes on a kinder hue, burnished by their personal history. Cat Grant interviewed Lena right after the trial, when she was low and vulnerable and probably expecting to be pilloried forever.

Instead, Grant used her platform to craft a persuasive narrative where Lena stood up against her family, in defense of the public and Lex’s innocent victims, and paid dearly for her bravery. Cat saw Lena as a hero before anyone else did, years before Kara even met her. She’s evidently still so invested in Lena’s well-being that she’s flown to Korea to ensure her friend is flatteringly photographed, properly feted, and adequately laureled for her Olympian endeavors.

So. Anyhow. That’s why Kara decides to give Cat Grant the benefit of the doubt, even though the woman is the very embodiment of the word ‘bougie.’

“Kim Swoo-geun, the late architect of note, designed the Space building as a home for his business and his art collection,” Cat is saying, as the CatCo Worldwide Media helicopter sweeps them into the city. “It now hosts three decent restaurants and Kim’s private gallery. The flagship, Dining in Space, has a Michelin star, though I can’t imagine why. The last time I was there, I ordered the wine pairing menu and twice - TWICE - they served the red cold.”

“Scandalous,” Lena says, soaking the word in sarcasm. She grins at Kara and tickles her palm. “I assume you wrote a scathing Yelp review.”

“Smartass. I had words with the chef.” Cat glares with amused eyes. “I only Yelp when Pizza Hut messes up Carter’s order.”

Kara smiles at this, warmed by the notion of a powerful business titan taking time to bitch out a chain restaurant for giving her kid an unsatisfactory junk food experience. It reminds her that love can surface in the oddest, neatest ways, like wildflowers sprouting from asphalt.

Brasserie in Space is not terrifically busy, and the view is amazing. Glass walls overlook a beautifully landscaped park, quaint Hanok-style houses, and the Changdeokgung Palace, built in the early fifteenth-century as a kick-back pad for royalty. The restaurant itself is less formal than Kara expected, with bare cement floors and ceilings, overhead heaters, and plain wooden tables.

Cat sits opposite them, orders a bottle of New Zealand Pinot Noir, and they make travel and weather and business chit-chat until the starters arrive. Sans ceremony or politeness, Kara and Lena demolish
two plates of coppa ham and dried tomato crostini with lustful abandon.

“No salad?” Cat asks, picking at her own bowl of lightly dressed greens and seared octopus.

“Salad is a waste of stomach space,” Kara explains, biting into a toast loaded with fatty ham and flakes of sharp, tangy pecorino.

Lena butters a thick slice of focaccia, then dips the crust in olive oil. “When you’re burning upwards of four thousand calories a day, nutrient density is crucial.” She bites into the bread and *ommmms* audibly. Tears off a pillowy, sopping chunk and feeds it to Kara, who responds with her own sensual exclamation of *whooooa momma*.

Cat sneers at them both. “Stop that. It’s just bread.”

“Spoken like someone who hasn’t had a carb this century.” Lena lifts a brow, smirks and offers a slice of luxuriant focaccia to her soignée friend. “Wanna piece?”

“Absolutely not,” Cat says, recoiling.

Kara delightedly gets in on the act. “C’mon, Miss Grant! The menu says it’s non-GMO heirloom wheat!”

“It’s a pointless indulgence.”

Lena dips a crust in the oil. “Extra virgin olive oil isn’t pointless. It’s loaded with anti-inflammatory phenolic antioxidants.”

“Such nutrition. Very health.” Kara slathers on a pat of silky-soft butter. “Sheep’s milk butter has an ideal calcium to phosphorus ratio, so it’s easily digestible, and may help prevent osteoporosis.”

Cat hits her with a freeze-ray stare. “What the hell is *that* supposed to mean?”

With a gulp and a cough, Kara realizes that her data spew might have sounded ageist. She backpedals furiously. “Bones are good. We need bone. And teeth, too. We need them, everyone. Calcium…it helps blood…clot. Hemostasis. Right, Lena?”

Lena has angled her body away from the train wreck. She sips wine and watches ducks flapping about in the park pond. “Ooh, look. A Baikal teal.”

After a few dead silent moments, the server arrives with their entrees. So grateful is the panic-stricken Kara that she almost breaks into song. She considers something from Madonna’s first album, like “Lucky Star.” Instead, she pries her foot out of her mouth and shovels in heaps of Pappardelle, rock shrimp and mascarpone while avoiding eye contact with Cat Grant.

Lena poaches some of her pasta and shrimp, but repays Kara with a few slices of rare steak and some prettily prepared ratatouille. Cat picks at pan fried sea scallops and watches Kara like a hawk, or whatever bird is most judgmental.

“You’ve made quite a splash at these games, Miss Danvers,” she says, while pouring herself a third glass of wine. “Is it safe to say that opportunity will come knocking?”

“Opportunity will attack her door with a battering ram,” Lena interjects. She scratches her nails along the top of Kara’s thigh. “You’ll be endorsing everything but MAGA hats and Heterosexual Pride
Kara feels heat and energy tickle her chest. When Lena says things like that, voices a strong belief in her, it’s like inhaling a hit of pure oxygen. She can’t help smiling like a goon. “Gosh, I don’t know about that.”

“You could at least secure a better snowboard sponsor,” Cat says. “On that halfpipe thing, your board snapped like peanut brittle. Or old lady bones.”

Air snags in her throat. She glances up and finds Cat smirking, amused at Kara’s discomfort. Kara shoots her a sheepish grin. “It was a bad fall, yeah.”

“My son was very worried for you,” Cat goes on. “Carter tells me it’s highly unusual for a snowboard to break like that. Perhaps it was a manufacturing defect?”

“Oh, no that wasn’t Lib Tech’s fault,” Kara says, leaping to the defense of her board maker. “Their boards are great! That was…” She stops short, realizes she should hush before she blabs the truth about Morgan Edge and sabotage to someone who is not yet in their circle of trust. “That was a freak accident.”

“So you’re not going to sue, either?”

“No! No.” Kara shakes her head. “Nope. Bygones.”

Cat sits back, crosses her arms. “I knew it.”

Lena takes a deep breath, leans onto her elbows. “Cat, don’t.”

“That son of a bitch!” She throws her napkin onto the table. “He sabotaged you both! He could have killed you! Dammit, I should have said something!”

Holding up an open, placating palm, Lena tries to calm her down. “It wasn’t your responsibility to warn me about Edge. From the moment I filed those lawsuits, I suspected that tangling with him might be dangerous.”

Cat’s face twists in confusion. “Edge? Wait, you think Morgan Edge was responsible?”

Lena’s spine goes noticeably rigid. Her consoling tone flash freezes. “There was evidence. Circumstantial, but persuasive.”

“Oh.” Cat looks away, nods. “I suppose that makes more sense. Edge does have the resources to pull off something like that, unlike…”

The Luthor’s expression is downright glacial. “Unlike who?”

Cat meets Lena’s gaze and a brief standoff ensues. Kara can’t blame her for stalling; right now, if Lena’s eyes were lakes, the ice would be thick enough to support a convoy of eighteen-wheelers.

“You might as well just tell her,” Kara suggests. “She’s gonna find out anyway.”

With a peevish huff, Cat surrenders. She slams her handbag onto the table and digs out a small tablet. With a few swipes, she pulls up a folder of .pdf documents and hands the tablet to Lena.

Kara puts an arm around her back, leans close, and they read together. The documents are a series of four hand-written letters addressed to Cat Grant and dated between January 15 and February 3 of this year. The first one gets off to a kicky start.
To the Abbess of Lies -

Your scriptures shall be revealed as apocrypha! There is no truth but this: Eternal life through Singularity: Eternal fealty to The Prophet; Eternal suffering to The Apostate. These truths I shall make manifest in your dissolute world, with His blessing.

Within one paragraph, it’s glaringly obvious that this letter was written by a lunatic, an acolyte of Lex Luthor. Kara feels scared for Lena, but she also feels bad for this person, who has obviously been deceived and obviously needs mental health care.

The writer is fixated on Lex’s false promise of perfect bodies and souls within his fictitious Singularity matrix. They’re convinced this paradise really exists and by “righting the scales” for Lex, they can worm their way into heaven, gain access to that mythical high-density server array which the evil Lena has hidden in some Luthor Corp bunker.

Lena tries to pull the tablet away, but Kara catches her elbow, implores silently to be allowed into this darker part of her world.

“You shouldn’t have to deal with this shit.”

“Too late.” Kara rests her chin on Lena’s shoulder. “I’m all in.”

With a shuddery breath, she leans her head against Kara’s. “Sorry.”

“You take the good, you take the bad…”

Cat huffs at them, impatient for the reveal. “The other letters are more of the same drivel. Lex was going to take everyone to an all-inclusive Sandals resort forever and Lena ruined it, now I have to work my dead-end job and deal with my crabby wife and snotty children. Woe is me, Lena must pay, etcetera.”

“Were they all written by the same person?” Lena asks.

“Yes. After the police told me there was nothing they could do, I sent the letters to Gavin, my security man, and he tracked down the author. Even worked up a depressingly thorough psych profile. Check the next folder.”

Lena punches up the profile document and looks at the author’s photograph, contemplating him silently. To Kara, the man looks utterly normal: blonde and blue-eyed, fifty-ish, receding hairline, average height and build. But Lena is staring hard, canting her head, zooming in on the man’s eyes, his chin and mouth.

“You recognize this dude?” Kara squints and catches his name between zooms. “Thomas Coville?”

“Mmm-hmm.” Lena turns to her with a flat, sad smile. “He looks so friendly when he’s not swinging a pipe wrench at my head.”

Kara feels a jolt of energy burn down her back. She wants to stand up and throw her chair. She wants to punch the tablet, shatter his face. She wants to cuss out Cat Grant for not warning Lena
about the letters. She wants to hold Lena and cry and sleep for a week. God, being in love is just fucking maddening.

“This is the guy from the stairwell?” she asks, just to be sure.

“Yes. That’s the guy.”

Cat is scrambling to catch up without looking like she’s fallen behind. “Coville was here?”

“Oh, yeah! Last Thursday morning, he snuck into the Village and hit Lena over the head with a wrench!”

“He hit…oh, Lena. Oh, dear girl. Are you okay?”

Lena shrugs. “He only took one swing before I drove my forearm into his windpipe.”

Kara’s eyes bulge. Her mouth drops open. “You hit him in the neck?”

One brow hikes up. “Well, I had to discourage him somehow.”

“I’m glad you did!” Kara giggles nervously. “I just didn’t know you could, like, beat dudes up and stuff.”


The notion that her girlfriend wields real power - both fiscal and physical - yet refrains from abusing it due to a surfeit of decency kinda does it for Kara. Her eyes light up like cheap sparklers. She wonders if this restaurant has a lock on the ladies room door.

“Lena, I am sorry,” Cat cuts in. “Gavin assured me that Coville was flat broke and couldn’t possibly secure passage to Korea. He thought hearing about the letters might upset you and ruin your Olympics. I had a bad feeling, though. I should have said something.”

“I wish you had.” Lena smiles, though it’s still flat and sad. “All this counterpunching is exhausting.”

“I imagine so.” With purpose, Cat takes up her phone. “I’m calling Gavin right now. He’ll liaise with local police and arrange security for you -”

“No, please, I don’t want the games becoming a goddamn Luthor spectacle!”

“These are not mall cops in uniform, Lena! Gavin uses former spec ops agents. They will blend,” Cat assures her. “Now just finish your meal, enjoy your wine, and let me take care of this.”

Lena sighs, holds out a hand to Kara. “Would you mind having The Rock and Vin Diesel follow us around? Only until this Coville guy is caught?”

Kara shakes her head, holds her hand tightly. “If it keeps you safe, I’m all about it.”

“Okay.” Lena pauses, considering something else. Her smile, when it resurfaces, has a warm and sparkly sheen. “Would you accompany me to the ladies room?”

“YES.” Kara stands and pushes back her chair with such vigor that it tips over. A massive clatter echoes off the brasserie’s cement surfaces. Cat looks up sharply. Diners turn and stare. She blushes.

“Sorry! Mianhae!”
Lena starts laughing at her. Kara pulls her up and tugs her toward the restrooms. The ladies is empty and there is a lock. The door is closed, the lock is thrown, and Kara finds herself hoisted onto the slate-topped sink vanity before she can even file a request.

Lena kisses her hard, holds her tight, smiles against her mouth.

“What?”

“Nothing. No, it’s just…” Lena pecks at her lips, again and again, then rests their foreheads together. “Every time I worry something might scare you off, you just burrow in deeper.”

“Like a sexy, sexy tick.”

“Well. That’s unkind. But somehow apt?”

“I know, right?” Kara kisses her, wraps her legs around Lena’s hips in a very friendly and not at all parasitic hug. “How many times I gotta tell you? You’re stuck with me, Lena Lutessa Luthor.”

“Oh, god.” Lena moans and hides her face in Kara’s hair. “I hate that name.”

“I think it’s cute. Fancy. Makes you sound like a tsarina or something.” Kara tips her head back and groans. “Unlike my middle name, which sounds like allergy medicine.”

“Kara Allegra Danvers.” Lena murmurs the words against her throat. “Beloved and lively; you name suits you.”

“You suit me,” Kara says, as they hold each other, safe and drifting in silence.

She wants to ask Lena what will happen tonight after the medals ceremony. Then tomorrow, after Downhill. What will happen next week, after the games end. How will they feel when all this tension ebbs away.

Kara is certain they will carve out space for each other, make time to be together, find ways to maintain this intricate little device they’ve crafted. The specifics elude her. She’s more of a big picture, broad strokes thinker. Maybe Lena has some more detailed ideas.

“I think we should take a trip, after this is over,” Lena says. Her hands slip under Kara’s sweater, cup both breasts over her bra. “Maybe head to Hemsedal. See the waterfall.”

Kara slouches back onto the vanity, gives her some room to work. “Won’t it be frozen?”

“Mmm. It’ll look enchanted.” Lena pushes up the soft Capilene base layer and kisses her stomach with a wet, open mouth. “Like Hyperborea. Ultima Thule.” She kisses again and blows cool air across the wet, causing Kara to giggle and shiver. “Hoth. Winterfell. Frigia…”

Kara clenches her stomach and sits halfway up. “Did you say Frigia?”

Lena licks at her belly button, nods. “Yeah, it’s an ice planet from -”

“Flash Gordon.” Kara nods. Sits all the way up. She loves that stupid movie.

“I love that stupid movie,” says Lena.
Oh, what the hell. “Hey. Could you maybe see yourself marrying me? At some point?”

Lena holds her breath for a moment, then smiles. She laughs like wind chimes in a warm breeze.

“God, Kara. I can’t really see myself not marrying you.”

TBC
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Hi. There's an old song by The Godfathers called "Birth, School, Work, Death" and I'm stuck precisely in the middle of the cycle and longing for the sweet release of the end. Well, it's not quite *that* bad, but I am a whiner, so fic productivity is down. Gotta say thanks to all of you who are taking the time to read this and comment; some of your notes have made me smile when I felt pretty rotten lately. So here's some words. Goodnight, and have a pleasant tomorrow.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Even though the door is locked and there is cover noise (water running in the sink, the Dyson dryer air-blading Lena’s hands) Kara still ends up whispering. She has a secret. They have a secret. And it feels rather daring to say it out loud.

Naturally, there’s a chance that she has misunderstood, that she’s excited and scared and ticklish inside over a joke. And so, freshly sexed and slightly wine-wobbly, she balances on one foot and leans sideways, toward Lena’s ear, and whispers.

“Baby. Were you being serious?”

Lena turns, her expression guarded. “Serious about what?”

Kara weebles back to two feet and squints funnily, unable to tell if Lena is kidding. “About getting the pineapple creme brûlée for dessert,” she feints, with pastel sarcasm. “You know what I mean. Please don’t tease me.”

“Oh.” Understanding glimmers in Lena’s eyes. “Well…were you being serious?”

Kara zips her clean piddies through the dryer and musters her guts. She takes Lena’s left hand and squeezes it tight, feeling somewhat queasy and absolutely bare-throated. “I am beyond serious. Lena, I’m so deadass in love with you that I’d marry you in this bathroom if you asked me to. Like, right now. You savvy?”

“Good god, Kara.” Lena laughs with tears brimming up. “Yes. I savvy.”

“Okay. Good. So please don’t think I said ‘marriage’ because I’m essentially made of corn, or because I don’t get how heavy that word is for some people. I know it can be heavy.”

Lena nods. “It can be. But it doesn’t have to be.”

Kara mirrors her, grinning. “That’s what I’m thinking! With you and me lifting together, that shit would be light as a feather. We would kick connubial ass. We’d be the masters of matrimony. The ballers of betrothal.”
“The empresses of espousement?” Lena offers.

“Ooh! Espousement. I love it.” Kara marvels over the new word like a shiny bauble. “Holy shit, you know what? If we have a game night, we’re gonna dominate Scrabble.”

“Game nights would require good food and top shelf alcohol. Otherwise no one would play with us,” Lena agrees, chuckling and dabbing at her eyes. “While we’re on the subject of social opprobrium - ”

“Opprobrium! Eighteen points!” Kara interjects. “Team Profound Domination - that’s you and me, babe.”

