Looking Backward, Moving Forward
by SapphicScholar

Summary

Alex recovers her memories after weeks spent believing she was still engaged to Maggie and rediscovering all the reasons why she and Maggie were so perfect together. Both women are left to confront all that has happened as they decide whether or not what they found a second time around is enough to overcome the heartache they endured

The still angsty (but with a happy ending) part 2 for the angst-filled post-breakup Sanvers amnesia fic, "Forgotten, But Not Gone." Please read part 1 first or this one won't make much sense!

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

It had been exactly 84 days since Maggie ran from Alex’s life a second time. The first night she’d gotten herself a hotel room and let herself cry for a loss she never should have had to mourn a second time. The next morning she’d snuck into the garage behind Alex’s building to pick up her car, then she’d driven for hours until she got to the cabin M’gann kept in the woods—a small space on a large plot of property with a winding creek and trees tall enough that they almost seemed able to keep memories and thoughts and reality away. It was spartan—the peak of asceticism—proof of a time when M’gann hadn’t felt she’d deserved anything more than the utter basics and enough space to contain her self-loathing and guilt. She’d promised Maggie back before Alex, before what looked like her chance at real, genuine happiness, that it would always be there if she needed it.

Her captain had seemed to understand what must have happened and told her to take the week off, promised that he’d call if there were urgent cases that needed her attention. At the moment, though, Reign seemed to have retreated—wounded, Maggie hoped—and the other aliens seemed reluctant to draw the ire of police forces and government agencies bitter and angry and all too ready to avenge the deaths of their friends and colleagues. Maggie only left the cabin twice to pick up food and booze. She spent her days trying to purge the happy memories of Alex from her memory and chase away the fleeting pangs of guilt for having fled the apartment without a word. But then again, Alex had her family, her friends—just like last time.

Eventually she made her way back into town, vowed to get her life in order, to make it past this little blip in her journey to get over the woman she’d thought of as the love of her life—their relationship so much more, so much deeper, than anything she’d ever shared with Emily, no matter how much longer that one had been. In her first week back, she found a small townhouse on the outskirts of town that needed a responsible adult to sublet it and care for the gardens while the owner, some French professor at NCU, was out on sabbatical. The only requirement was, “No undergraduates,” so Maggie sent an email with her references and proof of employment, and within a week she had settled in, the professor off to somewhere in the South of France that Maggie had to admit sounded sort of amazing compared to anywhere even close to National City. But this place was furnished and nice—much nicer than she’d normally be able to afford—and it came with an expiration date that she already knew in advance. No surprises.

Eventually she drove back to her old place and picked up some of the neatly labeled boxes Kara had packed for her and stacked in the appropriate rooms. The rest she checked into storage before she was finally able to tell the landlord that no, this month-to-month arrangement was over. No, she didn’t want to leave a Yelp review of the building. No, really, he didn’t want what she had to say about the place to become public.

She’d thrown herself headlong into her work, and none of the other officers were stupid enough to ask anything—and the one or two that might have been were quickly warned off by those with enough experience to know better. The news broke that Reign had officially been captured somewhere around the 30 day mark. It had been an official DEO mission, and the Science Division only got the briefest of updates. It seemed she had indeed been wounded in the last battle, that the dozens of lives lost or irreparably altered had, at the very least, not been in vain. Some rumor swirled of others like her, but further speculation suggested that whatever technology the DEO had developed would—or perhaps already had, Maggie wasn’t exactly privy to the ‘forgotten files’ binder these days—take care of them too. But there were new cases, cases that could be handled without DEO intervention to keep Maggie busy.

Kara-as-Supergirl had been the first to run into Maggie, though Maggie had spotted J’onn sitting at
the corners of bars carefully watching out for her, swore he was the one who called her a cab the one night she’d let herself drink far too much—a mistake she hadn’t repeated since then. Kara finally appeared on a crime scene—an inevitability, really—after Reign’s capture, and Maggie couldn’t help but notice that Kara looked slightly haunted, her face almost gaunt and her jaw clenched in a way she’d never seen it before. Idly, she wondered what might have happened to get to that place, but it wasn’t her place anymore, never would be again.

“Hi,” Kara had finally managed after a few awkward moments of stumbling starts.

“Supergirl.”

“Are you…how are you?”

“Just fine, Supergirl.”

“You moved,” Kara stated matter-of-factly. “We…I tried to come visit you.”

“Thank you for bringing my things back.”

“Maggie,” Kara whispered, trying to inch further and further away from the building where the witnesses were still being interviewed, their statements taken about the would-be robbery.

“I don’t…I know it’s not the same, and I know I’m not the person you want to talk to, but I do know a little bit of what it’s like to lose your home and your life and then to have to go through that again and again. And how…how even when you’re only losing pale imitations of the thing you once had, it still hurts.”

“I’m at work.”

“What if I came over…with pizza or something? You look thin. Have you been eating?”

“Could say the same about you.”

“Who’s saying that what I’m doing is healthy either?” Kara challenged.

“You have a sister to support. And friends. Go—go be with them.”

“You could too! James and Winn and J’onn and I—we’d be there in a moment’s notice if we thought it would be welcome.”

“That why the Guardian van follows me home from work some nights?”

“Um…”

“Mhm.”

One of the other officers interrupted their conversations. “Detective Sawyer, we’re just about done here. Need anything else before we head out?”

Looking down at her own notes, Maggie shook her head. “No, no I think we’re good. I’m coming now.” She left without a second look back.

She wasn’t overly surprised when takeout started arriving to her door on a semi-regular basis, always seeming to get there about half an hour after she arrived home from work, the delivery person insisting they’d already been generously tipped (and sometimes looking star-struck enough for Maggie to assumed that Kara had been running late and tipped in full Supergirl regalia). She would
have stopped it, but they managed to choose all of her favorite dishes from all of her favorite restaurants. She wondered if Alex had anything to do with it, but quickly chased that thought away. It could only lead her thoughts and heart down dangerous paths.

After a few weeks of the semi-regular delivery, Kara showed up with a bag of takeout from a little restaurant many, many states away in Gotham—and that, that was definitely something only Alex knew about, and it made Maggie’s heart ache. “I figured the delivery might get cold on the journey if I let their person drive it here,” Kara joked with a small forced laugh.

“You don’t need to do this,” Maggie sighed. “I’m an adult.”

“Yeah…and you didn’t need to come help Alex, who is also an adult. But you did it. Because that’s what you do for people you care about.”

“Or is it what you do to assuage your guilt?”

Kara’s tongue darted out to wet her lips and she dropped her head in acknowledgement. “I…I probably deserved that. But I just…I know that…look, Alex is my sister. She is my person. Always. At the end of the day, I’m in her corner. But I also…I know that I was dealing with my own things—not an excuse, but…a reason, perhaps—and there were times when I wasn’t good about showing how happy I was for you two. Because you made her happy, Maggie.”

“Kara.”

“Sorry, right, just…watching you drop everything when you didn’t need to…watching you do all of that to help Alex…it was”—Kara took a shuddering breath—“it was so much more heroic than anything I’ve ever done wearing that bright red cape.”

“I…” Maggie trailed off, unsure of how she was supposed to respond. She toyed with the drawstring of her sweatpants and hoped Kara would break the silence.

“Here, before your food gets cold. I don’t…I don’t have to stay or anything. But if you want someone, I’m here.”

“Here, before your food gets cold. I don’t…I don’t have to stay or anything. But if you want someone, I’m here.”

“I think…I think not tonight.”

“Right. Yeah, yeah, of course,” Kara nodded, taking a deep breath and pivoting on her heels.

“If you want to come back another night—with notice—we can try.”

“Yeah?”

God, Maggie loathed how hopeful she looked. “Yeah. With notice, Kara. I mean it.”

“How about the day after tomorrow? Thursday?”

Neither of them said anything about how it was Thursday instead of Friday because Fridays were sister nights—at least when they could both manage it. “I guess that is notice.”

“I’ll see you then.”

Maggie spent the next two days wondering how she had let another Danvers sister worm her way into her life. But Thursday night came, and with it, a slightly nervous, overly cheerful Kryptonian with her arms full of food. They didn’t talk much—just about cases and vague pleasantries—but Maggie found she didn’t hate the company. They watched a bit of TV when they finished eating,
and during a commercial break, Kara mentioned offhand that Alex was back to work, back to training with J’onn and anxious to get back into the field in more than just an “advisory” capacity. Kara appeared to have timed it so that the show came back on almost as soon as she finished speaking, and Maggie didn’t have to find words to respond—a small grace for which she was beyond grateful.

Thursdays became something of a standing date for Maggie and Kara—both of them aware that more than once a week would be too much. They talked somewhat more freely, though the conversations were rarely deep. Anytime Kara asked how Maggie was doing after…just after, Maggie shut down. And for her part, Maggie bit her tongue and never asked about Alex, accepting the handful of updates she got during commercial breaks. She liked to think of them as being a little bit like inoculations—it was just enough information, dead and inert, facts with no feelings, to protect her from demanding everything Kara knew.

It was over a month into their Thursday night dinners that Kara mentioned Alex over dinner instead of over television.

“What?” Maybe there was a new Alex, some coworker or friend, some other reason for this apparent disruption to their routine.

“I said that Alex…she’s been asking about you.”

“Why would she ask you?”

“Because when you left…when you left she panicked. She, uh, she tried to go out on her bike the next morning to find you.” Kara rubbed at the back of her neck and didn’t meet Maggie’s gaze. “I moved into the apartment with her for the next week or so. I only got her to stop trying to sneak out when I wasn’t looking by promising that I’d keep an eye out for you. Not, like, stalking or anything. Just making sure you were alive, that you were eating.”

“So the takeout was her idea?”

“Um, the specific restaurants might have been…at least once I mentioned that I’d ordered you pizza from what’s apparently your least favorite place in all of National City.” Maggie remembered the night. It was the only time she hadn’t eaten a bite of the meal; she wasn’t that pathetic. “Anyway, she, uh, I told her that I wasn’t going to be a spy and report back to her. But she…she knows that I see you sometimes.”

“Okay.” Maggie wasn’t entirely sure what to make of that information.

“She wants to see you.”

Maggie made a vague noise that she hoped would count as a response.

“I—she knows that you don’t—probably don’t want to see her. But she, if nothing else, she wants to thank you.”

“Thanks accepted. Feel free to pass it along.”

“Maggie…you aren’t obligated to do anything. You weren’t obligated to do anything then either. But she’s been doing a lot of thinking.”

“Kara, just, stop. Please.”

“Okay.”
Maggie was surprised that it worked, but for the rest of the night, Kara spoke of nothing more than Snapper’s latest tirades (and his rare compliments), and Lena and James’ weird relationship drama that even Maggie couldn’t quite figure out, and how Winn had started dating someone new—another alien, but one who treated him well this time after Lyra disappeared without a trace. The commercial breaks brought with them no updates about Alex that week, and Kara left with nothing more than a brief hug and an insistence that Maggie keep the leftovers—they wouldn’t be more than a snack for Kara anyway.

The following week, Kara came with a letter from Alex that Maggie promptly stuffed into a dresser drawer to look at when hell froze over or when she was feeling particularly self-destructive. Kara didn’t bring it up after handing it over, and during the commercial breaks she merely mentioned that Alex had been cleared for active duty on missions deemed relatively low-risk. Kara seemed upset by the information and nearly destroyed one of the throw pillows while she relayed it, so Maggie made a point of running to the bathroom during the next commercial break to ensure that Kara wouldn’t have to talk about it any more.

It was on day 84 that Alex finally showed up at her door looking both better and worse than the last time Maggie had seen her. The bruises had finally cleared completely, and Alex was dressed in work clothes and clutching keys, suggesting that she’d driven there on her own. But there were dark circles under her eyes, and she looked even thinner than she already had been. With her hands playing with the keys, her fingers never stilling for even a second, Alex cleared her throat and forced herself to look up. “Um, hi.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

A/N: Well…this chapter got long. Note, the paragraphs in italics that are indented as block quotes are the written documents. It should be quite apparent, but figured I’d mention it.

