The Comfort of Lies

by wordsarehard

Summary

The night Henshaw showed up at the Danvers house they took Kara instead of Jeremiah...
It gets dark for Kara...
This is like the slowest of slow burns for Supercorp.

Notes

TW - Talk of panic/anxiety attacks due to loss and claustrophobia.
Chapter 1

Kara flinched when a tall, dark-haired man ripped the cover of her pod off. She tried to lift her arms but they were heavy and stiff. Settling for a glare, she glanced around at her surroundings. Her thoughts muddled and murky, but her promise to protect Kal-El echoed in her head.

A large hand reached down for hers and she leaned back, pushing into the seat of her pod and hearing it moan in protest.

The man stopped, and his face softened. Muscular, with black hair and familiar blue eyes, he smiled. Fear rippled through her despite his expression. That smile. One she had seen a hundred times on her uncle. Worry gnawed at her gut and she knew something had gone wrong.

She didn’t understand his words but she did notice he wore the crest for the House of El on his chest.

In her memories, which seemed both recent and far away, her father and mother, both wearing that crest, had hugged Kara before sending her off. When she sniffed her shoulder she could still smell her mother's perfume. She bit back the tears that wanted to fall because she had a mission to complete and she couldn’t be afraid. She'd promised her parents.

After a moment of speaking in a language she didn't recognize, he sighed then spoke in broken Kryptonian. His accent weak, his mouth unable to form the words correctly.

He pointed to the crest on her chest. "I am called Kal-El. I will not harm you."

She worried her lip, unsure what to believe. "But he's a baby. I was sent here to protect him."

He reached for her then and she swatted his hand away surprised at the strength she felt growing inside of her.

"What are you called?"

"Kara. Kara Zor-El."

His eyes lit up. "So, you are cousin. Family..." And she knew what he said was true, felt the connection in her bones.

She scrunched her forehead. "What happened?"

He shrugged, glancing at the console of her ship with a confused expression.

Kara typed in a few commands to call up the flight history. She knew her pod had been hit by the blast of Krypton exploding. Remembered the flashing lights and alerts going off before she was spinning out of control. What she didn’t realize was that she had spent a very long time in the Phantom Zone. Her brain didn’t want to believe what her eyes were telling her.

Her parents had died long ago yet she hadn't mourned their loss. Her cousin was an adult who didn't need her. In the blink of an eye, her purpose had been taken away.

"Let me get you away from here before they come searching. Please, trust me."

His eyes, she couldn’t stop looking at them. Too familiar, and in them she saw fear mingled with something else she couldn’t identify. She accepted his hand and tried not to scream when he leapt into the air with her.
They landed in a city he called Metropolis, but Kara wasn’t so sure. She’d never seen a city this underdeveloped. He changed his clothes in an alley while she waited then walked with her for a bit.

It was dirty, loud, and smelled terrible. Memories of Krypton exploding came back to her and she gripped a hand railing, eyes widening when it bent.

"There are items we need to converse about. I am going to catch some food because I am sure you are empty. Then we can return to my abode."

Kara nodded, unable to disagree when her stomach rumbled.

Her head throbbed at all the noises around her and their increasing intensity. She kept her hands tucked up under her armpits, fearful of damaging anything else. A few times when she moved, her speed was uneven and jerky.

"I have an improved thought," he said when a particularly loud noise made her bend over in pain while clamping her hands over her ears.

His had a small but clean apartment, as he called it. He settled her on the couch, made a call, and then sat a few feet away from her.

Neither one of them were comfortable if the awkward silence and the way he kept looking around at anything but her was a sign.

"Do you remember what occurred?"

Kara nodded, not wanting to talk about it. Thinking about the fact that her parents died along with her planet, to her, a few moments ago, wasn’t sinking in. Her time in the phantom zone had her all turned around. She’d been trapped in one long, terrifying nightmare that had played itself out thousands of times in her mind. A dream-like state that had messed with her sense of time.

"This is Earth. The yellow sun will make you strong. You will have much abilities that no one else has. Some people have fear of that. It is important that you do not tell to anyone about us. It is dangerous not only for you but those close to you. Do you comprehend?"

She nodded, understanding most of what he said and ignoring some of the stranger mistakes he made in word choice and formality because the expression on his face was scaring her. Who wanted to hurt her cousin? Who was he afraid of? Maybe she could still protect him.

A knock sounded on the door and she jumped to her feet.

"It is fine, that is food."

He went to the door, and accepted several white boxes and handed over some paper to a young man. She watched the exchange with interest.

Kal returned with the food, offering her a piece of something. She made a face at the look of it.

"Trust me, you will taste it," he said, smiling.

She smelled it, still not sure, then took a bite, and then another. "What is this?"

"Pizza."

She didn’t recognize the unfamiliar word, but he was right, she did like it. A lot.
They ate in silence for a few moments.

"How many years do you have?"

"Thirteen." She reached for another slice of pizza. "I was about to go into the Science Guild, the youngest member." She didn’t know why she said it, but she needed him to know she was smart and could still help.

He removed…she didn’t know what they were called, from his face, and rubbed his eyes. She figured her word choice and accent was making it difficult for him to understand her as well.

"That is good. Do you have many memories of Krypton?"

She nodded, trying not to stuff this pizza in her face.

"Was there anyone else with you? Anyone else that escaped?"

She shook her head. Images of her parents as she flew off coming to mind.

He couldn’t hide the sadness at her answer but continued talking. "When I arrived, I was discovered by an amicable, older pair in Kansas. They gave me a wonderful life."

Memories of her Uncle Jor-El and Aunt Lara flooded her. How they doted on baby Kal-El. The urge to make sure that their memory, that their love was not forgotten, overtook her. "Your parents loved you very much."

He glanced away from her, wiping at his eyes. "I know. I have a…fortress my father built. That is where I learned how to speak Kryptonian and about my family…"

"Are there others there?" Something other than sadness flowed through her since she landed.

He shook his head. "No, only history. I will take you there some time."

She nodded, finishing her fifth piece of pizza.

A siren blared and she shut her eyes against the sound. Kal put a hand on her shoulder, soothing her. "It is fine, breathe. I have to leave, but I will return soon and we can decide what to do."

He changed back into the odd suit she’d first seen him in then watched as he jumped out a window. Her cousin was very strange. Perhaps growing up on Earth hadn't been the best thing for him.

She stayed on the couch until there was no more pizza left. Getting up, she went toward the window Kal had left through. Outside the sun had gone down and the city turned dark. The roar of engines, sirens, and other noises she had no name for assaulted her ears.

Returning to the couch, she let herself fall on the scratchy cushions. Exhaustion settled in her then. The memories she'd been fighting she the cover of her pod had been ripped off finally making their way forward. She turned her head to her shoulder and inhaled the scent of her mother. Remembered the strong arms of her father as he hugged her. Each tear that fell holding a memory that made her heart ache.

She woke to Kal nudging her shoulder. Wiping sleep grit from her eyes, she noted how bright it was outside.

"Great morning. How do you feel?"
She pushed herself up, eyes widening when she put a hand through the cushion beneath her.

"Do not worry. It takes time to adjust."

She lifted her hand with care and sat with both her hands tucked up into her armpits.

"I carry this for you. I created it at the fortress. It will aid you to comprehend English." He handed her a small educational crystal she recognized.

She accepted it, tapping the necessary spots to activate it. A swirl of words appearing in front of her while her cousin spoke.

"Kara, I cannot begin to comprehend what you are thinking or feeling at this moment. I know that what will help you is stability. A place you are protected and with people who will help you."

She swallowed the lump in her throat. "What do you mean? Why can't I stay with you? We're family…the only family left. I can protect you. You really shouldn’t be jumping out of windows."

He knelt next to her so they were eye level, laughing a bit. "The window is difficult to explain. I will do that another time. We are family. And we always will be, but my life is complicated and I need to make sure you are safe. Do you comprehend?"

She nodded, not trusting her voice because she really didn’t understand at all. All she knew was that she had just lost her whole world and now her cousin, who she was meant to protect, was sending her away. The ache it caused in her took her breath away. She didn’t think she could feel sadder … apparently she could.

"I have a friend. A good man. He and his wife will watch after you. They have a small girl who has a pair of years older than you."

Kara sucked in a breath, knowing she had to be strong, again. "I'm not scared," she said the words her parents had needed to hear before they sent her away.

He smiled, small but sincere. "I vow, you will be happy."

"Will they know about me?" Kara couldn’t imagine being able to hide who she was from these friends of Kals.

"Yes, and they will do all to help you as more abilities develop. It can be scary, but trust."

"I trust you." She hoped she hid her fear because the last thing she wanted was to go and live with aliens she’d never met before.

"Okay, I need to make a call…later. I will return."

More sirens and another hasty exit. She spent the time alone using her crystal learning as much as she could about the basics of English. A simple language with an alphabet of twenty-six symbols and twelve tenses. Easy enough compared to Kryptonian. After a few hours, she fell asleep.

Later, she wasn’t sure when, he shook her awake and spoke to her in what she recognized as English. "Hey, we need to get going soon. Are you okay?"

She wasn’t sure if he was being serious or not. To her, she'd lost everything she held close a day or two ago. She didn’t think she’d ever be okay again.

At her lack of response, he put an arm on her shoulder. "I am sorry. I thought…I do not know what I
"Not the whole thing, but the basics," she said.

A wide grin split his face, and he spoke in English, "I'm impressed. I can see why you were going to be the youngest member of the Science Guild."

Ten minutes later Kara was in his arms and they were flying. Another ability she could expect to kick in any time according to Kal.

They landed in a large green field and her eyes widened. This place was so different from the city. When a small shape flew above them and squawked, she ducked behind her cousin.

"What is that?" She pointed at it.

He grinned. "A bird. Very common on this planet. Nothing to worry about."

Taking her hand, he led her toward a white house. A man and woman stood out front and movement from an upper window alerted her to someone watching them. A young girl with dark hair who did not look happy to see Kara watched them.

"Are you sure I have to stay here?" she asked in Kryptonian.

He knelt, staring her in the eye. "I know you don't understand, but this is the best thing for you right now. I want you to have a normal life. It's the least I can do for you after what you've been through. The Danvers are amazing people."

She saw it then, in his eyes, the sadness and loneliness that matched hers. He gave her a hug, then left, but not before she caught sight of his watery eyes.

"Hi, Kara. I'm Eliza and this is Jeremiah." The woman smiled at her, and all Kara could think of was how much she missed her mom. "Come on, we were just about to have something to eat."

Kara followed the woman inside, careful not to touch anything. Her hands tucked neatly under her armpits once again. They sat around a large wooden table while Eliza called out for someone named Alex.

The stomping of footsteps echoed in Kara's head and she winced.

Jeremiah put a hand on her shoulder and spoke in a low, soothing voice. "Too loud?"

She nodded.

"I'll see if I can do something about that, okay? For now, when it happens just take a deep breath and focus on something calming."

She understood most of what he said, but a few words were still unknown to her. She nodded again, realizing she was probably going to be doing a lot of that over the next...however long.

"Alex, this is Kara. Kara, this is our daughter Alex."

Kara turned to the girl. She had green eyes, auburn hair, and an annoyed expression on her face.

"Hi," Kara said.

"Need to work on that accent if you don't want people to know you're an alien." Alex sat in the chair across from Kara, arms crossed over her chest.
"Alex, that sounds like something you can help her with," Eliza said while handing Kara a plate.

She grabbed it without thinking and it crumbled in her grip. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I…"

"It's okay, sweetie. It's only a plate." And Eliza looked at her with such kindness and acceptance that Kara had to look away because it reminded her too much of her mother.

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Kara sat on her bed using the language crystal Kal had given her. Her English had improved greatly, but her spelling left something to be desired.

She also spent a lot of time learning about birds. Their varying colors and sizes capturing her imagination and providing a temporary escape to the loss of her home.

Three days had passed since her arrival and she'd spent most of that time studying. The sooner she became proficient, the sooner she might feel just a bit more comfortable on this alien planet that would never feel like home.

Alex had barely spoken to her. Only tossing a few items of clothing on Kara's bed when Eliza had asked her to. Kara didn't need to be an expert in reading human expressions to know Alex was not happy with her new living situation, which made two of them.

Eliza and Jeremiah made various attempts to get Kara to talk or join them on something called game night, but Kara found excuses not to go. Claimed she was tired or not hungry. Their eyes always soft and concerned in a way that made her need to glance away. Her cousin was referred to as the Man of Steel, and Kara knew she was just as tough as him or close enough, but when they looked at her, she felt broken and weak.

Of course, it didn’t help that her first night there she had woken up screaming, Eliza running in to see what was wrong, Jeremiah hovering by the door, Alex giving her an annoyed look from across the room. Thankfully, Eliza had kept her distance; otherwise, Kara was sure she would have hurt the woman with all her thrashing. But then, the older woman was on the bed, smoothing Kara's hair, and looking at her with those kind eyes, and Kara almost broke.

The next day, Eliza asked her if she wanted to talk, but Kara didn’t. She didn’t want to remember. She didn’t want to put it into words. She didn’t want to make it real.

Eliza didn’t push. Somehow, Kara knew this reprieve wasn’t going to last much longer. Now, three days later she was exhausted from lack of sleep because she didn’t want to have another nightmare or wake anyone up. She also hadn't eaten anything other than things she could handle with her hands because she was scared of breaking another plate or bending a fork or smashing a glass like she had on her first day.

Outside the room she shared with Alex, she heard soft steps and waited. A soft knock.

"Yes?"

"Can I come in?" Alex asked.

Kara wrinkled her brow. "Yes?" Why was she asking to enter her own room?

The door opened and she spotted the familiar white box that Kal had had delivered to his apartment.

"You haven’t eaten anything good in ages," Alex said raising an eyebrow.
Kara shrugged. "I'm not hungry." Her stomach chose that moment to betray her and grumble.

Alex smirked. "Okay, more for me. I thought you'd want to share with me."

Not wanting the food to leave, Kara uttered, "I'd like to share...if you want."

Without another word, Alex sat on the bed and opened the box. Kara grabbed a piece swallowing it down in four bites.

Alex chewed a moment then swallowed. "It was a stupid plate. No one's upset."

Kara stared at the second piece of pizza in her hand. "It's not just that. I have to be careful, what if that was a hand or I was out in front of people. It's too dangerous. I'm too dangerous."

"All the more reason for you to practice. You can't hide from the world. You need to learn how to live in it."

Kara swallowed. "I don't know how."

"Duh, why do you think your cousin brought you here? It's only been a few days, there's gonna be a learning curve."

Picking off a piece of something black from her pizza and eyeing it, Kara sighed, "What if I can't learn? Things are so weird here."

Alex smirked. "No kidding, you're on a different planet. But, my parents can help you and I have an idea or two."

Kara finished her second piece of pizza. "Why are you being nice to me?"

Alex cocked her head to the side. "I didn't mean to be mean...I just...it's a lot to take in. I guess there's a learning curve for me, too."

Nodding, Kara remained silent while they ate. When the pizza was gone, mostly eaten by Kara, Alex grabbed Kara's hand. She froze, willing herself not to move in case she hurt the other girl.

"Come on."

Kara got to her feet and let the girl lead her outside with purpose. An assortment of items waiting for them next to a grinning Jeremiah.

"All right, Alex came up with this. So, to gauge your strength and help you learn to control it, we're going to play a game. The goal is to help you understand the different ways to handle things. Now, before we start I need you to understand it's going to take time, okay?"

Kara nodded. "I'll try my best."

Jeremiah patted her on the shoulder. "Then you're going to do great." He held up a round, orange colored object. "This is a basketball, made of rubber, very bouncy, and humans can't pop it. We're going to toss this back and forth, okay?"

She nodded, again. Her default way of communicating.

He put it in her hands. "Get a feel for it."

Kara winced when it popped. "Sorry. I didn't mean to do that."
"It's okay, like I said, it'll take time." He accepted another one from Alex and tossed it to Kara. She let it hit her instead of catching it, then picked it up with the utmost care, wanting to at least get a feel for it. She rolled it around in her hands, testing her strength. Making sure to ease her grip when the material started to indent. She smiled and tossed it back, eyes going wide when Jeremiah let out a grunt and fell over.

He held a hand up. "I'm okay."

Alex laughed, Jeremiah glaring at her a moment before he joined in, and then Kara smiled, realizing it was the first time she had done so since her arrival.

"That was good. We just need to work on how hard you throw it." He tossed it back to her and when she caught it; her fingers sank in and it popped.

"It's okay, here's another one," Alex said.

Kara eased her grip, forced herself to relax, smiling when it didn’t pop. When she moved to throw it back, she adjusted her strength, but Jeremiah still fell over.

"I'm fine. Don't worry."

They went back and forth for hours, several basketballs sacrificed along the way. When Eliza called them in for dinner, they headed inside and Kara sat at the table with the Danvers. Now, she was willing to try. Alex sat across from her sending her reassuring smiles the whole time. It didn’t go perfectly; Kara bent a fork, snapped a knife in half, and a spoon had yet to be found, but no one got hurt so she counted it as a win.

Later that night, when everyone was asleep, she snuck out the window in her room. She’d discovered this escape on her second night when the quiet almost made her crawl out of her skin. She made her way down to the front porch and sat. The noise soothing her out of the shaky feeling that was trying to take over and put her back in the pod. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw something move and tensed.

She tried to focus her senses, but it was too hard despite the less chaos the nighttime provided. After five minutes, she saw it again. All black and skinny, with bright green eyes, meowing at her from a distance.

Identifying it as a cat, she went back inside and down to the kitchen. She knew there were dinner leftovers in the fridge. With great care she opened the metal door. Then she eased the plastic lid on a container off, grimacing when it cracked. Biting her lip she grabbed a few bits of chicken and stuck it back on the shelf, promising herself she’d apologize to Eliza in the morning.

She crept toward the front door and eased it open. The cat was still there, staring at her with a fearful expression that she recognized from the few times she’d looked in a mirror since her arrival here. Setting the food down, she took a few steps back and waited.

After what felt like forever, the cat moved toward the food, eating it while keeping a wary eye on Kara.

She sensed his nervousness and fear, hesitation and distrust. Knew he felt like he didn’t belong by the way he kept stopping and raising his head at every noise. And for the first time, she felt like maybe she wasn’t so alone after all.

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Alex laid on her bed, unsure what to do. She could hear Kara crying, again.

When Kara had first arrived, she was annoyed. She’d be sharing her room with an alien. A Kryptonian one at that. One that would grow up to be a hero. An icon. And she hated it. She wanted her life to stay the same.

But, when her mom sat with her and explained that Kara had lost everything. Her parents, her world...her friends. Alex realized that whatever Kara was going through was something no one would ever be able to relate to. Her parents said that Kara would be sad, lonely, and need so much love and support.

So, grudgingly, Alex put aside her initial thoughts and tried to help. She was far from perfect, but she was getting better. She noted Kara liked to isolate herself under the guise of learning. When she was around people she tucked her hands under her armpits to avoid touching anything. She rarely made eye contact.

All these, and other, observations had helped her to come up with ways to help Kara, but there was one thing she didn’t know how to handle.

For two weeks, waking up to Kara crying had been the routine. Her mom would come in and tuck Kara in. Asking if she was okay. Kara nodded. Alex knew it was a lie and figured her mom did as well.

Alex suspected, based on tired blue eyes, that Kara was staying awake through the night so she didn’t bother anyone.

Climbing out of bed, she crept toward the bed across from hers. "Kara, it's me, Alex."

"Did I wake you? I'm sorry." Kara sat up.

Alex took a seat on the bed. "Don't worry about it. You wanna sit outside?"

"What?"

Alex turned on the lamp. "Come on. I've seen you go out there."

She walked to the window, sliding it open and crawling out. Kara followed.

"I come out here when I need to think or want to be alone," Alex said.

Kara glanced around, eyes squinting. "I like the noise."

Alex sat, pulling her knees up and resting her chin on them. "I only hear crickets."

Kara lowered herself. "There's a lot. An owl, the waves on the shore, the wind, leaves rustling, insects buzzing, cars on the road a few miles away..."

"Wow, you hear all that?"

"Yeah, I hear it all. It's...calming. Sometimes, the house gets too silent."

Alex knew there was more to it than that based off the tone of Kara's voice, but she didn't press for more. "Have you tried the focus thing my dad keeps talking about? Blocking everything else out except one thing."

Kara sighed. "Yeah, but I'm not good at it yet. New sounds distract me."
"Well, pick a sound that isn’t too loud, and that you can always hear. Focus on it and only it."

Blue eyes closed, and Kara took a deep breath.

Alex waited, staring out at the water. The moonlight glinting off the surface. Two weeks ago her life was totally normal. Now, she had an alien foster sister that had lost more than any one person should ever have to, which gave Alex a new sense of purpose. Whatever life had in store for her, Kara was a huge part of it, and it made her feel protective of the young girl.

Kara would grow up to have all the same powers as Superman, but right now she was just a girl. Right now, she was lost and scared and probably oh so lonely. Right now, Alex could help her.

"That's better. Thanks," Kara said.

Alex nodded. "Good, keep practicing, it'll get easier."

They stayed out there another hour enjoying the silence before Alex couldn’t stifle her yawns. She climbed in the window, losing her balance, but a strong hand caught her.

"Thanks," she muttered.

Back in bed, she heard Kara sniffling again within minutes. Making a decision, Alex crawled into bed with the girl and wrapped an arm around her.

"I know you’re sad, it's okay. I'm just gonna hold you so you know you're not alone."

Kara nodded.

Alex had no idea if she was doing the right thing, but it felt like it and that was all that mattered. Her dad had driven that point home with her. And listening to the breathing of the girl next to her level out let her know she was on the right track.

The next morning Kara appeared rested, a bit of life back in her eyes.

They ate a huge breakfast and when Alex spied her foster sister pocketing food, she said nothing. Were they not giving her enough? Was Kara scared they were going to stop feeding her?

"Do you want my bacon?" Alex asked.

Kara shook her head, cheeks bulging with pancakes.

Alex frowned, but when they were done she dragged Kara to the backyard to work on gaining more control of her strength.

"This is a beach ball. Very fragile, even I could pop it if I wanted to. It's made of a thin rubbery plastic-like substance and filled with air." Alex threw it up in the air a few times to try and show Kara how light it was.

"What do you use it for?"

Alex caught it, staring at it. "We play with them at the beach or in a pool."

She tossed it to Kara, wincing when she heard the pop. "It's fine, we have a ton more but you're filling them."

By the end of their session, seventeen ruptured beach balls lay on the ground. However, three made it and Kara's small smile at her achievement was worth it. Alex knew they would have to practice a
lot more, but it was progress.

That night after dinner, in which Kara didn’t bend or break anything, they planned to watch a movie. Alex was in the kitchen making the popcorn, explaining how necessary it was for the full movie experience.

"Did they…you have movies on Krypton?"

Kara glanced down, another technique she used to hide herself that Alex had picked up on.

"No. Are they fun?"

Alex grinned while raising an eyebrow. "The scary ones are." She hit the button on the popcorn machine. "Extra butter okay with you?"

No answer.

"Kara?"

She glanced around, finding the young girl hiding under the table. Without thinking, Alex crawled over and lay next to her.

"What's wrong?"

Kara didn’t respond, just covered her ears with her hands and squeezed her eyes shut.

"Is it the popcorn machine?"

"It's so loud…like mini explosions…it reminds me of…" Her voice broke then, tears forming in her eyes as she tried to curl into herself.

Alex ran to the machine unplugging it then returned to where Kara was. She put an arm around the other girl's shoulders and pulled her close.

"I turned it off. It's okay."

Slowly, Kara came back to her senses. She wiped at her face, glancing at Alex with big blue eyes full of fear, sadness, and what Alex was beginning to realize were the ghosts of a lost planet.

"I'm sorry. I didn’t know what it was."

"Don't worry about it. I want you to focus on that sound we talked about right now, just that."

Alex spent the next half hour calming the younger girl down, hoping she was doing it right. When Kara seemed better she took them to the couch and started the movie.

"Wait, I need to do something first," Kara said jumping to her feet.

She walked to the front door and stepped out onto the porch. Alex watched from a nearby window, smiling when she saw a black cat approach Kara and gobble up the bacon from breakfast.

Mystery solved.

Twenty minutes later, Kara came back in, calmer than before.

"Does he have a name?"
Kara gaped a second, her words getting caught and coming out in a mixture of English and Kryptonian.

"I didn't know...he seemed so alone and hungry and I couldn't just leave him."

Alex held up a hand when she saw the start of tears in Kara's eyes. "Hey, it's okay. He's a stray... and probably really happy to have you in his life now."

Kara bit her lip. "I call him Streaky."

Alex grabbed her hand and pulled her toward the couch. "Tomorrow we'll tell mom, looks like the Danvers are taking in a new family member." Alex raised a brow at Kara and smiled. "Again."

That night, when Kara woke from a nightmare, it was different. She was soaked in sweat, her breaths coming in short gasps, words tumbling out in an incomprehensible jumble and Alex was so scared she went to get her mom.

Eliza spoke softly to Kara and Alex made sure to remember everything so she could handle it next time.

"She had a panic attack, sweetie. It's normal and it won't be the last. What she went through was incredibly traumatic and she was stuck in that ship for a long time."

Alex glanced over her mom's shoulder at the now sleeping Kara. She held the top of the outfit she had arrived in close to her face and Alex knew it was because it still held the faint scent of her mother's perfume and the thought made Alex's heart hurt for the girl.

"But she'll be okay?"

Eliza nodded. "In time, she needs to learn to be patient with herself. And even though she doesn’t want to, she has to talk about what happened."

Alex pursed her lips knowing what she needed to do next and trying to come up with a plan to do it.

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Lena entered Luthor mansion with cautious steps. Her presentation in her Advanced Physics class had gone well, and she’d finished a few extra credit assignments during lunch.

When she didn’t hear Lillian's voice call out to her, usually to critique Lena in some way as to how she wasn’t representing the Luthor name properly, she ran up to her room. Today, her father was working from home, a rare occurrence.

Two years ago, when she was nine, he’d made sure to let her know she was allowed in his office at any time, here or downtown. The unfettered access made her feel special, loved, and she tried not to take advantage of it, but on days like today, she couldn’t help herself.

Running down the stairs she heard two voices as she neared the entrance to the East Wing where her father had his office. Recognizing Lex’s voice she broke into a run, throwing the door open and practically leaping into her brother's arms.

"Hey, Lil Bit, you did amazing on your presentation," Lex said.

Her eyes widened. "You were there? Why didn’t you tell me?"

"Today was your day. I didn’t want to take away any of the attention my amazing younger sister
obviously deserved. How many eleven-year-olds keep up with and outdo kids several grades above them?” He grinned at her, letting her down.

Lena noted he’d grown a lot since the last time she saw him. His muscles bulged, and for a moment she remembered seeing him on the news a few weeks back talking about Superman and how people were too reliant on him. The veins in his neck standing out, hands gripping the podium while he spoke. She shook off the worried feeling his words and actions sparked.

"I have a few calls to make and then I'm all yours," Lionel said from behind his desk.

Lena smiled at him, wide and toothy. She could almost smell the worn leather of his chair mixed with his aftershave.

"Since you did so well on your presentation, I'll let you win at chess until dad can pull himself away from work.” Lex sat on the couch and set up the board, a smirk on his face.

Lena crossed her arms and cocked her head to the side. "Let me win?"

"It's the least I can do to maintain my coolest big brother ever cred, Lil Bit." He motioned for her to sit.

She let the sense of comfort the nickname he had given her when she'd first come to live in the huge house wash over her. "You'll always be the coolest big brother, and maybe one day I'll let you win."

Lex laughed. "Don't ever do that. You're way too smart and one day you'll be saving the world one brilliant idea at a time."

They played two games before Lionel came over to them. He stood next to Lena with a hand on her shoulder.

"It's not looking good, Lex."

Lena glanced up, the proud glint in her father's eyes making her sit straighter.

"Think you're right," he blew out a breath. "If only I had your strategic skills. I'd be able to sort out this Superman problem in no time."

Lionel cleared his throat. "Not now, Lex. Tonight is about Lena. I made reservations at La Belle Fleur and then I have a surprise."

A warm feeling took hold in Lena. She knew her father adored her and that Lex was the best big brother anyone could ask for, but still, when they went and did something like this to surprise her, it made her feel like the most important person in the world.

Lena moved her Knight into place, watching her brother's face go from confusion to acceptance before he knocked over his King.

"Well, I think that's your way of saying you'd like to go eat.” He got to his feet, slipping his suit jacket on.

The three headed out and when Lillian simply waved goodbye and remained in her seat in the living room, file in front of her, Lena let out a sigh of relief.

The night was one of the best Lena had ever had. By the time the limo pulled into the driveway, she was half asleep, head resting against the window. She could hear her father arguing with her brother
in hushed tones, but ignored it.

Then strong arms wrapped around her, and she was being carried up to her room and settled on the bed. A familiar teddy bear tucked under the covers. Her father's aftershave filling her senses.

"Sweet dreams, angel."
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

TW - Anxiety attack and talk of torture/implied

Kara jumped when a noise from behind scared her and caused her heat vision to go off.

"Hey, be careful," Alex said, standing up from behind a fallen tree where Kara assumed her sister had ducked for cover.

"Sorry, when I get nervous…" She didn’t need to explain further, it was the reason they were out here after all.

Alex waved her off. "Stop apologizing, you're helping me hone my reflexes, and that's what we're here to work on."

Kara put her ruined glasses in her pocket and walked beside her sister. "Where are we going?"

Grabbing her hand, Alex grinned. "I peeked at my dad's notes and most of your powers have manifested. Only freeze breath is missing. So, time to be proactive and make sure you can control them."

They ended up in a clearing protected by a thick wall of trees. Kara glanced around, not sure what her sister's plan was.

"Are you sure?" Kara hesitated. "Jeremiah was pretty mad about the car thing."

"Positive."

When Alex used clipped responses in addition to lots of smiling, Kara knew it was because she was worried about something. And Kara knew that something was the incident at school two weeks ago where she knocked a door off its hinges and one a few days ago where a lunch table spontaneously caught fire while Kara was getting bullied.

Alex turned to her then, eyes pleading. "I know my parents tell you not to use your powers, but Kara, that's too dangerous. You have to at least know what you can do and how to control it so nothing happens that can draw attention to you, okay?"

Kara nodded, trusting Alex. The rest of the night she practiced focusing her thoughts on her heat vision, learning to note the differences in her eyes just before it went off. The tell-tale tingle, the static sensation in her head, the small seed of anger in her stomach, the sensation of loss that she had to push down.

Three hours later she could melt a can from fifty feet away on demand. Not bad for a single night of practice, then again, Alex's patience and support were the two most important factors.

"Look!" Kara sped to the last can and picked it up. "I did it."
"Of course you did, you can do anything." Alex helped her pick up the rest of the items they had used for target practice.

Alex’s words made Kara stand straighter, hold her head up higher.

They spent many a night thereafter with Alex helping Kara focus her thoughts and holding her when emotions got the better of her. When the memories of Krypton exploding threatened to tear her apart. When the loss of her parents and everyone she loved squeezed her heart so tight she feared it would stop beating.

Eventually, though, Alex just talked to Kara while she learned what she was capable of while also finding the tricks that worked to help her maintain control in situations where her emotions might get the better of her.

For heat vision, usually triggered by fear or extreme emotional stress, she went back to her Kryptonian roots and repeated one of Rao’s prayers for strength and clarity of mind.

Flight was under control for the most part except a few times when she was sleeping, but for the time being that wasn’t an issue.

Strength, well, pushing herself was a surprise, she'd grown a lot stronger in the last couple of years with the Danvers. For that, it was a matter of going back to basketballs and working down to beach balls while her sister distracted her with loud noises or jokes until Kara managed to not pop anything without having to think about it.

Months of work.

But still, Kara didn’t feel at home, or normal.

She didn’t feel like herself.

***

Alex held on tight while Kara flew over Midvale. This had become one of her favorite things not only because it was awesome, but the smile on Kara's face was so genuine. The only time she felt like she got to see her being herself.

Being a big sister to an alien wasn't easy, but it did have its perks. And as time went by, Alex had grown into the role. She knew she wasn’t perfect, at times the stress got to her and she snapped at Kara or her parents, but she knew the importance of what she had been asked to do and she took it seriously.

Help Kara.

Help Kara acclimate.

Help Kara be more human.

Which had gone from a list of items to watch for to a personality trait fit for the most protective of big sisters. She helped Kara through panic attacks and had learned to look ahead for potential issues such as tight spaces or noisy crowds.

And now, on the one-year arrival of Kara, Alex had a few surprises.

"Let's go back now."
Kara glanced at her. "Are you okay? Is it too cold?"

"Nope, just want to get something to eat."

Five minutes later they were on the section of roof outside her window. They both crawled in the window when Kara did her thing and said the coast was clear, meaning Alex's parents weren't going to bust them.

" Hungry?" Alex asked.

Kara laughed. "Always."

Downstairs, Eliza and Jeremiah stood in the kitchen. "We were just about to go get you two," Eliza said.

Alex smiled and nudged Kara. "Why?" Alex hoped her voice sounded sincere.

Her parents stepped aside from one another. "For cake of course."

Kara's eyes widened. "What…what is this? And why is it on fire?"

Alex grabbed her by the arm, tugging a few times before she got Kara to actually move. "You've been with us a year, so it's your Earth birthday."

Eliza picked up the cake and held it so Kara could see it. Brightly colored birds decorated the top and the words Happy Birthday were written in what Alex guessed was Kryptonian.

"Blow the candles out and make a wish," Jeremiah said with an encouraging smile.

Kara looked to Alex before continuing. "Really?"

"Yep, the wish is the best part." Alex nudged her, again.

Inhaling, Kara grinned before closing her eyes and blowing.

Alex grimaced at the result.

Eliza ran a tongue over her lips. "Well, the icing's good."

Kara's expression turned horrified. "I'm sorry…I didn't and I was so happy…and…"

"Breathe, it's okay." Alex ran a hand over Kara's arm. "It's all part of the birthday party experience…Kryptonian style."

Jeremiah took off his sugar-coated glasses. "You have no idea. The stories I've heard about baby Clark, well, trust me this is nothing."

Alex felt Kara relax and within minutes they were cleaned up (thanks to Kara's super speed) and eating cake.

Later, when they were in bed, Kara couldn't stop talking about birthdays. Did everyone get one? Was it every year? Were there always presents?

Alex answered them all with a grin on her face. She knew Kara had been through hell and that the last year hadn't been the easiest, so to hear her talking with such happiness and joy made Alex happy.
"Thanks."

"For what?"

Kara pointed to the art supplies in the corner.

"It's not a big deal, and I would have gotten them sooner if I'd known how much you liked art."

"I did…do. I loved sketching and painting back on Krypton. Since I've been here, it's been hard to find time for it."

Alex knew what Kara really meant. Between watching her abilities, learning English, cultural references, school work, blending in, and what not…she didn’t have a whole lot of time to be Kara Zor-El anymore.

Something Alex hoped to change in small ways. She knew how important it was that Kara not be caught, but it was just as important that she didn’t forget who she was.

***

Lena stared at the body in the casket.

Her father was paler than usual. His hair not quite right. The suit he wore wasn’t one of his favorites.

She hated it.

Hated that he was dead.

Hated that Lillian was acting like it was some sort of business deal.

Hated that she wasn’t allowed to mourn and had to act like this was all fine to her.

After paying her respects, she returned to her seat and listened as people spoke about her father. Applauded his accomplishments and all the good he had done. How his legacy lived on in his children. How proud he was of both of them. How much they would miss him.

Lena tuned out then, the tears threatening to fall.

Lillian smiled through it all, then again, that's what she did. She had mastered the fake smile that no one except Lena seemed able to see through.

The ride back to Luthor mansion dragged by. Lex sat across from her, brooding. Lillian admonished her the moment a tear threatened to spill while she texted.

"Don't cry. Never show weakness."

"She's just a kid," Lex interrupted.

Lillian glared at him. "Good. The sooner she understands the better." She turned her attention back her phone. "When we get back I want you to smile and shake hands with the guests. They were business associates and we want to show them Luthor Corp is as strong as ever."

Lex rolled his eyes. "Of course."

"I'm doing this for you. Our stock prices took a big hit. If we want to pull out of this we need to show a strong, united front."
Lex knocked his head against the window. "I'm aware, but I think no one will mind if we take a day to mourn our father."

"Don't be silly. We don't have that luxury."

Lena wondered why she wasn’t telling Lex to clean himself up. A few people had mentioned his appearance at the funeral. His tie was messy, suit wrinkled, and the odor of alcohol wafted off of him. Not to mention his random rants about Superman.

"Lena, this is as good a time as any to let you know about your new school –"

"New school? What?" Lena turned away from the window to look at Lillian. "I like my school."

Lillian opened her purse and pulled out a compact. "I'm sure you do, but I don't have the time to look after you. Mary has packed your bags and someone will take you to the airport tonight."

"Airport?" Lena croaked, she hated flying.

"Yes, airport. Don't make me repeat myself. I enrolled you at Logan Academy. It's a wonderful school and goes almost all year long. It's hard, but I'm sure you'll manage to pass your classes. Lionel loved talking about how smart you are, so I guess we'll see if he was right."

"But what about my friends?" Lena didn’t have that many, any really because of her age, but she hated the idea of being the new kid...not knowing anyone.

"What about them? This is good for you." She closed her purse and straightened. "Now, remember. Be polite to people today." And with that Lillian was out the door.

Lena fought back the tears threatening to fall.

"Hey, it's not so bad. It's a good school, Lil Bit. They have special programs for smarty pants like you." He smiled at her, but she saw an emptiness in his eyes.

That night, in her room before she left, she made sure to grab her bear. In all her time here, the things that mattered to her fit into a backpack with room to spare.

Her throat burned but she didn’t let the tears fall, there would be time for that later.

***

Kara sat in the waiting area outside the principal's office. Behind the thick wooden door, Eliza was learning about Kara’s latest "incident." She opted not to listen, already having heard enough from her teacher and a few of the older kids. Tears formed, but she focused on the cracked linoleum floor refusing to let them fall.

"Kara, sweetie, are you ready to go?"

She got to her feet, unsure what to think of the smile on Eliza's face. Surely, the woman had to be upset with her, angry even. This visit was the third call from the principal in as many months. Then again, in the past two years since her arrival, the Danvers had never once yelled at her or made her feel bad about her mishaps.

Well, there had been one time, when she saved that woman and her baby, that Jeremiah had been upset. He didn’t say anything, but she could tell. But, he seemed more scared for her. Part of her hoped it would stay that way, that she would get better and not give them any reason to send her
"Want some ice cream? I know Alex picked out dinner and a movie for you two tonight, but I don’t think it’ll spoil your appetite," she said with a not so sly wink.

Kara glanced over, seeing nothing but understanding and compassion in the older woman's eyes. It made her miss her mom, again. A feeling she knew would never go away. "Yes, please."

Eliza reached over and squeezed Kara's hand. "You got it."

They drove in silence to the ice cream parlor, Kara staring out the window at random things. Mailboxes, advertising banners, bicycles, kids skateboarding, all of them once new to her but now things she didn’t give a second glance to. But birds, birds still captured her attention more than anything else she had encountered so far.

She thought of Krypton where they had ships instead of cars and her learning materials were on crystals. Where cats didn’t exist and one of her favorite games involved people riding flame dragons. Where some flowers only bloomed on the night of the full moons and the oceans were darker, dangerous, bodies of water no one dared enter. Where colors once existed that she would never see again. Her favorite melodies fading in thought, only a few strands that she strained to recall now.

The familiar ache thinking about her home planet caused bloomed from deep within her chest. She swallowed the lump in her throat, physically shaking her head to rid the images of her parents, of her planet exploding.

"Sweetie, we're here." Eliza always kept her voice soft and low with Kara. Even after almost two years some sounds overwhelmed Kara and sent her into a panic.

Sensory overload they called it.

Jeremiah had made her a pair of glasses that helped, several actually. As her powers grew she broke more pairs than she could count. Though, their purpose was more for obscuring her identity after the car incident.

She followed Eliza into the store, smiling when a cone with a triple scoop of mint chocolate chip, vanilla, and strawberry ice cream was handed to her. Kara walked outside and sat on the bench her and Eliza always picked out.

Private and far away from all the others.

"So, you had a bad day, huh?"

Kara's eyes went to the table top, the ice cream not as appealing as it was a moment ago. "Yeah. I didn't mean it, I promise. I'll get better. Please don't send me away."

A finger under her chin forced her to look up.

"That will never happen. Why would you think that?"

Kara glanced away when a squirrel knocked over a soda can, a block away. "Some of the other kids at school said I was a charity case and you and Jeremiah would send me away because I was such a freak."

"Oh, honey, that's not true. Kids can be mean, just ignore them. You're a wonderful, brave, smart, young girl and Jeremiah and I are proud to be a part of your life." Eliza waited until Kara met her
eyes. "You are not going anywhere, understand? We love you. You're a part of this family, forever."

Kara sucked in a deep breath, less tense, but still not sure everything was okay. She knew better than most that you could lose your entire world in the blink of an eye. "You're not mad at me?"

"No. Not ever. You're doing great. I'm so proud of you, so proud. I know it's not easy; it's just a matter of time and practice controlling your abilities as they mature. And I'm sure having to hide who you are can't feel good. I wish it wasn't like that. Just know that Jeremiah, Alex, and I will always be there for you. We love you."

"Thank you. I lo…thank you." Kara wanted to say the words back, she wanted this to be her forever so bad, but the fear lingered in the back of her mind that all this would be taken away from her.

Kal-El had sent her away after two days...how was it this family, this human family was willing to keep her and put themselves in danger on her behalf? How was it they had a better understanding of family and bonds than her own blood?

For now. For today. She'd let herself think everything was okay.

They finished their ice cream in silence. Eliza offering supportive smiles and a kindness Kara felt awkward accepting. She thought of her parents and how much she missed them. She wondered if they would be mad that she cared about the Danvers. That she loved them back.

In her heart, she knew that her mother would want her to love and be loved, but still the guilt lingered at her. Eliza had told her it was survivors guilt and totally normal. That there was nothing wrong with what Kara was feeling and that made her feel better, only a little, but it was a start.

"We should get going. I have some work to do back at the house and I know Alex is excited about tonight."

***

Kara stuffed a fourth pot sticker in her mouth, chewed, then spoke, "Thanks, Alex."

Streaky rubbed against the couch, meowing. Kara tossed a bit of chicken to him.

"No problem, mom said you had a rough day so..." Alex smiled sympathetically from the other side of the couch nibbling on an eggroll.

Kara's shoulders sagged at the reminder. She knew Alex wouldn't push. She was always gentle and mindful not to overload Kara with new words, facts, music, and especially emotions. They'd developed a strong bond in the time Kara had been with the Danvers. And with it, a system when it came to helping Kara talk about any mishaps to do with her life on Earth.

Step one involved food, usually pot stickers, Alex's favorite. Kara couldn't count the number of times they'd eaten them while Alex patiently helped Kara with English, cultural references, and other things imperative for a teenage girl to know.

"Dad said he'd take us camping this weekend if you want." Alex wiggled her eyebrows, a movement Kara had come to associate with hopefulness.

Kara's brow crinkled and her hands went to rub Streaky's belly when he situated himself in her lap. "Um, I don't know. Why do you sleep out in the wild where animals can attack you? And the telling scary stories part...Alex, you know I don't like that. The last time we went I almost floated away in the tent while I was sleeping."
"Dad tied it down the next night, you were fine. And that was super cool if I might add," Her foster sister let out a laugh. "Sorry, I'll protect you, how about that?"

Kara eyed her. "Promise? Even if a bear tries to eat me? Or a shark?"

"Okay, first, you need to stop watching all those animal shows and second," Alex sat straighter, puffed out her chest, and raised her left hand. "I promise to always protect you."

"Is that the right hand? And aren’t you supposed to say that on a bible or something?"

Alex glanced around, then let out a triumphant yell. "Here, even better." She plopped the phone book on the table, held up her right hand making a peace sign and repeated her earlier statement with a few changes. "I promise to always protect you, especially from sharks, birds, and bears."

Kara laughed despite her bad mood. The relief in Alex's eyes did not go unnoticed and Kara knew she needed to make more of an effort to make this human girl who owed her nothing yet did everything in her power just to draw out a smile, happy.

"That's better. Not quite how we did it on Krypton but close enough."

Alex held up her hands, spread out in a give me a break way. "I'm working with what I got, anyway, now it's your turn."

Kara's brows rose at that. "Really? You'd trust me…" A pillow smacked her in the face.

Without hesitation, Alex answered, "I'd trust you with my life."

Pulling the phone book toward her, Kara held up her hand making the hang ten sign her sister loved so much and said, "I promise to protect you from anything and everything."

"Great, now that I have a flying, bulletproof bodyguard who can shoot lasers from her eyes as a sure thing, I can follow my dream of becoming a famous rock star, now let's go. We still have a few minutes before we need to start the movie."

Kara cringed inwardly, step two was commencing.

The two girls ran up the stairs to their room, opened the window, and crawled out onto a section of the roof they'd nicknamed The Lookout. Streaky sat on the ledge, watching them. They had spent countless hours out here, talking, silent, and many times crying. Most of the time Kara was with Alex or one of her foster parents, but on occasion, she came out alone.

Kara reached behind her and pulled out the blanket for Alex when she saw her shiver.

"Thanks."

"Well, if you die from hypothermia you can't protect me."

Alex leaned back, a look of mock hurt on her face. "I see how it is."

Trying to put off the conversation, Kara asked, "Do you want to go flying?"

"Tomorrow, I think Dad's onto us."

"Okay, whatever you want." Kara smiled, then turned her gaze toward the sky. She glanced in the general direction of where Krypton used to be. The pressure building behind her eyes, the frustration, the loss of…everything settling on her shoulders. It was easier now, but not by much. The
nightmares weren't every night anymore.

Her first Fourth of July had not been a good night. While the Danvers stared into the sky oohing and awing over the exploding fireworks, Kara froze. The display in the sky above her had turned into the last memory she had of her planet. Her body shook and when she gained control of herself she ran back to the house and hid under her bed. Alex had noticed, of course, and chased after her.

"I'm so sorry, Kara. We didn't...think...I'm sorry." She had slid underneath the bed with Kara bringing a blue blanket with her. Wrapping it around the both of them she put a pair of noise-canceling headphones on Kara and just held on until the shaking and sobbing stopped. That moment, that night, Kara realized Alex was the best person she knew.

She sighed, tugging herself free from the memory, knowing she needed to talk about what happened. "I almost broke Beth's arm today in gym. We were playing volleyball and I got too excited and..."

Alex leaned over, wrapped an arm around her, and pulled her closer. "It was an accident, Kara. She's going to be okay."

"But, I hurt her. She called me a freak and everyone laughed and I'm not fitting in and...I hate it. The glasses help but there's so much going on. You worked so hard to help, but I just keep messing it up..." Kara didn't bother to wipe at the tears streaming down her face. "And it's like drowning but no one knows anything's wrong..." Her eyes burned, and panic settled over her. She had to focus on her breathing. On calming down. Making sure she didn't lose control and hurt Alex. She'd never forgive herself if she damaged her sister.

A soft voice broke through to her. "...no idea what it must be like for you but you can always talk to me. I'll listen no matter what and do whatever I have to to make it easier for you. You're my sister and I love you."

I love you...

Kara swallowed the lump in her throat. She hadn't said those words since Krypton. Since her mother had given her her necklace and told Kara to protect Kal El. Since her dad...since the explosion.

Since she lost everything. Could she say them? Was she brave enough to risk losing everything again?

For Alex, she'd try.

"I love you, too. You're the best thing about Earth."

"Duh, of course I am. Why do you think your cousin brought you here? I'm pretty awesome; you're just too obsessed with birds to notice how spectacular I am."

Kara opened her mouth to respond but an explosion cut her off. She threw her body over Alex's, knowing she had to keep her safe at all costs.

Loud voices emanated from the first floor of the house. Eliza screamed. Kara ripped the lead-lined glasses off her face. Her x-ray vision allowing her to see a large man punch Jeremiah in the stomach, her foster father falling to the ground, unmoving.

"Kryptonian, we know you're here. Come peacefully and no one has to die," called out a deep voice.

"Kara, no!" Alex squirmed beneath her.
She didn’t think, just acted. "I promised to protect you, remember?" Kara scrambled to her feet and headed toward the window. Once inside she locked it so Alex couldn’t follow her, then spared a few seconds to leave a note for her sister, put Streaky in the closet, then headed downstairs.

Seven heavily armed men in black clothes waited for her. Jeremiah was unconscious. Eliza stared at her, tears in her eyes. "Kara, sweetie, don’t..." Her words were cut short when a tall, masked man slapped her causing her lip to bleed.

"Stop it! Don't hurt her. I'll go with you." Kara felt the heat begin behind her eyes.

The man growled, "Rule one: Never tell me what to do. And get those eyes under control, now."

Kara bowed her head.

"Let's move out."

Kara spoke to Eliza as she walked by, "Thank you for everything."

"No, Kara..." A man aimed his gun at her.

The man in charge motioned Kara forward.

When Kara got within five feet of him her stomach lurched and she fell to her knees. Any thought of a hasty escape fled with her energy. Pain registered when her face hit the floor. From above a voice floated down to her. "A precaution. We call it Kryptonite. It weakens your kind, might even kill you. One of many things we're going to find out."

She fought to keep her eyes open but it was a losing battle. The last thing she remembered before unconsciousness claimed her were the screams of Alex begging her to come back.

***

Alex kicked in the window to her room, crawled inside, and ran down the stairs, tripping on the last two from the tears blurring her vision. She sped past her mom and dad, pulling the front door open with such force the doorknob dented the wall.

"Kara!" She ran down the front steps, turning for the driveway when a boom rattled her teeth. Then Superman was there, stopping her and dragging her back to the house.

"I got Jeremiah's alert...what happened?"

"They took her. You have to get her back. I promised to protect her and I didn’t...please you have to bring her back. I have to keep my promise!" Alex's voice broke on the last word and her head fell on the superhero's shoulder. Sobs wracking her body.

"Clark, I don't know who it was, they wore masks. There wasn’t anything we could do. I'm..." Eliza stopped talking, unable to form any more words. Jeremiah's unconscious form lying half on the floor and half on her lap.

Superman clenched his jaw. "Henshaw?"

Eliza shook her head. "I don’t know, but he had something. Called it Kryptonite. It knocked Kara off her feet. I thought...I thought he was going to kill her..."

"Is Jeremiah okay?"
The man in question groaned before opening his eyes. "I'm fine, go find her. Bring our girl home."

Superman let go of Alex and she reached for her dad, falling into his arms.

"Hey, kiddo, it's gonna be okay. He'll get Kara back."

"Promise?" Alex's eyes shimmered with tears both shed and those waiting their turn to fall.

"Let's get you looked at while we wait." He pointed to the bloody gash on her hand. "Did they hurt you?"

Alex shook her head. "Kara locked me on the roof," she whispered. "She kept me safe. I had to break the window."

Jeremiah stroked her face. "Shh, it's okay."

Eliza leaned in and the three of them held onto each other waiting for Superman to bring Kara back. He didn't.

***

Lena tapped her pen on the desk. The words on the computer screen in front of her blurring after hours of staring at it. Picking up a print out of data she headed over to her bed and sat down.

Her Advanced Mechanical Engineering teacher had asked her to help him on a project and she was excited about it. If it worked, they would set up the groundwork for neural based prosthetics.

The door to her room opened and Veronica St. Claire looked down at her. "We're going out. Want to come?"

She glared at the girl. "No thanks. I have to study." Lena knew whatever the older girl was up to would likely be illegal and she had no intention of getting involved in anything of the sort.

With a hand on her hip, Veronica shook her head. "Why do you bother?"

Lena leaned back into her pillows. "Because I actually enjoy learning and want to do something good with my life."

Veronica smirked. "That's cute. But seriously, you're a Luthor. Who's going to hire you other than your crazy brother?"

Lena waved the papers around. "Have a good night."

Veronica disappeared and Lena grudgingly got to her feet and closed the door, making sure to lock it. One of the few perks of being a Luthor was having a room of her own, courtesy of whatever arrangement Lillian had made. Not that it mattered; the Luthor name made her a pariah. The only reason Veronica talked to her was to piss off her family and seem like a rebel to the other girls at the school.

Lena hated boarding school, but the curriculum challenged and pushed her, which was a welcome distraction from the fact her family was falling apart. Her father's death was a year ago and she still hadn't processed it. Lillian reprimanding her every time Lena got emotional. Lex was no better. The brother who had teased and watched over her as a child was no more, replaced with a man who broke out into rants at the oddest things and openly fought with Superman.
Lillian stood back and smiled at her baby boy, supporting and encouraging everything he said and did. Lena found herself growing more and more disgusted and feared he was going to go too far one day, part of her knew he already had.

With a sigh, she returned to her homework, thoughts of her family pushed away to deal with another day, or never.

Her phone rang, breaking her concentration. She eyed it, wondering who was calling. Knowing only a handful of people had her number, none of whom she enjoyed talking to, she braced herself. When she saw Lillian's name flash, Lena's stomach dropped.

"Hello."

"Lena, I won't be home for the holidays. Your brother will be otherwise occupied as well. The staff at the house will be there if you need anything."

The line went dead before Lena had a chance to answer. She set the phone down, wondering why her mother was giving her over a month's notice on her holiday plans. Last year, Lionel's death had been a blip, the Luthor gala and other events still went on with Lex in the lead and Lillian's head held high. This year, she wondered what could have happened for Lillian to cancel everything. To give up a chance to kiss ass and schmooze investors. Whatever it was it had to be major.

Deciding the enigma that was her mother, could be deciphered another day, Lena went back to studying.

***

Kara felt…

Kara felt…cold.

"Wake up. Geez, what did they knock you out with?" A female voice echoed in Kara's head.

She sucked in a breath, her body aching for the first time since she'd been on this planet. She cracked an eye open then quickly closed it when the bright green glare of the overhead lights hurt her.

"Where am I?" she rasped.

The voice answered, "Hell."

Kara rolled to her side, held a hand above her eyes and dared a look, again. Four walls surrounded her. A small, stinky mattress beneath her. No blanket. A toilet and sink in the corner with no offer of privacy. A metal door with slats at the top and no handle stood in the middle of one of the walls. The room was about six by six feet.

A cell.

She'd been put in a cell.

She trembled at the implication. Heart thundering in her chest painfully while her breathing turned ragged.

"Hey, you okay? I'm not good at the whole socializing thing," asked the voice.

Kara forced herself to calm down, a little.
"Isn't hell supposed to be hot?" Her voice cracked and she hated it, but if whoever took her was listening she refused to let them know how scared she was.

"I didn’t mean it literally. Man, where did they find you?"

Kara put her hands on her temples willing the throbbing in her head to go away. She tried to stand up, then changed her mind, crawled to the toilet, and threw up.

"Try to relax. It won't last forever. They just want to find the right level of whatever it is they're using to keep you in check."

She flushed the toilet, wiping her mouth on the back of her hand. "How can I hear you?"

"It's something they set up…helps us feel less lonely or something psychobabblish like that."

Kara dragged herself back to the mattress letting her head flop down. A minute later, the door to her cell opened. A woman with auburn colored hair pulled into a tight bun and a smile similar to the ones she saw on the faces of people in commercials, fake and plastered on, entered. She held a silver tray just high enough so Kara couldn’t see what it held.

"My name's Lillian. We're going to get to know each other so well."

"Why am I here?"

Lillian knelt next to her, pushing a strand of hair back from Kara's face. "Because you're a threat. One we need to learn how to eradicate. Which means lots of studying. And sadly, for you, lots of pain."

Kara shrunk back at the needle when she noticed the green glow of the substance it held.

"Now, tell me when it hurts."

Lillian grabbed her arm when Kara tried to push away and jabbed the needle into her neck. Her blood boiled, her stomach ached, her heart thudded so hard against her chest she thought it would burst out and land on the floor in front of her like one of those horror movies Alex liked.

Despite the pain, she passed out with a smile thinking of her sister, knowing she had kept her safe.

She woke to the smell of vomit. Her bed was covered in it. A bowl of white paste sat on the floor next to her. The smells made her stomach roil and she groaned turning away from it.

"Eat it, trust me. Meals are not a regular thing here."

Kara rolled onto the floor wanting to get away from the sick, the food, from everything. She found herself pushed up against the wall, her hands and feet straining to push harder against the cold tile despite the fact she wasn’t moving.

She needed to get out of here. Needed to escape this small space that was closing in on her.

Pushing harder, straining with all her might, tears came to her eyes when nothing happened.

The green lights weren’t as bright but her body was still weak and a dull ache remained in the back of her head.

"You okay? Sounded pretty rough there…"
Kara eyed the room trying to find out where the voice was coming from. "Who are you?"

"Samantha, I think. At least that's the name I went by before they snagged me."

"Who snagged you? Where are we? What's going on?" Panic took hold of her again, she broke out in a sweat, and thought became difficult.

"Take a breath. This place sucks, a lot. You have to learn to keep your cool. Can't let it get to you."

"Can't let what get to me?"

"This place. It's the D.E.O. Department of Extranormal Operations. Some sort of government group that protects the planet against aliens. It wasn’t so bad at first, but ever since that Lillian woman and Henshaw started working together things have gotten bad."

Kara put a hand to her neck remembering the fake smiling woman and her needle full of pain. Her breath came in short gasps and the walls closed in on her. She was trapped in here the same way she had been trapped in her pod in the phantom zone.

No, she couldn't live through that again.

"What...how...long..." The fear in her voice was unmistakable, but she didn’t care.

"Concentrate on my voice, okay? I've been here since they snatched me off the streets. I think they once said it had been ten years but that was a while ago. It's hard to be sure."

"Ten years...how did you..." Kara's heart hammered against her ribs.

"My life wasn't the best and at first this place wasn't so bad. I had a room, meals, and other people to talk to on occasion. I'm used to it, but these changes are weird. They're gearing up for something."

A door creaked and Kara glanced to her right, but nothing had moved. Then low voices reached her ears.

"Samantha, I see you're making friends. This won't take long."

A loud groan made Kara's skin crawl. "Stop it! Don't hurt her."

"Don't worry, Kara. I'll be in to see you soon enough."

The slamming of a door, the latch of a lock, and then agonized screams were the only sounds Kara heard for the next several hours.

Now she knew the real reason they could hear one another.

***

Alex sat on Kara's bed. She sniffled a few times squeezing the blue blanket her sister insisted on sleeping with ever since the fireworks debacle. Streaky rubbed against her and let out a meow as he looked around the room.

"I miss her too."

The Danvers had waited all night for Superman to come back. When he did, his face said it all.

She listened to him explain that whoever took Kara knew how to avoid him. That they were
Alex knew. Kara and her missteps at school got flagged. How many times could a fourteen/fifteen-year-old girl be involved in incidents that had no logical explanation? If Superman had bothered to call and check on her he'd have known that. Maybe he would have spent some time with her to help her with her abilities instead of leaving her to fend for herself.

Blood flowed from the wound on Alex's palm as she listened to the so-called hero talk. The D.E.O. had been slowly turning against aliens and the new head had taken a special interest in Superman. No one had to say what would happen if it truly was them who got hold of Kara. His warnings to her parents about various methods of experimentation he'd heard about and the danger Kara was in when he'd first dropped her off were enough to give Alex nightmares for a month.

Her parents had taken her into the bathroom and re-bandaged her hand. When the sky started to turn that reddish pink that Kara loved, Alex went into their room, headed to Kara's bed, and buried herself under the blue blanket while wrapping herself around a very unhappy Streaky.

She woke to the phone ringing and a pang of hope shot through her. She sat up, waiting, hoping for good news, but she didn't hear the sound of footsteps on the stairs or the cry of relief her mom would be sure to make. A sigh escaped her, her shoulders sagged, an emptiness formed in her chest.

She got to her feet heading toward the dresser. Out of the corner of her eye she caught sight of a piece of paper with the house of El symbol on it and Alex scribbled at the bottom. She picked it up with trembling fingers and unfolded the note, palming the object that fell into her hand.

Alex,

I'm sorry about the window, but I promised to protect you and I never break my promises. I hope you're okay and that whoever these men are they leave you and your parents alone. I want you to know I am so happy that out of all the people on this planet I got you as a sister. I want you to hold onto something for me. It's the most important thing I have and I know you'll keep it safe.

Love,

Kara

Alex held the necklace Kara always wore and slid down the wall she had been leaning against.

Why didn’t she say yes to go flying? If she had, Kara would still be there.

Undoing the clasp, she put it around her neck and made a promise.

One day, no matter what it took, no matter what she had to do, she'd find her sister and bring her home.

"You okay, honey?" Eliza stood in the doorway, her split lip noticeable against pale skin.

Alex shook her head not trusting her voice. She squeezed her hand, the pull of the stitches in her palm giving her something to focus on.

"Clark said to give it time. He's going to talk to some friends and see if."
"The D.E.O. denied any involvement in Kara's kidnapping. And he's too good to threaten people to get the truth. He could get her back!"

"He's just as worried as we are. If he goes in there angry he'll just prove them right." Eliza moved aside when Jeremiah joined her.

"We don’t know if Kara has any time. We don’t know anything. She might already be de—"

Her dad wrapped her in his arms. "Kara's tough. She's going to be fine and we're going to get her back."

Alex looked up at him, staring right into his eyes. "Promise?"

"I promise."

And she believed him. Not Superman who had left Kara with them and then took off. Not the government who they had been wary of since the start. But her dad, she knew she could trust him.

"Okay."

"Now, go with your mother and let me see what I can do to fix this window properly."

Alex stopped. "Maybe we can build a spot to sit out on the roof. For when Kara comes back."

Jeremiah swallowed. "Yeah, we can do that, honey."

That night Alex sat on the front porch with her mom. They'd set out a plate full of dinner leftovers like Kara always did. They had more than usual, Eliza, so used to cooking for Kara's appetite…

When the cat glanced around and mewed in the direction of where Kara usually sat when she petted him, Alex sobbed into her mother's side.

***

Rain pelted the windows and made everything beyond the limo blurry. Lena merely let her head fall back against the seat.

"Ms. Luthor, we're here. Do you need any help with your bag?" Harry, the family driver asked.

"I'm fine, thank you." Lena grabbed her small tote and exited.

Once inside the house, she hung up her coat and kicked off her shoes. She waited, part of her thinking this was some elaborate trick by Lillian.

After a few moments, Mary appeared. "Ms. Luthor, can I get you something to drink? Tea, perhaps?"

"Please, call me Lena when my mother isn’t here…she isn’t, is she?" Lena glanced around, still unsure she would spend the holiday Lillian free.

"No, and it's a good thing. Are you wearing jeans? And are those running shoes?" Mary shook her head, but the smile on her face took any harshness out of the words.

Lena shrugged. "Yes, typical attire for a thirteen-year-old. My mother doesn’t seem to understand that."
Mary grabbed her bag. "I'll take this to your room. Go raid the fridge. I made some of those cookies you like."

Lena smiled for the first time in months. "Snicker Doodles? You're the best."

In the kitchen, she piled a plate with several cookies and a sandwich Mary insisted she eat. Lena walked toward the dining room, changing her mind at the last minute and heading toward her father's office.

She stood outside the door, hand trembling as it reached for the knob. The last time she'd been in there, he was alive. He'd had her sit next to him as he explained various things about Luthor Corp and even showed her his secret room telling her not to tell anyone else about it, especially Lillian or Lex. When she asked why, he frowned.

"You're too young to understand, but sometimes the people we love do do bad things. And when that happens we're faced with a terrible decision. I'm doing what I can to make sure no such burden ever falls on you, but I need you to be prepared, just in case." He tapped the keypad and the door to the hidden area slid shut.

Lena bit her lip, unsure. "Is this about Lex?"

Her father put an arm around her shoulder and led her back to his desk. "It's about a lot of things. You're a smart girl, brilliant, and I know you can see the change in your brother."

Lena nodded, not sure what to say.

Lionel flipped open his computer. "No matter what, I need you to know that I love you and trust you. Now, want to know how the Research and Development Department works? I bet I can call up a few projects that might interest you?"

A small smile crossed her face at the memory. She twisted the handle, surprised when it opened. The familiar smell hit her and she took a moment to collect herself.

Entering further, she set the plate down on the coffee table and sat in the center of the couch. Running her hands along the cushions beside her she eyed the chess board. The same game lay out that she had started with her father before he'd died.

Glancing toward his desk a moment later, she found herself sitting in his chair. There was no computer or stack of files awaiting his signature. The drawers were empty and the filing cabinet from the corner was missing.

She spun the chair to face the back wall and felt for the hidden button he'd shown her, pulling her hand away when she found it. For some reason she knew this wasn't the right time. Whatever was in there was not something she could understand with her limited resources, let alone be able to do anything with.

She'd have to wait.

Swiping one of her father's fountain pens, she picked up her plate before heading out of the room.

Spending Christmas with the people her mother referred to as staff was fine with Lena. They were far nicer to her than her mother ever was and they let her be a kid. Mary even had Lucas, who tended the garden, go out and get a tree.

They spent hours decorating it while drinking hot cocoa and Lena ate cookies until she felt sick.
There were worse ways to spend the holidays.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

TW - Talk of torture/experimentation but nothing graphic

Kara yawned then opened her eyes with care. She raised her arm, pushing through how heavy it felt. She ran a hand down her face, fingers tracing prominent cheekbones, a small scar on her right cheek courtesy of Lillian. Blowing out a breath, she rubbed over a pimple on her forehead. She made a face, annoyed, but resigned. The first one had been a couple months after she'd arrived and she wasn’t a fan. She understood why Alex had complained about them all the time.

A moan escaped her when she rolled over and got to her feet, wearing two sets of socks to keep away the cold of the floor. She'd fought tooth and nail, and it wasn’t until she had almost frozen to death that Lillian relented and allowed the luxury. A thin sheet fell from her body, but she didn’t bother with it. Once she found her balance, she took one large step and was in front of the sink.

The small space had taken a while to get used to, a long while, and at times she wanted to pound on the walls and scream, and a few times she did, but on most days she found it calming. Her whole entire world consisted of this small space. A new life that if she were to lose, she wouldn’t really care.

And having lost two lives already, she felt confident in her assessment.

Turning the tap she splashed cold, rust-colored water on her face then stared in the mirror. She glared at it, wondering if her keepers were watching from behind. Taking notes on her decline. Thinking of new and horrible ways to torture her.

Her hair had gotten longer, blonder and more brittle with time and her eyes were bluer but had a dull, lifeless quality. Her skin, well it was ghostly, which suited her fine because that's what she felt like. She wiggled her lips inspecting teeth that weren’t as white as they used to be, a few of them disturbingly loose.

Kara Zor-El was long gone and with her Kara Danvers. She didn’t know who this mess was looking back at her.

Lifting up the edge of the grey tank top she wore, she ran a finger along her ribs. Each one easily felt and seen.

They limited her food as an insurance policy in case of, well, she didn’t know why, but she was sure their reasons were logical to them. After all the crap that had been done to her, she couldn’t imagine she'd ever be strong again let alone any sort of threat. Hell, most days she didn’t think she'd make it through the night.

Was it day? Night? She had no idea and part of her had gone crazy with the not knowing when she'd first arrived, but now she didn’t care. The lights were always on, a dull green color she had grown to despise.

A constant tingling on her skin, and the blood in her veins thrumming painfully. Though with time it
had lessened or she had gotten used to the pain, she didn’t know which and didn’t really care.

She slipped her shirt down and shuffled two steps to the mattress. Sitting on it, she leaned against the wall and let her head fall back.

Taking a few moments to center herself as best she could, she recited one of Rao’s prayers. When the weight on her chest lessened when the overwhelming urge to scream and claw her way out diminished, when the anger that had eaten away at years lowered to a boil, she opened her eyes.

“How are you today, Sam? Didn’t hear any screams yesterday.”

A slight rustling made it to Kara’s ears, then a groan.

“Ugh, whatever they tried this time just made me sick.”

“I hate those treatments. Rao, we need to get out of here.”

A weak laugh. “All this time and you still talk about that.”

Kara shrugged then remembered her friend couldn’t see her. “Well, what else is there? We’ve competed over who had the worst headache, stomachache, rash, and body ache to name a few.”

A game, twisted as it was, that allowed them to find some way to deal with the horrors they had gone through. Without it, Kara knew she would have lost her mind long ago.

“True. And you’ve updated me on pop culture and taught me more about birds than any one person should know.”

Over the years Kara had been held captive, Sam had been there for her. They offered words of comfort or silence when they knew there was nothing to be said. They made each other laugh, shared tears, and found ways to pass the time. And though they had never once seen each other, Kara owed this girl everything.

“Thanks, Sam.”

“For what?”

“Being here I guess.”

Sam laughed. “No problem, I didn’t have anything else planned.”

Kara quirked her lip at the comment then frowned thinking of Alex.

“I think I’ve told you about every movie I’ve seen, book I’ve read, as well as singing a lot of songs and I’ll tell you right now a lot of those lyrics are probably wrong.” Kara sighed thinking of the memories she’d created with her sister and how when things got really bad, when Rao’s prayers didn’t even touch the hell she was in, those memories saved her.

“We could talk about your family more? I like hearing about them.”

Kara knocked her head against the wall lightly. When she'd calmed down and accepted her fate. When she’d realized Kal wasn’t coming and this was her new life, she’d talked about her families, life on Krypton and life on Earth. But as time went by it got harder. She missed her parents. She missed Krypton. She missed the Danvers. She missed Alex.

She'd cried herself to sleep hundreds of times. Begged Lillian to let her go home. But in the end, she
was still here. The lives she had were a distant memory and this new one, this waking nightmare, had scared away all her good thoughts and feelings. She only took them out when absolutely necessary, keeping them safe in the back of her mind protected from her reality.

"I don't remember much. It's been so long." A lie, she just didn’t want to talk about things that she'd never have again. "How about movies? Or tell me about those dreams you've been having." Kara gripped the mattress beneath her. Years of use had turned it into more of a glorified mat.

A retching noise. "They're getting worse. Last night I dreamt there was a monster attacking me. It was huge, mean looking with a sword and black eyes. Nothing could stop it. I was mindless, wanting only to kill. I couldn’t stop."

Kara sat on the mattress, her feet dangling off the edge. How tall was she now? Almost as tall as Lillian but not nearly as imposing. "That sounds like a scary one. Who did you kill?"

"What? Not me, the monster did, and I don't know. I couldn’t make out their face. But it was like waving a red flag at a bull. Is that the right expression?"

"Yep."

Kara closed her eyes knowing they'd come for her soon. They didn’t come every day, not even every week. There were times when a month went by and they didn’t have a visit. Kara suspected that Lillian took whatever she learned and then locked herself in a lab to try and figure it out, apply it to something terrible.

But no matter what, she always came back.

That was the pattern. Kara then Sam then Kara then Sam…Over and over again.

Torture, rinse, repeat.

And they were able to hear one another unless it was a lab day, which had made it terrifying in the beginning but now Kara just wanted it over. Every time they shot her up with some new concoction, every time they cut into a part of her, every time they starved her for days on end, she prayed that would be the time.

That the pain would end.

That she would die.

Her continued survival was annoying both her and Lillian if the older woman's increased attempts and muttered threats were any indication. What they could still learn from her was a mystery. One she hoped they solved soon.

"Kara, I have a surprise for you today."

She glanced over at Lillian. When did the door open? She needed to stop letting her mind wander.

The woman held a cupcake with two candles on it.

An image from a cartoon she'd seen popped into her head. "Does it explode when I eat it?"

"No, don't be foolish. Agent Henshaw thought it would be good for your morale if we celebrated your…well, your capture date. Can you believe it's already been four years? We've learned so much, but my work isn't done."
Kara waited, body rigid, hands ready to go up into a defensive posture. Lillian liked to strike out for no reason, to test Kara's reflexes, she claimed.

"Come on, blow out the candles, I could only scrounge up these but it doesn't matter. And, as is custom on this planet you get to make a wish. Not that it matters for your kind."

A cake with birds and icing covering the faces of a laughing Eliza and Jeremiah flashed in her mind. The concert tickets they had given her. The art supplies from Alex. Kara forced the memories down, not wanting to taint them but hating Lillian for ruining something as sacred to her as her Earth Birthday.

"Come on, we have a busy day."

The flame flickered from her weak attempt to blow it out. She blew harder and watched it putter and for a second she saw the candles as symbolizing her. Burning bright but snuffed out. Nothing left but melted wax and wisps of smoke.

"Right, now that we've done that, come with me."

Lab day, ugh, Kara hated those.

Pushing off the floor she left Lillian's offering on the floor not trusting it. She followed the woman down a well-lit hallway to a large door guarded by two men. Neither one looked at Kara when she went by, they never did. The novelty of an alien had worn off.

Once inside the cold room, Kara went to her spot and waited. A thinly padded table. She'd learned when she cooperated they didn't tie her down, a small mercy. She gritted her teeth. A procedure? A timed study of something they introduced into her blood? The stupid looking head thing they used to make her solar flare, in the beginning, was gone...Kara no longer had her heat vision. She didn't have most of her powers actually.

Lillian pulled a chair over and waved at a mirror. "She's here."

Kara shivered sensing this was going to be different.

"There's a man on the other side of the glass. You met him when you first arrived. He learned so much. But, now I need you to answer all of his questions. He risked a lot to make this trip so I expect you to behave. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

A deep voice purred over the intercom. "Tell me everything you know about Superman and his secret identity."

Today was going to suck, Kara thought before saying, "I don't know anything."

"Come on. Is he really worth all the pain you know is coming?" Lillian whispered.

Kara didn't respond, instead focusing on her anger. In these instances, she'd abandoned the prayers and mantras of Rao long ago.

"You kept your connection to him a secret from us. That wasn't very nice. We had to find out from another alien that knows him." Lillian squeezed Kara's arm, her nails digging in and drawing blood. "And I do not like it when people keep things from me."
Kara winced but remained silent. One thing she appreciated about Lillian was the woman did try to comfort her with lies.

"I thought you said you had broken her? Get her to talk. I need to take him down!" The voice over the intercom ground out.

"She's stronger than I expected. Annoyingly resilient. But, she'll talk." Lillian nodded, then uncovered a metal tray revealing various instruments Kara was more than familiar with.

"Now, that's not very cooperative, is it? We'll try one more time and then it's the hard way. And you don't want that," Lillian said while pulling out the straps.

Kara knew without a doubt she was going to win the worst day ever contest with Sam.

***

Alex checked her watch. Seven o'clock. If she left now she could sneak in at least five more hours of studying.

"Hey, are you listening to me?" Hayley asked.

"Of course," Alex responded automatically. She had no idea what the girl was talking about but she'd lost a bet with her roommate, Amy, and had to go on this stupid date.

Hayley gave her a look. "You don’t want to be here do you?"

Alex pursed her lips. "It's not you. I have this thing in a few days and it's super important."

"I told Amy not to pressure you into this. You lose a bet?"

"Yeah, I should know better by now, but apparently I like learning the hard way."

Hayley laughed. "I'll make a deal with you. Let's call it a night and if you feel like hanging out in the future give me a call. No bets involved. I'm weird and prefer to date women who actually want to go out with me."

Alex nodded. "That's a sound way of doing things."

Hayley tossed a few crumpled bills on the table and smiled. "Later, Danvers."

Alex forced herself to smile, then shot to her feet and was in her room ten minutes later with books and notes spread out in front of her ranging from psychology to chemistry to articles on alien physiology. This she could navigate. This she could make sense of. This she could handle.

Dating…that was a whole different beast. And not something she wanted to deal with. Coming out had been easy and rather underwhelming. She wasn’t scared of losing friends because she didn’t have that many to start with, and when it came to what others thought of her she didn’t really give a damn. Her parents still loved and accepted her, though Alex was pretty sure there was nothing she could do to ever make them hate her. They still had her and they'd learned that was the most important thing in the world.

After Kara, they changed, which was to be expected. They put her in therapy wanting to make sure she was okay and did family sessions for themselves. But she knew her dad blamed himself and that her mother still cried often about it.

Therapy helped to a degree, it made coming out a hell of a lot easier. But, the hole she had in her
heart from the loss of Kara, the anger...was always there. Lurking below the surface. So, she learned to channel it. Set goals for herself and achieved them no matter what.

Relationships, dating...not really something she wanted to delve into. She'd gone a few dates and had some fun times when she was certain there were no strings attached, but getting involved emotionally? That was off the table.

Finding Kara was the priority.

In the years she'd spent studying, Kara was never far from her thoughts. Bringing her sister had become her purpose. No matter how far-fetched it was all these years later. No matter the odds that kept stacking up against her. No matter the fact she was the only one who thought she was still alive.

She fidgeted with the necklace around her neck, that night...the letter flashing in front of her.

Pushing it away, she focused on what was important.

**A Few Days Later** -

"Danvers, get up."

Something hard landed on top of Alex, a textbook maybe? "I don't wanna."

"You told me to do whatever I needed in order to get you out of bed this morning. I'll be honest, I have a bucket of ice water and I will use it."

Alex groaned. "Why, why would I tell you something like that?"

"The overachiever in you intends to finish college in two and half years with two bachelor's making the rest of us look like slackers?"

Alex bolted out of bed, tripping over her shoes. "Dammit, Amy! I told you I had to be up."

Amy laughed. "Do you know how hard you are to wake up?"

She ignored her roommate and slipped into the first t-shirt she picked up and pulled on a pair of jeans that sort of passed the sniff test. "I gotta go. I'll meet up with you later."

"Good luck."

Alex waved a hand in the general direction of her roommate and hauled ass out the door. She'd been put up for a medical internship at Luthor Corp and today was the only day they were holding the entry exams. She'd been studying for weeks, determined to win one of the three coveted spots.

Winding her way through the various corridors and pathways that would lead her to the lecture hall where the test was being administered, her thoughts went to Kara. Her sister had been gone for over four years. In that time Superman had discovered that an offshoot of the D.E.O. had taken his cousin. This particular branch didn’t need to explain, justify, or report any of their activities. What was worse, was that certain people within the military supported them.

Superman had tried to find out more, but the people in charge were smart. No reports existed. No communications to be tapped. Everything was off the books.

Her parents had kept up a positive attitude the first couple of years, but it had taken a toll. Holidays were full of sad smiles and sentences that trailed off whenever Kara's name was brought up. If she were being honest, it took a toll on her too, but she hid in school to avoid admitting it. Kara was alive
and she was going to get her back.

*It was as simple as that.*

She slowed her steps in front of the door to the auditorium. A few deep breaths later she entered, smoothing down her shirt, realizing too late it was on backward and inside out. A few seats remained in the front row and when she settled in and looked up, the imposing figure of Lex Luthor stood over her.

"Alex Danvers. I was worried you weren't coming." He winked before placing the test in front of her. "I read your paper on the impact of splicing and sequencing mutant genes. Interesting ideas."

She forced a smile. "Nothing could have kept me away, sir, and I agree, the future of genetic splicing needs to be delved into more."

"That's the kind of attitude we're looking for."

He stepped away to speak with a tall woman Alex recognized as Lillian Luthor. She eyed Alex, appraising her, and it set Alex's nerves on end.

"You may start."

Alex turned her full attention to the test, rubbing the necklace around her neck for luck. She zipped through the multiple choice section as well as the true/false bit. When she got to the essay portion she slowed down making sure to answer in a way that was correct but also indicated her as the type of person who thought outside of the box and might lack a moral compass when it came to certain things.

Like experimenting on aliens.

"And time, pencils down."

She scribbled one last sentence before Lex picked up her papers. "I'm sure you did fine, Alex. Now go relax with your friends. You deserve it."

When she got to her feet she caught sight of a girl with dark hair and pale skin, maybe sixteen or seventeen, her head bowed over a book. Lex said something and when the girl looked up Alex caught sight of her green eyes and almost stumbled at how sad they were. A second later the girl glanced away.

Lena Luthor. Alex recognized her. Brilliant and beautiful, but also a mystery. No friends to speak of and a loner. In the few photos Alex had seen of her, she always looked disinterested, annoyed, and sad.

Lex spoke with Lillian a moment, then glanced toward Alex. Unable to give the moment proper attention due to the all-nighters and cram sessions that had gotten her here, Alex headed back toward her dorm. She sent off a quick text to her mom that she'd finished and snagged a bagel from an outdoor café. By the time she reached her room, she was ready to crash. She face planted on her mattress, asleep before her head hit the pillow.

"Danvers, get up."

Alex moaned. "G'way…sleep'ng."

A door slamming caused Alex to bolt upright. Her eyes wide, heart thundering in her chest. Her eyes
darted around the room, body alert.

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. The clock on her nightstand let her know it was close to dinner time. She'd managed to get a solid five hours of sleep. Not ideal, but about what she was used to.

Grabbing her shower bag she headed to the bathroom, better late than never. When she finished she gathered her dirty clothes and stuck them in a bag. A note caught her eye on her second investigation of the room. Her nerves still on edge from being awoken so abruptly.

Her roommate let her know their friends were meeting for the last pizza night of the semester if she was interested in going.

She wasn’t.

Packed safely in her car she headed home for Christmas break. The three-hour drive giving her time to think about the dreams she’d had.

Kara alone.

Kara dying.

Kara screaming for help.

Always the same. She hit the steering wheel, her thumb unconsciously rubbing the bumpy area on her palm. The scar from all those years ago a physical reminder of what had happened and the promise she’d made.

She knew the test questions triggered some of the more horrific dreams she'd had. God, why did she ever watch those horror movies as a kid? More importantly, why was Luthor Corp looking for students with a hope to practice science and questionable morals?

When she'd heard about the internship, it was just another part of her plan. But recent news from a certain Metropolis-based reporter as well as the essay portion of her entry exam today confirmed her suspicions that Lex was not just anti-Superman. His hate speech against the hero and violent attacks were testament to that. But the rumors of what he was doing now seemed a lot more credible.

Not many companies in the tech industry asked questions about how to combine human and alien DNA. Nor did they specify what issues one might come up against and ask how they would deal with them. And what the hell was a chrysalis?

As soon as she got home she'd tell her dad everything and he'd send an encrypted message to Clark.

Lex Luthor had an alien and was planning to do something with their DNA that would not end well.

Alex's stomach tightened at the thought. Was it Kara? God, what would they do if it was? She forced herself to breathe, calming her nerves. If she ever planned to get scouted by the D.E.O. she needed to appear unflappable. Top of her class but not arrogant. Adaptable.

It was a longshot, but she didn’t care. Her degrees in Xenobiology and Psychology were just the start. After she graduated she’d get her Ph.D. in medicine, but with any hope sometime before that, she'd be approached.

She fiddled with the necklace around her neck thinking of all things she wanted to say to Kara. All the movies she had put aside over the years because she couldn’t imagine watching them with anyone but her sister.
The names of all the types of food she’d discovered that Kara needed to try. The books she needed to read about birds. Even the boy bands she’d sing along to and make Alex crazy.

Most of all she just wanted to be able to hug her sister again.

"Alex, I don't want you doing this anymore. If Lex does have an alien or plans to do something I want you as far from it as possible," her dad said.

Taking a sip from her mug of tea, she counted to five. "Dad, this is my chance. What if we can find her? We have to try."

Her mom entered then, a weary smile on her face. "Honey, your father's right. Lex recognized you. He knows who you are. The deal was if this ever got dangerous for you, you'd stop."

Alex set her mug on the table. "Kara wouldn’t stop. Not ever. How can I?"

"You're not listening. You can get hurt. You're not invulnerable. I have to protect you."

She didn’t need to hear him say that he hadn't protected Kara, the guilt was all over his face.

Alex pulled at the sleeve of her shirt. "This watch is a direct link to Superman. I literally have him on speed dial. I know you want to protect me, but I have to do this…I have to try."

Her dad shook his head. "This ends now. I'm not losing you, too!" He left the room, but she saw the tears in his eyes.

Across from her, her mom sighed. "Alex, try to understand. Maybe Clark will come up with something. But for right now, we need you safe. Please."

Alex nodded, "Okay, whatever you need."

Her mom reached over and gave her a hug before going to find her dad. Alex had to admit she was a little more than shocked that her mom believed her. But, more often than not people opt for the comfort of a lie, known or not, rather than the truth.

Getting to her feet, she walked onto the front porch and sat on the comfy wicker couch. Streaky followed, curling up next to her. And like she always did, she let her hand rest on him while she talked about her plans.

Five days later she received a letter, handwritten, from Lex Luthor letting her know that she didn't make it into the program.

That was okay; she was patient and excelled at strategizing.

***

Lena set her laptop down after hitting send on her last paper of the semester. She debated what to do next. Most of her friends were already gone so her options were limited.

Outside her dorm room, students were running up and down the hallways. Exchanges of gifts and Happy Holidays, and Merry Christmas floating into her room.

She stuck in her earphones and cranked up the volume.

Spending the holidays here was fine with her. Several friends had invited her to their homes, and while she appreciated the thought, it didn’t feel right. She couldn’t put her finger on it, instead
chalking it up to the age difference and a growing fear of the negative attention her last name attracted.

Pulling her computer over she pulled up her schedule for the next semester. A couple more years and she'd have two masters degrees finished and then perhaps join a Ph.D. program.

Pulling a blanket over her, she stared at the ceiling while music blasted in her ears. She thought back to the Christmas when Mary had made her Snicker Doodles and sighed. Her mother had found out, of course, she always did. And she wasn’t happy. She had sent Lena a text on her second day back at boarding school to let her know she’d replaced the entire household staff with those who understood their place.

Lena had tried calling Mary and Lucas but their numbers were disconnected. She'd felt terrible, still did. To make sure it never happened again she refused to go home for any holidays or summer breaks. The only time she gave in was when Lex begged her to go to some charity gala that was going to bore him to tears without her presence.

She laughed at those who felt bad for her. Without Lillian's constant critiquing and disapproval, Lena was free. She wore jeans and sweatshirts. Had a kick-ass graphic tee collection. Ate junk food. And had a great group of friends that didn’t care about her age.

She'd gone straight from her boarding school to M.I.T. With a two-week European interlude, courtesy of her brother to try and make up for missing out on so many things in Lena's life. Not that it worked. He left halfway through because of an emergency, though she knew it had more to do with whatever secret project him and Lillian had been working on for the last few years.

She caught snippets of conversation here and there, but nothing that made sense.

Either way, when it came to Lena, Lillian didn’t care what she was doing or where she was or possibly didn’t notice. Lena knew the latter was more likely.

Lex tried to talk to her a few times but it was strained and different. There was a growing rage in him bubbling just below the surface. He sent a text here and there. He even called a few times when he thought she might be able to help with a problem in the R&D department. She did, of course, and he was always grateful and she got a glimpse of the brother she had loved if only for a few seconds.

Those moments, when he would go on and on about how proud he was of his little sister, were rare and she held on to them. They got her through many a tough night.

But now, she was pretty sure those days were gone. Her last interaction with him had been about the possible integration of alien DNA into a human host. The data she’d seen worried her, but she didn’t say anything. Only going along with it to find out more. If what she’d read was correct, he had something at his disposal and from what Lena was able to infer, things were not going well.

She'd fought against her urge to ignore it, to not imagine the terrible tests they were conducting but acted interested instead. He'd taken her to National City. Apparently, Luthor Corp was introducing an internship for aspiring medical students. Lena sat in on one of the test sessions. The only one both her brother and mother were attending. They whispered something about one of the students, but she didn’t catch the name.

Instead, she read her book, hoping they'd accidentally slip up if she made herself invisible.

Afterward, Lex had thumbed through the exams, selecting a few and tossing the rest aside. He slipped them into his briefcase and smiled.
"Ready to get some lunch?"

Lena stood, hoping she wasn’t grimacing too noticeably.

"Lex, we don't have time. I need to get back to my studies," Lillian said.

Not reacting, Lena merely nodded.

Lillian had been out more than usual, taking on the role of cheerleader for Lex when both the authorities and citizens of Metropolis begged him to leave Superman alone.

"Hmm, she's right, Lena. We'll do it another time. The jet's ready to take you back to school." With a quick hug and directions to their security to get Lena to the car, he was gone.

A flickering of her lights roused Lena from her thoughts. She hated dorm life and was looking forward to getting an apartment for the next semester. Being seventeen sucked. Especially when most of the people in her classes were upwards of five or six years older than her.

Pulling off her headphones, she listened a moment, glad to hear that things had calmed down.

Walking over to her mini fridge, she pulled out a day old sandwich then grabbed a box of store-bought Snicker Doodles.

A knock on her door stopped her. She debated a moment whether or not to answer. Another knock, more insistent. More debate.

"Come on, Lena. I know you're in there," Ryan, her lab partner said in a sing-song voice.

With a resigned sigh, she opened the door. "Please tell me you're not here for last minute help."

He entered with a take-out bag of Chinese, grinning at her. "Of course not, that's my secret plan to get you to open the door tomorrow."

Lena rolled her eyes. "The assignment's due today."

"Exactly, can you see how that would make tomorrow all dramatic and make you feel bad for me?"

She smirked. "I see. You're trying the pity route this time."

He shrugged, handing her a container of vegetables and rice. "Um, can you blame me? Not only are you," he motioned toward her gesturing up and down. "But you're also the smartest person here."