Lena sighs and picks back up, undaunted. “You must know that it’s not the ‘you and me’ part of this scenario that concerns me. Being an Olympian, winning medals - it’s bought me some goodwill, but only among those who care about that sort of thing. Plenty of people still despise and distrust Luthors. You need to consider that, really think it through, before you commit to a hyphenation that’s guaranteed to upset people.”

“Kara Danvers-Luthor. Kara Luthor-Danvers,” she intones, testing it out. To her ear, the second version flows better. “It sounds great. How could people be mad at that?”

One brow darts up. “Cate Blanchett-Weinstein. Sandra Bullock-Cosby.”

Kara winces, grossed-out by these conceptual unions, just as Lena intended. “Thanks. You just ruined Ocean’s 8 for me.”

“Sorry. But some people find my name far more offensive.”

“Those people are ignorant. Once someone knows you, hating all Luthors is not an option.”

Lena smiles, strokes her cheek. “Honey, as much as I love your optimism, it’s gonna take more than a few sweet Instagram posts to rehabilitate my family name.”

After a quick think, Kara recommitts to the idea that Alexandrian tactics are required to hack through this knot. “I still believe the solution is to give ‘em the Full Lena, you know? Keep being your adorable, generous, brainy, sexy self, just more publicly. I will happily serve as your hype man, and I promise to do a good job. I’ll be the Bundini Brown to your Muhammad Ali. Wait, no - the Jerome Benton to your Morris Day!”

Lena snorts into her hand. “Oh, dear lord.”

“Yeah! And after people see firsthand how amazing you are, it’ll be way harder for dummies and haters to sell their version of what a Luthor is.”

Someone jiggles the restroom door handle.

“Be right out!” Kara calls, realizing it’s a miracle they’ve stolen this much time alone. She picks up the pace by slipping her hand around the small of Lena’s back and tugging her close.

“You are what it means to be a Luthor. And lady, you are a fucking treat.” Again, she drops her voice to a confidential whisper. “So, yeah, seriously. You can hyphenate me whenever you’re ready.”

Quiet and blinking slow, Lena lets that sink in. “Huh,” she says, and brings their lips together with gentle and simple passion.
It’s a kiss that would be appropriate by a frozen waterfall in the Scandinavian Alps, or cliffside on Lanai, or beneath the stained glass window at Eliza’s Unitarian church. The where doesn’t matter much, and the when feels very, very close.

“FYI - I was also serious about the pineapple creme brûlée,” Lena announces.

Kara gasps, eyes gleaming. “Oh, shit, me too!”

Cat Grant, being a woman of class and discretion, makes no mention of their ten minute restroom break. Her lone oblique reference is a post-dessert suggestion that Lena reapply her lip balm because she’s looking “a bit raw, dear.” While Lena hunts up her tin of minted-rose balm, Cat sips sweet wine and winks at Kara, and Kara coughs a mouthful of Sauternes onto the table.

As the CatCo chopper prepares to return Kara and Lena to the Olympic Village, Cat’s security chief phones with assurances that an inconspicuous two-man detail will arrive by mid-day tomorrow. Local police have also been apprised of Thomas Coville’s threat potential, and they promised to disseminate his description among Village security.

Before they part ways, Kara vows to Miss Grant that she will not leave Lena’s side until the sellswords arrive. Perhaps despite herself, Cat appears charmed. Kara notes a twitch at the corners of her mouth, a smothered smile, a flicker of warmth in her eyes. It ain’t a neon billboard flashing “I APPROVE OF THIS RELATIONSHIP,” but it means the world that someone who knows Lena so well thinks Kara isn’t a waste of her time.

The medals ceremony is spirited and moving, and Lena seems to enjoy it more because the spotlight isn’t stuck on her. The Super G gold medalist has the same deer in headlights look Lena had after GS, the same awestruck disbelief at her own achievement. Lena commented beforehand that they might be observing a dual-sport star in the making, and Kara (despite her nagging jealousy that a boarder showed out so well in skiing) agrees.

As the medalists huddle together for group photos, Kara cheers so loud that Lena can hear her over the crowd. Lena blushes brightly and waves at her and their friends. Kara is clustered with Alex and Winn and his roommate, James - a very tall very handsome man with a shaved head and brilliant smile. She hopes he was Winn’s mystery date; if so, well done Sk8rboi.

Lena is delayed several minutes as she poses for Julia Freeman, CatCo Magazine’s art director. An efficient photographer, Julia hops onto a folding step-stool and uses off-camera flash and a small softbox to shoot Lena at optimal angles in flattering light. Once done, she checks her shots while offering a fascinating bit of trivia about Lena’s new prize.

“The silver medal is the most genuine of the three,” says Julia. “They make a gold medal by taking a silver and adding six grams of gold overlay. The bronze is a copper-zinc alloy, basically brass. But the silver is truly silver - ninety-nine point nine percent purity. It’s all the more beautiful because it’s
“so honest.”

With that, she gives Lena a warm and knowing smile, congratulates her, and darts off to enjoy the K-Pop concert on the Plaza.

“Cat’s people don’t fuck around, do they?” Alex notes.

“Those who do are not Cat’s people for long.” Lena replies.

Winn excitedly crowds in, hugs Lena and makes a fuss over how pretty the silver medal looks against her dark hair. While arranging her locks over the light teal ribbon, he introduces her to James Olsen as “the world’s greatest boss.”

“Not really your boss,” she grumbles.

“Well, no, but saying you’re my boss’s boss’s boss’s boss’s boss takes too long.”

“Fine.” Lena tugs Winn’s USA beanie down, covering his cold-reddened ears. “Just say I’m your friend.”

Winn instantly looks misty. He turns to James with a watery grin. “She’s my friend.”

James laughs kindly and engulfs Lena’s hand in a shake. His smile is so wide, Kara suspects he has a genetic variance that gave him extra teeth. She is sympathetic; a snarky classmate once suggested that Kara’s mouth was so big, she could eat a banana sideways. Or sing a duet by herself. Kids can be so fucking mean.

They drift away from the concert and flit around the Plaza in a toasty, boisterous flock, meeting people and taking pictures and trading away the last of Kara’s Team USA ski and snowboard souvenirs.

Lena barges with a particularly cagey tourist and ends up trading a ski pin, a selfie, and an autograph for a team-issued Czech Republic Ski Federation pin that Kara wanted. She then trades the little badge to Kara in exchange for a kiss.

“Luthor, your negotiating skills just plain blow,” Alex observes.

“Beg to differ,” says Lena, angling in for another smooch. “Any swap where both parties are happy constitutes a successful deal. I am happy.”

Kara grins and displays her new pin. “I, too, am happy. Ergo…”

“Ergo you’re both idiots,” Alex mutters. “I need a drink.”

“Second the motion,” says James.

To a chorus of ‘ayes,’ they set out for the nearest eatery with a full service bar.

With Alex to her right and Lena to her left and the boys bringing up the stern, Kara almost feels like she’s in a gang. Maybe it’s a soft, nerdy clique that would settle turf disputes with Galaga tournaments or pool noodle jousts, but it’s the coolest set she can imagine.
Once everybody is buzz-deep in Don Julio Silver and craft beer, James produces an elegant Leica M10 digital camera and asks if he can take pictures of the group. After Lena consents, everyone else agrees, and he starts shooting from the hip.

In a fit of tequila creativity, he drafts Winn as a photo assistant and concocts a nifty plan. Using his phone’s LED lamp and a tiny American flag borrowed from the barkeep, James carefully lights Lena’s face and silver medal with tones of red and white and blue. Shot with no flash and a high ISO (whatever that means), the picture looks fucking cool.

James playfully eggs Kara on until she agrees to get in the frame. She tosses her third shot down the hatch and stands behind Lena’s barstool. Kara kisses Lena’s cheek and grins like a loon. She lays her forehead on Lena’s shoulder, hugs her waist, then faces the camera while Lena regards her with (she assumes) a look of fond patience.

The shutter clicks. James checks the view screen on the camera back and grins proudly. He shows the photo to Winn and Alex, and they react with varying levels of “awww.”

“Lemme see!” Kara bounces in place, clinging to Lena’s elbow. James shows them the photo and Kara quietly gawks at the bare adoration evident on Lena’s face.

She smiles, bumps her shoulder. “We look so stupid.”

All kidding aside, Lena has to agree. Their mutual infatuation is just that absurd. “We do.”

“Jimmy. Hey, Jimmy. You know, for a hockey player, you’re an awesome photographer,” Kara says, patting James on the forearm. “Would you take pictures at our wedding?”

Their five-seat corner of the bar is promptly swamped with awkward silence.

Alex looks like she’s been slapped. “Kara, what the fuck.”

Winn squeals happily. James pauses as Kara’s words hit home. “Didn’t you guys just meet last week?”

“Yeah,” says Kara, shrugging and throwing back her fourth tequila. She offers Lena a pixilated grin. “Serendipity, innit?”

“Stipulated,” Lena agrees, while subtly sliding the flight of beers and shots out of Kara’s reach.

“Serendipity? The fuck is that supposed to mean?” Oh, Alex is angry.

“It’s like when you go digging for worms and strike gold,” Winn explains.

“I fucking know what the word means! I am asking for context.”

Wow. Alex is very angry. But. Yeah. Of course Alex is angry. Alex is always scared that Kara is going to get hurt. Scared people get angry fast. Kara needs to convince her there’s nothing to be scared of. Only Kara has just realized she may be too intoxicated to litigate her own case. Four shots of Don Julio (on top of the wine!) has taken a toll on her elocution.


“FUCK. OFF. With that shit.”

“Alex. Alex. I love you. I love you. And you love me to be happy and so…right? Come on! Stipulate!”
“Go home, Supergirl. You’re drunk.” Alex leans back, arms crossed, and glares at Lena. “Start talking, Seoulmate.”

Lena, only two shots worse for wear (on top of the wine!), bravely takes a swing. “Certainly. You see, Kara and I have agreed, in principle, that we will stay together after the games end. We’ve also agreed that commitment - perhaps even marriage - would be mutually beneficical to - ”

“I love you, biiitch,” Kara sings, off-key and too loud in Lena’s ear. “I ain’t gone never stop lovin’ you, biiitch…”

“This is so beautiful,” Winn sobs, unsteadily pointing his upside-down phone at them. His thumb is covering the camera lens. It is a small mercy.

A negligible mercy, in fact. Wholly irrelevant, as it turns out. Because the bar happens to be a Karaoke bar, with a stage and video screens and an emcee who announces that tonight’s contest theme is pop ballads from the 1990s.

With an undignified screech, Kara Danvers leaps off her stool and rushes the stage, barely edging out Winanslow Schott for the honor of being the evening’s first performer. She confers with the emcee regarding her song choice, leans on the mic stand for dear life, and steadies her voice.

“I like to dedicate this song for my…” She can’t think of a word for ‘almost fiancée.’ Damn tequila. Damn wine. Damn love. “My Lena.” She leans away from the mic and mutters under her breath. “Can’t think of a word for almost fiancée, so that’ll have to serendipity-do.”

The gathering crowd applauds, with a few cheers and whistles mixed in. Kara can’t see her people at the bar for all the cell phone camera lights pointed at her. It’s disconcerting and weird, so she closes her eyes, taps into her inner wellspring of glee, and sings a cheese-drenched love song to the pretty girl who stole her heart.

“Although loneliness has always been a friend of mine
I'm leavin' my life in your hands
People say I'm crazy and that I am blind
Risking it all in a glance
And how you got me blind is still a mystery
I can't get you out of my head
Don't care what is written in your history
As long as you're here with me

I don't care who you are
Where you're from
What you did
As long as you love me
Who you are
Where you're from
Don't care what you did
As long as you love me…”

Kara wakes up with a slight headache, and says a prayer of thanks for her ironclad constitution, low cytokine levels - whatever miracle spares her from bad hangovers. Eyes closed, she can feel morning sun beaming through the eastern window, warming her face. Evidently, she made it safely home to their Athlete’s Village suite, got into her pajamas and into bed without causing an international incident.

At least, she thinks there was no incident. After Karaoke, things got a bit hazy.

Fortune is smiling on her though, because regardless of what happened last night, Lena is sitting beside her, breathing softly, holding her hand. That’s nice. That feels so nice.

No. Wait. Not holding her hand. Just her left ring finger. And she’s wrapping a string around it? Kara freezes, plays possum. Maybe she’s not supposed to be awake for this?

“Hmm,” Lena murmurs. There’s a scratch of pen on paper. “Fifty-four point four millimeters. Size seven, in case you’re wondering.”

Busted. Fine, then. Kara peels open one eye. “Hi.”

“Hello,” Lena smiles and stands up. She’s showered and dressed and looking perfectly normal after their big night. “There’s water and Gatorade and aspirin on the counter if you need them.”

“I feel okay,” she says, rubbing her eyes. “You going already?”

Lena checks her watch. “It’s almost eight. Downhill starts at eleven.”

Kara bolts upright, springs out of bed, starts grabbing her clothes. “Shit! Shit, I’m sorry! I shouldn’t have slept so long! I can be ready in ten minutes!”

With gentle hands, Lena snares her by the arms and eases her back onto the bed. “You don’t need to bodyguard me this morning. The sellswords are waiting in the lobby; they’ll make sure I get to Jeongseon safely. Alex will meet you at the venue with tech passes, if you want to come help me get
Barely resisting the urge to pout, Kara bites down on her bottom lip. “Are you mad at me? For spilling the beans to Alex?”

Lena shakes her head, sighs heavily. “Your sister gave me her blessing last night, after I poured two cups of coffee down her neck and escorted her onto the bus. Alex isn’t the issue.”

Only partly relieved, Kara homes in on the negative. “So there is an issue.”

“It’s nothing terrible. Reporters from HuffPo and Buzzfeed were in that bar last night.”

Kara is low-key mortified. “The bar where I sang you a Backstreet Boys ballad?”

“When drunk off your ass, yes indeed. And they heard you refer to me as your ‘almost fiancee.’ It’s all over the gossip sites this morning,” Lena says, sounding awfully blasé about this development. “At least CatCo’s website used one of Julia’s nice photos of me. She really is very talented.”

“Well. Balls.” Kara takes Lena’s arm, pulls her down to sit alongside. “Do you want me to issue a statement or something? An apology? I was blotto and spoke out of turn…like that?”

Lena scoops up her left hand, threads their fingers together. “I was thinking we could issue a joint statement tonight. Yours will be seven and one-quarter, and mine eight.”

“I’m sorry, what?” Coffee would be so helpful right now. Shit, Adderall would be helpful right now. “What is happening tonight?”

“Time is an issue, so we’ll start with two simple Cartier Tank solitaires - white gold, quarter-karat stones - and work up from there. Okay?”

Kara can’t get her brain in gear. She thinks she understands, but she just might not. “Are you… Cartier? Help me. Please. Mercy? I’m sorry, just…”

Lena huffs and rolls her eyes. She slips off the bed and drops to one knee.

Kara feels woozy. Her heart pounds; adrenaline floods her body.

“You said if I asked, you would say yes,” Lena begins. “So I’m asking. Don’t leave me hanging, babe.”

“Whhhuh,” says Kara.

“Kara Danvers - will you marry me?”

The casement windows in the Athlete’s Village apartment complexes are sealed (for safety) with quarter-inch steel pins that prevent the panels from opening more than an inch on the vertical axis.

However, a female occupant of Suite 259, in a feat of strength that stymied the maintenance crew, managed to pop all four steel pins like toothpicks and throw the window wide open sometime around eight this morning.

Witnesses on the Olympic Plaza reported hearing a cracking sound, then the tinkling of metal hitting
concrete, followed by a woman’s voice ringing out like a goddamn alphorn.

“We’re gettin’ married, y’all!” she allegedly screamed. “Oh no baby I broke the fucking window!”

TBC

Chapter End Notes

"As Long As You Love Me" by Backstreet Boys is Supercorp all damn day.
Alex gets off the bus wearing her big Ray-Bans and sipping Sprite, two sure signs that she is fighting a hangover. Kara has seen this combo enough to remember her sister’s scientific rationale: the black Wayfarers are polarized to cut glare and reduce eyestrain, and the Sprite helps produce ALDH (a friendly enzyme) which breaks down acetaldehyde (a boozy bugbear) and eases hangover symptoms.

The imp in her wants to rush Alex, loud and huggly, and share her amazing news. Kara’s better angels win out though, and she offers her sister a quiet smile and supportive arm as they cross the Plaza and board their shuttle to Jeongseon.

Tucked into a corner on the empty back bench, their silence lasts only a couple of minutes before Alex pipes up. “You know, I had the strangest dream last night.”

Kara braces herself. “Pray tell.”

“See, in this dream, I was enjoying some lovely tequila at a Karaoke bar when, all of a sudden, my drunken sister let slip that she might be getting married. Then she grabbed a microphone and warbled a lame Backstreet Boys song at her maybe-fiancée.”

Blushing, Kara bites her cheek to keep from laughing. “Girl must be a class act.”

“Sure. A regular Audrey Hepburn, that one.”