“Alex?” Maggie hoped her voice didn’t sound as breathy aloud as it did in her head. Then again, she felt like all of the wind had been knocked out of her, so it shouldn’t be too much of a surprise.

“Yeah, uh, I don’t—I understand if you don’t want to see me, and I’ll leave if you ask, but I had to come by. I needed to—you just ran. And I—I never got to say thank you or sorry or—” Alex shut her mouth and shook her head.

“Yeah, I, uh, no problem, Danvers.”

“No, it was—or not, I don’t know,” Alex sighed, rubbing at her temples. “I just can’t stop asking myself why you did it.”

“Why wouldn’t I have done it?”

“Do you want a list? Because I can think of dozens of good answers to that question.”

Maggie just shrugged.

“I was awful to you at the end, Maggie. I didn’t—all of the things I’d promised you I’d do—that I’d be your family and I’d never abandon you or not listen to your side or treat you the way too many people already had—god, I broke them all. Because, because I don’t even know why. I just, I panicked, and suddenly everything felt really overwhelming. And I’m not trying to make excuses! I just, I was terrible, and I certainly didn’t deserve having you back in my life, taking care of me when I was probably a total pain in the ass and—”

“Danvers,” Maggie finally snapped.

Alex’s eyes opened wide as she looked up at Maggie.

“Your listing out all the ways you think you’re not a good person or whatever the fuck that was—none of that makes me feel better. None of that changes what happened. None of that even an apology. And maybe you meant it as one, but it sure as fuck isn’t what I’m hearing, and now I’m stuck feeling like I have to hold your hand and assure you that you’re not terrible, and no, you’re actually a good person, and goddammit, Danvers, that shouldn’t have to be on me!”

“You, uh, you’re right.”

“I…” Maggie trailed off, unsure of what to say when her own points were so readily accepted.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have come here.”

“I just…I need time, Danvers.”
“Right. Understood.” With a clench to her jaw that Maggie knew meant she was barely holding back tears, Alex nodded and turned back to the street.

They both knew the walk from the door to the street was when Maggie could have yelled something—anything—and made it all a little better. But she didn’t, and Alex shut the door of one of the big black SUVs the DEO had in reserve without so much as a look back.

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The next few weeks seemed to pass in a painfully slow progression of minutes that inched into hours and just barely made it into days. Things at the precinct were quiet, and Maggie spent her nights walking back and forth between her living room and the dresser drawer where she’d stuffed Alex’s letter. The edges of the envelope were soft now, their crisp edges worn down from all the hours Maggie had spent toying with it, trying to decide whether or not she really wanted to know what Alex had said.

It was on a Thursday when Kara cancelled dinner—some top-secret DEO mission that had the sometimes frustratingly optimistic Supergirl sounding wary—that Maggie finally cracked and opened the letter. She even took the time to find some antique silver letter opener that the French professor had left at her desk. For some reason, it seemed impossibly important that the envelope stay pristine. It was…safer this way. Things were clean this way.

The first thing Maggie noticed was that it was not, in fact, a single letter. The envelope was stuffed full of papers that had been worn thin—likely from Alex’s incessant handling of them, much like Maggie had done to the envelope itself. Figuring she already knew what rock bottom felt like, Maggie carefully unfolded them and started from the top.

Dear Maggie,  

I don’t...fuck, I don’t know how to start this letter. Talking to you used to be the easiest thing in the world. Not in the beginning—I used to get Kara to vet my text messages to you the first couple of weeks to make sure I sounded interested at the appropriate levels. But by the end, it was obvious: you were my person. I knew you better than anyone else, maybe even better than Kara, who still carries the burden of a lost world that I don’t think any of us will ever fully grasp. Sorry, I’m going off topic. It’s odd, though, feeling like anything I say to you these days is wrong. Inevitably wrong. I probably won’t send this one, just like I never sent any of the others.

Maggie had to walk away then, take a moment to compose herself and check the impulse to drink or shred Alex’s letters in frustration because Alex had been her person too, but Alex had chosen to end that, had made it so that all of the words seemed to come out wrong.

I have all of my memories back now. Everything but when it happened. They don’t think I’ll ever remember what actually happened. J’onn said it was for the best, and he refuses to talk about it. But I also…I remember everything from in between the accident and the return of those memories. I remember having you at my side day in and day out. I remember leaning on you and burdening you with the weight of my recovery. I remember feeling—god, I remember feeling so lucky to have you still, to be alive and standing at your side and knowing—feeling deep in my gut with the kind of certainty that I’ve only ever had about my responsibility to protect Kara—that even if my memories or my full physical health never came back, my life would still be better than anything I could ever have imagined before because you were in it.

Maggie idly wondered whether there existed a level below rock bottom—perhaps some sediment or
molten magma. Alex would know. She suspected if there were a level, she might be hurtling toward it full speed ahead. But she didn’t stop.

Even though I felt comfortable talking and writing to you, I was never the one that was good with words between the two of us. Not really. But they’re all I have left right now. And I’m not sure...maybe all this is a terrible idea, but I need you to see? Obviously I can’t really make any obligations on you; I forfeited that right a long time ago. Not that it stopped you from stepping up—like you always have. But you didn’t have to. I appreciate it so much, but I wish they had never asked it of you. It wasn’t fair, and they’ve dealt with, well, it doesn’t matter, but suffice to say, they know better than to do something like that again. I promise.

The acknowledgment was something, at least. A month or two before the breakup, she would have expected the acknowledgment. The righteous indignation on her behalf. By the end, though, sometimes it felt like Alex had become someone new. They didn’t talk, and she wasn’t honest with Maggie about what she wanted or what she was feeling until it was all too late, until it was all crashing down around them. The reminder that some things apparently hadn’t changed pleased her more than it should have.

I’ve included a few notes and things that I wrote along the way. I don’t know if they’ll mean anything to you or even make sense, but I needed to try. I’m not asking for forgiveness. God knows I don’t deserve it for how I ended things. It’s one thing to have irreconcilable differences. It’s another to refuse to try to reconcile them. Or to talk about them. No, that’s not it, because I did talk about it some. But not with you. And you were my partner—the one I should have gone to and talked to and been with throughout all of it, but I fucked up.

You don’t have to read any of it if you ever get this packet. It’s there, though, if you decide you want to see it. You don’t have to tell me if you read it either. Or feel any one way about it. Not all of it’s good. But you deserve all the information.

-Alex

Taking a deep breath, Maggie debated folding back up the stack of papers, shoving them in the envelope, and pushing it into the deep recesses of the dresser drawer again. But she’d already opened the floodgates, and it seemed pointless to stop now when her curiosity would only get the better of her again soon enough.

The next note was in Alex’s scrawl—the chicken scratch that Maggie used to tease Alex about, suggesting that maybe she really had missed her calling as a doctor—that Maggie recognized as being the product of an Alex who was drunk, tired, rushed, or some combination of the three.

Maggie,

Please, I think I fucked up. I know I fucked up. Everyone keeps telling me I’ll get over it, but I’m not. I’m not at all. I’m doing the things I’m supposed to do to get over it, and they only make me miss you more. And it’s not fair. I shouldn’t get to miss you. Because I was the one who ended it. I had reasons, I know that. And the reasons are important things. In life, you know? But they don’t feel so important right now when this big, important, real—fucking real, you know?—part of my life is suddenly gone because I was too goddam stupid to hold onto it, even though it was the only thing in my life I’d ever done right.

Goddammit, it hurts. And I know you must be hurting. And I’ve only ever wanted to
hold you and help you when you were hurting, but this time I caused it, and this time I can’t be the one to help you heal. This time I was the one that did it. And god, I hate myself for it.

I don’t know why I’m writing. You’ll never see it. Kara said journaling was healthy, but I don’t think this is what she meant.

Maggie only realized she was crying when the first tear hit the page. She wasn’t sad, per se, but she could feel a heady mix of anguish and desperation and longing and deep-rooted anger swirling in her gut.

She flipped to the next page. It was short—scrawled on the back of something that looked like it might have been a map with some coordinates scratched in the corner—and even messier than the last one.

I’m on another world. Maggie, I’m scared. I think I’m going to die. I’m going to die, and you’ll never know how sorry I am. You’ll never know how much I loved you—how much I still love you. They keep saying that it’s for the best, but I don’t know if I believe them. If I die—when I die?—just know that you’re the best thing that ever happened to me, Maggie Sawyer. And know that to my dying day, I regretted how I treated you at the end. You deserved everything good in this world that had fucked you over so many more times than you deserved. I hope that maybe...maybe if I end up gone for good...that you can find some closure. I hope you find someone better. Someone as good as you are. Someone who brings you all the happiness you brought to me. I love you, Mags. Forever.

Maggie’s hand trembled as she reached out to try to flip the page, to try to get rid of the visceral proof of how close she had come to losing Alex, how close the world had come to losing Alex. Once it was turned over to the map—flat and innocuous enough and full of facts and data points that didn’t carry the weight of a dying woman’s words—Maggie pulled herself up on shaky legs and forced herself to walk to the kitchen, to fill a cup of water, to sip at it until her breathing was a little more close to regular.

But she couldn’t stay away from the letters, and so she returned once more.

I know we only got one Hanukkah and one Christmas together, but it didn’t stop this one from feeling like a huge change. It didn’t matter that this was my life for almost thirty years. All that mattered was that you weren’t there, and god, it hurt. I wanted to help make the holidays good for you again. I wanted you to have a family. I wanted to be your family. Together, we managed to make one. It was a little...different. But so were we, and it was good, right? I wasn’t just imagining that? People keep acting like I’m doing something wrong by continuing to be sad.

I hope you had someone to spend it with. Somehow who deserves you more than I ever did.

The next note was even shorter.

Kara, she, uh, she almost died a few days ago. I’m sure you saw the news. She’s in a coma, Maggie. I don’t know—I don’t know what I would do—I don’t know what I will do. I wish you were here. Not because you had to shoulder my grief, but because you always did anyway. You made me feel safe and loved. Always. I always hoped I was half as good as you when I tried to help you through things. I wish we could get through this together. With you—with you I was always stronger.
Maggie remembered watching the news and seeing the coverage and wondering how Alex was surviving. It was the closest she’d come in those months to reaching out and calling her. She hadn’t, though she’d monitored any and all news about Supergirl—even the conspiracy blogs that every so often managed to post the tiniest tidbit of truth. Eventually Supergirl had returned, and Maggie had congratulated herself for not giving in to her impulses to go be by Alex’s side, even as part of her still protested that it would have been the right thing to do. Maybe even for both of them.

Bed rest and desk duty suck. Snapped tibias also suck. All of the classified things I can’t talk about here suck as well. If you were here, you’d make it bearable. You’d cook for me and watch television shows with me and remind me that the better job I do of taking care of myself now, the faster things will heal and I can get back out onto active duty. You were always smart that way.

I babysat a kid today. Ruby. Before, um, before I ended things with you, I had a long talk with Kara. A lot of long talks with Kara actually. And I just…I got so wrapped up in this idea of motherhood as this set of experiences I could share with someone. I wanted to, I don’t know, take a kid camping and teach them all about the stars. And show them how to punch properly—no need for broken thumbs—and teach them shit that might give them an easier go of things. And protect them—god, I could do that, you know? But…I got to do some of that with Ruby. And she’s not mine. But I showed her how to throw a punch. And I helped her stand up to a bully. And I think I left her feeling just a little better. But I’m not her mom. And I know it’s so fucking belated to only now be considering that there are ways to parent without actually being a parent. But Kara—I know she wants kids. I know she doesn’t want to be the last ever in her family, even if we aren’t able to figure out how to get little Kryptonians. She’ll still have kids one day. We already spend so much time together, it’s not like I’d be seeing those kids any less. And maybe…god, fuck, Maggie, what if being an aunt who spends more time with those kids than some parents do with their own is enough for me? What if I fucked up the best thing to ever happen to me over nothing? Over something that’ll quite possibly never happen?