Lena sat on the floor and began to eat. "I already agreed to help you next semester, so what's all this for?"

Ryan pursed his lips before talking, "We worry about you. You lock yourself away in here and never hang out with us. You know we love you, right? We know you're not...you know..."

The food in Lena's mouth turned to dust and she struggled to swallow. "I don't lock myself away. I went to Jen's birthday thing last week."

"That was two months ago, and it was for Monica." He cocked his head to the side, a challenging look on his face.

Lena stabbed at the food in front of her. "I...last time I went out with you guys that stupid reporter was there and after what Lex has been doing I honestly just don't want to deal with it."
He sidled up next to her, nudging his shoulder against hers. "I get it, I do. But gentle reminder, you have friends here that want you to be okay."

"Thanks." And there was nothing more she could really say to that.

She had friends who cared about her, but she kept them at arm's length. The fear of what Lillian might do always in the back of her mind. She might be free in some sense of the word, but in many ways the woman still controlled many of the decisions Lena made.

One day she promised herself, one day she'd make her own decisions and to hell with Lillian.
Chapter 4

Alex secured her vest then checked her weapon. She grabbed a knife from the small container in the back of the SUV and slipped it into a compartment on her sleeve.

Inhaling, she tried to focus her thoughts. She needed to be on the ball right now.

No fear.

No hesitation.

No doubts.

For the last week and a half, she'd been running from one location to the next, racing an invisible clock.

Lex Luthor had finally snapped, and in doing so, during his attack on Superman, had made the mistake of taunting him about Kara. The fight was over then. The Man of Steel, taking down Lex in a matter of moments. Shaking with anger when he handed him over to the D.E.O.

Alex had tried to approach him but was waved off. J'onn stood there, his face blank. Alex knew he was unable to read Kryptonian minds, but he could read human ones. Two hours later they had a list of a dozen CADMUS facilities Lex knew of, but only half of which he had been to. The problem was he hadn't visited any in over a year. The only person who knew where Kara was, was Lillian Luthor and she had been off the grid for years.

Kicking at the ground, frustrated things were taking so long, Alex mentally listed off what she needed to do if they found Kara.

"You ready?" J'onn asked, in the guise if Director Henshaw.

Alex nodded. "You know I've been preparing for this since the moment she was taken."

"I know. That's my concern."

His eyes were too sympathetic. Too kind. She forced herself to look away.

"She's alive. I know it."

Superman landed then. "Lead lined like the others. I can't hear anything but haven’t seen any activity to indicate it's an active base."

J'onn's eyes glowed red for a moment. "There are people inside. At least two."

Alex nodded at Superman. "Same plan? If she's in there we get her out as soon as possible. You take her to the fortress. Let us deal with whatever else is in there. Got it?"

He took a step toward her. "Alex…"

She put a hand up. "That's the deal, don't change it now."

He nodded.

"I'll go brief the other agents," J'onn said.
Alex stood, arms crossed, staring at their target.

***

Kara's arm flopped on the floor. Did she mean to do that? She let out a shallow breath. Where was she? Her thoughts oozed around her head, images scattering around of three different lives. Her stomach cramped again and a low moan escaped her.

"How are you doing today?" Sam asked.

"Loving life, you?" Kara managed to wheeze out.

"Can't complain. They haven't been in here for a few days, so I'm betting they forgot about me."

Kara managed a weak laugh, that came out sounding more like a rasp. "When did you get a sense of humor?"

"Hell if I know. Must be one of the things they did to me."

Kara inhaled, trying to relax. "Wish they'd give me one."

"No kidding, you of all people need one."

Kara traced a crack on the wall with her finger. "I'm not a people." All of the harsh words and accusations from Lillian bounced around her head.

"Well, then I'm a proud non-people, too."

Kara's body relaxed as the cramp eased. She pushed herself into a sitting position, her head resting against the side of the toilet.

"You okay?"

Kara looked at her bony arms and stick-thin legs jutting out from beneath a threadbare blanket. "Just tired. They're doing a starvation thing." Words were getting harder to find and her eyes drooped more and more.

"Oh, same, though I'm not complaining. The last time they brought me something it was furry and moving."

Kara half-smiled. "Complain to the management. They're letting things slip."

"I know, who would run a business like this. No one's going to want to come back. I can tell you as soon as I get out of here I'm complaining to the manager. Then again, I barely remember my life before this. For all I know, your talk of the outside world is a bunch of delusions."

"Not delusional, and not a repeat customer." Kara forced herself to concentrate, pick the words and form them in the right way.

"Yeah, and it's not like you see anyone to ask for clean towels or sheets. I mean come on, how hard is it to get someone to do that?"

Forcing herself to stay in the present and not wander off in her thoughts, Kara eyed her door, no tell-tale rattle. No faint footsteps outside. "And activities, nothing to do here."

"The whole routine is thrown off. Has been for a while."
"Hmmm." Kara knew she should say more, but sleep was tugging at the edges of her mind.

"Hey, you still with me?"

Worry laced Sam's words, and Kara wanted to reassure her, but didn't know how.

"Want to hear about my latest dream?"

"Uh huh." A wave of nausea hit Kara.

She pulled herself over to the sink, reaching up to turn on the tap and cup some water in her hand. With care she brought it to her mouth, feeling her lips crack and bleed when she opened them to drink.

"I'll take it that you're too overwhelmed with joy to speak and share it with you. So, it starts out with this monster, the one I told you about. Black eyes and a sword, she's ticked. So, so angry…"

Kara slid down the wall knowing the dream by heart. She thought of her discussion with Sam. From their, what she hoped were secret clues, there hadn't been any new movement or experiments in the last few weeks and the quality of everything had been on a steady decline for what she estimated to be months. Not that they ever had the best, but lately it was different. Almost as if Lillian wasn't able to visit as often.

Not that she'd hold up to another one of Lillian's sessions. The woman was hell bent on making Kara suffer for not giving up Kal, and it only got worse the last few years. Lillian had changed, going from methodical scientist with no problem experimenting on aliens to pissed off defender of the human race willing to do anything. She'd mumble under her breath about her baby boy then glare at Kara. But, no matter what was done to her, what threats were made, Kara never broke. She never gave up her cousin.

It was her duty to protect him after all.

Her eyes closed. The weight of her lids too much to hold up. Part of her knew she wasn’t going to open them again. Her body was shutting down, and she was so, so grateful for that.

A boom sounded rattling her teeth and she realized she was dreaming of the night she was taken. A night she didn't often revisit. Or maybe she was remembering when Krypton exploded. It was so hard to keep track of everything. She coughed, not remembering that part. Then the metal latch of her door sliding and the creak of the hinges. Three loud steps, a gasp.

"God, Kara…is that you? Hold on. I got you."

Kara had no idea where that came from, she didn’t recall hearing it before, but decided to go with it. The end was so close, she could feel it.

Strong arms cradled her and she liked this version of the nightmare much better. She allowed herself to think of her parents and Alex, allowing the good memories to come out. She sagged into the embrace of the person holding her, a familiar smell making her feel safe. Something she hadn't felt for...well, since she'd been brought to this hell hole. She liked the idea of being carried out of this life feeling safe.

Voices buzzed around her.

"Kara, I need you to hold on okay? Clark…Kal is going to take you now. Please hold on."
"J'onn, we're gonna need you. We found her and Superman needs to get her out of here, now."

The arms holding her shifted and a warm body with hard, firm muscles pulled her close. Then, the faintest sensation of heat on her skin. A deep voice murmuring in her ear. "I'm so sorry. You're going to be fine. I promise."

Then wind whipping by, her hair, stringy and limp, stinging against her face. When she'd first arrived on Earth the sun's effect on her had been instantaneous. Her cells absorbing the radiation. Her muscles hardened. The changes inside of her were not visible but she could feel them. If what was happening now was real, which she knew it wasn't, the warmth on her skin couldn't be the sun because nothing inside her changed.

Her mind wandered, more images of her life flashing in front of her. She sucked in a breath, barely able to, and went limp.

"It's gonna be okay. Just hold on, Kara, please."

***

Alex leaned against the wall in what was Kara's cell. Her stomach turning at the condition of it. She covered her face with her hands, not sure what to feel. Relief she had saved Kara. Anger at what she had been through. Terror at the condition she was in.

"Agent Danvers, you okay?" J'onn asked.

She wiped at a few tears that had escaped and nodded. "Fine, sir."

Pushing against the wall, she focused on the task at hand. The quicker they got this place secure the quicker she could go and be with Kara.

Alex opened a door next to where she found Kara. A woman sat inside. Dark brown hair, pale skin, bright eyes, and from the way she huddled in the corner, terrified.

"It's okay. I'm here to help. My name is Alex."

The woman glanced at her, recognition in her eyes. "Alex? Kara's sister?"

Alex nodded, too emotional to speak. "Let me help you up."

"Where's Kara? Get her first, she's in bad shape. She wouldn't say it but I could tell." The woman trembled, tears flowing down her face. "She was always there for me, talking to me, sharing her stories...is she okay? Please, tell me she's okay?"

 Unsure what to do, Alex pulled the woman into a hug. "Hey, it's okay. Kara's safe. Let me get you out of here."

"This isn't some joke is it? You're not one of Lillian's ploys...a new form of torture?" The woman went rigid in Alex's arms, pulling away.

"I'm not." Alex held her hands up, far from her weapon.

Brown eyes sized her up, stopping on the D.E.O. patch on her arm. "You're with them," she hissed. "Get away from me. Close the door and leave me in here. I want no part of whatever this is."

"Yes, I'm with the D.E.O. but the people who have you...they're not who they say they are. Please, I swear I want to help."
The woman crossed her arms, glaring, and Alex had to wonder why she was in such different shape than Kara. The image of her sister lying in a pool of blood and vomit almost made her sick, again. She shook it off.

"Prove it."

"What?"

"Prove you're Alex."

Alex had no idea how to do that with a complete stranger. "I don't know…"

"Kara left something for you the night she was taken. What was it?"

"Her mother's necklace." She fished it out from beneath her collar. "Please, we really need to get out of here."

The woman didn’t budge. "What's Kara's favorite thing about Earth?"

Alex answered without hesitation. "Birds."

The woman nodded. "Close, birds are her second favorite thing. You're her first."

Alex nodded, using every bit of her strength to stop herself from falling apart then and there. "We need to go."

"J'onn, we got another one —"

J'onn entered, weapon drawn. "Another pris —"

"He's…I haven’t seen him in so long, but he was one of the worst. What the…who the hell are you?" The woman ran, faster than Alex. She tore down the hallway pushing agents out of her way like they were flies, then disappearing out the hole they'd created to gain entrance.

Alex sighed.

"Who was that?" J'onn asked.

"Unknown, she was in the cell next to Kara's. There wasn't a file on her."

The tall man put a hand on her shoulder and looked at her with his too sympathetic, brown eyes. "We did good today. We found Kara."

"Yeah, it's just…Kara was so frail. If she makes it, it'll be a miracle."

"Have faith, Alex. Go be with your sister."

Alex nodded, signaling for Superman to come pick her up.

A minute later he stood in front of her, not sparing the time to say hi or warn her of his take off. When they landed in front of the fortress she barely managed not to throw up. However, it didn’t matter when she caught sight of her sister lying on an ice slab in front of a display of crystals. Superman's cape lying over her, a pile of smoldering clothes lying on the floor next to her.

Most of the crystals were lit up red and she didn’t need to be a genius to know that that color was universal in the signaling of bad things.
"How is...is she?"

*Please don't make me finish that sentence,* she thought.

Superman didn’t look up from the panel he was tapping away at. "She's alive, barely. I stripped her out of those...rags." He glanced at the pile, his eyes glowing.

Kelex flew up to hover next to Kara. "Master Kal. I have the required medications for Kara Zor-El."

"Do it."

Alex watched the robot hook Kara up to an I.V. bag full of purple liquid. Alex's heart lurched when the needle slid into her sister's arm with no resistance. Nothing happened. Though, Alex didn’t know why she was expecting some sort of spontaneous recovery...hope probably.

Kara's chest barely moved, her breaths too shallow. Alex stood next to her, wrapping a hand around her wrist. A barely there, thready pulse beat under too pale skin.

"Kara, you're safe now. Please come back."

No response. Not that she was expecting one. A quick visual examination told her Kara had been through hell, twice. Scars littered her body, old and new. Some faded, others an angry red. The anger in Alex grew, warring with sadness and happiness. She swallowed the lump in her throat, finally letting the tears fall. Her hold on Kara's arm never faltered, and when she fell because her knees gave out, Superman was there to catch her.

Minutes turned into hours with no change. Clark sat on the other side of Kara, his large hand dwarfing hers. Alex didn’t know when he got her a chair.

"Sam?" Kara rasped.

Alex smiled. "Kara?"

Her lids fluttering to reveal dull, blue eyes. Then they closed and her chest didn’t rise again.

"Kara! Kara, come back. Dammit!"

Superman sped around, wrapping his arms around Alex a second before Kara's body arched on the table. An inhuman scream erupted from her body then she collapsed. Green fluids of various shades leaked from her eyes, nose, mouth, and what Alex now realized were injection sites on her neck, arms, legs, and stomach. The bile rose in her throat again at what her sister had been put through.

"What did they do to her?" she whispered. "Why? She was just a kid."

"It doesn’t matter. We need to focus on now, getting her better, helping her heal. She's going to need all the love and support she can get." Alex heard the steely tone of his voice and knew he was barely keeping his anger in check.

Alex nodded. "Whatever she needs."

She went back to Kara, taking her hand in hers. "I know you need rest now, but they say talking helps and...there's so much I've wanted to say to you." She rambled for hours. Talking about funny movies, bands, the new foods she knew Kara was going to flip out for. She talked until her throat was sore and her words were ragged, only stopping when fatigue kicked in and she passed out.

***
"Alex, come on you need to eat."

She rubbed her face, wiping the grit from her eyes. The events of the prior day coming back to her in a flash. "Kara? Where is she? Is she okay?" On her feet, her eyes darted around, not recognizing where she was.

Superman, dressed as Clark Kent minus the glasses, now, stood next to her. "She's stable. All the kryptonite has been purged from her system, but…"

Alex waited, eyebrow raised. "But?"

He held out a tablet with various test results on Kara's blood work displayed. "They…they tor…did things to her for nine years. I have no idea how she's still alive. The damage to her cells is extensive. I don't know if it can be reversed or…or stopped."

Alex scanned the data. Kara's cells continued to decay. Exposure to the sun had merely slowed it down and the fortress's ability to harness and focus it did nothing to improve Kara's health. "Well, we have to figure it out. She's not going to die. I won't let her."

She slammed the device against his chest, then stormed out of the room he'd put her in to sleep and headed in the direction she hoped her sister was. Various methods of dealing with cellular deterioration went through her head. She called forth all the articles she'd read in college, the seminars she'd attended.

She turned around and found Clark trailing behind her, his expression distraught. "Hey, we're going to save her, okay? And to do that we need my mom and dad. Get J'onn to bring them here."

"I'll do it, but what about…"

"What are they going to do now? Stop me? Kara is what matters right now."

He nodded, and without another word took off.

"Kelex, where the hell are you? We have work to do."

She went back to where Kara lay. Pale and unmoving. Alex grabbed the bag she'd packed and left here once they'd gotten a solid lead on Kara's whereabouts. She unzipped it and pulled out a blue blanket. She replaced the silver sheet that Clark had placed there while she was sleeping. Kara trembled a moment, a soft mewl escaping her mouth, then curled her fingers around the edge.

Alex gripped her hand and placed a kiss on her sister's forehead. "You're safe now. Nothing can hurt you anymore."

***

Lena exited through the back entrance of Luthor Corp, and sighed. She raised a brow, then spoke to the man following her, "Can I help you?"

He pulled out his phone, no doubt to record her. "Can I get a quote about your brother Ms. Luthor?"

She shook her head and motioned for the security detail to clear a path for her. Thirty-five feet from where she was to the car.

"Were you aware of your brother's plan to kill Superman?"

"Who will be taking over for Luthor Corp? Will it be you?"
"Can Luthor Corp survive?"

"Did Luthor Corp design the suit Lex was wearing?"

"Where's Lillian Luthor?"

That one got Lena's attention, but she didn't break her stride.

"Will you be testifying against your brother?"

Then she was in the car and being driven away from the madness that had become her life since her brother had appeared in downtown Metropolis in a war suit and challenged Superman last week.

Within seconds it was on Twitter, Facebook, and a dozen news outlets via hundreds of cell phones.

Lena had been in the R&D lab at Spherical Industries when it had happened. Jack running into the room and wrapping an arm around her when he realized she was watching it all unfold in shock.

She'd leaned into it needing his warmth and security. She'd known Lex wasn't well but she hadn't realized just how far he'd fallen. Part of her felt guilty, wondered if there was something she could have done. She shook the thoughts off to deal with another time.

After that it was answering endless questions for any number of organizations, being hooked up to lie detectors, watching investigators take out all of her brother's files from Luthor Corp and his penthouse in Metropolis.

A team of lawyers advised her on everything from what to say, how to wear her hair, to what outfits made her more sympathetic to the public. She told them ad naseum that she had nothing to hide, but from their patronizing expressions, she knew they didn't believe her.

Every day she watched the news ticker and her stomach dropped a bit more. Luthor Corp stock was at an all-time low and to make things worse she saw Jack's company taking a hit. Several articles were running about his affiliation with her and possible shared anti-alien sentiments. The press was eating it up and the news rags were getting more and more outlandish with their theories.

After the authorities cleared her, she quit her job and distanced herself from Jack. It hurt. He'd been the only person she'd allowed to get close. And this was a good reminder as to why she hadn't done it before. Somehow, someway, those who entered into her orbit got hurt.

She'd always love him for his unconditional support and the fact her last name did nothing to deter him from pursuing her.

But for now, she needed to focus on what to do with the company she'd inherited and do everything in her power to make up for the devastation and loss of life her brother caused in the name of hate.

She barely slept, all of her time spent outlining how she planned to restructure the company. In the few moments she passed out due to exhaustion, nightmares plagued her. In some it was Lex, in other it was Lillian. Every time she woke, a renewed sense of purpose took hold of her.
Three years ago –

Kara dried her hair with a grungy towel wincing when she rubbed a little too hard on an irritated patch of skin. She reached to rub at it, frowning when a clump of hair fell out. She wasn’t a vain person by any stretch, but she really hoped she didn’t go bald.

Making a scratch on the wall, she raised her brows at the fact Lillian hadn't paid her a visit in almost six weeks. She knew the woman had been busy with something, her visits becoming rarer, but this had to be a record.

A faint sigh and the sound of crying reached her ears and she turned her attention to her friend.

"Sam, you know what I can't wait for? When we finally get out of here…Showers. I used to take long ones just to annoy my sister." A faint smile graced Kara's lips at the memory before it fell away.

"Yeah, yeah. And pot stickers and chocolate picking pie and movies and N'Sync and the sky and birds…"

"Chocolate pecan pie…and it is the best in like at least five galaxies."

Kara hung the towel over the edge of the sink. Standing to her full height, she guessed her age to be about twenty or twenty-one in earth years. Though, she'd never know for certain because her birthday was lost long ago. First, when Krypton exploded, and then when they took her from the Danvers.

"Trust me, I'll show you everything. I owe you so much. Without you, I would've lost my mind years ago."

Sam chuckled. "Maybe you did? Because you're being a lot more optimistic than usual. You dig a hole in your room somewhere?"

Kara moved to the area beside where she slept. She dropped down and started doing push-ups. Nervous energy radiated through her body. Her anxiety levels were through the roof. "Why didn’t I think of that? See, that's why you're the brains of this operation.

"We're an operation now?"

Kara grunted at the stiffness in her shoulders and the ache in the pathetic bumps she called muscles. "Yep. We know each other better than anyone else."

Sam sighed. "That's kind of nice. I've never had that before. Family was just a word they tossed around when I was in foster care and once I got on the streets, well…then they brought me here. I forgot that word existed until they brought you in. There were a few others, but they didn’t last. You're made of some tough stuff."

*Used to be made of steel,* she thought.

*Not anymore.*

Kara let her body lay flat on the ground, rolled over and began doing sit-ups. "Look who's talking. You've been here most of your life and managed to stay sane."
"No offense, but coming from a girl obsessed with birds...I'm not sure how to take that."

Kara heard the laugh taking any bite out of the words. "This is true. But birds are so awesome. They can fly." She stopped her movements, trying to recall what it felt like to soar through the sky. The last time she'd gone flying had been with Alex.

The usual stab of pain that accompanied thoughts of her life before, of Alex, was gone. Replaced by a sense of relief that her sister was out living her life. Safe. She wondered what she was doing. Did she become a rock star like she wanted? Follow in Eliza's footsteps and become a doctor? She hoped whatever it was, Alex was happy.

That thought got her through the hard days.

"I'll take your word for it, tough stuff."

"Whatever, dreamer...speaking of, any new developments in that area?"

"Yeah, but...I don't know what it means."

The fear in Sam's voice was unmistakable. Kara shifted her position so she leaned against the wall she shared with the other girl. "Tell me."

"They're getting worse. The monster...I feel like it's part of me. And it's angry, so angry. It has one purpose, no matter what part of the dream is altered, the purpose remains the same. Kill."

Kara traced a circle on the wall next to her imagining where Sam's head might be. "It's not you. You're good. It's this place. Lillian and her treatments. Don't let her win. You can fight it."

"I don't know. Sometimes I feel like it's inevitable. That the only reason I'm even here is to destroy something, something good. And maybe because of that, they should keep me locked up. I don't want to hurt anyone."

"I won't let you."

"Promise?"

"Yeah."

"I'm gonna get some sleep. I'm tired."

"Night." Kara stood up from the wall, the nervous energy returning.

She paced the small room, three steps forward, three steps back. Over and over and over again. Her thoughts focused on nothing. She'd learned to clear her mind using her mantras. At least that's how she liked to see it. Admitting that she had nothing left to hold onto sounded a lot darker and right now she needed to be upbeat for Sam.

They worked well like that. Able to know when positivity was needed, no matter how fake.

Her door opened and Lillian stood there. "I haven't forgotten about you. Director Henshaw has had a sudden and inexplicable change of heart in regards to what we're doing so we're relocating."

Three men entered the room. Handcuffs lined with green made Kara woozy. "Are those necessary? I couldn't fight a cold right now."
Lillian smirked. "And you likely never will again, I've seen to that. Now move."

Another door creaked and she heard Sam mutter a few choice words. A bag was thrown over Kara's head and then she was brought out into the hallway. Her shoulder brushed against someone else's.

"Sam?"

"Kara?"

A hand pushed Kara forward. "Shut up," a male voice said.

They walked for a few moments then a door slammed. Kara recognized the motion of an elevator. More walking, doors sliding open, the click of Lillian's heels echoing around them. Then warmth. Kara tilted her head up, the action pointless due to the bag over her head, but it was instinctual, an automatic reaction her body had to the sun.

Then she was being shoved and fell onto the floor of something. A van? An engine revved and before Kara had time to notice anything else a pinch in her arm and then her world went dark.

When she woke, the room she was in was identical in size and layout to her prior one. However, a mixture of mold and rancid water assaulted her senses. Cracks in the wall and ceiling and a puddle of water beneath the sink indicated her new residence was old. The green glow she had grown used to was less severe but still present. A rattling noise came out of the air vent in the center of the ceiling. She ran her finger along a crack in the floor and panic gripped her.

"Sam? Are you there?"

No response.

"Sam? Can you hear me?"

"Kara? What the hell? My room smells like... dead things."

Taking a minute to compose herself and steady her pounding heart, Kara wiped at a tear. "Same here. Something tells me this isn't a step up in our situation."

"Pessimist."

Kara picked up the blanket on top of the mattress with two fingers making a face when an insect fell off and scurried toward the drain.

"I take it back, you're a realist," Sam said.

"What made you change your mind?"

Sam let out a small shriek. "I'm sharing my bed with a rat."

Kara patted her mattress to scare away any unwelcome critters. "Well, at least this time we won't be so lonely."

***

Alex set her cup down, the coffee gone cold long ago. She huddled over her tablet, typing and retyping data sets. Every now and then rubbing her hands together and stretching her back.

Around her birds chirped. The night sky slowly turned from black to dark blue. The usual hustle and
frenetic energy of the quad, not present at this time. Not many students were willing to enjoy the sunrise. Not that Alex did, just sometimes she missed Kara and the red hue of the sky was when she felt closest to her sister. She turned her face up when the sun broke through the clouds and allowed a small smile to settle on her face.

"Hang on, Kara."

Alex typed in another line of code on her tablet. She'd almost cracked the problem yesterday, but the enzymes kept breaking down. If she solved this she'd impress her teacher. If she impressed her teacher, she'd stand out among the other students in her Xenobiology Hybridization class. And if she stood out, various organizations would notice her. One of which she really wanted to get in to.

Her phone buzzed and she absently answered it.

"Hi, mom."

"How did you know it was me?"

"You're the only one willing to risk talking to me before noon."

"Still working on that problem?"

"Yes."

A sigh all the way from Midvale. "Honey, I'm worried about you. You're pushing yourself so hard."

Alex tore her eyes away from the formula in front of her. "I like what I'm doing."

"I know. Just remember to let yourself be happy, okay? What about your friends? What about Katie? I don't want you to –"

Nope, she wasn’t having this conversation. Not when she had put so many years into her plan.

"Gotta go, love you. I'll call soon."

She turned off her phone setting aside to focus. She plugged in new information and smiled when the result came out positive. Shoving her tablet in her bag with a triumphant smile, she started to get to her feet only to be stopped by a firm hand on her shoulder. She tensed, reaching for it, but it was gone a second later.

"Ms. Danvers. I see you solved the equation."

She glanced to her side. A tall, black man stood next to her dressed in a neatly pressed, dark suit with a white shirt. Definitely a company man she decided. Not much to go on there when it came to sorting out his organization.

"How do you know that?"

He tapped a finger to his temple. "I have my ways."

Sitting back down on the bench she eyed him, waiting.

"You're excelling in all your classes. Are skilled in three forms of martial arts. Know how to handle several weapons and took a defensive driving course. If I didn’t know better I'd say you were preparing for something." He reached into a pocket and pulled out a bag of cookies.

Alex didn’t want to get her hopes up. Getting recruited now? Too early. But still…
"I have a lot of hobbies. Going skydiving next weekend, wanna come?"

He chuckled, "Thanks, but no. I thought you might like to talk about your sister."

The false smile Alex had plastered on her face cracked. "My sister was taken a long time ago, not a subject I really enjoy." She thanked years of repression, therapy, and a degree in psychology that she was able to maintain her cool.

"I'm aware. But what if you could get her back?"

Her heart rate picked up, her stomach flipped. She'd run a hundred scenarios through her head about how they would approach her, and using Kara was always at the top of the list. How could they not? They'd want to know if they could trust her after what happened. Where her allegiances lied. And they'd want to know why Alex would agree to work with the people who took Kara…assuming they knew she knew.

"I'd give anything to get her back, but sadly that's not how things work. Let's be real, she's probably dead." The words burned her throat and sliced her tongue to say, but she had to sell it to whatever agency this guy represented.

Another cookie disappeared into his mouth and he smiled, a kind one that threw her off. "Anything? Would you be willing to commit to training, research, and working for an organization you despise? Lying to all those you care about? Possibly dying?"

Her mouth suddenly dry, she didn't know how to answer. Before she had a chance to speak he placed a hand on her arm. Having everything laid out in front of her like this…honest, accurate, and a bit scary.

"Alex, I need you to trust me. If you can be patient, if you can have faith, we will get Kara back."

She pursed her lips. "What do you need me to do?" This was too good to be true, but damn if they didn’t know her Achilles heel.

"Join the D.E.O."

Fire filled her veins at what he was saying. "Really? That's the pitch? You have her. Wait, let me guess…you lost her. Misplaced a Kryptonian. I hate when that happens."

He stared at her, eyes intent. "At one point the D.E.O did have her. I won't lie about that. But she's gone now. Moved by someone and I can't get a location for her. But I swear, I want to help you and Superman get her back."

Tears filled her eyes. She tried to stop them but failed. It had been years since she'd let herself cry. Years since she lost Kara. Years since she had any real faith. Years since she hadn't been driven by hate, anger, and loss. But here, this man with kind eyes and a soothing, deep voice sat and promised her everything.

And dammit if she didn’t believe him.

She rubbed at the scar on her hand. "I don't understand what's going on."

He cocked his head to the side. "I'm a friend of Superman. He speaks highly of you. He told me about his cousin and I did some digging into the Danvers family. When I saw what you were up to I knew you were going to get yourself killed."
She huffed at that. "I'm not an idiot."

"Far from it, and that makes you dangerous to the people we're up against. I know I can't stop you, and to be honest I don't want to, but I would like to be able to protect you. It's the least I can do."

She raised a brow at that.

Alex's thoughts swirled around. She'd spent the better part of the last five or so years working toward a single goal. Find Kara. Now, in front of her sat someone promising her that. She blew out a breath, unable to help the small part of her that screamed at her to accept this one break, just this once.

"Why are you helping me? And why didn't Superman say anything? I doubt he'd be happy with this…” She waved her hands around. "Method of introduction."

A sly grin appeared on his face while he wiped his hands together. "You're right about that. But I convinced him to let me handle it. As for why I'm helping, let's just say I owe Superman. He cares about you. Since Kara has been gone you two have formed a strong bond. My people…I respect bonds very much. If something happened to you he'd be very upset."

"So, all I have to do is join the crazy government organization that kidnapped my sister and has been doing god knows what to her, but then lost her, have a little patience and some faith, and everything will work out okay?" So close, the end of this whole thing might be within sight.

"There will be more pain, more failures, and many days where you want to give up, but you can't. You have to be strong for her." He placed a card on the table. "I'll see you Saturday morning to start your training."

And with that Alex was a member of the D.E.O. She couldn’t tell her parents, they'd kill her. She assumed Clark already knew, so she kept it to herself.

Not realizing she didn’t have anyone else to tell even if she could.

***

Lena slipped on a pair of protective glasses and waited for Jack to get behind the proactive glass with her. The moment he did she hit enter on the screen and waited.

In front of them, a lab rat with a small cut on its back twitched its nose for a second, then smoke started wafting from a small pipe. Two minutes passed with no change.

Lena blew out a breath and hit the venting switch.

"Well, looks like Elvis is going to have to heal the natural way," Lena said.

Jack ran his fingers over his beard. "Aw, poor guy, he was just telling me about this really beautiful lady rat he met the other day. Planned on treating her to dinner tonight. Reserved a spot next to the water bottle and had some prime carrots on ice."

Lena smiled. "Well, he does strike me as the romantic type."

"Really? Didn't think you'd notice something like that."

"Why?" She scrunched her face at the numbers in front of her trying to figure out where the ratios went wrong.

He sat on the desk and bumped his shoulder against hers. "Maybe you have your very own Elvis
that's been working up the nerve to ask you out."

Lena kept her eyes on the screen in front of her, but the numbers and readings no longer held her attention. "Jack…"

He held up a hand. "Lena, just dinner. It can be as friends or more…I really enjoy your company no matter the context. But, I'd be lying if I wasn’t honest with you about how I feel."

She opened her mouth, unsure what to say. "I like spending time with you as well."

He smiled that smile of his, the one that she was physically incapable of not returning.

"If I can't charm you with my amazing wit, dashing good looks, and endearing accent that makes everything sound smarter, then it's still a win for me because I get to spend time with you and that is one of my favorite things."

She stepped back, staring at him. No one had asked her out before, at least no one that wasn't several years older than her and obviously looking to get in good with the Luthors…before her brother went nuts, of course. Since then, her last name caused most suitors to recoil, and on the few occasions she met someone who didn’t know who she was, it didn’t take long to realize they only had one thing on their mind.

And despite how advanced she had always been in school, dating and relationships had never been on her radar due to her age. Making friends was hard enough.

Jack smiled, his big brown eyes full of nothing but acceptance and compassion. The same as they'd always been since they'd met a couple of years ago when she was finishing up a Physics/Chemistry Masters with a focus on Nanotechnology.

He'd recruited her right out of college to work on his Biomax project. She'd been wary at first, but when she'd realized he was one hundred percent genuine in his offer, she'd jumped at the opportunity to work for a company other than Luthor Corp on a project that had the potential to save millions of lives.

Maybe, just maybe, this would work. The old fear of Lillian doing something resurfaced, taking Jack away, but she hadn't heard from her mother in months…and at some point, she had to live her life on her own terms.

"Dinner, I'd like that."

Their first date had been a disaster. Lena kept her distance, the walls she'd erected stayed firmly in place and she had no idea how to let them lower beyond the friend zone. Jack didn’t give up though. With more patience than she deserved, he waited. Never once pressuring her.

Dinners became routine, then grabbing a drink after. The alcohol allowing Lena to relax, just a little. Their conversations were always lively and ran later and later into the night. It took months, but finally, one evening, when he walked her to her door she kissed him before he turned to leave.

It wasn’t full of fireworks or passion but was sweet.

She could do this.

She could let herself be happy, just this once.

***
Present

Kara tried to move but her arms and legs were tied down. She panicked, letting out a shrill scream. Lillian had promised there'd be no more of that if she cooperated. Then she remembered what the woman had wanted to know. What she has asked Kara hundreds of times.

Who is Superman?

Kara gritted her teeth refusing to give in. Tears fell from her eyes tracking down the side of her face. "I won't tell you who he is." She forced her face in the other direction fearful of Lillian's retribution.

Gentle fingers wiped away her tears. Words were whispered. She didn’t understand them, but the voice calmed her. The restraints on her were loosened, not completely removed, but it was enough to allow her to relax, a little. Though she knew this was all part of the ploy.

Lillian was good at manipulating, but Kara was stubborn and there was no way in hell she was giving up her cousin to this lunatic.

The table under her was cold, like ice. Her body shook. Another voice, this one deeper. Then she felt herself being lifted and something warm and soft placed beneath her.

Someone squeezed her hand and Kara fought to pull away. Lillian was screwing with her, again. The grip on her tightened but never turned painful, nails never dug in, harsh threats were not hissed in her ears.

The voice continued, soft and soothing and Kara wished she could understand the words. Another voice floated in, also soft, but deeper.

Warmth surrounded her and a smell familiar but just out of reach. She reveled in the feel, allowing herself to fall into this delusion rather than open her eyes to a nightmare.

Kara didn’t want to wake up; the feeling enveloping her was addictive. She clung to it, refusing to let go. Soon, it would be gone and she would be tracing the cracks in her cell wall for hours on end. She remained still, unable to do much of anything even if she wanted.

Another shiver and then a cool cloth was placed on her forehead. Was she hot or cold? She couldn’t tell. Her body was sending all sorts of mixed messages. The throbbing in her head was gone which was nice, but the aches and pains she’d collected over the years were out in force.

Her back ached and there was a tender spot on her side from where Lillian had cut into her to examine her years ago. Her left knee twinged and she ignored the memory of where that injury had come from. As she became more aware, as more memories forced their way to the surface, her breathing increased and her heart pounded painfully against her ribs.

The sense of safety she'd let in disappeared and she started to struggle.

The familiar pinch of a needle in her arm. She tensed, waiting for the pain, the burning, the vomiting, the screaming. But nothing bad happened. Her body relaxed, many of the aches easing. She let her head fall to the side, where the soothing voice was coming from. She cracked her eyes open seeing a woman staring back at her. Shock in familiar hazel eyes, then tears.

Lips moving on the woman's face. More words, none of them making sense. Kara went back to sleep. Finally understanding Lillian's new attempt to break her. Those eyes were Alex's, Kara would recognize them anywhere. She forced herself to swallow the lump in her throat.
Alex was there.
Alex was wearing a D.E.O. uniform.
This wasn’t a dream.
This was a nightmare.

***

Alex cried out when Kara's eyes opened. "She's awake! Kara. Hey, it's me. You're safe. I got you."
Kara trembled once, then the saddest expression Alex had ever seen fell over her sister's face. Then blue eyes were shuttered from her. Terror gripped Alex, she wanted to scream.

"That's a good sign." Eliza stood next to her, a hand on her shoulder. "Why don't you get some rest and let me take over?"

"No. I'm not leaving until she's okay."

Eliza didn’t argue.

For the last nine days Eliza, Jeremiah, Clark, and Alex, had been hovering over Kara as she floated between life and death. Her heart had stopped twice. Her body refusing the nutrients they were putting into her via an I.V. And then there were the screams...

Her sister was malnourished, poisoned by countless toxins, and based on the scars littering her body, had been experimented on in horrific ways. Alex forced the lump in her throat down.

"What did they do to you?" she whispered, wiping at the tears that never seemed to stop falling.

She squeezed the hand in hers willing Kara to wake up again.

"Clark, we're going to need some more of your blood." Eliza stepped away from Alex and headed over to the superhero that didn’t look so super.

Over the last week, like Alex, he'd barely left Kara's side. The blood transfusions probably weren’t helping, but at the moment they were the only thing giving Kara a fighting chance.

They'd stopped the cell decay and cleaned Kara's blood of all contaminants, but several internal organs were damaged. Most concerning of which was her heart. The sun still had no effect and Alex wondered if her sister had somehow been turned human, and if so, how the hell had she managed to survive for so long.

She shook her head of the morbid thoughts. Kara was going to be fine and then Alex was going to hunt down the people who did this and kill them. Probably torture them first. A lot.

"Kara, I know you're in there. Probably really confused and scared. I wish I could help you make sense of everything, but I don't know how. So, I'm just gonna talk, okay?"

Alex didn’t expect a response, so she wasn’t disappointed when she didn’t get one. Her mom hooked up a new I.V. The needle piercing Kara's skin sickened Alex every time. The number of scars on her arms from prior injections made Alex's blood boil.

"Okay, Clark, just sit here a moment," Eliza said.
Getting Superman's blood wasn’t as easy, but with the technology in the fortress it was possible.

"This will be the last one. I'm injecting her with a serum of special anti-bodies Kelex helped me make based off of the research Alex did on Kryptonian physiology. After this, it's up to Kara."

Alex used both of her hands to hold Kara's. Doing the same thing she had done for nine days. She talked about movies, music, and her parents. She told Kara about all the surprises she had for her when she woke up. She talked until she fell asleep, head on the bed next to her sister. She slept through the pale, bony hand tightening around hers for a fraction of a second.

"Agent Danvers, a word." J'onn tapped her on the shoulder, waking her.

She jolted, waking with ease after years of training. She nodded, knowing they needed to talk. All of them. Her parents had been wavering between joy Kara was back and anger at Alex for lying to them about where she worked and what she'd done the last few years. So far, no one had said anything, waiting to see what happened with Kara. But Alex had to admit she was exhausted from walking on eggshells around them.

"How's she doing?"

"Hanging in there." Alex didn’t need to say more.

He didn’t like to use his ability, knowing it was invasive to humans, but she'd learned to trust his judgment long ago.

Eliza appeared with Jeremiah at her side. Clark trailing after them rubbing his arm and looking pale. Alex knew her reprieve was over now that Kara was somewhat stable.

"Alex, why didn’t you tell us? We could have helped." Eliza's forehead creased with worry. "All this time, do you know what could have happened? Do you not realize what it would have done to us to lose you, too? I can't believe –"

Jeremiah put an arm around her shoulders.

Okay, right into a family argument it was. "No, you couldn’t have. I needed to keep you safe and the only way to do that was to keep you in the dark."

"Clark –" Eliza started.

Alex held up a hand. "No, he had my back. Don't be mad at him. I was going to do this with or without his help and I made him swear to keep you both out of this."

"Why? Why didn’t you trust us with this? We're a family." Her father shook his head. "If I lost you…"

"You didn’t. We lost Kara and nothing's been the same since. Mom pretends everything's fine. Like we don't notice the extra pie she makes at Christmas. You," she pointed at her father, "gave up on Kara a long time ago and alternated between suffocating me and hiding in your office. And you promised me we'd get her back. You promised me that night that we would bring her home." Alex forced herself to take a calming breath. "I made a promise too, and I did whatever I had to to keep it. I'm sorry you're upset, but I'm sure as hell not sorry for what I did to bring Kara home."

"This is different. You put your life in danger and we had no idea what was happening. I can't understand that and how could you let her do this, Clark?" Eliza turned her attention away from Alex. "She's our daughter. We had a right to know."
Clark's mouth opened, then closed, then opened. "I'm sorry. But, Alex is right. We needed to be able to trust one another. And neither one of us wanted to put you in danger."

Jeremiah walked up to him. "That was not your choice to make."

"You know what? We can argue later. Right now, I need to talk to my boss and then go back to trying to save Kara's life. You can help or you can go somewhere else and be pissed off at me."

J'onn eyed Alex. "The D.E.O. is undergoing an internal review. I've spoken with the President. No more secret projects. I managed to clear all the files dealing with Kara from their mainframes and anything helpful to her recovery has been transferred here. The guards we captured…I took care of their memories. The only person who knows Kara's real identity is Lillian and it's just a matter of time until we catch up with her."

Clark spoke up. "What about Lex's sister? Lena? You can't trust that family."

"Lex has been wiped and as far as I saw he never shared his work with her. Lena isn’t involved as far as I can tell."

"Can you check?" Clark asked.

J'onn's expression changed, minutely, but enough to alert Alex to his discomfort.

"Hey, Clark, I get it. You're scared. We all are, but we can't read everyone's mind. If J'onn says she checks out, then she checks out," Alex said.

Clark made a face, then walked away. "I'm calling Lois."

"Agent Danvers, you're listed on a covert op for as long as needed. Take care of your sister." And with that, her boss morphed into his Martian form and took off.

Her parents stared at her, eyes wide.

"Okay, he's a Martian but no one knows. The real Henshaw tried to take him in, they fought, J'onn won and when he took his place he caught a glimpse Kara in his memories. He told Superman and then recruited me to their side in order to bring down the bad guys within the D.E.O. End of story."

Eliza made a cutting motion with her hands. "I don't want to know anymore. I need to go check on Kara, but Alex, I'm proud of you and what you did. I'm still upset, but so very proud."

Alex glanced at her dad, his expression unreadable. Then she was sucked into a hug with both parents and reveled in the potential for happiness she felt. Finally, they were a family again.

"I've always said you were the strongest one out of all of us," her father whispered.

All of them.

She brought Kara home.

A promise made years ago finally fulfilled.

***

Lena sat in her father's chair glancing around the home office that hadn't been used in years. She wore jeans and worn running shoes along with a college sweatshirt. The odds of running into her other were non-existent, but she still took a small amount of joy appearing in an outfit that would
give the woman hives.

She knew various investigators had been through it, papers were still strewn about the floor, books in piles around the room, drawers pulled out of the desk. The coffee table overturned with a broken leg. Pictures askew on the wall. Relief settled over her that she’d had the couch and chess set moved to her apartment a year ago.

She didn’t care about any of the debris, however. Her father had been smart and when she reached for the hidden keypad and typed in the code, a sad smile came to her face when a portion of the wall slid aside and she saw the boxes in his secret room.

For years, her thoughts had wandered to this room and its contents. Each time she convinced herself whatever was inside didn’t matter. That she didn’t want to know. But now, after Lex…things were different.

Lena had had the responsibilities and baggage of being a Luthor thrust upon her, whether she wanted it or not.

Walking toward them she noted some were covered with a thin layer of dust while others were clean. Not to mention the sheer number. Someone had been adding to this stash and the hair prickled on the back of her neck.

Who else had her father trusted with this? She debated for a few seconds before loading the files into her car and taking them to a storage unit no one but her knew about for safe keeping. It took two trips, but when she was finished she felt a bit more at ease.

As much as she wanted to dive into them and see what her father had hidden away, she knew it wasn’t safe. Not yet.

When she returned to his office for one final walkthrough, she installed an independent surveillance system and set it up to send her an alert with a recording of anyone who entered.

With that done, she drove back to her apartment in Metropolis. A handful of reporters still hovered around hoping she'd slip up and say something, but for the most part, people had moved on. No connection between her and her brother's actions had been made. Not that that fact stopped some of the more tenacious ones from hounding her and trying to dig up dirt.

Letting herself fall onto her couch she eased back into the cushions and closed her eyes. The official paperwork handing her full control of Luthor Corp would be ready in a few days, Lillian's disappearance causing delays. The company had to keep going, no matter what, and when Lena took the reins, she had some hard choices to make.

Her phone buzzed and she when she saw the text from Jack, she sighed. Even after she told him things weren't working out (The last few months had been full of more arguments than late night conversations, but their friendship was dear to her). Even after his name had been muddied because of his association with her. Even after his life had been turned inside out by investigators…he still cared.

She hated the idea of him being affected by her last name, loathed the idea of hurting him. In the end, she had to let him go because she cared too and right now she was radioactive and staying in his life would destroy it. Distance wasn't enough.

Flipping the phone over, she made a mental note to get a new number the next day.

Pushing herself up, she wandered into the kitchen in search of food. Unsurprised to find her fridge
bare. With everything going on she hadn't had the time or inclination to shop.

Making another mental note to pick up groceries, she ordered takeout.

While waiting, her thoughts turned to Lillian. The authorities had hundreds of questions about her, none of which Lena could answer. However, she wasn’t an idiot and knew her mother had done something very bad, had been working on something with Lex for years.

And Lena knew whatever it was, was within the files in her storage locker. She just didn’t know if she was ready to see what the woman had been up to all that time.
Chapter 6

Murmuring woke Kara. Her forehead crinkled when she noticed her body was pain-free for the first time she could remember in...years. She sucked in a deep breath, only succeeding in coughing. An arm wrapped around her, supporting her and she tried to move away from it, push it off of her but lacked the strength. Something touched her lips and a voice told her to take small sips. Her breaths were shallow, difficult, and she knew whatever was going on she didn’t want to know, but she had to face the nightmare that awaited.

She'd heard more than one voice. So, Lillian had brought someone else with her? Maybe they had moved Kara to the lab? They were being nice to her which didn’t fit with any explanations she could come up with.

Gritting her teeth, she opened her eyes.

An older version of Alex sitting with Kal staring at her with matching shocked expressions wasn’t what she expected. At least this time her sister was wearing jeans and a thick sweater instead of the horrible black uniform Kara had grown to detest. She opened her mouth to say something but the words weren't there.

Kal sped off then returned with a second glass of water. "Here, in case you need more."

"Kara, sweetie. How do you feel?" Eliza, older, but still the same. Face full of compassion and understanding which scared Kara. Jeremiah nodded and gave her a small smile, but stayed back.

She hadn't been around this many people since...well, since the Danvers house. Her vision darkened and her head felt like it was stuffed with cotton. Her breathing came in rapid gasps. She slammed her eyes shut, wanting to escape, run away from this, but her weakness didn’t allow her to do anything other than tremble.

Another nightmare.

The pain she could take, but this?

"Are you in pain? Anything we can do?" Alex fired off several more questions but Kara didn’t hear any of them.

Too many people.

Too many sounds.

Too many voices clamoring for her attention after years of no one other than Sam.

Her mind tried to grasp onto bits and pieces, but it was too hard. Too much work after not having to do anything for so long. The icy walls and glistening ceiling brought back a memory and she recognized the fortress.

A long time ago, sometimes she didn’t even think it was a real memory, Kal had taken her to the fortress. A short visit to allow her to get some data crystals. They didn’t stay long, but the place was memorable.

Forcing herself to swallow, she stared at the ceiling. The sun's rays playing on the ice.
Panic rose up in her. "This isn't real. I know what you want and I'm not giving it to you. I have no idea how you got into my head like this but I'll die before –"

Strong hands on her shoulders. "Kara, listen to me. Please," Alex said. "I need you to concentrate, okay? This isn't the first time you've woken up…we've had to sedate you a few times because of…"

Kara refused to meet this impostor's eyes. "I am not telling you who he is."

"I don't want to know. You're safe. Please, just look around. Feel your body, it's healing. You're warm. Not in that…place. You're with your family now."

Breathing out of control, heart pounding, Kara's vision began to tunnel. "This is not real. It can't be."

"Kara, please. I'm begging you. I'm here. I'm real."

A pinch made her look down at her arm. "What was that? I thought you said I was safe?"

Eliza met her eyes, a sad smile in place. "It's a very low dose, hopefully enough to calm you down but not put you to sleep."

Kara's heart rate slowed, the frantic feeling coursing through her eased. Trying to get her vision back in focus, she finally met hazel eyes that helped push back on the darker moments she'd experienced.

"Is this…real?"

Alex nodded at her. "We found you. I'm sorry it took so long, so sorry." Tears were falling freely from Alex's eyes and it made Kara sad. She wanted Alex to be happy, then again she wasn't sure if this wasn't a delusion…in fact...

This wasn't Alex.

"This isn't real." She pushed herself backward, away from the hallucination and curled into a ball. "Go away."

More murmuring, but Kara ignored it. She searched for the silence that was never too far away when she was in that cell. Hoped her mind would calm and she could resume whatever it was she was living…

"Kara, I know this is hard. I won't pretend to know what you're feeling or thinking…how scared you are. But I promise you, this is real. Very real."


Swallowing, she opened her eyes and saw Alex, only Alex. Glancing around the room, she couldn't help the twitches at all the visual and aural input. The lights were bright and the metal surfaces reflected. Monitors had colors running across them. Machines beeped and hummed. The bed squeaked beneath her.

"The rest of them are gone…you'll leave, too," Kara said, refusing to look at Alex.

"No. I'm not going anywhere, ever. I realized it might be a bit overwhelming to have so many people crowding around you. I should have thought…but everyone wanted to be here when you woke up. They've missed you so much…I've missed you."

Kara turned to Alex then, an ache starting in her head. "This can't be real," she whispered, the fear of Lillian busting through the door and taking this away terrified her.
Alex squeezed her hand and Kara pulled away out of instinct.

"I need you to trust me. This is real, Kara. I know it'll take some time, but you'll see. I'm not going anywhere."

And so they sat. Kara closing her eyes and counting to a thousand before opening them again. Every time, Alex was still there. A small smile on her face and eyes filled with love and acceptance that Kara had no idea how to handle.

Kara kept her eyes open for longer periods of time, slowly adjusting to the bright lights. Alex changed position in her chair but never left.

"Is this real?" Kara's voice was barely a whisper.

Alex nodded, tears spilling out. "Yeah. You're home."

Then she reached around her neck and pulled off something Kara never thought she'd see again. "I kept it safe for you." Alex held out Kara's mother's necklace.

Kara's hand reached out of its own volition and bony fingers wrapped around it. She held it close to her chest, feeling a small part of her return. Her throat was tight, emotions she hadn't let herself feel in years struggling to the surface. Not quite ready or capable to deal with them.

She waited, not sure what she was supposed to do. The moment she accepted this as her reality it would be taken away. The ceiling above them shimmered. The air was cool and fresh around her. Her body not as sore as it usually was, but definitely not great either. Her stomach growled.

"I'm hungry."

Alex laughed, watery but genuine. "Why am I not surprised. Let me get you something."

When she stood, Kara panicked. "No, it's okay, Don't go. I'm fine."

If Alex left…she might not come back and Kara would wake up in that…place.

Kara went rigid when Alex gave her an awkward hug and kissed her forehead. "It's okay. I'm here. However, you need to eat. You haven't had any real food since you got here. Something simple to start…broth sound okay?"

Was she really being asked if broth was okay? How did she go from let me know how much this hurts on a scale of one to ten…to is broth okay? Her mind scrambled to make sense of the puzzle pieces, but it didn’t work.

Nothing fit.

"Can we get some broth in here?" Alex called over her shoulder.

Kal entered then, stopping a couple of feet from Kara. "Hi." He held out a bowl which Alex accepted.

"You'll love it. It's mom's recipe."

Kara closed her eyes, remembering. "Eliza?"

"I'm here, sweetie."
Startled, Kara opened her eyes at the voice. Eliza still had that understanding smile and it unnerved Kara. Her foster mom had always been able to see inside her, past her defenses, and Kara didn’t want her to see the things she hid now. She didn’t want to think about them ever again.

"Kara, you're in the fortress. You're safe. I promise." Kal reached for her and she pulled back, no one had touched her with kindness in years.

He let his hand fall away slowly, his expression concerned. "Sorry, I didn’t mean to... Take your time."

She waited for them to move away from her. This didn’t feel like a nightmare or a dream. She'd let herself imagine this moment for the first few years, but then she'd had to let it go because it was making her crazy. The longing for those she loved, for the feeling of safety…she'd suppressed it.

But now…How could she find out if it was real? She squeezed the necklace in her hand as hard as she could. She stared at Alex, the person she had known best. Now a grown woman. A woman who was crying. Was she sad because of Kara? Was Kara doing this?

"Don't cry...I don't want you to be sad." The words were rough, simple, but they worked because Alex smiled and motioned to Kara with her arms. "I'm sorry I keep...touching you but it's hard to believe this is real." Kara nodded, knowing she couldn't deny her sister anything. Strong arms wrapped her up and into the best hug she’d ever had in her life, and though her first reaction was to stiffen and pull away, Alex wasn’t having any of it.

Her head rested on Alex's shoulder and she inhaled the smell of her. Felt the sturdiness of the body around her. Absorbed the essence that was Alex. Kara forced her arms up and clung to her sister with all her strength, her fingers gripping the fabric of Alex's sweater, praying it wasn’t a dream because losing this, losing her sister again after all this time, would be what finally did her in.

"I'm not sad. I'm happy."

Kara swallowed, feeling the chill of the air when Alex pulled away. Kara didn’t loosen her grip but it wasn’t all that strong to start with.

Alex pushed a strand of hair behind Kara's ear. "I've been waiting for this moment for so long. I had a million things planned to say and I can't remember any of them," she half spoke half sobbed.

Kara wanted to say that she used to dream of this moment but had stopped. That she had given up. That she'd lost hope in that place. Instead, she went with a very simple, very real truth. "I missed you, too."

No response came from Alex other than another hug, tighter, and longer. Kara still reacted, but relaxed after a few seconds. Kal cleared his throat. Eliza and Jeremiah stood next to each other, touching their foreheads, then waved at Kara, saying, "We'll come back a little later. Glad to have you back, Sweetie."

"How are you feeling?" Alex asked, distracting Kara from the awkwardness of what to say.

Kara sighed. "Tired, sore, achy...the usual." Was she human? If she was free and had been exposed to the sun with no effect, on top of being inside the fortress, her fears were confirmed. Lillian had found a way to neutralize her. She turned toward Kal. "Are you okay? Did she ever find you?"

He came to stand on the other side of the bed. "I'm fine. Don't worry about me."

Should she say anything? Her mind raced. The gears rusty from years of disuse. "But...she...Lillian
wanted to hurt you. She asked about you with him…"

His blue eyes darkened. "Don't worry about her. You're alive. Everything else can be fixed."

No, Kal, some things can't be fixed, she thought.

"Here, have some broth," Alex chimed in. "Your stomach will thank me." Alex moved to pick up the bowl from where she had set it down, reluctantly letting go of Kara, and then Kara realized it was because she was literally clinging to her sister.

Kal spoke up, words tumbling out of him in an uncharacteristic stutter. "I'm so sorry, I tried…I looked everywhere…but I never gave up. Alex wouldn't let me."

"It's okay." What else could she say? She'd stopped being angry a long time ago. She'd stopped being a lot of things.

Alex cleared her throat and waved a spoon in front of Kara. It took a moment for her to realize that the food was for her. Another leap of faith, accepting this…situation as real. She held the bowl in one hand and eyed the spoon before shaking her head and simply sipping the broth from the dish. Flavors erupted on her tongue. None of them she could remember the name of.

"Thanks." She slurped it down, not caring that it dribbled down her cheek.

Alex nodded, staring at Kara as if she might disappear or break. "Take it easy, not so fast."

Kara ignored the warning, used to gulping down what she could when she could. A habit that years in the making wasn’t going to be broken in a day.

"We'll get you something more substantial soon, for now, it's better to take start slow."

Kara handed back the empty bowl, then laid down, energy gone. "Am I human now? Did Lillian succeed?" She caught the look Kal shot Alex and knew there was a whole lot more going on. "Am I dying?"

Alex cleared her throat, "They did a lot to you…we don't know everything. The long-term exposure to kryptonite as well as…other things caused your cells to break down. We were able to stop it but your heart sustained a lot of damage for some reason."

Kara cocked her head to the side. Images of Lillian cutting into her chest, injecting things into her. Dry, scientific explanations about what she was doing and the possible side effects. Kara slammed the door on the memories screeching to get out. "That was her favorite thing to experiment on." Kara didn’t share more, her nerves were raw and she felt as if any moment everything was going to unravel and she'd wake up in her cell.

A flash of anger sweat across Alex's face. "I see…well, because of that, we're giving you transfusions of blood from Clark. It's helped with a lot of the superficial cuts and bruises you had but we haven’t been able to figure out the right formula to fix your heart."

"My powers?"

"One thing at a time. We need to fix your heart first. I'm taking some support cells from Clark to try and help."

Kara looked at her sister, wondering when she got so smart and why she was wasting it on trying to fix her. There were so many other things she could be doing than saving a worthless alien who had
no home, didn’t belong, and destroyed every family she'd ever been a part of. Her breath hitched at the memory of one of Lillian's favorite conversation topics.

"You okay?"

"Yeah." It was an obvious lie, but it wasn’t like anyone was going to confront her about it.

Kal cleared his throat. "Our friend J'onn, J'onn J'onzz, would like to meet with you. I know you just woke up, but any information you can share with him can help us find the people who did…who were holding you."

Fear slid down Kara's spine. "Lillian's still out there? You didn’t get her? Does she have Sam? What about Sam?" How could she forget about her only friend? Because she was selfish, that's how.

Alex put a hand on her shoulder. "Sam's fine. She escaped."

"The uniforms…you're D.E.O." Even Kara heard the accusation in her voice, but try as she might, she wasn’t able to feel bad about it.

"Yes, we are, but the people who had you…they're out. The D.E.O. is under new management, and trust me when I say this. You're safe." Alex's eyes were pleading.

Trust her? Kara almost laughed. She hadn't trusted anyone but Sam in forever, and she'd never even met the woman. She brought a hand up to her face to rub her forehead. "What does this friend of yours want? I can’t talk about…I can’t…"

"No, you don't need to. He has an ability. If you let him he can read your mind."

Kara moved her hand and glared at Alex. "That's kind of invasive. Like all my thoughts and memories would be out there for him to see?"

Alex nodded. "I know it's a lot to ask, but he's one of the best people I know and he won't share anything that isn’t relevant to finding those responsible for what happened."

Kara let out a breath. She could say no. Tell them to leave her be and wait for her heart to fail, because that's what they were holding back. She was dying and their faces couldn’t hide it. Their smiles were too wide, eyes too bright for everything to truly be okay. Which made the decision all that much easier.

"Sure, he can dig around all he wants."

She'd be dead soon enough.

***

Alex paced the area of the fortress Clark had turned into a make-shift guest room for her. Her parents were taking their turn with a now conscious Kara.

Her sister was damaged, not just physically but emotionally, too.

She'd prepped for this. Taken the classes. Got the degree. Volunteered. But none of that had truly prepared her for seeing her sister in this condition. Her hands clenched into fists and she hit the wall in front of her then resumed her pacing. She'd only been here a little over two weeks and was free to go at any time but the walls were closing in on her, how Kara had managed…for years…

Another time around the room, she kicked a chair to get out some of her energy. Then she pounded
the walls until her knuckles bled. When she got her hands on the people who did this to Kara she was going to rip them apart. Her sweet sister who only wanted to eat pizza and play with her cat. Who wanted to help people.

Would she ever get her back?

"Alex, you okay?"

She hung her head. "Are you kidding me with that question?"

Clark entered, sliding the icy door shut behind him. "No…it's just…it's what people ask I guess."

Alex snorted. "I'm barely keeping my shit together after seeing what they did. The scars…her body is covered in them. I can't even imagine what the hell is going on in her mind. She's not okay and I…if we had been sooner."

He wrapped her in his arms before she could pummel more ice. "We did the best we could. It's a miracle we found her and I don't even know what the word is for the fact she was still alive. She's tough, and she has you looking out for her."

Alex sucked in a breath then pushed away from him. "Yeah, that's worked out well for her."

"It did. She's here. She's alive. Forget everything else a second and hold on to that. Kara. Is. Alive. She might not be the same, and she might never be. Maybe her powers are gone, maybe they'll come back. But, I don't care about any of that right now because I have my cousin back. My family…because you wouldn't give up." Unshed tears floated in his eyes and she held her breath realizing this was the first time he had ever expressed so much to her.

He'd thought Kara was dead. And she'd let anger guide and consume her over the years.

She grabbed a sweater off the table. "J'onn's going to do his thing soon. She's going to need us when he's done."

She exited the room, digging deep to find the energy to be strong for the next however long it took for her boss to find the information he needed in her sister's memories.

Kara was sitting up on her bed. Eyes dull, movements lethargic. An empty bowl sat next to her and she guessed Eliza gave her more broth.

"Agent Danvers," J'onn said from the entrance to the lab they were monitoring Kara in.

She glanced over at him then to Kara to introduce them but her sister's face was contorted in terror and she was pushing herself off of the bed.

"No, no, no no…you said I was safe. You lied to me…I knew this was a trick!" Kara cried and screamed while trying to make herself as small as possible.

Alex's heart broke at the sight, but she slipped into her old role with ease. She grabbed the blue blanket and crawled under the bed with Kara. She wrapped her arms around her, able to overpower her and she hated it. Hated what that meant. "Kara, I'm so sorry. It's not the man you know. J'onn's a shapeshifter. He took over for Henshaw a few years ago. The real Henshaw is dead." She rubbed her hand in a calming circular motion over Kara's back, ignoring the ribs jutting out.

"I can't, Alex. He ordered them to do things…watched…he's a monster."
"Shh, it's okay. He's gone. You're okay."

Thirty minutes later, a double dose of Ativan and a shift by J'onn to his natural Martian form and they managed to pull Kara out from beneath the bed. Her body trembled and her eyes were wild and unfocused.

"Can you still do it?" Alex asked.

"I'd prefer to do it under different conditions, and I'm not even sure it'll work. Since she lost her powers, there is a chance."

Clark had left the room with the others in the hopes of calming Kara. It didn’t work.

"It's okay. I'm used to people doing things I don't like," Kara said in the weakest, most lifeless voice Alex had ever heard.

If possible, Alex's heart broke more at the sight of her sister like this.

"That's not what this is. If you say no, he's gone. You hear me? No one will ever do something you don't want again." Alex didn't mean to speak so loudly or with such vehemence but it must have gotten through because Kara did that thing where her brow crinkled.

"This will help you find them…they won't hurt anyone else?"

"Never again."

"Will you stay close?"

Alex nodded. "Always."

Kara looked at J'onn. "Do it."

"Are you sure, Ms. Danvers? I can do this another time when you're more comfortable."

Her sister braced her arms on the bed, hands gripping the edge. "The sooner you find them the better. Let's get this over with."

"Okay. I have to put my hands on your face."

When Kara nodded J'onn moved forward.

The moment their foreheads touched Alex noted how her boss's body tensed. Kara remained rigid. Tears streamed down both of their faces within moments. Alex stared, an intruder on an intimate moment, but unable to leave her sister's side. She opted to let her head hang down and close her eyes, repeating over and over that Kara was going to be okay.

***

Lena's phone buzzed and she went still for a moment. Her memory was fuzzy and it took her a second to remember where she was.

Grabbing the phone from the coffee table she rubbed her eyes to clear them and saw the alert on the alarm she had set up and opened the video attachment. She watched as her father's old assistant opened the secret room, stepped back in shock, then left.

Interesting. She ran through her father's contact list and within seconds she had the man's number
and was dialing.

"Hello." A deep, confident voice answered.

"This is Lena Luthor. I was hoping we could talk, Mr. Gao."

A second of silence. "That can be arranged. When works for you?"

"My father always said there was no time like the present," Lena said.

"That he did. Where?"

"I'll text you."

She hit end and sent him the address of a hole in the wall diner a few blocks from her place that she'd be able to sneak into without any of the annoying paparazzi seeing her.

It had been almost a month since the spectacle of Lex fighting Superman, but reporters had a long memory and several of them were tenacious in their attempts to get an exclusive with Lena, others were certain she was hiding something and were determined to uncover it.

Dashing into her room she changed into a pair of worn jeans, running shoes, and an oversized sweatshirt. She slipped on a baseball hat and blew out a breath before grabbing her wallet and keys then heading out the door.

Ten minutes later, she was slipping into the back booth of Nat's Diner after entering through the rear. A cup of black coffee appeared in front of her and she smiled her thanks. Many a night had been spent here working over problems.

A shadow appeared over her and then Mr. Gao slid into the seat across from her.

"Evening."

"Hello," he said.

"You used to work for my father."

He slipped his overcoat off and set it next to him. A waitress appeared and he nodded when she pointed to the upside-down mug.

"I did. He spoke highly of you."

Lena folded the napkin in her hand. "He trusted you."

He cleared his throat, "I take it this is about his files. You have them I assume?"

Lena nodded. "They're safe."

He ripped open a sugar packet. "I know. You're the only other person who knew the code."

"Care to explain what you were doing there?"

He dumped creamer into his cup and slowly stirred. "Your father was a smart man. He knew something was going to happen with Lex if he didn’t do anything. He'd planned to step in…but his heart."
Lena swallowed against the memories of her father's death. The suddenness.

He sighed, "He left me with very detailed instructions. I was to keep an eye on Lex, find any information I could and add it to the collection."

Lena swallowed the last of her coffee. "For what purpose?"

The man met her eyes and she knew he didn’t want to answer her.

"For you. He wanted you to take over…to stop your brother, but only when you were ready. I…I didn’t know Lex was going to…if I had I would have said something sooner."

Lena waved him off; there were far too many things to regret at the moment.

The mug in her hand was empty but she waved the waitress away when she tried to refill it. "How did you get them? My brother is the most paranoid man alive. He doesn’t leave anything lying around."

He lifted his gaze and met her eyes. "My daughter is…was his assistant. I got her the job shortly before your father passed."

Lena traced the swirly pattern on the table in front of her. "That's convenient. Am I just supposed to buy that?"

His eyes hardened. "My daughter risked a lot to do this. And she did it because it was the right thing. Superman saved us years ago. We would do anything to help him."

"I understand and meant no offense. Please…this is a bit confusing to me. What am I supposed to do with these files? Lex is about to go on trial, he's been stopped. What good are they now?"

He glanced over his shoulder, then back at Lena. "Your brother was working on many things. He has warehouses all over the world, weapons that can take down a Super, and a number of other projects Luthor Corp funds that aren't on the books."

Lena waited a moment, allowing the waitress to refill her mug this time. Something told her she was going to need more coffee to deal with what was coming.

"And that information is in those files. Why not give them to the authorities?"

He shook his head. "Lionel and I spoke about this often. He didn’t trust the government, said there were people within it that would take the information and use it against the aliens seeking refuge here. Certain organizations that were even working with your mother. Not to mention your brother used some sort of encryption system on his files and took notes in a shorthand that I've not been able to decipher."

The weight of what her brother had done weighed heavily on her and she knew this was the burden her father had spoken of all those years ago.

"I'll see what I can do," she said, not knowing what else to say.

"My daughter, Jess, she can help you. She's smart, knows the company well, and still has ways to contact some of the less savory people your brother worked with."

Lena sipped her coffee, then set it down. "Is she overly attached to Metropolis?"

He shook his head. "Nothing's keeping her here."
Raising a brow, Lena looked at him. "What about you?"

He shrugged. "I'd go with her. She's the only thing I care about now."

"Tell her she has the rest of the week off, but starting next Monday I'll be in the office. We have a lot of work ahead of us."

He smiled. "Thank you, Ms. Luthor."

Lena left the diner through the back entrance. Her mind running with a million different ideas. The contents of the files weighed more on her with each passing day. Lex had made a mess of things on a monumental scale and Lena wondered if she would be able to make a dent in it. Sooner, rather than later she'd have to deal with it.

For now, though, she had other pressing matters.

Back in her apartment she plopped on the couch and slipped on her glasses. She'd compiled a list of places to move Luthor Corp. Step one in changing the direction of the company was to get the hell out of the city where the Luthor name had caused the most damage.

Running her finger down the list, she stopped at National City. The same size as Metropolis, with the added bonus of being a coastal city. Not that Lena was a sun worshipper, but she'd heard people were happier. The economy was strong and a number of tech-savvy companies were there.

Attempting to access the financial records of the company, she found herself locked out, again. She rubbed her forehead, hating that they were taking so long in giving her access to vital information. She'd have to do an assessment of the board as well as any employees that worked closely with Lex.

Something told her a lot of people were going to lose their jobs, not that she felt guilty. Any rich asshole that supported Lex's xenophobic rhetoric or cheered his attacks on Superman had no place in her company. The same went for any employees who held similar views.

Lena had never wanted Luthor Corp, but now that it was her she would bend it to her will.

She would make it a force for good.
Kara rubbed her eyes, again. Her body shuddering while she sucked in a breath. She hadn't stopped crying since that weird mind meld thing. J'onn had gone through her memories and while she didn't have a front row seat to reliving them, they were closer to breaking through the wall she kept them behind.

He'd sat with her a few moments afterward and held her hand while he explained who he was. When he spoke of losing his wife and two daughters she felt a strange kinship with him. She supposed having someone hang out in your brain did that.

Warm hands held hers and he told her that when she got stronger, if she wanted, he could wipe the memories for her. He spoke low, asking her not to tell Alex about it. Kara nodded, knowing that whatever he was offering to do to her came at a great expense to him. She'd told him she'd think about it, but she already knew her answer. As much as she wanted to forget what had happened, the anger about it was the only thing keeping her going right now. She had no idea who she'd be without it and had no intention of finding out. If she wasn't angry, she'd be some other emotion and she wasn't equipped to deal with that right now.

Eliza came in, freeing her from dwelling on her thoughts too long.

"I brought you some tea with honey. You used to like it."

Kara accepted the mug with hesitation, people still made her nervous. She took a large sip and spit it back into the cup when it scalded her mouth.

"Careful," Eliza warned.

With annoyance, Kara blew on the liquid. "Sorry. I'm not used to hot things."

Eliza sat on the chair beside the bed. "It'll take time, don't worry."

And Kara knew they were not talking about tea anymore.

"How are you feeling?"

Staring into the mug while she ran her tongue over the burnt skin of her mouth, she shrugged.

"Fine."

"You need anything?"

Kara met Eliza's eyes then, and she gave her one of those smiles, the kind that floated in the back of Kara's memories and made her feel. She didn't like feeling so she stared down at her cup.

"No. I don't need anything." While not true, the things she needed weren't within Eliza's power to give her.
"Have you thought about where you want to go once you're better?"

Kara's head moved of its own volition. "What?"

Eliza leaned back. "I know the fortress is nice, but it's not a home. You know you can come back to Midvale. We'd love to have you."

"Uh…I haven't…I didn't…"

"It's okay, you don't have to decide now, just know you have options."

Her foster mom, former foster mom? What was Eliza to her and she to Eliza? Her brain still rattled in her head at times, memories trying to break free, other times it was memories begging to be hidden away. Right now it was two pieces trying to fit together and it wasn’t working.

The Kara that was and the Kara that is weren’t the same and she didn’t know if the two could ever be reconciled.

"Alex has a place in National City, and there's Clark in Metropolis. Pretty sure those two will fight over who gets to ask you to stay with them first."

Eliza's laugh was light, meant to alleviate stress and tension, but it did the opposite. Why would they fight for her? She was damaged goods. Her heart was broken, literally. Why should she even be thinking of where she was going to live when death was coming for her? And if by some miracle she managed to pull through, everyone who cared about her always got hurt.

"You'll have to meet Lois. Clark's girlfriend. She's wonderful…"

Kara peeked at Eliza, the woman was no longer looking at her. Her eyes were on the monitor to the right. Peaks and valleys, blips that coincided with Kara's heartbeat. She stopped paying attention after she realized Clark had a girlfriend. For some reason that made her angry. She'd been locked up and tortured for years. Gone to hell and back to protect him and he…she swallowed against the pain in her chest. Unsure when Eliza had gotten to her feet and laid Kara down.

"Concentrate on my voice. It's okay. You're safe now."

People really needed to stop saying that to her. What was safe? She'd been in a cell for years. Lillian was still out there. Sam was missing. Safe was a word that held no meaning to Kara.

The beeping noise slowed. Kara's breathing leveled out.

"I'm sorry."

"No need. You've only been awake a few days, I shouldn't have pushed. I'm the one who's sorry."

The mattress shifted next to Kara as Eliza sat.

"I don't know how to act…" Kara didn’t mean to admit that, but Eliza's calming and accepting presence always caught her off guard.

"Sweetie, there's no script here. No right or wrong way to feel or act. It is what it is. You're here with us and that is all that matters. The rest we can work out."

Kara had been expecting more, pointers on how to deal with the chaos in her head. Because she certainly had no idea what to do with it. And in that second she was thankful she didn’t have her powers. How many people would be dead now? How many people would she have hurt? A super-
powered being on the verge of a nervous breakdown…Lillian might have been right after all.

"I think I need a nap."

Eliza tucked the blue blanket around her and kissed her on the forehead. Kara tried hard not to flinch, but she did, still not used to people touching her. Not sure if she would ever be okay with it.

"Get some sleep. We'll be here when you wake up."

Kara watched her leave the room, the beeps on her monitor increasing. Eliza turned, walked back to the bed and picked up a book. "I'll stay until you fall asleep, how about that?"

Kara nodded, not confident she’d be able to sleep with someone standing next to her. She closed her eyes, focusing on her breathing. Imagining Sam was there. The bed was warm, and a pillow…she hadn't had a pillow in so long. And the blanket. Her blanket. It smelled of Alex, their two years of sisterhood, and a past that she’d let go.

***

Alex left when Eliza came in to check on Kara. Her sister had been quiet, remote, and unresponsive since J'onn did his thing. She'd been concerned, accusing him of breaking her sister but he told her to relax. That there were a lot of memories to dig through none of which were pleasant. She backed off when she noted he was shaking.

Kara's hand shook along with the rest of her body. Alex wrapped her up feeling Kara stiffen, sitting behind her and putting her head over Kara's shoulder. "Just hugs, hugs are good." It was reminiscent of when they were kids and Kara came home from school upset about an accident or the other kids making fun of her. Alex would just wrap her up and hold her.

Fitting the both of them on the bed was awkward but nothing could have convinced Alex to move.

She sat there for hours until her arms ached and her shoulders burned.

"Alex, stop."

At that, she backed away but didn’t get off the bed. "What can I do?"

Kara shook her head. Her face ten shades lighter than it was when she'd arrived. All Alex wanted to do was help.

Kara was too skinny, get her to eat.

She was traumatized, get her to talk.

She was scared of Lillian, find the woman and kill her.

But she couldn’t do any of these things. Healing and recovery took time. She'd learned that. So, she waited.

"Sweetie, you want some tea?"

Kara didn’t move, but Eliza entered anyway, motioning for Alex to leave. J'onn stood in the doorway, face drawn, eyes sad.

She trailed behind them as they headed toward the main room. Clark waited, Jeremiah at his side.
"So, you got something? Right? We didn’t just put her through hell for nothing…please tell me we didn’t do that," Alex begged.

All eyes went to J'onn. "I need a minute."

That was twenty-three minutes ago and Alex was losing her mind. J'onn tapped at the keyboard of his laptop, eyes watery, and face stoic.

Alex waited.

Clark had left to take care of a few emergencies and came back with pizza.

J'onn sighed and she tensed. To see him so upset meant whatever he saw in Kara's head was bad, really bad.

"I put the names of those Kara knew into the database. Arrest warrants have been issued. Lillian Luthor…she's at the top of the list. That woman is the devil." He put his hands on his hips and directed his gaze to the floor a moment. "Most people, Kara only saw. I put in their descriptions and am hoping for some matches." He got to his feet, shifting back into the shape of Henshaw.

"I won't betray her confidence. But, I will tell you this. She went through hell. Truly, she is the strongest person I have ever met. Give her time and lots of support, she deserves it." His last comment was said while giving Clark a significant look.

Her skin felt tight at the words, her mouth dry. Alex knew. They all did, but to hear it in such a somber tone made it more real, more dire, worse for some reason.

"She'll get whatever she needs," Clark said.

J'onn gave him a weird look then nodded. "I have to get back. There were more people involved than we suspected." He motioned to Alex. "Agent Danvers, a word."

She swallowed, following him toward the exit of the fortress.

"I know you love Kara and want what's best for her. But she needs professional help. I know someone at the D.E.O."

Alex wrapped her coat around herself. "She's not going to go within ten miles of that place. She associates them with what happened to her not to mention the uniforms are going to trigger her."

He crossed his arms. "I'm aware. We'll set something up. You need to be her sister, not her therapist right now."

With that, he flew off. Of course, he was right, she wasn’t an idiot. But it didn’t stop her from wanting to help Kara. She kicked at the snow beneath her feet hating how helpless she felt. She didn’t even know how to be a sister anymore. It had been so long and they were only together a couple of years before it all went to shit. Did Kara even think of her as a sister?

Behind her, Clark cleared his throat. "How are you holding up?"

"Fantastic. You?"

"Been better."

They stood next to one another, the vastness of the white in front of them blinding. "We should go back in," she said.
"Yeah, it's been a heck of a day."

Alex traced her steps back to where Kara was. Her mom leaned on the bed, her sister sound asleep next to her.

Eliza came out of the room, a thin, but soundproof barrier of ice going up when Alex touched a section of the wall.

"How is she?"

Her mom let out a breath. "Physically, she's stable. The damage to her heart is severe but as long as she takes it easy it's not life-threatening, yet. As for her powers, I don't know. We've both been over the data, and there's no logical reason they haven't come back."

"I…I don't know how to help her and I'm scared I'll just make things worse. You and dad always said I just run into things without thinking and I'd never forgive myself if I screwed up with her," Alex mumbled as tears slid down her face.

Her mom put her arms around her and pulled Alex close. "Honey, one thing I have never worried about is you screwing things up with Kara. When it comes to that girl it's like you have a built-in manual on how to understand her. Have faith in that, she's your sister no matter what." Her mom gave her a squeeze, and Alex leaned into it, the pressure behind her eyes building. How did her mom always know what fear was threatening to come out and how to shut it down?

"Thanks."

"Go check on her. I know you want to. And you can let her know tomorrow she can go where she wants. She's going to try and stay here, alone."

Alex scrunched her forehead. "Isn't it soon to talk about that? She just woke up a few days ago…and her powers…and her heart."

"Honey, I know it's scary to think about leaving here. I know she's fragile now and that's tough to handle for you, but you can do it. Don't let her get comfortable here. After what she's been through a place like this is going to appeal to her and the longer she stays the harder it'll be to get her to leave."

Alex nodded. "Okay."

Of course, her mom was right. Alex had the same thoughts but had wanted to wait a few days to broach the subject and run more tests and keep Kara safe, and she was falling into the same trap her mom was worried about. She straightened her shoulders and swiped the panel on the wall again and slid into the room understanding exactly what her mom meant.

Kara had been isolated for years. It was what she was used to. The fortress was offering her the same thing but with the difference of being safe and after what she'd been through…

Something told her there was going to be some arguing in her future.

***

Lena ran her fingers through her hair. After a lot of arguing and several threats both veiled and blatant, she was given access to all information regarding the company. She'd spent the entire weekend examining the most recent financials of Luthor Corp and based on the numbers she needed to come up with a plan to save the company, stat.
Her brother had siphoned hundreds of millions of dollars into accounts spread around the world that no matter how deep she dug, all ended up as dead ends.

The files she'd taken from her father's office sat in the storage unit, but they weren’t something she was ready to go through just yet. Not that she had the time. Whatever terrible projects her brother had funded, people he had hurt, weapons he had created…she couldn’t do anything about it until she got the cash flow to stop hemorrhaging.

She took notes, outlined various plans to streamline the company, and defunded all of Lex's weapons and bio-experimental related departments. She knew the backlash from investors who supported the mania of her brother would be bad, but she hoped it would allow other more sane people to know that with Lena behind Luthor Corp, things were going to be different.

When she saw the time was 4 AM, she shut her laptop. Tomorrow would be her first official day in the office and she knew some of her more drastic cuts and changes were not going to go over well with some of the employees.

With that final thought, she went to bed, asleep before her head hit the pillow.
And here is the second update of the day!

Kara shivered but didn’t move. They'd probably taken her blanket away to punish her, again. For what she didn’t know, not that they ever needed a reason to be cruel to her. She curled herself into a small ball trying to get warm.

"Hey, are you okay?" A soothing voice broke through to her.

A warm hand, something soft covering her now. Everything came back. The fortress. Alex. Being free. Her eyes shot open to see her sister peering down at her with a concerned expression.

Alex put a hand on her shoulder. "I got some oatmeal for you today. Sounds amazing I know, but I did add some cinnamon and raisins. You used to like that."

Everything flooded back. Her captivity, her rescue, the last month in the fortress working on getting her healthy again. She still had issues when people crowded around her and wasn’t a fan of being touched. Shaking her head to stay in the present she gave a tentative smile to Alex before pushing herself up.

She hesitated before taking the bowl. Then she scooped out a portion and shoved it into her mouth.

"Slow down, you're gonna make yourself sick eating like that," Alex said.

She tried, but years of being on the brink of starvation made food really, really important.

"So, I was thinking that since you're on the mend and there's nothing keeping you here that we could take you back home."

Kara froze. "What? Why can't I stay here? I don’t have my powers and you said my heart…"

"Hey, shh, I understand. I know you're scared, but you don’t have to be. It's been almost a month and you're stable now. Your heart isn't great, I won't lie, but it's not life or death. As for your powers, I don’t know what to tell you. What I can say with certainty is that staying in an ice castle with a robot as your only friend isn’t the answer."

She didn’t hesitate with her response. "I can do it. I can stay here. It's better if I do. I'll be safe and no one else will have to worry about me and no one else will be…" she trailed off, the look Alex was giving her was kind and understanding and oh so much like Eliza's.

"Kara, there's nothing here for you. I'm a doctor and can look after your needs or we can get someone else to. I'm also a trained agent and can keep you safe as can Clark if you prefer. I can transfer to Metropolis. And if you think for one second that you might hurt someone or be the reason someone else is hurt, just stop. I've been missing you for years. I want you back in my life. But, if you really want to stay here. I'll guess I'll stay, too." Alex's eyes shimmered.

The bowl of oatmeal in her hand forgotten, Kara started to panic. Her heart pounded painfully in her
chest and her hand rubbed absently at the spot above it. Lillian had said that everyone Kara cared for got hurt. But here was Alex, strong and beautiful, smart and accomplished. Eliza and Jeremiah were okay and Kal was still Superman, out saving the world.

Could she go back to her old life? Did she want to? She knew Alex would uproot everything and live with her here, giving up her life for Kara. Again. Kara was smart enough to know how much Alex had done to find her.

"Why?"

"Because you're my sister and I made a promise to always protect you, and I keep my promises."

Kara remembered that night; it had been one of her favorite memories. Tears streamed down her face and landed in her oatmeal. She spooned another mouthful to buy herself a moment before having to speak. Then another until the bowl was empty.

She'd promised to protect Alex as well, and right now that meant protecting her from herself. Kara couldn't let Alex stay at the fortress. So, for as long as Kara was around, she'd make sure Alex was where she was happy.

"I'll go back, but wherever you are. That's where I want to go."

Alex wiped at her eyes. "Good...that's good."

They sat in semi-comfortable silence while Kara ate another bowl of oatmeal. Alex explained what they had done to help her heal and how her heart was weak but nothing to be scared of. That part was a lie. She knew when someone was lying after spending years with Lillian, but she couldn't get mad at Alex for it.

Her hands trembled, and when Alex asked why, Kara told her it was from being tired. She didn't want to admit that the thought of leaving the fortress terrified her, to be around people again, to create a new life. To try and live when she'd spent so much time hoping to die.

"Who will I be?"

"Kara Danvers."

She crinkled her forehead at that. "But, wasn't Kara Danvers a mistake?"

Alex glared at her. "What? Don't ever say that."

"I mean, they know who I am, and it would put you in danger...and how do you explain my disappearing for so long."

Her sister waved her off. "Don't worry about that. Your identity is safe. J'onn made sure of that."

At the mention of the shapeshifter Kara froze, memories coming back. "Do you talk to him a lot?"

Alex took the empty bowl out of her hand, having to pry it away. "He's my boss, so, he actually does more of the talking, bossing me around really." She smiled, no malice in the words.

"Did he say anything?" If he'd told Alex about what happened...about Kara's past...

"No, and he never will."

A tightness Kara didn't even know that had settled in her chest, eased. No one ever needed to know.
Especially Kal.

"So, where is home?" Kara pulled the sleeves of her shirt down, not wanting to see the scars on her arms.

Alex brightened, obviously glad to be talking about something not related to Kara's health or prior imprisonment. "I have a place in National City, mom thinks it's small but compared to their house everything is. I think you'll like it. Lots of windows, really bright, a corner you can set up your painting in. We'll have to share a bed or I'll sleep on the couch because it's a loft, but whatever. It'll be great."

She smiled because that was what was expected of her. Paint? Right, she used to do that. She could do this. And if she couldn’t, she’d teach Kelex checkers or something.

Kal peered into the room. "Hey, I don’t mean to interrupt but there's an earthquake that needs my attention. I'll be back in a bit."

Kara noted the frown on his face when he looked at her. She guessed he overheard their conversation and was upset she didn’t choose to stay with him. But how could she? She'd had more time than most to think about her life and how she got to this point. Kal was her cousin and she loved him and she'd done as her parents had asked. She'd protected him, but now, there was nothing she could do for him.

He'd spent hours talking with her on nights she couldn’t sleep. They spoke of Krypton, and she told him about his parents. She fumbled over the memories, many of them hard to reach and hazy at first. But the more she talked the more they came back. The topic of her parents and last moments was still too hard.

He knew when to stop. When she needed a break. When to change the topic. He told her about Lois and even though Kara had mixed emotions that she didn’t understand, she was happy to hear her cousin speak with such love about someone.

"You okay?" Alex asked.

"Yeah, just thinking."

Alex turned toward her. "Wanna talk about?"

"Not really."

"Okay, but you know if you ever do…want talk about anything, I'm here. Always."

Kara didn’t know that, but it was nice to hear. Whether or not it was true wasn’t something she was willing to test out at the moment. Maybe not ever.

The flight from the Fortress to Alex's loft brought back so many memories. The wind in her hair, sun on her skin, the view…for the briefest of moments she felt like things might be okay. That her life wasn’t completely ruined.

Then Kal set her down in the alley and reality settled over her. She had no powers. She had several lifetime's worth of bad memories. She had no idea how she was going to do this.

Her heart pounded in her chest and she rubbed the spot absentely while Kal changed in the blink of an eye. Alex had left ahead with J'onn to set up…and now Kara was here…to do what?
"You okay?" Kal's eyes were wide, concerned.

"I'm fine. Just not used to it..." she trailed off not sure how much to share.

He reached out, slowly. "It'll get better. We're all here for you."

They walked to the front of the building, Kara sticking close to Kal and avoiding people, not that there were a whole lot this early in the day.

Her anxiety lowered once they were inside Alex's apartment building, but only a bit. She sucked in a breath, counting to ten like her sister had taught her. Holding it, then letting it out. It helped. A little.

"Hey, come on in. The fridge is stocked and I set up a futon." Alex motioned for them to enter.

Swallowing, Kara did. Hoping the lightheadedness and anxiety surging through her would ease up at some point.

***

Alex shoved a box of old clothes toward Kara. "These should fit you. They're from college. We can go shopping later and you can pick out stuff more to your liking."

Her sister picked through the clothes, selecting a pair of jeans, a grey sweatshirt, a long-sleeved jersey tee, and two pairs of socks.

After a home-cooked meal (by Clark) the day before, he had left with promises of coming by soon. Alone with Kara, Alex started to panic. What if she messed up? Didn’t say the right thing? Screwed up in how she supported her? Knowing that the silence was getting awkward, she'd asked Kara if she liked the loft. Kara had nodded, but it was half-hearted at best. After what Kara had been through and the living accommodations she was used to, it was more than Alex had expected.

Kara's eyes darted all over, going from one point then back to the floor. Another point, then back to the floor. Time, it would take time for Kara to get used to such a different environment and Alex had her doubts, but when she saw the ghost of a smile form on Kara's face when she spotted all the pictures of birds Alex had put on the wall next to the windows, she knew they could do it, together.

Alex spent the rest of the day teaching Kara how to use the coffee machine, TV remote, and a cell phone. A lot had changed and she could tell her sister was more than overwhelmed. She also noted the nervous tics, foot tapping, nail biting, inability to focus. All the indicators of severe anxiety. Alex slowed it down, made sure not to draw attention to any of it, and tried her best to distract her sister from the thoughts in her head.

"What do you think?"

Alex glanced up from where she was making room in a drawer. "Looks great." The jeans were two inches too short and the sweatshirt barely made it to her waist, but Kara looked so damn happy, Alex didn’t have the heart to say much else.

"Clean clothes. I am never taking this for granted again." Kara ran her hands down the arms, bundled them up, brought them to her face and inhaled.

An image of her sister's cell flashed in Alex's mind and she forced the memory of its stench away. "How's your stomach? I think we can try something more substantial today. Maybe some pasta?"
"Whatever."