Kara waggles her hand in a yeah-but-no gesture. “Sounds more like some Carole Lombard antics, but go off I guess.”

“Oh, the hijinks evolved. She then dragged her poor maybe-fiancée onto the dance floor and did the Butterfly in super slo-mo while their guy friend sang ‘Kiss From a Rose.’”

Yeesh. The Butterfly? So much for Carole Lombard. “Man, your dreams are so detailed. Mine are usually just sensations, like ooh, I’m flying! and hey, these clouds smell like Krispy Kreme - ”

“Hold up. Best of all? A bunch of bloggers posted the whole spectacle online, so mom called me at two in the morning asking if my little sister was engaged and/or smoked up.”

That one lands like a sobering slap to the solar plexus. Kara hates the idea that she has worried Eliza again, especially after the Halfpipe scare.

“Would you like to know what I told our mother?”
Nervously, Kara clears her throat. “Would I?”

“Well.” Alex pauses. Adjusts her shades, sips her soda. “I told her that Lena Luthor has the patience of a saint, and is one of the most decent people I’ve ever met.”

Kara’s face instantly crumples. Shit. She’s gonna ugly cry on the bus.

“I told her that first and foremost, Lena is your friend, someone you can always be yourself around - your offbeat, loving, ingenious self - because Lena can handle the whole wildass Supergirl package. The filthy jokes and TBI scares and Chef Boyardee for breakfast and endless small repair bills… she adores you in total, right down to the most annoying bits. I told her that if you haven’t found true love, this might actually be something better.”

“Jeez, Alex.” She sniffs, tears spilling down her cheeks. “You said all that?”

“I blame the tequila.” Alex shrugs. “So. Mom said that was all she needed to hear. She would prefer to meet Lena first, but if you’re in a rush to make it formal, just let her know and she’ll be there with bells on.”

Kara lifts her glasses, wipes her thumbs under her eyes. She lays her head on Alex’s shoulder and exhales in deep relief. “It’s formal,” she says. “Lena asked me this morning.”

“I figured she would. Last night, the woman basically offered to shave her head in exchange for my blessing.”

“Oh, god.” Kara giggles, then stops short as she remembers Lena’s movie night pledge to shave off her eyebrows as penance for breaking a promise. “Why is epilation her go-to when she wants to prove she’s serious?”

“I dunno. Something to do with Lex’s alopecia? Maybe being seen as similar to him is Lena’s idea of punishment.” Alex shakes her head, dismissing her own theory. “Just guessing, not a shrink.”

“That…actually makes a lot of sense,” says Kara, nodding. “Your brain is a very good brain.”

“Meh. It’ll do.” Alex removes her shades, leans her head against Kara’s. “You accepted her proposal, of course.”

“Emphatically,” Kara confirms. “I broke our window screaming the news to the whole Olympic Village.”

Alex chuckles darkly. “Bet Lena loved that.”

“She laughed so hard I thought she was gonna barf. Then she duct taped the window shut and called maintenance.” Kara sighs. “I’m running up such a tab over here. Bus seats and light fixtures and faucet handles - ”

“I’m familiar with your Tasmanian Devil tendencies,” Alex cuts in. “You should get a titanium wedding band. Be tough for you to break that.”

Kara mulls it over. “I’ll ask Lena. She might have some experimental adamantium-vibranium alloy thingy we could use for rings.”

“She can probably rig them to change color based on your outfit.”

“Ha! Or your mood.”
“They already make those, K.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. They’re called mood rings. Duh?”

“Duh yourself, dude, those things don’t work! Remember, we bought mood rings at the ren faire? And they were basically just pretty thermometers?”

“Oh, you’re still mad because yours was always purple.”

“And yours was always burgundy - which wasn’t even on the color chart!”

Alex gives a haughty sniff. “I’m an enigma. That ring understood me.”

“Please. Lena’s indestructible, outfit-matching, disposition-gauging alloy would totally destroy your janky mood ring,” Kara proclaims. “You better recognize. Support the family business, girl.”

“Okay, okay. As your wedding present, I’ll get a Luthor Corp tattoo.”

Even though Alex is only teasing, it gives Kara an idea. “I need to redesign her logo first; the one she inherited is boring as shit. I can make her something way better.”

Alex straightens up, taps her sunglasses against her leg. Looks out the window and shakes her head. “God, the turns you’ve taken in a week. Can you even picture what your Olympics would have been like if you’d gotten a different roommate?”

“A different…” Kara stops, squeezes her eyes shut tight, and realizes she hasn’t thought of Lena as just her roommate since early on. Their feelings Hulked out so damn fast, flexing through the seams of that flimsy t-shirt of a word, shredding it to car wash rags and irrelevance.

As a thought experiment, Kara tries to concoct a scenario where she roomed instead with a bubbly figure skater from Connecticut, or a taciturn skeleton racer from Wisconsin. She tries to relegate Lena Luthor to the status of a news story, a scandal, a stranger.

She fails. Boy, does she fail. Kara’s imagination sputters like a gas engine flooded with water.

Evidently, Lena has imprinted on her so cleanly and quickly and with such indelible force that Kara can’t even conceptualize a world where they do not meet and fall stone in love. If there are such places, alternate universes where their paths never cross or their hearts never entwine…well, Kara wants no part of such a shitshow.

She turns to her sister, her expression soft and grave. “Nope,” says Kara. “No can do.”

“Oh, monkey.” Alex regards her with bittersweet empathy. “You’re so screwed.”

The technician laminate passes Lena provided them are sufficient to get through initial security at the Jeongseon Alpine Centre and permit them all the way up to the athlete’s area, where skiers are prepping for this morning’s Downhill runs.
The laminates do not impress the two security guards Cat Grant commissioned to protect Lena. Posted outside the equipment room door, they blend about as well as gargoyles in Patagonia fleece. The guy on the left (swoll and smirky and quiet) stares at them while the guy on the right (tall and wiry and relatively personable) asks Kara and Alex for photo identification.

As Mr. Right examines Kara’s official athlete ID and Alex’s NCPD credential - which she is all too happy to provide - Mr. Wrong sweeps up to them and waves a colorful card in Kara’s face.

“Never let it be said that I welch on bets,” says Mickey Gand, proffering the card with a toothy grin. He’s fully kitted out in Liechtenstein team gear, swathed head to foot in blue, red, and gold, looking like a tourism ad for his adoptive tax shelter-slash-home nation.

Kara has no idea what he’s talking about, and tells him so.

“Come on! My bet with Roulette? Giant Slalom?” He huffs and shifts from foot to foot. “I can’t be that forgettable.”

“Wouldn’t bet on it,” Alex mutters. Mr. Right snorts out a low laugh and returns their IDs and Alex’s badge.

It comes back to Kara then: Gand bet Veronica Sinclair that Lena couldn’t break 1:09 in her second GS run, and his price for losing was to host a big bash for the US ski and snowboard teams. The card he’s clutching appears to be an invitation to his make-good party.

Though Kara has no use for Gand himself, an open-bar party at a tony Seoul nightclub sounds like a good time. Also, it would be an ideal way for Lena to meet some of Kara’s teammates and coaches, seeing how her gold medal GS run made the party possible. She takes the personalized invitation card and her eyes instantly light up.

“What the frak? A Disney costume party?” She squeals into her fist. The card says costumes can be reserved through a website and picked up on Saturday the 24th, the day before closing ceremonies. “This sounds amazing!”

Gand nods, strokes his patchy beard. “Cool. I thought you’d like it.”

Kara shrinks back. “You thought I would like it? Me in particular?”

“Yeah, I mean, you posted a ton of Disney World pics on your socials,” he says. “You and some grumpy-looking dime piece went there last summer?”

“Oh. Right.” Kara doesn’t love the idea that Mickey Gand has been prowling through her online memories. She also doesn’t love being reminded of the disastrous vacation she and Lucy took to Florida. They broke up soon after, mainly because that trip made it clear to Kara that there are two sorts of people in the world: those who innocently hug Mulan at Epcot, and those who ask Mulan for her number when Kara is not looking.

“You should reserve your costume fast. The best ones are gonna go quick,” Gand advises. “Hey, guess who I’m gonna be?”

“Prince John from Robin Hood?” Alex offers.

“What? No!” Gand laughs and throws his arms wide. “Jack Skellington! I’m the Pumpkin King!”

“Riiiiight.” Kara simply cannot see it. But far be it from her to rain on his parade. “That should be fun for you. Hey, listen, thanks for the invite but we’ve got to go - ”
“Not a problem! It is my pleasure, one-hundred percent,” he crows. “Say, is Luthor around? I’d like to deliver her invitation personally. Be great if the famous “Seoulmates” both attend, unless you’re already married and divorced by next weekend.”

Kara blinks at him, shocked. Her hand clenches, crushing the invitation in her fist. She’s amazed at how this guy can go from pest to creep to asshole inside of two minutes.

“Buddy?” Alex touches her shoulder and steps forward, angling between her and Gand. “You’re barking up a lesbian tree. And even if she wasn’t gay? That passive aggressive, low-key stalker thing you do is not attractive.”

“It really isn’t,” agrees Mr. Right. “And Ms. Luthor is only seeing authorized guests at this time. There’s no Prince Pumpkin of Liechtenstein on the list, correct?”

“Nay, verily,” confirms Mr. Left, crossing his massive arms.

Gand looks rapidly from face to disapproving face, and realizes he’s badly overstepped. He tries for a winning smile and laughs while slowly walking backward. “Joking! I was just joking. I’ll get up with Luthor later.”

“Or you could just give me her invitation right now,” Kara suggests, extending her hand. “Save you some trouble?”

“Fantastic idea, yes.” Gand shuffles through the invites with shaky hands. His throat bulges with a nervous gulp. “Heh. Can’t seem to find it! You know what? I’m gonna check my locker? And when I find Luthor’s invite, I’ll drop it off with her team rep, okay?” He turns and sets out at a lively pace.

“Okay,” Kara calls. She shrugs at Alex and the security men. “I swear I haven’t done anything to make him think I like him.”

“Course not,” says Mr. Left. “Basic boy like that thinking he deserves Supergirl? I blame indulgent parenting and heteronormativity.”

“Preach,” says Mr. Right, winking at his partner.

Kara shoots Alex an impressed look and savors this latest piece of evidence that Cat Grant simply doesn’t truck with idiots, ever. “Thanks, fellas.”

“Any old time,” says Mr. Left, holding open the door.

Even though Morgan Edge is safely locked away and there’s no reason to suspect his henchmen will attempt further sabotage, Lena has once again shipped in all new gear for her Downhill run.

Kara and Alex find her surrounded by packaging material, splay-legged on the floor of the equipment room, adjusting the release trigger pressure on her boot bindings.

“Got that DIN dialed in, sis?” Alex asks.

Lena slips a small Philips head screwdriver behind her ear. She smiles, pinking at the casual endearment. “I think it’s good. But if I crash again and the sound of my snapping ACLs echoes
down the mountain, I’ll have only myself to blame.”

“Stop! You’ll jinx yourself!” Kara warns, plopping down beside her. After a small kiss hello, she asks how she can help.

Lena says the ski edges are sharp with an acute bevel set for hard snow, and she’s already used the gummy stone to de-tune her tips and tails to prevent edge snags at the end of turns. “Would you mind waxing them up for me?” she asks. “I’m kind of pressed for time and I’d like to try a quick sauna and ice bath.”

Kara snaps off a little salute. “Just call me Daniel-san. Wax on, wax off.”

“And on again, and off, and on and on and on…” Alex adds.

“I know the drill,” Kara assures her. “Go relax, do your stress-buster stuff. I got this covered.”

Lena smiles, dives in for another little kiss, and taps her fingers over her heart. “My hero,” she says, and clips off toward the training rooms with her guards in tow.

“Okay. Tell me again how she’s gonna win this race.” Kara makes this request as she clamps the skis into the table vise.

Alex hops up on the table and talks her through the Downhill strategy, reviewing in detail the five key things they should watch for in Lena’s one-shot, make-or-break run.

1: Wide stance for lateral stability and better edge angulation.
2: Knees, hips, and ankles all bending in concert to achieve clean turns.
3: Early prep - getting about seventy percent of the turn completed before she ever reaches the gate.
4: Drive into the jumps to get full leg extension and maximal air time.
5: Keep that unbreakable tuck going as long as possible to reduce air drag and redline the speedometer in the faster sections.

As her sister talks, Kara slips into a zen state, processing information as she heats the factory wax and scrapes it off, then re-waxes the skis with a soft scratch coat, then heats and scrapes that off to reveal a clean workable surface. She slips the iron along in steady swipes, applying warm wax and then cold wax until the sintered bases are deeply penetrated, and brushed & polished to perfection. She cranes her head around and thumbs the edges, checking her work. The skis should glide over hard snow like Teflon kissing Teflon.

Before she knows it, almost forty minutes have passed, and Alex is performing a final inspection. After a bit, she trills a happy little two-note whistle. “Nice job, slick.”

Proud of herself for helping out, Kara grins. “Good. I want Lena to have her best chance.”

“Yep. That’s the relationship gig, in a nutshell,” Alex says, offering a sidelong hug. “You’re gonna be pretty good at this fiancee thing.”

Kara’s grin compresses to a hamster-like squinch. “You think?”

Alex kind of shrugs. “Maggie’s the first person I ever dated that made me feel that way, like I’d do
anything for her. I know we started off kind of rough, with the open relationship stuff and then disagreeing about having kids someday, but I’m glad we stuck it out. Because now I have someone I’d eat vegan ice cream for, or take a bullet for, and I know that she’d do the same for me. That kind of consideration, that kind of partnership…it’s the best we can hope for.”

“And I found it.” Kara sighs, feeling lightheaded from luck and love, and probably some inhaled fluoro from the race wax. “At the Olympics!”

“With a hot billionaire, because you’re just that extra.”

Kara laughs and gives her sister a hip check. “I’m gonna go check on her. Would you keep an eye on her equipment? Just in case of gremlins?”

Alex winks and fires up the jet dryer to cool the skis.

The training areas are down the hall and through additional double doors, and Mr. Right and Mr. Left (Kara really should ask their names) are standing guard outside. Makes sense that they wouldn’t be allowed inside, since co-ed athletes are wandering about the men’s and women’s locker rooms and treatment rooms, often in a state of near nudity.

“All excitement, guys?” she asks.

Left just shakes his head, but Right leans down and asks, in a low voice, about Lena’s pre-race ritual of sauna and ice bath. “That’s how I blanch the skins off peaches,” he confides with a shudder. “Does that really work for her?”

Kara chuckles, remembering her own shock at the hundred-degree temperature swing. “It puts her in a good frame of mind, is what she tells me.”

“Ahh. Well, I admire her fortitude,” says Mr. Right, opening the door for her.

“Me, too, dude,” says Kara. “Me, too.”

She checks the sauna first and finds it empty, then heads over to the training rooms where the ice baths are set up. After this much time, she doesn’t expect to find her there, either. Lena’s probably already getting dressed.

As she’s reaching for the door handle, Kara registers a bright flash of color inside the room. She stops and peers through the narrow glass panel.

Lena lies very still in the steel tub, up to her neck in water and ice.

Sitting on the tub edge with his back to the door is a man wearing the red and blue and gold of Liechtenstein team gear. Kara instantly grows angry, thinking Mickey Gand has again overstepped, that he is imposing on Lena’s pre-race preparations to talk shit and make an ass of himself. She squares up on the door, ready to slam it open and read Gand the riot act.

A strange thing happens then. For a fraction of a second, Lena catches her eye.

In that fraction of a second, her eyes zero in on Kara’s and cut hard to the left. Lena’s hand, laying
on the tub lip, extends two fingers and makes a distinct pull-down motion. She then refocuses her attention on Gand, listening intently to whatever he is saying.

Kara looks closer at him. He’s holding something in his hand - a gray metal box with flashing LEDs on the front, attached to a thick black cord, which is plugged into an electrical outlet across the room.

“Oh, god…” The words whisk out on a breath as Kara notes that his build is too slight and his chin is too soft and the hair peeking out from under his knit cap is blonde and not brown and that is not Mickey Gand.

The man sitting inches from Lena Luthor, holding an electrical device over her bath, is Thomas Coville.

Kara steps back from the door. Her nerves are on fire with the need to act, to scream, but any attempt to enter the room may cause Coville to drop the device in the water and electrocute Lena.

She moved her eyes left. Look left, look left...

On the wall beside the door, just to the left, is a bright red Fire Alarm pull station.

She pulled her fingers down. She wants you to pull the alarm.

Kara doesn’t know how this will help, but she trusts Lena. She trusts Lena with her life apparently, because if this doesn’t work she can’t imagine how she would even…

Don’t imagine. Trust her. Pull the goddamn alarm. And be ready to move.

She hooks her fingers inside the trigger mechanism and pulls firmly down.

Instantly the hallway erupts with blaring bells and flashing red lights. Kara moves to the door and tries the handle; it is locked.

Inside the training room, Coville has dropped the box into the water, but Lena isn’t dead. She’s standing up, pushing him backwards onto the floor and reaching to unlock the door.