Instead of saying anything, I mailed your passport to you. I hope you’re having fun out there.

That particular note brought Maggie closer to shredding it or lighting it all on fire than any of the others. Because those were questions they should have discussed. All Alex had told her was that she wanted to be a mom, that it was some real desire deep inside of her. She didn’t talk about what her definition of motherhood was. She never told Maggie why exactly this need was so great. The closest they got to a moment of truth was when they were in bed together after things had already ended.

Refusing to dwell on “might have beens” any longer, Maggie flipped to the next note. It was on the back of a bar receipt in a red pen and increasingly tiny script to make it all fit. She assumed Alex had been drunk when she wrote it.

I still miss you. I don’t think Kara gets it. Or maybe she does, but she doesn’t want to deal with me. Or maybe she knows more than I do. Maybe she knows you’re seeing someone new. Better. Not me. I wonder sometimes. I miss you. You’re still my speed dial and my contact and all that stuff. I know I should change it, but maybe on a night like this I could call you by mistake, and it would be bad, but at least I’d get to hear your voice. I miss it. I loved your voice. Loved you. Still do.

The handwriting on the next note was shaky, and it was more formal—almost a journal entry. The
date was after the accident, after Maggie was back at Alex’s side.

*I don’t know what’s wrong with us. I’m scared because what if...what if something happened? Or what if this was all just a step too far? I know you’re a cop, but you don’t always have to put your life on the line quite so much. Most DEO agents don’t either. But Kara...she’s always going to be out there. And I’m always going to want to protect her. And maybe you’re finally realizing what that means for you and for us. Maybe it’s too much for you. I hope it’s not. I don’t know what I would do if I lost you. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me.*

Maggie could feel tears stinging at her eyes, but she refused to let them fall, rubbing at them with her rough sleeve and relishing in the burn of it.

*I wish I had my memories back. I feel like I’m missing something and it’s hurting you. I can see that I’m hurting you, even when you’re happy. Sometimes most of all when you’re happy. I never wanted to be the one that hurt you, Maggie. You’ve gone through enough. I could never forgive myself for adding anything more to that weight you carry.*

Maggie snorted derisively and turned the page so aggressively that the bottom of the paper tore. The next page was dated the weekend she fled Alex’s apartment in tears for a second time.

*I don’t...I don’t know. I can’t drink. And I can’t run. And I can’t spar. And you’re not here. And I’m not allowed to go find you. And I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.*

Sounded about right, Maggie thought to herself as she flipped the page.

*I hate myself and everyone around me. I should never have gotten hurt. I should have changed my contact information. I should have been smarter in the field. I should have been able to get my memories back sooner. No one should ever have asked you to do what you did for me. I’m so sorry. It wasn’t fair. And you said yes. Why did you say yes? I didn’t deserve that yes.*

Maggie grit her teeth. She would always say yes because it was always going to be Alex.

*Sometimes when you were helping me remember things, it felt like the beginning again. It wasn’t quite the same teenage crush feeling, but it was like falling in love all over again. I got to see just how perfect we were for a second time with sort of fresh eyes. Not that I ever forgot how much I loved you. I was just lucky enough to forget about how I fucked it all up.*

It was more of a compulsion than anything else now as Maggie flipped to the next page, nearing the end.

*Is it awful to say that a part of me—the small selfish part of me that hated Kara when she arrived and flares up every time my mother points out how much I’m failing in comparison—is happy to know that we still work together? Maybe you were just acting. Obviously you were. I don’t know why I said maybe. I shouldn’t ever let myself hope. It’s dangerous, and it never works. We both did, and look at where it got us. I hate myself, and you probably hate me too. I would. But I also still love you. It never went away. Maybe it dulled slightly. And so very slightly. But it never went away. And now I have all the proof I need for everyone who kept saying I was over you. Because my brain and my body or whatever (I know it matters but I don’t really sleep these days, and it makes it harder to think when I’m back home after work) clearly knew better than everyone around me that I wasn’t over you. That I’d never be over you.*
Maggie hoped Alex had started sleeping at some point after that letter. Then again, she’d looked gaunt, and the purple bags under her eyes were rather prominent. She never was particularly good at taking care of herself, even if she was ready to be a strict enforcer of all rules when it came to the health of Kara—or her, Maggie had to admit, thinking back to the few times she’d been injured out in the field or even just fallen ill.

I’ve been cleared for active field duty again. It’s good. Kara’s angry, I can tell. My mother won’t talk to me. She tried, but when I told her I wasn’t going to change my mind, she was done. But I can’t sit by and watch other people get hurt and killed—watch Kara go out there with agents who aren’t as in tune with her, who don’t know the little tells that mean she’s flagging or on the verge of solar flaring, who don’t know how to move in sync with her, who don’t trust her enough to believe that she’ll be there to catch them. Because that moment’s hesitation will get someone killed, could get her killed. And I’d never forgive myself. I think you’d understand it. Because we did the same thing for each other. If you were out on a mission with the DEO, I’d be there for backup no matter what. And you always had my six too.

Maggie remembered that week from her Thursday dinners; Kara hadn’t been pleased in the slightest, and she could only imagine how distraught Eliza would have been at the idea of the two daughters she’d very nearly lost throwing themselves back into harm’s way the second they were cleared. There were only two notes left. A part of her thought perhaps she should wait, but she’d already gorged herself like a kid on Easter morning, and there was no use in putting up a show of pacing herself now. It would only be a lie that would keep her up all night until she fished the envelope back out of the drawer.

I’ve been having nightmares. That’s not new, of course. You understood. You had them too. But together...we seemed to heal a little bit. We didn’t have them every night. And when we did, we were there. We understood.

But these are new nightmares. I almost died. You know that, of course. You were there. But I nearly died. It’s not quite a first, though this one was worse than others. Maybe not worse than the kidnapping in the moment, but worse in the aftermath. Because I was in a coma. And then I lost my memory. And you had to help me do absolutely everything, Maggie.

Since...just since...I’d been looking into having a kid alone. I have a pretty decent salary at the DEO, and it’s not like I spent too much money on things other than motorcycle maintenance and clothing and some nice whiskey now and then. I’m realizing already how distinctly un-maternal that sounds. But I was happy to have that savings account go toward a little person’s livelihood.

But I wake up from these dreams where I did it—I had a kid on my own, accepted all the hardships that come with single motherhood. But I’m still a field agent because I couldn’t imagine letting myself do anything else until my body finally gives out—and even then, I’ll want to be in central command. But I’m a single mother with this child who depends entirely on me. And then I die. Or I nearly die. Or I’m in a coma. Or I’ve forgotten everyone. And I know I could be cruel during those weeks before I’d recovered. And I hurt you through what I’d forgotten, through what I said because I couldn’t remember.

And these scenes haunt me. Because what if I had a kid? What if I did that to a kid? Maggie, I remember how destroyed I was when my dad went away. I remember how much it fucked me up—fucked my whole family up—when we got the call that he wasn’t
coming home. And now…god, I don’t even know what to think about him now. But Maggie…I’d be opening another child up to that uncertainty and that heartbreak. That’s not fair. That’s selfish. But I know I wouldn’t be able to live with myself if I stopped doing what I do at the DEO. If something happened to Kara… Maggie, what if I subconsciously blamed the kid for it? And I know, I know, I’ve read that all new moms or expectant mothers or whatever go through this period of worrying. But I don’t think most expectant mothers have the job I do. I’m scared I didn’t think through everything.

I’m scared that I had this idea from when I was a kid that seemed so obvious and firm and settled that I never interrogated it, never looked deeper to see if there were other ways of getting the experiences I thought I needed, never asked myself if it would be not what was best for me, but what was best for the kid.

Maggie had asked those same questions, but she’d never voiced them, never wanted to seem like she was manipulating Alex or ripping away her dreams. She suspected it would destroy a marriage if it started out through something like that. As it turned out, their marriage never was anyway. She’d still never said anything, assumed Alex—the Alex who, even at her most impulsive, had contingency plans for her contingency plans running through that brilliant mind of hers—would already have considered all of those questions and possibilities. It was part of the job.

After a moment to shore up her resolve, Maggie flipped to the last note.

During everything, you told me you were sorry for making me doubt how much you still loved me. And maybe it was acting, like everything else, but it felt real. I can’t help thinking—no, hoping—that it was real. That maybe you still love me too. Because, god, Maggie, I have never, ever stopped loving you. And it’s not just because you’re the only woman I’ve ever been with—to have everything out on the table, that’s not true anymore, not that it meant anything. It’s because you’re Maggie Sawyer. You’re the woman who made me brave enough to admit things I’d been repressing for so long. You’re the woman who showed me that my life had value outside of my ability to protect Kara, even if you still respected the fact that she was always going to be a priority. You’re the woman who changed absolutely everything and gave me a life worth living for me—for us.

Is it awful that I wonder sometimes what you would say if I begged you for a second chance? If I told you that things have changed, that certain things have made me question other decisions I’ve made? I know I was awful at the end. I know that I didn’t communicate properly with you, and I kept telling you things would be okay when deep down I could feel myself panicking and pulling away. I don’t know why I didn’t turn to you then; you always helped put things in perspective.

Does it change anything if I tell you that I love you, that I’ve never stopped loving you? Would you reconsider if I showed up at your door one night and told you that I didn’t want to imagine my life without you in it? Because I don’t, Maggie. And it’s not just that I don’t want to do it. It’s that I can’t. I thought I could—I really did. I tried. And if you say no, I’ll know for certain, and I’ll be fine—I’m not putting that on you. Not after everything. But, Maggie? The best parts of my life—the parts worth imagining—they always have you in them.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who has left nice comments or questions, and I promise I will finally be back to respond to them! I needed a little time away from this fic (and if you're not sending anon hate or leaving rude comments, please feel free to ignore the rest) because:

Reminder: fanfiction is free. You did not purchase something I wrote, nor did I coerce you into reading it. You’ve chosen to come here of your own volition. That means you, as the reader, have the choice to leave at any time. There’s a little x right up in the corner. If you don’t like the choices someone made (based on a plotline shoehorned in by lazy showrunners that anyone writing a canon-based fix-it fic is now forced to deal with), that’s fine. You don’t have to like them. You do not, however, get to dictate someone’s choices for them. And coming into the comments to tell me how much you don’t like the one I’ve made accomplishes nothing. And for those of you (and there were a few) who left rude comments and then deleted them, I don’t know what to say. Did you want me to get the email notification and see your words, but avoid any and all repercussions or responses? Should I hope that maybe you felt a pang of guilt when you realized that the person writing the story for you was another human being and not a mechanical typing machine?

I’m keeping on with this story, though I’ll admit that it took a lot to get myself in the mood to write again, but I know plenty of fic writers who have left ships and fandoms entirely because the fandom and the trolls were so out of control. And I get that you, the ones who pull stunts like this, probably think that’s a win because god forbid someone doesn’t know the exact minutiae of the story you personally want to see. But their disappearance is a loss for fandom and a loss for creativity. It matters to see different possibilities. In this instance, there are hundreds of stories out there that show Alex and Maggie getting back together (or never breaking up) because Maggie does want a family or doesn’t but then capitulates and decides that for Alex she’ll have children. But there are plenty of reasons for people not to have children too (and oh wow am I full on cackling now that the canon y’all were throwing in my face has come out to get behind my own thinking), and to act like only one of those options “forces” someone to change their mind...reassess. Recognize that if you need one character to always get their way while the other character must always come second and bend their will to that of the other, you’re advocating for something much more insidious and toxic than the change over time (with reasoning to boot) about one singular decision that I’ve written here. And if you can’t listen to that advice or refuse to simply x out of something you don’t want to read, then kindly go fuck yourself.