A Kara who didn’t care about food, whose face didn’t light up at the thought of a meal, had scared her at first. But then Alex remembered, sadly, that this was a whole new Kara. One that ate whatever was put in front of her, and only when something was put in front of her. One without an insane metabolism and one who had obviously gotten used to irregular meals was the only way she could think about it without getting angry.

She’d expected Kara to munch and nibble on things, but she didn’t. Not once did she get herself something to eat from the fridge or cabinets, which were overflowing with snacks Alex knew her sister loved as a kid. Alex would have to work on that.

"Mom’s going to bring some of your old stuff up from Midvale." It didn’t need to be said that they were going to wait to have Kara over. The site of her kidnapping probably not on her top ten list of places to see at the moment.

"I can’t even remember what I had." Kara’s face took on a thoughtful expression which was better than the meek, scared one she usually wore.

"I'm sure it'll be a surprise for both of us." That was a lie. Alex knew every item because she'd been the one to pack it up. The one to store it in her closet. The one who went through it at holidays. The one who held onto it as proof Kara had existed when she thought it was all a terrible nightmare.

"Have you talked to your boss?"

Alex closed the drawer and got to her feet. "This morning, why?"

"I was just wondering if he had any news about Sam."

"No, but there's a whole team looking for her."

Kara's face fell and Alex knew there was nothing she could do to fix it, only minimize the damage of the news.

"I'll make us something to eat and then we can catch up on some movies, how about that?"

Kara followed her into the kitchen sitting on one of the stools. Her eyes always found a single point of reference and stayed fixed on it. Alex had wondered about it until she remembered the near-empty cell her sister had been kept in. She wasn’t used to so much visual stimulus and it probably gave her a headache. In time it would get better.

She hoped.

"Tell me about Sam. Seems like she was pretty important to you.

Kara shrugged. "We talked to each other. Kept each other sane. She's my friend."

"I'm glad you had someone."

"I never saw her. They kept us separated, but they made it so we could hear each other." Kara's face went blank after that, trapped in the past.

Alex filled a pot with water and set it on the stove. "That was nice of them."

A dark laugh escaped her sister contrasting with her memories of Kara.
"They didn’t do it to be nice." She fidgeted with her fingers saying no more.

Alex forced herself to calm down. Imagining her little sister, scared and terrified, listening as another person was hurt and tortured and vice versa made her blood boil.

Don't think about it.

Help Kara.

"Can you think of anywhere she'd go?"

"No, she didn’t have any family. From what she told me she'd been there a really long time."

Alex dumped in a handful of noodles then grabbed a bottle of sauce from the fridge. She emptied it into a small pan and heated it up.

"I'm sure she'll turn up."

Staring at the same spot, her sister spoke, "It's weird she hasn’t. I mean, I know a bit about how to function out there and even I would have been terrified, made a stupid mistake and been taken in by the police or something. Unless she…"

Alex put her hand on top of Kara's, pulling back when she flinched. "Sorry." She forgot…Kara had been so tactile when they were younger, but now…all Alex could do was hope that in time physical contact wouldn’t cause Kara to recoil. Alex eased back. "She's not dead. They have an alert for any unidentified bodies." She hated how morbid it sounded, but it was the best she could do.

They remained silent while Alex prepared their plates and brought them over to the table. Kara handled her fork awkwardly and still ate too fast, but Alex let it slide. She could figure it out tomorrow…or the day after. Kara was alive, here, and eating - really, that was more than she could have asked for.

They curled up on the couch, Kara with her blue blanket tucked in around her and watched a comedy. Her sister was asleep twenty minutes in. Alex sat up reading articles, soothing Kara with soft reassuring words when a nightmare kicked in. Even in sleep, Kara tensed and pulled away from touch.

The words and phrases coming out making the anger Alex kept in check want to run free. The tiny mewls and tears broke her heart.

Alex wished someone would tell her things were going to be okay, even if it was a lie.

***

Lena liked Jess and from the way she handled herself, Lena knew she had found an assistant that was not only competent but could hold her own when people tried to bully their way into Lena's office or onto her schedule.

The past few weeks had been tough, but they'd made it through. Stock prices had slowed their descent, and only a handful of investors had pulled out when Lena was announced as CEO. Thankfully, they were all ones she had red-flagged as problematic.

In turn, she gained two new ones to her shock. Though, when she read Spherical Industries on one of the documents, she didn’t know what to think. She'd assumed Jack would be mad.
Picking up the phone, she dialed.

"Hello, beautiful."

"Jack, you didn’t have to."

His laugh, warm and familiar came through the line. "I know that. I wanted to. I know with you at
the helm that Luthor Corp will be the tech company in no time. Really, you're setting up my
retirement."

Lena cleared her throat. "I'm sorry. I should have called, just with everything going on I need to
focus on the company."

"It's okay. I understand...I might not agree, but I care about you enough to want you to be happy
and I know you're smart enough to do what's right for you."

"You always were too good to me." She slipped some papers into a file and moved it aside on her
desk.

"No such thing. And you must be forgetting the first couple of years we worked together."
Lena smiled at that. "How could I forget? I developed shatterproof coffee mugs as a way to cope."

"I still have mine. It has a special place on my desk next to the World's Best Boss pen you got me."

"Pretty sure that's not from me."

"Pretty sure it is."

They went back and forth a few more minutes before Lena turned serious.

"I'm going to be leaving Metropolis soon. I thought you should know."

A moment of silence. "I figured. Will I see you before?"

"I don't know. Lex made such a mess of things and the legal team is working around the clock to try
and figure out exactly what he was involved in. I don't want you to get any of this on you."

"Lena, that has never worried me. I care about you and always will."

"I care about you, too."

They hung up a minute later after an awkward goodbye. Lena knew it was the right thing to do. She
adored Jack. He'd been the first person to love her, to truly see her for what she could do and
respected her for it. She'd always love him for that, but right now, all she could think about was how
tainted she was because of her last name.

And perhaps that was part of the Luthor curse. Keeping her distance from people was the best plan
of action.

With a heavy sigh, she went back to sorting through the personnel files, especially those selected by
her brother or who worked closely with him.
Kara waited for Alex's breathing to even out. For the last two weeks, Kara's night terrors had woken both her and her sister, causing Alex to bolt out of bed and run to Kara's side and calm her down only to repeat the process an hour later. After the first few nights, Kara just stayed with Alex in her big bed to start but ended up out in the living room when it didn’t make a difference where she slept and she decided staying awake was her best option to make sure Alex got some rest.

Easing out from beneath the sheets, Kara made her way to the couch and settled down on it. She grabbed a...a thing that had books on it. Lots of books...the name eluded her but she liked it. Tomorrow she had her first meeting with Dr. Grey. A therapist Alex's boss had found for her.

For the moment, Kara's anxiety had won out. Being borderline agoraphobic made it impossible for her to go out. Hence the home visit. Just knowing that she'd have to talk about...things was making her panic.

She knew Lillian was on the run and had no idea if Kara was alive, but if she wanted to find out it wouldn't take much work. Which was why at times she feared the woman would jump out from behind a door or corner. Crash in through a window. Kara blew out a frustrated breath. Starting over was a lot harder than she'd anticipated and she'd thought it was going to be damn near impossible.

Thoughts firmly on the doom and gloom side, she set the book device down and stared out the window. An activity she never thought she would get bored of doing. The sky lightened a small amount. A few birds chirped. Kara did the only thing she could, she counted. Every time she reached 1,000 she started over again.

"Hey, want some coffee?" Alex sat on a chair across from Kara.

Rubbing her eyes and groaning at the ache in her neck, she nodded. "What time is it?"

"Just after seven."

Kara glared. "You never got up this early when we were kids."

"And you still love to sleep in."

Pushing off the couch, Kara went into the kitchen and sat at the table. Alex followed behind and set a bowl of cereal in front of her.

"You ready for today?"

Kara took a bite. "I guess. I mean I hope so."

Alex sat on the stool next to her. "Hey, it'll be okay. This is just a first meeting, get to know her type of stuff. See if you like her."

Nodding, Kara finished her breakfast. "I should go shower."

"Okay, I'm gonna clean up in here."
Alex answered the door with a smile in place "Hello, you must be Dr. Grey."

A woman in her forties with short dark hair and kind brown eyes nodded. "I am, and you must be Alex Danvers."

They shook hands after Alex welcomed her inside.

A moment later her sister appeared, pale, shaking, and fidgeting.

"Hi," she said, eyes darting around the room.

"Hello, Kara. I'm Dr. Grey." The woman held out her hand, but Kara didn’t do anything.

"She's hasn’t picked up all Earth customs, yet," Alex whispered.

"Ah." The woman smiled. "No worries, I'm pretty bad with them at times as well."

"I'm going to go out while you two talk," Alex said.

Kara's head snapped up. "Where are you going? Will you be far? What if something…"

Alex walked over to Kara and put her hands on her shoulders. "Hey, It'll be fine. Clark and I are a call away. Okay?"

Kara swallowed. "Okay."

Not allowing herself to cry at the sight of her sister so scared and fragile, Alex gave her a quick hug then left.

This was her first chance to sneak into the DEO and do some research. In the comfort of her lab, she pulled out the vials J'onn had hidden away for her and started to work.

"Agent Danvers, a word," J'onn said.

She went to his office, waiting for him to enter and close the door behind himself.

"How are you and Kara?"

Alex paced a few steps. "Good. I mean…terrible but, I hope this therapist helps."

He crossed his arms and stared at her. "And…"

She blew out a breath. "She doesn't eat unless I place food in front of her. I have the place packed with food and she doesn’t touch it. I make comments and drop hints but, it's like she's so used to going without and I don’t want to yell because she's still jumpy and has nightmares and I just want her to be okay." She brought her hands up to her face in an effort to hold back the tears of frustration that had been building for weeks.

Strong arms wrapped around her and she held out all of a second before letting it all out. She pulled away after a few minutes, wiping at her face.

"Sorry…I just…"

He handed her a tissue. "Don't apologize. You've been through a lot. It's normal." He motioned to the chair across from his desk before sitting. "You're doing great, but remember you need to heal as well. The last few years weren't easy for you."
She nodded. "I know, but what she went through…I have to be strong for her. She needs that."

"What she needs is her sister. She's strong, just give her time, and if you need to take a break, let me know."

She adjusted her position. "Thanks. I just…it's really nice having her back, but I don’t know how to act sometimes. She zones out and I know she's pretending to be interested in a lot of things to humor me. But when I try to get her to pick something, she just…goes away."

J'onn sat back in his chair. "I know it's hard. It hasn't been easy for either one of you. Both of you fought like hell the last ten years. You're not the same people now and it'll take time to sort all of it out."

Alex sighed. "I know. I just…she has nightmares, says things when she's sleeping and I can't not hear them. She's different now, and I get it. I still love her, but it's like she's doesn't even know who she is anymore or even if she is someone. It's breaking my heart."

"Maybe try mentioning that to her."

Blowing out a breath, Alex made a face. "I'll try, but she's still sensitive. The littlest thing can make her shut down for days."

He opened a drawer and pulled out a bag of cookies. "Time. You both need time."

"Yeah, I hate it, but I know. Thanks."

"Anytime. And remember if you ever need to talk, I'm here."

She exited the room, heading toward her lab. The test she'd been running on Kara's blood should be done and diving into the results would be the perfect distraction from watching the clock. Clark had run every test possible at the fortress, but Alex wanted to run her own.

She rubbed the back of her neck, the blood cells floating around on the screen in front of her. No problems she could identify, again. The tissue sample from Kara's heart didn't react with the serum she'd created from Clark's blood, not that she thought it would. She'd tried several other variations and all of them had failed as well.

"What am I not seeing?" She kicked away from her desk, letting her chair roll away. All around her were vials of Kara's blood in various stages of one test or another. Kara hated not having her powers, not that she talked about it. But Alex picked up on it anyways. She knew if she could find a way to get Kara her abilities back she'd feel safer and that was Alex's primary concern at the moment.

Her phone beeped alerting her that time was up and she had to get back to Kara. She spent a second wondering if she recalibrated Clark's white blood cells with a burst of solar radiation…

***

Kara gripped the cuffs of her shirt while Alex got ready for work. She'd been with Alex at her apartment for the last twelve weeks. And, today, for the first time, she was going to be alone. They'd managed to have Kal…Clark or Eliza stay with her when Alex needed to do something so far, but for the most part, Alex had been the one by her side at all times.

"Are you sure you don't want me to stay? J'onn has me listed as being on an undercover op." Alex asked while slipping on a black leather jacket. "He told me I can take more time."
Kara wanted to scream *Yes, please stay!* but she took a breath and forced herself to sound calm. "No, it's fine. I have your number in case of emergency and there's food and it's fine. I'll be fine." Okay, she needed to stop saying she was going to be fine.

An eyebrow quirked in her direction. "Fine huh? I know your therapist wants you to take steps, but you don't have to take them all at once."

She cringed at the mention of Dr. Grey. The woman was nice enough. She knew when to push and when to pull back, but Kara didn’t like her sometimes. Like today, when her voice was in the back of her head telling her that she could lean on Alex but needed to be careful she didn’t become dependent on her.

And yeah, it had only been a few months, but she knew her sister had a life to get back to and Kara needed to rebuild herself. Needed to not only deal with what happened but figure out the person she was now. The anti-anxiety meds would only take her so far, Kara had to do the rest.

"Remember, I programmed my number into your phone as well as Clark, Eliza, and J'onn. Call if you need to, okay? No matter what."

Kara nodded.

"Promise?"

"I promise."

Alex wrapped her in a hug, and Kara didn’t flinch, though she still had to make a conscious effort not to because she knew it made Alex sad. Then, she pulled away and left. Kara sagged against the wall, willing her heart to stop beating so hard because it hurt and that gave her more anxiety. She could do this. It was just a few hours. There were movies, and books, and art supplies.

None of which truly interested her, but did provide a good distraction from her thoughts.

She took a moment to focus on how far she and Alex had come. Kara had put on a few pounds much to her delight. They'd ordered some clothes online because going to the mall was a bit much for her. She still didn’t do well in crowds or around lots of people, or in public in general.

All her choices were long pants and love sleeved shirts. Kara had grown accustomed to the scars on her body but didn’t want others to see them. Especially Alex. Kara noted the anger that flared up in her sister's eyes that was soon replaced with guilt whenever she caught sight of them. There were a few on her face that were barely noticeable, some were fading with time.

They'd instituted sister night, where they ordered all the bad foods and watched movies. Falling back on some of their old routines didn’t erase the last decade but it soothed a part of Kara that had been rough and scabbed for as long as she could remember.

On days she had sessions with Dr. Grey, Alex left them in the apartment to run errands. At first, it was slow going but three sessions a week had her acknowledging a few things and realizing how much work she had to do if she wanted to truly be okay.

Finding out she wanted to be okay had been the biggest surprise. She'd thought there was no fight left in her, that all hope had been extinguished. Yet, that wasn’t the case and at times she didn’t know whether to be happy or annoyed at that fact.

Dr. Grey helped her with that. Listening to Kara's rants and frustrations once she became comfortable talking, though she still didn’t talk about what had happened, she did try to face how it
made her feel

"I just…the nightmares, the memories, trying to pretend that I'm fine. It gets so tiring. Some days I just want to give up."

Dr. Grey nodded. "And that's totally normal after what you've been through. To be honest, I'm surprised you're doing as well as you are. It's a testament to how resilient you are, even if you don't see it."

Kara soaked it in. She wasn’t crazy for thinking those things. She thought she was, had hidden it away with all the other broken parts of her she didn’t want people to know about.

"I won't pretend to understand what happened to you or try and relate to you because it would be crap. What I can and will do is listen, help, and remind you that despite what your brain is telling you when your emotions are high, things are going to be okay. It'll take a lot of work but it will happen. But I need a few things from you."

"Like what?" Kara didn’t have anything to give this woman.

"I need you to promise me you'll find a way to express what happened to you in a way you feel safe. Call me if things get too overwhelming or talk to your sister...she'll listen. And commit to the work I give you. Can you do that?"

Kara twisted her fingers together. "I'm not sure, but I'll try my best."

The doctor stared at her a moment, then nodded. "Okay. For today, I want you to start journaling or painting whenever you feel the bad memories pulling at you. All right?"

And ever since then Kara had done the work. She'd filled up two journals so far, showing them to Dr. Grey but the woman never read them. Instead, she'd ask Kara to tell her. So, in vague terms and phrases, Kara would tell her. Though, it was an easy picture to imagine.

It wasn’t a cure. Nightmares still plagued her and from the dark circles she saw under Alex's eyes every morning she knew it was affecting her sister as well which only made her commit to doing the work even more.

Now, three months later she felt okay enough to try and spend the day alone. Kara knew she would have to do this all the time eventually with the added bonus of having to go out. Dr. Grey had mentioned that their visits would start taking place in her office soon. Meaning Kara would have to go out in public and deal with people.

More work, but in the end, it would pay off. She hoped

And while she dealt with all of her fears and anxieties, Alex was always there. Whether to listen or just sit in silence while they pretended to watch a movie. And though Kara's plans not to care had gone to hell, in this case, she didn’t mind.

She'd forgotten how much having Alex in her life had made things better.

The best thing about Earth.

***

Alex glanced at her watch for the fifth time in ten minutes. It was Friday and she couldn’t wait to go home. So far, no calls from Kara, other than a washing machine mishap earlier in the week.
Her phone beeped at her and she answered it absently. "Danvers."

"Are you okay? It's late." Kara's voice held a hint of concern and a lot of anxiety.

Alex glanced at her watch. "I'm on my way out now. Be home soon." She cursed herself for getting caught up in work.

In the garage, she waved to a few co-workers before climbing into her SUV and revving the engine. She swung by her favorite restaurant on the way home and picked up dinner. Twenty-eight minutes later she entered her apartment to find Kara attempting to look casual while she reorganized Alex’s kitchen cabinets.

"Having fun?"

Kara wiped her hands on the rag next to her. "Keeping busy. Focusing on things outside of me so I don't get trapped in a negative thought process and all that."

Alex raised a brow. "Uh huh, how about you come and focus on dinner." She motioned to the couch. "Glancing at the sink, she didn’t see any dirty dishes, she'd check the fridge later to confirm her suspicion that Kara hadn't eaten…just like every day this week.

Her sister harrumphed, fidgeting with her fingers and squinting at the bags Alex brought. "Are those…"

"They are." She pulled out boxes of potstickers, rice, sweet and sour chicken, egg rolls, spring rolls, and beef and broccoli and set them on the coffee table.

Kara's eyes bulged. "Wow, haven’t seen this much food since we did that horror movie marathon on Halloween. Remember?"

Swallowing down the cry of joy she wanted to make, Alex smiled. This was the first time Kara had mentioned a memory from their childhood. It took everything in her not to drop everything and hug Kara.

"How could I forget? Neither one of us slept for a week." She doled out the food, Kara helping, taking several potstickers in the process.

"I think these are my favorite," Kara said, holding one up before popping it into her mouth.

"You think? You ate them by the bucket load when we were kids." Alex got up to grab a beer from the fridge and poured a glass of water for Kara when she returned.

Kara's eyes widened. "Me? That was you. They were your favorite and because they make me think of you they're my favorite."

How do you take that kind of compliment? Alex had no idea so she changed the subject before she cried. "So, what did you do today?"

"Cleaned."

"Sounds thrilling."

"It is. You don't want to know what I found under your bed."

Alex smirked. "Killer dust bunnies?"
Kara's face turned solemn. "It was them or me…"

Alex laughed, it wasn’t the funniest joke, but it was the first one her sister had made since Alex had found her. She swallowed the growing lump in her throat, Kara was making so much progress and for the first time, Alex realized she was hopeful.

"Can we talk for a minute?" Alex asked.

Kara tensed but nodded.

"First, I just want to say how great I think you're doing and how proud I am of you. I mean, you know that, right?"

"Yeah, sure." Kara lowered her chopsticks to look at Alex.

"And I know that things take time and I want you to take all the time you need, but I…am I…do you not like the food I'm buying? You know you can tell me if you’d prefer something else? And like you need to eat to get your strength back and put on some weight."

Kara exhaled, stabbing her noodles. "What you get is great, it's not that. I'm just so used to being hungry, and a lot of times when I do think about food I don't have the best memories."

Alex reached out and put her hand on Kara's arm, slowly. "It's okay, I just want you to know you can be yourself."

"I know. I'm sorry for being a pain and making you worry for no reason. It's hard. For a long time I just kind of existed. I'd given up hope and went to a really dark place. Dr. Grey's helping me sort through it, but having you…your support is what's giving me the strength to do it."

Alex's eyes burned. "Well, any strength I have is because I got it from you."

Kara cocked her head to the side. "Just no super strength."

"You," Alex made sure to get her sister's attention. "Have way more than super strength."

Nodding, Kara looked down. "I'll eat. When I get hungry I'll get something."

Alex smiled. "Good. That's good. That's great actually, thank you."

"Thanks for caring and being so great with everything."

Wiping at an errant tear, Alex spoke, "You're my sister. I'd do anything for you."

After that they moved on to lighter topics, both of them needing the break.

Alex set down the box of rice making a grand gesture of unbuttoning her pants. "I give up."

Kara smirked. "Quitter."

Without even having to aim Alex grabbed a pillow and threw it.

"Ow."

"Please, that didn’t hurt."

"I'll get you back."
Alex leaned down into the cushions, a smile on her face. "I'm a highly trained government agent, good luck with that." She laughed when she heard Kara mutter something under her breath.

"Hey, we need to do fortune cookies," Kara said.

A small projectile bounced off of Alex's forehead. "I knew that was coming."

"Sure you did. What does yours say?"

She pushed herself up and dug around the blankets until she found the wrapped cookie. She ripped it open, taking out the small bit of paper from the already broken cookie. "Destiny awaits those who go after it." Alex threw her hands up. "What does that even mean?"

Kara shrugged then tore into hers. "Love will bloom when the time is right."

"At least yours makes sense. How am I supposed to go after my destiny, isn’t it already…you know my destiny?"

"Wanna switch? I’d much rather deal with that than the horror of a first date."

Alex sat up. "That's right. You’ve never been on a date."

"And I never will, seriously. I am not dating. Ever."

Alex slapped her on the shoulder, lightly. "That's the spirit! Now pick out a movie to watch."

Kara glared at Alex while she picked through Alex's newly alphabetized movie collection.

"Why do you have so many comedies? I thought you loved horror," Kara asked.

Alex took a second to form her answer. "Comedies are better, sometimes you need to laugh."

With a shrug, Kara selected one of the newer Disney movies. "I guess. I missed laughing."

And with a start, Alex realized she missed laughing, too.

***

Lena slipped the last file from Lex's old office into her briefcase. After she had gone over the place with a fine tooth comb, she'd hired specialists. She knew of her brother's fondness for secret places and wanted to make sure she hadn't missed anything.

To her surprise, there weren't any. At least not in Luthor Corp. Though, from what Jess had shared with her, Lex hadn't spent much time in his office in the months leading up to his challenge of Superman.

After learning Lex had taken several trips to offices in London, Paris, Tokyo, and Rome Lena arranged a trip.

She spent weeks scouring those offices as well. More specialists. More nothing.

Though, it did give her a chance to check out how things were running and cross-check financials. Not surprisingly, they didn’t add up.

Whatever her brother had done or planned, he hadn’t left much of a paper trail. She knew that meant the files she had in storage were ten times more important than she'd suspected. But until she got out
of Metropolis. Until she felt some semblance of security, she didn’t dare open them. Knowing that when she did, she'd have to deal with the contents.

Back in her office, she pinched the bridge of her nose. The accounting department had done an admirable job of contorting the figures to what Lex needed, but when it came to getting them back on track things weren’t as easy.

Lena had spent the last two days trying to calm investors with little success. The company was further in debt than she'd first thought and with the move planned, resources were stretched beyond their limits.

"Ms. Luthor, is there anything else you need?"

Lena grabbed her bag and coat. "No, Jess. I'll see you in a few days in National City."

With that Lena left the office without a look back. This particular chapter of her past was coming to a close. Soon enough she’d be in a new city in a new place with a whole new set of problems.

Back in her apartment, she sighed at the cardboard boxes. Seven total, but only one she cared about. A small duffel at the foot of her bed contained everything that mattered to her. She didn’t know whether or not to be sad about that or not.

Leaving Metropolis wasn’t hard. She’d been looking forward to it. Part of her felt like this was what she was supposed to do. However, settling in National City made her nervous. Her name, no matter where she went, came with a lot of baggage. She hoped people would look past it, or at the least give her a chance before passing judgment.

Stripping out of her business clothes she headed toward the bathroom before changing her mind at the last minute. Putting on a pair of Yoga pants and shirt she headed to the gym near her place for a late night yoga session. The last few weeks had been stressful as hell and she needed to relax.

Two hours later she was back in her place, showered, and wearing her most comfortable pajamas. Glasses perched on her nose she went over the design alterations she'd made for the building in National City she had her eye on.

Her phone buzzed and she checked the message. The contractor she'd hired for her place in National City confirmed that everything would be done on schedule. She sent a quick thank you then lined up the next person she needed.

If she’d learned anything the last few months was that using the same person to design everything on a place you wanted to hold secrets was a mistake.

With that taken care of, she moved on to the pile of applications they'd received to fill new positions. Jess had screened most of them but Lena wanted to go through them as well. She didn’t trust her brother and knew without a doubt he would try and sneak people in to keep an eye on her.

As for Lillian, that was a problem for another day.

Chapter End Notes

And finally, next chapter they meet! I promise lol
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

TW for description of a panic attack

Kara sucked in a deep breath counting to ten while she prepared for the day.

Seven months. She had been a free woman for two hundred and thirteen days. Not that she was counting.

Her sessions with Dr. Grey didn’t stress her out like they used to. In fact, the last three months Kara had been going to the therapist's office. Of course, Alex or Kal had to go with her the first few weeks, but slowly, Kara managed to build up the confidence to go on her own.

The nightmares…well, they were still there but less frequent, five times a week was better than five times a night.

Alex and she got along great. Kara had even opened up about the nightmares and some of the things she'd experienced but toned it down when the vein started to throb in her sister's forehead. Kara supposed there were some things no one needed know about.

Eliza and Jeremiah had been up to visit several times, though, Kara had yet to visit the house in Midvale. They all agreed Kara needed to work up to that, and since she still avoided crowds, the mall, and anywhere with loud sounds, she had to agree with that assessment.

When her foster parents visited now, she managed to go out to dinner with them. The last couple of times she even managed a walk around the park…it was cold and no one was there, but Kara still counted it as a win.

That's what Dr. Grey taught her. No matter how small the accomplishment, Kara needed to recognize it. Record it. Remember it. Because she would have days where she didn’t think she was making progress. Days when she wanted to give up. As usual, Dr. Grey was right. But now, on those days Kara had an album to open up filled with photographic proof of her outings, of her increasing boundaries, of her accomplishments.

In her last therapy session, they had worked on Kara's goals. She wanted to be more independent, be able to get a job and contribute financially and be more self-sufficient so her sister could have a life outside of her.

Dr. Grey smiled, telling Kara she was doing great and to write them down and think of different things she needed to do in order to achieve them. The task overwhelmed her at first, but after flipping through the pages of her album, comparing the thin, pale, fragile person she was to what she saw in the mirror now…she knew she could do it.

Kara had also realized that Alex had no one other than Kal…Clark and her boss, J'onn. Alex had been isolated, too, just in a different way and Kara couldn’t let that continue. Of all the things she wanted, Alex's happiness was at the top of the list.

Finding Sam was a close second.
Kara knew that creating a life outside of her sister would be hard for both of them, but Dr. Grey had pointed out how it didn’t mean not having Alex in her life…more like expanding the list of people in their lives. Kara wasn’t too sure about adding more people to hers because, at times, Lillian’s voice was in the back of her head, whispering how those Kara cared about only ended up hurt. One of the many things she was working on in her sessions.

Today was an activity day, so Kara had her toolkit as she called it. Her emergency bag should something happen. A sketchbook, extra memory card for her camera, bottle of water, cash, fidget spinner, crosswords, an extra pair of socks, and candies.

Taking one more deep breath, Kara opened the door to their apartment and walked out. She counted the steps to the stairs, not comfortable with the elevator, yet. Once on the main floor, she snapped a photo. Exiting the building she went right. Three blocks later, she took another photo of the cross streets and then some random ones of graffiti She did her deep breathing exercise and once her anxiety went down she turned left and walked for another six blocks.

Sometimes, she counted steps, others she focused on the ground. She weaved her way through the crowds, no longer moving strangely to avoid people, but limiting the chance of contact as much as possible.

Now, outside her favorite café, she took one more picture before entering.

"Hey, Kara. What can I get you?"

"Hi, Jeff." She eyed the specials on the menu on the back wall. "Um, just an herbal tea today." She didn’t get her usual muffin, her stomach wasn’t in the best mood today.

"Is Alex with you?"

"Nope, she's at work."

Kara sat at a side table on the outside patio watching people walk by. There weren’t too many since it was the odd time between the morning and noon rushes. She took another picture, happy to see the visual evidence of her accomplishments. And, as her therapist had explained, it helped Kara get out of her head, by looking through the lens outward she was not looking inward and therefore not dwelling on bad thoughts or something like that. Either way, it worked and that was all Kara cared about.

Liking things again had been hard. She'd stopped caring a long ago and it wasn’t so easy to start again. The fear of losing it all always loomed over her. Slowly, though, she was reclaiming the parts of her that had been taken away. Using the corner of the small loft to paint, putting up her favorite pictures, and catching up on music and movies. Alex had so many to watch with her. Most of them comedies or action based. A few romantic ones that Kara didn’t know how to feel about.

After ten minutes of going through her pictures from her walk and selecting a couple that might be good for painting, she spotted something across the street. Lowering the camera she noticed a flower shop had opened, Love Blooms, written in a flowing script. The sign was bright and cheery and something about it drew Kara in.

The stupid fortune cookie from months ago flashed in her mind and without thinking she got to her feet and crossed the street. A bell chimed when she opened the door and she jumped at the unexpected noise. Moving to the side, she put a hand to her chest and took a moment to calm down.
That's when she noticed…

Inside was breathtaking, like something out of a movie. Flowers of all kinds sat on the shelves, in coolers, in buckets. Ornate vases were placed throughout with arrangements that looked like art. Painted birds perched on branches ready to take flight adorned the ceiling. A mist fell from above and the smell, the smell was amazing.

She moved aside to let a woman who'd entered behind her pass, and in the process caught sight of a white flower just like the ones her mom used to keep in their sitting room back on Krypton. How could they have it here? Time froze for a moment while she reached for it. A delicate, pale hand moving alongside hers. They touched a second and out of instinct Kara pulled back.

"Sorry. Were you going for that?"

The voice was rich, soothing, almost lyrical. Kara raised her head and found herself caught in green eyes. Kindness with a hint of authority emanated from them. Kara fidgeted with her camera, itching to get out of her head because for some reason she could not explain this woman unnerved her.

"Um…I…just looking. Go ahead." She forced herself to turn away.

"These are my favorite," the woman said.

Kara returned her attention to the flowers. Her hand reaching out to stroke a petal. "They remind me of my mother," she blurted before she could stop herself.

"That's sweet. Are you here to get her some?"

"No." Not familiar with the whole social niceties thing, she was pretty sure talking about a dead parent sixty seconds after meeting someone was totally not cool. "Why do you like them?"

The woman cocked her head to the side, one hand on her hip. "They look simple at first pass. Plain, white, nothing fancy. But when you take a closer look, there's so much hidden inside. The petals are delicate and fragile, each one a work of art. It's like it has so much to offer but you have to be willing to take the time to stop, to pay attention. I don't know, it probably sounds ridiculous." The woman refused to meet Kara's eyes.

"I think it's beautiful." Kara stared at the woman, feeling…something. Like the woman was talking about more than a flower and she felt exposed.

The woman grabbed a bouquet then motioned to Kara's camera. "Are you a photographer?"

"Oh… No…nothing like that. It's to…it helps me… I take pictures with it." Her head started to spin and she unconsciously fidgeted with the cuff of her shirt. This was why she didn't like interacting with new people…but, she knew she had to try. Alex wasn't going to be around all the time.

"Yes, cameras do that," the woman laughed, but the soft smile and kind eyes let Kara now she wasn't being teased, and she wanted to hear that laugh again. She'd heard Alex laugh, but this was different. This was someone who didn't know Kara's backstory…who didn't feel bad for her or expect anything from her. This was the first person, other than family, she'd heard laugh since she had been rescued.

Meeting green eyes for another few seconds before looking away, Kara made a choice. She joined in on the laughter, lightly, awkwardly, remembering Dr. Grey telling her that smiling, whether genuine or not, reduced anxiety; though Kara had to admit she wasn't forcing it. Not totally.
"I'm sorry. I'm not used to people…talking to people. I'm not used to talking to people." Why was she still speaking?

The woman's eyes crinkled at the corner when she smiled. "Don't worry, most people aren’t worth talking to I've found. Are you new to the city?"

Kara nodded, her fingers touching the edge of the flower in front of her.

"Me, too. I moved here a few months ago."

Daring to meet the woman's eyes, Kara spoke, "I like it here."

Green eyes bored into Kara with an intensity that threw her off balance.

"Well, this must be kismet. Where did you move here from?"

Kara's mind blanked, attention back on the flower. "Oh, just a place."

"Ah, I understand. I came here from Metropolis."

"Really? My cousin lives there. He keeps asking me to visit."

"You should go, it's quite a nice city." The woman glanced at her watch.

"Maybe one day."

"Well, it's been nice chatting with you, but I should get going." The woman turned toward the counter and Kara followed her, a pull she couldn’t quite explain.

She watched her pay and was jealous of her confidence, the ease with which she moved around and spoke to the sales clerk. Not to mention how she was dressed. Professional, mature, confident. More goals Kara hoped she'd one day reach.

"Look, I know this is probably strange, but here's my card. If you want to talk…to people, or a specific person, like me. Which I would like, give me a call." She winked and was gone.

Kara stared at the card in her hand and almost threw up.

L-Corp

Lena Luthor

CEO

Her vision darkened, stomach churned, sweat broke out on her skin. All the signs of her flight or fight response kicking in. She ran out of the shop to see if Lena was still in sight, unsure what emotion took over when she didn’t spot her. When she felt safe she headed back to Alex's apartment locking the door behind her and gasping for air.

Panic attack imminent.

"Relax, Kara. Breathe."

It was a coincidence.

She doesn’t know who you are.
Lillian hasn’t found you.

The moment her thoughts went to Lillian, it was over. She called Alex in a panic, who called Clark, who showed up thirty seconds later rattling the entire building with his arrival.

"Where is she?" His body tense, fists clenched, eyes scanning.

Kara didn’t answer, too busy hyperventilating. She shook and he came over, putting his hands on her shoulders.

"Kara, look at me." He put his hand on her sternum, making sure she was looking at him. "Breathe in with me," he counted to seven. "Now hold," he counted to seven again. "Now exhale," he counted to seven, again.

They repeated it seven times and by the end, she wasn’t shaking anymore.

"You're safe. I'm here and I'm not going to let anything happen to you, okay?"

Kara nodded.

"I want you to repeat it with me, okay?"

"I'm safe," he said.

"I'm safe," Kara repeated.

They went back and forth for ten minutes, running through the script Dr. Grey had given Alex and Clark for when a panic attack struck.

He rubbed her arms, making sure not to crowd her. "Better? Let me get you some tea and maybe a cookie or two?"

Kara leaned against the wall, the rush of adrenaline seeping out of her and leaving her exhausted. "Yeah, thanks. Sorry, I …"

He held up a finger. "Nope, remember the rules? Never apologize when that happens. There's nothing to be sorry for."

"I just hate it. I feel so…so…out of control and crazy and…and…weak." She closed her eyes, the tears finally coming.

A strong hand tugged at her softly and Kara let herself be pulled into a strong embrace. Arms wrapping around her and warmth enveloping her. After a few minutes, she sighed, wiping her nose and pulling away.

A moment later they were sitting on the stools, two steaming cups of tea in front of them.

"What happened?"

She held out the card. He read it then let out a breath. "Did she say something to you? Did you see anyone else with her?"

She shook her head. "I just panicked. I mean, what are the chances of meeting her?"

"I understand. That name holds a lot of weight. Lex is set to go on trial soon and from what I heard Lena left Metropolis. We've kept a close eye on her, and so far she hasn’t done anything suspicious
and trust me, I've checked."

Kara slipped the card into her camera bag and let her head fall into her hands. "I'm sorry to have worried you. I just... got scared."

He gave her a hug and kissed her on the cheek. "Hey, no being sorry, doctor's orders. Plus, it's understandable. Don't worry about it, okay? Let's watch some TV until Alex gets here."

Kara had no idea what was on the screen, her thoughts replaying her meeting with Lena Luthor. Those green eyes, high cheekbones... that laugh. Did she know who Kara was? Had she followed her? Did she want to hurt her the way Lillian had?

One thing she had learned to do while a prisoner was live in her head. Many a day, her inner voice was the only thing that kept her sane. And then there was the self-analysis. Her time with Dr. Grey helped, and Kara tried to parse through what had happened.

Her reaction, strong as it was, was not solely based on the woman's... Lena's name. She had felt something prior, something deep down that she had no clue what it was or what it meant or how to deal with it.

She grabbed a sketchbook from the side table and went to work.

Before long the features of Lena Luthor's face appeared and Kara furrowed her brow in confusion.

***

Alex weaved through the cars in her way. The Ducati her new favorite toy.

The call from Kara had scared her to death. Clark had messaged her as soon as he arrived which allowed her to take a few precious moments to check in on Lena Luthor. Ever since the woman had up and moved to National City they had been keeping a close eye on her. Though there was nothing nefarious to keep an eye on.

A man flipped her off when she zipped past him but she didn’t care. Kara's terrified voice on the phone replayed in Alex's head. She hadn't heard that particular tone in months. Kara had been making amazing progress in therapy along with reviving some of the rituals she had done with her mother back on Krypton to help her gain clarity of mind and peace.

Alex had never been a religious person, but seeing the change in Kara as she spoke the mantras and lit the candles, Alex understood. This connection, this belief, this sense of faith helped Kara heal. Helped her connect with her past.

Hopping off her bike she bolted up the stairs, used to taking them now with Kara, and ran into the apartment.

The sight of Kara sitting next to Clark in his Superman gear didn’t even phase her anymore.

"Hey, I'm here." Alex dropped her helmet on the table then unzipped her jacket as she made her way over to Kara. "How are you feeling?"

Kara reached out to her, and that was all Alex needed to wrap her sister up in a hug. She rubbed small circles on her back while she trembled.

"I'm okay. It's fine," Kara mumbled.
Alex didn’t say anything, just held on while her sister let out whatever she needed to.

Clark cleared his throat. "I should get going."

Kara pulled away from Alex and grabbed his hand. "Thank you…I…just thank you."

He leaned in and kissed her forehead. "Anytime. I'll check in later."

After he left, Alex went to the kitchen and grabbed a beer. "You want some water?"

Kara nodded. "Is there any pizza left?"

Checking the fridge, Alex frowned. "I'll order some."

"And some –"

"Potstickers? Of course." Alex made the call then sat down on the couch. Kara scooted over, allowing her head to rest on Alex's shoulder while she picked at a thread on the couch cushion.

"I hate being like this."

Alex put an arm around Kara and pulled her closer. "Like what? An amazing woman who is stronger and more resilient than anyone I know? Someone I look up to and admire?"

Kara blew out a breath. "You know what I mean…that the anxiety can just kick in and push me back, take away all of my progress."

"Hey, it didn’t take away anything. Yeah, you had a stumble today, but tomorrow you'll get up and do it again. Not to mention you were thrown off by something pretty significant. There's no real way to prepare for that."

Kara sighed. "I guess. It's just…before I knew who she was I…she laughed, Alex. I made someone laugh and it felt normal. For the first time, I felt like just me. No tragic past. Not an alien. Just me."

Alex pulled away, forehead wrinkled. "Hey, you know you can be yourself with me, right? I just want you to be you. That's all I've ever wanted."

Kara looked at her, eyes watery. "Really? Cuz sometimes I feel like I'm disappointing you or letting you down. Same with Kal…Clark."

Positioning herself so she could look directly at Kara, Alex shook her head. "Never. You could never disappoint me or Clark. Be whoever you want. I love you exactly as you are."

Kara sagged against the couch when there was a knock on the door and Alex stood to get their food. When she returned she saw the bags under Kara's eyes. Panic attacks took so much out of her.

Alex flipped open the box. "So, I know Clark probably told you already, but Lena is totally clean."

"Yeah? She seemed…nice."

Alex snagged another piece of pizza. "That's good. From what we know, she didn't have it easy with the…growing up. She's really smart and does a lot to make the world a better place."
Kara's expression turned thoughtful.

"So, I have the rest of the day off. Want to watch a movie?"

"Sound good." Kara got up to get some more water and her sketch pad fell on the ground.

Alex picked it up, noting half a dozen drawings of Lena Luthor, each one more detailed than the last until she flipped to a page of only her eyes.

Interesting.

***

Lena set the flowers down on the kitchen counter. She dug around three boxes before she found a pitcher that would have to double as a vase for the moment. Her focus on school then on to work had left her with little in the way of odds and ends. The things people displayed to demonstrate their personality. Random items most people had, like vases, or so she assumed it was a normal item to have.

Then again, she didn’t like having things. Things could be taken away or lost. Things could be broken. Ever since she was a little girl, she’d made sure she could fit everything that meant something to her into a duffel bag in case she had to leave at a moment's notice.

She'd never wanted for anything, that wasn’t the Luthor way. They had appearances to keep up, but that's all they were. Lena hadn't felt any sort of familial connection in close to a decade. No stability. Things always in a state of upheaval due to Lex.

Jack had cared for her, loved her even, but she'd always known they were better as friends. She shook her head to rid herself of the melancholy thoughts. She’d been in National City for months; it was time to start acting like she lived here, though the idea of making the place her home…she wasn’t there yet. When she officially unveiled the company she didn’t know how the residents would react. Until then, she was living in a state of flux.

Pitcher filled, she trimmed the stems of the flowers and dropped them inside. Turning, she spotted a box to set them on. All she had so far was a couch, a desk with a chair, and a bed. The essentials. Everything else she could have someone else take care of. Jess could have someone here within the hour, the woman knew Lena better than anyone else by now, but Lena wasn’t that type of person. She was more than capable of doing things for herself.

Plopping down on the sofa in a very un-CEO like way, she stared at the flowers. The meeting in the flower shop coming back to her. The woman's eyes had haunted Lena all the way back to her apartment and when Lena closed her eyes they appeared. A sad, murky blue so lost it made her heart hurt. They held in so much pain, none of it going away when the stranger attempted a smile that Lena, through her own years of pretending, recognized as forced. Why Lena had given her card to her, she couldn’t explain if asked. There was just something, a barely perceptible connection, a thread tugging her in that direction ever so lightly.

Warning her to be cautious.

Her phone buzzed and she read the text from Jess who was in the lobby of her building. Lena messaged her back to come on up.

Five minutes later the two women were sitting in the kitchen, blueprints, contracts, and applications laid out in front of them.
Lena put a kettle of water on to boil. "So, how what news do you have for me?"

Jess pursed her lips, outfit impeccable as usual and not a hair out of place. "Good or bad first?"

Lena puffed up her cheeks then blew out a breath. "Surprise me."

Pulling out her tablet, Jess smirked. "The contractors have finished the preliminary redesigns on the building and employees are now permitted on site."

Lena filled a cup with now boiling water and added a green tea bag before setting it in front of Jess. "That doesn't sound bad….so, hit me."

"Well, now all you have to do is get the city to sign off on the lab upgrades after the technician gives us the design schematics, and then we need to apply for a special license because of the chemicals that will be on site and rumor has it they plan to deny it…"

Lena rolled her eyes. "Because of my last name."

"Presumably, what would you like me to do?"

"Nothing, I'll handle it. What I could really use your help on is screening the applications. I want to make sure we don't get anyone who sympathizes with Lex."

Jess made a note on her tablet then set it aside. "Would you like me to take care of your…" She gestured around the vacant space.

"I can do it."

Jess pulled a face. "You said that the last three times I asked."

Lena laughed at that. "And I'll say it the next three. You already do too much. Remind me to give you a hefty bonus at Christmas."

"Please, like you need a reminder." Jess sipped her tea.

"You're the only one who doesn't hate me."

Jess set down her cup. "I'm the only one you spend time with. Things will get better, give it time."

"Right, let's get this paperwork sorted," Lena said.

Hours later, after Jess had gone home, Lena poured herself a scotch. She knew it would be hard, but was only beginning to see the scope of what she was up against. She estimated it would take a few weeks to get everything sort of in order, probably a month and a half until things ran smoothly. Thankfully she had started the process long ago, all that was left now were minor details.

She didn’t care. She had the time and the resources. Cutting off the money Lex had been diverting and redirecting it to the company, on top of new investors, had stopped the financial freefall the company had been on.

Turning off her phone she got to her feet and headed toward her home office. She placed her palm on the security panel and leaned in for the retinal scan. Then she keyed in the sixteen digit code. The door hissed open.

This room she'd furnished and designed herself. File cabinets, a paper shredder and smokeless incinerator she'd developed. A desk, lamp, chair, and Lionel's old leather couch.
A pile of boxes sat in the corner. She’d emptied the storage unit the night she left Metropolis but had waited to do anything until she had a secure space to deal with them.

No one else had been in here or ever would be. She might not be a Luthor by blood, but she did learn a few things from them.

She pulled open a drawer in the desk and grabbed a bottle of whiskey and a glass. She wiped the dust off of it with her sweater and poured herself a healthy portion, knowing she was going to need it.

Heading toward the couch she selected the first file her hand came in contact with from the boxes. Superman’s emblem stamped in the center of it. She had no desire to read about the alien who had done nothing but help the planet, but she knew her brother had lost his mind and she needed to make sure he didn’t have anything in the works that might hurt more people.

The public at large hated her as more information was leaked about Lex with the trial date looming and everyone assumed she was evil, again. Thank God for Jack, he’d at least checked in on her and told her if she needed anything to just call.

She didn’t.

Needing wasn’t her thing.

Instead, she planned to change the direction of the company while trying to undo as much of Lex’s damage as she could. Which based on her current calculations would take twenty lifetimes.

Sad blue eyes filled her thoughts a moment before she forced them away and opened the file.
Chapter 11

Kara crossed her legs, bouncing her foot. She spun the ring on her finger, a special one Alex had found her that she could fidget with when anxiety struck.

"So, Kara, how are you doing?" Dr. Grey sat across from her, expression open.

"Good. Really good. I've been going out more and trying to talk to people, but I'm not very good at that yet. I've even been able to go out to dinner with Alex and J'onn. I did like you said, looking at pictures and talking to him on the phone and now he doesn’t trigger me, in fact, we get along really well, so that's nice."

Dr. Grey nodded. "That's great. And you're still taking photos?"

Kara's head bobbed enthusiastically. "Yes. I'm thinking of getting a better camera. I really like it and might do something more."

"More? So, you're thinking about a job or possible jobs?"

Tensing, Kara blew out a breath. "I don't know, maybe? I didn’t think about it at first because it didn’t feel real."

"What didn’t feel real?"

"Being free. For the longest time, I expected to wake up back in the cell. Now that I know that's not going to happen and I'm feeling better about myself, I'm trying to figure out my path."

Dr. Grey smiled. "That's great, just remember not to overdo it. Being a photographer can be pretty intense."

Kara frowned, thoughts of her heart and how weak it was, were never far. "I know, it was just a thought. I've been reading my sister's science journals and a few of her old textbooks for fun."

"For fun? Interesting definition," A pause. "Have you had any more run-ins with Lena?"

Green eyes flashed in Kara's mind. "No."

"How do you feel about that?"

Kara shrugged. "Fine, I guess? I mean it was just one meeting and I completely melted down after, so I'm pretty sure it's not a good idea to call her up so she can witness me freak out."

"You had mentioned that you thought of her quite a bit and that before you knew who she was you felt something." Dr. Grey's eyes didn’t waver.

Kara didn’t remember much from that day, and what she did had been tainted by the panic attack. "Maybe, I'm not sure. I felt a lot of things that day and now they kind of all blend together." Kara shifted in her seat, uncomfortable thinking about Lena.

"You could always try and use the techniques you used with J'onn in regards to her." Dr. Grey adjusted her position.

She wondered if the fact she had done over two dozen sketches of the woman counted, then again she didn’t want to know. This was new territory she didn’t want to delve into. Ever. "I don't think
that's necessary. It's not like we're gonna hang out or anything."

"Fair enough. How are you sleeping?"

*How are the nightmares is what she meant, Kara knew.*

Blowing out a breath, Kara glanced away. "Good nights and bad ones."

"Still journaling or do you just paint now?"

"Mainly painting, now." Kara bit her lip, remembering when Alex had found her journals.

At first, she had been worried. Alex's forehead was crinkled and the way she looked at her had made Kara nervous, then Alex had pointed, asking what it was. Taking the book, Kara realized she'd been writing in Kryptonian. Her native language easier to write in since she'd only spent a couple of years using English. She decided then that she had to relearn English because of the risk of someone seeing her writing and uncovering her secret.

Kara reached into her bag. "I brought one to show you. I've got a dozen more at home."

The image of a pod, her pod, surrounded by darkness made her stomach clench in fear. She spun it to face the doctor. "I dream about this a lot. I'm not sure why. When I wake up I'm cold and I can't breathe. It feels like everything is closing in on me."

She stopped talking, needing a moment to catch her breath.

Dr. Grey took the drawing and eyed it. "Your parents put you in this to save you, right? And then you got knocked off course?"

Kara nodded. "Yeah, into the Phantom Zone. The data crystal on my pod said I'd been trapped in there for twenty-four earth years."

"I know we've talked about a lot of things in our time together and one of them was PTSD. We've been focusing a lot on recent events, but I think it's time we looked back further."

***

Kara waited by the door, trying to hide her anxiety. The cuffs of her shirt tattered from how often she fidgeted with them. She'd have to buy more soon.

"Okay, you have my flight info. I'll text you as soon as I land. If you need anything Clark is a call away." Alex didn't move.

"I'll be fine. I can stay a few nights by myself." Okay, she wasn’t really sure how true that was, but she wasn’t going to tell Alex that. They had some serious issues going on in the D.E.O. and her sister was needed in Geneva.

"Are you sure? I can ask someone else to go."

Kara picked up her sister's bag, happy to have some strength in her arms. "No, get out of here. I want to catch up on all those shows you told me about without you giving away what’s going to happen."

Alex shouldered her carry on. "You're going to watch horror movies, aren't you? Why do you do that? Stick with comedies and romcoms, maybe a drama?"

"Horror movies don't scare me." She wasn’t about to tell Alex that after what she had been through
they just weren’t realistic, whereas romcoms and dramas were terrifying. Relationships were real. It
could happen to her. Statistically, she was more likely to fall in love and get her heart broken than
she was to become the victim of a serial killer who snapped because his parents gave more attention
to the family gerbil.

"Sure, tell me that when you're texting me at 4 am about a vampire in your closet. Now come on,
hugs."

They embraced, and Kara maybe held on a little longer, a little tighter, but it was okay because Alex
did, too.

When she shut the door, she listened for the tell-tale ding of the elevator then sagged against the
door. She could do this. It was only for a few days and she had Clark and J'onn on speed dial. Even
their neighbor Ms. Wallinski had offered to come over if Kara needed her.

Kara went into the kitchen and made a quick bologna sandwich, poured herself a glass of water, then
went over to the couch to watch TV. She turned it to a musical and got sucked in. So, when a news
alert popped up about a plane having trouble above the city she perked up. When the ticker flashed
that it was a plane heading for Geneva experiencing engine failure her heart leapt.

She got to her feet and dialed Clark's number but got his voicemail. She paced a few steps then
called J'onn, the first time she'd ever done that. He didn't answer either.

"Okay, Kara, calm down. They're already on their way. Alex is fine."

She paced a few steps, her fists clenching, heart thudding away. She rubbed the spot over her chest,
her breaths shallow and painful. Forcing in a few calming breaths, she wished the pain away.

"Any minute now they're going to show up and people will cheer them on for saving the day."

Nothing happened.

A close up revealed one of the engines had blown out as the plane turned toward the bridge.

Panic crept into Kara's muscles and leched into her bones. She stood there, frozen in place with
fear. Pain ripped through her chest and she felt something tear inside of her. Reaching out, she used
the kitchen table to balance herself.

Her heart stopped. A ten-ton weight sat on her chest preventing her from breathing, moving, doing
anything. She teetered, her vision flickered and something kicked her in the ribs. Noises assaulted her
from all over, heartbeats, car horns and alarms, kids playing, and finally her sister's voice
accompanied by hundreds of people begging for a miracle.

Kara's breaths came further apart, shallower, then a pain made her gasp and crash to the floor. She
clawed at it, her fingers digging through the wood leaving a trail. Her head cocked to the side at what
she saw. Flexing her hand she felt...strong. Staggering to her feet, she ran to the window, normal
vision to x-ray, to something new. She scanned the sky until she caught sight of the plane. Her sight
continued to flicker, but she saw her. Alex. Heard that familiar heartbeat she had missed all those
years. Sitting on the plane helping a boy with his oxygen mask.

That was all Kara needed to get her ass in gear. She jumped out the window, falling to the ground
leaving a pothole. She started to run and jump then fall then run then jump then fall...then the pilots
said they lost another engine, her chest tightened one more time then she was in the air, flying toward
her sister.
Latching onto a wing, she tried to level out the plane, guide it, but that didn’t work and she had no idea what to do. She floated to the bottom when she saw the bridge appearing and flipped the plane over, her hands, arms, and shoulders cooperating. Once through the danger, she evened out the plane and brought it down on the water.

Engulfed in darkness, she panicked a moment, but then the lights from above reached her and she made her way to the surface. When she broke through she caught Alex staring at her through the window. Hand over her mouth, eyes watery. A mixture of love and terror on her face. Kara stood there, shaking, offering a small smile. People cheered her on, thanked her, but most of it didn’t register.

Boats from the port authority approached, voices on loudspeakers asking her to stand down and wait for them. She shot into the air, reveling in the sensation of the wind against her face, making it back to the apartment before she face planted on the couch.

News coverage still blared in the background, a reporter criticized her, but she didn’t care. Nothing could mar her memory of the event one bit. She'd saved Alex, nothing could take that away from her.

She raised herself off the couch, expecting to be dreaming or drained of her powers and was ecstatic to discover she wasn't. Happiness flooded her so much so, that she pushed a little too hard and almost launched herself through the ceiling. Taking slow, measured steps she went to the bathroom and stripped out of her nasty clothing and hopped in the shower.

An hour later, Alex entered, eyes wide, face unreadable.

Kara ran up to her. "Are you okay? I would have stuck around…but…"

Her sister wrapped her in a hug and Kara returned it, easing up when she heard a crack and an "ouch."

"Sorry. Um, I got my powers back?"

Alex laughed, tears coming out of her eyes. "Really? I didn’t notice. What with the near-death experience and you saving me."

Kara led her over to the couch. "I tried to call Clark and J'onn but they didn’t answer and then…everything hurt...a lot…and then I was me again." She shrugged having no other explanation.

"Adrenaline…lots of adrenaline. Clark mentioned it, but I guess you needed more because your cells were so damaged. That's the key I was missing." Alex hugged her again. "Are you okay? Does it still hurt? We should go to the D.E.O. and run some tests."

Kara went to the cupboard in the kitchen where Alex kept her booze stash, and kicked a stool through the window, chipped the corner of the island with her hip, and tore off said cupboards handle in the process. She returned with a chagrined expression and a glass of whiskey for her sister.

"I might be having some control issues and I will call a plumber tomorrow and have a plausible explanation as to how the piping and tub ended up melted." She did the smile that always made Alex laugh, where all her teeth showed and her eyes were comically wide.

It worked "I don't care what you did in there. You're fine. I'm fine. We're going to be fine." She kept a hand on Kara, leaning back into the cushions of the couch. "Everything's going to be okay."

"Alex, I feel different. Not just because of my powers, but up here." She pointed to her head. "I feel
like I have a part of myself back that I thought was gone forever. This part of me that was taken away…I don't know how to explain it."

"That's great, Kara. I'm just so damn happy and proud of you," Alex choked out while leaning in to hug her.

A phone buzzed and Kara realized it was hers. She picked it up when she saw Clark's number.

"Hey, cousin."

"Hey? That's what you say after saving a bunch of people? Hey? How about I'm back and I'm awesome and I'm a freaking hero?" His voice soothed a fear she didn’t know she had. He wasn’t mad or jealous. He was happy, proud even.

"Well, I didn’t plan on it. By the way, where were you?"

Sirens in the background. "Emergency in France. Speaking of gotta go, but, Kara, I'm really proud of you. Dinner tomorrow, my treat."

The line went dead and she savored the words. Letting them warm her up and remove some of the cold that had crept in and taken residence over the years.

"You want some pizza?"

"Yeah, I think we're going to need a couple," Kara said. "I'll call. You stay here, rest."

Before Kara could get up, a warm hand stopped her. "I'm proud of you, so proud, and…I love you. Thank you."

More warmth and Kara nodded, glancing away before the tears fell. She never thought she could feel this again. This sense of family and belonging, acceptance, and love. But here it was being offered to her and the part of her that wanted to fight it was no longer winning.

"I love you, too. And I had a promise to keep after all."

Alex smiled. "True…I'm so going to be a rock star and hire you as my bodyguard now."

"Please don't. I've heard you sing."

Alex laughed, deep and real. "Aren't you supposed to be ordering pizza?"

***

Alex peered over the side of the bed. Kara slept on the couch, one arm over stomach the other hanging over the edge of the futon. She'd had to borrow a pair of earplugs Alex used at the shooting range to drown out the barrage of noises that Kara had to relearn how to block out.

Flopping back onto the bed, Alex let the tears fall. She clamped a hand over her mouth, not wanting to wake Kara.

After she'd gotten off the plane and made sure no one had any pictures of her sister, J'onn had found her. He took one look at her then wrapped her in a hug.

"It was her…she's…she's got her powers back," Alex cried. "Did you see? She was flying…she saved us."
He wrapped his arms around her tighter. "I'm glad. I'd hate to lose my best agent."

"She's going to be okay…" She sobbed as a weight she didn't even know she'd been carrying melted off of her. "Her heart…it's going to be okay."

"You should get home and check on her. Bring her by the DEO tomorrow."

Alex wiped at her eyes. "Yeah. I'll do that."

Now, hours later, Kara slept twenty feet from her. Three orders of potstickers and four pizzas consumed.

Alex had never been happier. The hours spent trying to get Kara her powers back. The hours spent worrying about not if, but when Kara's heart would give out were over.

She sighed, wiping her face, again.

Tomorrow they could talk about Fort R'ozz and all that that entailed.

For right now, Alex replayed the events of the night, the smile on Kara's face brightening parts of her she thought long lost to darkness.

***

Lena watched the news. Transfixed on the footage playing on the screen in front of her. She'd seen it at least a dozen times but couldn't believe it. The woman? The hero? The alien? Whoever or whatever it was had saved a plane. Carried it on her back to safety then flew away. Could there be another Super in the world?

She sighed. Lex was probably having a stroke in his holding cell and who knew what Lillian was doing. Brainwashing people to join her cause probably.

The file she had been reading fell to the floor, forgotten.

The woman stood with her shoulders hunched, shying away from the lights and people, causing mixed feelings in Lena. Where was the confidence and strength? The air of…whatever it was Superman had that made people feel safe at the sight of him.

She paused the video, the screen zoomed in on a blurry face. Dirty blonde hair, maybe brunette? Hard to tell since it was wet and likely full of soot. Tall, five nine or ten? But thin, oh so thin and frail looking. Lena's heart went out to her.

The face staring back at her seemed familiar, though too pixelated to know for sure, but something tugged at her heart. She glanced at the flowers on her coffee table and remembered the woman with the camera from a couple of months ago. She'd never called and for some reason that made Lena sad.

Well, she knew the reason. She'd realized her attraction to women back in boarding school but her age difference made it awkward and weird at best. Then, she'd met Jack and after a few years, one thing led to another and…well, she didn’t regret it, but she knew that wasn’t what she wanted.

Though, she'd be lying if she said fear hadn't motivated her to make the choices she did. She'd spent most of her life under scrutiny as it was, she didn’t need something else for the press to dig up and plaster across the front page.

Lena had gone back to the flower shop several times to try and run into the woman, buying the same
flowers as if that would magically summon her, but never seeing those sad, blue eyes again. Lena had been so nervous, so rattled by…what she wasn’t sure, but she did know the idea of saying her name and having it ruin everything caused her to sprint out of the place without getting the woman’s name first.

Why she thought of her now made no sense and Lena kicked herself.

*Don’t let a pair of sad, blue eyes suck you in, Lena. One of you’ll end up getting hurt, probably her.*

Flipping off the television, she picked the file up off of the floor and went back to sorting through her brother's insanity. In the weeks she had been doing this she was beginning to understand the extent of his madness and it scared the hell out of her.

She'd managed to go through four boxes, two hundred and sixteen files. All of which were full of plans, blueprints, and schematics of traps, contraptions, suits, and unrecognizable scribblings. Creations Lex had planned to build or had already built to stop Superman.

Most of them had been found by the "secret" government groups that had searched his warehouses. To be safe, Lena had tracked down every plot of land Lex or an associate had so much as looked at and had them investigated. A few remained, half complete or inoperable. Lena had destroyed most of them, only keeping the ones she could alter for better more humanitarian purposes.

When her fears about that were put to rest, she opened a new box which shook her to the core. The files inside weren’t marked with an emblem or sigil. Opening the first one, she gasped when a photo of a young girl in a cell fell out. Slamming it shut, it had taken her days to return to it. When she did, the true depths of both her brother and mother's cruelty and madness had been revealed to her.

At some point, while reviewing the horror show of notes her mother had made in the current file Lena was reading, she’d fallen asleep, the kink in her neck and pain in her back, letting her know she’d spent one too many nights on the couch.

Lena stretched, flipped on the news and headed toward the kitchen after a detour to the bathroom. All channels were still talking about the events of the night before. Amateur footage, eyewitnesses raving about their new hero. One reporter focused on the damage and the cost to repair the bridge going so far as to call the woman a menace.

Irked, Lena grabbed her phone.

"Hello, Ms. Luthor," Jess said.

"I need a favor. I’d like you to make a donation toward the cost of damages from last night."

"Of course. Anonymously?"

Lena smiled at how well Jess knew her. "Of course."

"Anything else?"

Thinking a moment, Lena sighed. "No, that’s all."

"I'll see when you come in."

"I might be late. I have a meeting with the city about the permits required to bring the research floors up to spec. apparently, there's a paperwork issue."
Jess snorted. "Again? I can deal with it."

"No, you have enough to do and I think it's time I let them know I may not be my brother but that doesn't mean they can push me around."

"Excellent."

With a smirk, Lena hung up then turned the volume back up on the news. The reporter continued to prattle on about all the negatives and Lena noted her name. After a few minutes of research, she sent off an email to the owner of the network, who she knew from boarding school, making sure to CC the reporter, pointing out that whatever had been broken could be fixed with ease but the lives saved were irreplaceable. She also pointed out that the negative coverage of a female hero compared to the hero worship Superman received was a bad look given current events.

Whoever this hero was, Lena didn’t want her facing any more hardships than necessary. She didn’t question why she felt protective, figuring it had to do with making up for what Lex had done to make Superman's life hell for all those years.

A quick shower, bowl of fruit, and change of clothes later she was in the back of her car heading toward the municipal building.

"You see the news Ms. Luthor?" her driver asked.

"I did."

He glanced at her in the rearview mirror. "Do you think it's another one of them?"

She raised a brow. "One of them? If you mean hero, then yes I do."

"Yeah, that's what I mean."

With a sigh, she hit the button that raised the partition between them. She'd go through his personnel file when she got to work, perhaps he'd gotten by her first examination. The last thing she needed was people working for her that had been poisoned by Lillian and her brother.

When the car stopped she opened the door herself, sending a meaningful look to the driver. He bowed his head. Lena slipped the strap of her briefcase over her shoulder and prepared for a long day of planning.

Thoughts never far from the woman on the news.
Kara jumped when a crack echoed throughout the loft. Instinctively, she brought her hand to her chest, but there was no pain, just a rapidly beating heart.

She let one eye crack open, eyebrows launching when she spotted the now splintered coffee table. Then it all came back to her. The plane. Alex. Her powers.

Jumping up, she overshot and landed ten feet away, startling a bleary-eyed but armed Alex.

"What happened?"

"The coffee table broke."

Alex leaned to the side then straightened. "Broke?"

Kara nodded. "Yeah, it was totally weird. I was just lying there sleeping and bam, broken."

Putting her gun down, she pursed her lips. "Ah, interesting. I'll notify the DEO immediately. Might be a new alien threat."

Trying to hide a smile, Kara agreed. "Good idea."

"How do you feel? Anything weird? Any pain? How was the noise? Did you get any sleep?"

Kara bounced on her feet, energy thrumming through her. "I feel great. Nothing weird. No pain. Noise kind of sucked…car alarms are the worst. I got some sleep, only one nightmare"

Alex's expression softened and she hugged Kara. "Great, I…that's great." She wiped at her face, but Kara spotted the tears. "I'll make us some breakfast then we can head into the DEO where I can take a shower." A pointed look was sent in Kara's direction.

"Right, I'll wash up and call maintenance." Kara ran from the room.

In the bathroom, Kara grabbed her toothbrush and snapped it in half. Mumbling to herself, she held onto the brush end with care. She picked up the tube of toothpaste as if it was a grenade. This did not prevent her from emptying half of it onto the counter.

Pulling her hair, which felt a lot thicker, into a ponytail, she risked a peek into the mirror. When she caught sight of her reflection, she almost fell over. For years, she had shied away from looking at herself. Not all the scars Lillian had left were hidden by her clothes.

Small, thin ones on her face that she let her hair obscure were almost gone, but Kara saw them. Her eyes always zeroing in on them. Blue eyes held more life to them, but not quite what she remembered. Her skin, now blemish free, didn’t hang off her frame, but she still lacked in the muscle department.

Slowly, with twitching lips, she smiled. Shocked to see straight, bright white teeth.

Her breathing quickened and again, she expected to feel a pain in her chest…but nothing came. She pulled up the sleeve of her shirt, hoping, praying that the reminders of what had happened were gone or at least lessened.

A lone tear fell when she spotted the scars still running in random patterns across her forearms. She
didn’t check her legs or torso knowing what she'd find.

"It's okay, they're just scars now," she said. The mantra Dr. Grey had made her recite in the early
days coming back to her.

She pulled her sleeve down, wiped her face, then grabbed her phone and dialed the number for the
maintenance office.

"Hello."

"Hi, this is Kara from 4A. Um…we had a bit of an issue last night with the shower…"

She rambled a few more minutes before hanging up and heading into the kitchen.

Alex stood in front of the stove, three pans full of food going. "Hey, what's on your shirt?"

A quick look confirmed she'd missed a large blob of toothpaste. "There was an incident."

"Ah, the joys of adjusting to your powers being back. Speaking of, eat all of this while I go clean
up." Alex filled two plates with pancakes, bacon, eggs, and toast.

"Did I mention how happy I am that you learned to cook?" Kara called out.

"Nope, but doing the dishes is the best way to say it!"

Kara grinned while she ate. When done, she did as asked – only breaking one dish and lodging a
soap covered fork in the ceiling.

Alex didn’t say a word.

Ten minutes later they were headed toward the DEO and Kara's anxiety resurfaced.

She might have her powers back, but she still had work to do to get better.

***

Kara smiled when she saw J'onn, or as she had to call him here, Director Henshaw. Alex had been
running tests on her for the last two hours, what few she could since needles didn’t work anymore, in
some area of the DEO that had been vacated for that exact purpose.

"Hi, J'onn," she whispered, though there wasn’t a soul in sight.

He smiled at her. "Hello. I see you've got your powers back."

She nodded, practically bouncing off the table with excitement. "I did."

Raising a brow, he crossed his arms. "You did well last night. I'm proud of you."

"Are you mad? I didn’t know…I mean I just kind of reacted..."

He shook his head. "I'm not mad at all. I was a little concerned, but lucky for us with the water and
chaos no one got any good footage of you. Your identity is safe."

She sagged in relief. "Good. That's good."

"Alex will be here in a moment, in the meantime, is there anything you need?"
"My ears. I haven't learned to block out all the noises yet." She didn’t add on that during the night she'd heard a few screams that reminded her of Sam.

He flashed her one of his half grins. "I think I can find you something."

Alex entered, tablet in hand, dour look on her face. "Okay, I got the results back."

Kara nodded, hoping no one noticed the hand shaped imprints on the edge of the metal exam table she sat on. Of course, Alex did, but she only raised a brow and held out a bunch of papers in front of Kara.

"I've got good news and bad news."

Crap, it was too good to be true, Kara thought. "Bad news first, please."

Alex's face turned somber. "Now that you're powers are back you're going to have to relearn how to do everything, because I just got off the phone with the plumber and he totally did not buy your excuse this morning, and you have to start wearing these again."

Kara knew the crinkle stood out on her forehead. She accepted a pair of glasses and ran her hands over them remembering when Jeremiah had made them for her all those years ago. "But...what's the good news?"

"The DEO is going to give me a special stipend for feeding you and find me an insurance plan that has a 'Kryptonian adjusting to her powers' clause."

"Agent Danvers," J'onn said with a smile and poorly hidden chuckle.

Alex sighed dramatically. "Fine, the good news is you're healthy as ever. All damage to your heart appears to be gone, but I still think you should go to the fortress with Clark and have Kelex check you out." She turned to J'onn. "And...I still think we need to talk about the stipend thing."

Kara hopped off the table, grabbing her sister and spinning her. "Oh, Rao, this is the best news ever. Hey, can I work with you now? I can help keep you safe."

Alex gasped and Kara set her down, "Sorry. Need to learn my strength. Got it!"

Holding up a finger while she sucked in a breath, Alex spoke, "Yeah, that would be good. As for working with us...you need to learn to control your abilities and how to fight first."

"And have the director's permission," J'onn said, hand on his hips, something in his eyes that Kara had no name for.

Kara smiled at him; unable to hide the joy having her powers back gave her. "Can you please help me learn to not destroy my bathroom while adjusting the water temperature and training me to be a cool agent like my sister?"

"We'll see." He left the room shaking his head, a smile tugging at his face.

"That was a yes, right? That sounded like a yes," Kara said.

Alex set the papers down. "Might be, I'm going to train you anyway and he knows it. First, we need to keep your identity secret and I need to tell you about Fort R'oazz."

"This is my lab. Usually, there's more agents around, but because we want to keep your identity a secret...certain areas were blocked off today. I want you to wear those," she pointed to the glasses in
Kara's hand. "And keep your interactions to a minimum. It's safer if people don't know you're Kryptonian."

A thought hit Kara. Her breathing increased. Her heart beat painfully this time. "Alex, what…what if Lillian saw the news? She'll know where I am? She'll know I got my powers back?"

Leaning against the wall, she slowly slid down, her whole body trembling.

"Hey, listen to me. We have teams out looking for her. There has been no sign of her whatsoever. My address isn't listed. And I'm gonna train you, what happened…it won't happen ever again. I promise. No one is taking you away."

"But if she has kryptonite my powers don't matter." Kara had one arm wrapped around her waist, while the other grasped at a wall.

"Hey, look at me. It won't happen, but…if…let me repeat…if it does. You'll have this. We can track it anywhere, okay?"

Kara eyed the small device Alex held up. No bigger than a pea. "What am I supposed to do with that?"

Alex bit her lip. "I'm not entirely sure. Clark made it at the fortress then dropped it off last night with J'onn. I guess he had the same fear as you. Anyways, he said you just need to hold it."

Taking the chip, Kara examined it more thoroughly. When she held it up to her face it hummed to life, a series of symbols appearing.

"It's a Kryptonian tracker. Kal…Clark had Kelex make one. It will bond with my skin and isn't detectable." It floated in the air, then hovered toward her neck. A brief electric sensation and then it was in place.

Forcing herself to take in several deep breaths, Kara listened to the heartbeat of Alex. Remembering why she had gotten her powers back and she knew whatever fear she had to live with now was worth it if it meant she had Alex at her side.

Alex got to her feet and offered her a hand. "Come on, there's some things you need to know."

Kara listened for the next hour as her sister told her about the alien prison Fort R'ozz. How the discovery of Kara's pod had been the reason the DEO came into being. The threat they were dealing with now when it came to rogue aliens. It was…a lot and part of her wanted to go back to the Kara she was months ago. The Kara that had no responsibilities. The Kara that spent more time dwelling on the past than imagining a future.

"There's one other thing I have to tell you…please don't be mad."

Kara tensed. "Nothing good comes after that phrase. I should know, I'm going to be using it all the time as I readjust to my strength."

Alex interlaced her fingers. "Okay, here's the thing. The flight last night. We had intel that someone was targeting the DEO. We weren’t sure how much they knew or how far they were willing to go so last night was –"

"Bait? You used yourself as bait! Alex, you could have been killed. What if I didn’t get my powers back? And where was J'onn? If he knew you were doing that he should have been there but I called him and he didn’t answer and I was so scared and you can't ever do that again." Kara wiped angrily
at the tears streaming down her face.

Alex sighed. "It's my job. What I do keeps people safe, but I can promise no more lies."

Kara bit her lip. "Promise. And I want to know if something weird is going on. I can help now. I can protect you."

"Okay, and don't be mad at J'onn, he was dealing with something else. We suspect it was a distraction"

Now, Kara didn’t wish to go back to who she was. Alex, her human sister who was stronger than anyone Kara knew, put her life on the line every day. How could Kara do any less, especially with the abilities she had?

After all she had been through, there was no way she could ever not help someone who was in need, vulnerable, powerless.

A piece of her falling back into place.

This Kara was who she was meant to be.

"There's something else. This was recovered from your pod. For years people here tried to find out what it was but...failed. When J'onn took over, he let me work on it." Alex led Kara into a room with a security panel outside.

The area was bare, but when Alex put the device on the ground Kara saw her mom. Heard her voice. Her words. And oh the mixture of happiness and pain it brought. Her mom had believed in her, and as always, had the perfect words to make Kara feel better.

Alex held her while she cried, soothing her with nonsense words.

"Hey, I got ya."

"I know," Kara said, sniffling into her sister's shoulder then a few minutes later. "Can we get potstickers from that one place tonight?"

Alex brushed Kara's hair out of her face. "I'll make you a deal. Comfort food from the best place in town, but we work on your abilities a bit in the sparring room first. Seriously, that plumber did not buy you seeing a spider and trying to kill it with fire."

Kara let her head fall back. "Last time I rely on a meme to get me out of a tough spot."

"No, it won't be, but look at all the fun stories ahead of us."

She let Alex pull her to her feet, floating most of the way to make it easier on her sister. She slipped on the glasses, the noise around her lowering a tad. Though, she'd have to readjust when they were out in the city, the desert wasn’t all that loud.

***

Alex smiled inside when she noted Kara was fine. Seeing the test results was one thing, but seeing her sister in action was something else entirely. No longer a little girl trying to hold back, but a grown woman bench pressing a couple thousand pounds with a smile on her face.

"Okay, so try to gauge the difference in force needed to lift that as opposed to say a glass."
For the next few hours, she and Kara practiced picking up a glass, a plate, a fork, opening a door, a cabinet, tying a shoe, using a phone…everyday activities that her sister needed to relearn now that she was at full strength.

"How expensive are phones?"

Alex sighed. "I'll see if we can make a steel case for yours and maybe a special screen."

"Right, that might be a good idea." Kara dropped the fragments of her latest attempt to make a call. "I don’t remember it being this hard when I first arrived."

"You weren’t at full strength then, and I remember a few mishaps. But you'll get through it."

Kara nodded. "I hope so. Hey, remember that time with Jeremiah?"

"When you knocked him over with a soccer ball? Yes! I think I sprained something laughing."

A real smile graced Kara's face at that.

"I know it's been a packed day, but I want to set up a room to spar with you in. Somewhere you aren't at full strength." Alex pushed off the wall. "This is a good place, it's one of the lower levels and no one really comes down here. What do you think?"

"Whatever you need to do. I don't want to hurt you."

Alex rubbed her chin. "I was thinking red sun lights. They'll put you on par with me but also won't cause any of the cell damage Kryptonite causes."

Kara bobbed her head. "Yes. That's perfect. I want you to teach me everything."

"One thing. This time, with your powers back…use them. I know my parents always told you not to, but that's stupid. I'm not saying go nuts, but just…use them. They're a part of you and you have to know what you're capable of."

Kara smiled and gave her a small nod. "I will, but there is one thing…I was wondering. Now that I have my powers back can I look for Sam? I can try and listen in for her voice. I wanted to look before but I was such a mess and…I didn't know if I would be able to do anything if I did find her."

Alex didn’t know how to answer. Part of her wanted to say no. To tell Kara to stay away from anything from that time, but the other part of her knew Sam needed help. Then there was the earnest and hopeful expression her sister wore just before…and there it was, the pout.

"Yeah, of course you can, but the deal is you keep me in the loop. No going off on your own. Deal?"

"Yes! Thank you. You're the best sister ever."

J'onn joined them then, shifting into his Martian form and stretching. "I thought you might like to practice flying."

Kara's face lit up and Alex waved them off as they disappeared through a hole she'd never seen in the ceiling.

She stepped back toward the wall. Her body ached from the stress of the night before, but things were working out and despite the voice in the back of her head telling her not to get comfortable, she ignored it.
For now.

They deserved this reprieve.

Kara deserved it.

Struggling to get to her feet she made a mental note to step up her exercise regime if she had any intention of keeping up with Kara. She exited the training room and headed for her office. She assigned an extra team to keep an eye on Lex and after hesitating a few seconds, one to Lena. She didn’t think the woman would do anything, but Alex didn’t put anything past what lengths Lillian was willing to go.

Checking the feed and confirming no reports had popped up about last night, she went over the files from the plane malfunction the night before.

***

Lena glared at the numbers on the elevator, willing them to move faster. Her feet hurt, and her head ached from dealing with men who thought they knew more about the needs of her research and development department than she did.

She’d been to the planning commissioner's office twice, met with the contractor at the new building three times, and found time to do actual work in-between.

Thank god for Jess.

Finally, on her floor, she opened the door to her penthouse, kicked off her shoes and plodded into the kitchen. She opened her fridge, realizing too late she didn’t have any food. As much as she didn’t like take-out she made exceptions after 10 PM when she spent the day dealing with people talking down to her. Specifically those who turned everything she did or said into something nefarious.

Slipping into a pair of jeans and an old college sweatshirt, she grinned at her grimy running shoes. Lillian would hate them which made Lena love them all the more. A walk would do her some good anyways.

Ten minutes later she was in one of the few places still open. A Chinese restaurant that had great Lo Mein and veggie fried rice. Two people stood in front of her and she took out her phone to deal with work issues while she waited.

One bumped her shoulder, hard, and she glanced up into blue eyes that were far brighter than the last time she saw them but were now covered by glasses. "It's you."

"Uh, hi…sorry I wasn’t looking where I was going," the woman from the flower shop said. "Are you hurt? I didn't mean…"

Lena cut off the woman's ramble. "It's okay."

"But are you all right?"

"You never called." Lena wanted to smack herself, how desperate could one sound and still maintain their pride?

"Pardon?" A brunette woman stood next to the blonde, arms full of far too much food for two people, expression happy but tired.
"I gave you my card and said if you ever wanted to talk...to people. And you don't remember me. Wow, this is so embarrassing." Lena side-stepped her way around the two and glanced at the menu even though she'd memorized it the first time she'd seen it.

A soft voice broke through her defenses. "I do remember you, Lena. The flower shop. You liked the Plumerias. I didn't recognize you..." The woman motioned to Lena's outfit.

Lena swallowed, realizing her hair was up in a messy bun, she wore her glasses, and her clothes were a far cry from the power suit she'd been wearing when they'd first met.

"Yep, that was me. After hours I dress like a normal person."

The woman fidgeted with her glasses, a new addition? "I...um...I...how..."

She held up a hand to stop the other woman from stuttering herself silly. "I get it. You saw the name on the card. Don't worry. I'm used to it. Happens all the time. Can't seem to outrun the legacy my brother has made. Sorry to have bothered you." Lena gave her order to the man behind the counter in an effort to stop her babbling, trying to ignore the woman staring at her. She had filled out, didn't look so waifish but could still stand to put on a few pounds. Her hair was windblown and her cheeks rosy. Those eyes though, they held so much pain Lena had to make an effort not to reach out and comfort this...stranger.

"Ms. Luthor, I just want to say it's nice to meet you. I read about the work you've been doing and think what you're doing is great," the auburn-haired woman said.

Turning, but not making eye contact, Lena responded, "Thanks, I'm trying."

Mumbling caused her to look at the two. They huddled together arguing about introductions and being polite, and customs, the blonde looking at Lena then at the other woman, an awkward smile on her face.

"Excuse me, Ms. Luthor, I'm Alex Danvers and this is my sister Kara. She's really shy."

The woman from the flower shop...Kara, Lena corrected herself, smiled, larger than before but not quite reaching her eyes, while clutching the cuff of her sweater and wrapping it around herself.

"I understand. It's okay." She forced a smile. "Have a good night."

"Excuse me, Lena?"

Lena turned, unable to resist the soft, tentative voice. "Yes?"

"I'm sorry I didn't call. That was wrong of me. You were being nice and I was...wrapped up in some things that I needed to deal with." Blue eyes, too sincere and earnest and shadowed, Lena had to look away.

"It's okay." And it was. Something about this woman still tugged at her, but she also knew on some deeper level that she needed to be patient. The skittish look from the first time they'd met still appeared and the way she maneuvered to avoid touching the other people getting in line didn't go unnoticed.

"I still have your card."

"Well, I still have the same number." If it wouldn't make her more pathetic she would have facepalmed at the idiocy of her comment. When did she care if someone called her?
"I'm Kara, but you already know that…but yeah, just in case you forgot," Kara babbled until Alex elbowed her in the side, grunting then rubbing said elbow.

The action caught Lena's attention, Kara hadn't moved, hadn't even acknowledged that anything had touched her. Lena filed the information away for another time, deciding to see if she could salvage whatever…this…was.

She held out a hand, but Kara didn’t move to accept it, just looked at it strangely. "Lena…which you already know. Sorry, it's been a long day." And she could not wait for it to be over she thought letting her hand drop to her side.

Alex jumped in then, shaking Lena's hand with a tad too much enthusiasm. Glaring at Kara with raised brows.

"Right!" Kara said, grabbing Lena's hand the second Alex let go. "This. I do this."

The contact was…not what she had expected. Kara's hand was warm, firm, strong, very strong? Too soon for her liking, it was over, the expression on Kara's face fearful.

"Are you okay? Did I hurt you?"

Lena shook her head. "No. Why would you think –"

"Kara, come on. You hate it when the food is cold." Alex tugged on Kara, but she didn't budge.

"No, that would be you. I'll eat anything. I know what starving is like."

Lena tried not to listen in, but that comment…the way it was said held so much weight.

Alex sighed. "Fine, I hate cold food. Can we go now?"

"Hold on." Kara's fingers had returned to their normal state of fidgeting, but she made direct eye contact with Lena. "Night. Hope you get some sleep."

Unable to speak at the conflicting emotions of Kara's eyes, Lena merely nodded.

In the reflection of the mirror above the counter, she watched Alex drag Kara out of the restaurant and figured she'd never see her again. And for whatever reason, her heart hurt at the thought.

Appetite gone, Lena took the bag back to her place and shoved it in the fridge. She entered her office, even though she had planned on a night off, and opened a file.

Lex's notes were organized, meticulous, at first. As time passed, Lena could see the quality and coherency of his thoughts deteriorating. Not to mention the shorthand he'd developed to write in became increasingly difficult to translate.

She swallowed at what she knew was coming when she cracked open the cover. Pictures of a young girl from two decades ago. Dark hair and eyes, lanky, eyes scared. Psychologists met with her, analyzed her. Doctors poked and prodded her. Hundreds of blood tests were run.

Mentions of other aliens were peppered throughout the file, but nothing significant. No names Lena could track down.

Frustrated, she pushed on.

The files indicated a change, swift and severe. She'd been isolated. Taken to a new location. At first,
Lena had thought…well, she didn’t know what to think. However, as she read, she realized Lillian had something to do with it.

Lillian’s handwriting was an elegant script. The kind one would expect to see on a greeting card wishing someone well with a beautiful poem.

However, Lena read what the woman wrote, and beautiful it was not.

Tests went beyond their definition and entered the realm of torture. Experiments were designed to bring out the girl's full range of emotions – mostly rage.

However, nothing happened much to Lillian's disappointment, if the pages of ranting were any indication.

All results indicated she was human, but Lillian had been convinced that this girl was something more. Something that could be used, a weapon to mold then harness.

Though what against was a mystery Lena had yet to solve.

A shiver ran down her spine. She didn’t think she'd ever get over the horrors Lex and Lillian had committed. What she needed to do now was figure out what the hell they had done and where the girl had ended up.

Alive.

She had to be alive.

Opening the last box of files, she hoped it held answers. A lead. A location. Proof her family had not been insane enough to kill a child.

Pulling out the top folder, her throat constricted when she saw Superman's emblem on the cover. She'd hoped this was done with. Downing the rest of her scotch she opened it.

Then froze.

Superman had a cousin.

She had been living with a human family.

The DEO had taken her.

Lillian and Lex had been part of it…and done terrible, terrible things to her.

They’d taken Superman's cousin, who was just a little girl and tortured her.

Repeatedly.

Lena read how Lillian had cut into the girl and held her heart…no matter how elegant the script it did nothing to hide the pure horror of the words.

Nauseated, she emptied the meager contents of her stomach into the trash can.

Beads of sweat formed on her forehead.

The descriptions…the experimentation. The successes and failures.
Lillian’s notes about the girl’s resilience and annoying refusal to just die…

Lena grabbed the rest of the files dumping them out. She needed to see her face. Had to know…if she knew she could help her. Find her and somehow make up for the hell she had gone through.

Save her.

All she discovered was the most recent entry, almost a year old. Lillian’s writing nothing more than a hurried scratch.

"The Kryptonian has been without her powers for years. Everything we have learned has been put to good use. The world is safer. My work with her is done. Her current condition is…not well. She won't last the week."

Lena’s thoughts went to the woman on the news. The woman who had carried a plane and then flown away.

It had to be…

"You survived….and have your powers."

Fear caused her to stumble as she stood. Lillian would know and she wouldn’t be happy.

Running from the office, she grabbed her phone and dialed. An alert Jess answered and Lena wondered if her assistant ever slept.

"Ms. Luthor, is there a problem?"

"Yes, well…no. We need to get this permit nightmare dealt with. I need my lab up and running asap."

"Of course. I believe after your meetings today everything had been approved, but they were holding it up for a few days for review."

Lena grabbed the takeout container from her fridge. A sense of urgency taking over. "Yes, review. I want the entire legal department working on this. I want that lab open."

"Consider it done."

Swallowing a mouthful of cold lo-mein, Lena smiled. "Thanks. Have I given you a raise this week?"

"I have it set on your schedule. Have a good night Ms. Luthor. Try and get some sleep."

"Same to you."

Jess chuckled at that. "Assistants don't sleep."

"Mine do if they want raises."

Lena ended the call. Her mind filled with a hundred different ideas. She could make this right…well, not right. Help, that's what she could do, and it was what she damn well planned to do.

No matter what it took she would protect this new Super from her family.

She thought of the other girl and her mood dropped.
There had to be a way to help her, too.
Chapter 13

Kara moved to the edge of the sidewalk to avoid a couple holding hands. A flash of color caught her attention and she stopped in front of a mural. Bright colors mixed with red that reminded her of Krypton. She reached for her camera, but in all the excitement of the morning, she’d forgotten to bring it with her.

"She seems nice."

Kara stopped and turned toward Alex. "Who?"

Alex waved in the direction of the restaurant, bags in danger of spilling. Kara leapt to save them.

"Lena Luthor. I've never actually had an opportunity to talk with her. She's a lot shyer than I expected. Unless, maybe you bring that out in her." She wiggled her eyebrows.

"What? I don't even know what you're talking about or what that thing is that you're doing." Kara motioned to Alex's dancing eyebrows then sniffed at the smell coming from the bags. "I'm shy all the time, too."

"Uh huh, but you were different. You didn’t do your usual turn and leave. You made an effort to speak to her, to apologize." Alex stopped when they reached her truck.

Kara took a breath. "She seemed sad that I didn't call…and then her heartbeat did this weird thing I was worried something was wrong…that I hurt her after we shook hands. Plus, Dr. Grey told me I need to work on being more human when I socialize." She swiped an eggroll out of one of the bags and tried not to think about the fact that something about Lena grabbed her attention, that ever since the flower shop she'd thought of her often.

Being herself for those few moments. Making someone laugh. Having someone look at her with no sympathy or pity their eyes.

Alex glared at her. "Hey, not until we get home…give me one."