Her expression is calm, her eyes are still and sure, as her hand touches the handle. Then her pupils darken and she turns away, hopping on one foot as Coville grabs her ankle and pulls her to the floor.

“No!” Kara rattles the handle. Still locked. “No!” She pounds on the door and projects her voice toward the guards. “Help! Help us!”

People are rushing past Kara, headed for the exits. Athletes dressed in their race kits or their underwear and every combo in between are crowding through the double doors. Mr. Right and Mr. Left are fighting their way slowly upstream toward her.

Kara spins away from the training room door, spies a fire extinguisher mounted on the wall. She smashes her elbow through the glass and yanks the heavy red steel bottle from the cabinet, then pounds the base against the door handle until it shatters into scrap. She rears back and kicks the door once, twice, three times until the weakened lock gives way and the door flies open.

Lena lies on her back in a puddle of ice water. Blood streams from her nose and lip. The crazed Coville kneels over her chest with both hands reaching for her throat. She’s tucked her chin down tight to defend against the choke, and her strong fingers are clamped around his wrists.

Coville’s arms shake with effort. He’s not an athlete, not a soldier, not even particularly strong for a...
corporate attorney. This may be the first time he’s ever truly fought someone. Lena Luthor is not impressed. She looks up at Kara, teeth gritted in a red-stained smile.

“Hey, babe,” she says.

Kara gapes at her for an instant, then swings the fire extinguisher into Coville’s face.

They give their statements to the police while sitting in the sauna. Lena explains who Coville is, and gives them contact information for Cat Grant and her security director. She hits the high points of his attack: the box was a 4 terabyte SSD drive, into which Coville wanted Lena to upload his mind - under threat of death, of course; she signaled Kara to pull the fire alarm because she knew it would trip the circuit breakers in the training room and nullify the threat of electrocution; Kara entered the room, and Coville went down.

At the time of his arrest, Coville had not regained consciousness. Kara clouted him pretty good. The police assured her that, considering the circumstances, she would face no charges for the assault.

After patching up Lena's busted nose and lip and Kara's cut elbow, the medic team gives them a clean bill of health and departs. Turns out they have a more serious case to attend to, as Mickey Gand was found unconscious in the men’s dressing room. Apparently, Coville ambushed him with chloroform, stole his clothes and ID, and stuffed him in his locker. Gand was reportedly in good physical condition, but seemed highly agitated and kept asking for his mother.

In the sauna, blanketed in towels and wrapped in Kara’s arms, Lena’s body temp and vitals ease back to normal in no time flat. It’s pretty therapeutic for Kara, too.

“Do you think we’re disinvited from the Disney party?” Lena asks, after a bit.

Kara nods. “Probably. Why? Did you want to go?”

“Well, yeah. I already reserved us costumes.”

“You did?” Kara is relieved to find that, despite the terror and wildness of their morning, she can still get excited over the prospect of dumb fun. “What did you pick?”

Lena turns, looks up at her with cotton packing in her nose and a shiny stripe of skin glue across her torn upper lip. She’s so precious that Kara wants to cry.

“Kim Possible and Shego,” says Lena.

Kara smiles. Gently kisses the corner of her mouth. “I fucking love you,” she says.

“Love you, too.” Lena tucks her head under Kara’s chin. “I’m going to cry now, okay?”

Tears are already streaming down Kara’s face. She holds Lena a little tighter. “Think I’ll join you,” she says.
TBC
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Should be one or two more chapters and we can wrap this burrito up. Thank you very much for the encouraging comments and feedback. You guys have been awesome through this whole ludicrous, frustrating, gratifying experience. Much love to you all.

The Chief of Race for Olympic Women’s Downhill authorizes a start time delay of one hour. Citing a need to keep order among guests and minimize disruption for athletes, he orders race officials and volunteers to avoid discussing the brief flurry of police activity at the Jeongseon venue. If asked about the fire alarm, they are to blame a “prankster” who has since been removed from the facility. All is well, all is well.

Coach Jolves requests permission for Lena to race later in the start order, and the Chief agrees, provided another skier is willing to swap bibs with her. In a very classy gesture, Veronica Sinclair steps up and trades her nineteenth spot for Lena’s fourth, which gives her roughly an additional hour to recover and prepare.

For most competitors, the start delay provides enough time to get over the shock of the fire alarm, to transform a panicked rush down the hall in their undies and coats into a funny anecdote. In the locker room, several women are laughing as they get dressed. Others are texting and chatting with family and friends about their crazy, crazy morning.

The phrase oh, you sweet summer child goes through Kara’s mind more than once as they relay their mild tales of embarrassment and inconvenience.

A handful of skiers bid good luck to Lena Luthor as they exit the locker room, telling her to ‘smash it’ or ‘rip it up’ and suchlike. If Lena is startled by their well-wishes, it doesn’t show as she graciously returns the sentiments.

No one asks about her swollen nose or cut lip, which strikes Kara as strange. She wonders if any of them connected the dots, if they know or suspect that “#HTK” lived up to her hashtag again this morning. Kara hopes they don’t know, mainly because Lena has tried so hard not to let her troubles disrupt the games.

The locker room slowly clears. Kara helps Lena into her final competition suit - a skin-tight white jobbie slashed with red and blue accents. Lena zips the front panel, adjusts a crooked forearm pad, and does a fashionista twirl. Although she’s just being silly, the girl looks legit stunning in white.

For a moment, Kara thinks of white dresses and white veils and bouquets of fragrant plumerias, and she is so filled with longing that she cannot breathe.

“That’s pretty,” Kara eventually says, nodding and goggling. “You’re pretty. Are you aware of
Lena rolls her eyes, prods a fingertip at her busted nose and mouth. “Ugh. I look like I’ve been chasing parked cars.”

“You look like a fucking badass.”

“I do not.”

“You do so.” Kara gently pulls her hand aside and brushes her lips over the little injuries, mere dents and scrapes relative to Lena’s history. “For real, though. That’s the first thing I ever noticed about you, during the trial coverage, how you wore those bandages like badges. Like signs that said ‘I lived, bitch.’”

Lena grins against her mouth and brushes their cheeks together. “That was the gist of it,” she says. “I would rather have screamed at Lex in open court, but a contempt citation would have wrecked my credibility. I couldn’t risk it.”

Kara feels the woman tense up. She wonders how many times Lena has felt like screaming and borne that pain away instead. Walking the high road means she isn’t afforded the luxury of such base emotional displays, partly because hollering is undignified and partly because certain dim bulbs would spin it as confirmation that another Luthor has gone froot-loops.

“Screaming feels great sometimes,” Kara says, speaking from experience. “We should do that when we go to Midvale. I know this isolated spot in the dunes - it’s like a dead zone during high tide. We can scream our lungs out and not bother anyone. Then we can eat gelato and get high and listen to some records. Sound good?”

Lena pulls back, smiling softly. “Sounds so good.”

“Sweet. I’ll call Eliza and set it up.”

“Excellent. My feet are cold.”

“Ooh. Cold tootsies. Can’t have that.”

Kara clears a spot on the bench and Lena sits down to roll on some tall cushioned ski socks, patterned with a gray and white alpine landscape.

“I love putting on new socks,” Lena says, rotating her ankles and wiggling her toes.

Moving to stand behind her, Kara hums in agreement. “Fresh socks are great. Kinda like climbing into a bed with clean sheets.”

She notices that Lena’s air-drying hair is starting to frizz, so Kara roots through the borrowed ‘Bag of Requirement’ for some Bumble & Bumble Brilliantine. She squeezes out a dollop and finger-combs it through her damp locks.

“Mmmm, that’s nice. New socks and clean sheets are in my sensory top twenty, but what you’re doing right now is definitely top ten.”

Kara chuckles as she sorts out a flattish Dutch braid. She takes her time, smoothing hanks of hair between her palms, running her fingertips along Lena’s scalp in a firm and soothing massage. When she finds a tiny knot in the skin, it takes a beat before she identifies that ten day-old wound. Kara rests her finger on the spot, feeling the proof that Lena is strong, and that she heals quickly.
“Still with me?” Lena asks, when the silence grows heavy.

“I’m here,” Kara assures her. She begins methodically crossing sheaves of hair underneath each other. “Just thinking.”

Lena doesn’t press, and that’s probably a good thing. If Kara has to say out loud how thankful she is that they found each other, and connected, and survived, and triumphed, she will absolutely start crying again.

“You don’t have to say anything. Just know that it’s okay to think whatever you’re thinking, or feel however you’re feeling,” Lena says. “I’ve been through this sort of thing…” She pauses, holds up both hands and slowly counts on her fingers.

It’s dopily cute, but Kara doesn’t have the heart to laugh.

“…seven times now?” Lena resumes. “And it’s confusing and infuriating and it breaks my heart, every time. Being hurt by someone, being forced to hurt someone - we’re not supposed to treat each other that way, and it’s always awful. So whatever you’re feeling right now, I promise it’s okay with me.”

Kara finishes the braid, presses a kiss to the crown of her head. “I feel bad about hitting that guy. I mean, his face looked like roadkill. But I would legit Mack Truck a million dudes for you, so that’s not really bugging me.”

Lena looks up at her, practically radiating safety and acceptance. If life were a game of tag, Lena would be her home base. “Do you want to say what’s bugging you?”

Hell. Apparently, Kara is going to say it out loud. “Okay, so - do you ever think about the odds of us meeting and falling in love and staying together and not dying prematurely in some horrifying way? The odds of us being right here, right now, with everything that’s happened?”

Lena raises her brows. “The word ‘astronomical’ comes to mind. Perhaps the stars aligned for us?”

It’s a lovely phrase, and Kara adores the metaphor, but the Astronomy Club nerd in her just can’t let it stand. “In a sense. Except, like, the stars move sooo slowly that it would take hundreds or thousands of years for us to even register their movement so they can’t really align for us and wow I’m being pedantic. Yuck. Sorry.”

“No, please, that’s all true.” Lena smiles; her eyes grow appreciably brighter. “Could the planets have aligned, then?”

Frowning, Kara shakes her head. “The planets are sort of always in a line? Orbiting on the plane of the solar system? But they haven’t been in any kind of straight column-type arrangement since 561 BC. And that was only within about thirty degrees.”

“Well, shit. Is another propitious planetary parade due anytime soon?”

“Erm…not for another eight hundred and thirty-six years. Honestly, I don’t think anyone less powerful than Beyonce could get those ladies in formation.” Kara winces, as if she is personally responsible for this disappointing truth. “Sorry?”

“Stop apologizing.” Lena springs up, a rather cross expression on her face. “I love it when you flex your brain. Kara, that’s the prime reason I fell in love with you - your beautifully overstuffed, tenaciously kind mind.”
“Whaaaaat. Shut up.” Kara fiddles with her glasses, blushes right down to her toes. Despite feeling self-conscious, this is deeply pleasant to hear. All too often, Kara has dated girls who tolerated her trivia spouts and cockeyed cogitations so they could access her pants. She and Lena have gone very fast, yes, but she maintains that speed isn’t bad when you’re headed in the right direction.

“Same, though,” she says, with a shy head duck. “Your brain is like a machine that converts skunk funk to new car smell.”

Lena snorts and bursts out laughing.

“For real, though!” Kara insists. “You process through bad shit so fast! I don’t know how you’re not crying in a corner after what happened this morning. How are you this okay?”

Lena claps both hands on Kara’s shoulders, gives her a bracing little shake. “I am this okay because of you, you ridiculous angel. I’ve always bounced back fast - by necessity, for survival - but loving you has ramped up my emotional processing speed from gigaflops to exaflops.”

“…Is that…?”

“That is very fast, yes. And it feels wonderful!” Lena draws a fortifying breath, locks onto Kara’s eyes with electromagnetic focus. “I will not waste any more time and energy feeling sorry for myself or staying angry at other people. I have better things to do. Life is short, and I would rather spend every day I have left loving you, and working to create good things for the world, and upending those astronomical odds with some fucking panache. Sound good?”

For a few seconds, Kara is so paralyzed by endorphins that she is literally too happy to move or speak. She pulls air down her neck and pushes out a giddy whisper. “Sounds so good.”

Someone raps their knuckles against the metal lockers. They look toward the sound and find Eve Teschmacher peeking around the corner, so smiley and soft-eyed that she must have overheard at least some of Lena’s declaration.

“Excuse the interruption, but you should probably head to the start area soon,” she says, while vaguely fanning herself with a corrugated envelope. “Oh! A messenger just dropped this at the front desk. Your security guys checked it out and wrote a note on the back.”

Eve shows them the envelope, which has been sliced neatly open at the top. Written on it in black marker are the words “This is one way to unfuck your day! Mazel tov! - Hector & Lev”

Despite being confused by the message, Kara is glad to finally know Mr. Right and Mr. Left’s actual names. “Is Hector the tall one?”

Smiling, Lena just nods her head. She takes the envelope and slips her hand inside. Fishes out two octagonal red leather boxes with the word “Cartier” on top, embossed in gold.

Eve Teschmacher gasps and clutches her chest. A mousy squeak pops from her mouth. Kara’s heart races. Fat tears well up and roll down her cheeks within seconds; it is very embarrassing. Lena cracks open one box and looks pleased.

“This one is yours,” she says, removing and displaying the handsome white gold ring. “I know it’s small, but think of it as a starter - ”
“It’s perfect!” Kara asserts, entranced by the subtle auric glow and the classic princess-cut stone. “God! It’s so freakin’ perfect! Gimme yours! Gimme!” She grabs for the other ring box and Lena wisely forks it over. Kara pops the snap latch and slips the ring from its black velvet seat. She’s on one knee in a flash.

“I know you’ve already done this part but I wanna do it, too.” Kara shakily takes Lena’s trembling left hand; at the touch, they both turn steady as surgeons. “Marry me, baby. Please marry me. I just got started loving you, and I’m already so good at it. Just think how good I’m gonna be in ten or twenty years.”

“Kara…” Lena’s voice is little more than a faint sob. “Okay. Yes. Yes.”

“You’ll marry me?”

“Yes, Kara, god! I will marry you!” Lena wiggles her ring finger and Kara slips the band into place. She holds out the second ring as Kara stands up. “Now, are you sure - ”

“Ring me, baby. I’m so fucking sure.”

Kara watches, quiet and rapt, as the woman she loves gilds her hand with a beautiful promise. With Lena, getting engaged feels exactly how Kara always hoped it would: like they’re standing before a map with a jeweled pin marking home, and the rest of the world laid out to explore.

Eve sniffs and clears her throat. Her tear-stained eyeliner looks like Commander Lexa cosplay. “I am so happy for you! But Lena, I think you have to go.” She checks her watch and does a startled bunny hop. “Scratch that - Lena, you have to run! Go! GO NOW!”

“Oh, good heavens.” Lena carefully applies a kiss to Kara’s mouth and bolts from the locker room.

Kara stands there, suspended in a mild state of shock, until Eve Teschmacher starts laughing. In seconds, she’s dabbing her eyes with a tissue and clutching her stomach, looking trapped between delight and side-stitch agony.

“Aw, knock it off!” Kara snaps, when she can’t ignore her any longer. “Don’t forget it was you that jump-started this juggernaut by assigning her to room with me.”

“I know! But I just wanted you to make friends!” Eve staggers over, takes Kara’s arm and guides her toward the door. “I never imagined you were such an overachiever.”

Alex is waiting at the foot of the hill, with an extra spot staked out along the fence for her tardy sister. Kara sprints all the way from the lift and barely slows down as she weaves through the crowd, catching random high fives and greetings from spectators.

She playfully bumps Alex aside and leans out over the fence to check the leaderboard. The top time, clocked by the speedy Italian world champ, is 1:39.22

Her arrival coincides almost exactly with the announcement of Lena’s name over the public address.
For the United States, number nineteen, Lena Luthor.

The crowd cheers heartily and Kara smiles as the leaderboard clears and LUTHOR, Lena appears on the black screen. This time, Kara doesn’t wait for Alex; she runs through the course data in her head. There will be five interval timings on this 2,775 meter course, which uses a 730 meter vertical drop to generate velocity. 38 wide gates are positioned to challenge a skier’s ability to make controlled turns while blazing along at over 105 kph, or 65 miles per hour - which is enough to earn a speeding ticket on a National City highway.

And no, Alex will not call in favors with the Highway Patrol to fix speeding tickets for her sister. Kara learned that the hard way.

“Cutting it close,” Alex teases, pressing against her shoulder. “You feeling okay, slugger?”

She does not love being called ‘slugger’ for crushing a mentally disturbed man’s nose and cheekbones and fracturing his orbital sockets. But Alex is extremely proud of her, and has promised to arrange those Brazilian jiu-jitsu lessons once they’re back stateside.

“Mmm-hmm,” says Kara. “I’m good. Calm as a carrot.”

Alex shoots her an appropriately dubious look. “Right. How is Lena?”

Kara does not know how to answer that question without blabbing everything within earshot of a dozen fans, so she nods, super emphatically. Which is not suspicious at all.

“Uh-huh. You sure about that?” Alex points up at a stadium screen.

The giant monitors all display a shot of the starting gate… which is empty. The Start Referee looks perplexed, turning this way and that, waving his hands for someone to find the next skier and get this show on the snow.