The next few weeks passed haltingly; time seemed to move in fits and bursts with long slow lulls that left Maggie feeling reckless and unsettled in equal measure. After another week away, Kara returned to her apartment with two bags of take-out for their Thursday night dinners. She said nothing of Alex, and their conversation rarely veered into anything more emotional than the weather. On her way out, Kara held her arms open and wrapped them tightly around Maggie the second she stepped forward. She left with a sniffle and a nod of her head.
After nearly a month, Maggie pulled up Alex’s contact information, thumbs twitching over her screen until she managed to make a decision. “I read everything. I still need time. But I hope you’re doing better.”

The little checkmark indicating that Alex had read her message popped up within seconds. Three bubbles appeared and disappeared only to reappear once more before stopping altogether. Two days later she received a message back. “I understand. I hope you’re doing better too.”

There were only eight words, but the stiffness of them left Maggie reeling more than some of Alex’s letters. Because they were coming from a woman whose messages had once been suffused with warmth, with a level of casual intimacy that she suspected Alex had never known before. She was never the kind to throw in pointless emojis or exclamation points, but traces of her unique brand of humor shone through, as did the depth of her feelings. Maggie missed looking down to find messages like, “Walking past the vegan bakery – want anything?” followed by, “Oh, you’re probably at work. I’ll buy a cupcake just in case,” and then, “They had a new flavor, but I wasn’t sure if you’d like it as much as your pb chocolate. Got both in case the new one is as disgusting as most vegan food.”

It was two weeks after their text messages that Maggie ran into Alex at a crime scene for the first time since the accident. She was pleased to find the shock of recognition didn’t devastate her in the way she’d once feared it would. Maggie sent a two-fingered wave in Alex’s direction and felt her heart clench when Alex’s first instinct was to turn to see who was behind her that might have been the real target of Maggie’s attention. When she saw no one, Alex raised one arm in a tense greeting, and memories of the weeks after their first kiss came rushing back.

Maggie strode over to Alex, hoping her smile looked genuine. “Hey, Alex.”

“Oh, uh, hey?” Alex shifted her weight from one foot to the other.

“You, uh, you look better.” Maggie winced. “Sorry, no, not…I just meant, like, the bruises are gone.”

“Clean bill of health. Well, for the most part.” Alex shrugged.

“Look like you’ve been sleeping better. Eating too, I hope?”

Alex managed a jerky nod of her head. “Being back at work helps.”

“I get that.”

“Yeah…figures.”

Maggie looked around them as techs from the DEO and NCPD scurried about snapping photographs and bagging evidence. “Guess this’ll be a joint op, huh?”

“Oh, uh, sure.”

“Not gonna fight me for jurisdiction?” The teasing tone fell flat, and Maggie was met with stony silence. “Right, uh, I’m gonna go take statements.”

“I already got a pretty detailed statement from the two witnesses who called it in…in case you wanted to combine resources.”

“Oh. Uh, yeah…yeah, that’d be helpful. Thanks.”
“I’ll type up my notes and send them to you when I get back to the station.”

Maggie thanked her again and didn’t mention that she’d long ago learned to decipher the chicken scratch that was Alex’s rushed handwriting or ask if she wanted to pop by Noonan’s to go over the notes together like they used to do, having found that a second set of eyes get them a lot further a lot faster.

It ended up being simple enough that a second set of eyes would have been overkill. Traces of the killer’s DNA were still trapped under the victim’s fingernails, and the DEO got a match on an alien who’d been let out on a probationary basis through a new program Maggie had been pleased to see go into effect in the wake of the Alien Amnesty Act’s passage.

Given the violent nature of the murder and the fact that the suspect had run when two DEO agents tried to approach him to bring him in for questioning the first time, the DEO agreed to let NCPD join a small team when they raided the suspect’s last known address, and so Maggie found herself on Alex’s six for the first time in what felt like a small eternity. As they stalked around the building’s perimeter, Maggie couldn’t help but think of their walks around the hospital when Alex could barely stand, let alone crouch. She wondered if Alex was really okay to be out on field missions or if she had pushed everyone to let her back out before her body was fully healed.

“On my signal,” Alex hissed into the comms, holding up her hand and signaling for the team to slow as they approached the entrance. With a sharp nod two agents slammed through the door, and Alex and Maggie rushed in after them. The second Maggie saw their suspect with a weapon pointed at them, though, before the sound of the trigger even reached her ears, she had thrown herself at Alex, pushing her out of the way and landing on top of her with a soft thud.

“What the hell was that?” Alex rounded on Maggie the second the other agents were outside.

“What do you mean?”

“You pushed me out of the way! He nearly got away because I couldn’t get a shot off.”

“You mean when I kept you from getting shot?”

“I’m wearing a bulletproof vest. I’m fine.”

“You’re just back after almost dying!”

“But I am back in the field now, and you need to respect that.”

“I’m not just gonna sit back and watch you get shot.”

“You don’t need to try to protect me. That’s not your goddam job anymore.”

“Then don’t expect me to back you up.”

“I never asked you to in the first place.” Alex stormed back outside looking more like her old self than any of the agents had seen in a while. “What the hell are you all doing just standing around? Get in the goddam van, and let’s go!”
Maggie forced herself to count to ten as she took in a deep inhale, then slowly exhaled. She waited to walk back to the police cruiser until she heard the DEO van’s tires skidding as they sped away.

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Over dinner the next week, Kara nudged Maggie’s foot with her own, keeping her gaze trained firmly on the small mountain of potstickers in front of her. “Thanks.”

“For what? You know I don’t even like potstickers.”

“Blasphemy, but, uh, not that… I—Alex told me about what happened. At the raid.”

“Oh.” Maggie suddenly found the lo mein in front of her intensely interesting.

“Thank you.”

“Yeah, well, doubt she thinks you should be thanking me.”

“You know how Alex is.”

Maggie shrugged; she thought she did, but these days she wasn’t so sure.

“She’s finally back out in the field, leading her own teams. You protected her. That’s gonna make her think you think she’s weak, like she can’t do it anymore.”

“Didn’t used to be like that,” Maggie mumbled, pushing a chunk of carrot around the plate with her chopsticks.

“She almost died. She’s…scared, I think. I don’t know, she doesn’t really talk to me about it.”

“She’s almost died before. With Rick. She didn’t yell at me for taking care of her then.”

The unspoken difference between now and then sat heavily between them until Kara finally suggested finishing dinner over a movie.

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The next time Maggie ran into Alex was on a chill, rainy morning. Her feet smacked against the small puddles along the path, splashing cold water up her ankles. If it hadn’t become an integral part of her routine, she wouldn’t be out there, and the sight of another figure running along the path toward her came as a surprise. With the heavy rain pouring down, Maggie couldn’t make out any of the other runner’s features until they were a few feet away. “Danvers?”

Alex bobbed her head up and down. “Gross day for a run.”

“Could say the same to you.”

“Trying to get back to where I was before…” The rest of the sentence hung in the air.

“Knowing you, you’re already stronger and faster than you ever were.” Maggie attempted a smile as water dripped down her face.

“Do you really believe that, Sawyer?”

“Alex,” Maggie sighed. She wished she could reach out and reassure her the way she always had.
“What?” Alex’s voice was rough, and Maggie could almost see the walls coming up.

“It’s not—I was scared, okay?”

“Because you didn’t think I’d move on time or get off the shot fast enough.” Alex crossed her arms over her chest, her shoulders hunching.

“Because I’d almost lost you once already, and I’m not ready to go through that again when everything is so…there are so many things I haven’t said.”

“Like what?”

Maggie knew this was her opening, could hear it in the slight tremor to Alex’s voice, but she couldn’t bring herself to open her heart up again only to have it broken once more. “I—I can’t.” And then she was running as fast as she could, ignoring the burn of lactic acid that had built up as she stood and chatted with Alex. She didn’t look back.

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It was two weeks later that Maggie ran into Alex again. She was back in the same park strolling down the path with a coffee in hand, ready to enjoy a moment of peace in the fresh air on her day off. As she rounded the bend, she found Alex on the same bench they’d once called theirs, a coffee in her hand and sunglasses making it impossible to tell whether or not Alex had noticed her yet. She kept walking towards Alex and took solace in the fact that Alex didn’t bolt when she looked up.

“This seat taken?”

“Uh, no.”

Maggie lowered herself to the bench, careful to leave enough space between her and Alex—a constant reminder of everything they’d lost. “Lunch break?”

“Forced afternoon off.” After a moment, Alex added, “Apparently I’ve been working a few too many late nights.”

“You always did when you were stressed.”

“Yeah.”

“Want to tell me what’s bothering you?”

Alex was silent as she stared ahead, watching dogs chase each other around the field and parents and nannies strolling around with children in tow. “I think you already know.”

“Want a distraction, or would you rather I left?”

“I don’t want you to leave.”

Maggie drew in a shaky breath, reminding herself that it was nothing more than an answer to her question. “See that woman over there?” She was inordinately proud of the fact that she managed to keep her voice even.

“Which one?”

“Pink shirt. Boxer dog running around like a maniac with the tennis ball.”

“Yeah.”
“What’s her name?”

Alex blinked rapidly to keep the tears from falling, but her voice was hoarse when she answered. “Lindsey.”

“Yeah? Nice name. It fits.” Alex nodded in agreement. “What’s Lindsey do for a living?”

“She’s a fitness coach. For dogs.”

Maggie let out a snort of laughter then spluttered as coffee burned the back of her throat and nose. “That her dog or one of her clients?”

“Definitely hers. She uses him for the before and after ads.”

“That so?”

“Yep.”

“What’s the before? Chubby dog?”

“Barely even wanted to go outside and play.”

“Sat in the basement and made all the guests uncomfortable by humping his pillow.”

“Gross,” Alex exclaimed, laughing and shoving at Maggie before pulling back her hand.

“Look, he’s clearly made a full recovery. Sometimes we have to own up to even the most shameful parts of our past.”

Alex snorted and rolled her eyes.

“So what does Lindsey do for fun?”

“Instagram model.”

“For her or dogs?”

“Her.”

“She dating anyone?”

“Macho dude named Jeff or Jake or Joe or something like that.”

“He good to her?”

Alex shrugged. “He’s fine, but he doesn’t like dogs.”

“Oh well that has disaster written all over it from the start.” And suddenly Maggie felt like they weren’t talking about Lindsey and her J-name boyfriend anymore.

As if struck by the same realization, Alex shrugged. “It’s fine. They’re really only dating to get more Instagram followers. He was really popular too.”

“He train cats?”

“No. He sells protein powder.”
“Ah, so equally important social function.”

Alex murmured out a noise of assent as she sipped at the coffee that had cooled as they chatted.
“What about plaid shirt behind her?”

“At the jeans? Name’s Caroline. She’s bi. In a 9-year-long relationship.”

“So many details with so little prompting,” Alex joked.

“Oh. No. I know her.”

“Oh.”

“She runs the queer lady trivia night event down at the Abbey, remember that gay bar I brought you to?”

“Oh.” Alex sipped at her lukewarm coffee. “You—uh—you dating, then?”

After a moment of silence, Maggie shook her head. “No.” Then she asked, “You?”

“No. Uh, definitely not.”

“I mean, it’s fine, obviously. You can do whatever.” Maggie grabbed her jacket and stood abruptly.

“I should go.”

“Maggie!”

“I’ll, uh, see you around, Danvers.” Maggie blinked back tears as she half-ran to her bike, taking a few calming breaths before driving back to the precinct.

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Maggie spent weeks wondering whether she should try dating someone new. Part of her thought it might be healthy, but another part of her objected that it wouldn’t be fair to whatever woman she led on for a few weeks knowing at least her first few times back out there were probably doomed to failure. She spent too many nights rereading Alex’s letters and wondering if she still felt the same way, then stuffing the letters back into the desk drawer as though the wooden barrier could keep the words from creeping into her dreams at night.