Kara held the bag toward Alex. "I mean, I guess she's nice. I don't know I haven't talked to her. I had no idea what would happen if I called her, so I didn't, but I've been drawing her and read a few articles." She adjusted her glasses, still not used to wearing them. "Dr. Grey told me not to let my fear control me."

Alex took a bite of her eggroll as they got in the SUV. "Hmm, I get that and totally support it, like I said she seems nice. I wonder if she'd be willing to work with the DEO?"

Kara sat up at that. "What? Why? She can't be an agent. That's too dangerous."

"Not what I meant. Though, I would love to see her run in those heels she wears in all the promo shoots for the opening of L-Corp." Alex wiped her hands on her jeans and started the engine. "What
I mean is she's a genius, she could help with a ton of things. She put out an article with Jack Spheer last year about nanotechnology that is going to revolutionize the medical field."

"I read that."

Alex turned to her, an incredulous expression on her face. "Really? Why?"

Kara shrugged. "I like science, you know that."

"Uh huh, hey, didn’t that article feature a photo of her...a really good one?"

"I don't remember, but anyways," Kara fidgeted with her cuffs. "I don't know if her working at the DEO is a good idea. What if I ran into her there? What would I say?"

Alex nodded. "True. I guess we'll just have to see what happens."

Experience told Kara, the grin on Alex’s face meant she was up to something. With a sigh, Kara glanced out the window; wanting things to go back to how they were half an hour ago. Before she saw those green eyes and realized none of her sketches or paintings came close to capturing the essence of Lena Luthor. Probably not something Alex wanted to hear about, ever.

"Flying with J'onn was really nice. I haven’t felt like that in a long time."

"Good. Speaking of, I was wondering if you wanted to go see mom and dad tomorrow."

"We weren’t talking about that."

Alex waved a half-eaten eggroll at her. "Shh, imagine we were. So, what do you think? I mean you don't have to, but maybe it's time? Plus, dad is like dying to help you out with adjusting. Mom said he hasn’t left his lab since he saw you on the news."

Now that she had her powers back, the security of being able to return to their apartment if anything happened eased her fears. Memories of the past flashed in front of her eyes and she tensed, grimacing when she heard a snap. She blew out a breath…she was just talking about facing said fears so..."Okay, sounds like a plan."

"Really? I mean great. Text mom and let her know."

Kara did as asked, wincing when the crack echoed in the cabin of the truck. "How long on that steel case?"

Alex laughed. "Don't worry about it. I'll do it when we get home."

"No, I need to learn how to do this. I'm just really stressed or something."

"We'll go another time, don't worry about it." Alex maneuvered the car onto their street. "Just let me know when you're ready."

Kara shook her head. "You know how it gets. I'll never be ready, I just need to do it." Her anxiety level rising at the thought. She reached for her camera again and sighed, letting her hands fall.

Alex stopped the car and turned. "I told you that you would never have to do something you didn’t want to ever again. I meant it."

The sincerity and honesty in Alex's eyes, along with the fierce sense of protection emanating from her was enough to calm Kara, a little.
"It's different now. My meds don't work now that I have my powers back, I have to do this. Time to push myself." Kara clenched her hands into fists.

"Hey, I think it's great you want to push yourself, but don't go too hard, okay? You're still adjusting."

Kara nodded. "Tomorrow. As long as you're with me I can do it. Make the call."

After they got home and finished the food, Kara stayed up to watch a movie while wearing earphones when Alex went to bed. A romantic comedy which she usually made fun of Alex for liking, but part of her wanted to see what the big deal was and the sudden increase in noise when they'd returned to the city had her on edge, even the earplugs J'onn had given her weren't doing much.

As the movie started, Kara thought about Alex. Her sister had never mentioned dating anyone, which was weird because Alex was awesome. Then, Kara remembered during all their talks and wiping each other's tears away, that Alex had been sad, lonely, and determined for all those years Kara had been missing.

Maybe, Kara realized, her sister was still protecting her. Making Kara the focus.

Her sister had gone through the last nine years with one goal.

Find Kara.

She'd never given up.

Alex had skipped grades, missed out on typical college experiences, and joined an elite government task force. Kara had learned enough from Dr. Grey to know her sister needed to get out more, learn to relax.

However, setting up a fake dating profile probably wasn’t the best way to go about things. In fact, taking cues from this movie probably wasn’t the best idea either. So, Kara would figure it out herself.

Somehow.

She had a promise to keep as well.

An alarm went off and she covered her ears. A woman screamed. A baby cried. The click of a gun, a sound all too familiar to Kara, had her moving without thought. She jumped out the window honing in on the source.

A mile away, she found a man standing over a woman clutching a baby to her chest.

"Please take what you want. Just leave me alone."

The man picked up her purse and rifled through it. He flicked through the wallet, sneering. "Forty bucks? That's it? Give me your jewelry."

Kara sped in, knocked the gun out of his hand, but cringed when she heard his bones break. He screamed in pain, lashing out and she pushed him into a wall, panicking when he fell to the ground in a limp pile. She focused, or tried to, on his heartbeat, but ended up being bombarded with too much noise. Fear took over and she was at his side in an instant, relieved when she found a pulse. She turned to the woman, saw that she was already scrambling away, then launched into the sky.

She'd almost killed a man. She clenched her fists, angry she couldn't control her strength better.
Rending metal and a voice gasping for help broke her out of her reverie and she didn’t think before swooping in, tearing the door off of a burning car and pulling an unconscious man free with care.

When she stumbled into the living room, Alex stood there, arms crossed. An unamused expression on her face. "Where were you? I was worried sick!"

Kara went to the fridge and grabbed a bottle of water. "I couldn’t sleep. It was too loud and then I heard someone and I...I helped them."

Alex's posture relaxed. "Were you careful about your identity?"

"Yes. I went fast. People probably think it was a ghost or something and the other guy was unconscious." She downed the bottle in one gulp. "I thought I killed someone. I just...I can't control myself. What if Lillian was right and I just hurt people? What if you get hurt because of me?"

"Come here." Alex walked over to the couch and patted the cushion next to her.

Kara followed, falling next to her sister and laying with her head in her lap. Alex ran her fingers through Kara's hair. "Man, even your hair is super. All that flying and speeding around and not a single tangle! Not fair, first no more pimples and now this."

Closing her eyes Kara hummed. "Let's not talk about pimples, been there done that. Never going back."

"Listen, we'll work on something to help with the sound. For now, use those headphones I got you and wear the glasses. They should help a bit. And I know you want to help people, I so get that, but please be careful. I just got you back." Alex pulled a blanket over Kara. "We're going to train you, get your abilities under control and then who knows. You might be National City's next hero."

"Hmph, tell that to our shower."

Alex chuckled, a deep sound that comforted Kara. "Get some sleep."

The next day Kara woke early, anticipation coursing through her. She made sure her camera battery was fully charged and that the memory card was clear. She changed into a pair of blue jeans, brown boots, a white shirt, and blue button up. Happy her skin finally had some color from the time spent outside walking.

"Ready?" Alex stood in the doorway, wearing a pair of old black jeans, a grey sweater, and black leather jacket in hand.

"Yep, want to fly there?"

"You really shouldn't -"

Kara swept up her sister and a couple of moments later set her down.

"- powers for fun..." Alex glared, but Kara saw the sparkle in them.

"Please, like you haven't missed that." Kara turned and walked toward the house, the sight of it took her breath away.

Alex stood next to her. "You okay?"

Forcing herself to use her breathing techniques she waited a minute before answering. "Yeah, I think so."
"Anytime you want to go just say the word."

"It looks different," Kara said.

"I think they repainted it a few years ago, and the whole inside has been remodeled." Alex jumped over the first two stairs to beat Kara to the front door.

Kara stopped, glancing around. "Streaky! I forgot about him. Is he…did you?"

Turning, Alex nodded. "We looked after him. He had a good life."

"Good. That's good." Kara remembered the sound of his purr, the feel of his fur, his acceptance…her heart hurt, but the fact Alex made sure he was loved made her feel better.

"Come on." Alex opened the door, waiting.

"Shouldn’t we knock…or ring the bell?"

"Please, like mom isn’t in the kitchen panic cooking for you and dad's probably in his lab about to blow something up."

"I haven’t had that happen in years," Jeremiah said, Eliza appearing behind him.

"Sure, honey. Except that one time last week and there was that thing the month prior…your office still smells like burnt rubber."

Jeremiah put his arm around her shoulders. "Uh huh, and we have seven pies, two roasts, and three pots of potatoes boiling because?"

"Hi, can you two stop being adorable to say hi to your daughters?" Alex wedged her way in-between them and pulled Kara along with her.

The four of them embraced and Kara felt some of the anxiety leave her body. When she glanced over her Eliza's shoulder and saw the hallway where it all happened, a bit of anger bubbled up and she let it, then moved back to the present the way her therapist had taught her. Like Alex had said it had been remodeled, barely recognizable anymore.

They went into the living room to talk. Jeremiah giving her a new pair of glasses he'd designed. He also handed her a tiny pair of earplugs that would block out ten times more noise than anything else she could find so she could sleep at night.

Kara accepted them wondering how to find a balance. When she'd arrived the silence was too similar to that of the pod, but after years of being isolated, the quiet had become her new normal. Now, with her powers back she didn’t know which she preferred…or if she was being honest, which one freaked her out the least.

Alex snatched them from Kara's hand and got into a lengthy and detailed conversation about frequencies and polymers with Jeremiah that Kara tuned out.

"Want to take a walk?" Eliza asked.

"Yeah, that would be great." Kara grabbed her camera.

A path she didn’t recognize had been cleared out and she spotted dozens of birds. She took as many pictures as she could before she forgot to be careful and it cracked, just a small one but she didn’t want Alex to have to buy her another one. She slipped it back into the bag and hoped Eliza didn’t
"Still love birds, I see."

"Yeah, I thought about them a lot." She didn’t need to say more.

Eliza pointed to a bench and Kara sat down. "I'm glad you got your powers back. That must be a relief."

Kara nodded, eyes on the ocean, knowing they were about to have one of those talks.

"I know it had to have been very difficult to come here. I'm proud of you."

"It was, but Alex…with Alex I can do it."

Eliza smiled. "Do you remember when you first arrived here?"

" Barely, it seems like a couple of lifetimes ago." A small smile. "I do remember Alex had some issues."

"It was an adjustment, I'll admit that." Eliza reached out, slowly, and took Kara's hand, and despite her best efforts she still flinched when anyone except Alex touched her.

"You don't know this, but I was so scared. We knew what had happened and did our best to help you, but I had no idea what I was doing. You made it easy though, you were smart, resilient, and so strong. I've always been amazed by you, Kara."

A tear fell, but Kara didn’t wipe it away. "You were scared…but you did such an amazing job with me. I couldn’t have had better, more understanding people to look after me than you and Jeremiah."

A watery smile formed on Eliza's face. "Want to know something? We just followed Alex's lead."

"The best part about Earth," Kara murmured.

Eliza cleared her throat. "There were a lot of accidents until we figured out a way to help you control your strength. Do you remember that?"

Kara thought, reached back into her memories, side-stepping the bad ones. Playing catch with basketballs, tennis balls, and eventually beach balls. Coloring with crayons and color pencils until she didn’t break them. Picking apples off the tree and not maiming them in the process. Rolling cookie dough so it wasn’t paper thin, icing cupcakes where the cake survived. Blowing up balloons so they didn’t pop…then having water balloon fights. Memories of so many things that she gasped. She'd done too good a job forgetting about her life.

"Hey, it's okay. I bet you haven’t thought about that in a long time." She rubbed Kara's back. "Take a breath."

Kara glanced at the hand holding hers and dared to squeeze it, focusing on her muscles. "Thank you, I…never realized just how much you all did to help me."

"You are and always will be a part of this family. This place, we want you to feel at home here. And remember, if you need anything, call. Anytime. We never stopped thinking of you as our daughter."

Staring at the ocean, Kara let the words wash over her. She'd been terrified to care about people when she had first been rescued, and still was to a degree. Thankfully, that fear didn’t control her anymore. She still had a ways to go, but she was more than willing to try. "Thanks. That…it means a
"Good, and now, there are six chocolate pecan pies waiting for you back at the house."

Kara nodded, unable to say anything past the lump in her throat.

Dinner was tasty and full of laughter and a bit of pain when Kara realized what she had missed out on. She focused on the fact Alex was happy, safe, and loved. All the things Kara had wished for her.

When they finished Alex grabbed her hand. "Come on, I have something to show you."

Up the stairs they went and into their old room, which looked nothing like it had when Kara had lived there. Alex headed to the window and Kara froze, that night coming back. She started to hyperventilate, but then her sister was there. Her words floating in and out of Kara's head.

"Breathe. It's in the past. It can't hurt you."

Kara's hands flew up to her face and she ran to the window sticking her head outside just before a blast of her heat vision took down a tree across the yard.

"Crap, I'm sorry!"

Alex bent over to look out the window, pursed her lips, then turned to Kara. "That tree totally had it coming. And now that we can safely say you have that particular ability back, remind me to buy all the fire extinguishers on the way home."

And somehow that's exactly what Kara needed to hear because she laughed. A full-on belly laugh that Alex joined in on. Before long they were bent over wiping their eyes, trying to catch their breath. After a few long moments, they calmed down.

Alex wiped at her eyes. "Man, I think I needed that."

"Me too."

She nudged Kara and smiled, "Okay, now come on." Alex slipped out the window. "Dad and I worked on this after…well, you know after what. I wanted it to be perfect for when you came back."

Out on the roof, Kara remembered all the nights they sat out there, but now it was different. A portion had been reinforced and two small chairs were fixed to the spot. Alex sat in one, wincing at the tight fit.

"Jesus, why didn’t you tell me I had a big ass?"

Kara sat beside her, the chair cracking in half at her weight and dumping her on the floor. "It must have slipped my mind."

Then Alex's broke and she landed next to Kara, but she maintained her sitting position. "Like I said, perfect for when you came back."

And more laughter and another click as a piece of her life slipped back into place.

***

Alex juggled the sports equipment until she managed to get it to fit in her cart. Heading toward the art/school section, she grabbed half a dozen coloring books, some sketchbooks, crayons, color pencils, and charcoals. 
Today she planned on taking Kara somewhere to practice control. A rare day off from DEO duties. Lost in her thoughts as to what else might help her sister she didn’t notice the woman heading straight for her until it was too late and she plowed her over with her cart.

"I'm so sorry. Are you okay?"

"It's okay, no harm done." The woman, a brunette with blue eyes and a great smile, waved Alex off.

Alex helped pick up a few items. When she handed over a stuffed bear she met the gaze of the woman. "That's cute."

"Yeah, it's a gift for a friend."

Standing, Alex reached out and offered her hand. "Again, I'm sorry."

"It's fine, don't worry about it." The woman hesitated a moment, her eyes squinting. "I'm sorry, I know this will sound totally cliché, but do I know you?"

Taking a second to examine the woman critically, Alex shook her head. "I don't think so. Pretty sure I'd remember you."

The woman laughed. "I like to think I leave an impression."

Alex's heart rate picked up. Was this woman flirting with her? And was Alex flirting back? Crap, she was.

"Yeah, you do…I mean I'm sure you do." She blew out a breath, forcing herself to relax. "I'm Alex by the way."

"Cassie."

"Nice to meet you."

Cassie checked out her cart. "You got a lot of balls."

Alex choked, "What? Why would you…" She glanced at her cart full of soccer balls, volleyballs, softballs, basketballs. "Ah, right. Yes, I do have a lot of…balls."

Cassie crossed her arms. "Let me guess, you're a teacher? Coach kids after school?"

"No, not exactly."

Cassie crossed her arms. "Hmm, I'm intrigued."

"Actually, I work with the FBI." She gestured to the cart. "This is for a day in the park."

"A day with your…"

Alex laughed. "Sister."

"Ah, that sounds fun. I hope you have a good time."

"Right, I will…so, I should go." Alex grabbed the handle of her cart and turned it.

"It was nice meeting you, too, by the way. Try not to run any more people over."

"I'll work on it."
By the time Alex paid for everything and loaded her car, she'd almost forgotten about Cassie, almost. Thoughts about whether or not she should have asked for her number or shown more interest? Did she even ask what she did? She sighed, hating how bad she was at the whole flirting thing.

Then her phone dinged and she saw a text from J'onn telling her to come in.

She sent a message to Kara that she had to reschedule. Forty minutes later she walked into the main area of the DEO to find J'onn glaring at a monitor.

"What's going on?"

"We have a lead on who tampered with the plane last week. His name is Vartox. A former prisoner from Fort R'ozz. He's not the brains, just the muscle. We're having a hard time tracking him. He's popped up on a few cameras, but they're in random locations."

Alex read over his file. "He's humanoid. Can blend in easy, probably been doing it since he landed. We need more data points to find a pattern."

J'onn grunted. "He's getting around somehow, one of his buddies said he doesn’t like to walk around the human filth. We need to figure it out and soon, whoever he's working with are the ones targeting the DEO."

Alex memorized all the information they had compiled. "Any idea why they're coming at us now?"

She leaned in closer and whispered. "Perhaps someone upset with Henshaw?"

"The thought has crossed my mind." He rubbed a hand over his face. "I want you to be extra careful. They know who you are."

Alex's heart sped up. "Do you think they'd go after Kara?"

J'onn shook his head. "I don't know, depends if they know who you really are or just the alias we put you under for the flight. Either way, I have a team watching your place and you should warn her."

Alex clasped her hands behind her back. "I'll get on it."

She turned to Vasquez. "I need a team on this. Find out anything you can on him. Access the Fort R'ozz database. Find his known associates. See where else he's popped up. Run facial recognition. The works."

"On it."

Alex, grabbed a tablet loaded with what they had so far and went to her lab. Vartox had been spotted in three locations near the city in the last week, and before that he'd popped up in several out of the way diners that were equipped with surveillance.

Doing a search of those eateries she found each one of them was within walking distance of truck stops. Putting in a request of footage from all truck stops within a twenty-mile radius, she suspected she might have just discovered his mode of transportation.

She sent a message to J'onn then, texted Clark, then called Kara.

***

Lena arched her back wincing at the loud cracks her joints made. She went into the kitchen and made herself a cup of tea unable to go back into the office just yet. Her work combined with the
reading the night prior had left her with a lot of questions and a whole lot of concern about what Lex
and Lillian had been playing around with.

Lena took notes on all the things they had figured out would harm a Kryptonian. Many of the
devices and other creations she had destroyed, but she could do more on the off chance the plans had
fallen into the hands of those with ill intentions.

She would find a way to keep them safe.

To keep her safe.

The only problem was when she managed to get into her lab and work, she had no way of getting
the end result where it needed to go. The DEO didn’t trust her because of her affiliations and based
on her notes they worked hand in hand with her mother, so she didn’t trust them based on theirs.

Kryptonite was another issue. As much as she hated it, she’d have to make some in order to make
sure what she created actually worked against its effects. From what she saw, she did not want that
poor girl…woman, to ever have to suffer because of that damn green rock ever again.

For a moment she wondered if this was how it started with Lex. She knew, on some level, that her
brother wanted to protect people, but his ideas were twisted and warped from their original intent and
Lillian was to blame for most of it. She’d manipulated him from the time he was a child, and finally
managed to turn him against Superman. After that, Lena knew there was no getting her brother back.
She suspected Lionel had known all along and a wave of sadness washed over her.

No tears fell at the thought. Not that she didn’t care, quite the opposite, actually. She cared too much,
and she knew if she let herself cry about all the things she’d lost, all the people who’d left her, she
might never stop.

So many opinions floated around about her and while some of them were earned. Like not messing
with her in the boardroom, not interrupting her while she was in the lab, and absolutely no one was
allowed to order Jess around, except her. Everything else, she had to laugh at.

If they knew she had a ragged teddy bear on her bed, that was literally the only thing decorating her
bedroom, they wouldn't believe it. If they knew she donated a quarter of her salary to various
charities, scholarships for orphans, and animal shelters, they'd shake their head and say it was for the
tax write-off. If they knew she was building a children’s hospital, here in National City, they’d accuse
her of using it as a PR ploy.

No matter what she did, people always found a negative reason, an interpretation that fit the narrative
of her being a Luthor. And she hated it. God, it made her want to scream.

She rubbed her temples in an effort to fend off the impending headache that accompanied too much
thinking about her family.

Knowing her thoughts were completely derailed she checked the time. She could make the night owl
yoga class if she moved her ass. Which she did.

She returned to her penthouse an hour and a half later. Hot, tired, but feeling infinitely better. After a
quick shower, she raided the fridge for a bowl of veggies and dip. Plopping herself on top of the
counter (she still hadn’t bought a dining set, Jess was going to kill her), she scribbled a few designs
she had in mind about how to make a stable kryptonite shield. Her fingers itched at the idea of
getting into her lab and working again.

Her phone buzzed and she swiped it off the counter. A message from the private investigator she'd
hired last week to try and track down any information about the girl in the files. All Lena had was a location where she had been found fifteen years ago and a few photos.

Blowing out a breath she braced for bad news. No leads. Nothing to follow up on. She was lost forever in whatever system her mother had abandoned her in.

So, when she saw a picture of a woman with dark hair and eyes, she wrinkled her brow. The aging software she'd applied to the photographs…it was her. Before she could doubt her next move, she jotted down the address, grabbed her keys and was out the door. She didn’t have a plan, but that wasn’t going to stop her.

Lena found herself in front of an alley twenty minutes later and realized how late it was. Close to midnight. Checking her bag to make sure she had her taser, she got out of her car and walked toward the mural from the photograph. Bright colors with lots of reds, oddly familiar to her.

A door swung open, almost knocking her over. A man raced by, hat low on his head, but she caught sight of…blue skin? Perhaps a tattoo?

Grabbing the door before it closed, she entered, not having a clue what she was doing.

She expected a lot of things, a warehouse, squatter central, an abandoned building, deathtrap…what she could not have imagined, and she had a great imagination, was a bar, more specifically, an alien bar.

People…aliens sat at tables, danced, played pool…just like humans would do. The only difference being physical ones, some more obvious than others like red eyes, ridges on arms or legs or faces, sharp teeth, webbed hands, skin too loose or too tight…and so much more.

Lena had suspected, had heard Lillian rant that there were alien refugees on Earth but had never known for sure. Swallowing against the fear, she stepped further inside and approached a corner. A pretty woman with dark skin and eyes looked at her, eyes narrowing. Before Lena had a chance to say a word, the woman disappeared into the back.

Lena pushed forward, not having come this far to turn back. She glanced around the room not seeing the woman from Lex's files but getting an eyeful.

"Why are you here?"

Lena spun to see the woman from behind the bar, wariness in her eyes.

"I'm looking for someone."

"Who?"

"I don’t know her name. I just…please, this is her picture and I really need to find her." Lena held back all the reasons…I need to make sure she's alive. I need to protect her from my mother. I need to see if there is anything I can do to help…

The woman's face softened. "I'm M'gann. Go sit at the bar and wait for me."

"Lena –"

"I know who you are."

She should have thought about that. Her brother and his trial had put her face on the news on a
regular basis. With a sigh, she did as told and hoped she made it out of this place alive. Though she had no association with her brother, people assumed…speculated.

In the corner, a couple played pool. The tables were full of aliens enjoying meals and Lena realized this was their safe haven. The place they could come to be themselves. Where they didn’t have to fear anything.

Feeling like an intruder, she stood only to have M'gann stop her. "Come with me."

"I should go…I'm not…I shouldn’t be here."

M'gann turned to her. "This is a place for anyone who needs somewhere to go where no one will judge them or treat them differently because of who they are. Something tells me you could use that."

Lena didn’t say anything but did end up in a back office face to face with the woman from the private investigator's photo. The resemblance to the image created by the aging software was uncanny.

She was older, late twenties maybe early thirties? Her eyes told a different story, though. This woman had seen things…and Lena suspected she knew what many of them were.

"You're…are you…were you…I'm sorry, I have no idea how to ask you what I need to," Lena fumbled looking for the right words.

The woman cocked her head to the side. "My name is Sam, and I guess you could say I knew your mother."
Chapter 14

Kara blew out a breath. "This isn’t working. I should be able to find her…"

"You're doing great. It takes time. Try and let yourself relax," J'onn said. "To find your friend you need to have clarity first. Nothing blocking your focus."

Floating far above the city with J'onn, she closed her eyes. She inhaled in sync with him then exhaled. They did this for ten minutes.

"Do you feel that calm? In your center?"

Kara nodded. Since her meds no longer worked, J'onn had been helping her manage her anxiety with special techniques. She didn’t know exactly how it worked, just that it did.

"Okay, now…focus. Think of her voice. Remember it. Tune everything else out."

Car alarms from down below faded away, as did people screaming, engines, sirens, footsteps…all of it disappearing. She sorted through the different noises, allowing certain ones to enter her consciousness.

A faint wisp of a voice…she crinkled her brow.

"Jess, I have to cancel lunch with Fallon Industries today, reschedule for next week. And I need the name of a good therapist that knows how to keep their mouth shut."

"Is everything all right, Ms. Luthor?"

"It's fine. Thanks. And you go home early, no need for you to be there today since I'm stuck."

Kara's eyes snapped open.

"Did you hear her?"

"No, someone else. Lena."

"Luthor?"

Kara nodded. "Yeah, I didn’t mean to…I don't know why…it just happened."

A small smile flitted across J'onn's face. "I'm sure there's a reason, but for now let's keep looking for Sam."

Closing her eyes, she focused once more.

Fifteen minutes later she shook her head. "Why isn't this working?"

J'onn flew to a nearby building and landed. "Could be a lot of things. Perhaps she's too far from National City. She might not be talking at the moment. There could be something shielding her."

Kara's head snapped up at that. "You think she could…Lillian might have her back?"

"No, I don't think so." He put a hand on her shoulder. "We'll do this again tomorrow, at a different time, okay?"
"Yeah."

J'onn flew off and she let out a sigh. Hearing Lena's voice had shocked her and she hoped everything was okay. Why would she need a therapist? Guilt washed over her at the fact she hadn't called, but with the very real possibility that Lillian might come to the city looking for Kara after seeing her on the news and Alex's warning about some nefarious group after her… Kara didn’t want to put Lena in that kind of danger.

Shrugging off her annoyance at things in her life, she shot into the air and found a spot over the desert to practice her focus. With her powers back and regaining some of her confidence after working on it in therapy…

She needed to find Sam.

***

Lena accepted the tumbler of scotch from M'gann with a nod. "I brought the files, but I still think she shouldn’t read them."

"Thanks. I’ll let her decide. She has a right to know." M'gann left the room, promising to return in a few moments.

"My name is Sam, and I guess you could say I knew your mother."

The words hit Lena like a gut punch. She leaned against the wall, M'gann putting a hand out to steady her.

"I…I'm sorry."

Sam cocked her head to the side, arms crossed protectively over her body. "Why are you here?"

"I don't want to hurt you."

"I know that. If you did, you wouldn’t have gotten this far."

Lena didn’t know what their method of knowing her intentions was, but she hoped it kept working.

"I found out what happened…what was done. I want to help. I know I can't make things better or erase the past, but I'd like to ensure you have a better future."

Sam leaned against a desk, relaxing, slightly. The t-shirt and jeans she wore gave her a youthful appearance. "M'gann helped me, but thanks for the offer."

Lena held up her hands. "Okay, then help me. I want to find Lillian. Put an end to whatever hellish plans she has brewing. I want to stop CADMUS and the DEO. You are literally the only person that has a clue as to how her mind works."

"How did you find out what happened to me? How did you even track me down?"

Lena noted the glint in the woman's eye and hoped they could work out a compromise.

"Lillian's files. She had hundreds of them along with a photograph. I used a program to age it and hired someone to find you."

Sam turned to M'gann who nodded.
“I knew when we were rescued...or whatever ploy they were using to mess with our heads, that I had to hide. Of course, I didn’t know the first thing about avoiding a secret government agency.”

Sam moved closer to M’gann. “I have no idea how long I ran, then walked, then crawled until I passed out in the middle of nowhere. When I woke up, I was in a clinic. They didn’t speak English, but there were people waiting for me. Apparently, while I was sleeping I called out...said things. Screamed...”

M’gann put a hand on Sam’s trembling arm and took over. “We have people around the world. A network that we use to protect ourselves and those who might investigate us. We know who to avoid and how to help those of us who are in trouble. I brought Sam up here because National City was familiar to her. I also needed to know what she did to make sure we could better defend ourselves.”

Lena motioned to a chair and sat when M’gann nodded. “Okay, so you know where they are? We can send the authorities after them then. We can stop her.”

“It’s not that easy. We have an idea of where she was, what she did, but things have changed. The DEO…the man who runs it has changed. I don’t know why, but he isn’t the same. As for CADMUS, they’re completely underground, but word has it they’re gaining momentum. Your mother is pretty good at recruiting people, whether they want to be or not.”

“I remember. She could talk a drowning man into drinking a glass of water.”

“And her interest isn’t only in aliens, Sam’s human, but Lillian was convinced she wasn’t.”

Lena eyed Sam. “Human? Was there anyone else with you? Did you see anyone? Another prisoner?”

Sam’s jaw clenched. “There were a lot over the years.”

Lena chose her words carefully, not wanting to give away the fact she wanted to know about the Kryptonian. Needed to find her and see her for herself. Before she could utter a word, M’gann glared at her.

“I think that’s enough for today.”

“Wait, please. I truly want to help. Anything you can tell me. Even the location of where she kept you? There might be clues...a trail of some kind I can follow.”

Sam pursed her lips. “I want the files.”

“Why?”

“That’s the deal. Come back with all of my files. Don’t make copies...and I’ll know if you do. Then I’ll tell you everything I can remember.”

M’gann shot Sam a warning look. “Within reason.”

Knowing she wouldn’t get a better offer, that in fact, this was more than she had hoped for, Lena reached out her hand. Sam merely looked at it, expression familiar to Lena.

M’gann reached out and shook Lena’s hand, motioning to Sam.

“Right...I forgot that’s a thing.”

Lena tried to remember something but it flitted away due to another thought taking over. “How are
"You safe here?"

M'gann smiled. "I'm a lot tougher than I look, and this place has some pretty good tech that hides it. No one can listen in on us."

"And Sam's been here the whole time?"

Sam's face tightened at that. "Yeah. Why?"

"I just...if you need help. Someone to talk to or a doctor or...anything. Just let me know."

Sam rubbed the back of her neck. "I'll think about it. M'gann got me through the worst of it, but..."

"A therapist would help her adjust, but it's not easy finding one that deals with that kind of trauma as well as one who wouldn't freak at the alien angle," M'gann said.

"Let me handle it."

"She's ready to talk to you." M'gann tapped Lena on the shoulder. "Tell me one thing, what is it you truly want to know? Why are you really here?"

Lena had time to think about how they knew what she really wanted and realizing she was in a bar full of aliens with any number of powers, she realized mind-reading was quite possible.

"First, I wanted to make sure Sam was okay and offer her help. I'm more than my last name."

M'gann nodded. "I know."

Lena got to her feet. "Second, there was another alien my mother had...a Kryptonian. I want to help her, too. I know what was done, the risks, the damage. I can help. I need to."

M'gann studied her for a full minute before nodding. "Okay, let's go. Just remember to go easy on the questions. I can keep her calm for short periods, but she...she gets angry."

Once again the three of them sat in the office. Sam at a desk, file open in front of her. A hostile expression on her face until M'gann stood next to her.

"Thank you for these."

"You're welcome." Lena set her bag on the floor, not sure how or where to start.

"There were others with me, but they didn't stay long. I don't know what happened to them."

Lena swallowed, her mind swirling with possibilities. "Did you see any of them?"

Sam shook her head while closing a file. "No, they kept us separated...but we could hear."

Reading about that particular method of breaking them down in the files still haunted Lena.

"I found a therapist for you. He's experienced in trauma as well as with aliens."

"Give me his information. I'll check him out," M'gann said.

Lena handed over his name and address. "I'll cover the cost."

"I'm not sure there's much I can tell you that you don't already know. These files are pretty comprehensive." Sam motioned to the box in front of her.
"A location? Where did they find you? Do you remember the names of any guards? Any of the other prisoners? Anything?" She sounded desperate but didn’t care. She knew in her gut Lillian had seen the news and soon enough would be coming for the super with an army.

M’gann leaned over, whispering into Sam’s ear. The woman shook her head.

"M’gann has an idea of the location which she’ll give you. As for names, I got nothing other than Lillian Luthor and Henshaw."

Lena knew Sam was holding back but figured she had good reason. Getting to her feet, she nodded. "Thanks for the time. And I hope he helps." She gave Sam her card with her private number on the back. "In case you need anything."

"You can come back if you want…I mean it would be nice to talk and you seem like you could use a friend," Sam said.

"That sounds nice."

***

Kara slipped the earplugs into place and headed toward the park. She stuffed a sketchbook and color pencils in her bag. She’d upgraded from crayons…thankfully.

Her camera hung around her neck, never far away when she was heading out.

She’d spent the last two weeks training fifteen hours a day at the DEO with Alex and J’onn, managing to keep her identity a secret from the other agents by using a hidden entrance and staying to the lower floors.

Between re-adapting to having powers, learning to focus her heat vision, and proper flying techniques, she needed a break. Being at the apartment was no help because she ended up doing mental exercises J’onn taught her to try and focus so she could find Sam…but always ended up frustrated when it didn’t work.

Alex had mentioned they were still looking, but since they had no information to work with and only a vague description…it wasn’t promising. Which meant it was up to Kara, and right now she felt like she was letting her friend down.

Bright orange flitted to her right yanking her out of her thoughts. She brought her camera up to try and capture the bird. She checked her images, annoyed she’d missed it.

She tilted her head to the side, scanning the park. Finding the perfect spot she headed toward it, nearly running down a woman with dark hair on her way. Stopping she put her hands out to steady her before she fell.

"I’m so sorry. I didn’t see you."

The woman looked at her closing her eyes. "Say that again."

Kara took her hands back, shocked. "No! It…is it you?"

"Kara?"

"Sam?"

They stood there, awkward and unsure. Kara reached out tentatively, but Sam stepped back.
Okay, no hugging. Kara totally got that.

"How are you? Where have you been? I've been trying to find you…sorry I didn’t."

Sam smiled, but her eyes darted around. "I thought you were dead. That last day…you sounded so bad. And then the DEO showed up. I had no idea what the hell was happening. I thought they got you back." Sam covered her mouth with her hand. "Oh man, this whole time…I could have found you. I'm so sorry."

Kara nodded. "No, don't be. I thought I was a goner, too. It took months and I still have bad days up here," she motioned to her head. "But I'm stronger now."

Stepping forward, awkward and unsure, Sam held out her arms. "It's really you? Kara?"

"It is. Rao, I've missed you. I thought about you every day. Every. Day. You saved me in there."

"You're alive…I can't believe it."

Tears streamed down both of their faces and after years of only hearing one another. After years of talking the other through unimaginable horrors just to survive another day. After years of having no face, just a name and voice – they embraced.

Kara's hands gripped Sam's sweater and she had to force herself to calm down lest she crush her.

"That woman…she said she was your sister but she was in that uniform," Sam mumbled into Kara's shoulder. "I wanted to stop her but…"

Taking off her glasses, Kara sighed. "It's a long story. That was…is my sister. The DEO has changed…a lot."

They stood there, staring at one another. The ability to finally see each other robbing them of thought.

"I thought you'd be shorter," Sam said.

Kara wiped at her eyes. "Still think you're funny, huh?"

They kept touching one another, a hand on a forearm. Grazing fingers. Making sure they weren’t hallucinating, that they wouldn’t be torn away from each other again.

"Where have you been?" Kara slipped her glasses back on.

Sam's face brightened. "M'gann took me in. She's awesome. You have to meet her."

"Yes, of course. And you have to meet Alex."

Sam nodded. "Are you really okay?"

"I am, which I never thought possible, but I am."

"Good, that's good. You deserve that."

Kara gripped Sam's hand. "You?"

"Getting there." Sam squeezed Kara's hand.
"Come on, let me help you. I can keep you safe." Kara held off talking about her powers, not wanting to freak out her skittish friend even more.

"Trust me, M'gann can keep me safe. Want to meet her?"

Kara shrugged, nervous. "I'm not good with people"

"That's okay, I specialize in 'not good with people' " A woman appeared at Sam's side, her smile wide and warm, eyes searching Kara's. "You must be Kara."

"M'gann…it's her. I found her! You'll love her," Sam bubbled, mood brighter than a moment ago.

"Hi. Sam said you helped her. Thank you," Kara said.

"No need to thank me, it was a group effort." M'gann reached out with her hand, shaking her head with a smile when Kara just stared at it. "So, what brings you to the park, Kara?"

She held up her sketchbooks. "I like to draw." Motioning to the two of them, she asked, "What about you guys?"

"It has come to my attention that I need to go out more and socialize," Sam said with a roll of her eyes.

"Yeah, I've heard that before," Kara chuckled. "It gets better, supposedly."

M'gann tensed a moment, glancing behind her.

"Kara? Everything okay?"

"Alex, come here…you have to meet Sam."

Sam had gone rigid. Kara reached for her hand, slowly, easing her fingers open. "Hey, it's my sister. She's one of the good guys. I promise."

Alex reached them, expression curious. "Hi."

M'gann reached out a hand first and Alex accepted it. "Nice to meet you."

"You, too. I'm Alex. Kara's sister."

"M'gann and this is –"

"Sam, it's Sam, Alex. Can you believe it?"

Alex reached out her hand, laughing when Sam merely stared at it. A second later M'gann laughed as well and turned to Alex. "I think we're gonna get along just fine."

Turning serious a moment, Alex met Sam's eyes. "Kara told me about you. What you did for her. Thank you. I'm glad she had someone." Her voice cracked at the end and she wiped at her eyes.

Sam pursed her lips. "She helped me, too, and it's not like I had a choice. I had to make sure she got to see the best thing on Earth, again."

Kara swallowed the lump in her throat, meeting Alex's eyes. They both leaned into one another, shoulders bumping. "The best," she whispered.
"We need to get going, but come see us later." M'gann handed a card to Alex.

Kara and Sam stood a moment then hugged each other, hands gripping tightly, memorizing the feel…the look.

After they left, Kara stared at Alex. "Is it safe for us to see her? The last thing I want to do is put her in danger. With Lillian and that weirdo after you…"

Alex held up a hand. "I think we have to, if anything to at least give her a heads up."

"Yeah, you're right."

"I'm sorry; did you just say I was right? Will you go on the record with that?"

Kara made a face. "Ha ha."

"Speaking of being right, since we're here want to practice and then go eat?" Alex pulled a soccer ball out of the bag she had been carrying.

"Yeah, I'd like that." Kara went to kick the ball but fell to the ground. A piercing noise making her cover her ears.

"Hey, what is it? Is it the noise?" Alex huddled next to her, close but making sure not to touch. "Do you need your earplugs?"

About to answer, Kara gritted her teeth when a voice spoke. "He wants me to meet him…who is he? What does he want?"

She rolled over when the ringing stopped and she could breathe again.

"Who wants you to meet him?"

Kara shook her head. "I have no idea. His voice was in my head. He said it was a frequency only I could hear."

"Did he say where?"

"The power plant."

Alex jumped to her feet. "Are you okay? I need to get a team together."

"I'm fine. I'm going with you."

"No. You're not ready."

Getting to her feet, Kara glared at her sister. "I'm better than nothing."

"Kara…"

But, she didn’t listen. A quick check to make sure the coast was clear and Kara took to the sky. Whoever this guy was, she could take him.

She landed near the edge of the plant and did a check that turned up nothing because of all the lead lining. His heartbeat, on the other hand, could not be hidden from her.

"I can hear you." Clenching her fists, she walked forward, biting back the fear trying to take over.
He walked out, ax in hand. "I wondered if you'd show."
"What do you want?"
"You to die."
She raised a brow. "I've heard that before from someone far scarier than you could ever be."
He growled. "Someone needs to show you some manners."

Anger bubbled up in her, outweighing her anxiety. "I've heard that, too."

With a smirk, he charged her. The impact knocking her off her feet, but only for a second. She grabbed him by the arm tossing him into one of the concrete walls around them. Speeding toward him, she prepared like Alex had taught her. She dodged several of his swings and managed to get in a few hits of her own.

Noise off to her left distracted her for a second and he took the opportunity to slice her with his ax. The pain lanced through her, her free hand gripping the gash in her side. She turned toward him, hair falling in her face as she felt her eyes start to burn.

Anger welled up in her, and she welcomed it.

Before she could blast him, a helicopter appeared overhead and a rope was tossed out and Alex started to descend.  "Next time," he said before racing off, slicing through the rope as he leapt into the air.

Kara went to chase him but stopped when Alex dropped to the ground, catching her just in time.  "Are you okay?"

Alex nodded. "I'm fine. You? You're bleeding."

"I'm fine. I should go –"

"I have a team going after him, let's get you back to the DEO."

Grudgingly, Kara agreed. Her side ached, and while she was able to ignore the pain, it did worry her that she'd been hurt. Perhaps her powers weren't fully back…or she was losing them again.

The ride back was silent, Alex giving her a look every now and then that Kara knew meant she was in for a lecture.

When they were in her sister's lab, Alex turned to her. "You can't just run off like that. Lay down."

Kara got on the table and did as told, lifting her shirt to reveal an eight-inch slice across her stomach. "I…I'm sorry."

"Are my powers gone? The wound isn't healing." Kara poked at it, Alex swatting her hands away.  "Stop it, and you're not invulnerable. There are things that can hurt you. That's why we're training."

"Are you sure? I'm not going to lose them?"

Alex shook her head. "Nope, now let me look at that."
Alex slipped on a pair of gloves and lifted Kara's shirt, pausing for a second at the sight of the scars on her abdomen.

"I am sorry, Alex."

Alex probed the wound. "There's something in there. And don't be sorry, listen to me. If you want J'onn to let you work with us he has to know you're going to follow orders."

Hissing when something was pulled free, she glared at her sister. "Ow. Fine, I'll listen."

Raising a brow, Alex went over to a group of computers and set the shard of ax on a scanner. Kara sat up, watching with relief as she healed in seconds.

"Agent Danvers, I hear there was an incident today," J'onn said from the doorway.

Kara jumped to her feet. "It was me. I heard this voice in my head and it freaked me out. It won't happen again. I mean a real voice, not a pretend one."

J'onn stared at her, his expression unreadable. Kara wasn't too worried since she had her powers back, he wasn't able to read her mind like before.

"As long as everyone's okay." He gave a meaningful look to Alex, who nodded.

"Yep, all is fine. And we have a possible lead. We got a bit of his ax."

J'onn stepped over to her, reading the results on the screen. "Good work, we can try and track this."

***

Alex read through the reports on Vartox, again. They hadn't been able to track him as of yet, but when he came out of whatever hole he was in, they'd have him. They knew he moved around by truck, but it had alien tech on it that altered its appearance.

Sam showing up also had her on edge, and she hoped it was a coincidence. Kara had agreed to go home a few hours ago with a portable sun lamp Alex had been working on.

She packed up, ready to go and see if Kara was up for a visit to Sam and M'gann when an alarm going off derailed her.

"Agent Danvers, Vartox is on the move. Get a team ready," J'onn's voice came over the intercom.

Within minutes she stood in the garage, geared up with her team.

"Listen up, he's strong, can move fast, and has an ax that'll leave a scar so stay away from it. We want to take him alive if we can, be careful out there."

They loaded into the vehicles and were on the road thirty seconds later. Vartox heading toward the city and they had a seven-minute window to stop him. Alex gunned the engine.

Screeching to a halt they swerved to block the oncoming semi. It sped up.

"Spread out."

They waited guns raised, bodies tense, and then Kara was there, in the middle of the road, unmoving as the semi split down the middle around her. Alex's heart jumped into her throat at the sight.
Vartox flew out the broken windshield and Alex's team ran toward him.

He took out two agents with one swing of his ax, another with a fist. The three remaining flanked him, but Kara came up and punched him, knocking him a quarter of a mile down the road. She flew after him, Alex and the others getting into the car to catch up.

By the time they arrived Kara was on the ground, ax too close to her face for Alex's liking.

"Heat it up, give it all you got," she yelled.

Kara did, and a moment later there as a bright flash and then the alien flew back, bits of his own weapon impaling him. Alex moved in to cuff him but he mumbled something about them not being prepared for the real threat and then stabbed himself in the heart.

"Get him in the truck. I don't want any civilians to see this."

Alex made sure they did as told, and went over to Kara. She had a large gash on her arm, her clothes were trashed, but the smile on her face told Alex that her sister was going to make one hell of a hero.

"Okay, that was pretty badass, I'll admit that. But that thing you have wrapped around your head? Please tell me that's not my pillowcase?"

"It was last minute, cut me some slack." Kara's smile didn’t fade, if anything it got brighter.

Alex nodded toward the injury. "Does it hurt?"

Kara shrugged. "I've had way worse."

"Okay, head back to the apartment. I'll meet you there in a few to clean you up. And how did you even know to come?"

Kara glanced toward the ground. "I keep track of your heartbeat when I need to feel grounded… I heard it pick and…well, surprise?"

Alex laughed. "I can't get mad at that. You saved my life as well as theirs." She nodded to the remaining agents.

Kara launched into the sky before she could turn around.

Alex called in for a clean-up crew, briefed J'onn, then headed home.

Once inside the apartment, she found Kara in the bathroom fussing with a pair of tweezers.

"What are you doing? Stop…let me do that." Alex took them away and pulled out a medical kit she kept on hand.

She dug around until she found a pair of forceps. "This is probably gonna hurt."

"And I assure you, I've been through a heck of a lot worse."

Alex pulled out another sliver of the ax. Kara didn’t so much as flinch. The gash healed within seconds and her sister was off the edge of the tub, heading to the kitchen.

"Hungry?"

Alex shook her head. "Sure."
Cleaning up the supplies she made sure to put the bit of metal in a special container to take into the DEO. When done she went to the kitchen.

"Pizza and potstickers sound good?"

Alex nodded, grabbing two glasses and filling them with water. She handed one to Kara while she made the food order.

"So, about tonight…"

Kara made a face. "I'll replace the pillowcase. I just need a job first."

"It's not about that, well not really. I guess it's about two things. First, we need to get you something better than linens to fight crime in."

"Well, tonight was an exception. I'm pretty sure I have a ways to go before I'm out in the field." Kara fidgeted with the cuffs of her shirt, bundling them up in her hands.

"Maybe, but you did good out there." Alex cleared her throat, unsure how to say what she wanted. "You mentioned my heartbeat? That you listen to it?"

Kara's face reddened. "Oh, that. Remember when we were kids and you told me to pick and sound and focus on it? Well, your heartbeat…that's what I chose because I knew you'd always be there. I missed it, a lot, when I was…gone. And then when I got my powers back I focused on it again because you ground me and I don't ever want to lose you again." The last part came out in a whisper and Alex knew how hard it was for Kara to admit.

Alex took a breath, then another. Then wrapped her arms around her sister. "I love you so much and I don't want to lose you either."

A knock on the door had Kara pulling away and wiping at her eyes. "I got it."

***

Lena shuffled some papers into a neat pile, stuck them in a folder, then dumped it in her desk drawer. Her head ached, and dots danced in her vision. Checking her watch she confirmed she'd been working for eighteen hours straight.

Then again, taking over Maxwell Lord's company was a hell of a lot more complicated than she had anticipated. The man had his fingers in everything, some legitimate projects and quite a few that were shady at best.

Her lawyers had dug, her investigative team had dug, and she had dug through what they compiled for her. Lord was nearing Lex in his paranoid delusions about aliens and their powers, as well as his ego when it came to being the one to protect the planet from them.

She didn’t know what set him off, didn’t care to be honest, but she wanted his company. For all his deluded ramblings against Superman and efforts to build things to destroy, he did do some good.

And Lena would push forth those things. The elevated train system to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and help with traffic, his research into cloning while eerie, did have positive connotations for growing organs for those in need. However, his anti-alien technology was going to be halted.

Immediately.
She blew out a breath when the next file in her pile had a red tag. She couldn’t deal with another crazy plan tonight. There were enough of them floating around in her office at home.

Jess had gone home three hours ago and Lena had promised not to stay late. Oops. With a grunt, she shouldered her bag and took the elevator down to the lobby. Pausing a moment, she couldn’t remember if she'd driven today or not, and dammit she hadn’t. Stepping onto the sidewalk she hailed a cab, waited a few moments, hailed another one, then finally one stopped.

Sliding into the seat she gave her address and hoped this guy wasn’t going to chat her up. Thankfully, he didn’t. Ten minutes later she was in her penthouse, sipping a glass of scotch.

She kicked her shoes off, not caring where they landed, then unzipped her skirt letting it fall to the floor. Within seconds she was in sweats and a t-shirt, hair in a messy bun, and glasses on.

In the hallway, she veered toward the kitchen. Grabbing a container of chopped veggies and some homemade dip she plopped down on the couch and turned on the television. A romantic comedy of some kind played and as the scotch worked its way through her system and she relaxed, her mind began to wander.

Blonde hair, blue eyes, and a timid expression came to mind.

Kara.

She shook away the thoughts. No need to get her hopes up when the woman hadn't called her, again.

Frustrated, she slipped on a pair of shoes and headed to M'gann's. Over the last few weeks, she and Sam had spent many a night talking and Lena was more determined than ever to help the woman.
Kara flexed her muscles, liking the way it felt. She still had a ways to go in the filling out department, but she was getting there. Her powers had been back for over a month now, and she still reveled in the sensations. Her training was going well and her fighting skills weren't half bad. Of course, it would take months...years for her to master what they were teaching her, but she knew the basics.

She picked up a pen and erased the number 3 on the dry erase board and filled in a 4. 4 days without her abilities causing an accident. At least around the apartment. People still made her nervous and wary and at times jumpy when out in public, but nothing out of the normal had happened, thankfully.

Opening the freezer, a dozen burritos and twelve chicken breasts fell out. She grinned at the memory of the day before.

"Ready?" Alex had asked.

Kara turned and gaped. "What are you wearing? I thought you said we were grocery shopping?"

Alex smoothed down her camo shirt, adjusted her utility belt, and made a show of shining her combat boots. "We are. And when we get there you'll see why I'm dressed this way."

"Right, are you okay?"

Grabbing her by the arm, Alex shook her head. "Come on."

Half an hour later they were cruising a huge parking lot.

"Use your powers and get us a spot."

"That's not one of my abilities."

Alex huffed, honking the horn. "I know...I mean do you see any? Anything?"

Kara lowered her glasses. "I see one over there." She pointed to a spot eleven aisles over.

"Go, now! Lay down in it. Melt the cars around it. Do whatever you have to."

Kara hopped out of the car and sped to the space. She made a show of looking for something on the ground, ignoring all the honks and other colorful phrases directed at her.

When Alex finally parked and got out, Kara glared. "I am never doing that again."

Alex raised a brow. "Yes, you will. Now, we need to find a cart."

Once that task was accomplished, Kara wanted nothing more than to call it a day. The inside of Costco was huge. High ceilings with that annoying fluorescent lighting. People everywhere pushing you aside to get a vat of mustard or three gallons of mayonnaise.

"Why are we..." Kara's voice trailed off when she saw Alex put a massive box of cookies in the cart.

Then a woman offered her a free sample of some sort of chicken, which Kara was too polite to say no to.

In the frozen section, she thought she'd died and gone to heaven. So many pizzas and potstickers in
one place. In one smooth motion, she'd filled the cart.

"Kara, we can't get all of this."

"I'll get another cart...oooh, that guy's giving out smoothie samples. Do you want one? I'll get two in case you do."

"This was supposed to save money," Alex muttered.

"I love this place. Massive amounts of food and free samples. We should come here every week."

Alex's shoulders slumped. "J'onn was right; I totally shouldn't have taken you here."

"Don't be silly. If you didn't, who would help you carry the new freezer we're going to need for all this food?"

Kara wasn't positive, but she thought Alex might have whimpered.

Now, though, Kara had the day off, sort of. Dr. Grey saw her twice a month at her office. But, Kara didn't mind the trips anymore, if anything, she enjoyed the walk. It gave her time to think, not that she always liked what her mind whipped up.

However, with her abilities back, an awesome therapist, and the fact Kara was doing the work to pull herself out of the psychological mire she had been in, things were looking up. Add to that she and Sam had found each other and life was awesome. In fact, later today she and Alex had made plans to finally go and see Sam and M'gann. Kara had put it off until they knew for sure that they wouldn’t be putting her friend at risk.

Her anxiety was under control for the most part. When it kicked in, she used one of the coping techniques she’d learned to get through it. Being alone in the apartment overnight didn’t bother her. And having her powers back helped ease the feelings of vulnerability that had plagued her.

So, she knew what the next steps were.

1-Making friends.

2 -Getting a job.

The first one didn’t thrill her. Alex was enough, but she could already hear Dr. Grey telling her it was unhealthy. Hopefully, she and Sam could pick back up, it would be nice to have someone who knew. Who could relate to the bad moods and understand them.

Though she had to admit she thought of Lena Luthor often and had been tempted to call her a few times but fear held her back. Fear of what exactly, was what kept thoughts of the woman close to the surface.

The second one made her cringe. The DEO had forged all sorts of documents for Kara, and given her a college degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences. She'd passed the exams they'd given her a few months back with ease. Krypton was far more advanced than Earth, but she needed to learn the different names of a few things and did so with no problem...as long as she didn’t have to spell anything.

So, job wise, she could apply for a lot of different things, but she knew after talking to Kal that she needed something with flexible hours, easy access to an exit, and a boss who wouldn’t ask too many questions. That narrowed down the field significantly.
She opened the door to her therapist's office, surprised to run into Lena. The woman looked…well, she looked terrible. Dark circles under bloodshot eyes. Baggy clothes. Skin paler than usual. And even though Kara tried not to, she picked up the irregular beat of her heart.

"Lena?"

The woman looked at her, eyes darting back and forth, and Kara recognized the look. Had seen it many times in her own eyes.

Fear.

"Are you okay? Is something wrong? What can I do?"

"I just came out of a therapist's office. I think it's safe to say I'm not okay." She took her phone out of her bag but didn’t do anything with it.

"I noticed. You know there's a back exit so you don't have to worry about running into people?"

Lena wrinkled her forehead. "Really?"

"Yeah." And not able to leave the obviously distressed woman alone, "Do you want to get a coffee or something? Maybe an herbal tea would do you good?"

Alex had told her to keep her distance because of Lillian, but seeing Lena in this condition, knowing that something was haunting her behind those green eyes, Kara simply couldn’t. Not that she wanted to, which was something she'd think about another time. Or never.

Lena froze, staring at Kara. "Why? You haven’t bothered to call me…why now? Why are you here? Will you just disappear, again?"

Kara spoke in the softest tone she had ever used, surprising herself with how sincere it sounded. "Because you look like you could use a friend and to be honest, so could I. And I won't go anywhere this time."

Lena slipped her phone back into her bag. "Do you plan on leaving if…if someone comments on seeing us together?"

Kara smiled. "No. I really don't give a damn what other people think." And she didn’t. A new realization she'd have to share with Dr. Grey. "Hold on one second." She ran into the office and told the secretary that she needed to reschedule but everything was fine. Then she ran back out and slowed her steps when she approached Lena.

"So, know any good places around here?"

Lena shook her head, face still pale. "No, this is my first time in the area."

"Okay, I got it then." Kara led her to a small café that she had spent many a mid-morning at. The crowd wasn’t too bad and she managed to snag a table for two in the back, away from most of the street noise.

"Have a seat. I'll be right back."

At the counter, she ordered two herbal teas and a few pastries keeping Lena in her sight at all times. She knew the expression on the other woman's face, looking for an escape. Making her steps louder than necessary Kara approached the table, making sure to pay extra attention to her strength so she...
didn’t break anything.

"Here, this should help." She set down the cups of tea and sat across from Lena.

"Why are you doing this?"

Kara raised an eyebrow. "What?"

Lena motioned with her hands. "This…being nice, talking to me, getting me tea…It doesn’t seem like you."

Hiding the hurt at the comment, Kara responded, "Because it's the right thing to do…and I want to and it is me. I think…I think I messed up and you have the wrong impression of me." Kara didn’t explain further, not able to understand why she wanted Lena to think well of her.

Lena grabbed her bag. "I'm sorry, this was a bad idea."

Kara got to her feet. "Please, don't go. Let's start over, okay? I'm Kara Danvers and the first time you met me I was not okay. The second time I was…am scared. Since then, I've been getting better. I'm still a work in progress and have so much to learn…but I would really like it if we can have some tea and talk or not talk because I know some people, myself included, are not really fans of the talking thing. Though, I'm kind of rambling right now."

Lena clenched her hands around her purse, eyes flitting to the exit then back to Kara. "I'm Lena Luthor, that alone scares a lot of people off, and the first time you met me I was new to the city and under a lot of stress, and since then nothing has changed. But, I'd be lying if I didn’t say that it upset me you didn’t call…and I'll stop talking now because that was embarrassing to admit." She laughed a bit but sat back down.

"I'm sorry. I…" Kara struggled, not knowing where the line was on sharing too much. She'd never had to worry about it before. "I really wanted to call you. Like a lot. But I'm kind of…damaged. Is that the right word? Anyways, a lot of things scare me and I'm not very good at making friends."

Lena's eyes widened. "I don't…You aren't..." She blew out a breath. "I'm sorry about what I said about it not seeming like you, that…I don't think that. I'm not great at making friends either. How about we work on it? Together?"

"I'd like that." Kara relaxed, slightly, fidgeting with the cuffs of her shirt. "How do you like the city so far?"

"It's all right. I don't get to see much of it because of work."

"That sucks. I didn’t go out a lot at first, but now I explore more."

Lena nodded toward the camera. "Any good pictures?"

Kara adjusted her glasses. "Not really, it's just a thing."

"I remember, let me see."

She handed over the camera, a bit shy, but feeling like it was the right thing to do. Lena scanned through the images, raising a brow at some, asking where others were taken, then handed it back.

"Does it help?"

Kara nodded while sipping her tea. "It does. I thought it was a waste of time at first, but I have to
admit that after a couple of outings with it, the anxiety went down. And now, I enjoy it."

"Hm. Do you find it helpful, therapy?"

It was the last thing she wanted to talk about, but somehow she knew to tread carefully with Lena about this topic. "Yes. At first, I wasn’t a fan. Talking about myself is one of my least favorite things, but after a while, it got easier and all the stuff I was dealing with got more manageable."

Lena nodded, facing away from Kara. "I have dreams. Bad dreams. You ever have that?"

Images of Lillian flashed in front of her and Kara shivered. "Yeah, I also had a friend who did." Her thoughts went to Sam.

"It probably seems silly to go to therapy for that…but it scares me, they scare me."

Kara knew what Lena was feeling. She wondered what tormented Lena…if it was memories of Lillian or something else.

"Dreams can't hurt you and memories...well, if they can, they already have."

Lena let out a light chuckle. "You sound very wise."

Kara laughed. "No, not at all. Just my experience, for me it was worth it to dig through them in therapy."

"I hope so, can't say I'm a fan so far. Then again today was only my second visit. The dreams are a recent thing."

Kara took the last bite from her pastry. "I know the feeling. I've been doing it for a long time...do you wanna talk about it? The dreams? My friend used to talk to me, said it helped her."

Lena wrapped her hands around the mug of tea. "No, I don't think...no."

Smiling, Kara finished her drink. "It's okay."

Lena snagged one of the pastries and picked at it. "So, what do you do, Kara Danvers? Other than rescuing CEO's from breaking down after heavy therapy appointments."

She shrugged. "Well, I take random photos, have a million hobbies, but job wise...nothing right now. I was going to pick up some applications this afternoon."

"What kind of job are you looking for?"

Kara sighed. "Any kind. I don't have any work experience, so I can't be too picky. I mean really, I'll take whoever hires me."

"Okay, you're hired."

Kara choked. "Huh? I can't work for you?"

Lena raised a brow. "And why not?"

"I don't know the first thing about the business world. I literally have no skills you would find useful."

"I'm not asking you to be a board member, Kara," she said, shaking her head. "We have an
Kara bit her lip, thinking. She needed a job. Lena seemed nice. And Alex wouldn't have to bear the financial burden of looking after them both anymore. Not to mention she wouldn't have to go through the agonizing process of sitting in waiting rooms to be interviewed. Then again, it didn't really meet the requirements Kal had told her to look for.

"You can say no. I just thought I'd offer. My good deed for the year and all that," Lena smiled, but Kara saw something in the woman's eyes that…

"Okay, deal. Um…I don't…I can't afford a new wardrobe so…"

The CEO eyed her then winked. "Well, since you won't be doing any presentations I don't think you really need to worry about it. Just no jeans and t-shirts, please."

Kara grinned. "That, I can manage."

"And on that note, I have to go. Business to run and all that." Lena got to her feet, digging in her purse and bringing out her wallet.

Kara waved her off. "I already paid."

"Hmm, bribing the boss already?"

"What? No… I didn’t know. I just thought it was what friends do… was that wrong?"

Lena froze, her eyes rising to meet Kara's a second before flitting away. "No, it wasn’t wrong at all. It was very sweet." This time when Lena smiled, it reached her eyes, the fear Kara had seen lingering there since they bumped into each other was gone. "Well, see you Monday then."

Kara nodded. "Monday."

And then Lena was gone and Kara felt oddly alone. She frowned, unsure what it meant.

***

Alex checked her badge making sure it read F.B.I. then headed into the National City Police Department. She headed up to the third floor, surprised to see a sign reading Science Division. Pushing the door open a tall man walked by her.

"Excuse me. I'm looking for Detective Ramon."

He didn’t stop while he spoke, "In there, but he's in a mood. Tough morning."

Alex knew, it was the reason she was here. She scanned the desks for names until she landed on a plaque reading Miller. Heading toward it she ran into a man with an average build, dark hair, and a goatee.

"Let me guess, a Fed?"

Alex held up her badge. "Guilty."

"Great, Agent Danvers, you can take the latest nightmare off of my hands." He grinned and Alex couldn't help but return it.
"I can do that for you. I heard this guy hurt a lot of people, kind of strange looking."

Ramon snorted. "Kind of? He has an eye on the back of his head and his blood is blue. And we know that because his skin is clear...as in see-through. So, yes, he is kind of strange looking. Are you like the master of understatement?"

"I guess so. Can I see the suspect?" Alex hated this part of a pickup.

The detective grinned. "The quicker you get him out of here the better."

They made their way down four flights of stairs, putting them in the basement Alex noted. They had three cells with reinforced bars, no windows, and six armed guards. All of whom looked like they'd rather be anywhere than there.

"Here you go. Let me guess, you're going to hand me some official paperwork and then take him into custody, probably a black van with no plates and I'll never hear about this again?"

Alex shrugged. "Well, I do happen to have an envelope with your name on it and some friends waiting outside."

"Figured. Though, I can't say I'm mad. I might get home in time for dinner."

The floor rumbled, the bars rattled, and then a bright light blinded Alex. Something hard hit her from behind and she instinctually put herself between Ramon and the alien behind them. They crashed to the floor, choking on the dust in the air.

"You okay?"

"Fine, you?"

"Peachy, can you get off me now? Not that I mind, but your shoulder doesn't look too great."

Alex rolled over, groaning when her shoulder sent bolts of pain throughout her body. "That sucks."

"Let me help you."

With a firm grip, Ramon helped Alex to her feet. She wobbled a bit and when the agents from the DEO rushed in, she knew they'd lost the alien.

"I want a full sweep of this place. I want to know how the hell he got out and all available cameras looking for him." Alex called J'onn letting him know what happened.

"Hey, thanks for saving my life."

Alex shrugged, wincing at the movement.

"Okay, we need to get you upstairs."

"I can take her, sir."

Turning at the voice, Alex tried to hide her surprise at seeing Cassie.

"You sure, Miller? I know you want my job when I transfer, but I'm pretty sure they're bringing in someone new."

"Yeah, I'm good. Alex and I go way back," Cassie winked at Alex and then stepped up to her,
wrapping an arm around her waist and helping her up the stairs.

Alex hissed in pain at the first step, glaring at the ones still to go. At the top, she almost passed out from the pain, but Cassie, despite her size, was quite strong.

"So, a cop huh?" Alex gritted out.

"Not really, more of a scientist. I was down here trying to get some samples for us to keep on record for the database."

Alex nodded, taking a break. "So, you don't go out in the field?"

"I didn’t say that," Cassie said. "I go when there's a call that fits our parameters."

Alex nodded. "Hmm, I guess we'll probably run into each other on occasion then."

"Maybe you'll get lucky."

And before Alex could even try and think of a witty retort, her team was there. "Agent Danvers, we can take a look at you," said one of her team.

"I'll see ya 'round, Danvers."

Alex went to move away, then changed her mind. Reaching into her pocket she pulled out a piece of paper. "This is my number, in case you find him first."

Cassie took it, a smirk on her face. "Want to bet on that?"

Alex raised a brow, "Another time."

"Where's the fun in that?"

And with that Alex was whisked away by a concerned looking agent. They drove her back to the DEO facility in the desert taking her to medical upon arrival. They poked and prodded, scanned and probed. A dislocated shoulder which they put back in place, and a few scrapes they cleaned up.

With her arm in a sling, she called Kara.

"Hey."

"Hi, where are you? We have to go meet Sam and M'gann."

Alex winced when she moved wrong.

"What was that? Are you in pain? Did you get hurt? I'm on the way –"

"Stop. I'm fine. Just a bit banged up. The doc here took care of me and I'm gonna relax a bit and head home tomorrow, okay?"

"Why?"

Alex imagined the forehead crinkle appearing on Kara and smiled. "Because it's tough to drive at the moment and I want to get some work done. I'll be fine. Go have fun with your friend."

"Are you sure? I can be there in like five seconds."

"I'm positive. We're trying to keep the whole secret identity thing secret, remember?"
"Yeah. But if you need anything call me."

"I will."

"Promise me."

"I promise."

"Okay, I love you."

"Love you, too."

Alex ended the call and laid on the couch in her office. All she wanted to do was get some sleep. And if she thought about a certain Cassie Miller, that was totally a coincidence.

***

Lena hung up the phone, making a face at Jess when the assistant smirked.

"When will they learn that trying to intimidate me just pisses me off?" She rubbed her temples ready to call it a day.

"Probably never. I think they like the challenge. Will you need anything else?"

She thought for a moment. "Yes, I forgot to tell you I hired a new intern. Her name is Kara Danvers and she starts Monday."

Jess looked up from her tablet. "Our intern program is full. Unless it's someone from a university we work with? I might be able to get one of the board members to take on two?"

Lena frowned, from the way Kara had talked it didn't sound like she had a college degree. "No. Nothing like that. Is there anywhere we can put her? The mailroom? Accounting?"

Jess shook her head. "I'm sorry. There isn't. You made sure that we wouldn't have any staffing issues with the move."

"Well, you're taking on an assistant then."

"Ms. Luthor?"

Lena got to her feet, grabbing her briefcase. "It'll just be temporary until we can find somewhere else for her. Show her the ropes, okay? She just needs a little help."

"Of course," Jess said, in a tone that let Lena know her assistant knew she was a softie despite what everyone else assumed. "Have a good night."

Lena raised a brow. "You better be leaving right behind me."

"Of course."

Lena's drive home was filled with images of Kara intermingled with the words of her therapist. She liked Dr. Barron, he was soft spoken and didn’t write off her issues to being a woman in a man's world or any of that other sexist bs she was used to. He listened, asking few questions, and not telling her how she should feel.

Today had been her second session and though part of her felt ridiculous for going, another part of
her knew she needed to deal with her nightmares. She'd stopped going through Lex and Lillian's files weeks ago not wanting to add any more fuel to them.

However, her conversations with Sam fleshed out the bare bones analytical tone of the files. Now, she knew about sounds, taste, the pain, the mocking, and so much more. How Sam managed to make it through she had no idea. The woman had to be one of the strongest she'd ever met.

Lena hadn't learned any more about the Kryptonian, but she had a gut feeling Sam was holding back. Not that she could blame her. Aside from who Lena's mother was, she could only guess at the protectiveness Sam would feel for anyone who she went through that with.

She pulled into her parking spot with a sense of dread. For the first time in her life, the idea of going home to an empty apartment scared her. She forced herself out of the car, took a few calming breaths and headed toward the elevator. A scratching noise followed by heavy breathing made her move quicker. She was no horror movie idiot who planned to stop and investigate.

Her hand clutched her taser, keeping it at the ready while she waited for the elevator door to open. She flew inside turning to hit the "close" button immediately. Nothing stared back at her, no shadows moved, but something was out there. Someone.

The ride up to her penthouse crawled by and when the elevator released her she was at her door and in her place in under ten seconds. She locked the door, leaning against it, heart pounding.

"Dammit."

She cursed herself for being scared. For letting the dreams get to her. The worry of Lillian showing up. For everything…

Tossing her bag on the floor she went to her room, flipping all the lights on as she went. She put on a pair of comfy pajamas, picked up the book she was reading off her nightstand and went to the kitchen.

Pulling a bowl of pre-cut fruit from the fridge she headed toward the couch, not planning on doing anything else the rest of the evening. She put the television on as background noise so her imagination couldn't run away from her, again.

"Pull it together, Lena."

News coverage of an incident at the NCPD caught her eye. In the background cars burned while others were overturned. Storefront windows were shattered. Witnesses spoke to reporters, their versions all different from one another. Lena knew it was alien related, that kind of damage and chaos done by one person…her heart started to thump against her ribs.

Was this it? What she'd read in the files so far indicated something like this was coming. Destruction, chaos, and death. Pulling the blanket off the back of the couch she wrapped it around herself.

Too soon.

It was too soon.

This wasn’t related to her family. She could stop what they'd planned. She had to. Otherwise, the Luthor name would be irrevocably ruined and she had no intention of letting all the good things she had done and planned to do, go down the drain.

Mind made up she got to her feet and changed before heading to M'gann's bar. A few nightmares
were worth it if she saved the city.

And Kara her mind reminded her.

Which brought on a whole new set of thoughts.

Running into Kara today had been interesting. They had talked. A real conversation, and though it was awkward at times, Lena enjoyed it. She got a better look at Kara, noting the thin scars on her face she tried to hide by letting her hair fall in her face or looking in a certain direction. The way she fidgeted with her fingers. Her smile not quite reaching her eyes. It didn’t take a genius to figure out she had been through something.

The decision to hire her had been impulsive at best, but she wanted to help. Could tell that Kara was lost when it came to knowing the first thing about getting a job. And there was that pull. Something she couldn’t put a name to but was helpless to stop even though she knew it had to.

Now, in jeans and a sweatshirt, she grabbed her bag and headed out – Taser in hand, just in case.

***

Kara grabbed a sweater from the closet before she remembered she'd forgotten to tell Alex she'd gotten a job. She debated sending a text but opted to wait and do it in person.

With a sigh, she pulled at the cuff of her shirt before deciding to go and see Sam on her own. The thought made her nervous. A new place. A bar for aliens. She'd only spoken to Sam briefly so had the essentials and nothing more.

Next time Alex would come. Kara needed the two most important people from her life to talk and get along and…just bring Sam into her family. Pulling on a jacket she headed out the door.

A minute later she stood in an alley, a mural on the wall catching her eye.

"It's how you can find a safe place…in case you ever need one," M'gann said from behind her.

Kara jumped a bit at the noise. "I've seen this somewhere else."

"There are a few around the city. Thought you should know."

"Thanks."

"Where's Alex?"

Kara turned. "She got hurt in a work thing and couldn’t make it. I'll bring her next time."

M'gann's eyes were full of understanding and compassion and Kara was glad Sam had found her.

"I'm sorry, is she okay?"

"She told me she'll be fine which probably means she's in a lot of pain and doesn’t want me to hover around her…I tend to get overly anxious when she gets hurt."

"Understandable. I'm sure she'll be okay."

"Yeah, I hope so."

M'gann cocked her head to the side. "Come on, Sam's inside and she's been talking about this for the past week."
Kara cleared her throat. "Um, I don't want to worry her or you, but I feel like I should let you know that Lillian is still out there. The DEO is trying to find her…but ever since that thing last month, there's been fears she'll head back here now."

"Ah, you mean the woman who can fly like Superman and is just as strong?"

Kara nodded. "Yep, her."

M'gann winked. "I promise Sam is in good hands should Lillian try and hurt her, again."

Following M'gann into the bar, Kara knew what to expect but it didn’t prepare her. A place full of aliens. A place where she wasn’t the outsider. Somewhere a mishap with her strength wouldn’t cause a riot or out her.

Kara's eyes scanned the room, taking it all in. "This is amazing."

M'gann smiled. "We all need somewhere. Sam's in the back, I'll bring you two something to eat in a bit."

Nodding, Kara sped up, excited to see her friend. She knocked on the door, grinning like a fool when it opened seconds later to reveal Sam.

They both reached out at the same time, pulling the other into a hug. Kara closed her eyes, concentrating on the sound of Sam's heart, her smell, memorizing everything…just in case.

Reluctantly, they pulled apart.

"Come in," Sam ushered Kara into what appeared to be a mix between an office and an apartment. "Is this where you live?"

Sam headed toward a table with four chairs. "Yeah, it's pretty great. The quiet got to me at first, but music helps. M'gann has great taste in tunes."

Kara glanced at the stereo before sitting. She took a moment to focus and realized she couldn’t hear anything…not even the bar outside. Lowering her glasses she realized it was lead lined. No wonder she could never hear Sam…she swallowed the lump in her throat realizing if not for that day in the park, she probably never would have found her.

"Hey, you okay?" Sam reached across the table, hand landing on top of Kara's.

Kara shook her head. "Yeah, I'm just really glad you were in the park that day."

"Me too. So, tell me about you…what have you been doing? What's your life like? It's been like a year!"

Kara leaned back in her chair, a smile forming on her face. "It's great. Alex…having Alex back is the best. And Eliza and Jeremiah and my cousin, it's all falling back into place." She leaned forward, arms resting on the table as she fidgeted. "It was hard at first, I had so much anxiety and the nightmares…” She shook her head. "But, it's getting better. I even got a job today."

"That's awesome. I'm so happy for you."

"And you? What have you been doing?"

Sam made a face. "Not as much as you. It took me a bit to get here, but as soon as M'gann took me
in things got better. She can do this thing...she can read my memories. It's pretty wild, but she helps keep me calm and knows when things are bad. She listens to me, too, and makes sure I learn stuff. She has me studying now so I can get my GED."

Kara listened as her friend talked, wondering if M'gann and J'onn had the same abilities and what that might mean. She'd gotten the impression he was the last of his kind.

"And I just started therapy, which sucks, but I'm told it'll get better." Sam rolled her sleeves up and Kara braced herself for what she would see, blinking when she saw only smooth skin.

Reaching forward with more speed than normal, she ran her fingers over Sam's arms. "You don't have any scars?"

Sam made a face. "No. Why would I?"

Swallowing, Kara took off her jacket then pulled up her sleeves. Sam gasped, fingers shaking when she traced over the scars. "I...why. Lillian?"

Kara pulled her arms back, gently, pulling her sleeves back down. "I don't like to look at them."

Sam squinted at her. "That's why you hide your face...oh, Kara...you're beautiful. Don't let that bitch take any more from you."

"Working on it." Kara cleared her throat then. "You know Lillian is still out there and I did something that will definitely make her set her sights on National City."

Tensing, Sam's eyes darkened. "She won't get me a second time."

"No, she won't. I'll protect you," Kara said.

Sam smiled. "That's nice, but I'd feel terrible if you got hurt. We both know what she's capable of." Sam got out of her chair and grabbed a soda from a small fridge. "Are you safe? Can Alex protect you? I'm sure M'gann would be fine with you staying here if you wanted." Sam paced a few steps then sat.

Sam's body radiated tension and Kara's brow wrinkled, then realization dawned on her and she made a decision. She took a breath, fighting the rising anxiety in what she was about to say. "You know I got my powers back, right?"


"Um, you know that woman who saved the plane last month?"

Sam's face turned serious. "No way...that was you?"

Kara nodded.

"Whoa, you're like a...you're a Super. Holy shit."

"You can't tell anyone. I'm supposed to keep it a secret, but I trust you and I want you to know I'll do what it takes to keep you safe," Kara said.

The door opened and M'gann glanced at Sam a moment before nodding. "I got some burgers for you guys. Hope you're hungry."
Kara dug in, not one to turn a meal down. "Mmm, these are so good."

Sam took a huge bite. "Just wait until you have her chocolate cake."

"Don't talk with food in your mouth." M'gann swatted at Sam's arm.

They talked about random things while they ate, keeping the conversation light. Once they were alone again, they leaned in close, still not used to being able to see and touch one another.

"I'll bring Alex next time, you'll love her."

"Yeah, I kind of feel like I already know her. She okay?"

"Fine, just a work thing." Kara hoped she sounded convincing. "How goes the studying?"

Sam shrugged. "Boring, but I kind of made a new friend and she's helping me with it. She's really smart and M'gann said she's a good person so..."

Kara smiled, happy for Sam. "I have to meet her."

"Uh, yeah. Maybe. I mean, I'm not sure. She's got a lot of work and a weird schedule."

"Well, if you ever need a study buddy hit me up. I can help, too." She knew Sam well enough to hear the hesitation but didn’t push.

Sam grinned, wide and maniacal. "You'll regret offering to do that!"

Kara shook her head. "Never!" She let out a sigh. "How did you make a friend? I'm not very good at it. There's this woman I keep running into and I totally messed up by not calling her but I was still an anxious mess and then the next time I had this weird feeling, ya know?"

Sam shook her head. "What do you mean a weird feeling?"

Kara didn’t know how to explain it; part of her had hoped Sam would back her up. "I don't know. I just felt weird? It's probably just anxiety because I don't know her, but I think of her a lot, but I don't know what a lot is? I'm not explaining it right."

Laughing, Sam tossed a napkin at Kara. "You like her!"

"What?" Kara felt the blush creeping up her face. "I do not! I don't even know her and like...I don't...I mean I can't...Dating isn't for me. Not after...I can't. It's something else."

Sam's face turned serious. "Hey, it's okay. What I've learned is it doesn't take much to give me a weird feeling. Try not to think about it and just be you. You're a great person and whoever she is would be lucky to have you as a friend."

Kara scrunched her nose. "I guess."

"Speaking of dating though, have you..."

Kara shook her head. "Nope."

"Yeah, me either."

Kara rubbed her forehead. "I don't think I want to."
Sam took a sip of her soda. "Me either. Too stressful. I mean how do I tell someone about..." she waved her hands around. "And expect them not to run away? It would be nice but reality sucks."

Pursing her lips, Kara took Sam's hand in hers. "Hey, you were always stronger than me. I know there is someone out there for you and you deserve to be happy in whatever way you want."

Sam squeezed her hand back. "You, too."

Kara nodded but didn’t agree. She had far too much baggage on top of being an alien. Most days she could barely handle it, how in the world was she supposed to expect someone else to deal with it?

"I should get going. I have an early day tomorrow." Kara stood.

"You'll come back soon? Or we can maybe meet up somewhere?"

"I'd like that."

Again they hugged, tight and long, neither of them not wanting to let go.
"Are you sure about this?" Alex leaned against the bathroom door, forehead scrunched in concern.

Kara checked herself over in the mirror one last time. Khaki pants, brown belt, flats, and a blue button up. She fidgeted with the tie, loosening it just a tad. Her hair was half up, just enough falling down to obscure the sides, though the scars were diminishing.

Satisfied, she slipped on her glasses and made sure her earplugs were in her bag.

"Yes. Not only does Dr. Grey think it's good progress for me, but I want this. I want to figure out who I am. Who Kara Danvers is after all this time."

Alex hovered close to her. "Okay, but you know you don’t have to. Like there's no rush."

"I know, but if I waited until I was ready, I'd never leave." Kara noted her sister favoring the arm she'd hurt the other day. "Wait, do you need me to stay? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. I just want to make sure you're good." Alex futzed with Kara's collar. "And this isn't so you can be around Lena?"

Kara blew out a breath. "For the hundredth time, I don't even know what you're implying with that question, and no. It has nothing to do with her…but, it works out because if Lillian tries anything I'll be there."

"Uh huh, and what are you going to do if you run into her? She knows who you are." Alex tried to get into her intimidating pose but it didn’t work due to the sling.

"I can protect Lena for one, and second bring her in. The goal is to arrest her, right?" Kara's eyes burned, and she knew if she saw that woman she'd most likely lose control of her anger.

Alex put a hand on her forearm. "Hey, if you see her make yourself scarce. You call me and I'll have a team there in minutes. Do not put yourself at risk, okay?"

Knowing all the things that could happen if she ran into Lillian, and that none of them were good, Kara agreed.

Alex leaned in and gave her a one-armed hug. "Hey, you good?"

"All good." Kara gave her sister a quick hug and was out the door before she could talk herself out of it.

The entire way to LCorp, Kara used her breathing exercises. She'd spent the weekend studying business materials, what interns did, and learning basic terminology she'd run into in an office setting.

She exhaled, hoping she didn’t screw up. She needed this to work. She needed to know she could do something. She needed to prove she could look after herself.

The building loomed tall in front of her. Construction workers yelling to one another as giant letters were raised up the side. Kara took in a deep breath and entered, passing through a metal detector. A giant L stood in the center of the lobby. An information desk off to the left was manned by two security guards. Smoothing down her neatly pressed shirt to buy a few seconds to calm herself, she headed toward it.
"Hi. I'm starting today." She gave her best smile to the security guard behind the desk.

"Name?"

"Kara Danvers."

"ID."

Kara handed over the driver's license Alex had gotten her even though she didn’t know how to drive, a wave of nerves going through her at the thought of what would happen if it didn’t work.

"You need to fill this out, personnel needs to create a file on you."

She filled in the information Alex had made her memorize then handed the paper back.

"Here, put this on and don't lose it. Head up to the seventy-eighth floor. Ms. Luthor is waiting for you."

Well, Kara hadn't thought of that. For some reason, she'd assumed she'd be working on a lower level. One that wouldn’t require her to use an elevator, preferably the ground floor.

"Thanks." Kara hoped she didn’t sound nervous.

Several people waited in front of the elevator and Kara didn’t have it in her to deal with any extra anxiety today. Turning toward the stairwell, she made her way inside; going at what she hoped was a human pace and noting the position of cameras as she went. She'd have to ask Alex if there was some sort of work around so she didn’t have to worry.

When she opened the door to her assigned floor, a woman with dark hair, an impeccable suit, and a tablet in her hands gave her a strange look.

"Did you take the stairs up here?"

Kara faked being out of breath but stopped when the woman's expression turned worried. "Yeah, I'm big into cardio." Her thin frame didn’t help her argument, but she had put on enough weight that people no longer looked at her with concern.

"You must be Kara Danvers?"

Kara walked toward her. "That's me. Lena said something about an intern position?"

The woman raised a brow. "Ms. Luthor has decided to make you my assistant."

If irritation had a sound, Kara guessed it would be this woman's voice at this very moment.

"Uh, I don't really know how to do...anything? I mean I'm willing to try and I'll do whatever you tell me, but I really don't want to mess up because Len...Ms. Luthor was nice enough to give me this chance and I don't want to let her down..."

The woman's eyes softened and a small smile appeared. "It's okay. My name is Jess and I'll help you out."

Kara let out a relieved breath. "Thanks. I don't want her to regret taking a chance on me."

Jess smiled. "Come on. I don’t think you need to worry. Ms. Luthor is a pretty good judge of character, so if she wanted you here, it's because she sees something in you."
Kara trailed after her, soaking up the words. When Jess stopped and opened the door to a small room with an extra door on the right side, Kara paused.

"This was supposed to be the office for the former owner's assistant but Ms. Luthor didn’t want me to use it, too small and she likes the way I screen people though don't tell her I said that. I'm not supposed to know." She winked at Kara, and somehow it put her at ease. "Now, it's yours. That door goes into her office. You are not to open it, okay?"

"Right, got it. I won’t even look at it."

Jess chuckled, "You don’t need to go that far, Kara."

Pushing up her glasses, Kara blushed. "Right, sorry. I just meant I won't open it. Promise."

Kara took in the small space. It didn’t have any windows and the desk and chair were more than enough to make the space feel cramped. Stacks of printer paper, shelving units full of office supplies, and several boxes were piled all around. A bout of claustrophobia hit her and she flashed back to her cell, her pod. She forced herself to take several deep breaths. "Will I spend a lot of time in here?"

Even she heard the fear in her voice.

"I don't think so, but if there's an issue you can just come and sit by me. Not a problem. Okay?" Jess's eyes met Kara's, the concern in them easy to spot.

Kara fidgeted with her glasses. "Thanks, I might um…take some of the stuff out if that's okay?"

Jess nodded. "Well, that was your first job of the day. Sort this room out so that you can actually use it."

Jess walked away, eyes back on her tablet. A moment later, Lena's voice echoed in the hallway. Kara turned and caught a glimpse of her coming out of her office. She waved at Kara, sending her a quick smile, which Kara returned. Something in her chest fluttered and she put a hand over her heart to make sure everything was okay.

Turning back to her office Kara got to work. It took almost three hours because she had to act human and take breaks, pretend some of the boxes full of copier equipment were heavy, and find new homes for all the junk which ended up with her organizing the supply room.

When done, she could walk with ease around her desk, back up her chair without hitting anything, and had a small filing cabinet she could put her bag and lunches in. When another wave of claustrophobia hit her, she glanced to the door leading to Lena's office. She pulled down her glasses and used her x-ray vision noting Lena wasn’t there. Resisting the urge to open the door and see the light from the windows, she went into the main hallway and stood next to Jess's desk.

"Everything okay?"

"I'm done with the office."

Jess pushed her keyboard aside, then reached across the desk and picked up a pile of papers. "I need you to take these down to the thirty-second floor. Have Marshall sign them, then go to the marketing department on the eighteenth floor and give them to Stella. She'll give you a paper in return which you will bring back to me. Got it?"

"Yep."

And that is how the rest of Kara's morning went. She was glad for her alien DNA, otherwise, there
was no way she would have been able to do all the stairs and maintain being out of breath everytime she ran into someone.

"Kara?" Jess interrupted her while she stared out a window at the end of the hallway. "You should take your lunch now. The cafeteria is on the third floor. You have an hour." Jess smiled then returned to her desk, glancing back at Kara a moment before picking up her phone.

In her office, Kara opened her backpack, shoving in the earplugs Jeremiah had given her. An hour of peace she needed desperately. She pulled out a stack of sandwiches, smiling at the note Alex left her with little stick person drawing of Kara working in an office telling people what to do. Shaking her head, she chewed on her peanut butter and jelly.

The computer screen on her desk went dark and then a hand was in front of her. She backed away so fast, her chair fell over and she whacked her head on the wall.

Lena stood there, lips moving, but Kara didn't hear anything. Lena's face turned concerned, she knelt down next to Kara, reaching for her. Out of instinct, Kara backed away, disoriented in this new place.

Remembering her earplugs, she removed them and sent a tentative smile to Lena, who tried to hide her hurt expression, but Kara had seen it.

"Sorry, I didn't hear you come in. Was just…uh enjoying some silence."

Lena got to her feet, taking a step back. "Are you all right? I saw you hit your head….I knocked, but there was no answer. Jess said you had gone in here. I just wanted to make sure you were okay and here I've gone and scared you half to death."

Kara wiped her hands on her pants, staying in front of the hole her head made in the wall. She'd have to fix that.

"Don't worry. I have a really hard head. How are you? And thanks by the way. Jess is great."

Lena smiled, genuine. "I'm good. And there's no need to thank me for helping you. Also, Jess is an angel. I wouldn't be able to run this place without her and I'm pretty sure she knows that. She looked at Kara's lunch. "Would you like to join me in my office to eat?"

Remembering Jess's words from earlier, Kara didn’t know what to do. "Are you sure?"

Lena raised a brow. "Yes. If you don't want to that's fine. It's just that Jess ordered me an unusually large lunch today so…I could use the help."

"Well, since you need help." She smiled, peering through the door, eyeing the full wall of windows. "Wow, look at that view. Must be so nice to take pictures. Do you see a lot of birds?" Before she knew it she had wandered into the other room and was staring, mouth open.

"Yes, it is impressive. Sadly, I don’t get to enjoy it much."

Forcing herself to stop staring, Kara turned toward Lena. Her breath catching a moment when she saw the open expression on her face. A feeling, one Kara wasn’t familiar with stirred inside her and Kara almost crushed her sandwich.

"Are you okay?"

Kara shook her head. "Yeah, fine. You?"
Lena chuckled, "I'm good."

"Me, too. Let's eat."

"Sounds like a plan," Lena said.

Kara ran back to her office, making sure it was slow. When she spotted her stack of sandwiches she panicked. Deciding three wasn’t suspicious; she grabbed a bottle of water and met Lena on the couch.

"What are you having?"

Lena opened the bag on the table in front of them. "Something Jess ordered."

Kara inhaled. "Hummus, pita bread, gyros, and a salad."

"How did you know?" Lena set out the packages.

"I really like food."

Popping open the salad, Lena smiled. "I see. A talent of yours to add to the resume."

"Really?" Kara's mind filled with the possibilities of a food-related job.

"Ah, no. That was my attempt at a joke, a bad one."

Kara forced a laugh, hating how awkward it sounded. "No, it was great. I really liked it."