Kara’s heart swells into her throat. She doesn’t want to imagine some new awful thing happening to Lena, especially when she’s so far away and cannot reach her. Unconsciously, her hands grip the rail and her legs coil. While her mind lags behind in worry, her body is preparing to vault the fence and run for the lift.

“Whoa, hot rod!” Alex grabs her arm, holds her still. “Look - there she is.”

Onscreen, Lena comes into view. She shuffles into the chute, looking oddly disheveled. Her red gaiter is down around her neck, her helmet sits far back on her head, and there’s a noticeable gap between the helmet and her blue mirrored goggles.

“Oh, god. You’ve turned her into a gaper,” says Alex, laughing into her hand.

Kara starts to tell her to shove it, but she’s distracted by a number of fans pointing at the screen and talking about Lena’s cut lip and puffy nose. A pair close by speculate that she might have fallen during practice, or had a training accident, or - said half-jokingly - maybe someone tried to kill her again.
She’s a toughie. - Real ripper, yeah. - Think she’s got a shot? Snow was almost bulletproof this morning. - Puncher’s chance, brah. Bet me? - Nah! Not laying cash against HTK.

Kara tunes them out. Onscreen, Lena adjusts her helmet and goggles, but leaves her gaiter down. She rocks back and forth, drops to her haunches. The timer sounds and she lunges forward, tripping the wands and officially beginning the last race of her Olympics.

She digs the pole points in hard and fast, pushing off to a rapid start. The first interval comes up 5.25. Kara looks to Alex, but her sister only gives a faint grimace.

A couple hundred meters in, Lena drops into the first major dip and comes up a little wild, arms flailing as she struggles for balance exiting the top section. The speedo shows her maxing out at 90 kph / 55 mph, and her second interval clocks in at 16.40.

“Come on, Lena.” Alex’s grimace deepens to a frown. “Slow is smooth and smooth is fast,” she whispers.

Kara feels dread pooling in her guts. She knows it’s too much to ask, for Lena to endure the volatile emotional swings of this day and still be composed enough to race at her best…but she wants it for her anyway. She wants Lena to end her games on a high note, because she’s earned a triumphant finale, she’s earned it through grit and good sportsmanship and integrity, and if that isn’t what the fucking Olympics are supposed to be about, then -

“Oh. Oh! OH!” Alex sees something.

“What?” Kara slaps her arm, desperate for insight. “What, dammit?”

She looks to the screen and sees the difference, instantly, for herself. Rocketing over a flat, Lena carves through a technical section with obvious ease and floats over a series of bumps, smooth as a Cadillac. She hits a perfect tuck in the straightaway and glides to a third interval time of 30.01, hitting speeds of 113 kph / 70 mph.

The crowd lets out a collective “ohhhhh!” when the numbers come up.

Lena Luthor has found her form. Her stance is wide and her hips and knees and ankles bend in concert; she is a portrait of balance, of stillness and calm through the tumult of fall-away gates and skip-jumps.

Interval four flashes onscreen as 1:01.10, with speeds of 97 kph / 60 mph.

Alex Danvers drops to a squat and punches the snow between her feet.

Kara Danvers grinds her teeth and prays to every god in every pantheon to please, please give all their fastness to this good human woman.

Spectators rumble and coo. Many fumble for their phones, getting ready to record the finish.

Through the wide turns and flatter pieces, Lena folds her body into a boomerang, a low-riding vee, in a desperate search for aerodynamics through the low-speed zone.

Interval five… 1:23.20, speeds of -
Kara doesn’t get to read the screen because her sister has grabbed her around the waist and lifted her off the ground, howling with anticipatory joy.

As they spin in a sloppy circle, like drunks at a lesbian cotillion, Kara sees Lena drive straight for the final rise and launch into the last jump - a majestic airborne glide that takes her halfway down the landing zone before her legs bend and her skis kiss the snow for a talcum-fine touchdown.

She keeps her tuck, and slips politely across the finish line, with a final time of 1:39.12.

Lena shushes to a stop and doubles over, heaving for breath.

The leaderboard reconfigures to show the newly minted race leader, and the rankings cause such a ruckus of shouts and whistles that Lena visibly startles. She pulls off her goggles to check the board, and covers her mouth as her shoulders shake and tears roll free.

Alex is pointing at the board, pointing at Lena, and roaring laughter directly into Kara’s ear. It kinda hurts, but Kara is too blitzed on happiness to care.

The stadium is a boiling pot of good feelings, with revelers hugging strangers, bettors exchanging stakes won and lost, and a heartening scatter of rainbow flags waving against the bluebird sky.

Lena straightens up, releases her skis, and waves at the crowd. She bounds over to Kara and is immediately pulled halfway over the fence in a Danvers Sisters group hug.

She kisses Kara hard, heedless of her cut lip, and smiles when the applause washing over them grows even louder.

“Not to be that couple,” Kara sorta shouts, “but where are we going to keep all our medals?”

“I will build us a shelf!” Lena shouts back. “I got a new idea! It’s a metal alloy that I doubt even you could break!”

Kara claps and cheers at the prospect, although she already suspected their union would result in something shiny and new and damn near indestructible.

TBC
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

This is the part where I try in vain to thank you generous and patient readers for supporting this story (and this author) as I bumbled my way through an AU I probably had no business writing. We're almost home, and I can guarantee a soft landing in the final chapter / epilogue.

Dr. Seo gives the all-clear for Kara to compete in her final event tomorrow, with a few caveats. Since her follow-up scans came up clean, he sends her and Lena back to PyeongChang with a bunch of protective anti-inflammatory supplements and a daily dosage routine.

“For Miss Danvers and Miss Luthor,” he says.

After discussing several case studies that indicate such a protocol might speed healing and temper future TBI risk, Lena doesn’t argue at all. Kara consents to most of his recommendations (curcumin, Vitamins A and D, creatine, and essential fatty acids), but she digs in her heels over one particular delivery method.

“My dear intended - while I love you more than deep-fried Oreos, I regret to inform you that I shan’t be drinking this,” she states, while scowling at the bottle of lemon-flavored cod liver oil. Kara sets it on the kitchen counter, pushes it across to Lena with one fingertip, then wipes the fingertip on her jeans.

Lena throws her some eye-roll shade. “Come along now, funnel cake - high DHA and omega-3s are the cornerstones of Dr. Seo’s prophylactic protocol.”


“A mental dental dam,” Lena adds, smirking. “Honestly, I’m not looking forward to this either, but I fear ’tis a bullet we both need to bite. Unless we can figure out how to never fall down and hit our heads again?”

Kara has only one idea how they might achieve such a result, and she’s embarrassed to say it out loud, just in case Lena hates it. So she leans on the counter, on her elbows, and whispers. “Maybe we should talk about retirement?”

Her fiancee doesn’t outright reject the notion, though she does frown a bit. “It’s… worth considering.”

“Right?” Kara keeps her voice low. “I mean, I don’t want to overstay my welcome. I know I’m only twenty-six, but some of the kids on tour are a full ten years younger than me. In no time, they’ll be doing shit that makes the Montmorency Twist look like a cartwheel.”

Lena blushes and bites her bottom lip. Kara smiles and wonders if they will always think of great sex
when they hear the official, homologated name for a double cork 1620. She hopes so; there’s a real sense of accomplishment attached to both definitions.

“I know things are going to change for us, dramatically, once we leave here. But as soon as I stop skiing, Luthor Corp will devour a massive chunk of my time,” Lena says. “I guess I was hoping to put that off for a couple more years so we could figure out how this - meaning us as a married couple, and us as individuals - is going to work.”

“Hey, we can put it off as long as you want. Or we can both retire tomorrow, right after Big Air. You could run Luthor Corp yourself, or you can keep delegating the boardroom stuff to people you trust while you do sorcery in the lab all day.”

Lena grins, perhaps intrigued by the notion of devoting all her energies to research and development. “People will expect me to take on more management responsibilities.”

“People can stuff their expectations. You’re the boss.”

“Ahh. Right.” Lena narrows her eyes, nods. “I keep forgetting that.”

Kara extends a hand, palm up, and Lena takes it.

“We’ve got a buttload of options. You and me are gonna do so much cool stuff that does not revolve around our sports. Some things we’ll do as a married couple, some we’ll do as individuals,” Kara says, picking up Lena’s earlier reference. “Like, there’s this oil painting course I wanna take in Paris, and I’m volunteering in Montana this summer doing trail maintenance in Jewel Basin.”

“Goodness. That sounds amazing.”

“It is! It’s so beautiful there. The lakes are crystal clear and the meadows are green heaven and there’s mountain goats everywhere. Makes me feel like a von Trapp kid, every time.”

The memories light Kara up inside; she barely stops herself from yodeling “The Lonely Goatherd” and begging Lena to go with her… which would totally subvert this exploration of what they might do - as individuals - once they stop competing full-time.

“Anyway. It’s hard work and it has fuck-all to do with snowboarding and I really love it.”

“Huh.” Lena takes a beat, chewing on that thought. “Could you see yourself doing more in the conservation field, post-retirement? In addition to working your muscles, you could employ your notoriety and your artistic skill. You would be a godsend to the park service.”

“Ha! I’d be a foxy, ripped Ansel Adams!” Kara claims, while flexing like an uberdork. Her bicep strains against her t-shirt sleeve and Lena’s eyes widen with interest, reminding Kara that humor and sex appeal are wildly subjective indices.

She slumps onto the countertop, swaps her goofball grin for a more serious expression. “You know what? I think that would make me very happy.”

“Then I heartily endorse it.” Lena stretches forward for an easy peck on the mouth. Her lip is healing, but they’re still being careful. “Maybe we can ease our way into retirement. Let’s scale back our competition schedules a little next season and start strategizing Phase Two.”

Kara responds with enthusiastic applause. “We has a plan! Yay!” She hikes a knee onto the counter, clammers up and over, clomps to the floor with a graceless Marmaduke athleticism that always seems to make Lena laugh.
Lena does laugh, while drawing her into a slow rocking hug. As they still, Lena tucks her face into Kara’s hair. She inhales deeply and holds the breath, lets it unfurl and rest in her chest. As she exhales, her shoulders drop and round and relax. Her body instinctively trusts Kara’s body; Lena nests in her arms like an egg in feathers.

It still astonishes Kara how this love, by turns, makes them unbreakable and melts them like summertime chocolate. Such a love has real transformative energy, and Kara feels they’ve been entrusted to cultivate and wield some crazy power source. It’s like they’re holding a magic wand which, so far, they’ve only aimed at themselves.

*God help us both when we figure out how to take the safety off this thing,* she thinks.

“I never thought I’d have this,” Lena tells her, “or anything even vaguely like this, truth be told. I hope we’re together for a very long time.” She pulls back, graces Kara with a sweet smile. “I have such plans for you, Kara Danvers. Stick with me, okay?”

Unable to speak around the sudden lump in her throat, Kara just nods really hard.

“Good.” Lena gives her another little kiss. “Same goes for me. I’ll do whatever it takes to make sure I’m here for you.”

“Yes, please.” Kara nods and smiles and hopes some gentle necking might soon commence.

Instead, Lena slips from her arms and into the kitchen, starts lining up random items on the counter. First a lemon, then two packets of sugar, a paring knife, two shot glasses…

“Oh! Are we toasting to our future as wilderness-saving science ladies?” asks Kara.

Lena pauses in her prep work, her face strangely neutral. “Yes,” she replies, turning away toward the fridge.

Kara pumps her fist, and Lena returns the shot glasses half-filled with amber liquid. She sugars two lemon wedges and lays them atop the glasses. Just imagining the flavor of the sour-sweet treat makes Kara’s mouth water.

“Bottoms up,” says Lena, throwing back her tiny shot and sucking on the sugared lemon.

Not wanting to fall behind, Kara nabs her glass and pounds the drink. Immediately, she knows something is very, very wrong, but she will not embarrass herself by spitting the surprise dose of cod liver oil all over their kitchen counter. She swallows with a loud *ulp* and releases a whine of heartbroken disillusionment.

Lena has tucked the lemon wedge inside her lips, rind out. She flashes a vivid yellow smile.

Unmoved by her cuteness, Kara bites down on her own bit of sugared citrus. She is miffed to find that it does make the oil more palatable. Her stupid taste buds betray her then, and she accidentally makes a yummy sound. Kara tries to cover it with an extra mean glare, but it’s too late.

“I heard that,” says Lena, tossing her lemon rind into the garbage disposal.

“Don’t talk to me,” Kara mutters. “You tricked me.”

“I’m sorry! But I had to get that first dose down the hatch, just to prove it wouldn’t kill you.” Lena thoughtfully examines the cod liver oil bottle. “Not as revolting as I’d feared.”
Much as she would love to, Kara won’t engage in a debate about the relative palatability of cod liver oil. That way lies madness. “Still. I feel stupid now. You hurt my feelings.”

“For that, I apologize.” Lena relieves Kara of her glass and lemon, rounds the counter to stand before her, bold and shameless. “Listen, fragolina mia -”

“No international sweet talk!” Kara warns, though her grumpiness is already crumbling.

“Golubushka… skatten min…” Lena gives her a sultry smile. “Please know that if it means we could have more quality time together, years down the road, I am willing to guzzle fish oil every day for the rest of my life.”

Kara wrinkles her nose, grins a little. “Really?”

Lena nods. “That’s love, bitch.”

“Right. Okay, then. Me, too.” Disarmed and defeated, just that fast, Kara tips her head back and groans. “God!” She looks to Lena with beseeching eyes. “Baby, can you please work one of your lab miracles and make it taste like fruit punch?”

An eyebrow kicks up, and Lena frowns. “I suspect that is beyond my abilities.”


With a gloaty giggle, Lena raises Kara’s hand and kisses her palm. “Danke schön, hasenfürzchen.”

Though she’s mostly able to follow along with the pet names (strawberries, doves, treasures, etc.) Kara has no clue what this latest one means. Judging by Lena’s wicked smile, she’s pretty sure it’s something really dirty or really silly.

Lena wraps her mouth around Kara’s lemon-sugared thumb and gives it a delicate suck. In a flash, Kara’s body is ready. But she wonders aloud if they should brush their teeth first.

“Nah,” says Lena, with a nibble of her thumb. “Kiss me, min sitron fisk.”

That one is pretty obvious and pretty terrible. “Lemon fish?” Kara rolls her eyes, lifts Lena off her feet and trudges toward their mushed-together beds. “Woman, you are the actual worst at sexy talk.”

Lena sighs, licks Kara’s ear, and purrs. “Would you rather talk the talk, or walk the walk?”

Kara sets her down and gasps, tickled straight to her heart. “Did you just drop a Ric Flair quote on me?”

“Greater love has no one than this,” says Lena, utterly deadpan, “that a girl acquire a passing knowledge of sports entertainment to be conversant with her fiancee.”

“Wow.” Kara whips off her t-shirt and drops her jeans in the blink of an eye. “Good thing your races are all over, because you will definitely be unable to ski in the morning.”

Lena laughs, scuttles backward to the center of mattress, and crooks a c’mere finger. “Let’s see if we can take walking off the table, too.”

“Oh, you’re gonna need a fuckin’ Segway,” says Kara, leaping into action.
Since Big Air is making its Olympic debut this year, the Team USA press coordinator pesters Coach Lance until she agrees to provide a couple of warm bodies for an early morning studio interview to hype up the event on the network’s streaming service.

Coach has kept Kara off the firing line for most of the recent media requests (for her own sake, and so her high-profile engagement wouldn’t pull focus from the team), but she taps her and Leslie Willis to sit down with some random talking head for “a quick chat, maybe five minutes max, to cover the Big Air rules and shit” because it sounds easy-peasy.

That turns out to be a wishful thinking. When they arrive at the press center, they learn the interviewer isn’t just any talking head - it’s former ‘infotainment journalist’ Jody Heller, who was once fired from CatCo for photo-stalking Jennifer Garner’s children at a playground. Since transitioning to sports features, Heller has stayed out of hot water, but Kara still doesn’t have a great feeling about this.

“I don’t have a great feeling about this,” she tells Leslie, as they clip on lavalier mics and settle on the stiff, tweedy studio couch.

“You’re the tip of the spear, Supes. But if things get rough, feel free to tag me in,” says Leslie. “I do owe you one.”

Kara furrows her brow. “Do you?”

Leslie sees that furrow and raises her a sneer. “Yuh? Remember that presser where you told everybody to get off my back because I wasn’t a meth-head and that drug test was fucked?”

“Oh. No worries.” Kara waves her off. “I didn’t really do anything.”

Leslie snorts softly and mutters sideways. “Was more than anybody else did.”

“Ladies! Good morning!” calls Jody Heller, sweeping onto the set in a tasteful cap sleeve navy dress, her blond hair styled like an asymmetric combat helmet.

“Yo,” says Leslie, shaking her hand without getting up.

Kara stands halfway and takes her hand in turn. Heller’s grip is cold and loose - not a good sign. “Morning. Nice to meet you.”