Eventually she dragged herself out to the Abbey again. It wasn’t the same as committing to trying to date again, but it was...well, it was something. It was effort. She put on nice jeans and a white button up and tried not to remember how Alex always told her she looked good in it or how it always ended up on their floor by the end of the night. It was the first time since the break up that she’d been there for something other than an event, the first time she’d been there on a regular Saturday night when the air was tinged with possibility and furtive glances were cast across the dance floor and shy smiles and phone numbers exchanged over drinks.

Side-stepping bodies and drinks held carelessly out to the side, Maggie maneuvered her way up to the bar, biting back an angry comment when a lanky boy slid in front of her. All that mattered was getting a drink and getting a seat and maybe trying to show some interest in the sea of bodies around her. And it wasn’t as though she couldn’t feel anything. She hadn’t at first, hadn’t felt like much of anything. Old vices lacked the thrill they once held. The vegan chocolate fudge brownie Ben and Jerry’s she bought specifically to binge eat in true rom-com breakup fashion failed to satisfy, just like, well, everything else failed to satisfy her other needs, failed to even excite them in the first place.
“Scotch. Neat, please,” Maggie ordered when the bartender finally turned to her. With a drink in hand, Maggie cut through the growing crowds down to one of the high-top tables scattered around the edge of the bar. Perched on the seat, she scanned the crowds, looking for familiar faces. When she saw none—or at least none that she wanted to talk to—she turned her attention to the unfamiliar ones. It hadn’t been that long since she was single, but god, she felt like she’d already forgotten the art of finding someone new. It all seemed so…superficial. It lacked the organic chemistry that had been there from the first with Alex. But she forced herself to try, forced herself to look around and feign enjoyment and see if anyone caught her eye. There were gorgeous women, of course, there always were. The comparisons bubbled up in her chest, though. One woman had a jawline that almost reminded her of Alex’s. Another seemed to dance nearly as well.

“This seat taken?”

Maggie looked up to find a woman even smaller than her with dark hair that had a purple streak running through it cascading down her back. “Uh…no.”

“I’m Jasmine.”

“Maggie.”

“I haven’t seen you around here. You new?”

“Ah.” Maggie smiled wistfully, swirling the contents of her glass. “No. Been here a few years actually.”

“Oh. Not a fan of the bar scene, or…?”

“Work a lot of nights. Was seeing someone for a while. You know how it goes.”

“Work schedules can be a real bitch.” Jasmine tipped back her beer for a long sip before she looked back at Maggie. “What do you do?”

“Detective.”

“Ah fancy. I see a lot of NCPD officers at work.”

“What do you do?”

“ER nurse.”

“Gotta be a tough job.”

“Right back at ya.”

They sank into silence once more.

“I’m gonna go grab another drink.”

Maggie didn’t point out that her beer was still half-full. “Nice chatting with you.”

“You too. And, uh, good luck getting back out there after whoever she was.”

Maggie winced. “That obvious?”

“Little bit.”
Once Jasmine had slipped back into the throngs of bodies grinding together on the dance floor, Maggie slunk back over to the bar. “Another scotch. Still neat.”

She drank the second one more quickly, willing it to infuse her veins with some kind of desire, any kind of passion. Figuring there was no better place to test it than out on the dance floor, Maggie slipped into the crowd, forcing herself to take deep breaths and ignore the swell of panic that always bubbled up inside her at the first press of bodies too close against her.

For a song or two, she danced alone, pretending like it wasn’t awkward as hell. She’d never been the kind of person who could close her eyes and lose herself in the music. Instead she was self-conscious and too wary of those around her to relax. Sometime around song number three, someone new appeared. “Hey! You wanna dance?”

Maggie shrugged. “Sure.” She was hot and nameless, and the second Maggie agreed, she was pressed up against her. And for once she felt something, some low tug of arousal that was nothing like what she’d had with Alex but something—something more than the steady absence of anything she’d felt since the breakup. It was…nice to be held. To feel wanted. She didn’t quite get lost in the music and the feel of their bodies moving together—still couldn’t do that without Alex’s sure hands curled around her hips—but her typical hyper-awareness of her surroundings dulled enough as they danced.

She was content enough to merely throw a grunted out, “Sorry,” over her shoulder when she stepped straight back into someone, feeling them stumble forward. But when she looked up, she was met with those same wide doe eyes that she’d been trying to forget all night.

“Oh.” It was breathy and rushed out, and Maggie watched as Alex’s eyes darted back and forth as she looked for the best possible escape route.

“Alex, wait!”

The woman in front of Maggie turned around. “You okay?”

“I’m just leaving.”

Maggie watched as Alex’s shoulders and elbows grew increasingly aggressive as she forced her way out of the crowds. “I’m—I need to go—I’m sorry.”

“Whatever.”

“Right,” Maggie sighed to herself, pushing back through the same crowd of now-disgruntled people until she made it to the perimeter. Ignoring proper social protocol, Maggie got up on her knees on one of the barstools to better survey the room, looking for the flash of reddish brown hair she was once able to pick out of any group. She was about to give up when she saw Alex leaving the bathrooms and making a beeline for the exit. She cut around the edge of the dance floor and met Alex at the door, panting slightly as she held up her hand. “Wait.”

“What? Why…Maggie, no, go have fun.” Her voice was tight, and Maggie almost felt guilty for trying to keep her there.

“I…let me buy you a drink?”

“You don’t owe me anything. We’re—you’re allowed to dance with other people or date other people or whatever.”

“This was the first time I’d tried,” Maggie admitted, her voice soft and barely audible over the music
“I mean, she was pretty.”

She wasn’t you, Maggie thought, but she bit her tongue. Instead she led Alex back in and found them a table in the far corner where it was quieter, even if there were a handful of couples—or, more likely, two strangers who’d hit it off—groping each other around them. “Whiskey, neat?”

“Make it a double.”

“Got it.”

After several minutes of pushing her way through the crowds, Maggie made it back with two drinks in hand and only one splash of someone else’s beer on her boot. “Whiskey for you. Scotch for me.”

“Thanks.” Alex rolled the bottom edge of her glass along the table as she waited for Maggie to say something, anything.

“You, uh, you been seeing anyone else?”

Alex let out a bark of laughter and shook her head.

“What’s so funny? You were just saying it was something we both could be doing.”

“No, I, uh, I tried. Once. It didn’t work out.”

“Oh?” Maggie’s gut churned with a mix of emotions: jealousy over this unknown person who got to spend time with the woman she thought would be her wife; a sense of satisfaction in knowing it hadn’t gone well; guilt over hearing that Alex wasn’t happy with other people either.

“She was, uh, cute. Really cute, even. Tinier than you,” Alex admitted with a laugh. “And it seemed like maybe the kind of thing that could work because she worked in an ER, so she kept hours almost as weird as mine.”

Maggie nearly choked on her scotch. “Did you go out with Jasmine?”

“You know Jasmine?”

“Fucking small ass lesbian network.” Alex furrowed her brow as she looked at Maggie, waiting for her to elaborate. “I met her tonight.”

“Oh. I mean, you shouldn’t—just because things didn’t work between us—”

“Things already didn’t work between us either. Don’t worry about it.” After a minute, she decided it was better to rip it off like a bandaid and get it out in the open that Alex was dating—or at least trying to date—again. “Why didn’t you two work out?”

Alex rubbed at the back of her neck, a red flush creeping up her chest. “She, uh, she said it was pretty obvious I wasn’t over you yet.”

“Fucking ironic.” Maggie cursed the way the few drinks had loosened her tongue just enough to let something slip when Alex’s eyes flashed up.

“What do you mean?”

“She may have implied I clearly wasn’t over my ex yet.”

“Oh.” After a moment’s silence, Alex chuckled softly. “Bad luck for Jasmine, huh?”
And then Maggie was laughing in earnest for what felt like the first time since Alex had gotten her memories back, drawing annoyed grumblings from two of the couples closest to them. “Not her finest choices.”

“You, uh, you still think about me?”

“Alex.” Maggie sighed, trying to find the right words. “Of course I do. You…we were engaged.”

“I just thought when you—with the letters and not hearing from you—I assumed you were ready for it all to be in the past.”

“Sometimes it seems like maybe it’d be better to leave it in the past,” Maggie admitted. “I don’t…even with your letters and even knowing how much you went through, I—you still hurt me.”

“I know.” Alex bowed her head and picked at the remnants of some advertising sticker left on the table. “I’m sorry.”

“I believe you, but…it doesn’t erase the hurt.”

“I…I panicked. I don’t know if you read, but I got really in my head, and somehow I didn’t think to talk it out with you. I thought—I thought that if I did, you might pull away again. You’d already been worried about dating someone so new to all of this, and then I already used my one fuck up, and I didn’t want—I couldn’t deal with ruining something. And then I did it myself.”

Maggie didn’t fight her instincts then, didn’t stop her body from reaching out to Alex as words tumbled out of her mouth. “No, no, Alex, it was never like that. I—I see why you thought that way, but it doesn’t matter how long you’ve been doing things, there will always be conflicts and shit you didn’t consider right away.” She rubbed at her forehead, wishing more than anything that they had dealt with these issues when they came up the first time. “All I ever wanted was for you to be honest, to tell me when you were scared. And I’m so sorry that I made you scared to come to me, to talk to me. I should’ve been your partner. I should’ve been better.”

“You were good, Maggie, so good. But I think—there was this little voice in my head that kept whispering that things would fall apart if I rocked the boat too much. And so instead I lied to you, and I kept insisting that things were fine because if I said it enough, maybe it would be true.” Maggie nodded; she understood the sentiment. “But instead—instead I lost the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“You didn’t lose anything.” Maggie snapped, feeling a dam break and anger come rushing out. “You made a choice. I told you that you were enough. I told you I wanted you—wanted a life with you. But that wasn’t enough for you.”

“But it was. I—I wanted the family, yeah, but I wanted that family with you, Maggie. I didn’t want some random kid with some random woman. I wanted you and Gertrude, and for a long time, I assumed we needed some little baby to complete that picture. And, yeah, a part of me still wants that baby,” Alex admitted, pausing to sip at her whiskey, leaving a few drops in the glass in case she needed them later. “But I—that idea of motherhood I’d had since I was a kid. I’d had it since I was growing up with two parents with jobs that kept them busy but never really at risk. I’d had it back when I thought I’d need to marry a man and figured I’d be a doctor or a scientist like my parents.”

“People have single parents. People have parents with risky jobs.” Maggie heard the words as though they were spoken by someone else, so detached as they were.

“Yeah…but those jobs aren’t normally quite so risky. I will always be Kara’s big sister, and I will
always be there fighting at her side when the world is collapsing around us.” She reached out and grabbed hold of Maggie’s hand. “Almost everyone who would have been a part of that kid’s life died. Together. Me, Kara, J’onn, James, hell, even Winn! And it wouldn’t have been the first time my entire support network was almost wiped out by some threat we all faced together”—her mind wandered back to Myriad, back to the Daxamite invasion—“because that’s what we do. We get the rest of the world to safety, then we come back, and we fight.”

“You can’t let fear dictate your choices, Danvers.”

“What part of me looks afraid? It’s not wrong to be pragmatic. It’s not wrong to remember how broken I was, how broken my family was, when my dad died. And that was one single person. I don’t—I can’t do that, Maggie. I won’t do that.”

“But—”

“No!” Alex blushed a faint pink at the volume, leaning forward and dropping her voice. “I wanted to be a mom because I thought I could do right by a kid. For me, leaving a kid behind when I go off to work every single day knowing my odds of dying are a hell of a lot higher than just about any other person’s? I don’t really think I’m doing right by them anymore. But I’m not willing to give up my job or ignore the impulse to run into battle with Kara.” Alex took a steadying breath. “Just like I’m not willing to give you up a second time if there—if there’s still a chance—because I’m done ignoring the way I feel about you—the way I still feel about you.”

“I…I need water. Just—just stay here?” Maggie pleaded.

Alex watched as Maggie walked away, watched as she raised up on her tip-toes at the bar trying to catch the bartender’s attention, watched as some woman sidled up next to her, a flirty grin on her face. She watched as the woman wrote something on a slip of paper while Maggie waited, then looked down at the table as soon as Maggie headed back to her.