Lena merely quirked a brow. "You have the job; you don't need to suck up for at least three more months when it's review time."

Swallowing the bite of her sandwich she turned to Lena. "What? I'd never suck up. I mean, it just sounds wrong and uncomfortable for you."

She turned away when Lena's expression turned questioning.

"So, things are going well so far?"

"Yes, I cleaned the office and met some nice people when delivering papers."

Lena nodded. "About that, I heard you stopped by accounting and saved them from a huge error. They want to poach you from me, but I won't let them."

Kara downed half her bottle of water before speaking, "You mean that math thing? It was a simple mistake, I'm sure they would have noticed it."

Laughing, Lena shook her head. "I'm not so sure it was a mistake and hardly simple, you caught a three million dollar expenditure error with a glance. It saved them a lot of embarrassment and my wrath. You sure you don't have any work experience?"

"None. I swear, I would tell you if I did."

Lena set down her salad, relaxing against the cushions. Kara eyed her, noting the lines of tension in her face, the way her foot tapped on the floor.

Kara eyed the food on the table, the gyro smelled so good. Lena must have caught her because she
leaned forward and handed it to Kara.

"Here, I did ask for your help after all."

"Thanks." Kara unwrapped it, taking a bite and moaning at the taste. "How's your day going?"

"You don't want to know."

Kara nodded, emphatic. "I do."

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Lena met Kara's eyes. "It's my brother's trial and my mother. The lawyers are hounding me for information I don't have and I refuse to be a character witness. There's no defense for what he did. Meanwhile, my mother is missing and I...I just don't want her to come back but I have this feeling. You know?"

Perking up, Kara asked, "Is it like a weird feeling in your gut?"

Lena opened her mouth then closed it then opened it. "I guess? But more like a sense of dread or impending doom."

Kara's eyes widened. "Wow, that has to feel terrible."

Lena laughed at that. "Yeah, it does."

Tossing the empty wrapper on the table, Kara picked up her last sandwich. Lena eyed her.

"I get weird feelings, too, but I don't always know what they mean."

Resting back on the couch once more, Lena turned to look at Kara. "It's not always easy. Between gut reactions, instinct, and a host of other things going on in our lives, it can be hard to decipher."

"Yeah, emotions are so complicated! I've never been good with them." Kara finished her water, unsure if she should share more or leave or...

Lena sighed, glancing away. "I understand them but tend to lead with my head and not my heart. A lot safer that way."

Kara nodded. "I'm not sure what I do, maybe a combination of both. I do know that I'm trying really hard not to let fear make my decisions."

Getting to her feet, Lena gathered up the trash. "Fear can be pretty powerful."

Standing as well, Kara helped her clean up. "It can be."

Cocking her head to the side, Lena met Kara's gaze. "Well, if you run into anything that scares you and need some help, I'm always available and I'm tougher than I look."

"Same with you. I mean...I'd be there for you, too."

Glancing at her watch, Lena sat back down. "I believe you have another twenty minutes on your break. Let's talk...I don't want to think about my board meeting later."

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Alex almost smashed her phone when it alerted her to a new message. She'd been going crazy while on bed rest, and though she had a couple more days...she hoped something would come up.
A smile crossed her face when she noted she had a text from Cassie.

Miller – Let me buy you lunch for being a hero?

Danvers – Doesn't sound like a fair trade.

Miller – You're right, you buy me lunch.

Alex smiled.

Danvers – If I must, but next time you're saving my life.

Miller – I guess. Where's good for you?

Alex thought about places near her so she didn’t have to drive.

Danvers – Meet you at Joey’s in an hour.

Alex swallowed, nerves suddenly on edge. Kara was right, she really did need to make more friends this was just pathetic on her part.

She got to her feet and decided a shower was the first order of business. Her Netflix binging the last couple of days had left her rather ripe.

When done she didn’t have much of a choice in what to wear since her arm was still in a sling and her shoulder ached, but she managed to find something that didn’t have an elastic waistband and a shirt she could get on without too much of an issue.

Running a hand through her hair she grabbed her keys and left.

She arrived a few minutes early and selected a table where she could sit with a clear view of all exits.

A hand waved in front of her while she was looking at the menu.

"Hey. Sorry, I'm late."

Alex waved her off. "Don't worry about it."

"How's the arm?" Cassie took off her jacket and slipped it on the back of her chair.

The waitress chose that moment to come over and they both ordered iced tea.

"It's getting better."

Cassie grinned. "Did you catch him?"

Alex set her menu down. "I can't discuss that."

"I'll take that as a no. Which means the bet's still on."

"I didn’t take that bet."

Cassie shook her head. "Let's pretend you did, more fun that way."

Alex ordered a cheeseburger and fries, pleased when Cassie ordered the same.

"So, what's your story? I haven't seen you around the local dating scene. You new?"
"New? I've lived here a few years, but don't get out much. Partying really isn’t my thing." Alex grabbed a roll from the basket in front of them and picked at it.

"Ah, so you need someone to show you around? I can do that."

Alex chewed a moment, trying to figure out what to say. "I guess so. That would be nice."

Cassie nodded at that. "Don’t sound too excited, you might give me the wrong idea."

Adding ketchup to her burger, Alex wrinkled her brow. She felt like Cassie was flirting with her but wasn’t sure. Ever since she’d met the shorter woman she’d been off her game, not that she had much of one.

The need to find Kara had driven her for so long that she'd lost sight of a lot of other things, one of those things being how to date and have a healthy relationship.

The realization stopped her dead in her tracks.

"Alex, you okay?"

"I'm good…just…a pickle or something." She rolled her eyes at herself. Just as she relaxed, a woman came up to their table and put her arm around Cassie's shoulder.

"Hey."

Cassie turned, a big smile on her face. "Hey. How are things?"

"Same old, same old. When are we gonna see you at the bar? You've been scarce lately."

Alex eyed the interaction with interest, clearing her throat after a minute.

Turning to her, Cassie's eyes widened a bit. "Sorry, Carrie, this is my friend Alex. Alex, this is my friend Carrie."

They shook hands and it was weird and awkward and Alex had no idea how to handle it, so she just took a big bite of her burger and let the two women talk. She thought about how Kara was doing and glanced at her phone to make sure she hadn't missed any calls. Relieved when she saw nothing.

She came up with some new ideas on how to help train Kara. Thought of different techniques that would be good for her. So caught up in her thoughts, she didn’t realize Cassie had been calling out to her.

"Alex? What's going on? Where'd you go?"

"Sorry, just thinking."

"I saw. Pretty hard from the looks of it. Everything okay?"

Alex nodded, a little too enthusiastically. "Fine, you?"

Cassie shrugged. "She's my ex. We haven’t really talked since it ended so…you know that whole first time seeing each other after awkwardness."

Alex nodded again, feeling ridiculous. "Yeah, totally…awkward…with an ex. I get it." She wiped her face with a napkin.
Eyeing her, Cassie spoke, "You don't sound so sure on that?"

Blowing out a breath, Alex confessed, "I don't have a lot of exes…dating never fit into my schedule." She turned away to read over the dessert card.

"What had you so driven that dating wasn't something that interested you?"

Alex didn’t answer, unsure what to say.

"Must have been pretty important," Cassie said in a soft, understanding way.

Thinking of Kara, she answered, "The most important thing on Earth."

Cassie cleared her throat. "But you do like women? I didn’t read that wrong?"

Alex quirked a smile. "Yes. I do."

"Good."

And with that settled, the conversation went to safer more superficial topics as they got to know one another.

***

Lena tapped her pen on the file in front of her. Thoughts returning to Kara's fall and reaction to her earlier. She knew the woman had hit her head, hard, but showed no signs of injury.

She frowned unconsciously when she remembered the way Kara had recoiled at the sight of her hand. Not out of anything other than pure fear and confusion if the trapped animal look in her eyes was any indication.

Staring at the closed door at the end of her office she recalled the first time they met in the flower shop. How timid and shy Kara had been, her camera a shield against the world. The second time the woman was more confident but still kept her distance. And the third time, Lena almost kicked herself for her stupidity, had been outside the office of therapists who specialized in trauma.

So wrapped up in her own issues, she'd forgotten that Kara was dealing with some heavy shit as well.

The pen tapped harder, louder.

Their lunch together had been quiet but not uncomfortable. If anything, Lena was glad to get a meal in and have someone to talk to who didn’t turn the conversation to work. She'd have to thank Jess for doing that.

In fact, she couldn’t remember smiling so much. Kara showed her more photos of birds she'd taken, and mentioned, reluctantly, that she was a bit of an artist when Lena asked her why she had so many pictures. In return, Lena had mentioned her love of flowers and art.

Jess had to come in and remind her of a meeting, eyeing the open door and Kara until Lena made it clear she had been the one to bring Kara into her office, and Lena was pretty sure her assistant had smiled at that.

Now, Lena wondered why she did it. No, that wasn’t right. She knew why. That tug she'd felt ever since she'd met Kara had made itself known the moment security had alerted her to Kara's arrival at the front desk. For whatever reason, she was drawn to this young woman who was made up of so
many contradictions. Thin and wiry but strong as hell if the office she'd emptied in mere hours was any indication. Confident and wary, timid and blunt, and a host of other traits that didn’t make sense.

Kara spoke with enthusiasm when it came to birds and her sister, but seemed awkward when the topics turned to anything else. Lena got the impression Kara didn’t get to talk to people a whole lot and the thought made her sad.

Knowing she wasn’t one to talk, she decided to stop trying to figure Kara out and just get to know her. With that in mind, she opened the door to her office and set down a package for Kara to see in the morning.

She walked to the dent in the wall the young woman's head had made earlier. No blood and it was obvious that Kara had tried to make it seem less severe, but Lena knew this building well and she knew the force needed to leave a gap like that.

Perhaps Kara was more than she appeared to be? Tracing a finger around the hole she pushed the thought out of her head, hating the fact she let her paranoia get to her.

Once she arrived in the parking garage of her building, the eerie feeling from last week didn’t come back, but she kept her hand on her taser anyway.

In her penthouse, she slipped off her shoes and enjoyed the feel of thick, soft carpet beneath her feet. She went to the kitchen, made a grilled cheese, and poured a glass of water.

About to grab her book and get comfortable on the couch, something from one of the files came to mind. Observations on a test subject. In captivity for years, deprived of any positive human contact. Experiments that when described, caused Lena to be sick to her stomach and suffer nightmares for weeks.

She took a calming breath like her therapist had taught her. Recalling the images from her dreams but not letting the feelings overwhelm her, or at least trying not to. The girl was thin, her clothes dirty and torn, eyes dull. Lena made herself focus on the minor details, knowing that's where she'd find answers.

A lab formed around her. Bleak lighting, white walls and floors. Tables with restraints. Large scratches in several places, three feet long. Scorch marks on the ceiling. A woman in a lab coat holding a needle with a glowing green substance and a young girl with terrified blue eyes.

Lena forced herself out of the memory or whatever the hell it was. Her heart pounding. Sweat beaded on her forehead and upper lip. Her palms slick. Picking up her water she downed it in one swallow.

She eased herself off the couch shaking her hands out. Nervous energy thrummed through her. It was like having a word on the tip of her tongue, a thought just out of reach.

She found herself in the kitchen pouring a glass of something stronger. She glared in the direction of her office, hating all the things she'd learned in there.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Longish update - I am tired and it is super hot here and I am super busy - so hope it is up to par and the grammar is not too terrible - will probably read it over before next week's update to catch any errors I missed tonight, but I wanted to get the update up.

Thanks for reading!

Kara slipped out of the apartment before Alex woke up to run an errand before work and not wanting to explain said errand. Her sister had grilled her about her first day, but seemed more interested in how Kara felt about it and not so much about Lena Luthor. Kara hoped it stayed that way. The last thing she wanted to talk about was how she enjoyed being around the woman in a way she didn’t quite understand.

After completing her errand, she stopped at her favorite café and picked up a coffee for herself, Jess, and Lena. Outside the building, she did a quick scan noting Lena wasn't in her office yet. Sighing, she entered making sure her badge was visible. The guard behind the counter waved her by when the light turned green after her scan.

No one waited for the elevator, but she still went for the staircase. Alex had given her something to loop the feed for thirty seconds so Kara could race up with no fear of being caught. Reaching the seventy-eighth floor, she was surprised to see Jess behind her desk. Hiding one of her packages behind her back, Kara checked her watch, 7:23AM. So much for getting some quiet time to prepare for the day ahead.

"Here, this is for you." She handed the cup to Jess. "I got one for Len…Ms. Luthor as well…should I go in?"

Jess accepted the coffee. "Thanks. That was nice of you. I'll take Ms. Luthor's in when she arrives. I have to give her some papers to sign anyway, but maybe you can get her to relax and eat something for lunch again today? I'll order something and let you know."

Kara nodded. "Absolutely, eating is the one thing I do well."

Jess choked, glanced at Kara, then blushed. "Okay, that's good. Umm, I have some work for you to do here."

With reluctance, Kara handed over the cup. It annoyed her and she couldn’t figure out why. Before she had time to dwell on it a stack of files landed in front of her.

"These need to be sorted, copied, alphabetized, taken to the notary, then filed. Before noon."

Kara pushed her glasses up her nose. "Got it."

She hefted the pile, pretending it was heavy when Jess raised a brow. In the small, but safe confines of her office, Kara set them down. Using her x-ray vision she noted Jess was focused on her work. Kara opened the door to Lena's office and did what she needed. When she got back to her own office, she realized a package wrapped in purple sat on her desk. She ripped it open forgetting her x-
ray vision, something J'onn would disapprove of after all their training.

A book of bird facts. She opened it and saw the inscription:

Kara,

Hope you had a good first day.

Saw this a while ago and thought of you.

- L-

She traced a finger over the lettering, a smile coming to her face without her realizing it. Placing the book back on her desk, Kara pulled out some of the drywall filler she had brought from home. Mastering her abilities was going well, but there were a few mishaps and having this on hand was part of the process.

She filled in the holes as best she could then smoothed it over. The walls were off-white making it easy to spot, so she moved the furniture a bit to cover it up. She ended up with her desk facing toward the door to Lena's office, and her filing cabinet on her right. It actually made the space bigger and she breathed out a breath she didn’t realize she'd been holding.

Prepping to work on the files Jess had given her, a noise caught her off guard. Screams breached her concentration, the building shivered a moment then car alarms and sirens blared. Running out of her office she went straight to the window at the end of the floor.

Outside, dark plumes of smoke rose into the sky. Fires blazed a trail on the ground below.

Without thought, she forced the window open and leapt out.

***

Alex rolled out of bed, literally. A groan escaped her when she hit the ground.

"What the…"

She got to her feet, grabbing the nightstand when the apartment shook. From the window, she could see smoke clouding the sky. Her phone beeped.

"Danvers."

"We don’t know what it is yet, but people have reported seeing an alien that matches the description of the one that escaped the NCPD last week," J'onn's voice came across the line.

Reaching for her gear, she grabbed her weapon from the box on the top shelf of the closet. "I'm on it. Send the most recent coordinates to my phone."

"Are you up for it? You're still out on medical."

Alex tested her arm, wincing at the ache. "I can manage."

"Be careful. Do not engage. I'm sending a team."

People scrambled in the streets in front of her place. Police and firemen tried to control the panic. Alex did what she could but knew stopping the cause of the problem was the most important thing.
She swiped her screen, grimacing at the lingering pain in her arm when a ding alerted her to a new message. With a feral smile, she hopped on her motorcycle, kicked it into gear, and drove off.

This alien was going down.

***

Lena fell onto her desk when the first explosion hit knocking over her computer monitor. Reaching out, she grabbed the vase of plumerias someone had left for her. She looked toward Kara's office, almost calling out for her but stopped when Jess pointed to the wall of windows behind her.

Outside, unnatural grey clouds filled the sky, debris and dust flew around. Below, small fires littered the ground. But Lena didn’t miss the flash of black that darted across the sky.

"What the hell's going on?"

"I don't know. Security's on their way up. I'll send out an alert to evacuate." Jess typed in commands on the tablet that was never out of her sight.

Lena thought a moment. "Good. As soon as security gets here do what they say."

Jess nodded then left the room. When the door closed, Lena hustled toward the entrance to Kara's office. She frowned at the empty room.

Where was she?

All further thoughts of Kara were derailed when her security system went off. They had intruders in the labs.

***

Kara landed next to the most recent fire she saw flare up. Ripping off the hem of her shirt she wrapped it around her face and used her super speed to pull out those trapped inside, then she flew around the building in a tight, fast pattern, funnelling the smoke in an upward direction and suffocating the flames of oxygen the way Kal had taught her to do.

She really needed to master her freeze breath.

Another explosion had her in the air. Scanning the area, she spotted a large alien with translucent skin, small fires erupting around him. She landed near him after speeding around the larger fires to put them out.

Before she had a chance to utter a word, a motorcycle revved behind her and she knew without having to look who it was.

"Why are you doing this?" Kara prepared to make her move.

"It's not my choice. When the General wants something done, you do it." He moved his hands and Kara saw a red glow.

She ran toward him, heat searing across her chest when they came into contact. She'd absorbed most of the force, but saw Alex holding her hands out for balance.

"You can't stop her!" The alien yelled, shoving Kara.

He leapt into the air, but Kara figured escape was his next move and was a fraction of a second
ahead of him. Wrapping a hand around his ankle, she slammed him into the pavement. He kicked at her, missing, then created another red light with his hands. Kara reacted without thought.

A quick breath of cold air had his mid-section frozen in a block of ice. Right, so freeze breath was now officially on the table.

"Danvers?"

Kara turned toward a short woman running up holding a gun who was looking at Alex.

"Cassie?"

"I guess we both lose the bet. Who's this?" The woman pointed her gun in Kara's direction. "Friend or foe?"

Having her abilities back for a couple of months hadn't erased the past. Years of being led around at gunpoint was something she still thought about, dreamt about, and feared would happen to her again. She shot into the air when she felt the burn start behind her eyes. Alex's whispered, "Get out of here," kicking her into action.

She darted through the city, putting out fires and helping people when she could. When the majority of the danger was over she stopped by her apartment, changed clothes then zipped back to L-Corp.

***

Lena stood in the hallway getting briefed by her head of security.

"They were looking for something Lord had. Not sure if they found it or not," Joe said. "They cut our surveillance and the backup. I tracked down a few grainy images of them from traffic cams nearby but I can't make much of them."

Figuring as much since their internal network was shot to hell, she tried not to think about how they managed to pull that off. "Was anyone hurt?"

Joe shook his head. "A few cuts and scrapes, but these guys were quick. They knew our routine and protocols."

Lena chewed her lip while crossing her arms. "Change it up, and make sure anyone who was hurt takes the week off and is compensated." She turned to Jess. "I want a therapist in here to talk with people as well, as many sessions as needed."

Joe let out a breath. "I hate to say this, but it's possible we have a mole."

"Yes. I'll go through all the security personnel files and see if I find anything," Lena said, knowing she'd be hiring someone outside her company to investigate. She had no way of knowing how deep the roots of Lex's following went.

Joe nodded, speaking into his radio. "Check everything! Cameras, inventory, I don’t care how small it seems. If we're missing a stapler I want to know."

Alone in her office, Lena couldn’t do much until Joe finished his sweep and the system was secured. Tapping a finger on her desk, she stared at the flowers on her desk.

Kara.

The incident had been almost an hour ago and she still hadn't seen any sign of Kara…her bag was
still in her office. The hairs on the back of her neck rose and the fear that had been circling her landed on her chest. Jess had mentioned giving her several errands but Lena saw the files still piled atop Kara's desk.

Had she quit? Been scared off by what happened?

She remembered the ripped wrapping paper and open book in Kara's office…and the flowers on her own desk. No, she wouldn't have. Something told her Kara wasn’t a quitter, no matter how hard things got.

In her office, Lena debated calling the police but knew they were overwhelmed at the moment. Instead, she went into the new employee files and called Kara herself, while noting her address, just in case.

She dialed, waiting.

"Hello."

"Kara? You're okay?" Relief flooded through Lena.

"Yeah, forgot something at home and left to get it, then everything went crazy."

Lena put a hand over her thundering heart. "As long as you're fine. We had intruders in here and I worried that something happened to you…"

"What? Are you okay? I'm in the lobby now. I'll see you in a minute."

The line went dead before Lena had a chance to tell her the building had been evacuated and it would take at least another hour for it to be cleared. Lena put her phone down taking a calming breath. Forty seconds later there was a knock at her door. She arched an eyebrow, confused. The elevators had been turned off during the breach and she was certain they hadn't been turned back on yet. That left the stairs, but no way could Kara do that many in such a short time. She shook her head, trying to rein in her scattered thoughts.

"Come in."

A pressed white, fitted shirt and snug khakis gave the impression that the young woman was fine, but the dark smudges across her face screwed it up.

Lena walked to her side table and wet a tissue. "Come here, you're a mess. What did you do? Run into a building and save people?"

Kara met her halfway, turning toward the mirror. "Crap," she muttered. "Forgot about that."

Lena made a face. "Forgot you had ashes all over you? How did you manage this?"

Lena went to remove Kara's glasses.

"No…I can't see without them. Sorry, I'll get it." Kara took the tissue and leaned toward the mirror, wiping hard at the dirt. "You said something about intruders?"

Lena, annoyed with herself at how much more calm she felt with Kara next to her, nodded. "Yes, not sure what they wanted. Aliens for sure, some had similar abilities as Superman."

Kara froze, her eyes meeting Lena's in the mirror's reflection. "Really? But…that they...how?"
Lena turned, her gaze lingering just a tad too long. "I'm not sure. I know my brother didn’t make any friends in the alien community, so I'm an easy target when someone wants to get back at him."

She smiled when Kara twisted in multiple directions to check her face.

"But you aren’t him. Anyone who gets to know you would see that. I mean all the good work L-Corp does alone proves you're one of the good guys." Kara huffed out then moved toward the couch and sat, a perplexed look on her face.

Lena warmed at the words and joined her knowing she was too wound up to do any work and would undoubtedly have a late night dealing with whatever her security team turned up.

"Fair isn’t something I'm used to. People hear Luthor and make assumptions. Funny thing is, I'm adopted." Lena wanted to take back the comment, not sure why she continued to overshare with Kara.

Kara's eyes widened. "Really? I am, too, kind of? I don't know anymore. It's complicated."

Lena cocked her head to the side. "How is being adopted complicated?"

When a minute had gone by and Kara hadn't looked up from her hands, Lena suspected she'd hit a sore spot, the source, or at least one of the sources of Kara's past trauma.

"My parents died in an explosion when I was thirteen. I went to live with the Danvers after that."

Lena's heart ached at the pain reflected in the blue eyes staring at her. "I can't imagine that was easy. I was four when my mom died. No idea who my father is. The Luthors took me in."

Kara positioned herself so her leg was up on the couch, crossed over her other, and her body faced Lena. "That had to be rough. I bet you were confused."

Lena had to look away or she wouldn't get the words out. "It was, but I remember a few things, smiles, her laugh, and sometimes if I focus hard enough I can smell her perfume."

Kara fidgeted with her glasses. Something more than sadness and discomfort on her face but Lena couldn't place it. She hoped in time, as she got to know her better that she would learn to read her expressions better.

"I can't imagine…being raised by them."

The anger and terseness in Kara's voice surprised her. Like the words had been forced out with every bit of strength she had.

"Ideal it was not. Lillian adored her baby boy Lex, not some new ragamuffin, but Lionel made up for it. He taught me a lot about the business and made sure I didn’t want for anything. He was a good man and Lex, before the madness, was a wonderful brother." Lena sighed, glancing at her watch. "Lillian didn’t want me around and made no secret of that fact, but after Lionel died she kind of disappeared. Some project took her time and attention and I was free of her for the most part." Lena swallowed down the bile thinking of said project.

Kara's fists were clenched and Lena decided it was time to stop strolling down memory lane. Which was for the best, she was rambling and didn’t want to scare the young woman away before they even had a chance to become friends. "Anyways, that's in the past. And I have to sort out what these people who broke in were after as well as watch the footage of the incident downtown. Rumor has National City might have its very own hero. And I believe Jess gave you something to do as well."
Don't want to upset her on your second day."

"Oh, Rao…wow, oh wow, yeah. I have to get a lot done." Kara jumped to her feet. "I'm glad you're okay. Sorry I wasn’t here. If you need any help let me know."

Lena held up a hand. "Wait, I totally forgot. Everyone is outside while security clears the building. You should go down there." A thought occurred to Lena. "How did you get up here by the way?"

Kara's eyes widened. "Oh, I just came up the stairs. Um, are you safe in here? I think I'd rather stay here until you know everything is okay."

Lena smiled. "That's not necessary."

Kara wrinkled her brow. "Yeah, it is. You know where I'll be. Just yell if you need me." A frown graced her face when she looked at Lena, then she turned and went to her office.

Lena sat staring the door adjoining their two offices for several moments. For reasons unknown to her she didn’t mention the flowers she'd found this morning. The ones she knew had come from Kara. The ones she had no idea how to interpret the meaning of.

Focus, Lena.

***

On her way home, Kara called Sam to check in with her again, she'd only had a few minutes in the morning but now…she detoured and ended up at the bar.

"Hey, Kara. Everything okay?" M'gann motioned her over to the bar, pouring her a glass of something purple.

"Yeah, I just wanted to see how you guys were." She sipped the drink, making a face. "What is this?"

"Something new I'm thinking of adding to the menu. I'm trying to figure out what it reminds me of."

Kara set the glass down. "Kind of tastes like fries?"

M'gann laughed. "Yeah, might be different depending on species. To me, it has more of a fruity flavor."

"Where's Sam?"

"Studying, she has a test tomorrow and is a bit stressed. Maybe you can get her out here to relax a bit. Play some pool or something."

Kara nodded, pushing away from the bar and heading toward the room Sam spent most of her time in. She knocked and was wrapped in a hug ten seconds later.

"Yes, I knew you'd save me!" Sam grabbed Kara's arm, pulling her inside.

"Let me guess, I'm saving you from textbooks?"

Sam nodded, face serious. "I dream about fractions now."

"Time for a break, let's go play some pool."
Following behind, Sam caught sight of a television playing a clip of Kara. "Hey, that's you!"
Kara glanced around. "Ha, no way. That would be crazy, right?"
"Right, sorry…" Then in a lower voice. "You totally kicked ass."
Rolling her eyes, Kara handed her a cue. She hoped she kept her strength in check.
M'gann appeared with a plate of food.
"Did you see the news?" Sam tilted her head toward Kara while looking at M'gann.
"Yep, seems like we have a new hero in the making."
Kara cleared her throat, remembering something she'd been trying not to think about. "M'gann, are there any other Kryptonians you know of? Or aliens with similar abilities?"
Crossing her arms, she eyed Kara. "Why do you want to know?"
Realizing her error, Kara held up a hand. "No, I didn't mean…it's just that there was an attack where I work today and they said it was or could maybe have been Kryptonians but as far as I know there's only two of us…" She clenched her jaw a moment. "I saw my planet explode."
M'gann chewed her lip a moment. "I haven’t heard of any Kryptonians, but aliens with a similar ability or two are not uncommon. As for an attack, I haven’t heard anything about it. I've worked hard to make sure this is a safe place, the nastier elements rarely come here."
Sam waved an onion ring in M'gann's direction. "Seriously, no one wants to mess with you."
Raising a brow, M'gann grinned. "Really? So next time I tell you not to put off studying to the last minute you'll listen?"
"Let's not get crazy."
Kara, both surprised and not surprised at the pang in her chest, nodded. "Yeah, I guess more survivors would be too good to be true."
"I'm sorry."
"It's all right, let's play some pool."
Two hours later, Kara walked into the apartment expecting Alex to be waiting for her. She wasn't. Which was probably worse. Her phone beeped and a text told her to get her butt to the DEO. With a sigh, she dropped her backpack and met her sister at a special location that allowed Kara to enter and exit without being seen.
"What were you thinking?"
"I wore a mask! And the smoke made it hard to see anything. I was careful."
Alex crossed her arms, staring. "We talked about this."
Kara stood her ground. "I couldn’t let those people get hurt. I made a judgment call and if you don’t like it that's fine, but know this, I'd make it again. Every time."
Her sister pursed her lips then a grin slowly appeared on her face. "Then it's time. Come on."
Not what she'd expected, but she'd take it. Kara followed Alex down several flights of stairs. They stopped in front of a door with the House of El emblem.

"It'll only open for you."

Kara held her hand up to the pad. The door slid open and inside was a raised dais, similar to the ones they had on Krypton. Once she entered a hologram of her mother appeared. Kara stumbled, climbing the steps and rushing toward her even though she knew it wasn’t real. The image flickered.

"Hello, Kara."

Alex came up next to her, placing a hand on her shoulder. "I've been working on this for years. Finally figured it out. It's not your mom, but it is her memories and a decent sized database of information for you. Clark helped me with it, added some stuff."

Kara hugged her, a bit too tight if her sister's groans were any indication. "Thank you. I…this…thank you."

Alex nodded, her own eyes watery. "That's not all. Clark sent something over when he heard about the plane. J'onn knows someone and made a few modifications. He told me to give it to you when I thought you were ready."

Kara watched as her sister grabbed a large box from the corner of the room. Kara opened it, pulling out the red material she recognized as her cousins baby blanket. Below that was a suit in blue. Similar to the one Superman wore. The boots were taller with a bit of a heel. The cut was more feminine but still made to protect her and allow full range of movement.

She liked that it covered her arms and legs. Her time with Lillian had left her with a few scars that she didn’t feel like sharing with the world, or anyone.

The red and blue contrasted perfectly and she didn’t know what to do, overwhelmed.

"I'll be outside. Try it on," Alex said.

Kara slipped into it, smoothing down the material. She felt stronger in it, more powerful, braver. She exited into the hall and the expression on her sister's face told her everything.

"So, it looks okay?"

"It looks perfect."

"What about my face? I know Kal doesn't use a mask but…is it safe?"

Alex cocked her head to the side. "As Kara Danvers, you wear your hair in a way that hides half of your face, have glasses and are a bit klutzy. As Supergirl, you have long, curly blonde, annoyingly perfect hair, bright blue eyes unobscured by anything, and look like a badass."

Kara wasn’t convinced, but she knew Alex wouldn’t lie to her so she decided to go with it.

"I am sorry, Alex, I didn’t mean to —"

Alex shook her head. "No. Don't apologize. You helped people, saved them. You put down a rather nasty alien that we wouldn’t have been able to do on our own. We also heard about the attack on L-Corp…I think we're going to be needing you a lot more." She took a few steps then returned. "You still need to train, but at least you have something to wear when you're out being a hero."
Kara returned the smirk her sister gave her. "Will do and about L-Corp, do you know anything? Lena said that they might be Kryptonian. I talked to M'gann but she doesn’t know of any and Lena has no idea what they wanted. I listened in on her security team and they have no idea what this group wanted."

Alex nodded. "Okay, take a breath. We don't know anything but are looking into it. The Fort R'ozz database was damaged in the crash, we weren't able to get a full list, but there were no Kryptonians that we found."

"Yeah…It's silly to think…"

"No, it's not. It's completely normal, or whatever normal is in this situation." Alex hesitated a moment.

"What?"

"There is one thing…today with Cassie, that woman at the scene, you looked angry," Alex asked, tentatively.

Kara swallowed. "When she pointed the gun at me I…I was back in that place…"

Alex nodded. "I thought so, and now? Everything okay?"

"Um hmm." Kara hoped she was right.

"Didn’t the doctor tell you to expect things like that?"

Kara nodded. "Yeah…it's just I need to get a handle on it so it doesn’t affect me when I'm trying to help people. I'm pretty sure having a gun pointed at me is going to be a regular occurrence."

"We’ll figure something out. And you did manage to control it today, so that's a good sign." Alex glanced at her watch. "I have a few things to do here but then was hoping we could talk later?"

"Of course, since when do you ask?"

"Since now." Alex smiled, but it was strained. "Great, I'll see you later."

Kara changed out of the suit, making sure to pack it safely back in the box. She went home, hiding it under Alex’s bed and then got comfortable on the couch reading through the book Lena had bought her. Smiling the whole time.

***

Alex entered the apartment around eleven and found Kara asleep on the couch. With caution, she approached her sister, noticing she had her earplugs in.

A gentle nudge on the shoulder caused Kara to bolt upright.

"Sorry, I fell asleep."

Alex lay down next to her. "Don't worry about it."

Kara pulled her closer, the two of them snuggling like they did when they were kids.

"So, what did you want to talk about?"
Alex smiled. "I think I met someone…"

"You think?" Kara lifted herself up so she could look at Alex.

"Yeah, I mean we kept running into one another and then she was asking me to lunch and it was really nice and I don't know. I mean nothing's happened, but I like her. She has this smile…and she's smart and tough."

Kara wiggled her eyebrows. "Really? And when do I get to meet her? Or are you not at that stage yet?"

Alex turned onto her back, relaxing at the fact Kara didn’t seem bothered by the fact Alex was talking about liking a woman. "You kind of did meet her. The woman today…"

Kara scrunched her face up, thinking. "She's short."

"Man, don’t tell her that, she has a complex about it."

"Right, no short jokes, got it." Kara hugged Alex tighter. "When I meet her can I give her the shovel talk?"

Alex's forehead wrinkled. "No, you are not going to do that and where did you even hear about that?"

Kara shrugged. "A movie."

"Okay, you have to stop taking social cues from movies."

Rolling her eyes, Kara sighed, "Please, I rock the social thing."

Alex raised a brow and in less than a minute both of them were laughing. When they calmed down, Alex spoke, "Ya know, it's weird. I didn't date a lot. There was always something to do. School, training, work…and I thought maybe it just wasn’t for me."

Kara nodded against her shoulder.

"And now there's this wonderful woman who is so determined, and brave, and funny, and beautiful and…I'm scared." Alex bit her lip, not sure if she should continue.

"Scared of what?"

"That I'll lose her, which makes no sense because literally nothing has happened between us, but I just feel different around her. I can't explain it."

Kara didn’t say anything but Alex felt her tense for a few moments.

"I think that's normal and makes a lot of sense after everything that happened. It leaves a mark. But I know you and you're strong enough and smart enough to not let fear win."

Alex sighed. "I really hope so."

"I have no idea how the whole…" She gestured vaguely. "Relationship thing works. It was so different on Krypton, but one thing I know is you are amazing and she'd be lucky to mate with you."

Turning, Alex shook her head. "Date. Date me. Please don't ever say mate again."
Kara laughed. "Whatever, it's the same thing."

"Sure, until I ask how your mating is going."

"Trust me, that's one thing you don't ever have to worry about."

Alex gave her the side eye. "Sure, whatever you say. How was work by the way...other than an alien attack?"

Kara's eyes brightened. "Lena gave me a book! I forgot to tell you. It's full of bird facts. And we talked a bit. She's adopted. And I think that she acts like all the stuff people say doesn't bother her but it really does. And I don't think she has any friends. Like after the attack I could hear the other employees answering calls and reassuring loved ones but not Lena. I think the only person she called was me."

"That was nice of her. To call you. Like other people did with those they cared about," Alex said in a sing-song voice.

Kara looked at Alex like she'd the most obvious thing in the world. "Well, we're friends. I mean why else would she call me? I'm an employee, too, so there's an added layer of concern. Yeah, friends. This feels like a friendship. A good one or at least it has potential. Can a friendship have that? Is that how it started with you and Cassie? Then you felt more?"

"Sure! Let's have ice cream."

"Oh, do we have any Rocky Road?"

And Alex sighed in relief at how easily Kara's thoughts were derailed.

***

Lena glared at the security report. They hadn't been able to find anything missing which worried her more than she cared to admit. You don't break into somewhere like L-Corp without a reason. It's not a challenge or a dare. It's a job, a mission. Meticulously planned by people with ill intentions.

She drummed her fingers on her desk. Nothing in the code of their internal operating systems appeared altered but she sent a note to the IT department to run diagnostics every three hours.

Grabbing her briefcase she headed toward the door, veering at the last moment to look in Kara's office. Jess had mentioned all the work she'd assigned had been done on time and without complaint. She also noted Kara always took the stairs.

Lena felt bad about having to turn lunch down today but had promised to make it up which had caused the biggest smile Lena had seen yet to form on Kara's face and a smirk on Jess's.

Lena pulled a small item out of her pocket and set it on the shelf behind Kara's desk. For a good days work and sticking close to her, she told herself, not believing a word of it.

Arriving home, she debated what to do. The events of the day were catching up to her and she was feeling anxious. The aliens who had broken in...what if one of them was the Kryptonian subject her mother had done those terrible things to? What if she wanted revenge? She watched the news footage of the woman taking down the alien with her freeze breath. She appeared to be the same person who saved the plane. If so, it was at the same time as the break-in at her company...she held on to the hope that the Kryptonian was not after her.
She slipped into her usual comfy gear and decided tonight she'd get in some yoga. She tended to do her best thinking/avoiding when she was focused on something else, and she had a lot to think about or not as it were.

Two hours later, she returned hot and sweaty but invigorated. She'd come up with a few possible solutions to problems the Kryptonian might run into as well as a possible fix for the Kryptonite issue.

Rushing through her shower, she knew her night would be full of nightmares after the incident at the office. Slipping into a pair of jeans and an old college sweatshirt she knew where she had to go.

She printed up the few images of the intruders she'd managed to get and headed to M'gann's. Sam might have an idea or know something, plus Lena had promised to help her study for a geometry test.

M'gann met her outside the bar. Lena noticed her talking to someone but shrugged it off.

"Are you okay? I saw the news."

Lena nodded. "No harm done. Which is scarier than if they had done something."

"What do you mean?"

Lena followed behind as she explained. "They didn’t take anything. Didn’t damage anything. Didn’t do anything at all. So, why bother?"

M'gann slipped behind the bar and grabbed two bottles of beer, handing one to Lena. "Okay, let's think this through. You break into a place like L-Corp you want information, plans, prototypes. That sort of thing, right?"

Lena nodded. "Yes, it'd be an act of a rival. Someone who wanted technology I had. But from what the employees said they were all over the place, scattered."

"Or maybe they just appeared disorganized."

And it hit Lena what they did. "They knew exactly what they were doing but threw us off by spreading out. One of them did something but I have no way of knowing which or where or what because they shut down our entire system."

"My guess is if they didn’t take something they left something."

"That's what I was afraid of."

"Lena! You're just in time. I was about to set fire to this…this…terrible book. It makes no sense."

Sam slammed the book in question on the bar.

M'gann shook her head. "This is why I didn’t offer to help her."

Sam made a noise, affronted. "What? You said they didn’t have geometry on Mars."

"What? Me? I have to go back to work. Have fun," M'gann winked at Lena and left.

"I'm not that bad, am I?" Sam turned to Lena, frown in full force.

"No?"

Sam nodded, a satisfied look on her face. "See, this is why I like you."
"Let's get to it shall we?"

"I take it back." Sam sighed, dramatically.

Lena laughed, an oddly familiar feeling settling over her. She almost jumped when she realized it was how she used to feel around Lex before he went insane.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Sorry for delay...life and all that...but it is double the usual length?

Alex fumbled with the button on her shirt. "Ugh, why am I nervous? It's just dinner?"

Kara came up behind her, eyes meeting in the reflection of the mirror. "It'll be great. Just be yourself."

"Right, be me. I can do that. Sort of."

Kara scrunched her forehead. "What do you mean? Of course, you can be yourself."

Alex blew out a breath. "Sure, the me who has a normal family life. Who works with the FBI. Me who has to watch everything I say, especially with her."

Wrapping an arm around her shoulder, Kara pursed her lips. "It sucks I know. I hate keeping secrets, too. But maybe in time..."

Alex turned. "Maybe, but right now I don't know enough about her. We barely know each other."

Kara scooted her to the door. "Well then, get out of here and get to know her. You're gonna be late."

Alex stopped, grabbed Kara's arm. "Hey, I'm sorry I'm missing your dinner thing. You know I can reschedule? I should...let me just text Cassie."

Grabbing her phone, Kara shook her head. "Nope. It's just a celebratory dinner for a week...it's silly and just an excuse to hang out with Sam and M'gann. You go have fun and celebrate with me on week two."

Alex wrapped Kara in a hug. "I'm really proud of you. You've come so far. You really are the strongest person I know."

"And you're still the best thing about Earth." Kara swallowed, eyes watery. "Go on, you're gonna mess up your make-up."

Twenty minutes later Alex pulled up in front of the restaurant Cassie had picked. She debated trying to find a flower shop but changed her mind when she saw the place in question was casual. Cassie leaned against a wall talking to a tall woman in a tight dress, laughing...and exchanging numbers? Alex blew out a breath. They were just friends. So far.

Walking up to the two of them Alex plastered a smile on her face. "Hey, you look nice."

Cassie turned to her. "You don't clean up so bad yourself, Danvers. This is an old friend."

Alex caught the lack of name but didn’t say anything. "Nice to meet you."

"You, too. I'll see you later tonight, Cassie?" The woman winked then left.
"So, you hungry?"

Alex's inquisitive instincts kicked in, but she fought them. "Sure." The fact the fluttery feeling in her stomach had diminished didn't worry her, yet.

"That was an old friend. She has a thing she does and on occasion, I go and help her with it."

Alex sat across from Cassie, nodding. "Right."

Cassie busied herself with the menu. "So, the arm all healed up now?"

Trying to focus her thoughts, Alex nodded. She wasn't jealous, nor was she angry. Suspicious was the best descriptor, but she didn't know if that was because of her job or something else.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you're back in action. Far too many aliens in the city that need to be taken down." Cassie set down the menu, smiling at Alex.

Alex bit her lip. "That's not really my job. I arrest the ones that are a danger to society."

Rolling her eyes, Cassie grinned. "Aren't they all though?"

"You ladies ready to order?" The waitress pulled out her notepad.

When they were alone again, Alex spoke up. "No, not all of them are."

"Okay, anyways, tell me more about you. Embarrassing stories from when you were a kid?"

Alex didn't say much, her thoughts tumbling around her head. The fluttery feeling from before replaced with something else.

***

Kara settled behind her desk and opened up the files Jess had given her. Jess was giving Kara additional responsibilities and jobs that required more than making copies or delivering papers.

After her first week, she'd celebrated with Sam by going to a movie and dinner. They'd tried to take M'gann but she had other plans that came up at the last minute. Not that Kara minded, she loved getting to spend time with Sam one on one and was able to help her with coping methods when she got anxious or nervous. Then on Sunday, she flew Alex to see Eliza and Jeremiah and Kal…Clark…had stopped by. When she told him she was working for Lena Luthor, she had expected him to be mad, but he simply said she was a good person and did a lot of charity work anonymously.

Her life was coming together, not perfect, that was impossible. But the pieces of who she used to be and who she was now weren't so jagged and cutting. They had started to mesh together. Her friends and family were beyond supportive and she no longer dreaded thinking of the future.

Now, close to the end of her second week, Kara was on edge. She eyed her bag nervously, supersuit inside. She'd been waiting for the right time to make her debut, but the city had been quiet.

Left to her own devices, because despite the extra work, Kara still finished too soon, her thoughts tended to wander. Usually to Lena. In fact, she felt something altogether different when it came to the woman. When she was around Lena it didn't feel the same as when she was with Sam or M'gann. She chalked it up to the whole Lena being human thing but it felt like a shaky argument considering there were no strange feelings when it came to Jess or Mary in the cafeteria who always let Kara have double servings when she slipped in for a second lunch.
From the first moment they'd met, Lena had been nothing other than kind, patient, and considerate. They'd eaten lunch together several times. The first few required prompting from Jess but now it was Lena who knocked on Kara's door letting her know the food had arrived. This small gesture meant a lot because she knew Lena was busy trying to figure out what the people who broke into her building had wanted. She'd spent hours pouring over printouts and camera footage. Kara had peeked through a few times with her x-ray vision to try and help but was unable to find an answer.

Kara finished what Jess had given her and took a moment to stretch out her back. When her arms hit the shelf behind her desk a small item fell, her super speed preventing it from shattering on the ground. A small glass object. She marveled at the detail. A narrow branch made up the base. On it was a bird with its wings spread, ready to take flight. A slight blue tint to the glass.

Lena.

She glanced through the wall to see what the woman was doing. Noting she was alone, and from the constant sighing, a tad frustrated. Kara knocked on the door.

"Come in."

Kara opened it, poking her head around. "Hey."

Lena's shoulders relaxed and a small grin formed on her face. "Hi."

"Thought you might like some company."

"Why's that?"

Kara held out her hand. "A little birdie told me."

Lena laughed, genuine. "Get in here already. Save me from this…" She waved her hands around. "Mess."

Kara walked toward the couch, easing herself into her usual spot. "Tell me about it, maybe I can help."

Lena poured a glass of water for each of them before sitting on the other end of the couch. "It's probably nothing. They think I'm being paranoid. Worried I'm going to turn into Lex." She cast a disgusted look toward her door.

Kara cocked her head to the side, listening. "Paranoid about what?"

Lena glanced at her. "Have you ever heard of a break-in in which nothing was stolen? I find that strange and dubious at best. So, I've been operating on the theory they left something but I have been over every system we have, ran dozens of diagnostics and can't find anything."

"That does sound a bit weird." Kara adjusted her glasses while she did a quick scan of Lena's office.

"And it's ticking me off. I know something's wrong. I can feel it in my gut. But enough about that, tell me about how you're doing? How's work? I hear your boss is a real monster."

Kara rested her head on the back of the couch. "You have no idea! I don't know how much more I can handle. I think the power is really going to Jess's head."

Lena reached over and smacked her on the shoulder, pulling her hand back with a slight wince. "Be nice or I'll tell her you said that."
Kara widened her eyes, putting her hand over her heart. "Please, not that! I'll be good."

Lena raised a brow. "Uh huh." She checked her watch. "I have a meeting in the science division, want to come?"

"Sure."

The smile she received in return was becoming more common and she felt like she'd finally made a friend she could be the version of herself she wanted to be. The Kara without a sad past who had no scars physical or psychological. The Kara she might have been.

She trailed behind Lena, ignoring the people eyeing her as they walked by. It was well-known that Lena didn’t talk much. Many thought it was because she was stuck up or thought of herself as better than others, but Kara knew the truth. Lena knew the truth. Lena worked all the time. This company and doing good things were the most important things to her and to make that happen, she'd sacrificed having a life.

Lena put her hand on a display and a thick metal door opened.

Kara had scanned this area prior and found she couldn’t see through it. Lined with lead most likely. She'd mentioned it to Alex and her sister said not to worry about it. Kara didn’t ask how she knew, assuming they DEO had their ways.

At first, Kara had worried, but over the last couple of weeks she'd learned just how dangerous industrial espionage was and a woman like Lena would do everything to ensure the safety of her projects.

The room they entered was large, taking up most of the floor. Technicians, assistants, scientists, all scurried around. Tablets held up, checking data. Kara absorbed it all looking soaking up all the technology.

"I know it doesn’t look all that interesting but this is the framework for an elevated train system. We're still working some of the kinks out of it, but Lord was onto something good here. If I can get it to run faster, it'll cut down on carbon emissions, gas usage, and save the city millions." Lena signed several documents handed to her by a man in a white lab coat.

Reading over the specs Kara hummed to herself. "If you used Hafnium instead of a Tungsten alloy in the vacuum tubes you would decrease the weight of each car by thirty kilos and increase the speed to 500KM an hour."

Lena's mouth opened then shut then opened. "What?"

Kara pushed her glasses up. This was probably one of those times where she wasn’t supposed to know what she just said. "Nothing…just talking to myself."

Lena raised a brow, took a tablet from a passing technician and went to work.

Kara stood with her hands behind her back wishing she had stayed in her office.

"You're right. It's…brilliant. I thought you studied the arts?"

"I did. I also should be getting back to work." She turned and headed toward the door.

"Kara?"

"Yes?" She stopped but didn’t face Lena.
"Thank you."

"Of course. And thanks for this." Kara held up the glass bird.

Lena waved her off. "It was nothing, glad you finally found it. I like the idea of her watching over you."

Kara's heart skipped a beat at the comment. "Uh... thanks. I like watching over you, too." And for a moment she thought she'd fumbled her words but realized that it was the truth.

***

Alex stretched her arm, happy with the range of motion and lack of tightness.

In the kitchen, she smiled at the place setting Kara had made for her. A short note telling her to press start on the coffee machine and look in the fridge for breakfast.

Doing as instructed she pulled out a bowl of fruit and yogurt along with a smoothie, one of Kara's new favorite things to make. Today was chocolate banana. Enjoying her food, Alex thought of her dinner with Cassie over the weekend.

She wasn't sure how to classify it. They'd talked, had an okay if not awkward at times kind of night. The conversation had been forced at times and certain topics were avoided by the both of them after earlier comments. By the end of the night, Alex knew they fell on the opposite side of too many things. The fact neither one of them indicated wanting to see each other again was a good indicator their initial attraction had fizzled out.

Her phone buzzed and she Cassie's face popped up.

"Hey, I was just thinking about you."

"Yeah? You up for some pool? I know a place."

Alex glanced at the clock. "It's a bit early and why aren't you working?"

"Day off, and I really think you need to see this place."

Alex scrunched her forehead; Cassie's voice lacked any of the fun quality it usually had.

"Okay, tell me when and where."

An hour later, Alex was pulling up to a non-descript building in the warehouse district. She glanced around for the markers Cassie had told her about and followed them until she reached a reddish door.

The inside of the bar was the same as any other dive bar. The windows were papered over and most people chatted amongst themselves. A few glanced her way but didn't give her a second look.

Walking toward the back where she spotted the pool tables, she waved when Cassie looked up.

"Hey, interesting place," Alex said.

Cassie leaned on her pool cue, raising a brow. "Use those observational skills, Danvers."

Alex let out an overly dramatic sigh but did as told. That's when she noticed it. Strange ears on the guy in plaid, a woman with blue tinted skin drinking a martini, a couple with webbed hands arguing at the jukebox. M'gann appeared a moment later from the back and Alex froze. Tensing, Alex tried
to remain calm. Why did Cassie take her here? Did she know something? Kara had come here often the last few weeks to see Sam…Did Cassie know?

"Relax, they're harmless. M'gann has rules in here."

M'gann caught Alex's eyes and a flash of recognition lit up her face, but she didn’t walk over and say hi.

"I'm fine."

"You sure? You seem like you're about to run out of here."

"No, it's just a shock. So, why are we here?"

Cassie handed a cue to Alex. "Well, this is an alien gathering place. A safe place I might add. And you work with aliens. It might be a good spot to be aware of."

Alex eyed her, wary. "What? You mean like surveil them? See who comes in and out? If it's a safe place it should be…safe."

"Yeah, it's safe until something happens. You know as well as I do they can be dangerous. Two weeks ago we had an alien that emitted fireballs. Or did you forget?"

Leaning the cue against the table, Alex shook her head. "Of course I didn’t forget, but I still don't think this is right. There are aliens here that just want a place to be themselves. To have friends. To not feel so left out."

"Huh, isn't it dangerous to sympathize with aliens considering what you do for a living?"

Alex bit her tongue. "In my experience, humans are not innocent and more than capable of atrocious acts…especially against aliens."

Cassie frowned. "I guess I thought if you saw this…you'd realize the problem is larger than most people realize."

Alex shook her head. "I assure you I'm more aware of things than you realize."

Shrugging, Cassie sighed. "If you say so. Guess this is a deal breaker huh?"

"Yeah, but I think you already know that." And Alex knew what had been bugging her. The moment Cassie had turned her gun on Kara, ready to take her down after she had helped with the bad guy. The willingness to shoot first and ask questions later. The fear on Kara's face. Mixed in with the fact Alex had been…not really lying but also holding back so much about her life. Her alien sister. The DEO. Having a friendship was hard enough when you hid things, a relationship? Impossible. How had she not seen it sooner?

"Well, it doesn't matter anyway. Part of why I wanted to talk to you was I got a transfer. I'm leaving at the end of the month. I put in for it months ago."

Not quite ready to let go of how upset she was, Alex merely nodded. "Great. Where are you off to?"

Cassie grabbed her beer off the table. "Gotham. They have some crazy stuff going on there and a high turnover rate in the department. So, lots of promotion potential."

"That'll be a change. Just try to remember not all aliens are bad. And some of the people in Gotham are totally whacked out."
"I know. I'm gonna love it there."

"Probably."

"How did you get the day off?" Cassie cocked her head to the side.

"I didn't. I have to go in later."

"Hope getting your butt kicked in pool doesn't ruin your day then."

"You wish."

Cassie smirked. "Want to bet on it?"

Alex shrugged, attention no longer on the aliens all around her. "Sure."

An hour later, Alex counted off her winnings making sure to flick each bill. "Pleasure doing business with you."

Cassie sat on a stool, pouting into a beer. "I thought you said bars weren't your thing?"

"Partying wasn't my thing." Alex slipped the money into her pocket.

"Semantics."

Alex shrugged. "You made the assumption."

Grabbing her coat, Cassie nodded. "I did…about a lot of things. See ya 'round, Danvers."

Merely nodding, Alex knew it was goodbye.

"Hey, you're Alex, right? Kara's sister?"

Turning at the voice, Alex bumped into Sam. "Yes. How are you? Kara told me you've been studying? Something about fractions being after you?"

Sam laughed. "Yeah, though I have that sorted out now. Pretty sure the next bad guy will be volume."

"I remember that."

Fidgeting, Sam glanced at the door. "So, you know Cassie?"

Alex sat on a stool. "Sort of."

"Be careful. M'gann doesn't trust her and she has really good judgment."

"Did I hear my name?"

Sam grinned. "I was just telling Alex that she had to have lunch with us since she's skipped out on coming here so many times."

"Hey! I wasn't skipping out. Things came up. I really wanted to come."

M'gann smiled. "She knows that she just hates eating alone."

Sam's smile slipped a little and Alex remembered what the woman had been through. What she had
done for Kara. "Well, good thing I'm hungry. What are we having?"

Sam looped her arm through Alex's and pulled her to her feet. "You don't eat as much as Kara do you? We've been kicked out of like four buffets so far."

Unable to stop, Alex laughed. "No, I don't think anyone eats as much as her."

"Awesome, come on then. M'gann you, too."

***

Back in her office after implementing the changes Kara mentioned, Lena checked to see if she was still around, disappointed to find her gone.

How had Kara known to do that…off the top of her head? Well, it was obvious there was more to Kara Danvers than met the eye.

She debated her next step. Do a more thorough investigation on her to see if she was some sort of spy, or wait and see. She knew what Lex and Lillian would do which is what made her decision so much easier to live with.

For whatever reason, she trusted Kara, and until she did something to make her question that, she'd treat her with respect. Though, she wasn’t against picking her brain to see what other problems she might be able to help solve.

Thirty minutes later she was at home, munching on cold pizza. Her book, still unfinished sat on the coffee table. She made her way over, turning on the TV as she went.

When the image flashed across the screen, she stopped.

It couldn’t be…Superman? Then another camera angle. A woman, long blonde hair, and a suit similar to his…Lena didn't know what she was feeling. So many emotions and thoughts swirled their way around her brain.

She stared in awe at the power the woman on the screen exuded. A fire on a pier had grown too close to an oil tanker. And this woman, this hero, swooped in and carried it to safety. A moment later the cameras tracked her returning to the fire and blowing it out with her freeze breath.

Hovering for mere seconds, she flashed a smile. The crowd erupted in cheers. Then she launched into the air.

There was no doubt who she was. This was the Kryptonian girl her mother had tortured. The woman who had saved the plane then disappeared…

Fear, apprehension, and dread trickled down Lena's spine like a thousand spider legs. She'd hoped for a new start in National City. She'd hoped to get away from her family legacy. She'd hoped to get away from Superman.

She replayed the footage, pausing it when the woman smiled. Lena saw it then. A flicker of doubt, a second of anger, and something about the eyes. Almost dull. This Super might have gotten her abilities back, but she wasn’t 100%.

Lena hoped their paths never crossed. She doubted the Super would give her the benefit of the doubt in any scenario.
With a grunt, she got to her feet. Her book would remain unread. For now, she needed to get back to her designs. She knew what this woman faced and it wasn’t going to be easy. If Superman’s adventures were any indication, life was about to get a lot more complicated for the new heroine and Lena intended to do her whatever it took to help.

She would be ready if anything ever went wrong for the superhero.

***

Kara pulled open the door, a huge smile on her face. "Is that pizza?"

Clark poked his head around the side and rolled his eyes, a dozen boxes in his arms. "Of course, and it's authentic."

"Show off," a feminine voice said from behind him, then a face popped into view.

Kara nodded. "Lois, nice to see you."

"You, too. I saw the news. You did great." She handed Kara a bag of pot stickers. "Those are for you from my favorite place in Metropolis."

Blushing and lowering her head, Kara ushered them inside. "Thanks."

"Hey, guys. Set the food on the table," Alex said. "I'll get the wine glasses."


Standing next to Kal…Clark, Kara pulled at the cuffs of her shirt. A habit she couldn’t seem to break when she was nervous. "I really like the suit."

"It looks great on you."

"Yeah? I look like a hero?"

He turned to her. "Kara, you don't need a suit to be a hero. When you saved that plane you were a hero. Remember that. Everything you do. Every life you help or save is because of who you are. Not the suit you wear."

Kara nodded. "I know. I just mean that people tend to take someone with a suit more serious. I want people to know I'm serious about doing this."

He put his arm around her. "Trust me they know. Now, tell me how it felt."

"Don't pester the poor girl about work at her own celebration." Lois glared at Clark, a smile forming when she couldn’t hold it any longer. "I swear, this guy loves to gossip."

"Right." Clark jabbed a thumb at his chest. "Total gossip right here."

"Supergossip."

Lois placed herself next to him, fitting herself against his side and Kara couldn’t help herself from staring at how well they fit together. She thought about the months she'd been mad at her cousin for finding love while she…while she was in that place. But now, seeing them, she understood that Clark, despite his strength and secretive nature, had needed someone and Lois was the one for him.

She glanced at Alex, a wave of guilt washing over Kara when she realized her sister had been alone.
Eliza and Jeremiah were there of course, but she'd learned that sometimes humans needed a more intimate connection. She swallowed when Lena flashed in her mind.

"So, are you dating anyone?" Lois wiggled her eyebrows.

"Let's eat," Kara said, a tad too loud.

Alex groaned from her end of the couch. "How many did you eat? I lost track at thirty-three."

"All of them…I ate all of them. It was a celebration. I came out!"

Alex laughed. "Yes, you did. How do you feel?"

Smiling, Kara said, "Awesome. I think…I think I can do this."

Clark turned from his spot on the floor. "Of course you can."

"You totally got this," Lois said.

Alex reached over and rubbed Kara's arm. "You can do anything."

Unsure how to handle all the support, Kara shot off the couch. "Thanks. Just for that, I'll even do the dishes." She cleaned up the takeout containers, using super speed so she could get back to the couch.

Clark stood, taking Lois with him. "We have to go, but we should do this again sometime."

Kara walked him to the door and hugged him tight. "Thanks for coming."

Hugging her just as tight, he whispered in her ear. "Anytime."

Closing the door, she took a moment to let everything sink in. Savor it.

"Hey, what movie do you wanna watch?" Alex scanned the rack.

Kara tapped her chin. "The one where you tell me how things are going with Cassie?"

Alex moved her head so Kara was in her line of sight. "I don't like that movie. How about the one where you tell me how working for Lena is going?"

"It's fine. She's really nice and Jess is teaching me a lot. Now, why don't you want to talk about Cassie? Last week you were all happy about her." Kara rubbed her sister's foot.

"I got too excited, ya know? You meet someone and there's a connection and then it kind of just…fizzes out as you get to know them?"

Kara sat straighter. "What happened?"

Sadness overtook Alex's face and anger surged in Kara. She focused on her breathing, unclenching her fist.

"She just isn't who I thought she was. We have very different views. It's okay, really. Relax. I see the glow in your eyes."

From the tone of her sister's voice, Kara knew things were definitely not fine, but she forced herself to calm down. She flipped over so she was behind Alex and wrapped her up the way she used to do with Kara when she got scared of something.
"Just hugs."

Alex sniffled, and Kara turned the television on, not caring what they watched.

"It'll be okay."

Alex snuggled into Kara's arm. "It just sucks. And I feel stupid for getting so excited. I mean, what do I know?"

"You know a lot, don't do that! It didn’t work out with one person. The next one will. You're too amazing not to have someone that makes you happy."

"If you say so. By the way, I went to lunch with Sam and M'gann. It was nice."

"I heard. Sam said you were really cool and made me promise to get you to hang out with us more."

"Yeah, I think I'd like that."

Alex lay there silently while Kara pretended to watch TV. An hour later she fell asleep and Kara carried her into the bedroom.

Back in the living room, she picked up a package of photos she'd had developed last week and started to go through them. She needed something new to paint. Lena had mentioned one photo in particular and Kara thought she might like it.

Putting the pictures into a pile Kara made up the couch. She idly wondered if they should get a two bedroom now that both of them were working, but she liked this place a lot.

Her phone buzzed and she snatched it when she spotted Kal's name.

"Hi."

"Hey, how are you?"

"Okay, is everything all right?"

He let out a small sigh. "Kind of? I have a favor to ask. I meant to ask earlier but forgot."

Kara headed toward the balcony with her bag in hand. "Anything, I can be there in a minute."

"Wait, not that kind of favor…I need you to talk to a friend of mine."

Kara's stomach dropped. "What kind of friend and talk about what?"

Clark cleared his voice. "A good friend. My best friend. His name is Jimmy. I might have encouraged him a while ago to move to National City to help keep an eye on you…just in case, and now his boss, Cat Grant, is threatening to fire him if she doesn’t get an interview with Supergirl."

"I don’t do well talking about myself and I've heard about Cat Grant…she's scary. Jess, Lena's assistant, was telling me about her." Kara set her bag down, deflating. "Wait, did you say Supergirl?"

"Yeah, that's what Cat named you."

"Huh, I kind of like it." Kara smiled at the thought of someone caring enough to give her a superhero name, then… "But talk about myself? I don't know. I suck at that."
"I know. That’s why I want you to talk to Jimmy first. He's a really good guy. Please, trust me."

Kara sighed. "Okay, let me know when and where."

"Thanks, Kara."

The line went dead and a second later a time and address popped up on her screen. She made a face not wanting to do this but not wanting to let Clark down either. Heading to the couch she tossed and turned most of the night.

The next morning she headed into Noonan's. She selected a table in the back assuming Jimmy would know what she looked like. The smell of sticky buns snared her and she was munching on her second one when a tall, handsome, black man with a wonderful smile stood in front of her.

"Kara, hi. James Olsen." He reached out a hand and it took her a moment.

"Right, shaking hands…I always forget that." She accepted his and with great care, shook his hand.

He sat opposite her. "I'm not sure how much Clark told you…"

Kara spoke around a mouthful of sticky bun. "Something about your boss wanting an interview."

"Yeah, Cat Grant. She's going to fire me if I don't secure her an interview with you. Normally, I'd just walk away but Clark wants me here and I kind of like it." He ordered a tea when the waitress came by.

Kara nodded, not sure how to handle this. The thought of giving an interview gave her a lot of anxiety. So many risks, and then there was the fact she hated talking about herself.

"Why does Kal…Clark want you here and what is your job exactly? Are you a reporter like him?"

"I'm a photographer, actually. And, at first, it was to help keep an eye on you, just in case. He's overprotective. But, now that you're out so to speak, he worries more." He leaned back and gave her an easy smile that she couldn’t help but return.

Kara scrunched her forehead. "But, I have Alex."

James nodded. "Of course, and from what I've heard she's amazing, but Clark doesn’t want to take any chances."

The look he gave her let Kara knew why. Her cousin felt guilty and was doing everything he could to protect her, and a little bit more of the anger she had about everything melted away.

"I'm not good at talking to people and Cat Grant is known for making people crack. I could screw it up. I will screw it up."

James leaned forward, hands clasped. "I can help you."

Kara scrunched her forehead. "A photographer?"

"I'm good with people."

"I'll try, but I did warn you I'm not good at this kind of thing."
Alex wiped at her eyes, on the kitchen table she spotted everything ready for her and she had to smile at the fact Kara went out of her way to look after her. When done, she showered and headed into work. When she saw J'onn she debated telling him about the alien bar but opted to keep it to herself for now. She wanted Kara to have a place to go and be herself.

After a few hours and a text from Kara saying she was thinking about doing an interview with Cat Grant after talking to some guy named James, Alex decided it was time to visit Kara at work. She'd missed a lot in the last twelve hours.

In the lobby of LCorp, she handed her FBI badge to the security guard behind the desk. He raised a brow at it then gave it back.

"If you're not in the visitor log I can't send you up."

"But my sister works here. I want to surprise her for lunch."

He bit his lip. "Who's your sister?"

"Kara Danvers."

He typed something on the computer then glanced at her. "Sorry, she's on the top floor. You need to get clearance for that."

Alex frowned, the bags of takeout in her hand getting awkward to hold. "I just want to see my sister." She didn't note the panicked sound in her voice or the way she was starting to sweat.

"You need to be on the list. Give her a call."

Alex's mouth trembled. "I should not have to be on a list to see my sister...she's my family. I want to see her, now."

"Let me call up there."

She tuned out the conversation while she tried to get herself under control. This was the first time since Kara had been back that she feared not being able to see her. Taking controlled breaths she got her heart rate down, but not before she heard a familiar voice calling out to her.

"Alex? Are you okay? I heard your…" Kara stopped talking and forced an awkward smile onto her face.

"Fine, just wanted to see you." Alex held up a bag.

"You brought me food! Come on, we can eat in my office."

"Uh, Ms. Danvers, you need clearance to bring her up there." The security guard was on his feet now, holding out a badge to Alex. "Jess approved it."

Alex sagged, letting Kara lead her toward the elevator.

"Um, do you mind if I meet you up there?"

Alex shrugged. "Fine, but you take these."

Kara grabbed the food and disappeared with a smile on her face.

"And there better be some eggrolls left when I get up there!" Alex called out knowing wherever
Kara was, she could hear her.

When the doors chimed open, Kara was standing there, waiting. "Come on, I'll show you my office."

Alex followed behind, noting a woman sitting behind a large desk watching them with a curious expression.

Once inside the small room Kara called an office, the two sat and unpacked the food. Alex noted they were down at least five eggrolls.

"So, what happened between last night and this morning that you're talking to some guy and now thinking about doing an interview with the Queen of all Media who made the last president cry?"

Kara waved a chopstick at her. "James is a friend of Clark's from Metropolis. He's a photographer. A really good one. We had a long talk about that."

Alex bit her tongue before saying anything, "Kara, why is he here? And what does that have to do with Cat Grant? That's a huge risk."

Kara set down her box of noodles and took a sip of water. "He's here because Clark is really overprotective. And I wasn't going to do the interview, but what if it helps? Maybe more people will trust me and it will save James's job."

Alex let out a breath, looking around the room to try and collect her thoughts. A small bird perched on the shelf next to Kara got her attention.

"When did you get that?"

"What?"

Alex pointed to it. "The bird."

Was Kara blushing?

"Lena got it for me."

"Lena bought that for you?"

Kara nodded. "Don't you want to talk about the interview?"

"Yeah, of course…Lena knows you like birds?"

Kara smiled. "Yeah, she saw my pictures and noticed there were a lot of birds…she's really observant."

"Right, I remember. She got you that book, too."

Kara was totally blushing. Interesting. "The interview is too risky."

"I know it is, but did you read the paper today? People are worried about what I am. I know that feeling and if I can put just one mind at ease, make one person sleep better, I need to do it."

Alex saw the determined look and knew there was no stopping her sister. "Fine, but you're getting prepped for this."
"James is helping, too."

The door behind Alex opened and Lena Luthor popped her head in. "Oh, sorry. I didn’t know you had company."

Alex got to her feet. "No, please come in."

Lena stepped halfway inside, a questioning look on her face. "Oh?"

"Lena, this is Alex, my sister. Alex, this is Lena Luthor, obviously." Kara shoved her glasses up.

Alex stuck out her hand. "It's nice to meet you, again."

Lena smiled, but it didn’t reach her eyes. "Again?"

"Yeah, we met for like five seconds in that Chinese restaurant. It was late, you looked tired and maybe a bit annoyed?"

Lena nodded. "Ah, yes. I remember, now. Sorry, my mind's been all over the place."

"No worries, I understand. I have to admit, I feel like I know you. Kara talks about you all the time."

"Ah, the price I pay for having the last name I do." And Alex heard a world of insecurity in her voice.

Kara put her food aside, surprising Alex. "Oh, nothing like that. All good things, I promise."

When Lena turned to look at Kara, Alex noted the immediate softening of her expression and the slight relaxation of her tense posture.

"Good to know. I was going to ask you to lunch, but another time. It was nice to meet you, Alex."

"Bye." Kara waved, an expression Alex had never seen on her face before.

Alex cocked her head to the side. Hmm. "Lena, wait…if you like Chinese we have more than enough."

Halting in the doorway, Lena looked between the two. "I don't want to intrude."

"Please, join us."

Kara pulled at one of her cuffs. "Yeah, eat with us."

Indecision filled Lena's eyes. "How about next time?"

Alex nodded. "Deal."

When they were alone in the room, Alex turned to Kara, eyebrow raised. "So, you guys have lunch together a lot?"

Kara glanced down, but Alex saw the small smile form.

"Yeah, it's a thing we do. You know…friends."

"Right, so fill me in on James and this interview."

After Kara finished up the food, Alex left, promising that she'd meet her and James back at the
apartment, later on, to help Kara prepare for Cat Grant.

She stopped at the desk in front of what she assumed was Lena's office.

"Are you, Jess?"

"Yes." She glanced up at Alex, face expressionless.

"Thanks for letting me come up." She held the badge the guard had given her.

"Oh, that was Ms. Luthor, actually. She heard me on the phone with Mike...I had it on speaker and when he said you seemed distressed at not being able to see your sister, well...she seems to have a soft spot for Ms. Danvers. Though I can't blame her, your sister is so timid at times I worry that I'm going to frighten her off."

Alex wanted to be reassured at the words, really, she did. But Lena had interrupted them knowing Alex was there? She thought back to the bird and Kara's blush and wondered if there was more going on.

"You can keep that badge by the way," Jess said.

"Thanks. Tell Ms. Luthor I appreciate it, or could I? Would that be okay?"

Jess opened up a screen on her computer that Alex guessed was a schedule. "She has a call in ten minutes, let me check."

Thirty seconds later Alex was being led into a large office full of white furniture and lined with floor to ceiling windows along one wall. Lena was bent over her desk reading a file.

"Ms. Luthor."

"Yes, Alex...is it okay if I call you that?" Lena glanced up.

"Yeah, it's fine. Anyways, thanks for letting me up. I appreciate it."

Lena held up a hand. "Please, no thanks necessary. Kara's a good person and from what she's said about you...well, you're her hero. Plus, when I heard you were distressed I didn't know if perhaps something was wrong and Kara called you...and siblings can be complicated." Lena trailed off then, eyes full of a strange kind of understanding.

Alex found herself speechless. She hadn't expected this. She wondered if Lena was thinking about her brother. If some part of her felt guilty for not being there for him...the same way Alex felt about Kara. All of a sudden she had a whole new take on Lena Luthor.

When Alex didn't say anything, Lena cleared her throat.

"You don't have to tell me...but is everything okay? With Kara I mean."

Alex nodded, the sincerity in the other woman's voice startling her. "Yeah, I just needed to talk to her about some stuff." And before she could stop herself. "Next time, I hope you join us."

"We did make a deal, and you better call me Lena."

"Right, I know you're busy. Thanks again."

Alex left with a better understanding of why Kara spoke so highly of the enigmatic Lena Luthor.
Lena waited for the click of her door before she let out a deep sigh.

Alex Danvers was, in a word, an enigma. Dressed all in black, she stood rigid, tense, ready for a fight, and moved like those in her security teams. All calculated movements and eyes that never stayed still.

Which was not what she was expecting based off of what Kara had told her, nor how the security guard had said there was an agitated woman on the verge of tears asking to see her sister, Kara.

She'd hovered around the door to Kara's office for a full fifteen minutes before she knocked. Her stomach had been in knots with worry that something was wrong with the sweet, young woman. When she saw her eating food and smiling, a sense of relief washed over her.

After a brief conversation, she'd excused herself, finally able to concentrate on work. But then Alex had wanted to thank her and she couldn't really say no, or she could but she didn't want to. For some reason, it was important to her that Alex liked her, if possible. She tried not to dwell on why that mattered.

She and Kara hadn't talked about anything related to therapy since their first meeting and Lena wondered what the protocol on that was. An added complication was the fact she was Kara's boss, she knew they had to keep a professional relationship, but at the same time, she liked the idea of having a friend to talk to and hoped Kara knew she could talk to her as well.

With a glance at Kara's office, she made a decision. She knocked on the door, waited, then peered in. Kara bounced along to a tune Lena couldn't hear and when she sang, Lena smiled, a bit shocked at how great Kara's voice was.

She stepped further into the room slowly, as to not scare the girl, again.

Kara's eyes widened comically when she spotted Lena and she glanced around before pulling two thick plugs out of her ears.

"Sorry. I didn’t hear you. Do you need help with something?"

"It's okay, and technically, you work for Jess."

"Right, we're friends," Kara said with an ease that warmed Lena.

"We are, and speaking of that, I just wanted to make sure everything was okay."

Bobbing her head, Kara smiled. "Yep. You? Your forehead is doing that thing."

Lena raised a brow. "What thing?"

Kara stood and reached toward her, rubbing a finger over whatever it was her forehead did. "You get this little line when you're thinking about something that bothers you."

Lena entered the room more fully, leaning into the touch before she realized it and stood back. Kara was not only smarter than she let on but observant.

"I guess. Dealing with my brother's lawyers is taxing my patience."

Kara's head perked up at that. "Why? What's going on?"
Lena shook her head. "They want me to testify…of all the things. Why the hell would I do that?"
Glancing at the ground, Lena bit her lip before continuing. "He might have been a good brother once, but that was a long time ago and what he did…it's unforgivable."

Kara pushed her glasses up, an action Lena associated with Kara taking a second to sort her thoughts or to hide her nerves. She noted the frayed cuffs and wondered how many shirts the girl went through on a monthly basis.

"I have no idea what that must be like, but you have to take care of you. Don't let them make you do anything you don't want to. You're stronger than that."

Lena let the words slide over her, taking a moment to let them settle. "Thanks, and here I was coming to check on you."

Kara shrugged. "Any time you need to talk, I'm here."

Clearing her throat, Lena smiled. "Same goes for you, you know that, right?"

"I do now." Kara smiled at her and Lena had to fight the urge to hug her.

Get a grip Luthor, since when do you need hugs?

"Okay, I have to go do some work. See you tomorrow." Lena closed the door and headed back to her desk.

Two hours later, she was at home with a glass of wine in her hand. On the television in front of her, footage of Supergirl helping with a traffic accident played. Lena smiled at the image, noting the hero seemed a tad more confident, but her eyes still held a galaxy of sadness.

Kara's eyes flashed in front of her and her thoughts were derailed. Kara who was seeing a therapist for something traumatic. Kara who despite her clumsiness and awkwardness when it came to certain topics, had managed to endear herself to Lena.

Her mind raced to make connections but…dropped the thread.

Lena thought back to what her therapist had told her earlier that day and took it to heart. Kara's pep talk cementing her decision. Before bed, she took a calming breath and sent an email to her brother's lawyers telling them she would not be testifying.
Kara blew out a breath, grinning. "I think I got this, guys."

James made a face and Alex gave her a thumbs down.

"Let’s just go through it one more time. Ms. Grant is pretty tough," James said.

"Fine." Kara stood in her suit, arms crossed, face serious.

Alex downed the rest of her drink. "Perhaps, relax a bit? I'm pretty sure Cat Grant isn't going to spring an attack on you."

Rolling her eyes, Kara shook out her arms. "Better?"

"Maybe smile a little more? You want her to feel comfortable, not worried you want to melt her face," James said.

Kara did as told, face tight. "Of course…how's this?"

Alex nodded. "Okay, Supergirl, where have you been all this time?"

"I was living a totally normal life not bothering anyone until I decided I wanted to become a hero and help people. Which I do want to do. A lot." Kara fidgeted with the cuff of her suit, stopping when Alex slapped her hand.

"Okay, that's good…maybe less emphasis on the first part and more about the last. You want to sound natural," James encouraged.

"Supergirl, are you related to Superman?"

"Yes."

"No," James and Alex yelled at the same time.

Kara sat on the stool next to Alex. "I don’t like lying."

"I know, but in this instance, it might be for the best."

A whoosh followed by the ruffle of curtains and the appearance of Kal…Clark stopped the conversation.

Kara jumped up to her feet and hugged him. "Hi. What are you doing here?"

He leaned back, trademark smile in place. "Since you're helping out Jimmy, I figured I could chip in. Cat and I go back."

Jimmy laughed. "Yeah, that's one word for it."

Kara raised a brow. "What's that mean?"

James shook his head. "Trust me, you don't want to know."
In a flash, Clark was in his reporter gear. "Yep, some things are best left never talked about. So, want some help?"

Letting her arms fall to her side, sighed. "Yes, please. These two have been hounding me all morning."

Clark pulled out his reporting pad and pen, then put on a serious face. "Supergirl, what brings you out now?"

"I felt like it was the right time."

"Interesting, so you waited? What made you decide to save that plane?"

Kara grinned. "My sis…a friend…I saw it on the news and wanted to help and like I know how it feels to be helpless so I couldn’t at first but then I could so I did."

With an exhale, Kara sat back on the stool and laid her head on the table. "I don’t want to do this anymore."

"Come on, cuz, it'll be okay." Clark stood next to her.

For the next three hours, they peppered Kara with questions until she was answering with ease and not getting tripped up.

"Okay, what time do you want to do it? She's given me until eight tomorrow night," James said.

Kara pursed her lips. "Sometime after work then."

"Sounds good. Stop by my office after."

The next day Kara managed to get all the filing, copying, errands, and other assorted jobs Jess had given her done. By the time the clock read five, she was humming with anxiety.

She sped home, pacing for an hour before she left through the window. She honed in on CatCo and spotted Cat sitting in her office. With more grace than she thought possible, she set down on the balcony and waited. A moment later Cat glanced in Kara's direction.

Kara heard the beat of her heart pick up and was glad she wasn’t the only nervous one.

"Supergirl, how nice of you to come by."

Kara stood straight, hands at her side, loose but it didn’t feel right so she fisted them and put them on her hips so she didn’t fidget.

"I heard you wanted to talk to me."

Cat stood, approaching Kara with slow measured steps and an expression that made her nervous.

"Oh, I do. Very much. Tell me about yourself."

"Not much to tell. I just want to help people."

"What's in it for you?"

Kara wrinkled her forehead. "Nothing."
Nodding, Cat tapped a finger to her lip. "You seem awfully young to be taking on such a big responsibility."

"I'm older than I look."

"Really? Then why wait so long to come out? Superman has been around for over a decade."

Kara's thoughts went back to the last ten years and the change in her expression must have been noticeable because Cat's expression changed and she took a step back. Kara crossed her arms and fidgeted with the cuffs of her suit. "It was a big decision. One I didn't take lightly."

Cat waved at Kara's chest. "That symbol, the S, what does it mean?"

"It's my family crest. El Mayarah, it means stronger together."

"Family Crest? So, you're related to Superman. Husband?"

Kara raised her hands. "What? No! He's my cousin."

Cat smiled. "Cousin, interesting. Superman claims he was sent here as a baby. A lone survivor of a long-gone planet."

The ache associated with the loss of her home surfaced, but Kara managed to rein in her emotions. "My parents sent me. Superman didn't know."

Cat leaned against the railing of the balcony. "I know there's more to that story."

Kara smiled. "For another time, maybe. Was there anything else?"

"Well, now that you're here can National City expect to call you its very own hero?"

Kara nodded. "As long as I'm able, I'll help." With that, she flew away, not sure how badly she messed up.

She changed in an alley and walked into the lobby of CatCo taking the stairs up to the floor James told her he worked on. When she exited the stairway she bumped into a short guy with dark brown hair and a cardigan.

"Sorry."

"No problem... you work out, huh?"

Kara stared at him. "No, I don't work here."

"No, I meant like... working out, like at a gym." He made various movements with his arms, raising them above his head.

"Sorry, I don't know Jim. I'm looking for James Olsen."

The man's shoulders sagged. "Of course, right this way. I'm Winn. Winn Schott."

This time she shook the hand held out to her. "Kara."

"That's a nice name."

He led her to a set of large glass doors with Art Director written across them. She could see James
through them and waved. He smiled when he saw her and welcomed her in.

"Hey, how did it go?"

She waited for the door to close behind her. "Not bad? I might have let some stuff slip, but she's really sneaky."

James laughed. "Well, she didn’t get to where she is by playing it safe. And since you just saved my job, why don't you let me treat you to lunch tomorrow?"

Kara nodded. "Maybe another time?"

"Sure thing, just let me know."

When Kara walked out of his office she ran into Winn again.

"Hi."

"Hi," she said back. "I'm going now."

"Yeah, it was nice meeting you…if you ever have computer issues I'm your guy…or if you want to go out or something."

Kara knew she wasn’t supposed to hear the end of his sentence but her super hearing picked it up. She moved faster, still rattled from James's invitation and now having Winn's echo in her ears.

Dating.

Man, that was scary stuff. Terrifying really. Kara didn’t want to imagine herself in that situation. Her sister was the strongest person she knew and to see her hurt by merely liking someone and not having it work out, no thanks. Not to mention, at twenty-four years old, at least here on Earth, Kara had literally no experience whatsoever in that department.

She didn’t exactly relish the idea of trying to explain that to someone let alone have them be understanding about it. If what she saw in the movies was any indication she'd be laughed at in seconds.

So, dating was not happening.

And she planned to keep it that way. No way was she going to be able to let anyone in…it's just how it was and she was fine with that.

She had Alex and that was enough.

Lena's face popped into her head.

Right, that wasn’t confusing.

***

Alex set the paper down on the table with a small sigh. She sipped her coffee and waited for her sister to appear. "Kara, this isn’t what we talked about over the weekend. Remember when we practiced for hours with James and Clark?"

Her sister looked at her, blue eyes getting brighter every day. "I know, I tried really…but it's not like anything I said is that terrible. So what if people know Kal and I are cousins?"
"We only worry because Superman has made a few enemies and we don't want them trying to hurt you to get back at him." Alex placed her hand over Kara's. "We just want you safe."

"I know you do, but it'll be okay."

Alex's phone went off with a DEO alert. Kara perked up, listening when Alex answered.

Before she could say anything, Kara was out the window and on her way to a ten car pile-up. Finishing her oatmeal, Alex got dressed only moving her ass when J'onn called to let her know that some guy in a weird suit had attacked Kara.

Once she got to the DEO, she grabbed her sister by the arm and forced her into the med bay. "Tell me everything that happened."

Kara sat on the exam table, allowing Alex to confirm everything was fine.

"I don't know. One minute I was helping someone out of a car and the next I was hit with this blast of...heat? It was weird. I felt it. It knocked the breath out of me. I damaged the weapon part of his suit though. That's why he left."

Alex fiddled with the tablet in her hand. "But you're okay? No weird after effects?"

Kara smiled. "Nope. I'm good."

Getting to her feet and wrapping her arms around Kara, Alex shook her head. "You did amazing. I'm really glad you're okay."

J'onn chose that moment to enter. "Ladies, we have a report of an abduction by a man fitting the description of who Kara fought this morning."

Kara hopped off the bed and onto her feet. "Who was taken?"

Taking a breath, J'onn spoke, "Lena Luthor."

Alex opened her mouth but shut it when she saw Kara pale.

"What? Where is she? Is she okay? Was she hurt? What do we know? I have to help her."

"We will. Let's go find out what we know." Alex grabbed her sister's hand hoping to calm her down but wincing. "Not so tight," she whispered.

Kara let go as if burned. "Sorry, are you okay? I didn’t mean...I wasn’t thinking."

"I'll live. Don't worry about it. Let's go see if we can find your boss." Alex walked toward the control room where several screens were lit up. She scanned them. Several heads turned toward Kara, Supergirl Alex mentally corrected herself.

"Vasquez, what do we know about Lena Luthor?"

"Ma'am, she was abducted seven minutes ago from LCorp. The man Supergirl fought this morning broke into one of her labs demanding someone with engineering experience come with him. Ms. Luthor volunteered to take the place of her employee. We're still scanning video to see if we can find a trail."

Kara paced next to her, fists clenching and unclenching.
"Sir, we have something approaching fast," Vasquez said.

Cocking her head to the side, Kara sighed, "It's Kal."

Alex went outside with Kara to meet him when he landed.

"It's Reactron. He's going after you to hurt me."

"Okay, we find him first," Alex said. "What do we know about him?"

"Not much, he started coming after me a few years ago but quit a few months back. I never knew why. He has a nuclear-powered suit. It packs quite a punch. I've never been able to take him down."

Kara held up a hand. "What did you do a few years ago?"

"A lot...I can't think of any one thing."

"How about anything related to radiation?" Kara pressed.

Alex followed her sister's train of thought. "He wants to hurt you which means something happened to him and he blames you."

Entering the control area she typed in saves that Superman performed five years ago that fit the parameters she had in her head.

"The power plant. You prevented a nuclear meltdown, but two people still died." She ran another search coming up with a name.

"Is there any way to find him?" Kara asked.

Alex tapped her fingers on the desk, thinking. "It's a long shot, but if we can retask the satellite to pick up on radiation signatures..." She input the commands, waiting for the screen to change. "Give me a second." A new screen popped up and Alex pointed to a small area that lit up. "There. That's where he is."

"Are you sure?" Kara's eyes scanned the map.

"Yep, small enough to barely register. A nuclear plant would light up the screen."

Kal moved but Kara stopped him. "Together?"

Alex waited a tense moment, happy when he nodded.

"Be careful," Alex called out.

"See you soon."

***

Lena wiggled in the chair hoping to loosen the ties. The man who had taken her had left a few moments ago and she really wanted to be gone when he got back.

A shadow passed over her and she stopped her movements. "What do you see?" He gestured to a bit of metal on the back wall.

"Not much."
He leaned over her, breath rancid. "Don't. Now, tell me what you see or I kill you and find someone who can help me."

Lena glared at him a second before rattling off what she saw.

"Can you fix it?"

"Yes, but I'll need a few things."

She listed off what she needed as well as a few random bits she knew were difficult to find and would buy her some time.

Now, two hours later she was trying her best to drag her feet while he stared at her. She recognized him from the news report earlier about a strange man attacking Supergirl. If Lena had anything to say about it, that wasn't happening again.

She needed to be careful, though. He'd caught her doing something wrong and she knew then and there his threat of killing her was sincere. From then on she did it right, if a bit slower than he liked.

A loud noise startled her and then he was grabbing the chest piece from her hands and strapping it on. She tried to move but the chains around her legs kept her in place.

Before he could turn, a blur of red and blue came in and carried her out of the room, chair and all. As soon as she got her bearings she was free and Supergirl was looking her over.

"Lena, are you okay? Did he hurt you?"

How did Supergirl know her name? Then it hit her...she was a Luthor after all. Though, she sounded like she truly cared, which shocked Lena.

"No, I'm fine...thank you."

Supergirl nodded. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, go. Take care of him."

Hesitant, Supergirl nodded. "I'll be back to get you."

She flew off and Lena heard and saw the sparks of the fight. From the looks of it, Superman was there, too. A car flew up in the air and then another. Lena shielded her eyes at one point when a bright light filled the sky. Then...the man who had taken her flew off. Lena's stomach dropped. Moving toward the danger, she squinted seeing someone carrying another person off. A person with long flowing hair.

Her chest tightened at the thought Supergirl might have been hurt.

An hour later, after an emergency team found her, she was back at LCorp being checked over by a medical team. Once they cleared her, she sat at her desk trying to decide how to respond to the invitation from CatCo to celebrate the special Supergirl issue. Of all times to throw a party. She gritted her teeth but hit yes for no other reason than the hope that someone might know the condition of the hero.

At the party, she glanced around from her spot on the wall. A few people had tried to talk to her but she wasn't giving any quotes about what had happened. Some were blaming her for fixing the weapon, and she knew the fact she'd stepped in to save an employee wouldn't matter one bit.
A woman in a green dress with a nice, if not out of place sweater on top, across the room caught her eye and when she heard her voice, she almost choked. What was Kara doing there? She watched the woman talk to a tall, black man and a shorter, nerdier looking guy. All of a sudden her palms were sweaty and her stomach fluttered.

Taking a glass of champagne from a passing waiter, she couldn’t take her eyes off her. Then Kara was dancing with the shorter one and then the taller one was cutting in and Lena had no idea what to think.

Her shy assistant who she thought had no friends apparently had some suitors, and based on the look on a few other faces, a lot more if she were so inclined. Lena's stomach twisted at the thought, though she chalked it up to a protective streak. She could still read the tension and awkwardness in the girl as she danced.

Then their eyes met and Lena couldn’t breathe.

Crap. She was pretty sure that wasn’t a good sign.

"Lena, hi. How are you? I heard about what happened. Are you okay? You didn’t get hurt did you?" Kara asked several questions in rapid-fire succession before stopping and adjusting her glasses. "Sorry, I was worried."