“You as well, Miss Danvers! Soon to be Mrs. Luthor, am I right?” She glances at Kara’s understated Cartier engagement ring. “Hmm. What a sweet little ring.”

Oh, fuck off. It takes real effort for Kara not to ball her left hand into a fist.

“So! I’ve been following the whole ‘Seoulmates’ thing this past week. Your snowboarding and skiing events are entertaining as hell, but I bet behind the scenes it’s a regular soap opera, am I right?” Heller laughs and folds herself into the nook of the couch at Kara’s elbow, close enough that their knees firmly touch.

Put off, but not wanting to be rude, Kara inches her knee away and grins. “Well, my evil twin hasn’t shown up yet, so it’s not that dramatic.”
Heller laughs again, tries to toss her hair (which barely moves) and pats Kara’s thigh. “No offense, but someone who gets engaged to Lena Luthor after knowing her for ten days might have a deviant definition of dramatic.”

“Deviant…what?” Kara turns away, makes a pleading ‘witness me!’ face at Leslie, but Livewire only slumps back against the cushions and pops her chewing gum, apparently unsurprised.

The director’s voice pipes in, alerting everyone they’re going live in thirty seconds. Heller shuffles through some index cards, then turns them face-down on her lap. Kara didn’t see the whole stack, but the ones she saw were totally blank.

Now she really doesn’t have a good feeling about this. But she’s a professional, so when the red tally light goes on above the active camera, Kara is smiling and chipper and ready to make Internet viewers worldwide love Big Air as much as she does.

Heller begins with a few standard questions about Big Air, but once they’ve gone over the format, the scoring criteria, and the inherent madness of launching yourself into the sky at over 50 miles per hour, she gets a devious gleam in her eye.

“Sounds dangerous - and exhilarating!” she coos, while leaning in to stroke Kara’s arm. “Just another day in the life for Supergirl, though, am I right?”

“Oh, no - this will be a pretty serious challenge, even for veteran boarders,” Kara insists.

Heller cants her head, flutters her fake lashes, bares her teeth.

Oh, god… here we go…

“A serious challenge for regular, workaday snowboarders. But that’s hardly Kara Danvers, is it?”

“What? No, I’m just trying to - ”

“You’ve won two gold medals while engaging in a whirlwind courtship with skier and heiress Lena Luthor. And after barely a week, you’ve decided to marry into one of the world’s most disreputable families,” Heller says, her words clipping away at Kara’s patience. “Surely a little hop off a snowy hill pales in comparison to that kind of sustained adrenaline rush.”

Kara blinks, clears her throat. Beside her, Leslie finally sits up straight; her scowl calls to mind a pump shotgun racking a shell. With a small shake of her head, Kara asks her to stand down. Even if Jody Heller is proving herself a tabloid skeezer who doesn’t really give two shits about Big Air, Kara came here to promote that event. And that’s what she’s gonna do.

“It’s hardly a little hop off a snowy hill, Jody. The PyeongChang Big Air jump is a hundred and sixty feet tall - it’s the biggest snow ramp in the world,” Kara begins, then turns to face the camera.

“Now, I wouldn’t expect Jody Heller to know this, because she is not an athlete or a sports journalist, but to rock Big Air, we boarders have to calm our nerves, channel our adrenaline, and tell the physics of angular momentum and projectile motion to get bent. We only generate a certain amount of energy on the jump, and we have to parse that energy out in pulses, making sure we have enough to flip and rotate and orient ourselves for landing - ”

“Well, that sounds like - ”
“I’m not finished.” Kara glances at her, communicates in all caps that she is not yielding the floor just yet, then smiles into the camera again. “Let’s talk about the landing. There’s a sweet spot between the jump knuckle and the flat where, if we hit it just right, the impact is negligible. But if we miss it? Even by a couple of feet? Our spines compress like accordions. Our joints could literally explode. You wanna have a bad time online, just Google ‘burst fractures.’ It will haunt your dreams.”

“Oh, cow, Supes,” Leslie mutters. “You’re making me rethink my life choices.”

Undeterred, Kara presses on. “Even if we reach that sweet spot area, one mistimed pop off the jump or one rotation too many could mean a broken wrist, shattered ankle, ripped-up knee - or worse - when we plummet back to Earth.”

Jody sits back, hands primly folded in her lap. “That’s all very interesting.”

Kara leans forward, gives the woman her full attention. “I know, right? It is so interesting when elite athletes risk their lives to push the boundaries of physical performance. So much more interesting than dredging up old news.”

“Excuse me, but your fiancee is hardly old news.”

“You referred to Lena’s family name as ‘disreputable.’ That’s so tired. If you want current, relevant Luthor scoop, you should investigate Lena’s hands-on efforts to prevent childhood food insecurity, curb deforestation, and provide clean water to people in crisis. Oh! And now that Edge Corp is under new management, look for new medical advancements aimed at saving lives rather than increasing male groinial vascularity.”

“I think they call it erectile dysfunction,” Leslie chimes in.

“Okay, sure.” Kara shrugs. “I don’t go there, so… Women’s Snowboarding Big Air!” She pounds a fist into her palm and points at the camera. “Round one of finals starts today at noon at the Alpensia Ski Jumping Center, so be there or be square! Remember, kids - study hard, play hard, and be nice to each other! Mean people age faster!”

Perhaps unconsciously, Jody Heller touches her fingers to the deep furrow between her eyes.

“Ugh, nerd,” Leslie teases Kara, while unhooking the lav mic. “You were doing so good up to then.”

Jody gawks at them, sputtering with anger. “Wait, you’re just walking out?”

“Yeah, this was awesome, but we gotta go. Thank you so much for your genuine interest and thoughtful questions,” Kara says, dropping her mic beside Leslie’s. She beams at Jody Heller, a clear ‘fuck you’ embedded into the smile. “Good day, madam.”

As she passes, Leslie snags one of Jody’s blank index cards, displays it for the active camera, and folds it around her used gum.

“I think that went well,” she says to Kara, and tosses the card over her shoulder.

After parting ways so Leslie could take a bathroom break, Kara gets lost on the way out of the media center. She ends up ducking into three on-air studios and two control rooms before encountering two friendly, familiar faces in the hallway just outside a conference room.
Three familiar faces, technically speaking, but that’s only if you count Katie Couric, whom Kara has never actually met.

“Kara, dear!” Cat Grant calls, waving for her to join the trio.

Lena is at Cat’s side. She meets Kara’s eyes, shakes her head, and smiles.

*Whoo. Thank god she’s not mad at me!* Kara breaks into a run and stumbles to a stop, barely a foot away from Lena. “Hi!”

Lena laughs and pulls her into a hug. “Hi,” she says, kissing her cheek. “My paladin.”

Kara breathes easy, relaxes into her arms. “I told you I’d make a good hype man.”

“I’d have to agree,” says Cat, tapping Kara on the shoulder to gently break up the embrace. “And that might be just the beginning. Katie Couric, this is Kara Danvers.”

“Hello - ”

“HEY! Wow! I love you!” Kara exclaims, pulling one arm away from Lena to warmly clasp the broadcaster’s hand.

Couric makes a funny face and laughs. “Well that’s a relief! I just saw how you handle interviewers you *don’t* love.”

Pink creeps across her cheeks. Kara wonders if maybe she went too hard at Jody Heller, if people will see her as a bully or a jerk for the way she behaved. “Oh. Yeah, that was - ”

“Magnificent,” Cat interrupts. “Heller was aiming for a ‘gotcha’ piece to get her name in the headlines - like the vapid, lazy opportunist she obviously still is - but you utterly derailed her while defending Lena *and* convincing me to watch Big Air. Well done.”

Lena’s arm tightens around her back. “Kara is one of the most well-spoken, quick-witted people you will ever meet.”


“Present conditions notwithstanding.” Cat flicks her eyes at Kara, and she immediately falls silent. “I asked Lena to join me for breakfast this morning to see if we could arrange a formal interview with the two of you. Then Katie showed up to soak me for free coffee and Eggs Benedict.”

“Hey, now! I tried to pay!” Couric protests.

“A performative gesture, at best,” sniffs Cat. “And Lena insisted we watch your interview together. Suffice to say you made quite the impression.”

“Mark Lazarus texted me just after you walked off set,” says Couric. “He wants to know if you have any interest in broadcasting.”


“No shit?”

“No shit.”
Couric wrings her hands and makes an ‘awww!’ face. “You were right. They’re revoltingly cute together.”

Cat crosses her arms, slits her eyes. “No shit.”

Kara has a new board for the Big Air finals: Lib Tech finished the first pro-spec samples of her glittery rainbow design and they look positively magical. The tip to tail paint-brushed ROYGBIV lines are not entirely primary or pastel, but a unique blend of bold and gentle tones shot through with golden iridescence.

She adores the look of it and hopes others will, too, even if they don’t ever know all the reasons she chose these elements. The rainbow theme is an obvious nod to gay pride, but there’s some lonely art major ponderousness behind those luminous streaks.

Iridescence is rooted in a phenomenon called constructive interference, where two light waves match up - crest and trough - to complement each other and magnify their power.

When Kara designed the deck, alone in her Aspen bedroom with Photoshop and a sleeping malamute, she had a romantic notion of flinging her creation into the world like a message in a bottle, a coded request for the universe to find her matching light wave, someone who would love her and be loved in kind… through crest and trough.

Standing on the high hill, she takes a monocular from her bag and scans the crowd below until she finds her crew: tall James and bouncing Winn and white-fuzzy-hatted Cat and stealth-suited Alex, and Lena.

Leaning atop the fence, black hair spilling from beneath her red parka hood, gold-framed aviators slipping low on her nose, Lena is saying something to Alex. But then she pauses. Lifts her eyes toward the hilltop, and takes down her glasses. Though she couldn’t possibly see her, Lena looks right toward Kara. She shakes her head, as if she’s being silly, and flutters her fingers in a tiny wave.

“Hi,” Kara whispers in return. “Be right there.”

The P.A. announcer sounds off: For the United States, number seven, Kara Danvers.

Kara clips her boots onto the new board - which does actually look like a section of the Bifrost rainbow bridge (damnit Winn was right!) - and ratchets down the straps.

Coach Lance raps her on the butt with her clipboard. “All downhill from here, kid!”

“Can’t wait!” Kara flashes a double thumbs-up and drops in, whooping so loud her voice rolls downhill and echoes through the mountains.
TBC (To Be Concluded)
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

We're right at the end now, friend, which is a good thing because life is kicking my ass lately. I'm running on fumes and starting to cut corners. I tried to write Big Air multiple times and it always stunk, so I ended up scrapping it. I gotta wrap this up before I ruin it. Writing this story has been a balm for me through some rotten months, and I'll be sorry to let go of the good feelings it gave me. Please know that if reading this has made you laugh or smile, especially on a crap day, then I'll consider my time well spent. There will be an epilogue, which should be a series of vignettes about their life across the first year, post-games. Thanks for reading.

As the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games winds down, the parties increase in intensity, ramping up from the feel-good fizziness of the final medals ceremonies and concerts on the Plaza, to the drunken dancing of a hundred U.S. Ski and Snowboard teamers dressed as Disney characters at a Hongdae nightclub.

Mickey Gand licked his wounds and came through on his promised party - a 'no phones' affair where all guests deposit their mobiles in tagged and locked bags inside the coat check room.

“What happens in Seoul stays in Seoul!” reads the explanatory poster by the door.

Dressed as Jack Skellington, Gand prowls the bar and dance floor, sharing with any young woman within earshot the harrowing tale of how a strange man drugged him and stripped him to his shorts in the Jeongseon Alpine Center last week.

“I woke up on a gurney! I’m lucky to be alive! I bet that guy was planning to sell me into the sex trade - I mean, look at me!” He gestures to his professionally painted skull face and wiggles his skinless fingers. “Who wouldn’t want to bone this guy? Huh? Get it?”

Kara, crouching between two skiers dressed as Scrooge McDuck and Maleficent, hears him use this line twice before her drinks order arrives and she sneaks away from the bar, unnoticed. Disguised by the red temporary hair rinse, green cargo pants and black mock t-neck, she’s anonymous enough to slip through the crowd without drawing attention. It still amazes Kara how few people recognize her without her glasses.

She bobs and weaves across the packed dance floor toward a back booth where Alex (three beers gone and getting loose) watches Lena (rum-happy, lips pursed, focused) perform another nifty little bar trick. Their table is littered with toothpick geometry, matchstick animals, an array of empty barware, and trays of garnishes - props the scientist and the science cop have used to illustrate concepts ranging from centrifugal force to air displacement.

S’what happens when competitive geeks get drunk, reflects Kara.

This time, Lena has balanced a playing card and a dime atop an empty beer bottle. She precisely flicks the corner of the card and it spins off into Alex’s lap while the dime drops into the bottle. Alex
tips her head back laughing, Lena beams proudly, and Kara lets out a happy whoop.

“What’s the sitch, bitches?” she calls.

“Kimmy!” Lena shouts, making grabby hands at the classic daiquiri Kara offers. She takes a sip and grins. “God, that’s good. You’re my favorite archenemy.”

“Archenemy! Nineteen points!” Kara pumps her fist, envisioning the imminent end of Alex and Maggie’s Scrabble win streak.

She distributes two Wild Wave Surleims (the barkeep’s recommendation) for herself and Alex, then plops down and smooches Lena’s cheek. She’s so glad Lena rejected the pale green makeup and kept to the black and green catsuit, gloves, and boots. With her dark hair fluffed across her shoulders, flashing green eyes and wicked smile, she’s Shego enough already.

“Hey, we got my green glow working!” Lena announces. She clicks a hidden button tucked into the cuff of her black glove, makes a fist, flicks her hand open. A green ball of light appears in her cupped palm, courtesy of a hidden laser pointer and a sphere refraction lens.

Kara gawks, near breathless at the sight of her fiancee’s bad girl sneer. “Please don’t take this the wrong way, but you would make a very foxy supervillain.”

Lena giggles and sticks out her tongue. “Alex is my nefarious associate. She helped me fine-tune the sphere diameter.”

“Hold up - I made no substantive contribution.” While Alex looks the part in her all-blacks and boots, she waves a finger in denial. “I am not legally liable should you blind yourself or others.”

Lena rolls her eyes, aims her hand at the ceiling and straightens her fingers. The green neon ball leaps to the rafters, and she swirls it into the sherbet rainbow of club lights. “You know, DARPA asked Luthor Corp to develop something like this,” she says, angling her words toward Kara. “Scaled-down DEWs, directed energy weapon sidearms.”

This revelation probably shouldn’t surprise Kara, and yet… good god. “The government asked you to make actual ray guns?”

“Not me. Lionel, my father.” Lena crimps her lips in a not-quite smile. “He almost cracked it, except the prototype housing was too heavy, too weak, and too poorly insulated. They kept going boom instead of pew-pew.”

That doesn’t sound like he ‘almost cracked it’ to Kara. Since Lena rarely speaks about her father, she keeps the salt to herself. “Would Vanguardium suit the bill?” Kara asks, referring to the versatile metal alloy Lena recently devised.

Though its inventor still hasn’t settled on a name, Kara is lobbying her to choose a v-word root. Her personal frontrunners are Vanguardium (because cutting-edge), Valkyranium (because durable and sharp), and Vulpinium (because Kara can’t stop saying the word ‘foxy’ lately).

“This might work. But it’s a moot point.” Lena clicks off the laser pointer and fixes Kara with a soft look. “I want to help people, and I can’t see how selling plasma blasters to the military would benefit humanity.”

Kara sighs dreamily and fights the urge smother her fiancee’s beautiful peacenik face with kisses.

“How about if it benefits one really amazing person?” Alex asks.
“Dude.” Kara frowns and shakes her head. “You gotta stop with the alien gun stuff.”

“Come on! What’s the harm in Lena making a one-off, untraceable death ray pistol for her favorite sister-in-law?” Alex leans in, bats her eyelashes.

Lena snorts into her drink, and Kara looks scandalized. She cautions Alex with another sharp look and her sister shrugs, an ‘I had to try for my dream!’ gesture that conveys exactly zero guilt.

“Okay, enough with the death rays. Let’s dance!” Lena stands suddenly and drags the half-willing Danvers Sisters onto the floor, where they twirl and bop to some energetic K-Pop, point and sway to Mura Masa and A$AP Rocky, and howl laughing when it turns out Alex knows most of the lyrics to “Bodak Yellow.”

It’s a damn good night.

Around eleven, Kara and Alex do shots with Sara Lance and her girlfriend, a statuesque and surprisingly bawdy MMA fighter named Ava Sharpe. Ava, as it happens, lives in National City, and she enthusiastically agrees to become Kara’s BJJ coach.

Near midnight, Lena does an MIT-authentic version of The Robot with Jean Jolves and Eve Teschmacher while the DJ live remixes Midnight Star’s “Freak-A-Zoid.” When Jolves throws in a few classic B-boy Air Flares, the crowd loses their absolute shit.

Just past one, Kara and Lena try to sneak away to make out in the vaping lounge. They peep Mirage from The Incredibles (Leslie Willis) and Rapunzel (Veronica Sinclair) already making out in the vaping lounge and Kara almost dies from the sheer what of it all.