“Got one for you too.” Maggie slid the second glass across the table.

“Thanks. Saw you, uh, also got that girl’s number.” Alex tried to sound enthusiastic.

“Oh. What? Yeah. I don’t know.”

“No, I mean, she was cute. You should go find her again.”

“Excuse me?”

“Like you said, you—you’re a free agent and all.”

Maggie slid back down from the stool, shaking her head. “What the fuck is that, Alex?”

Not one to be on uneven ground, Alex stood up crossing her arms. “What do you mean?”

“You tell me to go date, then you tell me you changed your mind, tell me you still want me. But then I get back and you’re telling me to go chase after some random woman who did not, by the way, give me her number, but whatever.”

“Really?”

Maggie huffed and rolled her eyes as if to say, Really? Does it matter? Stuffing her phone in her pocket, Maggie turned for the door. “You let me know when you figure out what you actually want.”
“I already know what I want!” Alex huffed, keeping pace with Maggie.

Maggie rounded on Alex, frustration etched into her features. “And what is that?”

And then Alex’s hands were fisting roughly in her shirt and dragging her forward, and the lips on hers were so much different than they had been that first night, even if the moment was achingly familiar. And god, it was all so familiar. Even with the roughness and the desperation, it was Alex—her Alex—who knew her better than anyone else. Desire bloomed low in her gut and rushed through her body like flames licking up her veins, and, oh, there had been nothing like that since Alex.

When they finally broke apart, they were both panting, breath ragged and lips swollen and eyes dark with desire.

“Please,” Alex rasped.

“This doesn’t fix everything, you know that, right?”

“I know,” Alex nodded. “I know.”

And so Maggie let Alex take her hand and lead her out into the cool night air that did nothing to quell the desire she felt sparking between them. She tugged Alex around the corner and down two blocks to the hotel she’d walked past hundreds of times, but only ever been in twice—once to take a witness statement and once for a fundraiser. It was one thing to fall into bed together, but the idea of bringing her into the one space she’d carved out for herself as she tried to find a semblance of peace or of going back to the bed and the apartment they once shared was too much, and she was grateful when Alex didn’t question it.

“Room for two.”

“Do you have a reservation?”

“Uh…” Maggie was hit with the sensation of feeling like a teenager trying to sneak into a room on prom night. “No.”

“We only have two rooms left—it’s a Saturday night on one of our busiest weekends.”

“Okay, okay.” Maggie nodded even more quickly, trying to rush her along.

“We have a twin room, which would have two double beds”—she glanced down at where Alex’s hand still rested on Maggie’s waist—“or we have our honeymoon suite.”

Maggie looked back at Alex and couldn’t help but laugh—loud and long—because the universe had one fucked up sense of humor. “Double bed is bigger than a twin, yeah?” Maggie asked, not caring that she would know exactly why they needed to know.

“It is.” Her tone was prim, and she looked a consummate professional, though Maggie swore she saw the corner of her mouth twitch up slightly.

“We’ll take it.”

Once the much too slow process of paying and reserving and giving a name and a credit card was finally through, they grabbed their card and bolted for the elevators, pressing the button to call the elevator three times for good measure. When it finally arrived, they nearly tripped in their hurry to squeeze through the doors, and Maggie jammed the button for the 14th floor, then the door close as quickly as she could manage, turning back to Alex the moment the doors slid shut.
Alex was less hesitant then, if it could even have been called hesitancy before. Her hands slid up Maggie’s chest, finding the buttons and clawing them open as her mouth dropped to Maggie’s neck, kissing roughly enough that Maggie knew she’d be covered in marks the following morning.

The ding of the door sent them flying to opposite corners of the elevator, though Alex jumped in front of Maggie the moment she noticed how far down she’d gotten on the buttons.

“She said the top floor. They wouldn’t have said the top floor if they didn’t mean the top floor,” a woman huffed in exasperation, stomping into the elevator with a pile of towels and goggles and floaties as a man and two children traipsed in behind her.

Alex and Maggie held their breath for the next four floors until the doors dinged open once more and they shuffled out from behind the family, avoiding any and all eye contact. Alex’s mouth reattached itself to Maggie’s neck the second they were alone again, leaving Maggie whimpering loudly and fumbling with the room key until she finally slid it through at the right speed to hear the satisfying click as the door unlocked.

“Finally,” Alex murmured, pushing Maggie inside and kicking the door shut behind them.
Chapter Notes

Note the rating jump—it picks up exactly where the last chapter ended. Thank you all for the wonderful comments—I really do enjoy getting to hear your thoughts!

As Maggie’s back hit the wall, she forced herself to stop thinking, to stop worrying, for one night. They both wanted it, wanted each other, and they both knew better than to think sex was the magic cure that would fix their relationship—if it were, their last night together would have saved them. It was catharsis...the physical eruption of all the things they couldn’t yet get into words. That was enough—it had to be enough. And so, for the first time in months, Maggie gave herself over to feeling, to the lust coursing through her and making her feel alive.

Kicking off the wall, Maggie pushed Alex forward and down to the double bed, clambering up and pinning her to the mattress with a grip that they both knew Alex could have broken in seconds if she’d wanted to. Instead she looped her legs around Maggie’s waist and dragged her down so their bodies were flush, every inch pressed together. Maggie groaned at the feeling of Alex’s tongue slipping between her lips and took the opportunity to deepen the kiss, shifting to press one thighs between Alex’s legs and rolling her hips into Alex’s to a rhythm only they knew. It was all so easy, she thought, falling back into things, letting herself seek out pleasure in Alex’s strong arms. She came with a groan like some sort of hormonal teenager still fully clothed and grinding against Alex’s thigh.

“Fuck,” Alex panted, looking up at Maggie, her mouth slightly parted and her pupils blown wide with want. Maggie had nearly forgotten what it felt like to have someone look at her that way. The first time she’d come earlier than she’d been expecting with no way of hiding it—collapsing onto Alex’s back, the strap-on still half-inside her girlfriend but barely moving, save for the stutter of Maggie’s hips—she’d felt her cheeks burn with embarrassment and apologized profusely, only to find Alex looking at her with a heady mix of awe and unadulterated lust. When she’d gotten enough control over her body to thrust her hips forward, once more building to a steady rhythm, she’d found Alex dripping wet, and Alex, her sweet, new-to-this Alex, had mumbled, “It’s hot...knowing you’re getting off on fucking me.” And god, it had left Maggie somehow closer to the edge than she had been just moments before coming. But she bit the inside of her cheek and drove her hips forward and made Alex come three times in a row as an, “I’m sorry,” and a, “Thank you,” and a much too early, “Fuck, I love you.”

Forcing herself out of memories, Maggie pulled back long enough to strip Alex of her clothes, pausing only when Alex took her own turn, ripping open the final few buttons of Maggie’s white button up, pushing it over her shoulders and watching it flutter to the floor with a satisfied smirk.

Maggie trailed her fingers between Alex’s legs as she draped herself over Alex’s body, her mouth sucking a slow path along Alex’s neck. The insides of her thighs were already sticky with proof of her arousal, and even the faintest brushes of Maggie’s fingers close to the apex of her thighs left Alex’s whole body trembling. “You still like it when I come, huh?”

She felt Alex’s whole body shudder in response. The low groan rumbled through her chest.

“Do you want me inside you?”
“Please.” Alex’s voice had already taken on the raspy quality that never failed to drive Maggie crazy. And besides, Maggie had never been able to say no to that, and she wouldn’t dream of starting in the moment. As she slid inside of Alex for the first time in so long, Alex’s lips found hers. It was less kissing than it was the sharing of breath as Alex gasped her pleasure into Maggie’s mouth as her hips rolled up to meet Maggie’s hand. Maggie tried to remember what this was—and what it wasn’t—but her heart didn’t care that they were in some tiny bed in a mediocre hotel room doing little more than fucking; it still felt like coming home.

Alex came with Maggie’s name on her lips, and she was already urging Maggie’s hips up to her mouth before her body had even come down from its high.

“Not, uh, not yet. Could you…just your hands?” Maggie mumbled.

“Oh?” Alex’s brow furrowed—it wasn’t something Maggie asked for often—and Maggie had to quash the urge to kiss her so much more softly than the moment called for because of course Alex would remember, of course she would worry about things being perfect even then. “Right, um, yeah, of course.”

The flash of disappointment tinged with fear and hurt was beyond clear to Maggie, who had learned to watch for it in the scant few moments before it could be hidden behind a mask of cool composure once more. “No, I just…I want to see you…to have you, um, up here with me.” And god, those weren’t words she should be saying, those weren’t feelings she should be having, but she couldn’t stop the rush of warm affection as Alex’s eyes met her own, a wide smile adorning her lips. She kissed Maggie softly then—the kind of kisses they used to share on the mornings when they didn’t wake up to ongoing emergencies, when they had the luxury of calling out sick with the Black Lung and making French toast and kissing slowly, lovingly, until heat blossomed between them and turned it into something more.

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The next morning, Maggie woke up to a completely numb right arm and Alex’s warm weight pressed into her side. She groaned as she tried to sit, her joints stiff from a long night of activity that had quickly moved to the floor—the too small beds quickly forgotten. Their makeshift nest of pillows and comforters and sheets had seemed more than enough in the throes of increasingly desperate measures after falling half out of the beds one too many times. Pulling back the blanket, Maggie noted wryly that both of their knees were battered and bruised despite their best efforts to add extra layers of padding to the hard floor, and in the shower she discovered the strips of carpet burn up her forearms as they stung under the stream of hot water.

“Hey,” Alex yawned, stumbling into the bathroom.

“Hey. Sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“S’okay. Latest I’ve slept in ages.”

“Me too,” Maggie admitted.

Alex shuffled her feet along the towel spread out like a mat in front of the shower. “Uh…I think they have free breakfast downstairs. Want anything?”

“Sure, you know what I like.” Maggie winced; true as it might be, she hadn’t meant to say something quite so…domestic.

“Right, yeah, of course.” The smile Alex tried and failed to hide almost made it worth the slip.
By the time Maggie got out of the shower, Alex had returned with a spread of grocery store pastries and bagels with the little packets of jam and peanut butter that Maggie remembered sneaking out of the dining hall during college for cheap late night snacks.

“Coffee’s alright. Better than the precinct’s.” Alex pushed a cup over to Maggie, and the first sip revealed that it was prepared just as she liked it. “I’m gonna shower really fast.”

“Yeah, sure. Extra towels are over the toilet.”

Alex nodded and thanked Maggie like she didn’t understand how hotels generally operated.

Eventually, though, their morning routines ended, and no pleasantries remained to distract from the reality of the night before.

“I don’t want that to be a one-time thing,” Alex blurted out, flushing a light shade of pink but not backing down from her words.

“I don’t know that I’m ready to jump back into things.”

“Right.” Alex chewed on her lower lip.

“At least not where they were.”

“Oh? Yeah, yeah, of course not. I mean, it’s been—time’s gone by. Things have changed.”

“Right. And I think…I think that I want to get to know you again.”

“Yeah.” Alex nodded eagerly with the same levels of enthusiasm she’d once approached their early dates or her introduction to the limited world of lesbian cinema or her first forays into the joys of going down on another woman.

“I don’t want to have any lies between us.” The “this time” hung heavy between them.

In the spirit of wiping the slate clean, Alex amended, “And no more half-truths. Understood.”

“Right. Well…in that case…um, I don’t know where to start.” Maggie picked at the remnants of a dry croissant she’d eaten half of more to give her mouth something to do than for any other reason. “It’s funny cause months ago, I had so many things I wanted to say to you.”

“Like?”

“Like…I’m angry at you. And hurt by you.”

“I get it. I—I know I probably didn’t have a right to be—”

“You don’t need to have a right to feel things, Alex,” Maggie interjected.