Lena swallowed. "It's okay. I'm fine, though I do appreciate the concern."

"That's good. I'm glad. Like really glad." Kara wouldn’t stop looking at her and Lena felt herself blushing.

"I heard you were sick today?"

"Oh, kind of. A friend needed help…sorry. It won't happen again."

Lena had to chuckle at the blatant honesty Kara gave her. Anyone else would have feared being fired by Lena, but not Kara. Honest to a fault, or she really had no idea what the proper things to say to your boss were.

"I'm sure it was important, don't worry about it." Lena glanced to the side. "Your boyfriend is looking over here, you don't have to keep me company." Yeah, that was not as smooth as she had expected it to sound.

Kara wrinkled her brow. "No, not my boyfriend. Nope, not one of those. Just met him a couple of days ago, actually. More of a friend in progress? Is that a thing? He knows my cousin and needed some help with stuff and I agreed and then he invited me to this thing and..."

"Kara, breathe. Are you okay?"

She sagged a bit. "I had a rough day and I was really worried about you. I didn’t like the idea of you being in danger or getting hurt."

Lena's throat bobbed a moment, the lump that had formed at the sincere words piercing her. "I'm fine, truly I am."

"I know that, but I still didn’t like it." Kara met her eyes, her gaze intent.

Clearing her throat Lena looked away. "Is your sister here?"
"No. Why?"

Lena leaned in close. "I know she works for the F.B.I and I wanted to share some information with her to see if she could get it to Supergirl."

Kara's eyes widened. "You can tell me, I'll make sure she gets it...if you trust me."

Lena almost blurted out that she was one of the only people she trusted and it both shocked and scared her. Instead, she went with her original plan.

"I worked on that thing he uses, his chest plate. It wasn't quite finished...I didn't mean to work on it but he would have taken someone else and hurt them...but I stalled as much as I could."

Kara reached out and placed a hand so, so gently on Lena's arm that she barely felt the touch. A trail of goosebumps rose on her skin.

"What you did was brave. You're a hero."

"Hardly a hero, but you need to tell your sister that if Supergirl can find a way to encase the core in lead you can remove it without the risk of killing him or causing a meltdown."

At that moment the wall next to them exploded and Kara threw herself behind Lena shielding her with her body. Kara's body was hard, and Lena spared a moment to wonder how much time she spent in the gym. Then they were halfway across the room and Kara was looking at her in that intent way she had earlier that seemed so familiar.

"Get out of here...I need to find my friend." When Lena didn't move, Kara nudged her. "Please, get somewhere safe. I need you to be safe."

Lena nodded, following the crowd out of the building. There were crashes and explosions, the sound of glass shattering and all she could do was stare at the door and wait for Kara to exit.

When two forms launched out of the top of the building and landed in a parking lot nearby, Lena didn't take her eyes off of the doorway. While others went to watch the fight, Lena stayed put. Her heart thundering in her chest, adrenaline coursing through her.

Making her way back into the destroyed room she saw no sign of Kara. The tall man from earlier grabbed her.

"Ms. Luthor, you shouldn't be in here," he said in a calm voice.

"My friend was in here and she didn't come out. Kara...you know her, too." Lena looked all around for any sign of Kara. "Where is she? Is she hurt?"

"She's okay. She went out the back exit. I'm sure if you go out front you'll be able to find her."

Lena nodded, unsure, but she let him lead her away. His hold on her calm and steady.

Out front, the fight between Supergirl and Reactron had wrapped up and the tall man left her to make a call. Within moments, Kara appeared, a bit out of breath and smudges of dirt on her face and legs.

"Kara, are you okay? Where did you go?"

"I called my sister with that info you had. Thanks, by the way. Supergirl was able to stop him for good." Kara grinned.
"That's great. Glad to have helped."

"You helped a lot. You're a hero, Lena."

"Hardly, just doing my best."

Kara cocked her head to the side. "But that's what a hero does."

Lena could only stare. Who was Kara Danvers? Why did she have more faith in Lena than anyone else despite who her family was and how blue could someone's eyes be? The last thought made her shake her head.

"Well, as long as you're okay. That's all that matters."

"Me? I'm fine." Kara ran a finger along the frames of her glasses. "I should go. I mean, I can stay if you want but I had a long day and I know you did, too. Wow, you had a really bad day and now this. Are you sure you're okay? Want me to take you home?"

Lena blushed and she hated it. "I'm fine, Kara. Go do what you need to do. I have a driver right over there." She pointed to a limo on the other side of the parking lot.

"Oh, okay, if you're sure."

Lena totally wasn't sure. "I'm sure."

And with that Lena walked to her car, a million thoughts about her day running through her head. Most of them centered on Kara, the sweet woman who had managed to get through Lena's barriers. Lena felt like there were things, important things that she should be focusing on, but that was for another day.

***

Kara crumpled up the wrapper from her taco and tossed it in the bag. Her stomach still grumbled, but she'd pushed it already by eating three in front of Lena.

"Are you still hungry?"

Kara shook her head. "No, my stomach just does that."

"Yeah, it does it when you're hungry," Lena laughed.

"Well, I guess I have a big appetite."

Lena made a face. "Now it makes sense! With how much you work out you must eat ten times a day."

Kara fidgeted with the cuffs of her shirt, wincing when one ripped. "Uh, work out?"

"Yep, the other night when you saved my life…which I never thanked you for because of all the chaos. You might hide those muscles with long sleeves and pants but I felt them when you grabbed me from behind." Lena's mouth clamped shut.

Warmth spread up Kara's neck at the memory of pressing against Lena. "Um, right. I work out. A lot."

Lena raised a brow and Kara felt that same weird pull that happened whenever she was with Lena…
like when Lena looked into her eyes, or when Kara stole glances of her. She had chalked it up to a lingering sense of worry for her boss turned friend, but now she wasn’t so sure. The pull had been there prior to that so…that didn’t really hold water.

Her thoughts went to her session with her therapist when she almost reached out to wipe away a bit of sauce from Lena's cheek.

Dr. Grey had prodded Kara yesterday morning and a few of the things that came to light had terrified her.

"How's the job going? It's been three months now."

"It's great. Jess is teaching me a lot about office work and Lena's taken me down to the science labs a few times to show me stuff. At lunch, I get to sit in Lena's office and stare out the windows at the city and talk with her. It's really nice, like having a friend who just knows me and not any of the bad stuff." A smile came to her face while she spoke, something that happened every time she spoke of Lena.

Dr. Grey smiled. "You spend a lot of time with Lena?"

Kara nodded. "Yeah, she doesn’t have a lot of free time or friends either so…"

"Do you do anything outside of work with her?"

Kara shook her head. "I saw her once at a party thing but it was just a coincidence." She blushed at the memory of the jolt that hit her when she saw her friend in the black dress.

"Do you want to do things with her outside of work?"

Running a finger along the frame of her glasses, Kara shrugged. "I mean yeah, I guess. I'd like to show her this place I found that has the flowers she likes and maybe this one area that's good for bird watching? Maybe to the planetarium or the museum, something relaxing because she's always so stressed."

"So, you'd be okay with her getting to know you better?"

Kara was pretty sure that's not what she said, but when she thought about it…nope, she didn’t want that.

"No, I guess not." She sagged in her seat, more saddened by the thought than she wanted to admit.

Dr. Grey spoke, softly, "Kara, at some point you need to let someone in…other than Alex. I know it's scary, but I promise you'll feel better for it. You can't go through life alone and holding everything inside of you."

"There's Sam, too. She's great. I talk to her all the time."

"Yes, but you and Sam share a history. I'm talking about new people and learning to make friends now."

Kara scrunched her face up. "The things that happened, no one wants to hear about them. I certainly don't want to remember them. And dating is not something that appeals to me, not that I could if I wanted to."

"I didn't say anything about dating, I meant friends. But, are you thinking about dating?"
"No, I don't think so…I'm not sure." She had no idea how to talk about her lack of experience, or that she had no idea how to tell the difference between feelings for a friend or something more.

"I know you were young when you were taken and now here you are, all grown up. You missed out on a lot of things people do to prepare themselves for life in general, specifically relationships and dating. I don't want you to feel embarrassed, okay? You can talk to me about it. It's not an easy thing to navigate even when you know what to expect."

Kara nodded. "Maybe next time? I think our time is up."

"Okay, see you in a couple of weeks."

With that Kara left the office and was in the air a moment later. Alex had texted her that morning that J'onn wanted to do a test on Kara's abilities now that they had been back for a few months with no change.

She spotted them out in the desert and landed next to Alex.

"Hey, how was therapy?"

Kara made a face.

"That good?"

Kara crossed her arms. "She wants me to talk to more people and think about dating."

Alex chuckled. "Ah, she hit on your favorite topics. Who were you talking about that made her think about dating? James?"

"I don't know. I was talking about Lena and working and she asked after that. I don't think it had to do with anything I was saying."

Alex raised an eyebrow. "Right. How is Lena?"

Kara smiled, her body relaxing. "Great. She's doing so well after the whole thing with Reactron. I've been keeping an eye on her and making sure she eats and I read up on symptoms of trauma and she hasn't shown any. And tomorrow I'm thinking of getting us tacos for lunch, she's never had any, can you believe that?"

"Supergirl," J'onn interrupted. "If you're ready."

And with that Kara was in the air dodging missiles, breaking the sound barrier, and performing an assortment of other tasks while J'onn spoke into her ear.

She stopped when a convoy of cars appeared and she heard the raised voice of her sister.

"She doesn't have to do anything she doesn't want to and you can take your robot and shove it up –"

J'onn stepped in then as Kara landed. "Agent Danvers, I'll handle this. General Lane, Supergirl does not work for the DEO and I certainly won't force her to do anything she doesn't want to."

A tall man in uniform glared at Kara before walking toward her. "You will fight this robot. We need to know what you're capable of. Vigilante aliens like you and your cousin need to be held in check."

Kara tried to stand firm, but his voice and manner made her take a step back. "I don't want to hurt anyone."
"Then one week from now you'll be here to help with this test."

"She doesn't have to…Supergirl you don't have to do this," Alex said.

"Actually, she does, I have an order signed by the President," a short woman with dark hair said.

Kara didn’t say anything when Alex led her away.

"Are you okay? You don't look okay."

Shaking her head she made a fist to try and stop her hands from shaking. "In that…place, they would yell at me like that and do tests. I felt like I was back there for a second. But I'm okay, now."

Alex wrapped her up in a hug. "You're not doing this. Screw them."

"Something on your mind? You seem distracted today?" Lena asked.

Kara pushed up her glasses. "Have you ever been asked to do something that you really didn’t want to do…like really didn’t want to do, but not doing it would just make things so much worse?"

Lena wiped at her mouth with a napkin. "Yes. I think most people have been in a situation like that at some point."

"Have you?"

Lena nodded, setting her taco down on a paper plate. "They keep asking me to testify at Lex's trial and I keep saying no. They tell me it might help him…but I don’t want to do that. What he did is inexcusable."

Kara cocked her head to the side. "And since you won't do that, your family is probably pretty upset with you."

"That's putting it mildly. Knowing my family they'll have me killed because of it," she chuckled darkly but Kara knew Lena was serious.

"They can try, but I'll keep you safe." Kara reached out a tentative hand and placed it on top of Lena's for a moment then pulled away when she felt warmth start to spread up her arm.

"I appreciate the offer, but I'd rather nothing ever happen to you because of me."

Kara smiled at her. "I'm tougher than I look."

"I know, but when you don't do what other people want they have a way of making you pay for it and a lot of times that means hurting those you care for."

All too familiar with that particular threat, Kara sat straighter. "No one's going to hurt you."

Lena smiled sadly. "It's not me I'm worried about."

***

Alex paced the apartment ranting about generals and where they could shove their presidential orders. This was her little sister who had been traumatized and was now being forced to do something she didn’t want to do. She’d promised her that would never happen again.

Dammit
"Kara, why are you doing this? I told you, you don't have to. You know as well as I do that Clark will come here and kick all of their asses for making you do this."

In her suit, fidgeting with the wrist cuffs, Kara sighed. "I know, but if I don't do it they'll just find some other way to come after me. At least this way I know what's coming."

"Are you sure? Why are you so calm about it now?"

"I talked to Lena and realized a few things. I just want to do it and have them go away. My issue is I'm not as in control of my powers as Kal. I still tend to let my emotions get in the way or throw me off."

Alex took a sip from her coffee, noting that four cups before 8AM was not a great idea because her eye would not stop twitching. She also decided not to mention Lena. "You've come so far, don't let them take that away from you. Fight their stupid robot and then we'll go out for pot stickers, okay?"

"Yeah, and then come home for ice cream."

"All the ice cream you can handle," Alex said while hugging Kara.

Alex arrived at the spot selected by General Lane an hour early. She wanted to scope it out but everyone was already there. She stood next to Vasquez.

"So, you see this robot thing they want Supergirl to fight?"

The woman pointed toward a heavily guarded truck. "Nope, but that's where they're keeping it."

Alex scanned the area knowing J'onn was probably doing the same thing. She ended up inside a tent with a set of blueprints laid out on the table and a man with dark, wiry hair having some sort of meltdown.

"It's not a robot, it's an A.I."

"I don't give a damn what fancy name you gave it, just make sure it works," General Lane said.

Alex backed out, wondering why exactly they had Kara going up against this thing.

"Agent Danvers, everything okay?"

She turned to J'onn. "Not sure, guess we'll see." She cut herself off from saying more when she saw Kara approaching.

"All right people, let's do this. Supergirl, if you don't mind." General Lane motioned toward a cordoned off area and Kara obliged.

Alex's heart clenched at the sight of her sister with her arms crossed, protecting herself already from whatever was in the truck. She looked so scared; J'onn had to physically restrain her from running to Kara.

"Give her a chance, Alex. Let her do this."

The back door swung open and a red robot stepped down. It went toe to toe with Kara. It had flight, super speed, and strength, but that was about it. Kara kept up with it, not using her full strength until the end. Alex wasn’t sure what happened but she blasted it with her freeze breath and started punching and didn’t stop until an arm snapped off and General Lane was screaming at her.
When Kara stepped back to allow the technician in to see, the robot got to its feet and flew off, disappearing as it did so.

Kara scanned the sky. "I can't see it…it's gone."

Alex ran up to her, putting a hand on her shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"Is she okay? Did you see what she did to my robot? She disobeyed me and look what happened? It's gone?"

Alex spun on him. "You should have thought of that before you asked her to fight it…unless you didn’t expect her to win? Is that what this is about?"

"It's not a robot. It's an artificial intelligence. It's gone into self-preservation mode. I'll track it down," The dark-haired man from earlier said.

General Lane glared at the man. "All you're going to do is clear out your stuff and make sure I never see you again. What a colossal waste of money."

Alex ignored the rest of the conversation, grabbing Kara and telling her to get to the DEO. J'onn nodded at her and followed.

When Alex reached the compound twenty minutes later, Vasquez greeted her, "Ma'am, there's something you should see."

Alex followed her to a lab where J'onn stood glaring at the arm. "It's been designed be invisible to Kryptonians. It has stealth technology that makes it impossible to track."


J'onn turned to her, voice softer than before. "Some people are afraid of what you and your cousin can do. There's no changing it, just keep doing the right thing and let the rest sort itself out."

Kara bit her lip and Alex knew her sister was not okay. Pulling her out into the hallway she whispered, "Meet me at home. We have a date with pot stickers, remember?"

Alex pulled out her phone the moment she knew Kara was out of earshot. When the other end was picked up, she started in. "Did you know about this? Did you know they were building something to hunt Kara? How could you not tell her?"

"What happened? What are you talking about?" Clark said.

"I'm talking about the fact your girlfriend's little sister just showed up here with dad and had Kara fight a robot that's been designed to hunt down Kryptonians…and now it's on the loose because it malfunctioned." Alex pinched the bridge of her nose.

"Are you sure? I swear this is the first I'm hearing of it and trust me, if Lois knew she would have said something."

"You're right, I'm sorry. Its just…you should have seen her. She was so scared, Clark."

"Is she okay? Did it hurt her? I'm on my way."

"She's fine…physically. I'll see you in a bit. Bring –"

"Potstickers," he finished.
Alex sighed. "Yeah, and ice cream."

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Lena dumped the last bit of trash into the can before surveying her office. A comfy couch, neat desk, filing cabinet, and bookshelves full of various knick-knacks. Her chess trophies among them.

A quick glance at her watch let her know she'd skipped dinner, again. She almost called Kara to see if she wanted to meet up but decided against it. They'd managed to have lunch four times this week and with each passing day Lena's walls crumbled a bit more.

At first, it terrified her, still did at times, but maybe having a close friend wouldn’t be so bad. Considering how often she thought of Kara and how touch starved Lena was based on how often she barely restrained herself from hugging Kara…hmm, she needed to keep a lid on that.

Grabbing her wallet she headed downstairs and walked to one of her favorite restaurants. When she was ten feet from the door she spotted the tall man from the gala with two other people. She adjusted her path to avoid them, though she noted he held a petite brunette rather close which eased some part of her that she didn’t know was tense.

All hell broke loose a second later. An odd-looking red android of some kind appeared and targeted the older man in uniform. Within seconds, Supergirl appeared and fought with it. Supergirl was holding own until the thing rotated its arms and created two massive tornadoes.

While it sped off, Supergirl flew into the massive wind formations and stopped them from killing anyone or doing any severe damage.

People got up from their hiding spots and applauded until the man in uniform started yelling at Supergirl for letting the android get away. The heroine's face fell, enough for Lena to almost go over and shove the man's five stars where the sun didn't shine.

Instead, she went home and made sure whatever that thing was, it had nothing to do with her brother.

Sunday morning found her asleep at her desk at LCorp, an insistent buzzing waking her up. She stared at her phone in an attempt to make it stop. It didn’t work. Picking it up, she squinted in confusion when she saw the name Alex Danvers.

"Hello?"

"Lena. This is Alex, Kara's sister. I was hoping I could speak with you about something."

Lena rubbed a hand over her face. "Is Kara okay?"

"She's fine, this is something of a more delicate nature."

"How did you get this number?"

"I'll explain when I see you."

Lena rubbed an eye. "I'm at the office."

"I'll be there in ten minutes."

Lena stared at the phone, unsure what was happening. She sipped at the old coffee wincing at the coldness.
She made a fresh pot in the lounge down the hall while she waited for Alex Danvers, all the while trying to figure out what the woman wanted.

Sitting at her desk she kept her gaze on the monitor, hitting the buzzer to allow the woman up. While she watched the elevator work its way to her floor she organized the files on her desk into a pile.

"Lena, thanks for seeing me."

Lena stood, waving her in. "Not a problem, what can I do for you?"

Alex hefted a case onto Lena's desk and opened it. A red arm inside of it. One she recognized from the night before.

"I had nothing to do with this and I spent the night scouring my brother's projects...I have no idea where this came from." She crossed her arms waiting for the accusation to come just the same.

"I'm aware. I need your help. This thing...how do I find it?"

Lena wrinkled her brow. "You want my help?"

Alex nodded. "It would seem this thing has some high tech stealth abilities and as of now it's on the loose."

Lena motioned to pick up the item, waiting for Alex's nod of approval. She admired the wiring, the mesh, the circuitry. She opened a drawer and pulled out some tools she kept on hand when she felt the need to tinker with something.

"This is military tech." Lena raised her head. "Why...Nevermind. I know."

Alex sat in the chair in front of Lena's desk. "Yeah, as if she doesn't have a hard enough time as it is. She just wants to help. Why can't they get that?"

Returning her gaze to the arm on her desk, Lena shrugged. "Some people see her abilities, or the symbol she wears, or her family name and assume things."

Clearing her throat, Alex nodded. "I guess they do. She'll just have to keep doing good and prove all those jerks who doubt her wrong."

From the tone of voice, Lena knew they weren't talking about Supergirl anymore. "I guess she will." Pulling out a chip, she made a face. "Whatever this thing is, it's not autonomous. Someone's controlling it. I can narrow down an area the frequency is originating from for you, but other than that I can't do much else."

Alex smiled. "That would be amazing, anything is a step in the right direction."

Lena went to work pulling the wires out and attaching them to a device. She acquired the information and did a scan. She wrote down the address and handed it to Alex.

"Here. Whoever's controlling this thing is doing it from this area."

Alex closed up the case. "Thank you. I appreciate this."

Lena nodded. "Can I ask...why me?"

"Aside from the fact you're National City's resident genius? Kara trusts you."
"Oh." Not to the most eloquent response, but Lena was stunned by the words. "You don't really work for the FBI do you?"

Alex shrugged. "Right now, I'm just someone doing whatever I can to help Supergirl."

"Well, anytime you need help with that my door is open."

The smile Alex gave her before leaving was so genuine that Lena’s eyes teared up. For someone who planned on not making any new friends, she was doing a hell of a job.

Which reminded her, she had to check on Sam and see how her biology test went.
Chapter 20

Kara eyed Alex as she handed her the crystal.

"All you have to do is set this part up in the lot we picked. It's out of the way so you don't have to worry about civilians. The minute it goes on it should bring in that stupid robot. You keep it distracted while I find and take down the guy controlling it."

Accepting the crystal, Kara nodded. "Are you sure you're going to be okay? I'd feel better if we were together."

Alex put a hand on her shoulder. "Me too, but we have to keep the danger to others to a minimum. I'll be okay."

Kara hugged her sister, whispering in her ear. "You better be or I'm gonna be really mad at you."

With that Kara flew into the air and went to the destination they gave her. She set up the crystal and set it up when Alex gave her the go ahead. She watched as General Lane appeared, his angry face yelling at her.

It didn't take long for the sound of the incoming android to reach Kara's ears. The moment it landed it tried to take out the General, confused when nothing happened. Jumping in, Kara delivered several well-placed punches. She stumbled a few times when it got in a few of its own.

On the other end of her ear piece, Alex struggled with someone and the urge to go help her sister flooded her.

"Alex…"

"Stay there! I got this."

Gritting her teeth, Kara did as Alex said. A misplaced foot on her part allowed the robot to get her in a choke hold. Her vision blurred, her lungs fought for air, and then she was free. Behind her the android glitched a moment and she focused her heat vision. The fear she'd felt a moment before bringing all her anxieties and anger to the surface.

Visions of Krypton exploding, her parents, Lillian, her cell…she pressed forward, clenched her hands and put everything she had into annihilating the robot. Another foot forward as the android lost ground. Hugging her mother. Locking Alex out to keep her safe.

A scream erupted from her and then…an explosion of red and she fell to her knees, gasping. Her body weak, fatigued, not regenerating with the bright sun. She was all too familiar with what was happening.

Shaking it off, she tapped her ear piece. "Alex, are you okay?"

"Fine, you?"

"Yep. I'm going to head home and change for work."

"What? You can call in or something…"
"No, I'll be fine. I can't just skip out all the time."

Kara waited a few moments for the DEO to show up and deal with the remnants then headed home. Stumbling when she landed on the balcony, she barely made it in the door before falling, grimacing at the pain in her knee. A quick shower and then she switched into work appropriate gear, shoved her suit in her bag, and downed two donuts before she had to stop.

The bus ride to LCorp was long, cool, and boring. Too much time to think let her thoughts linger on the possibility of losing her powers. Clark had a name for it, something silly she couldn't remember.

The stairs almost did her in, and by the time she was walking past Jess's desk, she was right on time for work but had used up whatever was left of her energy reserves.

"Ms. Danvers, morning. You okay?"

Kara wiped at the sweat beading on her forehead. "Morning, Jess. I'm good. Overdid it this morning. What do you have for me today?"

"Over did it?" Jess gave Kara a strange look then pointed to a stack of boxes. "Ms. Luthor wants those catalogued and then put into storage."

Kara grabbed one, noting it actually felt heavy. She sighed hoping it was temporary and hauled it into her office, eyes going to the back shelf out of habit to see if Lena left a surprise. How did Clark say he got them back? Why didn't she pay attention? Her hand slipped and she yelped at the pain when a piece of paper sliced her finger.

The sight of blood froze her in her tracks. Forcing in a deep breath, she counted to ten. Five times. Her anxiety slowed and after a moment she unclenched her teeth. Being without her powers was nothing new, she'd spent far more time not having them, but it still threw her off.

Not thirty seconds later there was a knock on her door right before it opened and Lena peeked inside. "Morning. I heard you come in."

"Morning. Do you need something?" Kara tilted her head to the side, noting the wide smile on Lena's face.

"No, just wanted to…check in. Um, do you want some coffee? I have donuts."

Kara nodded. "Sure, that'd be great."

Lena put her hand on the door, then stopped, her eyes moving to Kara's hand. "What happened? You're bleeding! Get in my office."

"It's nothing." Kara waved off Lena while walking into her office.

"Just do what I tell you."

Kara sat on the couch, Lena pulling a first aid kit out of her desk. She sat on the couch next to Kara, the space between them smaller than usual and Kara swore she felt the heat emanating from Lena and something else she couldn't put her finger on.

"This might sting a bit."

A sting then Lena was blowing on Kara's finger and all thoughts of pain and being cold were obliterated. "It's okay." Kara managed to get out."
"Just let me put a band-aid on it."

Kara grabbed a jelly filled to distract her from staring at Lena, a wave of feelings and emotions, none of which she understood.

"So, how’s your day?"

Lena quirked a brow. "Well, it's barely eight in the morning, so not much to speak of yet…but I guess that's a good thing. I wanted to let you know I talked to your sister."

Kara stopped chewing, scrunching her forehead. "What about?"

Lena picked at her donut, a strawberry glazed, Kara noted. "Just some work stuff she wanted my opinion on. But, that brings me to you…"

"Me?" Kara choked. Did Lena know? Alex had mentioned asking for Lena's help. As the various thoughts swirled in Kara's head they were accompanied by the growing sense of guilt at not sharing her secret with her friend.

"Yep. I know the majority of the reason she trusted me was because of you, so, thank you."

Kara shrugged. "Whatever, I just tell her the truth."

"Anyways, there's another thing. Kind of like a sharing of trust. I know you're a lot smarter than you let on, but I'm not going to push you about it. I'm sure you have your reasons. I will, however, ask that maybe we can talk science every now and then?"

The expression on Lena's face was so hopeful that Kara was helpless to say no. "Yeah, I mean I'll contribute what I can, but I don't really know that much."

Lena nodded. "Great. Now that that's out of the way, what does Jess have you doing today?"

Kara let her head fall back on the couch. "Sorting through boxes and then putting them in storage."

"Hmm, sounds fascinating."

"I'm sure it will be," Kara sighed.

Lena reached out, placing a hand on Kara's leg, slowly. "How are things? You seem a bit…not like yourself today. Tired?" Lena tilted her head to the side and looked at Kara with kindness and concern.

"Just a long weekend that poured over into my morning. Sorry."

"Please, don't apologize. We're friends."

Kara smiled. "True, I feel good about that. I think we're doing well." Though, Kara didn't feel this way about her other friends.

Lena nodded. "I agree. Perhaps it was meant to be."

"How's uh…are you still going to…you know therapy?" Kara asked, not sure why but knowing she needed to know Lena had someone to help her.

Lena stilled at the question, what little color she had in her face draining away.
"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked. It's none of my business." Kara moved to get up.

"It's okay. We're friends and the whole reason we met was because we were in the same office so... yeah. I still go when needed and it helps. Thanks for convincing me to stick with it. What about you?"

Kara blew out a breath. "I still go, but only once a month or as needed if something comes up. It helps, a lot, but I have most of the coping mechanisms down and a great support system."

"If you ever need to talk. I mean I know you have your sister, but sometimes it's easier with someone that doesn't know you as well." Lena shrugged and Kara didn't like the feeling of not knowing Lena well.

"Same goes for you." Kara reached out, unsure why she did so, but when her hand fell on top of Lena's arm and gave her a reassuring squeeze the softening of Lena's eyes made her want to do it more.

"I appreciate that. But, we still need to work. Do you feel like getting lunch today? I know this place I think you'd love."

Kara nodded, not one to turn down an opportunity to eat. "Just let me know the time and I'll be there."

Slipping out of the office and into her own, Kara wondered at the strange feeling in her stomach and the sensation on her skin where Lena had rubbed her arm and leg. For a moment she thought about what Dr. Grey had said, but she dismissed it not wanting to contemplate all the reasons why a relationship was impossible for her – even with someone as great as Lena.

Then it sank in that she and Lena were going out to eat. As in a date. Did she have a date? Her fingers tapped nervously. Grabbing her phone she dialed Alex, annoyed when it went to voicemail. Trying a second number, she sagged when it was picked up.

"Hey, dork, what's up?"

Kara raised a brow. "Dork? Excuse me, but I'm the nerd in this friendship."

Sam huffed. "Yeah, yeah. Hanging out with younger folks is messing with me."

A smile formed on Kara's face. "I'm glad. How's school going?"

A groan answered her. "I'm looking forward to getting this GED thing done and moving on. I might do business school. I have a friend that runs her own company and is pretty successful."

"I can see you in all those power suits bossing people around."

"Right! That's the perfect job for me. I love bossing people around." A muffled noise that Kara's hearing wasn't good enough to pick up. "So, how are you? I saw the news and that weird red metal man thing."

Kara shook her head. "Taken care of. I lost my powers, but they should come back. I hope. But..."

"Wait. You lost your powers?"

Holding the phone away from her ear, Kara glanced around before talking again. "Hey, keep it down."
'Sorry, but that's a huge deal. You need me to come down? I can be there in like twenty minutes. Faster if M'gann flies me. Hey, want her there, too? She'd totally come.'

'No, I'm fine. I managed to get through years with no abilities, I'll be okay. However, I did have a question.' She cleared her throat. 'What's a date, technically? Like two people going out or does it have to be designated as romantic? Perhaps it has to be at night? Are flowers always involved?'

'Are you sure you're okay? I'm worried.'

Kara smiled. 'I appreciate it, but really I'm okay and I totally need help with this date thing because thinking about it is far more likely to kill me than a papercut.'

'Fine, but if you need anything, call me.'

'Okay.'

'Promise.'

'I promise.'

'Promise on pot stickers.'

'I promise on pot stickers, now will you help me?'

'Yes, but to be clear, 'Kara I am never dating no matter what and you can't make me' might be going on a date? That's it, the world's ending. Screw school.'

Kara laughed, thankful for Sam being in her life once again. 'I don't know. That's why I'm asking you.'

'You do know that I have no experience with this other than random alien mating stories I've heard at the bar which are terrifying, and I'm pretty sure none of those apply here and no I'm not repeating them. However, wearing the skin of your enemy is a turn on to some. Just putting that out there.'

'Right, outfit aside. My friend asked me to lunch and I have no idea if it's a date or just a friend thing or you know...something else.'

Sam didn't hide her laugh. 'Lunch with a friend? I think you're okay. Unless you want it to be more?'

Kara stuttered, 'No, why would I want that? I mean she's great and I love talking to her but like we're just friends.'

'Uh huh, that was super convincing. Might want to work on it.'

'Whatever, I'm gonna stop by tonight and bother you.'

'Awesome, what do you know about chromosomes? I need someone to do my bio homework.'

'Goodbye.' Kara hung up, smile firmly in place.

***

Alex checked her gear into the armory then headed to her office. J'onn stood in the doorway.

'Everything okay?"
She glanced to him. "You know it is."

He crossed his arms and gave her a wry grin. "Despite what you think I don't read your thoughts. I respect your privacy."

"Uh huh. Well then, I promise all is well."

"So, you're up for a round of prisoner checks?"

Alex sagged against the wall. "Seriously? Can't Vasquez do it? I had a big morning."

J'onn raised a brow. "I'll give you extra time on the shooting range."

"You always say that." Alex shook her head as she walked by him. "But something always happens."

Behind her, his deep laughter echoed in the hallway. They assembled a team and entered the elevator to the lower level where they kept the more hostile and dangerous aliens. The door opened and once everyone had spilled out, the ground shook and didn't stop for almost twenty seconds. The lights flickered then emergency lighting kicked on.

Alex lost her footing, but J'onn reached out and steadied her. "What was that? An explosion?"

J'onn glanced around, tilting his head and closing his eyes. "No, an earthquake."

Tapping her ear piece, Alex frowned. "Comms are down. How far along were they in checking the cells?"

"I don't know, but we need to get back to the control room to find out the extent of the damage." He pointed to the team behind them. "Get that door open."

They worked together and pried open the door to the stairs. Climbing their way up, Alex kept her eyes peeled for any indication of cracks in the walls. When they arrived at the top the door was open, Vasquez waiting for them with a flashlight.

"Director, the facility is locked down but we have an issue."

"What?"

"Jemm was being transferred. We haven't heard from Fitzgerald's team since the earthquake."

Heading to the armory, J'onn spoke. "How long have you been out of contact?"

"Four maybe five minutes."

Alex accepted the device he handed her and strapped it on as did four other agents.

"Jemm is a powerful telepath. These will block him from getting in your head."

Alex checked her gun. "Fitzgerald's team?"

J'onn shook his head. "Let's go."

Alex tried to send a text to Kara, annoyed when it didn't go through.
Lena stumbled when the floor beneath her shook. She smacked into the side of her desk, wincing at the jolt of pain that shot down her leg. Kara's door opened and she peered in.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, you?"

Kara nodded, making her way over. "We need to get out of here."

They headed toward the stairs, grabbing a nervous looking Jess on their way. Lena slipped her heels off knowing she'd break her neck if not. Their progress was slow but consistent and fifteen minutes later they were in the lobby of L-Corp with over a hundred others.

Cracks marred the windows and Lena made sure to give them a wide berth pulling Kara and Jess with her. Out on the street people gathered. Some crying, others holding bandages to themselves. Next to her, Kara stopped. Lena saw the tension in the woman's face and grabbed her hand.

"It's okay."

Another violent shake of the ground and this time when Lena's feet gave out, Kara was there to catch her before they both tumbled to the ground.

"Thanks," Lena said, then stopped when she noticed the pained expression on Kara's face. "What is it?"

Left arm dangling at her side, Kara grunted, "I think it's broken."

Lena's eyes widened. "Okay, it's okay. We'll get you to the hospital. They'll take care of it." Lena helped Kara to her feet. She pushed up the sleeve of Kara's sweater, trying not to wince at the odd angle it was at or the number of scars that littered the revealed skin.

"No, I can wait. The hospitals are going to be flooded with people who need help more than I do." Kara pulled her arm away, putting her sleeve back in place while she met Lena's eyes with a wary expression.

Lena didn't know what to do…Kara in pain was not okay with her. She was about to force the issue when a woman cried out for help and Kara made a beeline for her.

"What is it?"

"I don't know…I think maybe it's his heart?" said a young woman hovering over the still body of an older man.

Lena knelt next to him and checked for a pulse, relieved when she found one. Kara glanced at her, confusion in her blue eyes. The pulse beneath Lena's fingers slowed and Lena looked around for a paramedic.

"We need to find someone to help. There's something going on internally…we can't do anything here," Lena said.

Kara stared at the man with a gaze so intense Lena didn't know how to interpret it. Letting out a breath she got to her feet.

"Kara!" A deep voice called out.

Lena glanced over to see the tall man Kara had danced with running toward them. He glanced at
Kara's arm and then to her face.

"What happened? Are you hurt?"

He seemed more shocked than concerned, something Lena filed away for later.

Kara nodded. "It's fine, James. But this man needs help. We have to get him to the hospital."

"Ms. Danvers, you're arm," Jess said, expression incredulous. "But…are you okay?"

"It looks worse than it is. I'll be fine." Kara grimaced.

Jess cleared her throat and Lena noted the odd expression on her face as she watched Kara.

"Ms. Luthor, the building’s been evacuated. The labs have been shut down and security measures have been activated, but we have an issue," Jess said.

Lena was torn. She knew her employees needed her to do something, but she loathed the idea of leaving Kara. Grabbing her hand again, for support, not for the warmth she told herself, she asked, "Are you going to be okay? Will your friend get you help?"

James took hold of Kara and gave Lena a reassuring smile. "I'll take good care of her for you. Go do what you need, Ms. Luthor."

On impulse, Lena leaned in and gave Kara a quick hug, memorizing all the details of the experience. The softness of Kara's hair, the smell of her…lavender. The sturdiness of her frame. The warmth.

Heading back into the lobby, Lena wrote off her reaction to the hug from the adrenaline and excitement of what was happening. Nothing more.

"Jess, is anyone hurt?"

"A few minor injuries. They're being tended to. The main issue is the lab on the fifth floor. Some chemical containers must have broken because we have a toxic substance reading coming in."

Lena rubbed her forehead, thinking. "Who was up there?"

"No one, thankfully."

Pulling up her mental map of the building, Lena thought. "There's a venting system in case of emergency. Is it not working?" She grabbed the tablet from Jess and went to work solving the problem.

***

Kara leaned against the wall of the alley while she put on her suit. Her arm hurt like hell, but she'd had worse.

"Are you sure about this? I mean you can get hurt now. You are hurt," James said.

"I'm sure. People are scared and need to know it's going to be okay." A small groan escaped her when she pulled on her boots.

James took a few steps toward her. "Your cousin will kill me if something happens to you."

"I have to do this." Kara had no explanation as to why she thought going out in her suit while
powerless was a good idea, she just had to do it.

Her arm hung at her side, pain radiating up from it. She ignored it as best she could. James helped her with her cape then slung her bag over his shoulder.

"What can I do to help?"

Across the street, a man yelled. A child screamed. A gun glinted. "Get me over there."

James walked beside her, ready to catch her if she fell. By the time they reached the store her head was swimming, but she entered the store without hesitation and faced off with the gunman.

"You don't want to do this."

He turned to her, face sweaty, hands shaking. "How do you know what I want?"

"You're scared. I get that. But this isn't the answer. Hurting other people…it's never the way to do things." She turned a bit so her good arm was facing him.

He glanced between her and the store owner, who was on the ground, tears streaming down his face while he used his body to shield a child.

"We can all do better, but it's a choice. You can make that decision right now. Be better." Kara reached out slowly, keeping her face as open as possible.

"I can't…I want to…"

The man didn't hesitate when she took the gun. She smiled at him and nodded. The store owner thanked her. And when she looked at James she saw so many emotions on his face she had to look away.

Slipping out the door, she didn’t get to enjoy her moment because an explosion blew out the windows on the fifth floor of L-Corp. She ran toward it, ignoring the searing pain in her arm. When she was a block away she saw Lena's head leaning out of one of the windows.

Her heart thudded in her chest and her thoughts went back to how weak her heart had been when she was first rescued. She placed a hand over it, hoping to calm the erratic, painful beat. Lena coughed, disappeared a moment then reappeared with a man at her side. Both of them gasping for air.

"It's going to explode, again…there's more chemicals leaking," Jess yelled. "You need to move back, now!"

"What's she doing up there?" Kara asked.

Jess looked at her, shocked. "I thought you…There were trapped workers, she managed to get most of them out then the gases exploded and must have blocked her exit."

Kara met Lena's gaze. Saw the recognition when she spotted Supergirl. The crowd glanced at Kara then back to Lena. Murmurs began, but Kara couldn’t make them out.

She swallowed, totally at a loss as to how to handle this situation. When flames licked the top of the window and Lena let out a scream a buzzing started in Kara's ears and then her whole body felt like it was being electrocuted. Half a second later, Kara was in the air and pulling Lena and the man to safety. Setting them down, Kara jetted back into the air and dealt with the fire and smoke.
Hovering outside the window she glanced at Lena once before flying away and helping those who needed her.

The feeling of Lena in her arms again had felt…good.

Really good.

***

Alex punched the alien in front of her, cradling her hand after. "Dammit!"

J'onn got back on his feet and sped toward them. He grabbed Jemm from behind a second before he was about to swing at Alex. She heard a snap and watched the alien fall to the floor.

J'onn morphed back into his Director persona and gave her a once over. "Are you okay?"

"Fine."

He tilted his head to the side. "You sure?"

"Yeah, I just need to make sure Kara's okay." He nodded to her to go and she fled the DEO, pulling out her phone the moment she heard it start to buzz.

"Kara? Are you okay?" Sirens in the background set Alex on alert.

"Fine, just doing some Supergirl stuff. How are you?"

Letting herself sag against the side of the building, Alex smiled. "Great. Go be a hero. I'll see you at home."

"I'll buy this time, you sound exhausted. You okay?"

"Fine, just had a rough day. I'll tell you about it later."

"Sounds good. Love you."

Kara saying that so casually was a huge deal, monumental. A giant step. Not only showing how she felt but expressing it in words. Wiping at a stray tear, Alex responded, "Love you, too. Be careful."

Alex slid her phone into her pocket. Blowing out a breath she went back inside and finished her day. A few texts from Clark made her grit her teeth, but she opted to wait until she got home to do anything. By the time that happened, Kara was there, five empty pizza boxes in front of her.

"Hi. How was the rest of your day?"

Alex smiled. "Great. How was yours?"

"Good," Kara said around a mouthful of pot sticker.

Alex threw her coat on the back of a chair and sat next to Kara. "How's the arm?"

Kara's eyes widened. "Uh, fine?"

"Yeah, heard you broke it. Weird, right? Cuz, that shouldn't happen." Alex used her intimidating glare.

"Um, well, yeah I did. I think I blew out my powers fighting that android. But they're back now so
Alex nodded, the one that let people know she was anything but okay with what they were saying. "It's not fine. Why didn’t you tell me? And what were you thinking going into that robbery." At Kara's expression, she continued, "Yeah, James totally ratted on you. Welcome to having friends who care about what happens to you."

Kara wrinkled her forehead. "There was no way I could not do something. People were scared and I know exactly how that feels. I won't feel bad for doing it, nor will I say I won't do it again."

Alex let herself fall back on the couch, rubbing her eyes. "I know. I just worry. You sure you're okay? I can run some tests."

"No thanks. But you can tell me about your day and almost dying because of a mind controlling alien."

Kara raised an eyebrow. "Clark told me six agents died."

"I'm gonna kill him."

With a sweet smile, Kara spoke. "Welcome to having friends who care about what happens to you, on top of an extremely overprotective alien sister with super powers."

Grabbing a slice of pizza, Alex shook her head. "Well played. Anyways, Clark filled in Lois on the whole robot thing. She's pissed about it and promises to try and keep her ears open."

Kara shrugged. "It's cool." She glanced down at her buzzing phone and paled. "It's Lena."

Alex raised a brow. "Since when is that a bad thing?" The wide eyes full of panic gave Kara away. "What happened?"

Kara sat forward resting her head in her hands. "Um, well…she saw my arm."

The tone gave it away. "Not just that it was broken, huh?"

Kara shook her head and Alex knew how much anxiety those scars caused Kara. It wasn’t that she was ashamed of them; it was what they reminded her of.

"Hey, it's okay. Lena doesn't care about that and as for covering up the broken arm thing…I can fix you up an air cast or something to wear for a few weeks. Okay?"

"There was an explosion, she almost died. She went up to save people and got trapped. I was powerless…and then she screamed and…I don't want to think about what would have happened if my powers didn’t come back then."

Alex nudged Kara's side. "She's tough, been a rough couple of weeks for her, though."

Kara nodded before holding up her phone. "I'm gonna call her back."

"Then I'm gonna finish the pot stickers. Tell her I say hi." Alex watched out of the corner of her eye, noting the slight smile on Kara's face.

So oblivious, she thought.
Lena didn’t hide the smile that came to her face when she saw Kara's number pop up on the phone.

"Hi. How’s the arm? Did you get it checked out?"

"Uh, great, actually. Not as bad as I thought."

Lena pushed the file in front of her to the side. "I'm glad to hear that. You can take tomorrow off … as much time as you need, actually. The week, in fact. Take two. A lot of people are." Lena fidgeted with the pen in her hand. "Do you need anything now? I should have asked that right away. Can I bring you something?" She was babbling and hated it but also couldn’t seem to stop.

"Nah, I'll be okay. I'd go crazy sitting at home alone. Alex is here, too. She says hi by the way."

"Good, tell her I say hello as well." Lena struggled a moment, not sure if she should address what she saw on Kara's arm or not. Deciding it wasn’t her place, she ignored it. "Well, if you'll be coming into work injured, the least I can do is buy you lunch."

Kara's laughter came through the phone clear as a bell and Lena relaxed at the sound of it. "I'll never say no to a meal."

Lena chuckled. "I have noticed that about you."

Then Kara cleared her throat. "Are you okay? I heard about what happened with the fire…sounded scary."

Lena's body tensed when she thought about it. The smoke suffocating her. The heat of the fire. The fear when Supergirl didn’t move to help her right away.

"It wasn’t fun, but Supergirl saved me." As she said it, she recalled the feel of being held in strong arms, of warmth, and intense blue eyes.

"Of course she did. Being a hero is kind of her job."

Lena scoffed. "Saving a Luthor is hardly on her list of things to do."

"That's not true. Your name doesn't define you and I wouldn't…Supergirl wouldn't think that either. You're a good person."

Lena shook her head. "I love how good hearted you are. Sadly, I have a ways to go to make it up to the Supers. But I will, somehow."

"Lena…"

"Kara..."

"You're stubborn."

Lena laughed, most people wouldn’t dare to say something like that to her. "It's one of my better qualities, consider yourself forewarned."

"Fine. I have to go, but I'll see you tomorrow and I'm really glad you're okay."

The words settled in Lena's heart and she ran a nervous hand over her chest at the feeling. "You too, good night."
She hung up the phone wishing…wishing for something she didn’t know how to put into words.

Going back to the paperwork in front of her regarding the explosion and insurance and a host of other crap that gave her a headache, she almost shot through the ceiling when she heard a knock on her balcony door.

She spun so fast she fell out of her chair and when she looked up she saw Supergirl standing there, trying and failing to hide a smile.

Getting to her feet with as much dignity as possible she went to the door and slid it open. "Supergirl, is everything all right?" Her eyes unable to decide where to look, sigil – eyes – sigil – eyes.

Supergirl nodded, arms crossed, shoulders straight. "Yes. I just wanted to check on you. I heard you saved some trapped employees. That was very brave of you."

Lena stepped back and went to the table where she kept a bottle of scotch. "Yes, that's right. Thank you for saving me by the way." She poured three fingers and downed half, needing it all of a sudden.

"No need to thank me. Kind of my job," Supergirl said in a friendly, almost joking tone.

"Kind of your job…" The words rang familiar to Lena, but the moment she made eye contact with the Super, her thoughts scattered. "Well, you do your job well. Thanks for coming by…it wasn't necessary."

Supergirl tilted her head in a familiar way that gnawed at Lena's gut. "I know that. I wanted to."

Lena finished her drink, a light buzz starting. "Oh, any reason why? I mean…did you want to say something? I know my brother…" She braced herself, fearing the answer.

Supergirl's expression softened. "I saw your light on and wanted to make sure you were okay. That's all. I'll let you get back to work." She turned then spun to face Lena, face earnest. "You aren't your brother. I don't think that. I know you're good. I hope you know that."

And with a blur of motion the hero was gone leaving Lena to wonder about the exchange. She poured herself another drink and sat at her desk. The paperwork not as frustrating to deal with as before.

Supergirl's words chipped away at a fear she had since moving to the city.

***

By Friday Kara was ready to call it a week. The air cast Alex had given her to wear while at work was making her insane and the window she had been using to do her Supergirl duties was off limits due to the team of engineers coming in and out to make sure the high rise was still in perfect condition after the earthquake. Which meant she had to go up three flights of stairs to the roof and dodge several security cameras while figuring out what the emergency was.

Aside from that, she'd been bored to death. Jess, who normally had an unending list of things for Kara to do, all of a sudden hit a dry spell. No contracts to get signed or notarized. No boxes of documents to be stored away. Nothing. So, Kara sat in her office slowly going insane.

Her only reprieves, she thought with a smile, were lunches with Lena. Though, there had only been two. Lena had been inundated with paperwork and meetings. From what Kara overheard, she was not happy with the safety measure that had been put in place and was stepping things up.
So, Kara read or listened to music, but after a week she was itching to get out of there. Watching the clock she prayed nothing came up in the next fifteen minutes. All she wanted to do was go home and sulk on the couch and hope her mood improved over the weekend.

A knock on the door to Lena's office made her sit straighter and pull out her earphones.

Lena peered around the edge. "Hey, glad I caught you before you left. Want to get some dinner?"

"Dinner?"

Lena licked her lips. "Yeah, I mean I was supposed to take you to lunch but had to cancel." She held up a hand before Kara could protest. "I know we still ate here, but I did promise you a real meal."

Swallowing, Kara nodded. "Sure, yeah. That sounds great. Dinner with you. I can do that."

"Good. Just come into my office, I have a few calls to make before we go but I didn’t want to miss you before the weekend got here. People clock watch and try to scoot early sometimes."

Kara smiled in response. "I didn’t even notice the time.” When the door shut, she noted the improvement in her mood.

Sending a text to Alex that she had plans, Kara grabbed her bag and entered Lena's office. Heading over to the couch she set it down before grabbing a glass of water and making a face at the pile of paperwork on the woman's desk.

She sat and pulled out her book, shoving her ear plugs in and getting lost in the story.

A tap on her shoulder made her flinch before she could stop herself. Lena pulled away, her eyes unable to hide a flash of hurt.

"Hey, sorry I got lost in my book."

"I can tell. What are you reading?" Lena took a step back before sitting next to Kara.

Kara held up the book. "My sister has a stack of ones I missed while I was gone that she says are a must read." Kara realized her slip up and bit her lip.

"You'll have to tell me how it is. I haven’t read it. Whenever I had free time I was either studying or studying." Lena closed her eyes and let her head fall on the back of the couch. "I am so glad this week is over. If I have to talk to one more person about structural integrity I might snap."

Kara set the book down and cocked her head to the side while she looked at her friend. "Sorry you had a rough week. Is it at least over or is your Monday going to suck?"

Lena chuckled. "My Saturday is going to suck and probably my Sunday, Monday is a given. But, for now I have a few hours to enjoy and spend with you. What do you feel like eating? I need to make up for canceling a few of our lunches this week."

Kara absently scratched at her arm, Lena's words making her feel special. "Anything. You know me. I'm easy." Kara stood and pulled the other woman to her feet.

Lena's eyes widened. "Are you okay? That was your bad arm." She grasped the limb in question and checked it over.

Barely resisting the urge to pull it away, Kara spoke softly, "It's okay. I heal fast."
Lena nodded, letting her hands fall to her side. "Right, let's get out of here and get you fed."

On cue, Kara's stomach growled.

Kara focused on Lena when they went into the elevator. So far, she had been able to avoid it but now…She sucked in a deep breath and watched the numbers tick down.

"There's a great little place a few blocks away. I've been meaning to take you there," Lena said.

Kara nodded, jaw clenched.

"You okay?"

The door opened and Kara all but sprinted out. "Yep, fine. Let's go."

Lena rubbed at her arms and Kara guessed it must be cool out. By the looks of the leaves on the trees, autumn had arrived. She reached into her bag and pulled out a sweater she kept on hand in case of emergencies.

"Here, put this on."

"Thanks. I should have brought a coat or something, but my head has been out of sorts lately." She slipped it on, bunching up the sleeves and inhaling the scent. When Kara raised a brow, Lena blushed. "It smells good."

Kara didn’t say anything, but an odd sensation settled low in her gut at the sight of Lena wearing her sweater. She followed as Lena made her way to the restaurant. They were seated at a table in the back and Lena talked about what was good while Kara tried to examine what was going on with her.

She liked being around Lena, a lot. Her stomach felt weird sometimes when Lena looked at her or they brushed up against one another. The idea of something happening to Lena scared Kara, in fact, the past few nights her usual nightmares had started to feature Lena and the fire.

Then it hit her…and she knew she needed to talk to Dr. Grey. Stat.

"Kara…hey, Earth to Kara."

"What?" She looked up from the menu she wasn't reading. "Sorry, what did you say?"

Lena's face fell. "You seem really out of it tonight. Are you sure you're up for this? We can do it another time; it's not a big deal."

All Kara wanted to do was put a smile back on the beautiful face in front of her. "No way. I'm not turning down a free meal." She glanced at her menu. "Or the chance to spend time with you. I missed you this week." She hoped the low lighting hid the blush she knew was growing on her face.

"Oh…I missed you, too."

Lena vented about the repairs taking so long. Kara nodded where appropriate and offered words of support when needed.

When the waiter asked if they wanted dessert Kara ordered a slice of chocolate cake and so did Lena.

At Kara's raised brow, Lena smirked. "Please, like one piece will be enough for that bottomless pit of yours."
"I burn a lot of calories…at work." Kara shrugged.

"I know. I was shocked you didn’t take the stairs tonight."

Kara pushed up her glasses. "I didn’t want to make you do them."

Lena reached across the table. "I appreciate that, really I do. But, please don’t ever do something that makes you uncomfortable for my benefit."

Swallowing, Kara nodded, her attention focused on the hand on top of hers.

The waiter cleared his throat as he set down their plates. "Your cake."

Both women muttered their thanks. When Lena pulled her hand away, Kara added to her list of things she needed to talk about with Dr. Grey.

"So, any big plans for the weekend?" Lena asked.

Kara pushed her plate aside when she finished eating and accepted Lena's plate when she pushed it toward her. "Nope, the usual. Something with Alex, movies, reading, maybe go to the park. You?"

Lena fidgeted with the napkin in her hand. "Nah, I'll be working."

"You work too much. We should do something." Kara almost froze, almost took the words back, but calmed down before she did anything to ruin her friendship.

"What did you have in mind?"

Kara put her fork down, appetite gone and replaced with a fluttering in her stomach. "What do you like to do?"

Lena glanced away. "I'm not sure. I haven’t really done much other than work since everything happened with Lex. I think I forgot how to have a life since Jack."

"Jack?"

Lena sipped her wine. "My ex."

Kara felt a surge of something…disappointment, jealousy…weird.

"Oh, I'm sorry."

Lena smiled. "Don't be. It was my first relationship and we had a lot of ups and downs. We make better friends. What about you?"

Kara bit her lip. "I don’t really…dating wasn't something I…It's not my thing."

"I know what you mean."

She didn’t say anything, but Kara was pretty sure Lena didn’t know what Kara meant.

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Alex fell onto the couch face first.

"Rough day?" Kara asked.
Turning her head to the side, Alex glared. "You have no idea. I worked late then got called in early and did a double shift and then went to hang out with Sam."

Kara set down the charcoal in her hand and put her sketch book on the table. "How is she? She's been so stressed waiting for the results of her test."

Alex nodded. "Still is. She's trying to figure out what to do about college. She plans on a two year thing and then transferring but said a friend who knows people can help her get into some great places."

Kara lifted Alex's head, sat down, and then let it rest on her thighs while running her hands through her hair. "Hmm, I hope she stays close. Is that bad?"

Alex flipped so she was on her back and nestled in closer to her sister. "Nope, but even if she goes far it's not like it would take long for you to go see her."

"True."

"How are you? I saw Supergirl had a busy afternoon."

Kara grinned. "Yep, all quiet now. Just doing some sketching and then I'm going out with Lena later."

Alex raised a brow and tilted her head so she could see her sister's face. "Really? What are you doing?"

A goofy smile spread on Kara's face and Alex wondered if Kara was aware of what was happening. "I have a couple of ideas. I was thinking the Main Street art walk, this is the first Saturday of the month so there are a ton of local artists on display. If that doesn't sound good to her I thought she might like the fair."

Alex laughed. "Lena Luthor at the fair? Are you serious?"

Kara huffed out a breath, "Yes! She needs to do more fun things. She's so serious all the time."

"She has a serious job."

Kara met Alex's eyes. "So do I, and I know it's important to not let it eat you up."

"You're right. Man that Dr. Grey is smart."

"Yeah, I hope so. I have an appointment tomorrow."

Kara's fingers stopped moving and Alex reached up to tap them.

"I thought that was next week?"

"It was, but I changed it."

Alex pushed herself up and sat so she was facing Kara. "How come? What's going on?"

Kara turned her head. "Just some stuff I want to talk about."

"Like what?" When Kara sighed and looked away, fingers playing with a loose thread on the couch, Alex pressed, "Come on, talk to me."

"Sometimes I feel weird around Lena and I don’t know what it means. Or I think I do but I'm not
sure because…it's just weird."

Alex smiled, softly. "Weird how?"

Kara exhaled, loudly. "I don't know. It's hard to explain. Like sometimes when I look at her I forget what I was going to say or I get this feeling in my stomach like I'm going to be sick or something…but not in a bad way? And like I think about her all the time and I try and think of nice things to do for her because she's always leaving me little things about birds for me to find in my office and I just think…"

Alex took one of Kara's hands and tugged on it until her sister looked at her. "You like her."

Kara made a face. "Of course I like her. She's my friend. But friends is a new and scary concept for me and all these feelings are kind of overwhelming me."

Nodding, Alex chose her next words carefully. "Remember how you said you didn't want to date and that you had no experience with all that…what you're describing is how you feel when you like someone."

"In a romantic way," Alex continued.

Kara's eyes widened and she got to her feet. "No. Nope. That's not possible. Lena's a woman first of all and…" Alex quirked a brow and Kara held up a hand. "I don't mean it like that. I mean she's not into women. Her ex is a guy. And even if I did like her that way, I can't fall for my boss. And there's no way she would feel the same. Not to mention I don't want to date…I can't date. I'm Supergirl and would have to lie to whoever and I can't do that, especially to her. I mean I already am and hate it. I feel guilty all the time."

Alex blew out a breath. "Come here." She waited for Kara to sit next to her, nervous energy radiating off of her. "Listen, I know you're terrified of letting someone in, but it's normal. Healthy. And Dr. Grey will tell you as much. I can't tell you what you're feeling, but I'll say this, let yourself feel it. Kara, you deserve something good for a change, okay? Let yourself have this."

Kara worried her bottom lip. "But look at you and Cassie. You were so hurt."

Leaning in to her sister, Alex put an arm around her. "Yeah, I was, but I got over it and I know I'll meet someone else."

"You deserve to be happy. I want that for you so much," Kara said.

"I want that for you, too. Now, go get ready for your date."

"It's not a date."

"Uh huh, get out of here already."

Alex helped Kara pick out an outfit for her not date, all the while not pointing out all the details that definitely meant this was a date for Kara's inexperienced brain. Once her sister was out the door Alex poured herself a drink and found the sappiest movie she could on TV.

***

Lena adjusted the buttons on her shirt for the fourth time. For some reason she couldn't decide what
the proper amount was. The few dates she'd had were more formal and...this was not a date she
reminded herself. Kara had said to dress casual, like the time they'd run into one another at the
Chinese restaurant. She'd mumbled something about glasses, but Lena wasn't sure what that was
about.

Glancing in the mirror she made a face and did up a button on her shirt. "What are you thinking?"

Pouring herself a drink to calm her nerves, she chalked it up to this being the first time she was going
out with someone in a friends capacity outside of work hours. Just because she made up excuses to
see the woman in her office and had been in a sour mood all week because she'd had to skip a few
lunches and so what if the mere sight of Kara brought a feeling of peace to Lena she'd never felt
before.

They were friends.

Lena had no interest in dating...not to mention Kara was her employee. And straight. Probably.

Her buzzer went off and she nearly threw her glass across the room. Forcing herself to take a breath
and calm down she hit the button and waited until she saw Kara enter the lobby of her complex on
the screen. Then she went off-screen, most likely to take the stairs and Lena had to grin. She lived on
the thirty-fifth floor, penthouse, and knew it would take a while for her friend to arrive.

So, when there was a knock at her door less than thirty seconds later she was confused. Tensing, she
peered through the security screen and saw Kara standing there, looking adorable in a pair of faded
jeans, black boots, white V-neck, and pale blue hoodie. Her hair down loose, not in its usual
ponytail.

Lena swallowed. Crap. She looked good.

Opening the door, she motioned Kara inside. "Hi."

Kara stepped over the threshold, a shy smile on her face. "Hi."

She inhaled the scent of lavender that Kara always carried and her stomach fluttered. "Just let me
grab my bag and we can get going." Lena went to the kitchen taking a second to calm down.

On her way back, she undid one of the buttons on her shirt. "So, where are you taking me?"

Kara didn’t respond, her expression one of awe as she looked around the spacious place. "This is so
nice. Can I go look at the view?"

"Of course, I'm so sorry...you want a tour?"

Walking toward the window, Kara looked back over her shoulder at Lena. "Next time."

"Right, next time." She stood in front of the window, the sun setting and casting a reddish glow over
the buildings across the way.

"It's beautiful," Kara said.

Lena glanced to her side, noting the red tint on Kara's face, the slight curl of her hair, the small smile
that rested on her face. Lena remembered when she first met the woman, she didn't smile at all, now
they came easier. Not often, but more so than before. More genuine.

Clearing her throat, Lena agreed. "Yeah, I don't appreciate it as often as I should."
Kara turned to her. "You should. I'd love to paint or sketch it."

"Anytime you want to, just let me know."

On their way out Lena realized how bare her place was. Nothing hung on the walls, the shelves held a few magazines and some books. Only the remote for the television sat on the coffee table. She made a mental note to go shopping for things to add some life to the place.

"Okay, so you have two choices or maybe just one? I told Alex about one of the things I thought you'd like and she said no way…"

Lena threw her bag over her shoulder. "What was it?"

Now, in the hallway, Kara eyed the elevator then the door to the stairway, seeming to make a decision to herself and entering the small space. Lena followed after her not saying anything but wanting to distract her friend from something that she knew made her uncomfortable.

"A fair. I guess it was more for me. I went to one as a kid and had a lot of fun memories from it that got me through…a bad time. But, there's a cool local artist thing they do on the first Saturday of the month here, so we can do that instead."

Lena hated the sad expression that crossed Kara's face at the mention of the fair. "The fair is only in town for a few days right?" At Kara's nod, she continued. "And the art thing is once a month?" Another nod from Kara. "Okay, the fair it is. I've never been to one. We can do the art thing next month."

Kara gaped at her. "The fair is so much fun; at least I remember it being fun. I got to eat a lot of junk food and there were these games I'd never seen before."

When they exited into the lobby of Lena's building they decided to walk since it was only about a mile away and Lena hadn't been able to do much exercising in the last week due to work.

At the entry gate, Kara insisted on paying for Lena's ticket.

Little kids ran around, adults chasing after them. Kara made her way to the first food booth they came across, not shocking, and ordered a giant piece of fried dough with powdered sugar on top.

"You have to at least try it. It's like a rite of passage." Kara held it out and Lena took a small bite. "See, it didn’t kill you."

"The night's still young," Lena joked.

And they were off. Kara trying everything from a deep fried Snickers to chili covered popcorn. Lena's stomach ached watching her. Thankfully, she managed to find a few places that had easily identifiable foods and was content to enjoy a plate of nachos with a bottle of water.

"Look! It's Supergirl." Lena pointed to the left and Kara's head whipped around.

"What?"

Lena tilted her head toward the game booth that had Supergirl shirts, key chains, cups, and a few plushies.

"Oh, right…hmmm." Kara eyed the items. "Why would they want something with the house of El sigil on it?"
Lena crossed her arms. "She's a hero. Someone to look up to and try to emulate. Having a reminder close at hand might make them feel safer." Lena had not meant to sound so adamant and fierce about this.

"You think Supergirl makes people feel safe?"

Lena's eyes widened. "Of course, don't you?"

Kara looked at her, an expression of deep concentration on her face. "I'm gonna win you something."

"There's no need, just have fun."

Walking toward the booth Kara grinned. "Winning you all kinds of weird prizes will be fun. Not to mention add a little color to your place."

"Ten bucks gets you two tries." A man with a Supergirl shirt and matching hat called out from behind his bench.

Kara crinkled her forehead. "Tries at what?"

The man tossed a basketball at her and for a moment Lena saw her expression turn inward. "Get this into the basket."

Lena stood next to her. "And what does she get?"

The man pointed at the bottom rack full of small items.

"What if I want something bigger?"

"Keep making baskets."

Lena noted how small the basket was, it would be near impossible to get it to sink in.

However, as she was learning, Kara had a lot of hidden talents even with a broken arm. By the end of the night they both had a Supergirl t-shirt with matching hat. In addition to that, Lena now had a giant plush teddy bear with the El sigil, four inflatable hammers, a clock with the Super insignia, and two dozen different toys.

"You never told me you were some kind of booth game expert."

Kara swallowed the last of her hot dog and grabbed some of the haul she had won for Lena. "Well, I needed something to fall back on if the job with you didn't work out."

Lena chuckled and then Kara joined in. Her blue eyes shining, and for the first time Lena noted how young the woman was. The normally tense lines of her face were gone.

"Good to know you had a backup plan."

They headed toward Lena's building, Kara managing to maintain her hold on all the toys she'd won.

"Did you have a good time?" Kara toed the ground, nervous. Lena melted at the sight.

"I did. Thank you." There was so much more Lena wanted to say but for some reason keeping it simple felt like the right thing to do.
"I'm glad. And don't forget, next month is the art show." Kara juggled a frog and monkey that were about to fall. Lena moved in and grabbed them.

"True, and here's hoping they have a better selection of food." Lena stopped in front of the entrance to her lobby, a wave of awkwardness taking over. "Uh, you can come up…you know to my place, if you want? I have drinks…we can have a drink on the balcony. The view is really nice at night." God, what was wrong with her? This was Kara, her friend and employee…but damn if she didn’t feel something more no matter how hard she tried to ignore it.

Kara glanced around, shuffled the items in her arms, then looked at Lena. "I should go home. I have an early therapy appointment tomorrow and we both know how fun those are."

Lena nodded. "Like torture, sometimes."

The expression on Kara's face turned hard and Lena knew she'd said something wrong. When she realized her word choice and put together the image of scars on Kara's arms with the kind of therapist they were seeing, she wanted to crawl under a rock.

"I'm sorry. That was a poor word choice…I didn’t mean. I wasn’t thinking."

Kara's face softened. "It's okay. You're right. Sometimes it does suck to talk about things you don't want to."

Lena swallowed. "Yeah. I only go when needed. I'm lucky."

"So, the nightmares stopped?"

"For the most part. When they do crop back up, I know how to deal with them."

"Good. That's good. I'm glad for you."

"Right, so, see you Monday then?"

"What should I do with these?" Kara held up the two plastic bags they'd found and shoved the remaining prizes in.

"Whatever you want. I have enough here."

"Goodnight, Lena." Kara hovered a moment and Lena's heart rate accelerated hoping that Kara would...kiss her.

"Night, Kara."

And with that, Kara turned and walked away, leaving Lena to wonder how this had happened and what she was going to do about it.

That night she set the large bear with Supergirl's sigil and a cape next to the smaller one she'd had for years and couldn’t stop the smile on her face.
Chapter 21

Kara paced outside Dr. Grey's office. She hadn't slept the night before, various moments from her time with Lena swirled around her brain.

The moment the door opened she dashed inside and stood in front of the small coffee table that separated the patient from the doctor.

"I'm confused about something."

Taking a seat, Dr. Grey nodded. "Okay, want to talk about it?"

"I'm not sure. I mean yeah, of course I do, but I don't how to or if it even matters. But I think I should."

"If it's bothering you it matters. Take a breath and talk to me."

Kara exhaled and let herself fall gracelessly onto the couch. "I think I like someone, but I don't know if I do. I mean the only person I ever got close to was Alex and then Sam, but that was different. And now, I feel things I've never felt before and it's really distracting and I'd like it to stop. How do I do that?"

"Why do you think you like this person?"

Kara crossed her arms, gripping her biceps tightly. "I think about them all the time. When I see them I smile…it's like automatic, I have no control over it. But, there are times when my stomach gets weird so maybe I don't like them?" Kara imagined Lena, and a flood of other information flooded her. "Oh, and I catch myself staring at times and dreaming. I dream about them."

Dr. Grey gave a half smile. "Wow, that's a lot. I think it's safe to say you like this person. Does it affect your work or any aspect of your life in a negative way?"

Kara scrunched her forehead. "No. Why?"

"You mentioned something about it being distracting…how is it distracting?"

Kara rolled her eyes. "Like distracting…clouding my thoughts and making it awkward when we're together. I need it to stop."

"Feelings are a normal part of life. I know that's scary for you, but it's really not healthy to suppress or avoid having them."

"I can't have these kinds of feelings for the person that's causing them."

"Why?"

"I…well…because I just can't."

Leaning forward, Dr. Grey picked a candy out of a dish. "Is this person bad?"

"No, she's…they're great. At least I think they are."

Dr. Grey raised a brow. "No holding back in here. Remember?" When Kara nodded, she continued. "I know you have no experience with romantic relationships, but you have to start somewhere."
"I don't want –"

"I know you don't want one, but obviously some part of you does because you have feelings. And ignoring them only leads to worse problems down the road."

Kara made a face. "But I don't even know what kind of feelings I'm having. How do I know if they’re romantic?"

"No hiding in here, Kara. I don't allow my patients to take the easy way out. You're smart enough to know the answer to that question."

"Fine. They're romantic, but I still don't want them."

"Are you opposed because it's a woman?"

Kara scrunched her face. "I don’t know. I never thought about it because you know…captive and thought I was going to die. When I was rescued it was the last thing on my mind, so I guess it's kind of a shock but not really an issue other than I have no idea what to do, but the same would happen with a guy so…" Kara trailed off, embarrassment taking over.

"Understandable. Do you think that's part of the reason you're so uncomfortable with it?"

Fidgeting with the arm of her chair, Kara shook her head. "No, that just complicates things. I'm opposed to it because of other things."

"And those things would be what? What is it about this woman that bothers you?"

"She doesn’t bother me; she's great like I said. But, she's also my boss and that's bad. I know that much, not to mention she's not into women. So, can we make these feelings go away? Do I start a new journal? Paint? What?"

Dr. Grey stared at her for a full thirty seconds before saying anything. "Are you certain she doesn’t return your feelings? Didn’t you tell me that you two leave one another small gifts? Go to lunches?"

Rolling her eyes, Kara sighed. "Yes, but as friends. Trust me. She told me about her ex-boyfriend last night. I'm sure."

"Just because she has an ex who is a man doesn’t mean she doesn’t return your feelings."

Not wanting to think about this more than she had to because it made her heart hurt in a way that was worse than anything prior, Kara shook her head. "Please, trust me. She doesn't feel the same and I need this job."

Pursing her lips, Dr. Grey said, "In this instance, journaling and painting won't help. If you're certain she doesn’t return your feelings and I mean truly certain, the best thing you can do is distance yourself. Take the time to deal with them, accept them and what they mean big picture wise, then move on. But don't deny yourself this experience, it's part of life."

"Move on? I can do that."

"Good, so what else is going on?"

"Wait, how do I move on?"

When Kara left therapy she didn’t feel much better about the Lena situation. In fact, she was more confused than before. She kept thinking to the night before and how nice it was to just be in her
presence. The lack of stress about being Supergirl or worrying about her past. Lena made her feel normal…among other things.

Back at the apartment, Alex was just getting home from her morning run. "Hey, how was therapy?"

Kara gave her a look.

"Awesome, I'm going to shower."

Kara continued to glare until her sister came back. Alex took one look at her and grabbed a pint of ice cream from the freezer and tossed it at her.

"It's like nine in the morning," Kara said while opening the container.

Alex quirked a brow. "And? When you have that look the only way I'm going in is if you've been properly fed."

"Whatever," Kara mumbled around a spoonful of Rocky Road.

"So, spill. What happened last night?"

Kara told her everything, including how her morning went with Dr. Grey.

"Ah, so what are you gonna do?"

Kara frowned. "Avoid her I guess. What else can I do?"

Alex reached forward and covered Kara's hand with her own. "You sure you want to do that? I've seen Lena around you…she seems to really care for you."

Tossing the container in the recycle bin, Kara frowned. "I'm sure. I don't want things to be weird with her. And I don't have a whole lot of friends as it is so I'd like to not lose the ones I have."

"Okay, I support you, but remember if you ever need to talk, I'm here."

"Thanks."

"Now, get changed. We're going to M'gann's."

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Alex maneuvered her bike into its spot, grinning when Kara appeared at her side half a second later.

"Sorry, I'm late. I had to go back and get a book for Sam."

They entered the bar, M'gann nodding at them with a big smile in place. The moment Sam saw Kara she bolted up from the table where she was looking over papers and tackled her.

"Hey, you're here. I'm so happy. I'm looking at universities and colleges and programs and trying to figure out where I'd best fit. What do you think? Want to come check them out with me? Oh, man… why don't we go to college together? You're like way smart, you could totally get in. We could be roommates!"

Kara smiled while leaning back. "How much coffee have you had?"

Alex raised a brow at the two. "Too much is the answer. Why don't you take a break from that and
hang with us?" Sam glanced over and met Alex's eyes. Alex forced herself to break their connection. "If you want, I mean you don't have to."

Inserting herself between Kara and Alex, Sam looped her arms between theirs. "No, you have good ideas, Alex. I told you I understood why Kara says you're the best thing about Earth. I'm starting to see all these qualities about you she talked about."

Alex swallowed, not sure if liking Sam was inappropriate or weird or wrong or...she paused at the table, letting Kara and Sam choose their spots. "I'll be right back with the drinks."

Heading to the bar, she noticed M'gann scoot down to meet her. "Hey, nice to see you in here, again. How are things?"

Leaning her arms against the bar, Alex tilted her head to the side. "Good, I think? A few close calls but that comes with the job."

Placing a beer in front of her, M'gann shook her head. "Yeah, but it doesn't make it easier. Anyone with eyes can see how much you love Kara. It has to be tough to see her do what she does after all she's been through."

"You have no idea." Alex took a swig off her beer.

"I might have an inkling."

"I guess. Sam seems like a handful, but I'm happy she's thinking about college."

With a proud smile, M'gann glanced at the table. "Me, too. She's worked hard in every way. She deserves this happiness. She deserves all the happiness." The last comment was said while looking Alex straight in the eyes.

"Yeah, of course. Totally. Happiness," she cleared her throat. "Um, you have time to join us?"

"I'll make time." M'gann hesitated a moment then put a hand on top of Alex's. "I'm glad you and Cassie didn't work out. You deserve better. In fact, after your last visit, Sam didn't stop talking about you for days."

Alex picked at the label on her bottle. "She's great. I mean just look at what she's been through and she's doing so well...she's strong."

"And she's a grown woman who's like Kara in a lot of ways. Navigating new emotions that make little sense to her, but I know the right person is out there for her. Someone who understands, who..."

Alex stared at M'gann. She hadn't shared her feelings with anyone. Not that she even knew what she was feeling since everything was so mixed up in her head and all she wanted to do right now was forget the last couple of weeks. It was too soon to like someone, wasn't it? Or there was some kind of rule about not liking your alien sister's best friend from captivity?

"Alex, take a breath. I'll put in a food order for you guys and join you in a bit."

"Thanks."

On her way back to the table she glimpsed Sam. Noted her slender figure, wide easy smile, and bright eyes. Again, she wondered how she and Kara were so different after what they'd been through.
In the few times she'd spent with Sam alone, they'd never ventured into her history and Alex was fine with that. But part of her was curious.

"Hey, sit by me," Sam said.

Easing herself into the spot next to Sam, Alex forced a smile.

"So, forget something?"

Alex turned to Sam, eyebrow raised. "What?"

"The drinks." Sam motioned toward Alex's beer with her hand.

"Oh…right. I'll go back –"

A waiter appeared then with three bottles. "Here you ladies go."

"So, how's work?" Sam turned her attention to Kara.

"Great. Super. It's fantastic." Kara pushed up her glasses, clearing her throat. "I'm learning a lot from Jess."

Sam pulled a face. "You okay?"

"Uh huh. Why?"

"You're acting weird."

"Nah, it's nothing. I'm fine, really. It's not a big deal. I mean it's like so minor. I can totally handle it. I –"

Sam held up a hand. "Kara, you know I love you. But if you don't get to a point I'll have to do something drastic."

Kara opened her mouth a few times, then half-smiled. "Like what?"

"I have my ways, so you better talk. Get it out. Does it have anything to do with that lunch date that wasn't a date but you maybe wanted it to be?"

Alex watched the exchange, curious as to how Kara would handle it.

"Sort of, I mean it wasn't a date. But we did go out. At night. Together. Just the two of us."

Sam let her head fall forward and made snoring sounds. "Alex, wake me when she starts circling the point."

A thud, then Sam sat straight up. "Hey, Ms. Toes of Steel!"

"Be nice," Kara said.

"Will you tell me what's going on if I am?"

Kara huffed out a breath. "It was a date I guess, but just as friends. A friends date, but I like her." Kara's shoulders sagged, and Alex wanted to wrap Kara up in her arms and tell her it was okay. That relationships were a good thing, but she knew she wasn't ready and didn't want to push. "I'm new to this and don't want it…for a lot of reasons, but the main one being Lena is my boss and it would be
Sam's eyes widened. Her face taking on a far more serious expression than Alex had ever seen.

"Lena? Lena Luthor? But you always talk about Jess?"

Alex's stomach dropped. Of course Sam would freak out. Everyone knew who Lena was…and her mother.

"Lena's not like that. The DEO checked her out…you're totally safe," Alex said. "I promise I won't let anything happen to you." She reached out and put her hand on top of Sam's without thought.

Sam's forehead scrunched up. "I know that. Lena's great. It's just…I know her, too. We're friends."

Kara's eyes zeroed in on Sam. "What? How do you know her?"

Sam bit her lip. "Promise you won't get mad?"

Alex knew nothing good ever came after that phrase but hoped just this once she was wrong. "Sam, it's okay."

Kara remained rigid in her seat.

"She came here a while back. Was looking for someone based off her mom's files. Somehow she tracked me down and M'gann did her thing and cleared her. We started talking and got along."

"What files? Do you have them? What did they say? How did she find you? Was I in them? This is…has she known all along who I am?" Kara tapped her fingers on the table, a crack forming under her hand.

Alex leaned forward, grabbing hold of Kara's arm. "Hey, it's okay. Take a breath and let Sam say what she needs."

"Kara, the whole reason I never said anything about her was because I didn't want her to have any link to you whatsoever. She knows there were two of us in that place, but has no clue who the second was. Your secret's safe and I was just trying to keep it that way at first, but now we're friends. Like you said, she's great." Sam finished her beer. "She helped me with classes and offered to pull some strings to get me into some really awesome universities."

Alex relaxed her shoulders. Kara on the other hand still sat ramrod straight, eyes unblinking.

"So, who wants a burger or three?" M'gann set down several plates, her presence easing some of the tension. "Everything okay?"

Sam quirked a brow. "Kara just found out that Lena comes here."

"About time. Watching you sneak between the two of them was grating on my nerves. Now, you can all hang out." M'gann nudged Kara, and Alex was surprised to see her sister move. Once again she wondered who exactly the bar owner was.

Alex popped a fry in her mouth. "That would be nice, though I don't think Lena seeing Kara here would be ideal."

Kara made a face at the comment but dug into her burger, still silent.

"Why? Kara likes her." Sam glanced between M'gann and Kara. "They'd be really good for each
other I think."

Alex finished her beer. "It's complicated. Lena's her boss."

Pushing up her glasses, Kara finally spoke. "It's not just that. Her seeing me in an alien establishment...considering who I am. And I can't even think about a relationship. You know what I mean, right, Sam?"

Scrunching her nose, Sam shook her head. "No, I can't. Sorry. I spent years in that place, way before you got there. It was hell. I don't want to waste another day. I have issues, I'm aware of that. But, I'm working through them. I have friends. And I'm learning that relationships are worth the risk."

Alex looked away when Sam made contact with her after the last part. She tuned out the rest of the conversation, something about the files and Sam destroying them. Things she should pay attention to, but at the moment nothing was making sense to her.

She'd learned quite a bit this evening and didn’t know what to do with it. Most of all she was concerned about Kara. Her sister, whether she knew it or not, was falling for Lena, and this plan to distance herself was not going to end well.

Not that she was avoiding thinking about Sam and the growing feelings she had for the woman.

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Lena swept her hair up into a ponytail before entering. She'd had a long day and just wanted to relax before heading in to work tomorrow. Talk about something innocuous. Perhaps, have a drink or four. Then she got a text.

Taking off her coat, she folded it over her arm heading for the back table she always sat at. However, this time it was full. Wrinkling her brow, she stopped a moment before continuing.

"Hi. You didn’t tell me this was a party."

Four sets of eyes turned to her, but it was the blue ones that stole her breath.

Kara.

"Lena! What are you doing here? How random...it's great to see you. Have a seat, we just started eating," Sam spoke in rapid-fire succession.

Lena didn’t miss the looks shared between everyone, especially Kara and Sam.

"But you sent me a text --" Lena started.

Sam shot to her feet. "Yes, to say hi. I'm so glad you decided to drop in. It's been so long. Here, there's a spot beside Kara."

"I saw you Friday." Lena had no idea why Sam was acting so odd.

"Hi, Lena," Alex said, voice tight.

"Alex, nice to see you." Turning to M'gann, Lena smiled. "You as well." Then she looked at Kara. She hadn't moved, and her face was scrunched in a manner Lena interpreted as pain. "Kara, how's the arm?"

Everyone held their breath, which made Lena do the same, not sure why.
"Good. How are you?" Kara smiled, but it didn’t reach her eyes.

"Fine…you know what I think I misunderstood. I'm gonna –"

M'gann got to her feet and pulled over a chair from a nearby table. "You're gonna have a seat and eat with us."

Lena didn’t miss the sharp Look M'gann shot Sam, or how chastised the woman appeared.

Clearing her throat, Lena spoke. "So, what brings you here? You all know one another?"

Thoughts raced in Lena's head now that the initial shock of seeing Kara had worn off. What was she doing in an alien bar? How did she know Sam? Before she'd arrived they seemed to be having a serious discussion, but now were silent.

"Uh, I brought Kara here. A friend introduced me to this place and I thought she would like it," Alex said, looking away.

Yeah, and I saw them and you know me, I'll bug anyone when bored enough," Sam said.

Kara had yet to say anything, something Lena filed away. "That's nice. How have we never bumped into one another? I've spent many a late night here with Sam when I couldn’t sleep, which is most nights."

That got Kara's attention away from her plate. "What? You and Sam spent the night together?"

Lena wanted to say something. Wanted to erase the look of…betrayal on Kara's face, but she didn’t have the words, didn’t know if she wanted to. After a sleepless night thinking about Kara, she'd realized she had more than platonic feelings for the woman and that was a big no-no.

"Yeah, we make a great team, right, Sam? She's going to study business and then come work for me," Lena said, winking.

Sam choked on a bite of her burger. "Um, yeah. That's the plan."

Kara fidgeted with the cuffs of her sweater, a habit Lena had grown familiar with. Kara was nervous, upset, anxious. Lena felt terrible for possibly causing it, but she was unable to stop herself from doing it.

Sam's hand darted across the table and squeezed Kara's arm. Lena noted that Kara didn't flinch. She was comfortable around Sam. Alex waved a hand in front of Lena's face, her mouth was moving, but Lena's focus was on the familiarity between Kara and Sam.

"You…you're the one…when I have…sleeping. You're the…one that…it." Sam murmured, but Lena caught bits.

Kara nodded. "Yeah…you too. But, it's…now, right? And…you…her….understand."

Sam shook her head, both hands gripping Kara's in a way that should have been painful. "No, it's …that. We're…friends."

They spoke in low tones, half words, with a comfort and ease that comes out of years of knowing someone, not a few months of hanging out at a bar. Lena swallowed. If Sam and Kara had known each other for a long time, there was only one way that was possible, which meant Kara was…

"Lena, are you okay? You zoned out for a minute." Alex leaned toward her, eyes full of concern.
"I'm fine. You know, I just remembered I have an early meeting I forgot about."

M'gann appeared spoke up, "I'm sure it can wait. I think you're just where you need to be right now."

Even if she hadn't been raised to be respectful, there was no way she'd be rude to M'gann who had been nothing but kind and accepting of her.

"A quick bite."

Lena had no idea what she ate. She nodded when appropriate, threw in a few noises of agreement, but her mind was elsewhere. More specifically, her thoughts were pinging back and forth in her head. Kara had been held captive with Sam. Kara was the other alien. Kara was…

Supergirl.

Lena's stomach dropped and her heartbeat picked up.

How had she not seen it? The eyes? The incident with her head hitting the wall. The feel of Supergirl's arms and Karas. The familiar scents both of them had. Everything hit Lena like a ton of bricks then.

Kara taking the stairs in record time…all the indicators of trauma that still lingered. The scars covering Kara's arm…the smaller barely perceptible ones on her face that Lena noted. It all made her want to throw up. Scream. Run out of there. What her mother had done. How could Kara work for her?

This sent her thoughts bouncing in a totally different direction. Was Kara spying on her? Biding her time until she could catch Lena doing something nefarious?

She dismissed the thought before it had a chance to fully form. Kara might be a lot of things, but evil, calculating, and manipulative were none of them.

"Lena, did you hear me?"

A hand shook her shoulder lightly. "I'm sorry, what?"

Sam gave her a weird look but didn’t push. "Kara and Alex left. You didn’t even say bye."

Around her, the table had been cleared. The seats around her were empty. M'gann stood next to her, concern filling her eyes.

"I think we need to talk. In my office."

Shaking her head, Lena got to her feet. "I'm sorry. I need to go home."

"Lena, Kara was never spying on you. She knows you aren't your mother." M'gann waited for Lena to challenge her.

"How did you…I didn't say that."

Tapping the side of her head, M'gann smiled. "Like I said, we need to talk."

Inside the confines of M'gann's office, Lena's nerves unraveled. She paced the office, her thoughts chaotic.
"You two...knew each other in that place," Lena said to Sam.

"We did."

"You said you didn't know...but I mean of course you would protect her. It makes sense. I...does she hate me? How can she stand to be around me?"

Firm hands took her by the shoulders and led her to a chair. M'gann made eye contact with her.

"Listen to me. I know you're confused and hurting and need answers. All I can do is reassure you that Kara is a good person. One of the best, but you already know that. Whatever happened in her past, she knows you had nothing to do with. Believe what you want, but the people who matter know you are not your brother. It's you that doesn't realize it"

Lena's eyes burned and she swallowed, hard. "But, I...how do I act? What do I say? I get why she wouldn't tell me who she is, but...would she ever? And working as an assistant? She can't do that...she needs to be free to help people. How can I help her? What can I do?"

Images from the night before of Kara laughing while winning Lena prizes flashed in her mind. Kara in her apartment with the reddish glow of sunset on her. Kara, with her small, shy smiles. Her love of birds...Kara whom she had fallen for if she was being honest.

"Hey, it's okay."

Lena pushed away. "It's not okay. She's...she's a super and...my employee. This is...I can't do this."

M'gann frowned then her face took on a sterner expression. "What is it with you humans and this need to deny yourselves happiness? I have seen so much pain and suffering in my lifetime. Horrors you could never imagine. When I came here it was to hide. To punish myself for the things I had done. Then I met Sam and somehow she helped me see I can do more. I can atone. I can help. And so can you. You're so wrapped up in the past and crimes of other people you barely take a moment to think about yourself." M'gann inhaled, eyes softening. "I have no idea how Kara feels, I can't read her mind. But from what I've heard she likes you and it scares and confuses her. She thinks so highly of you, it would crush her if you were to push her away."

Lena forced herself to glance away. Too many thoughts going round and round in her head.

Sam chimed in, "For what it matters, she's one of the best people I know."

Lena didn't want to know. She really didn't...but part of her...Terrible pictures that she now had a face to connect to. "What happened to her?"

"That's not my story to tell."

Lena nodded, knowing that would be the answer. Relieved. "Of course, I just...I don't think I could stand to hear it from her."

Sam's face took on an unusual hardness, her eyes glimmering, body tensing. "Then don't bother with her. If you can't be there for her should she ever decide to open up or share, you aren't worthy of her."

"Sam," M'gann said. "That's uncalled for."

Whatever had possessed the woman, dissipated. "Sorry, I just get...protective of her at times."
"We'll talk about that later." M'gann turned to Lena. "I know I don’t need to ask you not to say anything. You won't sell Kara out or put her in danger. From here, it's your choice how you handle things, but know that what you decide doesn’t just affect you and from what I've seen and heard, both of you have had enough pain."

Lena cleared her throat, still unnerved by Sam's change in demeanor. "I'll think about it. I should go."

Lena made it home, somehow. She'd been a stupor for what felt like hours. Her mind bringing forth so many small moments and memories that she'd filed away. Part of her wondered if she always knew Kara was different. Suspected she was Supergirl. The way she'd written off so much, it was as if she'd wanted to be distracted from the truth.

Now, she had a decision to make and she had no idea how she was going to do it.

Pretend everything was fine? That she didn't know the truth. Distance herself? Try to remain friends? She shook her head, realizing she'd fallen for a Super. How ridiculous and cliché could she be?

While she slept, nightmares plagued her once again. This time, Kara played the starring role. Begging Lena to help her. And Lena was powerless to do a thing.

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Kara kicked off her shoes. "Well, that went terribly. She didn’t even talk to me. Did you see that?"

Alex hung her jacket by the door. "She didn’t talk to anyone. And it's not like you were all that chatty."

Kara made a face. "It threw me. I didn’t expect to see her there. That was supposed to be a safe place."

"It still is." Alex plopped herself on the couch, searching for the remote.