At last call, the DJ does medalist shout-outs, and the only person who gets crazier applause than three-time gold medal winner Kara Danvers is two-time gold medal winner and silver medalist Lena Luthor.

This happens because, in a fit of decency, Gand takes the mic and tells everyone exactly why he had to throw the bash, so every partier in the place knows they owe their free night on the town to Lena’s blistering GS run.

Shocked by the acknowledgment and warm reception, Lena’s eyes round and widen. She grins nervously while waving rock-n-roll horns at their teammates, coaches, and friends. Kara goads her into using the light blaster, and Lena clicks on the laser and does a slick crouching spin move, flying the green sphere around the room over everyone’s heads.

Scores of buzzed millennial jocks duck and laugh and scream like kids as they’re ‘attacked’ by Shego. It’s one of the more sweetly goofy things Kara has ever witnessed.

Kara is so elated to see Lena this carefree and happy that she claps and hoots louder than anyone. She keeps glancing down at her feet to make sure she isn’t actually floating. She’s pretty drunk and kinda exhausted and so high on love that gravity feels like fake news.

When the DJ suggests they lead the night’s last dance and coaxes the crowd into a deafening chant of “SEOUL-MATES! SEOUL-MATES!”, Kara almost chickens out for fear of embarrassing them.
both. Lena, however, reminds her that it might be good practice.

“We’ll have to dance in front of people at our wedding reception,” she notes, “where, I imagine, we will both be tired and inebriated and emotional. The stakes are somewhat lower here.”

“True,” Kara says, with a curt nod. “I love that you always make sense.”

“Well.” Lena glances down shyly. “May you always view my arguments with such charity.”

Kara chuckles, sways a bit. “Hey, can we get a band, not a DJ? For the wedding?”

Lena pauses, considering this. “Live music would be fun. No cover bands, though.”

This is confusing because Kara isn’t quite sure what other kinds of bands play at weddings. “You already have something in mind, don’t you?”

A shrug, a cocked brow. “You do like the Backstreet Boys.”

Kara busts out laughing, but Lena looks serious.

“Wait. Real talk - you’d hire BSB to play our reception?”

“Why not? Might as well *bring the flavor*, as they say. I will only marry once.”

Lena states this with such sincerity, such conviction, that Kara almost starts crying…in a Seoul disco…surrounded by scores of drunken ski bums and toasted boarders…with the opening strains of Mansionaire’s “Astronaut” slinking into her ears…while she’s dressed as Kim Possible.

“Yeah. Once ought to do it,” she replies, offering her hands. “Dance with me?”

Lena smiles. She knits their fingers together and pulls Kara onto the dance floor.

Kara Danvers is chosen as Team USA’s flag bearer for the closing ceremony. With Lena Luthor and Winn Schott and James Olsen clustered around her, she alternates between proud smiles and streams of tears, overjoyed and nostalgic as the most eventful fortnight of her life comes to an end.

Kara Sorrell picked up a snowboard for the first time when she was thirteen, before her adoption was complete. Still missing her dead parents, feeling rootless and unwanted, Kara was legitimately frightened when Alex Danvers offered to take her boarding one January afternoon.

She was scared because Alex was habitually aloof and didn’t seem to like her - or anyone - very much. Maybe she was planning to chuck Kara off a cliff so she didn’t have to share her bedroom with a grief-stricken insomniac stranger anymore.

Fortunately, Alex had no plans beyond getting out of the house, getting to know her new roomie, and having some fun. She patiently helped Kara gear up with hand-me-down boots and a board. Alex coached her into a proper stance, and cheered as Kara completed a few wobbly slides down a friendly hill.

That afternoon changed Kara’s life. With encouragement from her new sister, Kara found she was
actually good at something, and that gave her a sense of confidence and purpose. She stopped hiding her light, grew to believe that her parents would have wanted her to shine.

She started walking with her shoulders back and her head up. She took art classes and asked a cheerleader to the movies.

She suffered a few heartbreaks, but never let that pain break her. She knew that she had an ocean of love to give, and Kara held out hope that someday she would find a girl whose heart could bear the surge of her affection.

Through rejection in love and failure on the snow and dogged persistence all around, she got strong - strong enough to hold Alex together when they lost Jeremiah, strong enough to chase her dream of turning pro and making the Olympic team, strong enough to open her arms to an unexpected love and hold on tight.

With Lena’s arm hooked around her elbow, three Olympic gold medals around her neck, her nation’s flag in her hands, and a diamond ring on her finger, Kara thinks that if she were to die right here, her life would end at the ultra-fucking-pinnacle. Surely things couldn’t get better than this.

It’s disorienting at first, how the quiet settles onto them like fog, when it’s all over.

After a fun and tearful goodbye breakfast with Alex and Winn, Kara allows herself a few hours to relax into this new normal, adjusting to the fact that she and Lena can simply be together without doing much of anything.

They take hours to pack up their suite. They keep taking breaks to laze in the kitchen, snack on Cheetos and pop, and watch videos. Kara likes animal friendships (the golden retriever is taking care of tiger cubs! she’s the best momma ever!) while Lena has a fondness for quirky visual stim (Fresh Guacamole is on her favorites list).

Kara picks up their Olympic logo comforters from the dry cleaners and (as promised) posts one to Alex in Nat City, and sends the other to her condo in Aspen.

Lena books a secure messenger service to deliver their medals to Eliza Danvers’ house in Midvale. This surprise loan arrangement was Kara’s idea, because Eliza is hosting her gossipy book club midweek and “it’ll be so funny if they show up and there’s six fucking Olympic medals on mom’s mantel! Is it possible to die from jealousy? God, I hope so!” Lena seems delighted by this possibility, and Kara suspects it might be her first opportunity to get bragged on by an obnoxiously proud parental figure.

They walk the Olympic Plaza one last time, hand in hand, and say a grateful goodbye to PyeongChang, where they endured difficult trials and tests, and lived out the true meaning of the games: Citius, Altius, Fortius - they raced faster, jumped higher, and emerged stronger.

“I love this place,” says Kara.

Lena squeezes her left hand. “Korea has been pretty good to us.”
“Yeah.” Kara nods, smiles at her fiancee. “Now let’s get the fuck out of here.”

On the Luthor Corp jet from Korea to Norway, Lena goes through several dozen work emails from Sam Arias and Jack Spheer, then dives into a worn copy of Alfred Bester’s *The Demolished Man*. Kara listens to a few Radiolab podcasts and eats half her weight in salt & pepper pistachios. During take-offs and landings and the odd bit of turbulence, she rests her open hand on the armrest, just in case Lena wants to hold it. Lena always does.

Hemsedal feels like a frozen oasis - a refreshing spot of peace after their hectic charge through the games. There’s no media, no schedules, no competitions. Here, they can do what they want, when they want, with most people paying not one lick of attention. Staffers at the resort are super chill and really helpful as they schedule their rather freeform itinerary. After a brief whispered convo with Lena, the pro shop kid tucks a joint in with their lift passes. Norwegians are beyond swell, in Kara’s book.

The first day, they go off piste and snowboard wild and challenging trails through lunchtime. They build a crackling fire in their lodge and picnic on the floor, wining and dining through the afternoon. When night falls, they make slow wandering love until they sink into sleep.

Kara wakes just after midnight, alone in the cooling featherbed. She toes into her unlaced snow boots, wraps up in a soft blanket and prowls around until she spies Lena on the back deck. In boots, a bathrobe, and her Team USA knit hat, she’s smoking the joint and gazing toward the cloud-draped mountain peaks. Creeping up behind her, Kara opens the blanket and presses her chest to Lena’s cold back. Kara shivers; her nipples stiffen as she loops her blanketed arms around Lena’s shoulders, enfolding them both into fleecy warmth.

“You’re nakey,” Lena notes. “Not cold?”

“A little cold is good for us. Hormesis, wasn’t it?”

“Mmm,” is all Lena says back. Kara rests her chin on Lena’s shoulder, glances up at the boldly starry sky. “Whatcha lookin’ at?”

“Nothing, I guess.” Lena shrugs lightly. “Just thinking.”

She waits, waits, and asks. “Anything you want to talk about?”
Lena shrugs again, then offers Kara the joint. Kara tips onto her toes, parts her lips and Lena holds it still so she can take a quick puff. She’s a lightweight when it comes to cannabis, so one or two good tokes is usually all Kara needs.

“I got up to use the bathroom and saw a text alert on my phone. It’s my private line, so I checked it.” Lena pauses for another deep draw. She holds it in for several seconds, then blows a plume of smoke upward into the breeze. “It was a message from my mother.”

Oh. Oh wow. What did she say?

Lena remains quiet, and Kara wonders if she asked her question out loud, with her actual voice. Maybe she didn’t? As previously mentioned, Kara is a lightweight.

“What did she say?” There. That was out loud. Good job.

Another long pause follows. Lena sighs, rounds her shoulders to tuck her back more firmly against Kara’s chest. In response, Kara tightens her arms, and feels Lena’s stomach tremble.

“She congratulated me on my performance at the games, the Edge Corp takeover, and my engagement. She said…” The tremble becomes a shudder, and Lena takes a stuttered breath to steady herself. “Lillian said the way I’ve conducted myself would have made my father very proud.”

Oh. Oh wow… no. Out loud, please. “Oh, wow. That’s gotta be nice to hear, but…”

“Yeah.” Lena tips her head sideways to rest against Kara’s. “It’s out of the blue. And now all I’m thinking is what does she want from me, you know?”

“Right.”

“Because Lillian doesn’t say nice things for no reason. It’s always transactional.”

“Right.”

“She once complimented a dress I wore to a Luthor Corp charity ball, and then immediately requested that I dance with a sweaty, handsy federal judge named Burt.”

“Ew.”

“Burt was married.”

“Eww!”

“I was seventeen.”

“Ewww!” Kara shudders and clings to Lena like a traumatized koala bear. “What the fuck, man?”

Lena manages a dry chuckle. “You see my quandary.”

After taking another little puff, Kara has an idea. “Maybe we should call her bluff.”

“… … continue.”

“Let’s invite your mom to our wedding.”

“What? Kara, no. No, that’s a terrible… she would never…”
“But she might!” Kara does a little hop, accidentally-on-purpose rubbing her boobs against Lena’s shoulder blades. “Maybe she wants a truce. Maybe she misses you.”

Lena thinks it over for a moment, then shakes her head. “If she had reached out to me a month ago, I think I would have tripped over myself rushing to respond. Now, I just… it’s like the space in my heart where family should be? It’s not so empty these days.”

Kara smiles and kisses her cheek, thinking that space is gonna get real crowded once they’re back home in the states. She plans to fill Lena’s family album with sisters and moms and dogs and friends and maybe even a few kids, if parenthood is in the picture.

Lena carefully stubs out the half-smoked joint in a sand tray on the deck rail. She turns and slips her arms around Kara’s waist, pulls them together in a loose hug. “Here’s what I’m thinking: I don’t need that woman to tell me that I’m worthwhile, because I know I’m a good person.”

“You are, babe.” Kara nods real hard. “You’re my favorite person.”

“And you are mine,” Lena replies, “and since I am so very proud of us, I will invite Lillian Luthor to our wedding.”

Yay! ILYSM! Wait, how do you say ILYSM out loud? Boy, this Norwegian pot is right on the fuckin’ money.

“Despite the fact that you are already too high to hold a proper conversation,” says Lena, “the day that we marry will be the happiest of my life, so whether Lillian attends or not is of little consequence.”

Kara’s face contracts in a squinty smile, and one perfectly sappy tear rolls down her cheek. “Ill-eee-sim,” she says.

“Yes, dear.” Lena ducks low and hoists Kara over her shoulder in a fireman’s carry, then trudges back into their warm winter oasis. “I love you so much, too.”
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

A few porthole windows on the first six months. One more installment covering the next six will wrap it up. Shit, I'm almost giddy that I might actually finish this story. It's the longest thing I've ever written, including work stuff. And it's practically cohesive! Ha!

An epilogue of sorts...

March

Kara signs a ridiculously lucrative endorsement and sponsorship agreement with Red Bull. It requires her to do three tour events and the X-Games for the next two years, where her body will essentially be transformed into an energy drink billboard.

She does several print ads (Omega gave me a watch, Lena! Look! The stylist said I'm wavy now!) and tapes four television spots:

Apple uses footage of her gold medal Halfpipe run, with Kara’s voiceover bragging about how the well-designed AirPods never slipped out of her ears, even after that horrendous crash.

Hilton focuses on how important it is for a world traveler to feel welcome and at-home in their chosen hotels. It’s pretty overt gay-friendly subtext, which Kara is okay with.

American Express conveniently overlooks the fact that Kara is not a “card member” and shows her breezing through checkouts in various international settings. Side note - Amex is the first credit provider to option Luthor Corp’s new smart ring tech; the first rings should roll out in the fall, just in time for Christmas shopping.

Campbell’s has to cut her line and replace it with a voiceover by Lili Taylor. On set, Kara sat smiling over a steaming bowl of chowder and could not stop saying “Mmm! Noodle soup!” When she publicly blames fictional Friends thespian Joey Tribbiani for this persistent tick, actor Matt LeBlanc starts following her on Instagram. This almost makes it worth the humiliation.

During a solid month of hustle, Kara earns enough money (with shrewd fiscal planning and management) to keep her financially sound for many years. It’s a fraction of a drop in the bucket relative to Lena’s mind-boggling wealth, but it makes Kara feel better knowing she can’t easily be labeled a sponge or gold digger.

Lena remains on tour for most of the month. She takes second in Super-G at Crans-Montana, Switzerland, first in GS at Ofterschwang, Germany, then hauls in another first place GS and a second in Super-G at Are, Sweden. At the season’s end, Lena collects an FIS Alpine Globe - the Giant Slalom cup - and promptly announces her retirement.

Her statement reads as follows:
Twenty years ago, I put on skis for the first time and glided down a green slope with a very patient instructor named Paola holding my hand. I was terrified and exhilarated and eager to go again, to find some way to go faster. Even though I tumbled a dozen times that day, I fell asleep smiling and dreamed of snow. Skiing still evokes all those same emotions in me, and it probably always will.

I love this sport, and I owe it a great debt for giving me confidence and a community and something to put my back against during difficult times. I’ve been very fortunate to compete and train with some of the finest athletes in the world, women and men whose hard work and perseverance continues to inspire and motivate me on and off the slopes.

Thank you all very much. It’s been a wonderful run. I’m going home now.

- Lena Luthor

PS: thank you Paola

April

Having been separated for most of March, they spend much of April in Kara’s National City loft apartment, trying to kill each other in the kindest possible ways.

Padded silk restraints are purchased and employed. After Kara accidentally shreds them like so much string cheese, they are replaced with garment leather straps.

They experiment with radical intimate shaving and achieve mixed results. Lena would make an excellent barber; Kara would not. Which is just as well, because while the smoothness is a novelty, the regrowth is an itchy nightmare.

They have a pillow fight and a tickle fight and a food fight. These activities result in sneezy feathered sex, breathless headachy sex, and mixed berry sex, respectively.

After some debate, they agree to never ever ever make a sex tape.

They make a sex tape. They smoke some weed, watch it once and laugh until they’re wheezing. Then Lena microwaves the SD card.

Kara’s platform bed suffers a broken leg, though not from any adult activities. It happens when Lena gets word that Departments of Education in six states have approved her smart ring-based summer feeding program. While Lena melts into a teary mess on the phone, Kara starts jumping around like David Lee Roth on the mattress and soon discovers why they don’t make trampoline frames out of bamboo.

They carve out time to hang with Alex and Maggie, who seems predisposed to like Lena based on Alex’s glowing recommendation, and Sam and Ruby Arias, who both seem predisposed to like Kara based on Lena’s glowing recommendation.
Sam is bafflingly pretty, and wears the weighty Luthor Corp interim CEO mantle like a gauzy blouse. Ruby is smart and willful, and she likes soccer and ice cream and Ariana Grande and wears a necklace with a Supergirl symbol pendant. She and Kara become fast friends.

They spend a few nice Saturday afternoons at the dog park with Krypto, although Kara’s feelings are a little hurt when the malamute transfers seventy percent of his affection to Lena. Krypto mostly walks by Lena’s side in the dog park, and fetches back Lena’s racquetball tosses with moony urgency. At home, he naps atop Lena’s feet while she works or reads or takes calls, and he’s taken to ‘singing’ at her while she cooks breakfast.

“Admit it. You’re secretly bribing him with your fancy uncured bacon,” Kara accuses, while sulking through another dogless morning.

Lena is unperturbed. She steps back from the stove, dangles a strip of crispy bacon right above Krypto’s nose. The dog stands perfectly still - mouth closed, eyes focused on Lena. She waves the fragrant treat in circles around his muzzle, and he doesn’t even flinch.

“See?” Lena sasses, laying the bacon on a plate. “Krypto is immune to such base inducements. His love is pure.”

On cue, the Benedict Arnold of dogs tips his head back and softly “arooooos” at Lena Luthor.

“Fine.” Kara leaves her unfinished coffee on the island and slips on her sneakers. “I’m going for a run. Have a nice breakfast with your boyfriend.”