“But I—I was the one that panicked. I was the one that ended things. And it seems wrong that I was so fucking crushed by it, so hurt by it, when I was the one that did it.”

“We both could have been better at the end.”

“At least you were honest,” Alex whispered.

“But I didn’t—there were things I’d just assumed, you know? And we’ve never done well when we left things to assumptions.” Maggie let out a humorless snort and shook her head, thinking back to
the night she’d let Alex run out of the bar, assuming she’d have heard in Maggie’s rejection the 
unspoken, “Not yet.” the scared, “I care too much to lose you.” There had been the full weeks they’d 
spent assuming both of them liked Mon-El, assuming both of them liked Lyra, not wanting to be the 
asshole to say, “My partner can come, but yours sucks; leave them at home or maybe just, you know, 
leave them.” The Valentine’s Day debacle was its own category of miscommunication, but for a 
while it seemed to change things, to push them into better habits and more honest conversations. 
Then…then things had fallen apart at the end, and neither of them had realized until it was too late.

“Well then, for the sake of no assumptions, why don’t we go through it all. Ask any question. Either 
answer honestly or don’t answer at all.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“I guess…yeah, alright. Deal.”

“Do you”—Alex took a deep breath and let out a shuddering exhale—“honestly, do you ever see 
yourself being able to move past what happened and be together again? Is there something— 
anything—still there for you? I put all my cards on the table in those letters, but I’ll say it again.”
Alex looked up and held Maggie’s gaze. “I still love you. I…I will get over you if you tell me that 
you don’t want me even though—even though I’ve rethought a few things. But I can’t stop loving 
you when I’m still holding onto the thought that we might have a chance.”

“I—you know I still love you, Danvers.” Alex tried to hide a grimace at the distance her last name 
seemed to impose. “And I want to trust you, I do, but I—I’m scared. There, that’s honest.”

“Good. Or, no, not good that you’re scared. You know what I mean, right?”

“It hasn’t been that long.” Maggie laughed drily. “I just—I lost more than you that night. I lost…I 
lost everyone.”

“I know.” Alex’s voice cracked, and Maggie wondered if Alex knew how utterly broken she looked. 
“And I didn’t mean for it to happen like that.”

Maggie held a hand up. “I know. I wasn’t—obviously you were upset too, and I wasn’t expecting 
you to come knocking at my door with ice cream and movies.” She held her hand up again to silence 
any additions. “And I know that Kara and the boys apparently came looking for me too. I’d 
moved…and I wasn’t quite ready to see them after the way things between us went down.”

“I’m sorry.” Alex’s voice was barely a whisper.

“It’s not,” Maggie began before shaking her head, reminding herself that their trust exercise only 
worked if they were both honest. “Thank you.”

“Do you, uh, have anything you want to ask me?”

Maggie nodded and steeled her nerves. “Are you sure? The things you said in your letter…about 
reconsidering—are you sure?”

“I am. And there’s a part of me that’s really fucking broken up about it.” Alex toyed with her watch. 
“But there’s a bigger part of me that knows I’d be so much angrier with myself if I gave up the things 
I had now—and not, not just you, you know—but if I gave up being the one to go running into 
trouble to protect the people around me, to be there for Kara and J’onn…” This time Alex was the 
one to hold her hand up to silence Maggie’s protests. “I know—I know that something could happen
any day to anyone, but the odds are different, Maggie, you know they are. And I’m okay with it for me. I’m okay with knowing that I go to work and do something that matters, even though there’s a good chance I might not come home from work one day. And you—and Kara and J’onn and James and Winn—you get it! You do the same thing. But I can’t sit down and tell a baby that, not after knowing what it was like to go through it.”

“And your really don’t think there’s a day when you’ll step back to a less…active role?”

“Don’t think I haven’t considered all the possibilities. I shattered my tibia, Maggie, and I was barely able to stay upright after—you know, that last battle with Reign. I’m fully aware of the fact that I could get so badly injured that I couldn’t be out in the field anymore.” Her lips curved up into a wry smile. “Not that being on desk duty at the DEO has ever really kept anyone safe…” Alex shook her head; now wasn’t the time to consider new safety standards or additional regulations or protocols to implement.

“I kind of meant as you got older, but I’m glad your mind jumped to horrible injury first.”

“Doesn’t it kind of prove my point?” Maggie shrugged. “Maybe one day I will be old enough that I spend more and more time in the lab. But I don’t see that happening for a long time, Maggie. And I don’t really see you being the kind to sit back and stay home or at a desk for a kid either.”

“No… But there are other women out there—women who don’t have jobs like ours and who I’m sure would love to be with you and raise a family with you. They could give you what I couldn’t.”

“Maggie! You’re not getting it! You—you were the part of the puzzle that made everything click into place.”

“How can you know that?”

“I tried, Maggie. I tried getting over you and going out with other women. I went to bars with Winn who, by the way, is almost endearingly bad as a wingman. I went out on a few ill-fated dates with Jasmine. I”—Alex swallowed heavily, her gaze dropping to her hands as she pinched at her fingers —“I slept with someone else.”

“Oh.” Maggie knew she had no claim over Alex, had no right to feel the burn of jealousy running through her, but knowing it and being able to convince her body were two very different things.

“I—it was when I went to the other Earth.”

Maggie thought back to the letters; maybe she could have read between the lines there a little more.

“Her name’s Sara. We met at a wedding and got plastered together, and I slept with her without, uh, without knowing her name really. And Kara and everyone kept acting like I should be pleased because I was finally getting over you, but I—I wasn’t.” Alex looked up at the ceiling and rubbed at her face. “All I could think about the next morning was that she wasn’t you—she wasn’t even close. And all I wanted was you.”

“But maybe if you tried—”

“Maggie!” Alex snapped. “Remember how last night you got pissed when I asked if you were gonna go try to see that woman from the bar?”

“Uh, yeah.” Maggie twisted her fingers together.

“Same rules apply here. I’m telling you I’ve tried—I’ve tried casual meetings and dating and fucking,
and all of them remind me of the one thing I gave up—the thing I gave up over this idea of what I wanted my life to have in it, even though you were the only person I ever wanted to share that life with.”

“I—I don’t—it’s,” Maggie stammered, desperate to keep the conversation going because the moment they stopped was the moment she needed to answer, the moment they needed to reach some sort of conclusion, no matter how tentative it might be. “What if it’s more complicated than that?”

“Isn’t it always?”

“I suppose.” She wondered when Alex had become the wise one between the two of them.

“If you are willing to try—to really try, not to go into it still convinced it’s going to fail—I want you, Maggie. And if that means being your friend and starting over and earning your trust until I can ask you out and get a yes, well then so be it. I’m in it for the long haul.” Alex licked her lips and forced herself to hold Maggie’s gaze. “Because I love you, and you have never stopped being my family or the person I want to see at the end of every day and wake up next to every morning. You’re the one who I want to tell all about the crazy shit at work or text when I see vegan bakeries like I don’t already know I’m going to get you something.”

And Maggie knew there was work to do, knew it couldn’t be so simple as hearing Alex say those things and falling back into her arms, but for a moment, she let herself believe it could be. Maggie leaned forward, clutched at Alex’s shirt, and dragged her the rest of the way in, letting her eyes flutter shut the moment their lips met. The kiss was slower then—nothing like the ones from the end of their night and everything like the ones she’d taken for granted for too many months.

After several long minutes, Alex pulled back, her lips glistening and a spark of hope dancing in her eyes. “Is that a yes?”

“It’s an…I’m willing to try.”
Chapter 5

Thanks for sticking with me through to the end here! I really appreciated your comments and encouragement along the way! I hope you enjoy the happy ending I promised after the delightfully angsty "oh" of part 1

Maggie paced down the hallway outside Alex’s apartment—a routine that was beginning to feel far too familiar—until she gathered the courage to knock. Two sharp raps against the door were all it took for it to swing open, Maggie’s fist still poised to knock a third time.

“Oh. Hey.”

“Hey.” Alex shifted her weight from her left to her right foot. “I, uh, might have been watching you pace…through the peephole.”

Maggie rubbed at the back of her neck. “You, uh, you caught that, then?”

“Little bit.”

“Well, first date jitters are a thing, right?”

“They are.”

“So then it must be a sign we’re doing something right.”

Alex cracked a smile before letting her gaze rake up and down Maggie’s outfit. “I’d say you’re doing more than one thing right…”

Tugging at the lapels of her blazer, Maggie shrugged. “I just, you know, it’s a nicer restaurant.” It wasn’t one they’d gone to until several months after they’d started dating the first time, but then they had fallen into things, had shifted from coworkers to friends to something so much better. This time, Maggie couldn’t help but think things needed to feel a little more formal. If they were going to try again, it needed to be a clear restart, some built-in promise not to descend into the same patterns that had broken them the first time.

“To quote a very wise woman, you clean up nice.”

“Ah well”—Maggie tipped her head to the side, a glint in her eyes as she fought a smile—“you do too, you know, with the dress and the shoes and whatever the hell else it was you said.”

“I suppose we can’t all have perfect recall.” Alex sighed dramatically as she looped her arm in Maggie’s, and Maggie couldn’t bring herself to try to limit their interactions to something more awkward and stilted like a real first date.

“Shut up, you do not have perfect recall.”

“How would you know? It’s our first date.”
“About to be our last too,” Maggie grumbled, earning a poke in the ribs and a fearful look that was quickly hidden behind a too-loud laugh. “No, I mean, you know, I’m teasing you, Danvers.”

“Right, yeah, of course.”

This, Maggie thought, felt exactly like a first date. The stumbling over words and uncertainty over intentions. The question of how familiar was too familiar. But then they were in the car and Alex was chatting about a case, and the old ebb and flow of their conversation came back so easily, much too easily to let Maggie forget how much history existed.

Over dinner, Maggie teased Alex by pretending to consider the snail eggs as a shared hors d'oeuvre, and Alex asked about some of Maggie’s coworkers and knew right away when Maggie tried to shrug off the frustration that still ate away at her over a case that had been stolen from her the day before. And, sure, it was something that a first date wouldn’t know, but maybe it was something that a friend could know, that someone still hovering in that awkward space between friendship and more might say.

They ended the night making out in Maggie’s car until hands began wandering and Maggie slammed herself back into the space between the seat and the door, one finger raised and her chest heaving with frustrated desire. “No—no, we should wait.”

“You know this past weekend I had my finger ins—”

“Alex,” Maggie whined. “Don’t make it harder. I’m trying to do things right.”

“Fine. Yes. I’m sorry.”

“You’re good. I just—things have been…so much has happened, and I want us to do things better.”

“I want to be better for you too, Maggie.” Alex voice was softer then, and she reached out a hand to hold Maggie’s. “And if that means waiting and going out to more expensive restaurants, I can do that. But if it means doing dates that feel…a little more like us and less like this TV version of a perfect couple, that’s okay too. All that matters is that I’m here with you.”

A small smile tugged at the corners of Maggie’s mouth. “Keep saying things like that, and you might just find out that sometimes I put out as early as the second date.”

Alex threw a hand over her chest as her mouth dropped open into an exaggerated O. “My, my, Detective Sawyer, I would never!”

They dissolved into laughter at that, and when Maggie dropped Alex off at her front door, she didn’t bother shoving down the sneaking suspicion that no matter what they were doing, no matter how they were defining it, it was right.

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Their second date ended in a movie theater, and they made out during the previews and the credits, both of them too stubborn to miss a minute of a film they’d paid $18 per ticket to see. At the end of the night, Alex didn’t push Maggie to come inside, but she linked their hands together and took a deep breath and asked if she could plan their third date for that Thursday.

“I…it’s actually, um, I have dinner plans?”

“Oh. Right, yeah, you totally should have a life! I didn’t—you can just, um, let me know when you’re free?”
“It’s, uh, it’s with Kara.”

After a moment’s confusion, Alex chuckled. “That where she’s been every week?”

“She didn’t tell you?”

“No, and she expressly forbade me from using DEO resources to track her.”