"Yeah, but it's different now. She and Sam have had this secret friendship for months and I feel like I don't know what's going on with either of them and...did it seem like there was more to them?" Kara sat on the edge of the couch and maneuvered herself next to Alex.

"Stop. There's nothing there and you know it. Plus, Sam was protecting you just like you were protecting her by not mentioning you work for Lena. Goes both ways you know."

Kara scrunched up her face. "You don’t always have to be right you know."

Alex shrugged. "It's a curse."

"You think she suspects anything?" Kara tore the cuff of her shirt and frowned.

"I'm sure she does. It's not like you and Sam were subtle with the whole whispering to each other and then glancing around the table thing."

"Should I quit? Find a new job? James owes me."

Alex raised a brow. "That seems not only premature but drastic. Go in to work tomorrow and see how things are. You still planning on distancing yourself from her?"

Kara sighed. "I wasn’t totally sure about it, but the way she was tonight. She couldn’t even look at
me. It hurt." 

Alex wrapped her arms around her. "Hey, it's gonna be okay. I promise."

Kara went to bed that night dreading the next day. When she woke, a message from James to check in with him gave her something else to think about.

Grabbing her bag she left the apartment, setting everything up for Alex before she did. She arrived at CatCo just before 8AM and went up to James's office.

"Hey, how are you?" Winn asked.

"Fine, you?"

"I'm great, you?" He rolled his eyes. "I mean you already said you were fine…but I see the air cast on your arm so how is that? Is your arm okay? I mean obviously, it's not…"

Kara squinted at him. "Are you okay?"

He smiled and held a file in front of him. "Yeah, fine. Ms. Grant has a meeting with the board, so we're all on edge."

At that moment, Cat exited a glassed-in boardroom. Her expression was dour and she gave Kara a brief once-over before continuing on. "Good to see you again," she called over her shoulder.

"Hey, Kara. Thanks for coming," James said.

"No problem, what's up?"

He led her to his office. Before she entered she caught a snippet of conversation between three men headed toward the elevator.

"We got this. As soon as the rest of the stuff leaks she'll be out of here within the week."

"You sure?"

"Trust me. Cat Grant's days are numbered."

"Kara? Everything okay?"

She let the door close behind her. "Those men…they were talking about Ms. Grant and leaks?"

James's expression turned serious. "There were a bunch of leaks last night. Someone got into her personal emails and now the board is using it to try and get her to take a step back."

Kara shook her head. "That guy wants her out of CatCo."

James leaned back against his desk. "So, now that you're here…"

Still distracted, Kara used her x-ray vision to see what Cat was doing in her office. A harried assistant was running out with a box and Cat had her head cradled in both hands.

"Can't we help her?"

"Who?"

"Ms. Grant. It's not right that someone is doing this to her."
James sighed. "I guess we could try. But I don't really know where to start."

"You said something about leaks?" The wheels in Kara's head started to turn. "I remember Lillian… she had an issue with someone and said perception was everything, ruin that and you ruin them. It doesn't matter if it's true or not."

A knock on the door and then Winn popped his head in. "Hey, you said you needed some help with your computer printer connection?"

James nodded.

Winn entered, eyes staying on Kara the whole time. "I do the tech stuff here. I could work on you…I mean if you had a computer I could help you out. I'm like a wizard and not just the Dungeons and Dragons kind." His face reddened.

Kara glanced at James and raised an eyebrow.

"Winn, relax. Take a breath."

"Right, no. I totally got this. So, that's pretty crazy about Ms. Grant, huh?" He ducked under the table holding the printer and sorted through the wires. "Those emails are pretty harsh."

"Yeah, wonder how someone got a hold of them." Kara hoped she wasn’t being too obvious.

Winn's head popped up. "Oh, that's easy. There are so many ways, that's not the issue. Finding out who is doing the leaking would be the problem."

Kara nodded. "Right, but it could be done."

"Pshaw, of course it could."

James shook his head in an almost panicked manner at Kara.

"Winn, would you like to help me with a project?"

A thump followed by an "ow" then Winn's smiling face. "I'd love to."

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Alex set her weapon down and hit the button to get a new target. She'd spent most of the morning checking out the new specs on a weapon design she'd be fiddling with. She also took inventory of the armory, sparred with Vasquez, and made her grocery list.

By the time lunch rolled around she was bored out of her mind, so the text from Kara to help her out with something was a welcome distraction from not thinking about Sam.

She rode the elevator up with the requested lunch items, thinking it was a large order even for Kara.

"You, too?" Jess asked.

Alex stopped. "What?"

"Your sister seems to be having a party in there." The assistant motioned to the office with her shoulder. "She's not is she?"

Alex shook her head. "Nope. No party"
Opening the door to Kara's little office, Alex barely fit inside. James was there with a short guy in a cardigan.

"Kara, what's going on?"

"We're going to help Ms. Grant."

Alex set the food down, nodding when James reached for it. "Why? And how are you doing that from here?"

"Oh, I need access to a computer with a –"

"Who are you?" Alex asked, looking at the smaller guy.

"Winn, I'm the tech guy. Hi." He waved at her.

"Hi, Winn the tech guy. Why are we all in Kara's office?"

"Okay, so I was at CatCo today and overheard someone talking about how they were going to screw Cat over... and there are these leaks of her personal emails."

Alex opened her bottle of water. "And why are you helping her? You don’t even know her."

Kara made a face. "It's not right that they want to ruin her. She's worked really hard to get where she is. If I can help, I will."

And Alex knew it was a lost cause. Once Kara got an idea in her head, that was it. On top of avoiding the whole Lena situation, which Alex totally related to so...

"Right then, so what are we doing?"

While Winn laid out the plan, Alex didn’t miss the glances at Kara he stole. James wasn’t as bad, but Clark had mentioned Lucy was still in town so that probably had something to do with it. By the end of his explanation, her smile was more pained than anything. She, an elite government agent, was in charge of a team of Super idiots by the sound of it.

Alex tossed her taco wrapper in the garbage. "Let me get this straight. James is going to break into this guy's office to plant a thing Winn made and Kara is going to keep watch and Winn is going to secure the connection? And you want me run interference in case he comes back early?"

"Yep, pretty much," James said.

"Come on, Alex. It'll be fun."

"Breaking the law is not fun. Not when it can get you," She jabbed Kara in the chest. "in trouble."

"I'll be fine. I can be sneaky."

Alex raised an eyebrow at that and glared. "No, you can't."

Kara huffed. "Come on, help us."

And that is how Alex found herself standing in the lobby waiting for their target to exit while James did his business. All seemed to go fine until Alex noted the guy was coming back earlier than intended. Kara texted her saying James needed a couple more minutes.

"Excuse me, sir. Can I talk with you a moment."
The man stopped, giving her a questioning look. "Who are you?"

"I work for some people who are interested in what's happening at CatCo. I heard you might have some information."

The man eyed her a moment pursing his lips. "Not interested. Go back to whatever rag you're reporting for and get your gossip somewhere else."

"I can make it worth your time," she said in a suggestive manner, placing her hand on her hip and trying to push out her chest.

He made a face. "This your first assignment?"

She gritted her teeth. "Yeah, something like that. Look, you want to share or not? I can help."

"Lady, I don't need your help. I got this handled. Now, leave me alone and go see if you can handle the traffic beat." He turned away from her and Alex knew pushing him would only draw more attention, and knocking his lights out was definitely not a good idea, however, her concerns were eased when she saw James duck from the door leading to the stairs.

Back in Kara's office, they waited for Winn to work his magic.

"Once you get the information what are you going to do with it?"

"I'm having dinner with Lucy tonight. I'll ask her what our options are," James said.

Alex glanced at Kara noting the tense set of her shoulders at the mention of Lucy. "Hey, where's Lena? Aren't you afraid she's going to walk in on this?"

A frown briefly flashed across her face. "No, Jess said she had some emergency meeting come up. Going to be out of the office all day... and most of tomorrow."

"Got it! I'm in. Now, I just need to download all the data and trace it back to..." He looked around the room. "I'll just take this back to the office and get it done. As soon as it's all finished I'll let you know."

Alex breathed a sigh of relief when the office emptied out. "Well, that was different."

Kara plopped into the chair behind her desk. "I hope it works."

Alex took a swig of water. "I have the rest of the day off, when do you get out of here?"

"Couple of hours or so. I did most of what Jess gave me but can't let her know or she'll wonder."

Alex stood. "I'll be waiting at Noonan's."

Making her way to the restaurant Alex didn’t notice the shadow behind her, so when a hand clamped on her shoulder her first instinct was to defend herself. This ended up with her flipping her attacker over her shoulder...and then looking into the eyes of Cassie.

"Geez, Danvers. I'm really starting to doubt your sincerity in not having a bias against short people."

Reaching to pull up the other woman, Alex started to ramble. "I am so sorry...I was in my head... and then I felt your hand and I've been stressed..."

Cassie dusted herself off. "Relax, I should know better than to creep up on a government agent."
"Are you okay?"

"Nothing my ego won't recover from. Why don't you buy me a coffee to make up for it?"

"Uh, I was going to Noonan's to wait for my sister."

Cassie smiled. "Great, I look forward to meeting her."

"Uh, sure. That should be fun." Alex knew it totally was not going to be fun.

Cassie tossed her napkin on the table. "That was pretty good, can't believe I've never eaten here."

"Hello?" Kara appeared at the side of the table.

"Kara, this is Cassie…Cassie, this is Kara, my sister."

Kara's face went still.

Cassie held out her hand. "Nice to meet you."

Kara didn't move.

"Sorry, she's just off work and not herself." Alex nudged Kara's arm.

"Right, sorry." Kara accepted Cassie's hand in hers and gave it a firm squeeze based.

Cassie tilted her head to the side. "That's quite a grip you have."

"I exercise. A lot. So what are you doing here? I thought you were gone. I thought you didn't like my sister that way, which is ridiculous. She's the best, like literally the best person on this planet."

Alex was both extremely flattered at the compliment as usual and horrified at how quickly the conversation was spinning out of control.

"Well, Kara, your sister and I were doing pretty good until we realized we had very different views on aliens. She seems to think they're okay whereas I think they're a menace. As for me being gone, I am, technically. I came back to see a friend for the weekend. I'll be out of here tonight."

Kara tensed next to Alex. "Just a meal. We ran into each other and decided to have a coffee while I waited for you." Alex plastered a smile on her face but knew Kara could see right through it.

"Ah, so she's leaving now?" Kara clenched her fists under the table.

Cassie raised an eyebrow. "Actually, I think I'll stick around to get to know you. The way Alex talks, well, it's obvious you're important to her."

"Hey, Kara, what can I get you?" The waitress smiled at them and Alex tried to think of a way out of this situation.

"A couple of sticky buns and a tea, please."

"You got it."

Kara cleared her throat. "Alex is important to me, too. The most important."

Cassie nodded. "I gathered as much. I can't see how two people living in a one bedroom loft
wouldn’t have killed each other unless they loved each other."

Kara's forehead wrinkled. "What do you mean?" She looked at Alex.

"It's nothing. Hey, you know Cassie's a cop. She catches bad guys for a living, that's pretty cool, right?"

Eying her, Kara nodded. "Are you unhappy with the current living situation?"

"No, I didn’t say that. I was just talking about how much different it is since you moved in. All good things… I have someone to hang out with and watch TV and talk to.” Alex fired off all the good things about living with Kara she could think of. "You always set out my breakfast and we go to the park and we try fun new takeout places."

"Wow, I'm sorry…I didn’t mean to make it a thing. I like my space and privacy and assume others do as well."

Kara made a face. "Privacy for what?"

"Come on, Kara. You have to know Alex is a catch. One day she's gonna meet another alien sympathizer and want to bring her home and you know…” Cassie wiggled her eyebrows.

"And what?"

Alex wondered if they served scotch.

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Lena signed her name for what she hoped was the last time for at least a week. Mondays were bad enough, but Mondays spent in a lawyer's office were ten times worse. After that, she had a meeting with the city to meet with someone to get permission for safety upgrades she wanted to make to L-Corp. Then, she got to finish off a hellishly long day by having dinner with a potential investor.

She knew by the end of their appetizers that he wasn't interested in her plans, but had a few of his own that had little to do with the company. Rushing through her entrée and skipping dessert she thanked him for his time, and left, but not before turning him down half a dozen times and hearing him mutter something under his breath about her ass.

Buzzing with angry energy she changed into her yoga gear and went to the all-night studio, sitting through two classes before taking a short walk to cool down and ending up in the small park across from her building.

The air was cool and she reached into her bag for a sweater. She wrapped it around her and the scent of Kara wafted up to her. Burying her nose in it she smiled, her tension ebbing away for a brief moment before everything she had been avoiding thinking about came crashing down on her.

"What am I doing?"

Across the way, a small pond with an elevated path and a gazebo caught her attention, or rather the couple inside it locking lips. Not wanting to be a voyeur, she crept out of the area and headed up to her place. When she pulled out her keys she noted the Supergirl keychain Kara had won her. Once inside, she smiled at the stuffed monkey on the table next to the entrance.

Everywhere she looked were reminders of Kara and she didn’t know if she loved it or hated it. Kara, who made her feel happy and safe. Kara who was her employee. Kara who was probably straight.
And even if she wasn't, it's not like she'd be the woman's type. And oh yeah, that one other small thing.

Kara who was also Supergirl.

Bypassing the kitchen she went to her mini-bar and poured herself a glass of scotch. Then again, there was the fact Lena didn’t want a relationship, something she had to keep reminding herself of more and more often.

Deciding she didn’t want to deal with any more work she sat on one of the chairs on her balcony, wrapping the sweater around herself.

Images of Kara ran through her head. She couldn’t stop if she wanted to. Scratching her arm, caused one memory in particular to surface…the marks on Kara she had seen. Small cuts, a large one, uneven stitching.

Her heart ached at the implications. Lillian had hurt Kara, severely. Therapy had to be helping her somewhat because the skittish, frail, wisp of a woman was no more. Kara stood tall, smiled, laughed, and had made a lot of progress in the past few months.

Of course, Lena avoided touching her as much as possible, but it was getting increasingly more difficult. She remembered the first time she'd touched Kara in the office and the woman had fallen. The flinch, the fear in Kara's eyes had affected Lena in a way she could not explain. All she wanted was to protect Kara and make sure no one hurt her ever again. What a joke. Kara needing her protection.

Sighing, she went inside and crawled into bed, keeping the sweater on.

The next morning she dragged herself out of bed and managed to get to her meeting at the mayor's office before heading back to L-Corp.

So far, the only interesting part of the day was an announcement from Cat Grant that everyone thought would be her announcing her stepping down due to the leaked emails over the last couple of days, but had turned into her having one of her board members removed and arrested.

Lena had to respect the woman and hoped she never had to deal with anything like that.

Her driver pulled up to the side entrance and opened the door for her. Using the service elevator she bypassed the lobby and went straight to the top floor.

"Ms. Luthor. Cat Grant's here," Jess whispered.

Lena froze in her tracks. "What? Why?"

"No idea, I put her in the lounge."

"Why didn’t you call me?" Lena straightened her clothes and tried to think of anything that might require the Queen of all Media to come by.

"I was about to, she just arrived."

Lena nodded and headed to the lounge. Taking a breath she entered, hoping she wasn’t in for an interrogation or ambush.

"Ms. Grant. What can I do for you?"
Cat sat on one of the couches, legs crossed, a look of annoyance on her face. "I'd like to talk to one of your employees. Kara is her name, I believe."

Lena's protective instincts kicked in, whether they were needed or not. "About what?"

"That's between me and her."

Crossing her arms, Lena stared back at the older woman. "I'm sorry, but she's a valued employee so you'll have to tell me more." At that moment, Kara stumbled into the room, a box of files teetering in her arms.

"Hi, sorry to interrupt." Kara set the boxes down and began lifting out files. "I just need to put these here for the meeting and I'll be out of your hair."

Supergirl setting up a meeting like a normal person. And then it clicked…this is what Kara needed after everything. One normal thing. A job, friends that didn’t expect her to save the day. A place to figure out and be Kara Danvers. After years of…terrible…Kara needed normal. She needed to be mild-mannered Kara Danvers just as much as she needed to be Supergirl. Lena could make sure she had that.

Lena cleared her throat. "Kara, this is Cat Grant. She'd like to speak with you, but you don't have to."

Kara spun so fast Lena thought she might fall over. "Ms. Grant? Hi."

Cat examined Kara, critically. Lena didn't like it. There was a gleam in the older woman's eye. "Hello, again."

"Yeah, saw you at the office yesterday," Kara said, nervously playing with her glasses and staring at the floor.

Cat squinted. "Among other places. I never forget a face. Anyways, I heard you helped me out of a rather unsavory position."

Kara kept silent.

"You heard someone say something and launched an investigation, or so Mr. Schott said after some prodding." Cat tapped her glasses on her chin. "I wanted to say thank you."

Kara crossed her arms. "No need. It was the right thing to do."

"And no doubt you always do the right thing." Cat picked up her bag. "Keep an eye on this one, Lena. I just might poach her from you."

Lena raised a brow. "Not a chance. Kara's far too valuable to me." She didn’t bother to hide the sincerity or seriousness from her voice.

Another knowing glance from Cat that annoyed Lena.

"I'll bet she is."

And with that, the woman was gone.

"I'm sorry about that, Lena. I didn’t think they'd rat me out." Kara went back to the box and pulled out more files.
Walking next to her, Lena reached out but stopped herself. "It's okay. You helped her, that's nothing to be sorry for."

Kara pulled away, walking to the other side of the room and placing the files on the table. Lena noted how she avoided making eye contact. "I know. I just didn’t want you to think…I don't know. I like working here."

Lena smiled, though it was sad and forced. "I like having you around." She went into her office, unsure of how she was feeling but knowing something felt off.

She'd made her decision, or so she'd thought…now she wasn’t sure of anything.

***

Kara exited the shower holding her suit in front of her. She sniffed it and made a face. "Alex, does the DEO have anything stronger to clean my suit with?"

Her sister popped her head from around the corner in the kitchen. "I can check, why?" Kara waved the suit at her and her face paled. "What is that? Get it out of here."

Unsure what to do, Kara stuffed it in a bag and put it on the fire escape. "That last alien I fought was at a fertilizer plant."

Alex set down two plates of spaghetti. "Right. I heard about that. What did you say it was?"

"Helgramite," Kara said around a mouthful of garlic bread. "Did you make this?"

"Is the kitchen on fire?" Kara shook her head. "Then no, I did not make it."

"He got away."

Alex nodded. "J'onn and I have a plan."

Kara perked up. "What is it?"

Alex added some parmesan to her pasta. "Going to trying to lure him out and catch him when he goes for the goods." Twirling her fork, she made a face at Kara before taking a bite. "So, how has work been? And I don't mean Supergirl stuff, which you have been going a bit overboard with. You barely talk about it anymore. All you used to do was talk about Lena and nothing for the past two weeks."

"It's fine. Great."

Alex made a noise Kara couldn’t interpret. "And what about Lena? No lunches?"

Kara made a face. "No. I mean, that's what I wanted. It's for the best, but it seems like she's keeping her distance, too."

"Isn't that what you wanted?"

How could she explain that she had no idea what she wanted? That her total and complete lack of experience left her at sea when it came to dealing with feelings. "I guess."

"That sounded convincing." Alex dabbed at a bit of sauce on her chin.

Not wanting to talk about Lena anymore because of the confusion it caused, Kara decided to tackle
something that had been bugging her for a while.

"You remember what Cassie was saying…about two people living in a small space and wanting privacy?"

Alex set her fork down. "Yes, but she doesn’t know all the details. And since when do you care what Cassie thinks? She's gone now, for good."

"I don't and I know she isn't aware of our situation. I was just thinking that maybe it would be a good idea if we got our own places." Kara couldn’t read the expression on her sister's face. "I mean, that's normal right? And it would be good for me to be more independent."

Pushing her plate away, Alex stared at the table. "Is that what you want?"

Kara knew she needed to tread carefully here. "No, it scares me, but I also know that's not a good reason not to do it. In fact, that's exactly why I should do it."

Finally, Alex met her eyes. "I know you want to push yourself and I think it's great, but it hasn’t even been a year yet. You don't have to hit all the milestones at once. I'm sure your therapist would agree with me."

Kara pushed the food around on her plate, appetite gone. "I know you have given up so much for me and I love you for that. But, it's time for both of us to live our lives." She was about to say more when her phone alerted her to a Supergirl emergency.

Alex waved her off. "Go be a hero, but this isn't over."

Holding her breath, Kara slipped into her suit and headed to the other side of the city where a warehouse was on fire. She managed to get all the workers out, snuff the fire, and then helped take some of the injured to the hospital.

Another alert, this time a twelve car pile-up and chemical spill. She went through the motions, but her thoughts were distracted by Alex. She knew her sister was great and that it was only a matter of time before someone equally as great came along. Problem was, Alex was pretty much ignoring everyone at the moment because her focus was on Kara and work. All she did in her free time was hang out with Sam.

The one thing Kara wanted above all else was for Alex to be happy. For that to happen, Kara had to take that last step to independence. Supporting herself so that Alex would know she was okay and could move on with no fear.

Lost in thought, she didn’t hear the convoy getting ambushed and by the time J'onn got through to her to tell her Alex had been kidnapped. Kara went into panic mode. She yelled at J'onn, then stormed out and flew around the city. Her senses focused on a sound she'd memorized years ago when she'd first arrived on Earth.

Ten minutes later she heard Alex's voice. She told J'onn and ignored the order to wait. Crashing through the ceiling she managed to undo the handcuffs on Alex's wrists before someone rammed her from behind and sent her flying across the refinery.

She winced, but got to her feet, no stranger to pain.

However, it didn’t make the shock of seeing her aunt any easier.

"Astra? How?"
"You didn’t know? Your mother sentenced me and your uncle to Fort R’ozz."

"Why? She wouldn’t do that." Kara stumbled on some piping.

"You didn’t know your mother as well as you think. I wanted to save Krypton and she let it die. I won’t let that happen again. Join me and we can rule these humans, together."

Kara gritted her teeth, thoughts of her last moments with her mother. The faint smell of her perfume that still clung to her old top. "I don't know what you're planning but I won't let you do anything to this planet."

"So be it."

***

Alex freed herself and managed to get to her feet. Using the wire mesh of the fence to gain her balance she watched Kara and her aunt go head to head. About to call out a warning to her sister, an arm wrapped around her neck and pulled her back.

She grabbed at it, flipping the alien over. He sprang back into place and punched her in the stomach. Grunting, she used his momentum against him and managed to knee him in the side. He pushed them into the wall, bits of jagged metal pushing into her back.

When he stood in front of her, cocky smile on his face, she brought her knee up and smiled in satisfaction as he fell to the ground.

Dragging herself toward where her sister was holding her own against Astra, Alex stumbled when she saw her sister take a hit and fly into a support column, falling into a heap but bouncing back up and wrapping her hand around a shocked Astra's neck.

"Too bad, you chose wrong," Astra ground out, kicking Kara in the side hard enough Alex felt the reverberation.

Kara didn't move, not even a wince. "I won't let you hurt anyone." Kara's expression was fierce. Blood dripped from a gash on her forehead, and Astra didn't look much better.

Astra blasted Kara in the face with her heat vision. Kara let go, turning her head to the side.

J'onn entered at that moment, Astra trying to brush him aside but stopping when he jammed a kryptonite blade into her arm. Screaming she jumped into the air and left.

"Are you okay?" Alex called out to Kara.

In a flash, her sister was next to her. "I'm fine, but we need to get you to the DEO to have that leg checked out."

They were in the air before Alex could protest. Two minutes later, Kara set down outside the desert base and handed Alex to the medical team. The wound wasn’t life-threatening, just needed to be cleaned out and stitched up, but Kara hovered anyway.

Alex ordered the doctor away when he prodded her one too many times and called out for Kara.

"Hey, how are you feeling?" Kara asked entering the room.

"I'll be fine. How are you? That was one hell of a family reunion."
Kara sat down on the edge of the bed. "I don't know. I thought it was just me and Kal left...and now Astra and Non are alive and they seem to have something pretty terrible planned and..."

Alex sat up and wrapped her sister in a hug. "Hey, it'll be okay."

"I hope so."

A week later, Sam texted Alex asking about her leg and to know if she was up for dinner. Kara chose that moment to enter the apartment, dropping her bag by the door and kicking off her shoes before grabbing a box of leftover pizza from the fridge.

"Rough day?"

"Annoying."

Snagging a slice, Alex urged her to continue. "How?"

"I'm tired of having to sneak out to do Supergirl stuff and I can do more than file and deliver documents. Sometimes, when I look over the lab reports I cringe at how wrong or backwards they are. And like I haven't talked to Lena unless it was work related in like three weeks and my feelings are not going away. If anything I'm more confused by them and her. She can't even look at me. I feel like I did something wrong." Kara finished her speech by shoving half a piece of pizza in her mouth.

Knowing this was a tough subject, and one that Alex didn't want to push her sister on, she opted for distraction. "I was thinking about what you said...about getting our own place."

"Really?"

Alex nodded. "I've been in this place since college. I think I'd like something closer to work and different. I need change. However, this place is rent controlled and ridiculously cheap...and perfect for you."

Kara's eyes bulged. "Really? I mean I do love it here, but I don't want to kick you out of your own apartment."

Alex laughed. "You're not kicking me out. I'm volunteering, and to be honest, you're right. It's a good thing for both of us."

"We have to celebrate! What do you want? I'll get whatever food you want from wherever you want. Even those gross hot dogs from that place in Chicago." Kara got to her feet, ready to go.

Pursing her lips, Alex made a face. "Actually, I have plans tonight."

Kara's forehead wrinkled. "With who?"

"Sam."

"That doesn't count. We can all hang out."

Pursing her lips, Alex let out a breath. "Actually, it's more like a date."

"Oh." Then Kara's eyes went wide. "Ohhh...so things are going well? Is that why you want more privacy?" She sat back down on the couch, regarding Alex. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Alex pulled a face. "I didn't know how and to be honest it kind of felt weird? It's not weird is it?"
Kara put a hand on top of hers. "Nope. I'm happy for you. Sam's great, and since I have the night free, I'm going to go and talk to Lena."

Alex sat up at that. "Really? What about?"

Kara shook her head. "Not sure, I'll figure it out when I see her. I just know I miss her."

"Call me if you need to."

"I will."

"Promise?"

Kara smiled. "Promise."

***

Lena threw the file she currently held across the room. Her thoughts kept returning to Kara and Cat and whatever had made the media mogul come all the way over here three weeks ago. Cat Grant did not go out of her way.

For anyone.

Ever.

The fact it coincided with Kara avoiding her had nothing to do with it…and if she were to be honest, she wasn’t exactly going out of her way to run into her.

She sighed, rubbing her forehead. Glancing toward the office Kara used, Lena got to her feet and headed toward it. Cracking the door open she flipped on the light, smiling at how organized it was. Not a piece of paper out of place.

She sat in Kara’s chair and ran a hand over the surface of the desk. The only personal item was the little glass bird Lena had left for her to find. She assumed Kara had taken the other things she’d left her home. In her hand, Lena had a matching green bird now. She set it on the shelf next to the blue one, knowing she didn’t need to leave a note, but hoping Kara understood that whatever was going on, Lena would be there for her.

Back in her office, she gave up on work and picked up her bag. The ride home passed by quickly, the news reporting an incident with Supergirl. Lena focused on the news, tense until she knew Kara was okay.

In her apartment, she went straight to the bedroom and slipped into her comfy clothes. Kara's sweater now part of that routine. Once done with that she poured herself a scotch, selected one of her favorite books, grabbed a blanket, and sat out on her balcony.

So engrossed in the story, Lena didn’t hear the flutter of the cape until it was accompanied by the clearing of a throat. The image was so unexpected that Lena tossed her book, but Supergirl swooped and caught it with ease.

"Sorry, didn’t mean to scare you."

"You didn't. I'm fine."

Supergirl…Kara raised a brow at her, but did land on the balcony and place the book on the table next to Lena. "Right, good to know."
Lena sat up, trying to find some semblance of cool. "How are you?" Don't use any names, less chance of messing up and calling her Kara.

Kara leaned against the railing. "Good. You?"

"Fine. Great." She searched her brain for anything to talk about then realized the other woman was staring at the empty lounger. "Do you want to sit? I mean I know you have other things to do but if you wanted to take a minute?" Lena wanted to throw herself off the balcony for the inane comment but knew Kara would just catch her and then she'd feel even more ridiculous.

Kara smiled, small but sincere. "Yeah, that sounds nice." She adjusted her cape and sat on the lounger, relaxing into it. "Nice view."

Lena nodded. "I never seem to have the time to appreciate it." She glanced over and noted the other woman's eyes were directed toward the sky. "Lots of stars out."

"Can't see them though. Have to go out to the desert for that."

"Do you do that often?"

"Not as much as I'd like." There was a melancholy tone to her voice that made Lena want to reach out and wrap her up with her blanket.

Lena wanted to point out she could go now but didn’t want Kara to leave or feel like Lena didn’t want her around. In fact, she wanted her around too much. She’d been going crazy these last few weeks with just how much she missed Kara and their lunches…and just being in her presence.

Kara turned to her, face so open. "How are you doing? Really? Last time we talked you seemed… I'm not sure, but you had made a few assumptions about," she gestured between the two of them. "Based off of your last name."

Wrapping her sweater tighter around her, Lena blew out a breath. "I know you don't think that way. It's me. How I see myself. It doesn’t help that a lot of people look at me with an air of judgment, waiting to pounce on even the slightest misstep. I'm trying so hard to look to the future and make L-Corp a force for good. So, when I think of Superman and my brother and all that…"

Kara made a face, one Lena recognized when Kara was working out a problem. "I guess I'll have to try harder to convince you. But for now I'll settle for getting you to go inside, it's cold out."

Lena pulled at the arm of her sweater then held up the blanket that covered her legs. "I'm prepared."

"That sweater's nice, but it's not warm enough."

A smile settled on her face. "Probably not, but it's one of my favorites."

Kara glanced away at that, an indecipherable look on her face. "Really? Why?"

Lena swallowed, realizing it was Kara's sweater and she'd admitted more than she'd intended. In for a dollar… "It belongs to someone I care a great deal about."

Kara's mouth twitched, but her gaze remained on the skyline. "Really? That's um…I bet she'd be happy to hear that."

Lena's heart started to pound. Was this it? Time to put it all on the table? "I should probably tell her, but things have been strained lately."
Kara fidgeted with the cuffs of her suit and Lena could not suppress the smile at the action.

"Yeah, I know what you mean."

"You do?"

"Yeah. There's someone that I like and it scared me. So, I made all these excuses which was just a way to sabotage it and now I don't even have my friend. All because feelings scare me."

Lena reached out, slowly, happy when Kara didn’t flinch. "Maybe your friend is scared, too. Perhaps you should talk to them."

Kara turned to her, blue eyes pinning her in place. "It's a her. Does that bother you?"

Lena shook her head. "Not at all."

"How do people…humans, how do you know who likes who or what? How do you know what you feel? Or if someone feels it back? It's so confusing and I feel like I'm just going to mess it up. I've never…you know liked someone until this woman?"

Not wanting to screw things up, Lena took her time. "Humans are complicated, as I'm sure aliens are, too. I think the best we can hope for is a connection. Someone we like to be around. That makes us smile and feel safe. Someone we can talk to, who listens. And go from there."

"You make it sound so easy. But how do you separate that from a friendship?"

This was the moment, Lena knew it. Right now. Her answer would be one she looked back on and knew she tried or she chickened out. "I suppose you don't go out of your way to leave small gifts for friends just to make them smile. Or clear time you don't have to eat lunch with them. Or wear their sweater because it smells like them and you miss her so much it hurts."

"But your ex was a man?"

"Yes, he was. But trust me when I say this, feelings confuse all of us at one point or another. I don't regret my time with him, but men don't do it for me."

Kara looked at her then, eyes shimmering. "I have to tell you something, but I don’t want you to get mad."

Had Lena read this all wrong? Was Kara about to…

"It's me...Kara. I'm Supergirl. I've hated lying to you. Hated it, but I had no idea how to tell you and just wanted to keep you safe, but I also know that nothing good can happen until I'm honest with you. And like it's probably safer if you know because maybe someone will assume you do and then what?"

"Uh…okay. If we're being honest, I already knew but didn’t say anything."

"You knew?"

"Figured it out that night at the bar watching you and Sam."

Kara's face fell. "Oh."

Lena swung her legs over the side of the lounger and moved closer to Kara. "You don't have to tell me anything. I just want you to know I like you, too. And I would like to try. To see where this
goes? If you want."

"I do, but are you sure you do? I mean, I really have no clue what I'm doing and feelings are really
tough for me."

Lena laughed. "You and me both."

Kara swallowed. "I also work for you. You're my boss."

Lena moved her head from side to side. "Technically, you work for Jess. And we can deal with that
later. Maybe a transfer to the science division? I see the looks you give those reports. And if I recall
all offices have windows in them now. In case you need to fly off." She motioned with her hand.

"Okay, yeah. That sounds good. So what now?"

Lena smiled. "You let me take you on a proper date?"

"Or you can let me take you to the art thing this weekend. We did agree to do that."

"Deal, but we get dinner before."

"Deal."

Sirens in the distance caught Kara's attention.

"I have to go."

"I know. Be safe."

"I will. Get some sleep, Lena." Kara pressed a quick kiss to Lena's cheek before flying off and Lena
didn't need a mirror to know she had the world's biggest smile on her face.
Chapter 22

Kara put two plates stacked a foot high with pancakes on the table. "Are you sure you haven’t seen or heard anything, Clark?"

Alex made room for a plate of bacon and sausage before sitting down. Kara swatted at her hand when she saw her reaching for a piece. "It's hot."

Clark poured everyone orange juice while shaking his head. "Sorry, nothing. If she's been here as long as you, she's done a good job at staying hidden."

"Did you find anything out from your mom?" Alex asked, accepting the plate Kara handed her.

Kara made a face. "Minimal. All she said was Astra was sentenced to Fort R'ozz for killing two people, but not why she did it."

"I can check at the fortress if you want?" Clark said around a mouthful of food.

"I'd appreciate it." Kara turned to Clark.

"You know you can go any time, too. My fortress is your fortress." He grinned at her, all blue eyes and dimples.

"Thanks. I'll keep that in mind."

"Hey, this is really good." Clark helped himself to a second serving.

"Well, as much as I love Alex and her many skills, she can't cook. So, it was either learn or live on takeout."

Alex threw a sausage at Kara. "Please, like you minded that. You're only learning cuz you got bored and read all the cooking books mom gives me in hopes I'll use them."

Kara put on an affronted look. "Whatever, maybe I just like looking after you."

Alex smiled. "It's too early to get soft like that! Clark, nothing more about General Lane?"

He shook his head. "Lois is keeping a close eye on things. If she hears anything, I'll let you know."

"Thanks."

Kara cleared her throat. "Um, so, I forgot to tell you this thing I did."

Alex and Clark stared at her, matching confused expressions.

"I told Lena."

Clark stopped eating.

Alex grinned behind her coffee mug.

"Told Lena what?" Clark asked.

Kara blew out a breath, barely catching her plate before it flew off the table. "Uh…a couple things."
"How'd she take it?" Alex set her mug down, leaning in.

Clark looked between the two of them. "What did she tell her? Wait…you mean…" He turned to Kara. "You told her you like her?"

Kara scrunched her forehead. "Wh…uh…how did you know?" She eyed Alex as she examined her empty bowl. "Alex?"

"She might have mentioned something in passing. But, how did she take it and how do you feel now?" Clark waved to get her attention, the smile on his face reassuring her in a way she didn’t quite understand.

"She was great, as usual. We're going out this weekend to dinner and then the art walk."

Alex got up to refill her coffee. "That's great, Kara. I'm happy for you."

"Well, it's just a date so there's still lots of time and so, so, so many ways I can mess this up. I mean dating? What was I thinking? I can't date? I'm Supergirl…oh yeah, I told her that, too."

Hyperventilating. She was hyperventilating. Was that even possible for her on Earth?

Coffee spilled on the floor. Clark's face froze.

At the same time. "You told her what?"

"Yeah…I mean I didn’t want to lie to her you know? No secrets. That's how you date here?" No response. "Look, in all those romantic movies Alex made me watch all the problems started from lies, so no lies with Lena."

Alex nodded. Clark still hadn't moved.

Finally, Alex spoke. "It'll be fine."

Letting out a long-held breath, Clark nodded. "Yeah. Kara, you just need to be careful."

Kara thought of Lena's words the night before about Lex and Superman. "I trust her. She's nothing like her brother."

Holding up his hands, Clark smiled. "I'm aware of that. I just meant that any enemies you make…if they find out about your connection to her that puts her in danger."

Opening her mouth to comment, Kara had nothing.

Getting to his feet, Clark walked around the table. "Hey, I'm not saying it will happen. And if it does, just give her something to signal you with. I did it for Jimmy and Lois." He wrapped her in a warm hug, holding her so tight she could feel it. "And I'm happy for you. Have a great time on your date and remember to bring her flowers."

With a flash, he was gone and Kara was left with Alex. Based on her expression she wanted more details than Clark.

"Spill. I want to know everything. Don't leave out a word or detail. I want to know wind direction, understand?" Alex cocked her head to the side.

Grinning, Kara got to her feet and dragged Alex to the couch. "Okay…"
"Ms. Danvers, Ms. Luthor would like you meet with her," Jess said when Kara walked by her desk.

"Oh, right now?"

Jess nodded. Kara dropped her bag off in her office and knocked on the door separating the two. She heard Lena's mumbled "Come in" and entered.

"Jess said you wanted to see me. Everything okay?" She pressed her hands down the front of her pants, nerves on edge. How was she supposed to act?

Lena raised her head, their eyes met and Kara's stomach dropped. Now that she thought about it, no one else had had that effect on her. Not that she was thinking about it.

"Yes, sorry. Didn’t mean to alarm you. I was hoping you'd take a look at this and tell me if you see anything wrong with it."

Kara pushed her glasses up. "Uh, sure." She walked over to the desk and stood next to Lena, the familiar smell of her perfume making it hard for Kara to concentrate. She pointed to a few places and mentioned what she hoped were obvious alterations. "Does that help?"

"It does. My team has been stuck on this project for months. I was about to scrap it but was hoping it could be salvaged. This filter will reduce greenhouse gases by fifty percent over the next ten years."

Kara smiled. "That's great. Your team is awesome."

Lena chuckled. "You're the one that solved it, so right now my team consists of you. The others asked to be placed on other projects because I was making them insane."

"Oh. You don't make me insane." Kara moved away, preparing to go back to her office.

"Do you have a minute?" Lena fidgeted with her hands in a way that always made Kara smile.

"Of course, need help with something else?"

"Let's sit." Lena walked toward the couch and Kara followed. "I just wanted to make sure everything was okay…after last night. I know that now that things have changed it might be weird?"

Kara's stomach fluttered. Yeah, that was a weird feeling but she didn’t know if that's what Lena meant. Probably not. "No, it's fine. Well, maybe it's a bit different. Like I don't know how to act or what to do? Like do we pretend here…at work? I'm not good at that. So, I guess it might be a bit weird but not in a bad way."

"Take a breath, Kara. I know what you mean. It's okay. We're friends first and foremost." Lena reached out, slowly, and put her hand on top of Kara's forearm. Warmth spread out from the spot and Kara let herself enjoy the sensation. "Just act like we used to."

"Friends, right. But like…I don’t handle emotions well at all and I didn’t want to do something wrong. I mean you're my first friend outside of…outside of stuff and my feelings are really intense because I like you a lot. Like a lot a lot." Kara heard the other woman's heartbeat pick up. "Are you okay? Your hearts really beating fast. Then again, mine is too which is weird because that doesn’t happen often…am I okay?"

Lena nodded. "Fine. I'm fine. You're fine." Taking a moment, Lena met Kara's gaze. "I'd really like it if we went back to having lunch. I was actually developing a normal eating schedule for a bit."
Grinning, Kara squeezed Lena's hand. "That I can totally help with. And we have that thing this weekend if you still want to go."

Lena made a face. "Of course I do, unless you don't want to?"

"No, I totally do. I just didn't know if you did…still. After everything."

Quirking a brow, Lena held up a finger. "Kara, from this point on, just assume that if you will be present I want to go. Understand?"

Blushing, Kara nodded. "It's the same for me. I meant what I said. I really like you and even though I suck at dealing with emotions and have so much baggage from my past and a target on me because of being Supergirl and all that kind of makes me freak out at times, I feel normal with you, even after telling you my secret."

Kara scrunched her brow when Lena just stared at her. "That was too honest, wasn’t it? I really suck at keeping track of social niceties and boundaries when I'm stressed out. Dr. Grey is always telling me to speak my mind, but sometimes I think that just gets me in trouble."

Lena held up a finger, again. "It's okay. I appreciate honesty, no matter how blunt. I feel normal with you, too. And, there's another reason I asked you in here. I want you to go to the science division. There's an office for you at the end of the hallway. Has a great view, private balcony, and security cameras have been disabled." Lena winked.

"But…what? I…what will I be doing?"

"Putting that super intelligence of yours to work. There's a stack of projects that stalled out because we hit a wall. Maybe you can work some magic and revive a few of them."

Kara was hyperventilating. Again.

"You did all that for me? In like twelve hours? Why? What if I can't do it? Or let you down? What if I screw something up? Why would you do all that?"

Lena frowned. "Well, because you deserve it. You're smart and capable. Even if we hadn't talked about…how we felt, I was planning this. I'm good, but not good enough to have an office set up and multiple files removed from archives and set up for you an hour after we open." Lena put her hand on Kara's thigh. More heat spreading. Kara's heartbeat going crazy. "You've shown a lot of initiative here. Jess is always talking about how hard you work and how she knows you can do more. As for letting me down or messing things up… don't worry about it. As long as you try that's all that matters."

Panicking at the sensations she was feeling. Frustrated at not being able to identify all the emotions Lena's kindness and support caused, unsure why she wanted to hold Lena, Kara blurted the first thing that came to mind. "I've never dated anyone in my life and have no idea how to identify romantic feelings…and I know that is like the most pathetic thing in the world, but that's where I'm at. But, I'd be willing to work on it for the right person. You. I'd be willing to work on it for you." Kara slapped a hand over her mouth, mortified at what she'd admitted.

Lena swallowed, her heart beating a lot faster than before. "Never?"

Kara shook her head. Wishing she had just kept her mouth shut.

"Oh."
"Too much too soon?" Kara asked.

"No. Maybe a little? Kind of…but, it's okay. We'll just take it slow."

"Slow is good. I can do slow. Like super slow. Like so slow you won't even know we're doing anything." Kara pushed her glasses up.

Lena pursed her lips. "Right, maybe not that slow. Anyways, let's go look at your office."

Kara hopped to her feet. "Great. Let me grab my stuff and I'll meet you out front."

In the small space she'd gotten to know quite well over the last few months, Kara grabbed her bag and stuffed some of her preferred pens and a plant from the shelf. She turned to grab the glass bird Lena had left her, stopping when her eyes caught a flash of a different color. She reached over and picked up a small green bird made of glass.

She cradled it in her hand, knowing how delicate it was. This was why people tried. The mere fact that Lena had thought about Kara and gotten this as a gift made her want to go right back into the other room and hug the woman.

About to do just that, she heard Lena in her office, "There's a woman hovering in the sky outside my building…who do I call for that?"

Lowering her glasses to use her x-ray vision, Kara was on the way to the roof a second later.

Alex shot to her feet the moment the alert sounded. She grabbed her weapons and was halfway to the garage with a team when J'onn stopped her.

"Supergirl's holding her own."

Looking toward the screen showing live footage of the fight, Alex cocked her head to the side. When the two landed on the ground and Kara was able to overpower her aunt, something didn’t sit right with Alex.

She didn’t have time to examine what it was because Kara walked in three minutes later dragging an unconscious Astra behind her. Several agents ran up and put the Kryptonite cuffs on the woman while Kara watched with a blank expression on her face.

Alex walked up to her and pulled her into her lab. "You okay? Did she hurt you?"

"I'm fine." Kara stared at the floor before meeting Alex's eyes. "I know she…she's planning something and tried to hurt you, but do we have to put her in a cell?"

"I'm sorry. Until we know more, this is how it has to be, but no one will hurt her."

Kara nodded, bowing her head. "It's just hard, but I get it."

Doing a quick once over with her eyes, Alex nodded. "Okay. I'll let you know when she wakes up."

"Whatever. I need to get back to work."

And with that, Alex was alone. She headed to the containment cells and made sure no one was slacking. With that done, she went to the control room and grabbed a tablet and transferred all available footage of the fight onto it.
An hour later, J'onn knocked on her door. "Astra's awake."

Alex sent a text to Kara and headed down to the holding cell. The woman hadn't uttered a word according to J'onn, she merely stood there.

The next time the door opened, Kara entered. "Astra."

"Little one. Nice to see you."

Kara crossed her arms while she paced in front of the cell. "What are you doing? What's your plan? Tell them and they'll let you out."

Astra shook her head. "Are you truly that naïve? They love seeing me in here. A specimen to play with. Cut into and experiment on. How can you stand to allow this?"

Kara's face darkened and she glanced at the guards around her. "That's not true."

Alex gritted her teeth. It killed her to see Kara in a room like this. The memories…when she found her. Skeletal and hovering closer to death than life. Alex forced down the bile rising in her throat and focused on Kara.

"I can't stand seeing you in there. I know what it feels like, but you're being treated well. Why can't you just cooperate? You're my family…"

Astra laughed. "Family? What do you know of your mother?"

Kara stopped then, face tightening. "She tried to save Krypton."

Astra glared at that. "You have no idea. She imprisoned me for taking action to save our home. She didn't do anything. She's part of the reason we have no planet."

"She wouldn't have done that."

Astra sat on the stool in her cell. "When you're ready for the truth, come back."

Kara left the room and Alex hustled to keep up with her. "Hey, she's just trying to piss you off. Don't let her get to you."

Alex watched Kara enter the room where her mother's AI was kept. She stayed put, wanting to give her sister some privacy, but changed her mind when she heard a scream and the tell-tale buzz of heat vision.

She ran to Kara and wrapped her arms around her. "Shh, it's okay. I got you."

They tumbled to the ground with Alex doing her best to soothe her sister.

"Why is she here?"

Alex wrinkled her forehead. "What do you mean?"

"You saw her last time we fought. She's good. Like really good. She trained for years, Alex. I should not have been able to take her down. And now she's here…not even slightly concerned about being captive."

"Shit, that's it." Alex scrambled to her feet and pulled Kara with her to the control room.
J'onn watched them, a curious expression on his face. Alex pulled up the fight, stopping the footage toward the end.

"There. Astra's a warrior, there's no way she would do that." Alex pointed to the screen where Astra stood over Kara. "She wanted to get caught."

"Why?" Kara asked.

They didn’t have to wait long for an answer. An alarm went off alerting them to an attack in the city.

"Where is it?" Kara yelled, already running toward the exit.

"L-Corp," Alex whispered.

"Lena..." And then Kara was gone.

***

Lena put the last contract on the stack in front of her. Everything she wanted to do to upgrade her lab had official approval.

She picked up the phone to call Kara then put it down. Seeing her fight that woman today…and her face when she got back. She'd shut down. Didn't say a word. Lena wanted to help but had no idea how. Opting to give Kara space, Lena glanced at the clock and calculated that if she left now she could make it to one of the Yoga classes held at a respectable hour.

Grabbing her bag and coat she headed out, glad to see Jess's desk empty. The woman had been working almost as much as Lena.

Sighing, she walked out of the elevator and into her lobby to see several people hovering in the air.

Not a good thing.

A guard tackled Lena to the ground while others were tossed around like rag dolls. Kara…Supergirl showed up then, catching one man and setting him on the ground before he could smash against a wall. She knocked out two more aliens before moving to punch a third.

Lena felt a hand wrap around her neck and a deep, calm voice whisper in her ear, "You're the best this planet has to offer? Pathetic." Her heart slammed against her ribcage then Supergirl was there tearing the man off of Lena and throwing him across the room and out the upper window.

"Are you okay?"

"Fine, don't worry about me," she choked out. "Just stop them."

Getting to her feet while a new group dressed in black arrived, Lena ran to the body of one of her security guards, wincing at the smoldering wound in his chest. She grabbed his weapon and fired it at a lizard-like creature that was slithering toward her. It altered its course.

Lena found a protected spot, watching Supergirl take on the stronger aliens, and if Lena didn’t know better she’d swear Kara was making sure to keep Lena in her sights. A thought that, despite current circumstances, made her feel safe.

A scream made Lena turn to her right and fire at a woman about to shred an agent in black. She aimed, hitting its arm. The agent took the opportunity to get the upper hand and sent Lena a quick nod before moving on.
Smoke poured into the room and in the chaos, Lena lost track of everything. Strong hands gripped her and she was pulled close to a warm, familiar body. She let her head rest against a shoulder, willing her heart to calm down.

When her feet were once again beneath her, she gazed up into eyes she'd recognize anywhere. "Thank you."

Supergirl smiled, small but sincere. "Not necessary. I was really worried. I'm glad you're okay."

"Hey," said a voice Lena recognized…and a moment later an agent was pulling off a mask to reveal Alex Danvers. "They took J'onn."

Supergirl shot into the air.

"Hi," Lena said.

"Are you okay? Do you need someone to check you over?" Alex asked.

Lena shook her head. "I'm fine, but I'd like to know what they were doing here."

"I think we all want to know that. Do you have any ideas?"

"None. I'm working on ways to better the world. I disbanded the weapons program my brother created. I'm doing everything I can to change what this company stands for." Lena hated how defensive she sounded, but damn she was tired of the rumblings people made when they thought she couldn't hear or the articles implying she was up to something with all her good deeds.

Alex put a hand on her shoulder. "I know. I'm on your side, okay? No one is blaming you for this. Do you have security cameras?"

Lena raised a brow. "Of course."

"Can we get copies of the footage and send in a team to look around?"

Lena took a breath knowing this was one of those moments. She was having a lot of those lately. If she agreed, there was a chance this agency, which didn’t exist on paper, would take advantage or perhaps screw her over because of her last name. However, if she didn’t cooperate there was a strong possibility they’d think she was hiding something and force their way in any way.

"How about a compromise?"

Alex raised a brow. "Depends, what kind?"

"I'll let your agency have copies of the security footage, but I want a team you trust to go through the building with you. I have nothing to hide, but I have little faith in any government organization looking past my name at the moment. And you should know I'm only agreeing to this because I trust Kara."

"Seems she trusts you, too."

"Yes, it does."

Alex glanced around before motioning Lena toward a corner. "Be patient with her. Okay? She's been through some stuff. When we have more time, I'll give you the shovel talk then tell you that if you have any questions to just call me."
Lena let out a breath. "Thanks. My brother's trial has started and the threats are coming in at a steady pace. I'm worried this might have something to do with Supergirl…"

Shaking her head, Alex spoke, "I know Lex had connections, but those aliens that were just here were organized, and if my suspicions are right it has nothing to do with your brother."

"I guess we should get moving then."

Alex nodded.

Lena let Alex take the gun from her, just now realizing her hand was shaking.

Alex shifted from one foot to the other. "I'll make sure you're treated fairly."

While Alex walked away, Lena watched as four of her security guards were taken away on stretchers. Two remained on the floor, unmoving. Needing to get away but knowing she couldn’t at the moment she exited through the side door and sat in the small area used for employees during lunch time.

Pulling out her phone she sent a message to Jess and then a companywide email that no one was to come in to work for the rest of the week. Then she got on the phone to people about repairing the windows, burn marks, and other damage caused while trying to figure out if her insurance covered any of it. She had a feeling alien break-in was not part of her deductible.

"Ms. Luthor, mind if I sit for a moment?"

Lena glanced up. A familiar looking man in uniform stood in front of her, three others standing fifteen feet back.

"Go ahead."

He sat across from her, hands crossed on the table between them. "I was wondering if you had some of your brother's old projects on hand. We knew he had plans for quite a few weapons that would be of help to the military."

Lena's hackles rose. "No. I destroyed everything and I assure you I will not be reopening that particular branch of the company ever again."

The General looked toward the building then back at her. "You can see the kind of damage these aliens are capable of. They need to be stopped. Your brother understood that."

Lena slipped her tablet into her bag. "Lex is a lunatic and I am nothing like him. Are there bad aliens? Yes, there are. Are there bad humans? Yes, there are. No one is perfect, but the good I see being done by the Supers outweighs the bad I see done by other aliens."

"You'd be smart to cooperate."

Lena narrowed her eyes. "Really? Guess we'll just have to agree to disagree on that. Are we done here or do you intend to continue to try and intimidate me…which to be honest, your routine needs work."

He got to his feet. "I'm disappointed in you Ms. Luthor. I was hoping you'd be more like your brother."

Lena smiled. "Wish I could say I'm sorry."
She watched him stalk off, agents in black making sure to keep him from entering the building. Alex didn’t seem too fond of him if the glare she was sending him was any indication.

Two hours later Lena was given the all clear and headed back into her office with Alex trailing behind her.

"Did you find anything out of the ordinary?" Lena asked.

"Nothing."

Lena took off her coat and tossed it on the couch. "I'll have my team go over everything. They're on their way in now."

"Sounds good. I wanted to ask you something."

Lena sat at her desk. "Go ahead."

"What did General Lane want? You don't have to tell me…this is purely personal."

"He wanted some old plans Lex had created. I don’t have them and made it clear I have no intention of following in my brother's footsteps."

"Good."

"Not a fan of his I take it?"

"You could say that."

A noise behind her alerted Lena to a new presence, she turned to see Supergirl hover then land, waiting. Walking over to the door Lena opened it.

"I couldn’t find him. I'm sorry, Alex." Kara looked as if she was about to cry when they hugged one another.

"It's okay. I'm heading back in, as soon as we have any information I'll let you know," Alex said.

Lena turned away from the scene feeling like a voyeur. A door closed and then a sniffle.

"How are you? I'm sorry I couldn’t come back sooner but I really wanted to find J'onn. I looked everywhere."

Lena shook her head. "Don't ever apologize for being a hero. I'm okay and that's thanks to you."

Supergirl blushed at the compliment. "Just doing my job."

"Holding two jobs, how do you do it?"

A faint smile. "Still figuring some stuff out, I'll let you know how it goes."

Lena poured herself a scotch. "Please do."

Supergirl fidgeted, pulling at the cuffs of her sleeves and at that moment Lena realized Kara was standing in front of her. Not National City’s hero.

Her friend.

Her friend who looked like she was about to fall apart.
"Hey, want to sit down?"

Kara nodded while walking to the couch. Lena abandoned her drink and followed. "Want to talk about it?"

Kara shook her head leaning toward Lena. Instinctively, Lena wrapped Kara in her arms. Despite being invulnerable, Lena was going to protect Kara in whatever way she could.

"He was my friend. They took…he saved me. Helped Alex find me…he's gone. I couldn’t save him."

Lena made small, soothing circles on Kara's back. "Hey, it's gonna be okay. I'm sure he's fine and you'll be saving the day in no time."

Warm, wet drops soaked Lean's shoulder. She held on tighter.

"He saw…in my head. All the things that happened and he still believed in me. He never treated me like I was too broken to be a hero."

Lena didn’t know what to say. Her own tears falling now. She fought off the images trying to break into her thoughts. Notes her mother had scribbled in those damn files.

"You're gonna save him, Kara. I know it in my heart."

Wiping at her face, Kara pulled back. "I hope so. I should go. I'm sorry. I didn’t mean to break down like that. It just happens sometimes…emotions you know?"

Lena brushed a lock of hair behind Kara's ear. "I'd say that you're doing okay. Pretty normal reaction to everything that happened. And you don't have to go. You can stay as long as you want." Lena didn’t add that she'd hold Kara well into next week if she'd let her.

"Thanks. You should go home and get some rest."

"Is that what you'll be doing?"

Kara glanced away. "That's different."

"I may be a mere mortal, but I'll be here as long as you need me and then I have a break-in to investigate. I need to get this figured out as much as you do."

"Maybe, but you're getting death threats."

Lena crossed her arms. "And how do you know about that?"

Kara blushed. "I overheard you talking to security earlier in the week."

"I appreciate the concern, but the people I hired can handle whatever thugs Lex sends my way."

"Please, take them seriously. I would hate for something to happen to you." The earnest expression on Kara’s face pulled at Lena's heart in a way she’d never felt before.

Unsure what to do or say about such a sincere comment, Lena stood and went to her desk, stacking some files.

"Please, Lena." Kara continued, and something about the tone…the plea…got to her.
"Okay, I'll hire more security."

"That's a good start. For now, I'll just keep a closer watch on you and escort you home tonight."

Lena's chest fluttered. "Really? I don't think that's necessary. I'll be fine. Plus, you need to help find your friend."

Kara's forehead did that thing that made Lena want to reach over and smooth out the worry line.

"I can't do anything until we get a lead. As for your well-being, I still worry about you. Let me know when you're ready to go." Kara remained on the couch flipping through a magazine.

Usually, Lena hated to be out-stubborned, but in this instance, she was willing to concede. "Okay, but I have a team coming in to go over footage and check this building out from top to bottom. You may want to change…"

Glancing down at her suit, Kara pulled a face. "Right. I'll get my bag and be right back."

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Kara ran for coffee after she noted Lena yawning for the fifth time in an hour. The security team was going over everything and Lena insisted on being there, though Kara wasn't sure how much longer she'd last.

When a thud took Kara's attention away from a conversation a few floors down, she shook her head. Lena had fallen asleep on her desk.

"Lena, come on. Wake up. I'm gonna take you home."

"M'fine…just need a min."

Jess showed up them, a curious look on her face.

"Ms. Danvers?"

"Jess, Lena…er did Ms. Luthor fill you in on what happened?"

"Of course, as did the news. Is she okay? She promised me she wasn’t hurt." Jess walked over, eyeing Lena.

"She's fine, just working too hard as usual."

"Ah, well, it has been a rough few weeks for her." Jess gave Kara a significant look, which Kara chose to ignore.

"Right, I was going to take her home."

Jess pulled out her phone. "No need. I'll call her security detail."

"Really, I can take her. The thought of leaving Lena's safety to someone else did not sit well with Kara at all.

"I'm right here you know?"

Lena rubbed her face. "Jess, what are you doing here? I told you to take the rest of the week off."
With a roll of her eyes, Jess spoke. "I'm here because I knew you would forget to take care of yourself and someone has to...though Ms. Danvers seems to be helping out with that."

Kara felt the blush creep up her neck. "Uhh...I...yeah. I am."

Standing up, Lena put a hand on Kara's arm. "I'll be okay. The team I hired is the best. You go do what you need. I'll text if I find anything out."

Forehead scrunched, Kara reached for Lena's phone and added in Alex's number. "If you can't reach me, call this number."

"Okay, and thanks for staying with me."

Unsure what her next move was, not that she had a whole lot, Kara wrapped Lena in her arms. She let out a sigh, it had been too long and the memory of seeing Lena almost die made her wince. "Please, be careful."

Lena squeezed back. "You, too."

Kara made sure Lena got home safely, she just happened to be flying above her while searching the city looking for any sign of J'onn. She listened for his unique heartbeat. For his deep grumbly voice. Nothing.

Frustration infused her. With all her powers she wasn't able to do a damn thing to help him.

J'onn who had helped Alex. Who had helped rescue Kara. Who had given Kara a chance to be more...She pushed herself harder, hearing the crack when she broke the sound barrier.

An hour later, she returned to the DEO where she found Alex giving out orders. An emergency protocol had been initiated which left her sister in charge in case anything ever happened to the Director.

Less than a minute after Kara arrived, General Lane appeared with documents giving him power over the DEO. Fear crept up Kara's spine. She knew men like him and what they did when put in charge of organizations like this.

"Hey, come with me, Supergirl," Alex said.

Kara followed her but made sure to keep an ear open for anything the General had planned.

"We'll find him. We have to..." Alex paced her office, body coiled tight.

"No matter what. I promise we'll get him back."

Alex nodded, resumed her pacing.

Kara plopped on the couch thinking. J'onn could be anywhere. He was just as powerful as her but unable to expose himself. She exhaled, leaning back. A second later, her aunt screamed. Kara sat up. Eyes burning.

"What is it?"

"They're torturing Astra."

Kara found General Lane standing outside the clear glass containment area. Inside, her aunt was
being held down while a soldier picked up a needle filled with a familiar green glow. Kara's stomach turned, memories washed over her, and anger took over.

"Get away from her!"

She shoved the general out of the way and moved to where her aunt was. Pushing a soldier out of her way. The Kryptonite weakened her, but she was a pro at dealing with it.

"I said get away from her." She was halfway in the room now.

Two soldiers held their guns up. General Lane glared at her.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"You're hurting her. Why are you hurting her?"

The General opened up a small case next to him and a wave of nausea washed over Kara. Her head spun and she lost her balance, falling to her knees. Her vision blurred, the green glow closer than before. The sensation of her blood boiling…

"I'm doing my job and if you were really on our side you'd understand that."

Someone pushed her down from behind, hard. Her hands hitting the ground with a crack. She reached out to take her aunt's hand barely grazing the woman's fingertips. Tears streamed from her aunt's eyes. Her mouth moved but no sound came out.

"Astra…"

"Get her out of here! I want her in a cell, now!"

"Don't you dare touch her." Alex's voice, low and threatening. "Come on, I got you."

"You can take her, but I'm going to have a conversation with her later." General Lane's voice, deep and menacing.

Kara closed her eyes, the pain from the past causing her to go rigid.

"They have no idea how much that hurts…to have it injected into your blood. It feels like your burning from the inside out. Like your lungs are going to explode. Your heart is going to beat right out of your chest." She let her head slump onto Alex's shoulder, not caring if anyone saw.

Alex rubbed Kara's back, not saying anything.

When her emotions stopped swirling and she was more in control, Kara opened her eyes. Somehow she'd made it to Alex's office where they both now sat on the couch.

"Hey."

"Hi," Kara said. "How long?"

"Not long."

Kara moved a bit so she could straighten up. "Astra?"

"They stopped about half an hour ago. She's alive, but in bad shape."
Rubbing her forehead, Kara's thoughts raced. "How could they? Why? I thought we were better than...than her. This is something Lillian would do."

"This isn't me or J'onn. I know the military has that stuff as a precaution, but...hell, Kara. I don't know. It's not right. I'm sorry."

"I have to get her out of there. They're going to kill her."

Alex sighed. "They won't let you near there and I'd avoid the General if I were you."

"We need to get J'onn back. And that only happens if Astra cooperates."

A man Kara didn't recognize walked into the room. He wore a military uniform and looked at Kara with a mix of fear and disgust. "The prisoner gave us a location. We're moving out now. The General wants her to stay here." He motioned to Kara with his head while speaking to Alex.

Before Kara had a chance to respond, he disappeared.

"You know I'm going with you."

Alex scrunched her forehead. "Duh? We need you. The General's an idiot."

Kara hovered over the caravan as they moved to an old refinery. Flying ahead, she surveyed the area and spoke into the comm she had with Alex.

"There are five containers inside. I can't see what's in them; they must be lined with lead."

"Okay, hold position until we get there."

Three minutes later a dozen soldiers poured out of two military vehicles along with a team from the DEO. Kara set down next to Alex.

Several guns were raised in her direction, but instead of getting panicky, Kara remained calm.

Alex and her team stepped in front of Kara. "Hey, think about this. You know she's on our side."

"I'm here to help," Kara interjected peeking over her sister's shoulder.

A few of them glanced at one another then shrugged. "Fine, but if she messes up it's on your head."

Alex met Kara's gaze, both of them rolled their eyes.

At the front of the building they military teams stepped aside, more than happy to let Supergirl do her thing when they spotted the reinforced doors. She smirked, forcing them open with two fingers while maintaining eye contact with them.

The teams headed in, splitting up so they had people at the base of each container.

"What's inside them?" The military guy asked.

"I don't know. They're lined with lead."

"Well, I guess the General was right. You're useless." The man glanced at the others. "Okay, on my count breach the containers."

Kara thought of her aunt. The anger in her. Then Lillian and what all that anger had done to her.
"Wait. Everyone out."

The military guy, Kara saw Simmons on his tag, glared at her. "You're not even supposed to be here."

Kara crossed her arms. "But, I am. So, I suggest you use that to your advantage. If this exchange was on the up and up why all this? Something's not right and you know it."

Alex motioned to her team to back out. "She's right. This feels wrong."

Simmons looked from the container he was about to breach then back to Kara. "Fine. Open it, but I'm sticking next to you. You might be working with her."

Alex motioned her team out and nodded at Kara. "Be careful."

"Can we get this over with already?" Simmons said.

Kara rolled her eyes, but after the men moved aside she ripped the latch off. Inside, a crystal stood on a table, J'onn behind it.

"We have eyes on the Director," Simmons clicked the radio on his shoulder. "We'll take it from here."

J'onn hadn't moved. His face remained impassive. When the crystal exploded she had half a second to get her cape around Simmons and another soldier who had entered the small space. Fire roared above them. The blast hitting Kara a breath later. She stayed put, keeping the two men safe.

When it died down, she got to her feet and surveyed the mess. The other containers were in shambles. Bits of twisted metal everywhere.

None of the containers held her friend.

Turning to Simmons and the other soldier, she asked, "Are you guys okay?"

They coughed, nodding at her. "Yeah…thanks."

Kara stood in the debris. The soldiers poked around while the DEO team collected any evidence they could find.

Walking over to her sister, Kara sighed. "I'm going back to the DEO. Something tells me General Lane is not going to be happy about this development."

***

Alex slammed the door then trudged into the DEO. She checked her weapons, undid the straps on her vest, then stepped into the hallway. Her movements halted when she didn’t see the normal hustle of agents running around. Those she did spot refused to meet her eyes. A shiver of fear skittered over her and she hurried her steps while pulling out her phone to call Kara.

"Psst, Alex," Vasquez hissed from a side hallway.

Glancing around, Alex went to her. "What's going on?"

"Okay, first, you need to promise not to freak out."

Alex clenched her fist. "That is the exact thing you say to freak someone out, Vasquez! Spill it,
now."

"Supergirl's been locked up."

Alex gritted her teeth. "Are you kidding me? That arrogant, pompous, windbag…where is he?" She moved, shaking the hand off of her shoulder.

"Wait. I did it, figured it would be better than one of his goons. She's fine. A little stressed, but okay."

Alex punched the wall beside her. "What the hell is going on? She's on our side? She saved the team from getting blown to hell!"

Vasquez dragged Alex further back. "That's why she's in a cell and not somewhere else. He wants her to cool down. You need to go talk to her."

"What happened?" Alex knew Kara had a temper, but she wouldn't risk being put in a cell.

"Lane was happy she went on the mission. Even less happy when he found out it was a trap. He accused her of being in on it."

Alex interrupted, "That's ridiculous, she saved all of us."

"I know…but Lane is single-minded, he has a vendetta. He said he was gonna make Astra pay for what she did and Kara lost it."

"Damn."

Alex followed after the agent, hoping her sister was okay. She didn’t want to think about what being in a cell would do to her…jesus…it would wreck her. Both of them.

Three levels down they entered a containment area that had been set up in case they ever had to bring in Superman. Inside, Alex raged that this was where they would keep Kara. A throwback from the days when the real Henshaw had been in charge.

Kara sat in the corner, body wilting beneath the green lights and heavy chains.

"Can we turn these down and get those damn things off of her? Or is killing her the goal?" Alex snapped at the soldier in front of the door.

"Uh…"

"She just saved a bunch of your friends." Alex stood with hands on hips, fighting the urge to punch the guy. "You really gonna let her die? You want to be known as the asshole who killed Supergirl?"

"But my orders –"

"Were your orders to kill her?"

Sweat glistened on his forehead. "No…she won't die will she?"


A moment later the greenish glow almost disappeared.

Kara moved her head to the side, glassy gaze landing on Alex.
Using her security clearance to enter the cell, Alex went straight for her sister and undid the cuffs and tossed the chains aside. Vasquez made sure to put them in a lead-lined case.

"It's okay. I got you." She sat next to Kara, pulling her in close. "I'm sorry they did this."

"When I got back I tried to stay calm but then he accused me of being part of the plan and setting up that ambush…then he threatened Astra. I got so angry… I'm sorry."

Alex squeezed her. "Hey, don't apologize. You didn't do anything wrong." She pulled back when she felt some of the strength returning to her sister. "You want me to call Superman?"

Kara shook her head. "I need to get Astra out of here. They're going to kill her."

Pursing her lips, Alex thought. "Okay, I have a plan. Trust me?"

Blue eyes locked on hazel. "Always."

"Give me fifteen minutes. Are you okay in here?"

Kara nodded. "Yeah. It wasn’t so bad because I knew you'd come."

Alex smiled and turned away, her throat tight and eyes burning at the faith her sister had in her. After everything, Kara still had hope.

In the hallway, she pulled Vasquez aside and told her to gather the crew from the raid earlier. While she waited, she recruited a few others she knew had been saved by Supergirl over the last few months.

Finally, with everyone behind her, Alex glared at the guard who didn’t put up a fight when they opened the door to let Kara out.

On the main level where Astra was being held, Alex made sure the coast was clear before sneaking Kara into the room with her aunt. She only hoped the familial bond went both ways and that Astra would follow through for her niece.

"Astra, I'm getting you out of here, but you have to help me find J'onn."

Sitting in the corner, forehead still covered in sweat, Astra glared. "You saw what they did. How can you help them?"

"They're not all like that. Please, I don't have much time."

Astra narrowed her eyes. "What happened to you? Where are those scars from? On your face… barely noticeable but I see. One of them?"

Alex tensed, time was running out. "Please, Kara's risking a lot to get you out of here. We have to go."

"Why is it so important to you?"

Kara frowned. "Because you're my family. I care about you. I looked up to you so much as a kid. I would never forgive myself if something happened to you and I stood by and did nothing…and I know what it's like to be in a cell and feel powerless."

Astra moved forward. "The humans are killing this planet. I'm going to save them."
Alex tapped her comm making sure no one was on their way. Vasquez had disabled the camera but for how long was anyone's guess.

"No. Earth isn't Krypton. We can help them. I don't know what you're planning, but please think about it. This is a chance to start over. For all of us."

Astra shook her head. "Oh, Little One, you always were so hopeful." She cupped Kara's cheek then put her hands out for Alex to slip the cuffs on.

"I need access to a computer to contact Non."

Seven minutes later they walked to the main room where General Lane stood, arms crossed and a sour expression in his face. "Just what in the hell do you think you're doing? I put you in that cell for a reason. You're a menace. Must be a family trait."

Astra growled, but Alex put an arm on her and shook her head.

Alex opened her mouth, but Kara stepped forward. "We're doing this the right way. We tried yours and that ended up in torturing someone, almost getting a team of soldiers killed, and me in a cell."

He smirked. "Someone arrest Supergirl and put that other woman back in her cell."

Three men moved forward, but a dozen stepped in front of Supergirl. A tall man named Rogers, spoke up, "Sir, she saved us today. If it wasn't for her we'd all have been blown to bits. She's saved others here many times over. She isn't the enemy and we aren't going to treat her as one."

"I said someone arrest Supergirl."

Dozens of weapons lowered, faces turned away.

General Lane glanced around. No one moved. He cleared his throat. "This isn't over."

Alex walked next to Astra with Supergirl on the other side. They'd made a call and Astra promised them the trade would be fair.

They arrived at the meeting point fifteen minutes later. The three of them fifty feet away from the others while they waited. Above them, Non and a dozen other aliens appeared.

"Join me," Astra said to Kara.

"I can't."

"But you see what they do...how can you stand it? They ruin everything that is beautiful." Astra tilted her head to the side, hand on Kara's cheek again. The implication was clear and Alex had to bite her tongue.

"They need to be saved from themselves."

Kara crossed her arms, a frown on her face. "I don't agree with what they did to you and will do everything I can to make sure nothing like that ever happens again, but that doesn't mean I agree with what you're doing either. I'm going to help and protect this city, the people in it, and the planet in the best way I can."

Astra shook her head. "So be it."

Glancing down, Kara whispered. "I've missed you."
"Me, too."

Alex leaned in and undid the Kryptonite cuffs. Astra nodded her thanks then flew into the air above them while J'onn was dropped to the ground.

Helping him to his feet, Alex asked, "Are you okay?"

He grunted. "Fine."

Non remained in place with the others, ready to attack but Astra shook her head. "Not tonight. We made a deal and shall honor it."

As they flew away, Kara's shoulders sagged. "Glad to have you back."

The three of them embraced.

"It's good to be back. Thank you."

Kara stepped back. "I'm sorry it took so long."

J'onn put a hand on Kara's shoulder. "There's no time frame. You did well. I'm proud of you."

"Let's get out of here. I'm pretty sure General Lane has a lot to tell you," Alex said.

J'onn raised a brow but kept his expression neutral. "Really? Anything I should be worried about?"

"I need to go clear my head," Kara said.

Alex waited until Kara launched into the air before continuing. "He tortured Astra…Kara...they put her in a cell with the kryptonite emitters and cuffed her. She's not okay. I…I hate that man."

J'onn nodded. "I'll take care of it."

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Lena arched her back. She'd taken a two-hour nap and had been going over footage since she woke. Something about this break-in was off.

Lifting her mug to her mouth, she made a face at the taste of stale coffee. About to scream in frustration at the fact she had found nothing, her phone rang.

"Hello, beautiful," Jack's voice floated over the line. "Now, I know you're doing the whole distance thing to save my good name, but really, Lena. I miss my friend and am not going anywhere until we braid each other's hair or whatever the phone equivalent of that is."

"Hi, I'm actually glad you called," she blew out a breath.

"What's wrong?" His jovial tone turned to one of concern.

She sighed. "So much and I don't know what to do about it."

"Talk to me. Is the trial getting to you?"

She let out a hollow laugh at that. "The trial is the least of my concerns."

"Well, I'm in my comfy chair and posing in a thoughtful manner to entice you to open up."
And she did. She told him everything that had been happening, almost. The trial, the aliens invading her building… How she’d met Kara and for reasons unknown couldn’t get her out of her head. How they’d met a couple of other times and it wasn’t until the last one… the one where Lena was flustered and close to panicking that Kara canceled her appointment and talked with Lena. Helping calm her down and somehow Lena had ended up offering her a job.

The words flowed, having been held back for far too long.

How they’d become friends. Lena leaving little gifts and Kara showing up every morning with Lena’s favorite coffee order. How bouquets of her favorite flowers showed up after tense or stressful meetings. How regular lunches were a thing.

"I went to a fair, Jack. An actual fair."

He laughed at that. "It only counts if you had a deep-fried Snickers."

"Kara gave me a bite of hers."

His hum of approval came through the phone making her smile. "I approve. It sounds like she makes you happy."

And Lena was thankful his voice was full of support and happiness. Lena grabbed Kara's sweater, wrapping it around her. "She does, but with the trial and now aliens breaking into my building and apparently not doing anything… I’m not sure if the times right."

"Is it the time thing or that big brain of yours going into overdrive? You know how you think you can't be happy while redeeming the family name because of what your brother did? Which is rubbish by the way, you deserve the world."

A smile formed at his words. "I wish I could say it was all my brain, but no… there are things."

"Okay, I'm not going to push on whatever these things are, but you know what I think. You deserve to be happy and loved and I know you have so much love to give someone. This Kara sounds special and if she got you to attend a fair she must have superpowers of some kind."

Lena almost choked. "She can be persuasive."

"I love you dearly, please think about letting yourself be happy and not sabotage it?"

"I will, and thanks for listening."

"Of course. What are devilishly handsome exes for? And by the way, if you need help with any of these Lex stunts or sorting out what happened at LCorp, just let me know."

"Thanks, Jack. I'll call you if I need anything."

He laughed. "No, you won't. Remember, I know you."

"All right, but I'll think about calling you."

"Fair point, and with that, I have to go. Talk again soon?"

"Yeah." She ended the call, feeling less rattled.

She leaned back into the cushions of the couch and blew out a breath. Her rational mind told her things with Kara were good. But at moments like this. When she had to deal with aliens and possible
sabotage, it made her think of Lillian…and that led to her imagining the suffering Kara went through.

And that was the issue.

Lena was ashamed of what her mother had done. She'd had nightmares about it. Sam had mentioned things that made Lena cringe and cry and scream. And now she knew all those things had been done to Kara.

Sweet, innocent… *I want to win you that giant bear* Kara.

Pulling the sweater closer to her face and inhaling the faint lingering scent of Kara, Lena closed her eyes. No one knew her, not really. They’d laugh if they found out she was a romantic at heart. She wanted the butterflies and heart eyes. Kisses in the rain and dancing in the moonlight. She wanted to fall asleep feeling safe and wake up to the sounds of someone making breakfast. She wanted to spoil someone rotten. She wanted to mean something to someone beyond being a conquest or a means to an end. She wanted someone to care about her, despite who her family was.

And over the last several months, without her permission, her subconscious had attached Kara’s face to that dream. And now, it was within her reach and she didn’t know how to handle it. Or maybe she did and that scared her more than anything else.

Glancing at the files, her headache increased. She needed a break.

After a few seconds of mental debating, she sent a text.
Chapter 23

Kara hovered over the desert. Far from the DEO. But not far enough from everything that had happened.

She'd tried breathing.

Taking pictures.

Tiring herself out...she'd need a good reason for the new quarry she'd made.

Distracting herself by making mental to-do lists.

But… her thoughts tumbled around her head. Images of the past and present mixing together.

Lillian's voice. Kara's screams.

General Lane's voice. Astra's screams.

History repeating itself in the most twisted ways.

She'd called Dr. Grey on the line reserved for emergencies. They had an appointment in fifteen minutes and Kara didn't know if she'd be able to hold it together much longer.

Before she knew it she found herself hovering over Lena's penthouse, frowning when she didn't hear the familiar heartbeat that had been a source of comfort as of late. She focused, zeroing in on it a few miles away. At M'gann's.

Of course, Kara realized that after the last couple of days Lena had had, she needed someone. And Kara had been busy. She shook her head when snippets of conversations from inside made their way up to her. No way was she invading Lena's privacy like that.

Instead, she waited, counting down from a thousand in Kryptonian while flying in circles. One of the techniques her therapist had taught her, though the circles were a Kara addition. By the time she finished, it was time to see Dr. Grey.

The office was quiet. Then again, it was just before 6 am.

The door was open and Kara entered, unsure and anxious.

"Kara. Come on in."

Dr. Grey wore a pair of jeans and a sweater. A far cry from her usual formal wear.

"I'm sorry to have bothered you…but…"

"It was an emergency. I gave you that number for situations just like this. So, no feeling bad, this is all part of the job. Okay?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"Good, now do you have something to change into?"

Kara glanced down at the suit she still wore. She shook her head angrily. "I'll be right back."
How many times had that happened? She needed to get her head on straight.

By the time she returned, Dr. Grey had a cup of tea in her hand and sat in one of the chairs opposite the couch. A mug had been placed in front of the spot Kara usually sat in.

"So, you had a rough night."

Plopping down on the couch, Kara nodded. Then the tears came, finally. A box of tissues appeared in front of her.

"Let it out."

And Kara did. Between sobs and hiccups and drawn out moments of silence when she got trapped in a memory, she managed to tell Dr. Grey everything that had happened. A few times Dr. Grey calmed her, reminding her to breathe, that she was safe. But nothing stopped all the events that had happened from tumbling out of her mouth.

Her aunt.

The break-in.

The setup.

The torture.

The cell.

"That's a lot to be taking in at once. Any anxiety, anger, frustration you're feeling is totally normal. Don't ignore or suppress it."

Kara wiped at her eyes. "It's just…how can I work with people who do that? I know what it feels like to be…a prisoner. To be the one on the other end. It isn't right."

Dr. Grey cocked her head to the side. "That's something you need to figure out. You have to do what feels right for you. What's best for you."

"And my aunt? After what happened to her she's not going to stop whatever it is she plans. How am I going to fight her? She's family? When I was a kid we…we were so close. I can't hurt her."

Dr. Grey's brow furrowed. "I don't know the answer to that. What I can say is this: Keep trying. I know you. You can do amazing things with all those powers of yours, but you know what I admire most?"

Kara shook her head.

"Your hope. Hold onto that, keep trying to reach her."

Glancing away, Kara nodded. "I um, there's something else. It kind of took a back seat to everything else, but I told Lena how I feel."

Tilting her head to the side, Dr. Grey half-smiled. "I'll accept the topic change since I know you're overwhelmed, but we're revisiting all of this. Deal?"

Sagging in relief, Kara nodded. "Deal."

"So, how did it go?"
"Good. I think. It's recent and we haven't even gone on a proper date yet…but there is a valid reason I'm bringing it up. I'm wondering if it was a bad idea? I mean my cousin warned me about her being hurt by people wanting to get to me. After seeing what the DEO did to Astra, I realized just how real that possibility is."

Setting her mug on the table, Dr. Grey leaned in. "This is not the time to be making any decisions when it comes to feelings or emotions. You've been through a trauma that brought out old memories. Take time, sort through them, feel what you need to, but try not to let things overlap into other areas."

Kara gave her a look.

"I know it's hard, especially for you. But try, okay? Talk to someone."

A few moments later, Kara left. She didn't feel as confused as before and had calmed a bit. Though, the tears were still there, pressing on her heart. She moved in the general direction of M'gann's before stopping. A quick check confirmed Lena was still there. Not wanting to bother her she turned to head home before shaking her head.

She sent a text and landed on top of the Daily Planet five minutes later.

"Hey, you okay?"

Staring at the ground, Kara shook her head. Clark wrapped her up in his arms.

"I'm so sorry that happened to you. I would have been there…I didn't know. What can I do? Want me to beat someone up? Knock down the General's house? I've always wanted to do that."

He rambled and she realized that perhaps they had more in common than just a name and powers.

"I don't know if I can keep working with them. What they did...what they have. Kal...Clark, they have things that can kill us. They almost killed Astra. I want to help people and I was powerless to help my own family." She paced away from him, pulling at the cuffs of her suit. "I mean, I know there are bad aliens out there but to simply turn to torture before trying to talk is not what I signed up for. I was...there were things done...I just don't know if I can be a part of this."

"I get it. I don't work with them because of that reason. I do understand on some level that they need to be careful. After you, and now Astra, the chances of a Kryptonian showing up with less than good intentions is a real possibility, but that doesn't make what they did right."

Kara bit her lip. "So, you wouldn't be disappointed in me if I quit?"

He smiled softly at her. "Kara, I could never be disappointed in you. Especially over something like this."

She blew out a breath. "Thanks. I needed to hear that. Now, to tell Alex."

"She'll understand. Don't worry about that. And when it comes to protecting those we care about there is something you can do."

They talked a while longer then grabbed a quick breakfast before Kara headed home. Because of the time difference, it was only 9 am, not that it mattered. LCorp was closed for repairs and an internal investigation to figure out what the aliens wanted.

She thought of Lena and hoped she was okay. Should she call? Text? Drop in? She didn't want
Lena to feel like Kara was suffocating her, but at the same time, she missed her.

Fidgeting a moment, she opted to go home after sending a quick text to Lena saying she hoped she was okay.

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Alex paced her office for the hundredth time. "What is she doing there? Is she leaving? She'd tell me if she was leaving, right?"

"She's probably just talking to him about everything," J'onn said.

"She can talk to me."

"She knows that, but I think right now this is the last place she wants to see."

Alex scoffed. "It's the last place I want to see. I can hardly blame her."

When they'd arrived back at the base and J'onn took over, she'd been certain the General was going to try and pull some shit. Instead, he shook his head and said it wasn’t over. Whatever the hell that meant.

They'd gone into J'onn's office. When Alex opened her mouth to say something he held a hand up to his lips. He pulled three small devices out of well-hidden spots and crushed them to dust. Then he closed his eyes, wrote up a list with detailed directions and handed it to Alex.

The title of the list made her shake her head in anger: They think they're smart…

Forty-five minutes later she returned. The need to speak stronger than ever. As soon as the last one had been destroyed, she broke.

"What was that about?"

J'onn sat down, shaking his head. "I think they're trying to find out certain things about how we operate."

"Great. We have to do something. Why do we have those things? They can hurt Kara. Kill her. Why?"

He frowned. "I know they can, but it isn't my call. You know there are some people in power that see Kara and her cousin as enemies. An unknown. They think of the 'what if' scenarios and act accordingly."

She eyed him, recalling the scene of Astra being tortured. When he winced she knew he got the message. "We need stuff like that? Things meant to cause pain? I don't think so. And I will not work here if that is the kind of place this is. I appreciate your help beyond words and admire you and respect you, but I just can't. I won't."

"Alex, you've had a long day and night. Now is not the time to be making decisions like that."

Her eyes widened. "It's the perfect time. The terror on Kara's face. The fear in her voice. Seeing her in a cell. I never want to see it again. Hell, it's not even a decision. This is a matter of me maintaining my soul. You know I'll choose Kara's well-being every time."

He nodded. "Have a seat. Tell me about what happened."
She made a face and pointed to her head.

"I know, but humor me and tell me. In your words."

So, she did. At a few key points, she stood to shake off the angry energy a particular memory kicked up within her. She'd go back when she remembered something. She bit her tongue multiple times, but in the end, the tears still came. The admission of feeling helpless to do anything.

The feeling of letting her sister down.

"She didn't do anything. Vasquez told me. She just accepted his decision and went into the cell. She could have ripped them apart, flew out of here, melted their damn faces off. But, she didn't do any of that. She's too good. I have to look out for her. I have to do better."

He stood then, a stern look on his face. "You do just fine, Agent Danvers. I will not tolerate that kind of talk. You're my best agent, and I know you'd sooner die than let something happen to Kara. What happened was terrible. And I will find a way to address it so that you and Kara feel safe here. Give me that chance."

Tossing a tissue in the trash, she nodded. "Of course. I'm going to go home. Maybe get some rest."

Changing out of her uniform and taking a quick shower, she hopped on her bike with every intention of going back to the apartment. However, when she checked her phone a message changed her mind.

The bar was quiet, then again it was barely nine in the morning.

M'gann spotted her first and waved her over. In the back, she spotted Lena sitting with Sam.

"What happened?" Alex leaned over, asking in a low voice.

M'gann poured a cup of coffee and slid it toward her. "The break-in...among other things."

Alex's forehead crinkled. "Did something happen with Kara? Because if so, Kara's not in the best place, so any decisions she made—"

"Nothing happened with Kara. Well, not exactly."

A warm hand settled on Alex's back. "Hey, you're here. Come over to the table and help me talk Lena down about Kara."

"What?" Anger flared in Alex. Her need to protect Kara taking over.

Sam made a face. "She's in a bad place. Thinking about what Lillian did...she has no clue how to deal with it. Come on, you too, M'gann."

Alex's thoughts went to recent events, and a part of her started to boil at the thought Lena would be another name on a list of people that hurt her sister. A list that was getting far too long for her liking.

"We'll be there in a moment, Sam." M'gann turned to Alex after Sam left. "You okay?"

Taking a moment, Alex shook her head. "Nope. But, not much I can do about it right now. Everything okay with you?"

M'gann hesitated. "I didn’t mean to look but you were thinking really loudly. Is Kara okay?"
Alex’s eyes slid to M’gann then. "You read my mind?"

"Not on purpose. I steer clear for the most part, but having a bar in which there can be shadier elements at times, it happens. I’m sorry."

"Don't be. My boss can do it, too. It was weird at first, but I got used to it and he is annoyingly good about not doing it."

M'gann laughed. "Ah, makes you actually talk about what's going on?"

Alex sighed dramatically. "Yes! Like just look in my head, already."

Taking a sip from her mug M'gann smiled softly. "Trust me when I say this, saying it out loud... actually talking about it, helps. For humans at least." She winked after the last part taking any sting out of the words.

"So I've been told." Alex glanced at Lena before turning back to M'gann. "Kara's fine, physically. Emotionally, well that's another thing entirely. Have you seen her?"

"No, she hasn't been in. If it helps, Lena isn't trying to hurt Kara. It's the exact opposite. I see this a lot. People feeling like they don't deserve happiness or they're not good enough. It doesn't help that Lillian is the one who..."

Alex filled in the rest of the sentence; glad M'gann let it trail off. "I get that, but Kara doesn’t see Lena that way. Not to mention, those two are already in so deep and have no clue. Like how do they not see it?"

"They don't want to. Kara has no experience and is probably unsure. As for Lena, I can only imagine the kind of guilt she carries around on behalf of her family. She's like a one-person atonement team for things she didn't do. Everything weighs on her so much."

Alex frowned, knowing everything M’gann said was true. She pushed away from the bar. "I'm gonna go see if I can talk to her. You coming?"

"In a minute. I have some calls to make."

Making her way to the table, Alex noted the bags under Lena’s eyes. The lack of vibrancy in them. The sag of defeat in her shoulders.

Sam smiled that smile at Alex that made her feel lighter somehow, despite the night she'd had. "Hey, you."

"Hey." Alex leaned over and gave a quick side hug to Sam then turned to Lena. "How are you doing?"

Bleary eyes focused on Alex. "Great. You?"

"Not so great."

"What happened?" Sam asked.

"Work stuff."

Sam rolled her eyes. "Ah, I figured that much. I mean the person you're kind of seeing is pretty awesome so I know that's not an issue."
Alex smiled genuinely at the comment. "This is true."