“I will,” says Lena, ruffling his gray-tufted ears.

“I hope you do!” Kara shouts from the doorway.

“I love you!” Lena yells.

“I love you, too!” Kara hollers back. As she pulls the door shut, she glimpses Lena kneeling down and feeding Krypto a goddamned bacon strip.

“And we both love you, good boy. Good boy!” Lena whispers to the dog, who promptly attacks her with kisses.

Kara ain’t even mad.

**May**

It’s a gentle spring evening in Midvale, and Eliza Danvers’ garden is a riot of color. Kara’s eyes feast on purple and magenta Pride of Madeira and sunset shades of daffodil, calendula, and California poppy. Still, there’s no bloom here to match the delicate wonder of Lena Luthor in a periwinkle
sundress.

She’s mixing margaritas on the porch, hair in loose waves, a marmalade sky at her back, and Krypto napping across her bare feet. Lena’s brow crinkles as she pours precise measures of Patron Silver, Cointreau, and fresh lime juice into a glass pitcher.

While toting a tray of marinated veggies out to the grill, Kara’s engine slips into neutral gear and she idles for a moment, watching her girl laugh. Eliza appears to be teasing her for slicing perfectly symmetrical lime wheels, and Lena’s blush is as bright as her smile. She’s clearly tickled, and her happiness hits Kara with such immediacy that it feels like an endogenous process, like Lena’s joy is flooding through two hearts at once.

*Alex is right - you’re a textbook gay disaster,* Kara tells herself.

Earlier, at Lena’s request, she shimmied up the lime tree and fetched down several ripe beauties. Alex mocked her eagerness and proclaimed Kara pitifully whipped. Maybe a minute later, Maggie kissed Alex on the cheek and asked her to drive into town for strawberries. Alex practically sailed out of the house, borne aloft by lurve and unfettered by irony.

“Your sister is in denial,” Maggie tells Kara as she pulls up alongside. “At least you know you’re whipped.”

Caught mid-ogle, Kara pinks and taps a finger over her heart. “Cupid lit me up, dude. Multiple arrows.”

“Glad to hear it, Little Danvers.” Maggie flashes her trademark winkyface grin. “You deserve the full quiver.”

“That’s what I keep telling Lena, but she’ll only do the full quiver on weekends,” Kara says, wagging her brows.

Maggie deflates, sighs. “I see getting engaged has not refined your sense of humor.”

Kara shrugs and cants her head toward Lena. “She fell in love with a gutter-brained doofus. If I start doing erudite political material, she’ll dump me for sure.”

“Hey, you gotta mix in a curve ball every now and then. Keeps things fresh,” says Maggie, swatting Kara’s butt and relieving her of the delayed vegetable tray.

Lena looks her way then, and smiles with such fond regard that Kara thinks she must be looking past her, must see something much finer than ponytailed Kara Danvers in her glasses and Rockies baseball tee and faded board shorts. Maybe there’s a lovely angel floating by her shoulder, making bunny ears over her head. On days like this, it sure feels like there’s a couple of seraphim at her back, sweetening her luck and reminding her to savor every minute.

She imagines their faces, thinks of her auburn hair and his kind eyes, and feels warmth like a hand resting at the back of her neck. Imagined or not, Kara senses their presence, and she hopes they are proud of her. Proud that their little girl has done good, that she lives honestly, that she loves well.

Lost in thought, Kara doesn’t notice Lena approaching until she’s right in front of her, wrapping her up in a very nice hug.

“Gosh. How’d I earn this?” Kara asks, leaning into the unexpected cuddle.

“You’re crying,” Lena whispers. “This is my default action when you cry.”
Kara touches her own cheek and finds it wet with tears. “Huh. Did not realize I was leaking. I started thinking about…something… and I just - ”

“Okay. It’s okay.” Lena nuzzles her ear, kisses her hair. “Take a walk with me?”

“Oh, that sounds good. Yes, please.”

Lena eases them apart and leads Kara down the steps into the garden. The grass is damp from the sprinklers and feels deliciously cool and springy underfoot. Lena winds their fingers together in an easy knot, and their joined hands swing loose as they amble around the yard. By a rosebush laden with butter-colored blooms, Kara pauses to enjoy the flower’s strong aroma. It’s so heady that it almost makes her dizzy.

“High geraniol,” she murmurs, raising a blossom up so Lena can take a hit.

Green eyes flare with pleasure. She sniffs again, deeply. “Good heavens. Geraniol?”

“Yup. It’s an organic compound produced in the petals, the key ingredient in rose oil. Tweaking rose enzyme profiles to bump up geraniol production is one of Eliza’s hobbies.”

Lena laughs softly. “My kind of mad scientist.”

“You betcha,” agrees Kara. “She says that when breeders started mixing the Chinese and tea varieties with old English roses, it enhanced the colors but rendered many of them scentless.”

“Boo,” says Lena, pulling Kara back into motion.

“Boo and hiss. Now only about half of today’s roses actually smell like roses. They’re colorful, and they look the part - ”

“But the scent is the soul of the flower.”

“That’s what Eliza says!” Kara squeezes her hand. “Baby, you guys are gonna get on like gangbusters.”

Lena shyly hikes up a shoulder. “She’s been very kind to me. I only hope I haven’t behaved too awkwardly around her. This whole ‘maternal affection’ thing is new territory.”

“You’re doing great,” Kara assures her. “Mom thinks you’re the cat’s pajamas.”

She chuckles from deep in her chest. “Well, I think she’s the bee’s knees. So there.”

Kara stops walking and turns to face Lena, a hesitant smile forming. “I was thinking about my birth parents. That’s what started the waterworks.”

With folded lips and a small nod, Lena bids her to continue.

“I think they’d be proud of me. I think they’d be okay with who I am and how I live,” says Kara, “but god, it really bums me out that they’ll never get to meet you.”

Lena tilts her head, lets out a sobbing laugh. “Kara.”

“They would love you, just like Eliza does, because you’re very lovable. Also because you take such good care of me, and I am extremely lovable.”

“Oh, dear lord.” The sob loses out to the laugh, and Lena smiles. “Even though I barely remember
my mother, I feel certain that Niamh Kieran would adore you and be happy that I’ve found you, because we take such good care of each other.”

This time, Kara is aware that she’s about to cry. Lena seems aware, too, and takes the situation in hand by backing Kara against the sturdy trunk of a Chinese pistache and kissing her so thoroughly that their guardian angels promptly tap out and flutter back to their celestial cab stand.

June

This is a true thing: shopping for real estate can be stressful, even when you have unlimited funds.

When Kara and Lena officially agree to make National City their HQ, they spend the first several weeks at Kara’s downtown loft apartment. It is a nice and good space where they do many nice and good things with / for / to each other, but it is not their home.

“I want something that’s ours, a shared home that we can grow into together,” says Lena.

Kara, who remains a sucker for the ours and we and together of this entire enterprise, notifies her landlord that very day that she will not be renewing her lease.

That lease ends June 15. As of June 12, they still have not found a place to live.

The progression goes something like this: hey this one looks good on paper / okay let’s check it out - wow it’s like being inside Barbie’s house / too small, too pink - holy shit you could play basketball in here / too cavernous, too woody - the neighbors took their children inside / too old, too straight - this place is so ugly we’d spend the first year in renovations / also dear god what is that smell…

Finally, with the clock ticking down to their last days, they find a Goldilocks listing. It’s a converted 1929 train depot about ten miles outside the city, set on a lightly forested fifteen-acre plot. On the property are three partially rehabbed dining and sleeping cars from the defunct Coast Starlight line. Just out the back door is a plantation teak deck centered by a keyhole-shaped swimming pool.

The house itself has soaring ceilings, embossed stone floors, exposed brick walls, rustic reclaimed woodwork, a spiral iron staircase, and a loft master bedroom with a giant elliptical window overlooking the back yard.

The security system is top-notch, featuring multiple cameras, floodlights, sirens, motion and pressure sensors, air quality monitors, and redundant hard-wired and cellular communications to call for emergency services… or private security… or a gung-ho sister and sister-in-law.

Also, the owner is throwing in a few rare pieces of mid-century modern furniture to sweeten the pot.

“That sofa is a Harvey Probber. The leather is soft like a baby’s hiney,” says Debbie the realtor.
She’s got her phone fastened to her ear and claims (*the clever minx!*) to be on hold with another interested buyer.

“I’m feeling this,” Kara admits, once Debbie stops hovering. “It’s solid. Like Gibraltar with choo-choos.”

Judging by the kiss she receives, Lena likes her choice of words. “We’re about to become homeowners,” she declares.

Kara lets out a train whistle-y *wooo-wooo* and bellows at the realtor. “Quit playin’ on the phone, Debbie! We’ll take it!”

Cash being a marvelous accelerant, they have the keys by close of business. They don’t even go back to Kara’s for a change of clothes. She shoots a quick text to Alex sharing the good news, and asking her to dog-sit tonight.

**Alex:** wait. u bought a train station?

**Kara:** WE BOUGHT A TRAIN DEPOT

**Alex:** I don’t even know who you are anymore...also that sounds cool and I am jealous and is there a guest room?

**Kara:** You can have your own sleeper car!!!!

**Alex:** Woo-woo!

**Kara:** WOOO-WOOOOOOOO

Lena and Kara wander the property all afternoon, exploring the woods and poking around the rail cars. They designate one a painting studio, one a guest room, and one a staging area for barbecues and tailgates and various party activities.

They spend the night downstairs, spooned on the soft soft sofa, whispering and plotting and giggling like delinquent kids who’ve discovered a secret clubhouse.

**July**

Brazilian jiu-jitsu is hard. Kara admits this to herself as black spots swim in her vision and she realizes Ava Sharpe is about to put her to sleep with a triangle choke. She taps her gloved hand hard against Ava’s thigh, and the leg wrapped around her neck instantly loosens.

Ava scoots back, sits up. “You good?”

Kara takes a deep breath, laughs at herself. “I suck at this! I’m sorry you’re wasting your time on someone who sucks.”

“Kara, this is not supposed to be easy. The learning curve is fucking steep, girl.”
“I know, but I’m on Pikes Peak and you’re on the damn Trango Towers!”

Ava rolls her eyes and takes a swig from her sports bottle. “Think back to when I had you in guard,” she says. “Where did you lose me?”

Kara runs the instant replay in her mind and suspects she knows just where she buggered the poodle this time. “I was in full mount…you squirmed up into guard… then you started pushing on my left support arm and slid your hips to the side.”

Ava nods, seems pleased that Kara saw the progression. “That opened the door.”

“Then you slipped your knee past my chest and the calf went around back of my head and that was all she wrote.” Kara grunts and slaps the mat. “It seems like no matter what I do, you’ve got a countermove. I want to learn how to counter your counters.”

“That’s the essence of the game,” says Ava, rolling up to her feet. “You do this and I do that, and you do that and I do this…forever.”

“Bitch, you are surprisingly deep.”

Ava smirks. “That’s what Lena told me last night.”

_Nope_, Kara thinks. Nothing else, really. Just ‘_nope_’ and then it’s happening.

Her response is purely instinctive, and it’s over before Kara can even reconsider. She pushes up onto her fingertips and swings her shin against the back of Ava’s knees in a perfectly executed leg sweep. The tall woman drops hard on her ass, bouncing on the mat with a shocked look on her face.

_Oh god. So this is how I die._

Kara scrabbles backward and stands up, ready to run for her life, but Ava just starts laughing.

“Guess I had that coming,” she observes.

Relieved that she hasn’t just signed her own death warrant, Kara leans against the octagon fence and speaks softly. “I’m sorry, Ava.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“I didn’t even mean to…it’s like… Look, the only time I’ve _ever_ physically attacked anybody for real was when this guy was trying to hurt Lena. If there’s a shortcut to my temper, it’s through her. I’m sorry.”

“I said don’t worry about it.” Ava gets up, approaches Kara with her palm open, and they slap hands in a high five. “I know a little about what really happened at the games. I know you don’t want to go out and beat people up, show them how strong you are. You want the ability to protect someone you love. That’s why I agreed to coach you.”

“Thank you.” Kara takes off her gloves, loosens her ponytail, runs a hand through her sweaty hair. “I’m still sorry for the cheap shot.”

Ava smiles and raises her index finger. “You get _one_, white belt. Same time next week?”

Kara does a little bow. “Yes, sensei.”

The index is swapped for the middle, and Kara scampers out of the gym.
August

It’s no surprise that Lena reads at a breakneck pace. She takes at least three newspapers every day and brings home countless magazines and journals, resulting in a rotating roster of national and international publications making brief touchdowns on their outsized barn wood coffee table.

Kara notices that among the Daily Planets and Tribunes and Posts there is only one she reads consistently all summer: Le Canard Enchainé (The Shackled Duck), a satirical French weekly that mixes scrupulous reportage with the irreverence of The Onion. It usually makes Lena laugh out loud or shake her head.

One August morning, she reads this paper as they start their day on the back deck. A ‘no screens’ breakfast routine has been established: they soak in a little sun, read printed things, listen to music, eat healthy food (provided it tastes good), and talk before Lena bolts for Luthor Corp and Kara tackles her own tasks.

Today she’s meeting with consultants and attorneys to flesh out the non-profit ‘girls in sport’ foundation she’s planning, then she’ll head to the gym for another ass-kicking by Ava Sharpe - who assures Kara that her jiu-jitsu game is actually improving.

Lena’s workday will likely involve more research on cryptojacking detection software. One of Luthor Corp’s auxiliary server arrays was recently hacked and put to work farming Bitcoin for some unknown rascal. Lena is low-key pissed about it, but also highly impressed that they pulled it off. Kara kind of feels sorry for the hackers…god, they’re gonna get reamed.

After reading her French duck paper for maybe ten minutes, Lena folds it neatly and wipes away a few tears.

“Hey.” Kara stops what she’s doing (slathering a slice of almond flour poppyseed bread with lemon curd) and touches Lena’s arm with her non-crumby hand. “What’s the matter?”

Lena directs her to a small article on the back page. Even with Kara’s middling comprehension of French, she recognizes this piece as an oddity: it’s roughly a hundred word joke, listing fantasy vacation spots of historical figures.

“Come on,” grumbles Kara, “Elba was Napoleon’s sexy island getaway? Gross.”

Lena hums, taps the article. “Third down.”

Kara reads it and scowls, befuddled now. “Okay, not saying Marie Curie wouldn’t deserve a Monte Carlo holiday, but calling it a baccarat glow up is just bad taste.”

“The article is nonsense; it’s a coded message from Interpol.”

The befuddlement deepens. Lena is receiving coded messages from a rock band that sports bolo ties
and undercuts? Or from an international police agency? Right. Considering this is Lena Luthor, which is more likely?

“So, what is the Euro PoPo secretly saying?”

“They’re saying Veronica is safe. They’re saying it worked.”

Kara’s mouth forms a perfect ‘O’ of disbelief. “No fooling?”

“No fooling.” Lena nods, smiles, lets out a giddy little laugh. “Roulette has punched the Corsican Mafia square in the balls.”

Kara marvels quietly, takes a huge bite of her curd-covered, stealthy-healthy bread, and reflects on how this came to pass.

Lena has shared the basics: Veronica Sinclair was being pressured by her old gambling contacts to throw races or sabotage her competition, to cheat just enough to skew odds and plump up payouts. When Veronica refused, the mob threatened her life. At PyeongChang, she asked Lena to put her in contact with the FBI, hoping that they could guide her out of this no-win situation. In the weeks following the Olympics, Roulette provided Interpol with enough intel to arrange a high-level takedown, in exchange for witness protection and a new identity.

“Where do you think she’ll end up?” Kara wonders. She tries to imagine Veronica selling vintage clothing in Wellington, or hawking sex toys in Cologne. Even in those odd spots, there’s almost no way she wouldn’t stand out and draw attention. Roulette is no wallflower. Plus, she’d get bored almost instantly.

After a sip of oolong tea and a quick think, Lena offers a possibility. “Mountaineering guide in Nepal.”

Lena writes off the idea with a casual shrug, but it’s so damned right that Kara claps her hands and shouts. “Yahtzee! That’s perfect! Baby, you would be such a good secret agent.”

With her sultriest Mata Hari smile, Lena asks: “How do you know I’m not already?”

Kara almost laughs, then realizes how utterly plausible that scenario is. She freezes with approximately seventy-seven crazy questions gridlocked in traffic between her brain and her mouth.

Lena is connected to business and government in multiple countries. She’s traveled the world frequently and freely on the FIS tour. Her high profile is a perfect cover for clandestine missions. She is technologically peerless and physically formidable.

Holy mama. What if…

Kara gulps down some tea, clears her throat. “Would you tell me? If you were a spy?”

Lena snickers. “I’m not a secret agent.”

“…oh,” says Kara, feeling rather crestfallen. The whole cloak and dagger thing is undeniably romantic. She’s already imagining Lena in a trench coat, walking across a fog-shrouded bridge at midnight.

The woman in question smiles over the rim of her teacup. “That’s not to say I’ve never been asked.”

The squeal that peals from Kara Danvers is pure tantalized joy. “Tell. Me. Everything.”
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