Maggie fixed Alex with a disbelieving glare. “When has that ever stopped you?”

“I—I didn’t—okay, never,” Alex admitted. “But this time Winn seemed to be in on it too, and I figured it must be important.” Alex scuffed her foot along the concrete of the sidewalk. “Well…first I thought it was you, so I guess that instinct was right. But then it kept going for a long—after—you know. And so I just kind of assumed maybe she was dating someone. Or going to some Superheroes Anonymous kinda group. I don’t know.”

“Nope, it would to be my apartment for more takeout than is healthy and some shitty television.”

“I suppose it’s better than a mystery suitor she runs off to every Thursday night.”

Maggie appeared to consider it. “Mm, I think I’m definitely better.”

“Very humble too.” Her hands clasped in front of her, Alex cleared her throat. “What about this weekend, then? Saturday? Friday night is sister night—we’ve skipped a few too many in a row to cancel,” she added by way of explanation.

“Saturday works for me.”

“Perfect.”

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On Thursday Kara and Maggie sat together, and Maggie was tempted to set a timer to see how long it would take for Kara to bring up Alex this time. Surely, after everything, Kara wouldn’t wait until the commercials.

Kara made it through two full potstickers before she blurted out: “Are you happy?”

Maggie blinked twice, trying to reorient herself to the direction the conversation had taken. “I… yeah.”

“I mean, not in general, you know? But, uh, with the whole thing—the Alex thing?”

“I am”—Maggie paused, twirling her fork between her fingers as she considered her words—“cautiously optimistic.”

“It’s just, I mean, it wasn’t that long ago that you were telling her she should date other people.”

Maggie steepled her fingers and smiled wryly. “She told you about the park, huh?”

“Might’ve mentioned it.”

“I’m still glad she tried dating other people. It’s—that was part of why I didn’t want to say yes the first time around.” Kara raised her eyebrows, and Maggie sighed. “I—I don’t know how much of the story you got from Alex, but when she first came out, I thought maybe she should take time on her own.”
“But she wanted you, Maggie. She already liked you.”

“No, I got it, I do. And I liked her. But I wanted things to work with her. And sometimes that first venture out of the closet is really rocky, or other times it’s great and it makes you want to see and try every other thing that’s available in that sparkly new world. Of course, there are times when it works, and for a while, it really seemed like we had one of those rare success stories.” Maggie shook her head. “It’s good that she got to see a little bit else of what’s out there for her. It’s good that she was with other women. It makes it feel less like she’s coming back to me because she was assuming that she couldn’t find anyone else.”

“Maggie.” And then Kara was up and out of her chair and coming to crouch right beside her. “She’s never thought of you as some sort of…I don’t know, settling partner.”

“You been watching 30 Rock, Kara?”

“Maybe,” Kara admitted. “Point is: you’ve never been Wesley Snipes. You’ve always been Astronaut Mike Dexter.”

“I never really thought I’d hear those sentences uttered with such conviction.”

“Because you need to hear it. I…I kept pushing her…after everything. I thought that it was something she could get over because it was what was best for her, for what she wanted.” Kara fidgeted with her glasses and trained her gaze firmly on her food. “I, you know, I set her up on dating apps and cheered her on after, uh, after Sara.”

“It’s fine, really,” Maggie insisted, seeing the conflicted look on Kara’s face.

“It took me a long time—maybe too long—to start listening and believe her when she kept telling me that you—you were what she wanted more than anything else.”

“How bad does it make me sound if I tell you that it wasn’t until she almost died and you were the first person she asked for?”

Maggie shrugged. “At least it’s honest.”

“But I—look, Alex is my sister. She’s always going to come first. But I care about you too. And if Alex isn’t what’s best for you, I—you need to do whatever is. I’ll be there to help Alex through it, and she will get through it, I promise. Once she has a firm answer, she will, even if it takes time. But”—Kara’s fingers twitched, like she was looking for something to ground her—“we already dragged you back into all of this once. I don’t want it to feel like an obligation again.”

Maggie blinked back the tears that threatened to fall and reached across the table. “Thank you.” Kara nodded, and it felt solemn somehow, like they were crossing into some new territory, some level of trust that they’d never managed to get to while she and Alex were together the first time.

It was later in the evening, during a commercial break again, that Maggie brought Alex back up. “We talked, you know? For a while. We’ve actually done more talking about what it is that we’re doing than actually doing the thing.” Maggie chuckled and shook her head. “Sometimes stereotypes can have a little truth to them. Point is: we’re not rushing in blind. We—we’re both aware that it might not work. We both know that we can’t act like nothing changed or jump back into things where we left off.”

“Okay…yeah, that’s good.”
“Glad to have your stamp of approval,” Maggie teased, earning a piece of popcorn thrown at her.

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As it turned out, they managed to make it all the way to date number 6 before Alex bit her lip in the doorway to Maggie’s townhouse and Maggie’s resolve to take things slow snapped. But even then, it was nothing like the hotel. Where before there had been teeth and fingers hard enough to bruise as they fell through the door of the room, this time it was slower. There wasn’t the same hesitation as there had been their actual first time, but Alex took her time with each button on Maggie’s shirt, reveling in every inch of newly revealed skin. She held Maggie’s hand and walked her down the hallway, trying to keep things sensual even as she peeked behind all the doors, until she finally relented and asked where the bedroom was.

Finally in Maggie’s bedroom, they sank down onto the mattress, the final bits of their clothing making their way to the floor until all that was left was the two of them, legs slotted together, Alex’s arms looped around Maggie’s back, holding her close, and Maggie’s free hand curled around Alex’s jaw as she kissed her deeply.

Maggie had no idea how much time had passed or which caresses came from whom as they lost themselves in the feel of one another once more. It wasn’t until Alex gently rolled them over and sat up that Maggie felt the world slowly slide back into focus.

Alex slipped off the bed and held out a hand to Maggie, urging her to the edge of the mattress before she sank to her knees. “Please? I’ve missed this.”

Maggie nodded, whimpering as Alex’s strong hands hooked around her hips and dragged her closer until she could feel the wet heat of Alex’s tongue against her, slowly stroking up and down, working her up in a way that lacked the frantic urgency of before. But when Alex’s lips wrapped around her clit and her tongue flicked against her, she swore she came even harder than she had then, and when she came to, she dragged Alex back up into the bed, wiping off Alex’s chin before kissing her slowly. She moaned at the taste of herself on Alex’s tongue, and it wasn’t long before she had rolled Alex onto her back, intent on returning the favor and making up for lost time.

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When the French professor returned from her sabbatical, Maggie moved back into the city. Nice as the self-imposed semi-exile had been, she missed the vibrancy of being in the actual city limits. The parade of puppies out on walks on weekends could only make up for so much. She found a place in between Alex’s apartment and the precinct, and ignored Kara’s teasing remarks about how it really didn’t matter where her apartment was when she woke up most mornings in Alex’s bed. She tried to justify it as a matter of convenience; Alex’s place was closer than the suburbs had ever been, and dammit there was something nice about a bed that large.

After that year, though, when the end of Maggie’s new lease began creeping up, Alex took her out to dinner and asked if they could move in together. “Not—not like last time. I want to find a new place for us, not just have you learn to fit into my life again.” That night they barely made it through the door of Maggie’s apartment—it had been closer, bigger beds be damned—before they were tugging clothes off in their rush to celebrate a milestone that felt genuinely new, that felt like some kind of uncharted territory that they could discover together.

It turned out that apartment hunting was much less fun than the random half-assed house hunting they’d done before their would-have-been wedding. Instead of playing “how could we defile each room,” they considered things like water pressure and room layout and the quality of the building construction and the cost of parking, though Maggie still made a point of asking about how
soundproof the apartments were and winking and mouthing, “For the neighbors,” at a blushing Alex the second the property manager turned around. They eventually settled on an old brick building that was a little pricier but had the fireplace of Alex’s dreams and a nice kitchen and balcony for Maggie (and Kara, of course, though they couldn’t exactly voice those needs when shopping around).

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It was three years later that they found themselves packing boxes once more. They chuckled at the small dent and crack in one of their walls from the night they’d tried to make pot brownies and accidentally doubled the weed. Alex had insisted that Sara had taught her “ninja moves” while she was on the other Earth and whipped some long stick-looking weapon out from their hall closet only to trip over her own feet in a fit of giggles when Maggie made a joke and fall stick-first into the wall.

Feeling sentimental, they walked hand-in-hand around the apartment. “Remember that time you got a concussion here?” Alex gestured to the shower, and Maggie glared.

“Shut up.”

“It was so cute. You kept insisting I should get to finish first.”

“Excuse me for being a generous lover,” Maggie deadpanned, only managing to hold Alex’s gaze for a few moments before she burst into laughter. “Whatever, at least I’m not the one who nearly died under a bookshelf.”

“They should really specify that the safety hook in the back is only optional if you like the idea of death by book,” Alex grumbled.

“I got you, though.”

“You always do.”

Then there was the dining room table where they’d hosted Thanksgiving dinners and brunches and family holidays. There was the table by the front door with the busted leg after an ill-fated attempt at throwing Alex a surprise party because Kara insisted that she’d “mellowed out” a little over the past few years. In all fairness, Maggie had to concede that Alex had not pulled a gun on anyone. She had, however, thrown the first thing she could find as she jumped behind the door for cover, and that first thing she could find happened to be a rather heavy table that Kara managed to catch, but not without collateral damage.

There was the bed where they’d spent long nights wrapped up in the other’s arms, and the balcony where they’d sipped coffee on lazy mornings off with the Black Lung.

Then there was the fireplace—that fireplace that Alex insisted she wanted even in California for the rare nights where the temperatures dipped to something approaching brisk. It had been a few months after their third anniversary of their second attempt at dating that Alex had sunk down to one knee in front of a crackling fire. She’d cleared her throat and blinked back tears. “Maggie Sawyer, I didn’t really do this proposal thing right the first time. And I definitely didn’t do the wedding bit right the first time. But over these past few years I have fallen deeper in love with you than I ever thought was possible—even back then. You—you are my partner, in everything. You’re the one I want by my side no matter what life throws at us. And if you’ll have me, I’d really like to make it official, to be your wife.”

The wedding had been small—just their closest friends, their makeshift little family, gathered together on the beach behind Alex’s childhood home in Midvale—but it had been exactly what they
wanted, what they needed. They exchanged vows they’d written themselves, and Alex prefaced hers with a threat to anyone who took photos of her as she tried to make it through them without sobbing. When the ceremony was over, they had dinner and a champagne toast and a cake with the words, “Happy Biggest, Gayest Wedding Midvale’s Ever Seen!” swirled across the top in light blue frosting. After they’d eaten, Kara dragged some old karaoke machine out of the basement, insisting she’d been saving it as one of the closest things to a childhood memory she could get on this planet, and they sang off-key and drank a bit too much champagne and twirled each other around the beach until the sky began to turn a light pink as the sun slowly peeked up and over the house.

Kara’s loud voice broke them out of their reminiscing. “Are you two decent? The moving van is out front!”

“Yes, Kara,” Alex yelled back, squeezing Maggie’s hand as they cast one last look around the apartment that they had called home for so many years. “I’ll miss it here, you know,” she whispered to Maggie.

“Yeah…yeah, I will too. But”—she smiled at the sight of Kara striding in through the front door before checking her impulse to go do everything herself and instead directing James and Winn and J’onn to the stacks of boxes—“I think your sister’s really gonna appreciate having us a few doors down.”

“Yeah…one Kryptonian teenager was bad enough. Can only imagine what twin babies are gonna be like.”

“For that Aunt Alex is on diaper duty the whole first month,” Kara bellowed, though she couldn’t stay mad—not when everyone was gathered together again.

“Hush, Aunt Alex already promised enough nights of babysitting to give you free weekends all the way through to their college years. Besides,” Alex added with a wink to Maggie, “someone’s gotta teach them how to throw a proper punch.”

End Notes

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