Sam's thigh brushed against hers, and Alex warmed at the contact. "How's Kara?"

"Definitely been better."

Lena, slouched in her seat, scrunched her forehead. "You're alone?"

"Yep."

"Oh. I thought she'd be with you."

Alex worried at the lack of emotion in Lena's voice. The woman sounded utterly defeated. "Nope. You wanna talk about it?"

Lena snorted. "What's there to talk about? I know Sam told you I'm having doubts. I know Kara's too good for me. I know my connection to Lillian will either bring up the past or loom over any future we might have."

Alex cleared her throat. "Aren't you kind of jumping the gun here? I mean have you guys even gone on a date?"

Glaring, Lena pushed the glass in front of her away. "No. We're supposed to this weekend, but who knows. Something might come up...I still have to solve why those damn aliens broke into my lab."

"Having a life outside of work has proven to increase productivity and new ideas," Sam said.

"I'm fairly certain I'm the exception to that rule."

Sam rested her arm on the table and leaned on it. "Lena, I say this from a place of love. But you need to get over it."

"It?"

"Yes, it. Whatever it is that's got you all of a sudden doubting what's happening. Whatever it is that has you thinking you're not worthy. Whatever it is that's scaring you."

Alex patted Sam's thigh, impressed with the woman's words.

"Is it really that easy?"

"It's only as hard as you make it," Sam said. "Right, Alex."

"Uh, yeah. Totally."

Lena glanced between the two of them. "So, you've shared everything. Told each other all the terrible things that happened? Opened yourselves up and been vulnerable? Had to hear about how your stepmother did the most atrocious things?"

Alex tensed, not sure what to say.

Sam jumped in. "Of course not. We've only been hanging out a few weeks. It takes time. You don't get to know someone overnight. And you certainly don't lay out all your flaws before showing the good stuff."

Lena shook her head. "Maybe, but what if it's not enough. What if she doesn't like what she finds"
out…what if she realizes she made a mistake?"

Not sure how to handle things, but knowing she didn’t want them to be dragged out longer than necessary, Alex spoke. "Have you talked to Kara? I'm just going to say no. Because if you had, you wouldn’t be sitting here saying this stuff. And you definitely would not be wondering if you should push her away or whatever it is you plan to do."

Lena sat up at that. "Why? What happened? Is she okay?"

"No. She's not."

A tiny bit of life lit up Lena's eyes. "Where is she?"

"Hold on. You need to listen to me first, okay?"

Lena nodded.

"People hurt her. Sometimes intentionally…other times by accident. The last day has been spectacularly shitty for her on that front. She's pretty good about pretending she's fine because she thinks that's best. That she needs to be strong all the time. A part of her is still figuring out her place here. In National City…Earth. But, I know she cares about you two, a lot. So, it would be nice if you could just stop whatever spiral you're on and be there for her, Lena. I know you have your own shit, but don't let that ruin something that has the potential to be great." Alex paused, putting her hand on top of Sam's arm. "Both of you. But especially you, Sam. Recent events…well, they're going to bring up her past in vivid detail."

Sam's face didn’t pale. Didn’t go soft like Alex expected. Her expression turned hard. Her words bitten out. "Who hurt her? Where do I find them?"

The arm beneath Alex's had turned hard, warm, too warm. She glanced down at it noting Sam's fingers clenched.

"Sam? You okay?"

"Tell me who hurt her."

"Sam, calm down," M'gann said. "It's okay. You're safe now."

M'gann placed her hands on the side of Sam's head. Eyes focused on Sam's. "Breathe with me."

Alex watched them, not understanding what was happening. "Is she okay? Was it a flashback? Did bringing up the past trigger this?

"She'll be fine. It happens sometimes. She fixates on Kara." M'gann's face turned concerned a moment. "Sam, stay with me. Focus on my voice."

Sam shook her head. "What? What's going…" She glanced around the table. "Sorry about that. I don’t like the idea of Kara being hurt. I heard it for years. Couldn’t do anything about it other than talk…"

And there it was. The one topic Alex had always steered clear of because she had no idea how to handle it. Looking at Sam, the lost and sad look on her face, Alex knew she needed to do something. Say something.

Reaching out tentatively, she wrapped her fingers around Sam's hand. "You know, that helped her a
lot. She told me many times that if it wasn’t for you she never would have made it. You’re the reason she’s still here. Thank you for that."

Lena got to her feet then, paler than Alex thought possible. "I should go. I have calls to make."

Alex sighed. "Please think about what I said."

"I will."

"You okay?" Alex asked Sam.

Sam blew out a breath, shared a look with M’gann then shook her head. "Can we talk?"

"Of course."

M’gann motioned toward the office and Alex let Sam lead her there. Once inside, Sam sat on the couch, patting the spot next to her.

"You'll probably want to be sitting for this."

Alex shifted, unsure. "You don’t have to do this. I don’t want you to feel obligated to tell me stuff."

Sam smiled, but it was full of sadness. "I need to tell you this. After listening to Lena I kind of realized that leaving things unsaid or letting others make assumptions doesn’t generally end well."

Two hours later, with tears streaming down her face, Alex held onto Sam with everything she had. "It's gonna be okay."

It had to be.

***

Lena read the text from Kara and didn’t respond, unsure what to say but knowing she wanted to do it in person. When she got home, she debated between her bed and a shower.

The bed won.

When she woke, she had twelve new texts, all of them from Jess. Squinting she read through the messages and sighed. Of all the times for one of her subsidiary companies to have a PR disaster. She hopped out of bed, dialing and putting her phone on speaker.

"Ms. Luthor," Jess said.

"I need you to get the jet ready. I'll be heading to Japan to take care of this personally."

"Already done. The hotel's been booked, your usual suite. I also assigned the top four members of your IT team to the break-in while you're gone."

Lena grabbed a suitcase out of her closet that she kept at the ready for instances just like this. She stripped out of her clothes as she made her way to the shower. "Thanks, Jess. You're a life saver."

"Just doing my job. Your security detail is waiting to take you to the airport when you're ready."

Lena hit end on the phone and hopped in the shower. She made a mental list of all the things she needed to do. First of which was finding out what idiot signed a deal with a company that dealt in weapons.
Her mouth twisted in anger. Did people really think she wouldn’t notice?

After she dried her hair and selected a comfortable suit to wear on the long flight, she gathered her things and left.

She went through security, boarded and was in the air before her thoughts turned to Kara. Lena knew she should text her. Let her know she wasn’t going to be able to make their date. Maybe it was for the best. Things seemed to be going rather fast. A couple weeks apart might do them some good. Give them perspective.

The fact Lena's heart ached at the thought was secondary.

She opened up her computer and went to work, her thoughts going back to Kara more and more often. By the time she landed, she knew she had to talk to her. Being a coward wasn’t her way, nor was treating someone she cared about like crap.

Once settled in her hotel room, she sent a text.

Five minutes later, a wary looking Kara knocked on her door. Lena let her in, smiling as Kara made her way toward the box of donuts Lena had bought.

"Oh, are these for me?"

"Yes, as you said, everyone likes donuts."

Plopping on the couch with a strawberry glazed in her hand, Kara smiled. "So, are you okay? I know things have been stressful."

Letting out a breath, Lena sat on a stool opposite Kara. "They have been, but I know I'll eventually figure out what's going on. How are you? I saw Alex earlier."

Kara froze, then set the donut in her hand down. "Did she say anything?"

"Just that you've had a rough couple of days."

A low tearing sound as Kara fidgeted with the cuff of her shirt. "That's one way of putting it. And the laugh she let out held no humor."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Shaking her head, Kara sighed. "But I should, but I don't know if I should with you."

Lena forced herself to smile. Of course, why would she… "I understand."

A warm hand settled on Lena's arm. "Hey, it's not whatever you're thinking. It's more like...how much is too much? Ya know? Like we haven’t even gone on our date yet, so ideally I'd rather not scare you away. There's so many thoughts and memories rolling around in my head and I don't want any of it to get on you. Like I have a lot of...what do they call it? Packages?"

A smile made its way onto Lena's face. "Baggage."

"Right, baggage, and some of it I'm still sorting through and I have times where I doubt if I'm capable of a relationship or caring about someone in the way they deserve and it sucks. But then I think of you and your smile and how I feel comfortable around you that I know I at least want to try, but maybe that isn’t enough for you. Maybe you deserve more than that? Well, no you do deserve more, so does that mean I'm being selfish?"
"Kara, breathe." Grabbing a donut and picking at it, Lena chose her words with care. "Mind if I share some stuff?"

Kara's eyes widened. "Of course not. You can tell me anything."

"As can you with me…anyways, let's start with you're the least selfish person I know. Yesterday, I kind of had a freak-out. My friend Jack talked me down a bit, but I still needed…someone who knew you. Who knew what you had been through to reassure me." Lena stared at the table top. "I have my fair share of baggage and thoughts that make me feel that love is not in the cards for me, but with you I feel that more." She held up a hand when Kara opened her mouth. "Please, let me finish. I know Lillian did terrible things. Nightmarish. I read about them. I have no idea how you made it through that, but then knowing how strong you are, and no I don't mean your abilities. I feel at times she'll be a shadow over us and then there's the fear. Being vulnerable is not something I do, but you snuck behind my walls without me even knowing it. So, I know I'm not perfect and there's a list of reasons as to why we shouldn't do this, but when push comes to shove, I can't not try because you're the one person I'd be willing to risk it all for. And I guess I needed to say that all out loud to realize it."

Kara gaped at her a few seconds. "Oh. Okay…can I talk, too?"

Lena laughed, lightly. "Of course, you don't need to ask."

"My aunt is alive. We fought. She got taken in…the military showed up and tortured her. It was…it sucked to watch. It made me sick. Then they put me in a cell and used Kryptonite on me —"

"They what? Who did it? Are you okay?" Lena reached out, taking Kara's hands in hers and turning them over.

"I'm fine. It just made me question the people I work with and obviously brought up the past." Kara flipped her hands then, taking Lena's in hers. "A lot of bad stuff happened to me. You know that. I know you've seen the scars." Kara's eyes went down to where one of Lena's fingers traced one. "I never…when I think about it, I don't think of you. There is no association in my head between what happened then and you. You're like the exact opposite of Lillian. And one day we'll share our stories, over time. But for now, let's just get to know each other. For example, why are you in Japan?"

"That easy?"

Kara nodded. "It can be if you want. We could talk about fears and why things might not work every time we see each other, but I'd rather not."

"Hmmm, you have a good point." Lena shifted, an invisible weight lifting from her shoulders. 
"Okay, as for Japan…"

They talked for a couple of hours before Kara had to head back and talk to Alex. But they did make plans to keep their date, there'd just be a change in location.

Perks of dating someone who can fly really fast according to Kara.

Lena didn't disagree.

***

Alex bolted up when Kara landed. Rubbing at her eyes, she squinted while trying to focus. "Hey, are you okay? I was worried."
Worried didn’t quite cover it, but she wasn’t about to go into that. The fear of Kara gone, again. Not seeing her again. Someone taking her. She’d been climbing the walls with worry. Only J’onn’s reassurances had kept her sane.

"Yeah. I talked with Dr. Grey and then went to see Clark." Kara slipped into the bedroom and put on her pajamas before coming back out. "Then Lena texted me, and I went to see her in Japan. You okay?"

Alex was about as far from okay as she had been in almost a year. "I'm better now that you're here."

Kara sat next to her, head leaning on her shoulder. "I have to talk to you about something."

"Okay."

"I can't work for the DEO anymore. I know you guys saved me and I'll be forever grateful for that, but what happened to Astra. What they did to me. I can't be part of that."

Swallowing, Alex nodded. "I know. I'm so sorry that happened. I don't even know what to say…I already told J'onn I was quitting. He said he'd work something out, but just in case do you think Lena has a job for me?"

Kara turned to look at her. "What? You're quitting? You love that job."

"I loved the job that was getting my sister back. I am grateful for and admire my boss who trained me and he will always be a part of my life. But the DEO, what they did. How can you think I'd still work for them?"

Kara didn’t answer, just stared at her ever fidgeting fingers.

"Hey, I didn’t know torture was on the table. You can bet your ass if I did I would have said something about it."

"Right, of course."

Alex frowned. "Do you think I would work for people like that?"

"No. I don't. Everything is just really confusing right now."

Alex grabbed Kara's hand. "I know. I talked with Sam. She mentioned her nightmares...how they seemed real."

Kara pursed her lips. "She told you about that?"

Alex nodded. "She said she still has them on occasion, but not as often. She also mentioned that you guys were treated differently. Like she doesn't have scars..." Alex trailed off not knowing exactly what she was asking.

"Yeah. I wondered about that, but Sam's human. I just have no idea why they had her."

Bracing herself, Alex pushed on. "I know we don't talk about it, but you know we can? Like, I'm here for you. Whatever it is."

Kara leaned into her. "I know. Just a tough couple of days."

"How was Lena...everything okay there?"
"Yeah."

Alex let out a breath at that, glad Lena had opted to give things a try.

A knock on the door interrupted Alex's next question. She nudged Kara who glanced over then back at Alex. "It's J'onn."

Alex stood and let him in, leading him to the kitchen. "Can I get you anything?"

"No, I'm fine, thank you."

Kara wandered in then, steps hesitant. "Hi."

"How are you doing?"

"All things considered, better than expected. You? They didn't hurt you did they?"

He shook his head. "I'm tougher than I look."

Alex cleared her throat. "Kara and I were just talking. She's with me about the not working at the DEO anymore."

J'onn quirked a brow. "That's part of the reason I'm here. First, Kara, I'm sorry that happened to you. The General is an ass. No excuses. Second, what he did to Astra is not how we operate."

"I know that, J'onn. But it's too dangerous for Kara to be near that. Right now he doesn't know her identity, I think it's best we quit while we're ahead. I love working with you and you've taught me so much and…and I have Kara back because of you, but…" Alex stopped there because if she kept going she'd end up crying and she didn't want Kara to feel bad.

"Are you sure about that? I haven't finished what I was going to say."

Alex looked at Kara, who shrugged.

"As I was going to say. A lot changed when we got rid of the old Henshaw, but certain other branches don't operate within the same boundaries as us. And I have to take some blame for the Kryptonite. I knew we had it. There's always been a fear of Superman going bad. I spoke with Superman and we came up with a solution. He's taken the Kryptonite to a location only he and I know about and I can promise the General will never be inside the walls of the DEO in any capacity other than guest ever again."

"How can you be sure?" Alex asked.

"I might have called in a few favors and Superman was quite motivated. As of now, the DEO answers to the President. She was oddly accommodating when I told her I wanted us to be more alien friendly."

Kara spoke up then, which Alex was grateful for. She'd been too quiet.

"What about that cell. A cell designed specifically for me...or my kind. J'onn, I appreciate what you've done, but I can't go back there."

He cleared his throat. "What do we do about Astra? If we catch her I mean. Where do we put her, Kara?"

"I don't know, but locking her up and exposing her to something that will eventually kill her doesn't
sound like the answer to me."

"How about if the only people who can access that cell are you, Alex and myself?"

Alex raised a brow. "You'd do that?"

J'onn nodded. "I'd do what it takes to keep my best agent and to make sure Kara feels safe."

Kara wiped at her face then hugged J'onn. "Thanks."

Alex joined in and swore she saw a tear in J'onn's eye.

"You're both worth it."

And with that, he was gone. Kara returned to the couch, head lying on the arm.

Grabbing some ice cream and two spoons, Alex sat on Kara's legs.

"Oof."

"Please, like you even notice."

"At least give me a spoon." Kara held out her hands and made a grabby motion. "He's a good guy."

"The best," Alex agreed.

Kara grabbed the remote. "Movie and veg?"

"Genius plan." Alex smiled.

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Kara stretched a few seconds, then her eyes popped open.

Today was the day. She glanced at her phone, realizing she had just under two hours to get ready and come up with a plan.

In the bathroom, she brushed her teeth and ran down a list of options in her head. She wasn't familiar with Japan at all, but had done some research and was hoping Lena would be open to an adventure type situation.

In the bedroom, she shoved a pile of Alex's clothes to the side and pulled out a pair of black pants. Slipping them on, she debated between a white shirt and a red one.

"Nope, blue...always go with blue." Alex stood there, blue top in her hand.

Kara grabbed it. "You sure?"

Alex mock gasped and placed her hands over her chest. "Would I steer you wrong?"

"Can I borrow your black leather jacket?"

Alex flopped on the bed. "It's by the door for you."

"Thanks."

Alex, already half asleep, mumbled, "Looks better on you than me."
Kara pulled the comforter over her sister and kissed her on the forehead. "Night. Love you."

Closing the door to the apartment with care, Kara set out to find a flower shop that was open. Checking her watch, that meant going east a few time zones.

Twenty minutes later she knocked on the door to Lena’s hotel room. When it opened, Lena stood there, shy smile and hands smoothing down the front of her dress.

"Hi. You look nice," Lena said.

Kara, unable to do much more than nod, held out the flowers in a sudden movement. "For you."

Accepting them with a slight blush, Lena ushered Kara into the room. "I'll put them in some minute. Give me a water." She paused a moment, shook her head. "You know what I mean."


Why couldn’t she stop?

Lena peeked around a corner. "Might want to save a few of those adjectives for our second date."

"Yeah, of course. I'll learn more, don't worry."

Laughing, Lena picked up her coat and took Kara by the arm. "You ready?"

"Yes, though I hope you have a plan because I'm now thinking the list I made."

Quirking a brow, Lena pushed the button for the elevator then glanced at Kara. "You know what, why don't we take the stairs?"

Kara really wanted to, but she knew forty-four flights of stairs wasn’t something Lena was looking forward to. "It's okay, I think I'll be okay with you there."

Lena smiled that shy smile Kara loved. On the journey down, Kara focused on the hand in hers. The soft skin. Delicate fingers. The way Lena seemed to hold on to Kara just a bit tighter, giving Kara some of her strength which just the thought of made Kara tear up.

The doors opened, and Lena glanced away, both of them needing a moment.

"So, what was on this list of yours?" Lena asked.

Pursing her lips, Kara listed them off using her fingers for each one. "The Nezu Museum, Tokyo Tower…it has an animation theme park, Ueno Zoo, which I am usually opposed to but this one offers education and does a lot for conservation, and lastly Shinjuku Ninja Trick House which I think is self-explanatory…ninjas, Lena."

Lena tapped a finger on her lower lip. "Good choices. Hmm, I think we need to start with the Ninja Trick House, can't go wrong with that."

Kara smiled. "Really? You're gonna love it. I was reading about it and like it has a lot of interactive stuff for kids, but we can do it, too. It'll be so much fun!"

An hour and a half later, Kara held a bag of assorted memorabilia and had even managed to sneak in a shirt for Lena.
"Now, dinner. You're choice." Lena waited, holding Kara's hand, again.

Following her nose, Kara led them down a few side streets until they found a small restaurant with what smelled like amazing food.

They were led to a small table in the back. Strings of lights hung from the ceiling and a small candle flickered in the center of the table.

A man approached, smiling while he handed over two menus then leaving.

"Any idea what you want?" Lena asked.

"I'll eat anything."

Lena choked and Kara glanced at her. "Are you okay? Need some water."

"Fine, I'm fine."

Was she blushing? Perhaps she was just as nervous as Kara. "What looks good to you?"

Lena swallowed. "I'm not sure. I haven't had much other than what they bring in to the office since I've been here."

The waiter reappeared then, and Kara took over, ordering them shabu shabu and a plate of onigiri, in Japanese.

"Impressive," Lena said.

"Alex and Clark told me to prepare." Kara adjusted her glasses, happy at Lena's reaction.

"You mean you learned Japanese for this dinner?"

Kara nodded while unfolding her napkin. "Yeah, I mean it took a few days. It wasn't like overnight."

Lena cleared her throat. "Right, that would be odd."

Catching the playful look on Lena's face, Kara assumed her language skills were one of those things she needed to keep under wraps. Deciding a topic change was in order, Kara asked, "How much longer are you here?"

Lena snorted. "At least a week probably more. The press is hounding me over this weapons deal, but I had nothing to do with it. It was a disgruntled employee…but with Lex's trial everywhere."

Kara reached across the table and took Lena's hand. "Hey, it's okay. I'm not gonna let anything happen to you."

"I don't want you to worry about me." Lena sat back when their plates arrived.

"Yeah, that's not likely, in fact, I have something for you."

Lena's face reddened. "Really?"

Kara fidgeted a bit, then reached into her bag and pulled out a small box. She set it on the table and pushed it across to Lena.
Picking it up, eyes narrowing, Lena pursed her lips. "Is it a picture?"

"Nope."

"Damn, I was really hoping for a Danvers original." Lena turned it over, sliding off the ribbon and popping it open. "A watch?"

Kara held up a finger. "Not just any watch, a signal one. Here, you're too far for me to hear your heartbeat, so, if anything happens just flip that latch and hit the button. It emits a sound only me or my cousin can hear."

"This is very thoughtful, but not necessary."

Kara used the pout that Alex could not resist when Kara wanted pot stickers for a third night in a row. "Please? For me? I'd feel better knowing you had it."

"Okay, but only because I've never had someone learn a language for me before."

Blushing, Kara reached for her glass of water. "You're worth it."

The rest of the evening went by far too fast for Kara's liking and before she knew it they were standing in front of Lena's door.

"I had a really nice time," Lena said.

"Me too." Kara shifted her feet, unsure what to do. Her stomach fluttered and she kept stealing glances at Lena's lips.

"So, you think you might want to go on a second one?"

"Huh?"

Lena backed into her room. "Come here."

Kara followed.

Taking both of Kara's hands in hers, Lena stepped closer. "Can I ask you something?"

Kara nodded.

"You said you had limited experience, right?"

"Yeah." Was she sweating? That happened a lot around Lena.

"Have you ever kissed someone?"

Kara knew she was blushing. Knew her face had to be red as something that was really red, her brain wasn't quite working at the thought of where this was going.

"I'll take that as a no." Lena let go of one of Kara's hands and raised it to cup Kara's cheek. "May I kiss you?"

Heart pounding in her chest, Kara could only nod.

Leaning in slowly, making sure to keep her eyes on Kara's, Lena barely touched her lips to Kara's
before pulling away.

"Okay?"

"Better than okay." This time Kara lowered her head and met Lena's lips. A tad more pressure, longer. Both of Lena's hands cupped Kara's face now, and Kara automatically wrapped her arms around Lena. Hands resting on her back pulling them closer together.

A million different sensations rushed through Kara. Pushing past them all to focus on Lena, Kara's knees went weak and she let out a low moan when she felt Lena's tongue trace her bottom lip. Unsure what was happening, but knowing she'd liked everything so far, she did the same to Lena. Kara heard a similar response, and far too soon the warmth of Lena was being pulled away from her.

"Right, so…not bad for your first time."

Kara swallowed, willing her heart to stop thundering away. "Yeah, it was…nice. No, not nice. Better than nice. Wonderful. Amazing. Soft. It was…perfect. Like you."

Lena seemed to be having just as much trouble getting herself together as Kara, which reassured her.

"Yes, well…I…are you sure you've never done that before?"

"Positive, I'd remember."

Lena cleared her throat. "Right, well, you're a natural."

"Good to know. I should go. Let you get some rest." Kara did not want to go, but she knew it was for the best.

"Of course, I'll see you soon?"

"Yep, send me a text whenever. I can be here in a flash."

"I'll keep that in mind."

Kara set the bag down she'd put a few items in for Lena when the woman had turned her back then headed for the balcony. Unable to resist, Kara kissed Lena once more, quick but sincere.

"See you soon."

And with that Kara was flying, both literally and figuratively. So distracted by replaying the kiss, she didn’t quite pay attention to the noises coming from her apartment.

"Hey! You're home early." Alex jumped up from the couch adjusting her shirt…where she was definitely not alone.

"Hi." Sam waved, holding a blanket over her.

"Uh, sorry…I didn’t know you'd be here. I'm sorry. This is so embarrassing."

Alex came over to her. "It's fine. Why are you home early? Everything okay?"

"It's not early in Japan." Kara raised an eyebrow and tilted her head toward Alex's belt, which was undone.

"Right, of course. I'll make some coffee."
Sam wandered in, eyeing Kara. "You don't wear make-up."

"You don't wear pants apparently," Kara said.

"It's a thing, and I approve of Lena's choice of lipstick for the night."

Alex spun. "I knew it! Spill! All the details." She held up a hand. "Wait. I need coffee, and we all need to sit, and nothing gets left out."

Setting her bag on the table, with care, Kara fought back...something. She'd been getting better at identifying and dealing with her feelings, but there were times – like now – that overwhelmed her.

"I think I like her, like really like her."

Sam walked up and sat on one of the stools. "You think?"

"No. I know."

Sam laughed, leaning over and pulling Kara toward her. "Duh, you two are so adorable."

Alex appeared and set down three coffee mugs. "Okay, I just need to get snacks and then you spill. And Sam is so right, big duh about really liking her." Alex stood next to Sam then, and Kara wondered if her sister was aware of how the two of them gravitated toward one another.

Kara rested her head on Alex's shoulder. "Okay, so we went to this really cool Ninja place."

"Hold on, you didn't get her flowers? Clark said he was going to remind you about that."

Sam shook her head. "Good thing you have a great personality, Kara...tsk tsk."

"Har har, and yes I did get her flowers. I got her her favorite; I even flew four time zones away to get them."

Alex sighed. "Okay, when I say spill, I mean literally tell me everything from the second you shut the door of this apartment, 'kay?"

Kara laughed, "Okay."

The next hour she told them about her night, both of them being sweet and supportive, and trying but not quite succeeding in acting like the kiss was no big deal.

"Glad to hear it went well, Kara. Keep me posted, but now, I have to get back to the bar." She turned to Alex then. "Walk me out?"

Kara checked her phone, sending a quick text to Lena that she hoped made her smile when she got it.

Alex came back in, face flushed.

Raising a brow, Kara laughed. "I see things are progressing with Sam."

Letting herself fall onto the couch next to Kara, Alex wiggled her eyebrows. "They were. It's new and terrifying which is fun, but she's totally worth it."

"I know the feeling."
Alex examined the window making sure it was big enough for Kara to get through. The kitchen was small, but she didn’t cook much. The bedroom was an elevated area with enough room for a big comfy bed.

Next to her, Kara pushed up her glasses. "Did you notice there are six different restaurants that deliver within five blocks."

"Definite selling point." Alex stepped down and peered into the bathroom.

"I think you should take it. This place is totally you. There are two fire alarms in the kitchen. I mean this place is literally meant for you." Kara pointed up, cocking her head to the side.

Alex smirked. "You're gonna miss my cooking."

"I can scoop ice cream. I'll manage."

Shaking her head, Alex told the woman she'd take it. Thirty minutes later all the paperwork had been filled out, security deposits paid, and Alex had keys in hand. Her head spun at how fast it went.

Kara hugged her and Alex felt the stirrings of worry in her gut. She pulled away. "You sure this is okay?"

Pulling her out of the building lobby and onto the street, Kara tapped her chin, thinking. "Alex, you turned down the last two because of me. I'm fine with it. You want Chinese or Italian to celebrate?"

Alex sighed, "Both."

Kara grinned at that. "Good answer!"

Alex cleared her throat. "I'm serious, though"

With a sigh, Kara stuck her hands in her pockets. "I know, and I love you for that. But, this is the right thing to do. Not just for me, but you as well. I understand why some people need privacy now."

Alex hoped she wasn’t blushing as hard as she thought she was. "Okay, you have a valid point."

They ordered takeout and made it back to their apartment before dark. They ate while packing up Alex's stuff. Kara sneaking some of the larger furniture when Alex wasn't looking.

"You know, we don't have to get it done tonight."

Kara glanced up from the picture frames she was wrapping. "Yeah, we do. I know us. We'll put it off and off and off and you need to go and live your life. You deserve that. I need you to do that."

Swallowing, Alex wiped at a tear and shoved some jeans into a bag. She knew Kara was right, but that didn’t make it any easier. The past year had flown by and Alex's life had changed in so many ways, all of them for the better.

She had her sister back.

She had a girlfriend.

And the anger that had driven her to extremes, while still there on occasion, had diminished greatly.
Out of the corner of her eye she watched Kara. Sleeves down, the cuffs on yet another shirt in tatters from being fidgeted with, but her eyes were bright, shoulders straight, and a small smile on her face as she hummed some song.

Where Kara got the strength…how she was able to be so good after everything. That was what kept Alex going.

They kept each other going. There was no struggling to keep up. There was no resentment. There was just love and support.

Which reminded her…

"How's Lena?"

Setting the picture in her hand aside, Kara smiled. "Great. She's coming back tomorrow. It'll be weird to have her around after flying off to Tokyo the last few weeks."

Alex moved so she was next to her sister on the floor. "Hey, guess what?"

Kara turned to her. "What?"

"I'm really happy for you."

"Thanks."

"Though, you guys have redefined taking it slow." Alex easily dodged the pillow Kara tossed at her.

"You said it was sweet!"

"It is, but you need some moves."

Kara snorted. "Please, you're one to talk. Sam told me all about the oil thing."

Alex paled. "No."

"Yes."

"Why…"

"You were there, it's funny."

Alex rolled her eyes. "Not if you're me…which I am."

Kara shook her head. "Well, it's not like it was written on the bottle…oh wait, it was." The laughing started.

"Please, it was in super small print. I can't be the only one who's made that mistake."

Bent over at the waist, Kara gasped for air. "You slathered her with numbing stuff," Kara waved her hands, "And then you," tears now streamed down her face, "So, you couldn't warn her when she," Alex wondered if Kryptonians could hyperventilate. "And she thought the heat one was okay to…" Kara wheezed then.

Alex glared, but Kara didn’t see. "Laugh it up. I couldn’t feel my tongue for a day and Sam had to spend hours sucking ice cubes knowing M'gann knew…it was a nightmare."
A loud crack when Kara hit the ground, body convulsing.

"Laugh it up. But one day, you too will have sex, and karma's a bitch."

Kara stopped laughing at that, eyes going wide.

***

Alex went over the leads they'd gathered over the last month about Lillian. Each one had turned out to be a dead end, but she was hopeful the woman would make an appearance for her son's trial at some point.

She closed her computer and checked the time. Sam would be there in half an hour. Just enough time for Alex to shower and pick up the few straggling items in her new place.

By the time she finished stacking her magazines, there was a knock on her door. With a grin, she danced over and opened it.

"Hey."

"Hey." Sam held up a bag of takeout. "You know there are an obscene amount of food places near here."

Alex ushered her in and headed toward the kitchen. "One of Kara's demands."

Sam sat at the counter. "Ah, makes sense. Doesn't want you cooking."

Pulling down a couple of plates and opening a drawer to grab some forks, she glanced at Sam with a mock hurt expression. "Maybe she just likes takeout. And if she tells you I can't cook, that is a total lie."

Cocking her head to the side and raising her eyebrow in a way that sent a thrill through Alex, Sam said, "You forget, I've seen you cook, or at least attempt to. Do you not remember grilled cheese night?"

Alex let her shoulders sag. "Like you've never forgotten to take the plastic wrapper off."

"The pasta sauce fiasco?"

Alex blew out a breath. "Come on, that bag of potpourri looked like spaghetti seasoning!"

Sam crossed her arms. "Do you want me to keep going…because I can, but I feel like it would just be cruel, not to mention I haven't even known you that long."

"Fine, see if I ever make a romantic dinner for you."

Sam opened the bags and pulled out several containers. "Is that a promise?"

Taking their plates and setting them on the table, then returning to the kitchen to get something to drink, Alex mumbled, "Why do I even like you?"

Sam grabbed her from behind and rested her chin on Alex's shoulder. "That's easy. I'm irresistible and keep you on your toes."

About to respond, Alex nearly stumbled when an arm snaked around her front and dipped below the waist of her pants.
"What's this I hear about breaking in new places? Something about every room? Or was it every surface?"

Turning, Alex was met with soft lips and warm eyes. "Why can't it be both?"

"Think you can handle it? Got the stamina?" Sam punctuated the question with a quick move of her hand that had Alex grabbing on to the counter to steady herself.

"You brought food, we're good." Alex captured Sam's lips then, not in the mood to talk anymore.

***

Kara set the last of the files Lena had given her to look over down. Of the seventy-three projects, thirteen were a definite no go. Thirty-five had potential, but in a few years. Kara wasn't that comfortable accelerating Earth technology. The remaining twenty-five were good and would keep her busy for the foreseeable future.

Lena had arrived back in National City almost a week prior but had a mountain of work to deal with that had accumulated while she was gone. Kara had stopped by a few times with food and coffee. Left her flowers on occasion, but didn’t get to see much of her.

Her phone beeped and she fumbled her briefcase in her haste to answer it when she saw it was Lena.

"Hey! How are you?"

"Tired…so, so tired. And sorry. I know I haven’t been around much, but I was wondering what you were doing tonight?"

Kara shrugged, picking at the sleeves of her shirt, then stopping when she remembered this was one of her nice work shirts. "The usual, patrolling."

"That's what I figured. Well, when you get time, stop by and we'll have dinner. Sound good?"

"Sounds perfect."

They hung up, Kara's smile bright and full. About to take the stairs she hovered a moment before taking a breath and hopping on the elevator.

When the doors sprung open, she didn’t leap out into the lobby, she waited a moment then exited. Proud of herself at the victory, she didn’t recognize James until she bumped into him.

"Hey, how are you? Is everything okay?"

He shook his head, face serious. "Remember Winn?"

"Of course, what happened?"

James looked around before heading to a corner, Kara following. "His dad broke out of prison. The feds showed up at work today and asked him a bunch of questions. He looked scared after they left. When I went to check on him at lunch, he was gone. He's not answering his phone or at his place… can you?"

"Of course! Give me his address. And did they find his dad? What did he do?"

James's eyes widened. "You don't know." He bit his lip. "His dad is Toymaker. Killed a bunch of kids a while back. Not something Winn talks about."
Kara's heart hurt for the man who had been nothing but sweet, if a bit awkward, with her. "I'll find him."

"Thanks."

She hustled out of the lobby, zipping home to drop off her stuff and then heading to the address James had given her. The apartment was neat, filled with toys and action figures, as well as computer parts, wires, and tools littering every available surface.

But no Winn.
Kara searched Winn's apartment. Sadly, she didn't find anything that could lead her to his current whereabouts on the first pass, not that she expected a map. Doing a quick scan with her x-ray vision, she spotted a doll on the floor. It didn't quite fit with the other toys and whatnot that Winn had in his apartment. Picking it up, she pulled on the string, and a gravelly voice listed off an address. Within seconds she was out the window and on her way.

She contacted Alex with her headset to let her know where she was heading and why.

"Are you sure that's a good idea? Going alone?"

"I'm just going to check it out. If he's there, I'm going to help him out. His dad is bad news."

"Still, I don't like it. Toy Man did a lot of bad stuff in his time. And he was far from a model inmate. I'm going to meet you there."

"You don't have to. I can handle this."

"I want to."

Kara gave her the address, then set down in the parking lot outside the warehouse where she suspected Winn was. There were no cars or people, the place had been deserted for quite some time if the decrepit buildings, broken windows, and rusted machinery were any indication. From inside, she heard a muffled voice. She focused and caught the tail end of a conversation.

"I want you to join me, son."

"I can't...what you did...I am not like you."

"You're more like me that you want to admit. Don't make me do this the hard way."

Winn took a step. "I am nothing like you. You killed people. I would never."

Kara picked up a sound, a signal...Winn's dad wasn't real. Dread at the implication ran through her.

"Son, soon you're going to find out just how easy it is to be like me."

"Never."

Sirens in the background distracted Kara for a second.

"You told them I was here?"

"No. I didn't...I have no idea how they knew."

"Get out of here, son. Run, now!"

Underneath the voices, she could hear the clicking of a mechanism then the slight hiss of a compressed canister. Using her x-ray vision once more, she spotted what was about to happen.

Barreling through the door, she grabbed Winn and kept going until they were safe. "Are you okay?"

He stared at her, eyes wide mouth hanging open. "You're... Her."
"Yep. Are you okay? Actually, no, you're probably not okay. That's a dumb question. Should I take you somewhere? Like the authorities? Do you want to make a statement?"

Winn paled. "I lied to them. They're going to lock me up."

Kara put a hand on his shoulder to reassure him, and hold him up, he didn't look too steady. "I'm pretty sure if you explain to them what happened it'll be okay. And not to be rude, but there's a noxious gas in there I should probably take care of before someone gets sick or worse. Be right back."

Just then several cars pulled up, lights flashing. An agent with a bad attitude and her gun at the ready exited one of them. "Winn Schott Jr., don't move."

Kara stood in front of him. "Hey, he's not the bad guy here. He almost died."

"Supergirl, move to the side this is not your jurisdiction."

Now, two guns were pointing at Kara. Thankfully, that no longer bothered her, but she was concerned for Winn. All it took was one overzealous agent with bad aim and the poor guy could die.

"Look, he's going to help you out. Put your weapons away, let me take care of this nasty gas before it makes you all sick, and then we can find a way to work together."

The agent didn't back down. "Supergirl, I'm not going to tell you again, please step aside."

Kara crossed her arms and stood in front of Winn. "Can't do that. He's innocent."

The rumble of a motorcycle made Kara smile. Seconds later, Alex pulled to a stop, rested her bike on its kickstand, and walked straight up to the female agent holding a gun on Kara.

"Excuse me, is there a reason you have your weapon trained on National City's hero? And are you aware that your bullets literally have no effect on her so your threats are really kind of baseless?"

"Who the hell are you?" Asked the female agent.

Alex took out her badge. "Agent Danvers, F.B.I., I think we can find a way to work together, right?"

"The alien lover. Cassie warned me about you."

Kara clenched her jaw. Prepared to move when she saw Alex tense.

Alex smiled, the scary one. "As long as everyone does their job right, no warning necessary."

After that, things were a blur of motion. Kara cleared out the gas when one of the officers started getting ill. Then she did a scan of all the surrounding buildings to make sure there were no other traps. Once that was done, they went over the area with a fine-tooth comb to try and find any clue as to where Toy Man might be.

Winn sat in an unmarked van, face pale and hands trembling. Kara tried to reassure him with her presence, but he just kept staring at her with an odd kind of awe.

Alex pulled her aside. "Maybe the Supergirl thing is a little too much for him right now. I've got this under control and James is coming to pick him up. We've got our systems using facial recognition to try and find Toy Man. Maybe come back as you know...Kara?"

Kara nodded. "Do you think he'll want to see me?"
Alex smiled. "Of course he would, who wouldn't want to see you?"

Supergirl flew off and 10 minutes later Kara Danvers walked up to the scene.

"Winn? Where are you? Are you okay? I heard about what happened...you were so brave."

His eyes lit up when he saw her, and when he stood to greet her, he tripped over his feet and she barely had time to catch him.

"You're not going to believe this. It was so cool. She was here. She came here and she actually saved me. Me. Like why would she save me? I'm nobody. How? How did she even know? I mean she saved me Kara how cool is that?"

Kara cocked her head to the side. "What do you mean you're nobody? You're being ridiculous. Of course she would save you. That's what she does. And it is really cool, I'm happy for you."

Winn stuttered a moment before talking again. "Yeah, I mean I know it's what she does, in theory. But, it's totally different to see her in action and when it's you. Like I mean me but you...you know what I mean?"

Oddly, Kara did know what he meant. "Yeah, I get it. But are you okay? Really?"

"Yeah, it was stupid. I should have told them what I knew but, do you know...sometimes you just hope that they've changed. That maybe you matter to them this time. That things are going to be different. I don't know." He trailed off.

Kara put a hand on his shoulder and he stopped, looking down at it a moment before she spoke, "I do understand. I also know that not getting to know you is his loss. You're a really great guy."

He didn't say anything, but his audible swallow and watery eyes told her enough.

An agent approached them. "Mr. Schott, we're ready to take you somewhere safe."

Winn grabbed Kara. "Please be careful and tell James to watch out as well. I have no idea what he'll do next."

Kara reassured him, watching as the agent took him away.

Alex and the bitchy agent were still going at it so Kara took a moment to call Lena.

"Hey there, where are you?"

"I'm in the parking lot of an abandoned warehouse."

"Sounds thrilling. Everything okay?"

"Yep, all is well. How are you?"

"My files are multiplying."

Kara smiled. "Oh, like that one movie...you know the one. Where everything duplicates over and over again?"

"I must have missed it."

Kara glanced at Alex, deciding this was not the time to ask her rom-com loving sister what the name
of the movie was. "I'll get it and we can watch it later."

"Sounds like a plan. What are you doing later?"

Kara sensed the hesitation and a bit of fear in Lena's voice. "Not sure, there's the Toy Man situation, but other than that I was thinking about you and maybe having dinner?"

"Deal, I have lots to keep me busy so just come by when you're free."

"Okay, see you later."

The line disconnected and the thought of seeing Lena sent a thrill through Kara. The last month had been amazing and thought they hadn't done much in the physical department, what they had done had made Kara crave more.

The problem was she didn’t know what more was. She had some ideas and her imagination was kicking into gear. Sam, of course, was full of helpful hints, but most of them confused Kara and the websites downright terrified her.

An image of Lena flashed in her mind and she felt her stomach tighten…yeah, she definitely wanted more.

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Alex, tired of arguing, crossed her arms to avoid punching Agent pain in the ass. The woman had a serious chip on her shoulder and did not like the idea of handing over control of this investigation to Alex and her team. Usually, Alex would stay out of something like this. However, since it was Toy Man and Kara was now involved, J'onn had given her a little bit of wiggle room.

"Look, Agent, we want the same thing. We want to catch the bad guy. Do you not understand that? We have a much better chance of doing that if we work together."

"I work just fine on my own, Agent Danvers. Plus, we don't need Supergirl's help. Everywhere she goes she brings destruction. I have no intention of putting the apprehension of Toy Man at risk because of her messing something up."

Alex wrinkled her forehead. "What are you talking about?"

The agent stood with a hand on her hip. "Do some research, Danvers. The Supergirl defense. It's used all the time. Crooks get off because Supergirl thinks she's above the law. It's not about to happen in my investigation."

"That's not true. She does nothing but help people. She catches the bad guys."

"She's a super-powered alien who doesn’t know her own strength. She's a menace. I don’t want her near this case."

Deciding there was absolutely no reasoning with the woman, Alex walked away. She met Kara off to the side.

"Hey, did you find anything new?"

Kara shook her head. "Sorry."

Alex groaned, "That woman is making me insane."
"I heard." From the expression on Kara's face, Alex knew she had overheard their conversation, which made her want to go smack the agent. But she refrained. Barely.

"Winn's being taken into protective custody, and there's nothing left here. Let's get something to eat," Alex said.

Kara perked up at the mention of food. "Pizza and pot stickers?"

"As if there was a doubt."

An hour later they were settled on Kara's couch.

"So, how are things going at L-Corp now that you're a big deal science person?"

Rolling her eyes, Kara snagged a piece of pizza. "Good, actually. I have an office which makes things easier. The people I work with are really nice."

"Uh huh, and you get to make out with your boss."

Kara scrunched her face at that. "Actually, she's not my boss. She was super worried about that dynamic so she brought me in as a consultant and I report to some guy named Mr. Hillerman."

Alex smiled. "Smart."

"Hmm, and how goes the Lillian hunt? I know you've been spending all your free time on that."

Alex took a swig from her water before answering, "Nowhere at the moment. That woman is smart and has connections. It doesn't help there are people in the military who agree with her and are likely helping."

Kara's hand rubbed her leg. "Hey, you'll find her. I know it."

"I hope so. I think a lot of people would sleep better knowing she wasn't out there anymore."

"I take it Sam's still having nightmares?"

Not sure how much to share, but knowing she needed to talk to someone, Alex spoke, "When you guys were…did she tell you about her dreams?"

Kara nodded.

"They're really violent at times. When she thrashes, it's scary and I don't understand what she's saying. I want to help her so badly, but have no clue how."

"Just be you. You're more than enough, don't ever doubt that," Kara said.

Alex wiped at her yes. "I hope so. I really like her."

"I kind of noticed."

Shoving her, Alex winced. "Oof, you're supposed to pretend like I can move you."

"Not until you say you're enough and smile and promise if things get too intense you'll talk to me. I know what Sam went through, I might be able to help."

Alex wrapped her hands around Kara's arm. "I hate bringing it up. I know…I have an idea of how
hard it was."

Kara took Alex's hand in hers. "Yeah, it was hard, understatement, but if it will help you and Sam it's worth it."

"Do you talk to Lena?"

Kara shook her head, looking away.

"Why not? Lillian?"

Kara nodded. "Lena already feels bad. I can see it in her eyes when she watches me fidget with my cuffs or when she caresses my face. This scar here," she ran a finger along the left side of her face. "It's barely noticeable, but it's like her hand is drawn to it. She traces it."

Alex turned to her. "Maybe you should talk to her?"

"Maybe, but not now…not yet. Everything's still really new and I'm still learning how to date and all that it implies. I'm kind of floundering in the whole dealing with emotions thing and I think it's getting to her and I feel terrible but I also have no idea what to do. Dr. Grey says to talk to her, but I know if I share the messy thoughts and fears I have, Lena will run away."

This, Alex could help with, sort of. "What do you mean?"

"Like, sometimes my feelings get so intense that I get anxious and weird about it, you know? And I have trouble not just running away because I hate the fear it causes."

"What are you afraid of?"

Kara let her head fall onto the back of the couch. "All of it. Feeling, being vulnerable, getting hurt, messing up, hurting her, having to talk about my past eventually, her reaction to my scars….sex. Literally, all of it terrifies me."

Alex turned so she was facing Kara. "Look at me, you have nothing to be afraid of. And yes, I know that is really easy for me to say. But, it's also the truth. You're amazing. You inspire me every day, and not because you're Supergirl. Lena loves you and I know if you were to talk to her about this stuff, she'd reassure you."

A tear streamed down Kara's face. "I think she would, too, but I don't know how to do it yet. The words get jumbled and when the anxiety kicks in…well, you know, fight or flight."

"You'll figure it out. You're so much better than you give yourself credit for."

"I hope so. Sometimes I still feel so broken."

Alex pulled Kara closer. "When that happens, tell me and I'll remind you where the glue is."

Kara laughed. "Please, like I could forget. You're the best glue."

Alex let the tears fall, finally getting used to these precious word gifts from Kara.

Before she had a chance to respond, someone knocked at the door. With a turn of her head, Kara squinted, then said to Alex, "It's James."

On her feet and opening the door, Kara motioned him inside. "Hey, what's up?"

Alex didn't pay attention at first, annoyed that her conversation with Kara had been interrupted.
James cleared his throat, "So, I was going through a list of invites that I get, you know people who want a photographer at various events to cover for the magazine. Anyways, I came across this one…it stuck out because it was for a toy convention, which we don't usually cover. I did a quick search and guess what…the guy in charge is Toy Man's old associate. The one he accused of stealing his ideas."

Alex pulled out her phone. "Perfect target for him. Did you bring the invite with you?"

James nodded then handed it to her, Alex passed on the information to her team. Kara was already in the air and on her way. Alex glanced at the open window. "I hate when she does that."

James laughed, "Yeah, I have to admit it took some getting used to with Clark."

Alex ran downstairs with James on her heels. Alex eyed her bike, annoyed it was blocked in by a delivery truck. "Come on, give me your keys." She held out her hands, waiting.

"What?"

"Keys, come on…we need to back Kara up."

He tossed them to Alex. She slid into the driver seat and put the car in gear, causing the tires to squeal and smoke to rise.

James gripped the "oh shit" bar above him staring at Alex with a panicked expression. "You have done this before, right?"

"What? Arrest a bad guy, of course I have. Don't be ridiculous."

"No, I meant drive."

She rolled her eyes and made a face.

By the time they arrived, Supergirl had saved the day and Alex handed Toy Man over to Agent no longer a pain in her ass with a smirk.

"See, not a mark on him. Your case is fine."

"Hope I don't see you around, Danvers."

"It's mutual," Alex said.

"What are you going to do now?" James asked.

Alex shrugged. "Probably grab some takeout and see if Sam wants to hang out. You?"

"I'm going to pick up Winn. I'm pretty sure he could use a friend."

Kara chimed in, "Hey, why don't we all hang out? Together or something? We can meet at my place in say an hour? I bet Winn would love that. We can play games or something?"

Both Alex and James nodded at the same time.

Back in the car, James glanced at Alex. "Right, so just how much takeout are we talking? Because I remember with Clark…"

Alex smiled. "Oh, yeah, we're going to be splitting up to maximize food gathering. Get on your
phone and find all the places having specials right now."

She dropped James off at his car so he could pick up Winn and extra food while she went to M'gann's and picked up Sam. M'gann was gone, again.

"So, who's going to be there and who knows what?"

"Winn and James. Winn knows nothing and James knows about Kara."

Sam spoke after a moment. "I don't like that people know about Kara. It's dangerous."

"I know, but James is trustworthy."

"I'll decide that."

Alex smiled. "Kara's lucky to have a friend like you."

Sam didn’t say anything, her face stony. In the last few weeks, Sam had a few of these episodes, usually when it came to Kara. They had talked a lot about the past, what had happened. Alex handled it as well as could be imagined. Which wasn’t well. She'd tripled her efforts to find Lillian.

She shook off the morbid thought, hoping to enjoy a rare afternoon off with Sam and the others.

There was so much food. So much. Yet, Alex knew they would eat it all, or at least Kara would, eventually. She still had to do the whole human thing in front of Winn, which meant eating a normal amount of food. And if the longing looks she was giving to the leftover pot stickers were any indication, she was not liking it one bit.

They sat around talking about random things, all of them careful to avoid asking Winn about the events of the day. He seemed like a good guy, despite his predisposition to ramble and talk about Star Wars and computers.

They had just finished up a heated game of Monopoly when Lucy showed up. That's when things went to shit.

Kara answered the door and almost froze. Alex had to go and physically move her out of the way, knowing that only her sister's self-control allowed Alex to do such a thing.

James watched the interaction with a concerned look. "Hey, guys, this is Lucy…my girlfriend. We had plans for later, so I invited her…I hope that's cool?"

Lucy gave Kara a once over, smiled, then turned her attention to Alex. "I know you, don't I?"

"Yep." Alex saw the moment it clicked in Lucy's head.

"Work." Lucy stiffened.

"Yep."

James glanced between the two of them, eyes occasionally going to Kara who still had yet to move. "Is everything okay?"

Lucy smiled. "Yep."

"Come in, we were just about to start a game of Scrabble," Kara said, teeth clenched.
Alex sat next to Sam, who sat up when she saw how stiff and rigid Kara was.

"Everything okay?" she whispered to Alex.

"I'll tell you about it later," Alex murmured back.

"Hey, everyone, this is Lucy Lane."

Winn waved. "Hey, good to see you again."

Lucy gave him a hug. "You, too. I heard about what happened. You okay?"

He bobbed his head, clearly excited. "I'm fine, Supergirl saved me."

Alex didn't miss the look on Lucy's face at the mention of the hero. "That's great."

"She's so nice in person. I mean, I know she's nice, but in person, she was like extra nice."

James patted him on the arm. "We got it, here, have a drink."

They managed forty-five minutes of awkward conversation during the game before James decided to leave with Lucy and drop Winn off at his place.

Kara immediately relaxed. "I had no idea she was still in town. What does that mean? And what do you think she knows? Would James tell her? What if he told her about Clark? I can't believe she knows where I live. This sucks."

Alex spotted the start of the spiral. "Hey, Kara. Listen to me. Clark trusts James for a reason. Lucy Lane does not know who you or your cousin are. You're safe."

Sam piped up, "What's this about? Why is she so worried?"

Kara blew out a breath. "That was Lucy Lane, daughter of General Lane the man who made me fight that stupid Android thing. And he pretty much hates me and my cousin."

"Want me to go kick her ass? It would kind of be fair and I promise not to fight too dirty." Sam rolled up her sleeves, the smile on her face feral.

Alex put her hand on Sam's arm. "You know, I think it's okay, I'd rather not have to bail you out of jail tonight you know it's just not how I was seeing things going."

Sam gave her a look. "But, this is for Kara. If there's a chance this Lucy person could put her at risk we have to do something about it. Actually, James could put her at risk, too, we have to do something about that."

Sam's muscles tensed under Alex's hand. Her eyes hardened and her face took on a determined look.

"Hey, no...no that's...that's not what's going on here. We can trust James. If Lucy knew, the General would have Kara and Clark in custody right now. It's all okay, I promise," she spoke in a slow, soothing voice.

Sam glared. "It's just a matter of time. Everybody talks. If I learned anything during my time with Cadmus it's that. Everybody talks."

Kara cleared her throat. "Not everyone." And Alex could feel the pain of Kara's admission and had no idea what to do with it.
Sam's head snapped toward her. "And what price did you pay for it? You thought you were dead. Every day you hoped for death. James and Lucy have something to live for. That's different."

Alex's stomach dropped at the facts about Kara's state of mind in that place. Sam said them so casually, and once again, Alex was reminded of just how much she didn't know about what happened. How much Kara and Sam had been through. She knew the highlights—the main things, but not the smaller details that were far more important in the long run.

Kara shook her head. "For me, the cost was worth it. My cousin is safe. As for James, I trust him. He's not going to tell Lucy."

The words didn't seem to have the calming effect on Sam that Alex hoped they would. Sam got to her feet, pacing the room. "It's not right! You have to take care of threats, get rid of them. Did you learn nothing from Lillian?"

Kara's jaw clenched and Alex had no idea what to do. She just wanted everyone to calm down. "There's no threat right now. It's okay, Sam. Come on, sit down and have a drink. Please?" Alex stood and wrapped her arms around her, not knowing what else to do.

Thankfully, that seemed to pull Sam out of whatever thought process she had been in.

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Lena glared at the pile of paperwork on her desk. It seemed for every file she cleared five more appeared. She'd sent Jess home when she caught her napping in the breakroom, the woman had done so much while Lena was gone and refused to take any time off.

She flipped on the news, noting Supergirl had saved a bunch of kids at a toy convention. She smiled to herself, proud of her, and happy to see her unscathed. She might be the Girl of Steel, but Lena still worried. Remembered things she wished she could forget. Glimpsed scars the world had not seen. Knew just how fragile Supergirl really was.

Returning her attention to the morphing pile of papers, she sighed. Rubbing her temples, she wondered if Kara was going to stop by, sure she said she would but emergencies happened. Lena knew she was busy watching over the city and had done a tremendous amount of work on the projects she had chosen to do, but Lena was human and she missed Kara…a lot.

Seeing how late it was, Lena assumed she'd have another late night where she fell asleep, yet somehow woke up in her apartment. Courtesy of Kara, she knew. But nothing was ever said. Just the way flowers appeared when she left the office for a moment or how a salad or muffin appeared in between meetings.

Kara had said she'd come by…she would. Doubt crept up Lena's spine. What if Kara changed her mind? What if she finally realized what being with a Luthor meant? What if she didn't really like women? She hadn't been with anyone, ever. Male or female.

Lena tried so hard not to go down that path, but it was hard. She had to focus. Kara was different. Special. And Lena didn’t have any Scotch to get her through this. Taking a deep breath, she tried to relax. So lost in thought, she almost jumped out of her seat at the soft knock on her balcony door. She turned, hoping she didn’t look too happy, too excited, too...just too anything really. She wanted to play it cool for Kara, not come on too strong and scare her away.

"I was wondering if you'd show up."

Kara looked shocked for a moment. "Of course, I'd show up. I said I would. I really like spending
time with you, which I think you know by now." Kara moved closer and kissed Lena on the cheek, then pulled back before leaning in at Lena's nod and giving her a proper kiss hello. When a warm tongue traced her lips, Lena let out a moan.

Lena smiled, pulling away, slowly. "Just in case you were wondering, I enjoy spending time with you, too. Now, what did you bring us to eat?"

Kara's face turned pink and Lena knew there were not eating anything even remotely healthy. She raised a brow, waiting.

"Okay, well the thing is I was at this thing earlier today and had to suck in all this nasty gas and then I had to use my freeze breath and then we had this kind of…game afternoon I guess. There was a lot of food, but I had to do the human thing and then Lucy and Winn took a bunch of the leftovers with them."

Lena raised a brow at that. "That was bold. Do you need an alibi or is everyone okay?"

Kara tilted her head to the side. "Right? Though I think Alex distracting me saved the day. Anyways, by the time I was able to get away, I knew I was late and most of the places you like were closed. But, I know you prefer green stuff."

Lena interrupted. "Healthy, Kara. It's called healthy."

"Green is the same as healthy, anyways, I had a choice to make and it was whether or not to be a little bit late or to get you something you like. So, I got you this."

She handed Lena a bag, the address on the side was in Japanese if she wasn't mistaken. She glanced up at Kara, eyes wide. "You flew to Tokyo to get me something to eat?"

Kara nodded. "Yeah, I'm sorry I'm late. I was told to never keep a lady waiting, but I figured it was worth the risk. Are you mad?"

Dating Kara was unlike anything Lena knew, and she doubted she would ever get used to it and part of her really hoped she never did. The smallest of things brought a smile to her face. This had to be love, she corrected herself. This had to be what being in love with Kara was like.

She walked up to Kara, wrapped her arms around her, and kissed her. "Thank you. And no need to apologize for being late. I didn’t even notice."

"Phew, I was worried. I don't want to ever make you mad or think I don't care."

Lena grabbed the bag from Kara. "Go change, I'll set the food out."

Kara disappeared a moment, returning in a pair of worn jeans, green long sleeve shirt with tattered cuffs, and scuffed brown boots. Lena swallowed.

"You look nice."

Kara glanced down at her clothes. "Thanks, but you…I mean…" She gestured in multiple directions toward Lena. "Look at you…that dress…and the shoes…and your hair down. You're stunning, as usual. A visual feast."

Lena noted the look in Kara's eyes. It wasn't hungry or lecherous. It lacked any sort of predatory intent. It was honest, sincere and it took Lena's breath away. "You know, I've been told I'm beautiful a few times in my life, but you make me feel beautiful."
Kara took Lena's hand, then pulled her down to the couch. "I'm glad, you deserve that."

They ate dinner together, well, a late meal was a better descriptor, but Lena didn’t care. Whatever it was, it was a habit that she could see herself getting used to. Something she never would have believed herself capable of.

Everyone got on her nerves and in turn, a lot of people were annoyed by the fact work constantly whirred in the back of her head. How many times had she gotten an idea during a meal, a walk, the shower…and had to drop everything to get it down? Times she needed to run to the lab because she had a breakthrough.

With Kara, it was different. She understood Lena's scientific ambition. She helped her with frustrations and solutions. Lena never ceased to be amazed at Kara's intelligence and she wondered just how much the woman held back. She figured quite a bit.

When they finished, Kara took their packages and threw them out returning a moment later with a glass of Lena's favorite wine and water for herself.

"Thank you, I really needed this after…this day, this week, this month."

"How are things going?"

Lena thought a moment. "Better than I hoped, but still a mess. There's a lot of fallout from last month, not to mention the verdict in Lex's trial. Every reporter in the city is calling me, they either think I'm going to end up just like him or…no, there's no other option, just me ending up like him."

Frowning, Kara grabbed her hand. "I don't think that and Alex doesn't think that or M'gann or Sam, and definitely not Jess. In fact, I think if Jess met anybody who thought that she would personally kick their ass. And, I bet there are a lot of other people that don't think that either."

A laugh bubbled up when Lena thought of her diminutive assistant taking on the hordes of people talking smack about her boss. "If I've learned one thing, it's to never underestimate Jess and her abilities."

Kara nodded. "You have no idea."

Lena listened as Kara talked about her adventure with Toy Man and her friend Winn. She let her soothing voice lull her into a more relaxed state of mind before she knew it they were leaning against one another on the couch, hands tangled, sides touching. The same electric jolt that had started a few weeks back, buzzed through Lena. She and Kara had not done much more than kiss, make out like teenagers, a few stolen moments on the couch in her office or on the balcony, one time at Lena's where hands wandered dangerously close to skin, but never going further. Not that she was keeping track.

Lena wasn't going to push, Kara might be the Girl of Steel, but even Lena could tell when she went rigid with nerves or fear. The last thing she ever wanted to do was make Kara feel uncomfortable or not safe in any manner whatsoever. She let Kara set the pace and didn't care how long it took because Lena knew, in the end, it would be worth it. As long as Lena and her doubts didn’t mess things up.

Lena wasn't sure, and she certainly didn't know how to phrase it, and if someone asked her to process it or assimilate in some way, she would probably tell them to go to hell, but her feelings for Kara had grown strong and intense in a short period. She didn't dare wonder how Kara felt, or ask, she might seem like a badass to people, but a rejection from Kara wouldn't feel very good.
"What are you thinking about? You have that doubty look on your face."

Lena pulled herself from her musings and looked at Kara. "My what look?"

"The one full of doubt. The one you wear when you're thinking about people hating you or your brother, your mother, actually, now that I think about it, it happens quite often. But, I've noticed it happening more recently, specifically when you're with me." Kara pulled her hand away.

Lena felt the loss of warmth instantly. "Sorry, I don't mean to get like that."

"Is there anything I can do to make you feel better? I mean…are you doubting how you feel about me? Or us? Because I know I can be a bit much and I probably invade your space too much and the whole dual identity thing is a lot and –"

"Kara, listen to me." Lena, for the first time in her life, reached out. She took Kara's hand in her own and kissed the back of it. "You just being here makes me feel better."

Kara's eyes softened. "Well, that's easy. I like being here, so I guess it's kind of a bonus."

"I guess it is."

Squeezing her hand, gently, Kara spoke, "But there's more to it…talk to me."

Could she do it? Lena thought about shrugging it off, about saying it was nothing, but in the end, she had promised to always be honest with Kara so there was no choice to make at all.

"I care about you, a lot. I want you to be happy and comfortable." Lena stopped there, her thoughts getting flustered.

"Hey, I care about you too and I'm happy and comfortable. Are you? I want those things for you as well."

Lena nodded. "Of course, you're amazing. But…I know this is all new to you and if you ever have doubts about your feelings or me, it's okay. I'll understand." Saying it out loud hurt a lot more than she anticipated, but she had to.

Kara pursed her lips. "I think I understand. You want to give me an out."

"Well, that sounds bad when you say it like that."

Smiling, Kara pulled Lena onto her lap. "Lena Luthor, I don't care about your last name or what the people in your family have done. All I care about is you and what you do. And you do good."

Lena nodded. "Right, I mean I try. I know I'm still cleaning up a huge mess and who knows where Lillian is…but there are other reasons you might want out…” Lena trailed off hoping she didn't have to go into detail because she wouldn't be able to if pressed.

Kara tilted her head to the side. "Ah…okay. I know that the fact I have no experience is scary. Imagine how I feel. But, I assure you that my feelings for you are real and only get stronger. I have no doubts about this. When we kiss, I feel like I'm floating and for a person who can fly, that says a lot! I think about you all the time. How I can make things easier for you. What I can do to surprise you. And I know I'm not great at this. I'm trying to find a balance between everything, but I promise in no part of that equation will I want out of this. You're stuck with me until you tell me to leave."

Lena exhaled, the words a balm. "I love you."
Kara kissed her. "I love you, too. And I know we've been taking this slow...like really slow, and you have been so understanding about it. And just so you know...part of it is fear because I never thought about...sex as being something I would want. But I'm scared, too. Have you heard of Google? I did some research and well let's just say that I had to spackle over some burn holes and buy a new desk. I don't ever want to hurt you and if just reading about that...well, the real thing..." Kara shook her head.

"Absolutely not. I'll find a way other than exposing you to Kryptonite."

Before Kara could argue, Lena kissed her. She tangled her fingers in Kara's hair, trying to get the message across that she would never be the cause of Kara hurting. Kara, in turn, wrapped her arms around Lena's waist, her hands holding her steady. They both pulled away several minutes later, Lena out of breath and Kara with a dazed expression.

"I'll pretty much agree to whatever you want if you promise to keep kissing me like that."

Lena would have laughed if she wasn't having a hard time focusing herself. She nodded, then returned to her spot on the couch where Kara had her head in her lap within seconds. A favorite position, apparently.

"Okay...now that that's taken care of, how was Sam? You said you saw her earlier?"

"She was good, she still gets a little bit intense when it comes to protecting me. I'm not quite sure how to feel about that."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't really explain it. It's just sometimes she gets this look on her face and her voice is different."

Lena thought about the information she'd read in the files. The main goal of Sam's treatment had been to try and make her into a weapon. Something to do with her genetic makeup, the only problem being as far as Lena could tell it was completely human. However, something made her special. Something made Lillian go after her. Part of Lena wanted to think it was a mistake and that Sam was just an innocent victim, but she'd seen the bizarre changes come over Sam as well.

"It's probably PTSD or something similar considering what the both of you went through. You're very important to her. As far as I know, she still going to therapy and M'gann is amazing with her. She probably just needs more time."

Kara nodded. "I guess. I'm just as worried about her as she is overprotective about me."

"Well, I think considering everything that happened, that's kind of understandable."

Kara picked up her phone. "Okay, it's like super late. So, these are your options. One, you let me take you home. Two, I stay here until you let me take you home."

"You drive a hard bargain. I think I'll go with option one, but we take the car. I'm still not a fan of flying."

Kara sighed, dramatically. "We're going to work on that. You know with me as your girlfriend flying..."
is going to be a thing. And it's really, really handy."

Lena picked up her bag. "If anyone's going to change my mind it'll be you."

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Kara sent off the last set of directives for her new project before closing her computer. A quick look at her watch let her know she'd finished a couple hours early. She knew Lena was in a meeting and Alex was at the DEO.

A text to Sam went unanswered.

She fidgeted with her fingers a moment before making the call.

"Hey, Kara. What's up?"

"I need a favor."

"Anything, just ask."

"I need to know if the fortress has a way to limit my powers so I can uh…you know. With…and not hurt her, you know?"

"What?"

Kara blew out a breath of frustration, catching her stapler before it flew across the room. "Lena. I don't want to hurt Lena when we….you know. Have se –"

On the other end of the line, Clark cleared his throat. "Got it. Yep. I totally know what you're asking about."

Kara pinched the bridge of her nose. "I know this is weird. You're my baby cousin, but I figured you and Lois must…so…there has to be a way. Right?"

"Um, yeah. There's a training crystal that I used. You could um…use that."

Sagging in relief, Kara smiled. "Yes. And it helped? You didn't hurt Lois?"

"Well, it just helped me with my powers and kind of focusing them. But, I've been doing it since I was young. It'll be harder for you."

"But it might help?"

"It might, but there is an alternative."

"What? Tell me?"

"A red sunlight emitter."

Kara's eyes widened. "Like on Krypton," she said, a mixture of awe and sadness in her voice.

"I've been around them but end up destroying them because they're being used to take away my powers as someone tries to kill me, but I think you and Lena might be able to come up with something. The particulars are at the fortress."

"Thanks," Kara said.
"No problem, anything else?"

"Nope, that's it."

"Great, we still on for family dinner next week?" Clark asked.

"Yeah, Jeremiah has something he wants to show me and Eliza just wrote a paper on alien physiology she wants me to read over."

"Perfect, see you then."

Kara hung up feeling infinitely better. Checking the time she ducked out of her office to grab an extra pair of socks and a thick coat.

When she entered, she noticed the mess. A chair knocked over. Vase shattered on the floor. She glanced around, scared until she saw her mom.

"Kara, is everything okay?"

"Yes, I forgot what I came home for."

Her mother laughed. "I guess it wasn't that important. Come on, you're father's waiting for us. I think he might have tried to make dinner, so be nice."

"I'm always nice."

Her mom raised an eyebrow.

"I'm usually nice."

They both laughed and when her mom put her arm around Kara and she inhaled her perfume she let out a breath she felt like she had been holding for a lifetime.
Chapter 25

Kara, fidgeted with the cuffs of her sleeves while walking into the dining room and felt an overwhelming urge to hug her father. It was so strong she hurried her pace and when she saw him all the breath fled from her lungs and tears sprung to her eyes.

"Hey, sweetie. Is everything okay? I know I'm not the best cook but I didn't think it would make you cry," he laughed, giving her that crooked smile everyone said she got from him.

"No, it's not that. I'm just really happy to see you. I feel like I haven't seen you in ages." He pulled back, straightening his arms and she felt his absence like a physical jab.

Her mother chimed in, "See, Zor-El, I told you if you kept working in that lab we wouldn't recognize you soon enough."

"I always have time for you two, and the Kelex hovering around me to put out any fires while I cook was a nice touch."

Her mother walked up to her father and kissed him on the cheek. "Just a precaution."

Kara could not help but smile at how her parents got along. She hoped to have that one day, a face crossed her mind, fair with green eyes, but was gone before she could latch onto it.

"Okay, time to eat!" Zor-El said.

Kara sat at the table. The food looked amazing despite her father and mother's insistence that it would be bad. For a moment she had a flash of different foods and delicacies at a different table with different people. She shook her head bringing herself back to the present.

She listened as her parents bantered back and forth like they usually did. He would talk about something going on with the Council and her mother would talk about an interesting case she had resided over or one that caused her great distress.

Just as they finished eating, a Kelex came to inform them they had a visitor. When Astra walked in, Kara's eyes widened and her heart began to pound.

"Hello, little one, how are you?"

Calming, Kara responded, "I'm good. How are you? And Uncle Non?"

Kara forced herself to breathe, this spike in fear and anxiety was irrational. She imagined Astra screaming out in pain, another of her asking Kara what they did to her beautiful face. Unconsciously Kara raised her hand to her cheek.

A wave of dizziness overtook her, then Astra stood next to Kara and leaned down to wrap an arm around her and give her a kiss on the top of her head. "All is good, now. I'm glad to see you up and about. Are you nervous about taking your exams?"

"She better not be. She's been studying non-stop for almost a year. Not to mention she's better in the lab than I ever was," Zor-el said.

"Then you won't mind if I steal her for a moment." Astra reached out and took Kara by the hand.

The intense fear and anxiety passed, whatever it was and Kara hoped that was the last of it.
They exited her apartment, went down the hallway, then walked out onto the observation deck. Astra pointed off into the distance.

"I'm going to be heading to Kandor soon."

"How long will you be gone?" Kara didn't like the idea of her aunt leaving, for some reason it scared her, made her fear never seeing her again.

"I'm not sure. Hopefully, not long, and I won't leave until your exams are done because I know I'll have a graduation ceremony to attend for the youngest member of the Science Guild." Astra smiled at her while wiggling her eyebrows.

Unable to help herself, Kara laughed. Her aunt had always had an unwavering faith in Kara and her abilities. Part of Kara wanted to take note of that and hold on to it, as if it was some important piece of information she'd need in the future.

"I hope you're right. I would hate to disappoint everyone."

Astra put an arm around her. "Little one, that is simply impossible."

Later that night, Kara stared out the window of her room absorbing every detail. Colors and shapes and the designs of buildings and the way the sun reflected off of the windows. How the sun made the clouds look like ripe fruits hanging from the sky. So committed to remembering all this, she pulled out some of her art supplies and went to work. Something about it familiar yet alien.

"Kara, what are you doing?" Her mother asked.

"Painting." She glanced at the easel, canvas, and paint brushes, but couldn't remember where they came from.

Her mother, sensing her discomfort stood next to her and bumped their shoulders together. "It's okay, your father made this for you when you were young. You always had a knack for the arts, but science is your true love."

Kara relaxed then, the memory of her father presenting her with all this when she was a child coming back to her. Setting down one of the brushes, she walked over to the couch with her mother. The whole way, inhaling that familiar perfume. It brought back so many memories and conflicting emotions, but most of all it comforted her. She reached for her necklace, gripping it in her hand remembering that it used to be her mother's and that her mother had given it to her… given it to her when…

"What is it? You look troubled. Are you really worried about your exams?"

Kara shook her head. "No, oh, well a little bit of course, but it's something else and I don't know what it is or how to explain it."

Her mother took both of Kara's hands in her own. "Sweetheart, everything's okay and everything will be fine. Trust me. Your father and I love you so much and we will do anything to keep you safe."

The words had a calming effect on Kara, a balm to her soul, but also seemed ominous. She shook the feeling off, more interested in the warmth and comfort her mother was providing.

As she got ready for bed, her reflection in the mirror caught her attention. For some reason, she felt like it was different. Her hair was darker than it should be and her eyes brighter and bluer than she
recalled. She ran a finger on the left side of her face looking for something that was no longer there. When she stripped off her robe, she glanced down her body, another wave of something off hit her. She brushed a hand along the skin on her arms and then her stomach. A spot on her thigh called out to her, but it was smooth and unmarked.

A tingle of apprehension gripped her.

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Alex pressed end and slipped her phone into her pocket. Kara hadn't answered her phone in over a day.

She'd been worried the first time she missed a call but had chalked it up to being overprotective. By the third missed call, she called Clark. He'd said Kara had mentioned going to The Fortress to look something up. When Alex pressed, he got flustered and said it had something to do with Lena. No matter how many threats she made, he wouldn't give up the reason. Now, a day later she was officially off the charts concerned.

She wanted to trust Kara and let her know that Alex had faith in her, but this just wasn't like her. She went to her apartment where her cell phone was pinging and knocked on the door. No answer. Not really caring because the level of concern Alex was experiencing was nearing critical, she used her key to enter.

She knew immediately that something was wrong. Two bar stools by the kitchen counter were knocked over, the dining room table was angled odd and a fruit bowl was broken on the floor. Moving deeper into the space with her gun out, Alex spotted the shattered coffee table. Then, she saw Kara, lying on the floor with some sort of strange thing on her chest, her heart thudded painfully against her ribs. Black tentacles spread out around the room and Alex stepped over them.

"Kara." Alex knelt next to her, touching the side of Kara's face. "Kara, can you hear me?"

With no sign of life other than the subtle rise and fall of Kara's chest, Alex called J'onn, then Clark, then forced herself to take a few calming breaths and assess the situation. Whatever was on her chest was alive and slithering around. Kara was unresponsive and pale.

"What do we have?" J'onn asked before he landed.

"I was hoping you'd know. I've never seen anything like this before."

J'onn knelt on the other side of Kara, his eyes examining the thing attached to her chest. "I don't know, but we'll find out. We need to get her to the DEO."

Another set of feet landing, the swish of a cape. "I'll take her. You two stay here and find out what happened," Clark said.

"Neither of you know what this is? Is she going to be okay? Why can't you just rip it off, Clark?" Alex holstered her gun, and watched as Clark cradled Kara in his arms.

"I don't know what it is. But if it can take down Kara, it can do the same to me. I won't risk that, I need to be able to help her."

"Take her to the National City facility, it's better equipped and closer," J'onn said.

And with that, Clark was in the air.
Alex felt useless in helping Kara, again. A feeling she didn’t like and didn’t plan on letting stick around.

"I'll head back to the DEO and see about removing that thing from Kara."

"I'll have a look around, go over her apartment and make sure there's no more of those things and see if I can find any clues as to where the hell it came from. I'll meet you back there when I'm done."

Not needing to be told twice, Alex was out the door and on her bike in under 30 seconds. By the time she reached the facility, they had set Kara up in one of the lab rooms. A laser saw was being prepped and Alex stepped into the room.

Clark stood with his arms crossed, an anxious look on his face which didn't fit while he was wearing the suit.

"Do you know what it is? Is she okay?"

"I'm not sure. I've seen something similar in the archives, but it was never supposed to be a threat to us here."

Alex blew out a breath. "I'm going to see if we can cut this thing off of her. Might want to stay back just in case."

He nodded but remained in place.

She went into the operating room and took over. "Everyone, listen up. We're going to be removing this parasite or whatever the hell it is off of Supergirl. We've never dealt with this before, so be prepared for anything."

When Alex lowered the laser and turned it on, the thing on Kara squeezed, her blood pressure dropped, then her body arched off the table. Alex immediately backed off. Whatever this thing was, it wasn't going easy.

She wanted to try again, she wanted to tear the thing off with her own hands for hurting her sister, but in the end what little reason she had left won out.

Knowing there was little she could do, Alex cleared out the room and let Clark in. A few people gave him sympathetic looks, others stared at him in awe. He noticed none of it, his full attention on Kara.

He leaned over her and placed a hand on her forehead. "Hey, cuz, we're gonna take care of this. You hang in there, for me, please. I need you."

Alex turned away when she saw him wipe at his eyes.

"I'm going to the Fortress to see if there's anything in the archives."

Before she could respond, he was gone.

Alex pulled a stool up next to Kara's bed, sat on it, and took one of Kara's hands into her own.

"I know you're in there, somewhere. I hope you can hear me. I'm going to help you. I'm going to get you out of this no matter what. I'm going to protect you. I'm going to keep my promise. I'm going to get you back." She wiped the tears falling on her face and closed her eyes.

Alex thought of everything Kara had been through already and anger bubbled up in her that
something like this could happen. Why now? Who would do this? Why would they do this?

Before Alex had a chance to completely spiral, J'onn showed up.

"I've been through her apartment, there's nothing to give us any clue where this came from." He put a hand on Kara's forehead then closed his eyes and murmured something in a language Alex had never heard before. "I take it you were unable to remove it?"

Alex shook her head. "The minute we tried it tightened its grip on her. They have some sort of symbiotic relationship. Must be a defense mechanism."

"We'll figure it out Alex, she's going to be okay."

Needing to move, or not strong enough to sit next to her sister and watch her die, Alex got to her feet. "I'm going back to her apartment, maybe you missed something."

J'onn nodded, the expression on his face letting her know that he understood. Her thoughts were chaotic and messy as she headed towards Kara's. She alternated between fear that almost stopped her in her tracks when she thought of losing her sister and anger at whoever had done this.

When she entered the loft that had been her place for so long, the place where she had spent many a night crying for her sister, praying to a God she didn't even believe in to bring her back or give her the strength to find her. The emotions were so overwhelming, she almost fell to the floor.

To lose Kara now would be the cruelest thing fate could do to her.

"She stayed with you for almost two years then disappeared until last year," Astra said. "She was taken by an organization, they're the ones responsible for her scars."

Alex turned, not bothering to drop her weapon. She knew there was no way she'd be faster than a Kryptonian, but she didn't care. Astra might have answers and Alex would find a way to get them.

"Why are you here? Because if you're not here to fucking help her get the hell out."

Astra cocked her head to the side. "She's been infected by a Black Mercy."

Alex didn't move. "And you just happen to know that because…"

"Her uncle did it. He doesn't want her to stop his plans. I came here as soon as I found out."

Glancing at the ground, Astra shook her head. "You were raised as sisters. I know that bond." She turned toward a wall Kara had taken to posting photographs on. "Kara is my niece. The closest thing I have ever known to having a daughter. I wanted to keep her safe. Protect her the way I was unable to back on Krypton."

Alex lowered her gun. "That still makes no sense to me. Why fight her? When she talked about you
it was with adoration."

Astra's eyes whipped up to Alex at that. "That's why I had to fight her. I'm not who she thinks I am."

"Let me guess, you made some bad decisions that landed you on Fort R'ozz. Here, you've been planning something with your crew that isn't going to be great for humans. You're scared Kara will judge you or stop loving you or think less of you. But, here's the thing, and really, if you knew her you'd already know this. Despite every shitty thing that's happened to her, Kara has never given up. Not on the people she loves, and you are one of those people. So, please, don't give up on her. The fact you're here tells me you want to help."

"That's not why. I have done things that others see as wrong, but in the end, I was right. Krypton died and with it everything I love. I stand by my decisions, all of them. I had to fight Kara to see how strong her conviction is to protect you, humans." Astra's expression turned to one of disgust. "Unfortunately, it's strong. But, she's still my family and I love her. So, all I can tell you is that the Black Mercy puts her in a dream state, but not just any…her perfect life. The only way to get the parasite to let go of her is to make her reject the dream."

Alex swallowed. After everything Kara had been through, a nice, ideal life where everything was perfect would be damn near impossible to give up, let alone the fact Alex had no idea how she would even communicate with her.

"Thank you."

"I wish I could tell her how sorry I was."

Alex met Astra's eyes. "You will, because I'm not losing her." And with that, Alex was out the door and on her way to the one person she knew would be able to help.

***

Lena frowned at her phone. She knew Kara had certain responsibilities as her alter ego, but she usually sent a text or something so Lena could cover for her. This morning, however, nothing.

She drummed her fingers on the table, worry bubbling up in her gut. There were no news reports over the last twenty-four hours about Supergirl. She continued to stare at her phone, willing a text to appear from Kara.

The old insecurity she felt resurfaced and she wondered if Kara had decided to run away. If the Luthor name and all it carried as well as Lena's parentage had become too much. Tears formed in her eyes. It's not like she could blame Kara, in fact, she was surprised it hadn't happened sooner.

A second later she forced herself to calm down. Kara had never lied to her. Kara cared about her, loved her even. Lena needed to get over this or she'd ruin the best thing that had ever happened to her.

Nodding, she returned to her work when a buzzing noise distracted her, one that wasn't her phone. She shot an annoyed glare at her intercom, not answering it. A few seconds later there was a disturbance outside her office, then raised voices, then Alex Danvers was breaking down her door and looking at Lena with an expression that terrified her.

"I need your help. Now."

Lena grabbed her bag, walked to the door, and turned to Jess. "Clear my schedule for the rest of… just clear it all. I'll let you know when I'll be back."
"Yes, Ms. Luthor. I'll take care of everything."

Lena followed Alex, fear about Kara making her antsy. "Was it Kryptonite?"

Alex shook her head.

Unsure what else could take down the Girl of Steel, Lena felt panic rising in her. "Is she..." Her voice broke, unable to finish the thought.

"She's alive. Some sort of alien parasite has attached itself to her." Alex stared straight ahead, but Lena knew her well enough to spot the fear hidden in the tension.

"How can I help?"

"She's in a coma and when we can't remove it without killing Kara. We have to find a way to communicate with her."

They exited the elevator in the parking garage and Lena got into a large, black SUV. She ran over all the tech her company had as well as those she'd taken over. What Alex was asking was cutting edge, merging two consciousnesses. Could it be done? Ten minutes ago Lena would have said no, now, however, Lena would find a way to do it no matter what.

By the time they reached the facility, a tall building downtown, Lena had managed to come up with a few ideas and bounce them back and forth with Jack under the guise of a hypothetical situation.

"I thought your place was out in the desert?"

"This place is closer and has a better lab."

Alex handed Lena a lanyard. "Wear this, for now, we'll get you set up on the list later."

Once in the room with Kara, Lena's heart stopped. A grotesque mockery of a plant had wrapped itself around Kara. Machines beeped and hummed. Lena took quick steps to Kara's side and ran her hand along Kara's cheek. No fever, though she didn't know if that was a risk or not, but the contact made her feel better.

She traced Kara's arm down to her hand and tangled their fingers together. "Hey, I'm here. Alex and I are gonna get you out of this, I promise."

Alex cleared her throat, "What can I do to help? What do you need?"

Lena inspected the parasite as best she could then the machines hooked up to Kara. "I have a list."

Lena rattled off all the items she would need as well as a few extras just in case. She'd seen schematics of something that could pull this off when she'd gone through Lord Technology's assets, but she planned on refining it.

While agents wheeled in what she'd asked for, her eyes kept returning to Kara. The slow rise and fall of her chest, the unusually pale complexion. Forcing herself to shake off the negative thoughts, she went to work.

"Can I help with anything?"

Lena thought a moment. "Something a bit more comfortable to work in and tell me whatever it is this thing is doing to her."
Alex disappeared a moment, then returned with some black training pants, a grey sweatshirt, and some sneakers. She shut the door and drew the curtains while Lena changed.

"From what I've been told Kara thinks she's living her best life. The only way to get this damn thing off of her is to get Kara to reject whatever fantasy it's implanted into her brain."

Lena bit her lip in thought. "Okay, let me get back to work. You look like you could use a break."

Alex didn't move, just stood at the end of Kara's bed. "I promised to keep her safe."

"You have and you will continue to do so. Why don't you call Sam? She'd probably like to be here."

"Yeah, let me know if you need anything. Anything okay?"

Lena smiled. "I will."

When Alex left the room, Lena went to work. She'd had Jess send her the necessary files from the archives. Building it was the easy part, making it compatible with both a human brain and a Kryptonian one was the tricky part. She'd have to make two headpieces and calibrate them. For that, she'd need a brain scan of Kara.

As if reading her mind, Alex walked in then. "I thought you might need this."

Lena accepted the tablet, examining various things.

"Sam's on her way in."

Lena glanced up. "Good."

"Yeah, she was pretty upset about it. I…I sometimes forget how close they are."

"They were there for each other when they needed someone. I can't imagine what they went through, but I'm glad they had each other."

"Me too, it's just hard sometimes. I feel like I let her down." Alex stared at the floor, her usual confidence gone.

"Alex, you didn't. Kara hasn't really talked to me about the specifics, but she did tell me that she thought of you often. The knowledge you were safe made her feel better."

"That's Kara, always thinking of others. That's why I have to look out for her and look what happened…"

"How about from now on, we look out for each other?" Lena offered.

"Yeah, that would be good."

About to say more, Lena stopped when Alex sat on a chair next to the bed and took Kara's hand in her own. "I promised to protect her."

"I'll make sure you don't break that promise."

Alex didn’t respond, caught in memories of her own for the moment.

Lena spared a second to squeeze Kara's hand then got back to work.
Kara stood in front of the crowd, all her anxieties gone. She'd passed her exams and was now an official member of the Science Guild.

Her mother, father, Aunt Astra, Uncle Jor-El, Aunt Lara, and Kal-El, all sat in the front row looking at her with expressions filled with so much love and pride it made Kara's heart swell. She smiled at them while she took her oath, memorizing the moment.

Afterward, they gathered back at the house, a full spread of all of Kara's favorite foods waiting for them.

Her mother came up next to her and hugged her from behind. "Have no fear, I didn’t let your father near the kitchen."

Kara laughed, her mother's picking on her father's cooking, while a regular thing, felt like something she hadn't heard in ages. She leaned into her mother, inhaling the light scent of her perfume. Closing her eyes, she allowed herself to relax.

For the past few weeks, she'd been certain something was wrong, but slowly, she'd begun to realize this was, in fact, her reality. She had her parents and cousin and aunt and everything she'd ever wanted.

Piling her plate full of food, she headed toward where Astra was talking with a young man.

"Kara, I was just about to go find you." Astra enveloped Kara in a hug, holding on tight. "I'm so proud, Little One. So proud."

"Thank you."

"I'll be leaving soon, but I hope you'll come see me."

"Of course I will!"

Astra put her hands on Kara's shoulders. "Remember, you're one of the brightest, strongest people I know. You're meant for great things."

Kara's chest tightened. "Thank you. That means so much from you."

"What's going on here? Am I missing a moment? Astra, you know I hate that," Alura said.

Kara pulled her mother in and the three of them embraced. A moment later they pulled away, smiling and wiping their eyes.

"Sorry to interrupt, but can I steal Kara for a moment?" Zor-El asked.

Making sure to take her plate with her, Kara followed her father. He led them to the balcony that overlooked the city. She inhaled the smell, let her eyes roam over every inch, absorb each color.

"How's the food? Your mother wouldn’t let me into the kitchen, but I still managed to make you this."

"Is that an Oregus cake?" Not waiting for an answer, Kara took a bite. "It's been so long since I had one of these."

Zor-El grinned. "At least you appreciate my cooking."
"You do make the best cakes." Kara took a third bite, savoring the taste.

"I just wanted a minute to tell you how proud I am that you're my daughter. There has never been a father as proud as I am right now."

"I wouldn't have been able to do any of this without you. All those hours you spent teaching me and letting me work in your lab. Thank you for believing in me."

Her father hugged her, tight. "I'll always believe in you."

After the party, Kara settled in her room. Gifts and flowers overflowed on multiple tables and she sat at stared at them. Her life was perfect. She had everything she ever wanted. But, as usual, when she had thoughts like this, a small voice perked up at the back of her mind. She couldn't quite make it out, but it left her on edge.

"Kara? Is everything okay?"

She looked over and saw Kal-El in her doorway. A small bouquet in his hands. The voice in her head forgotten.

"Everything's fine. What are you doing up? Does Jor-El know you're here?"

He ran over to her in that awkward way twelve-year-old boys do when they're excited but don't want you to know. Sticking out his hand, a slight blush covered his face.

"These are for you. I picked them myself."

Kara accepted the flowers. "Thank you, they're beautiful."

He sat next to her, his expression serious. "Will you still have time for me now that you're in the guild?"

Setting the flowers down, she met his eyes. "I'll always have time for you. You're my baby cousin, it's my job to look out for you."

His eyes, a blue that matched hers, widened. "I can look out for you, too! We can be a team."

She scrunched her face. "Sounds like a plan."

He leaned into her, and she rested her head atop his. Closing her eyes she prayed to Rao this feeling of contentment never went away.

***

Alex noted the time, Lena had been working for the last four hours and Sam had been moving between anger at the person who did this to Kara and forcing Alex to breathe.

"She's going to be okay, she's strong, Alex. So strong."

"I know, but she's living her perfect life right now. How do I talk her out of that?"

Sam pulled on Alex's hand as she paced by her. "Hey, we'll figure something out."

Unable to stay still, Alex resumed her pacing. "You know, she was only with us for a couple of years, but I never stopped thinking about her. Never stopped wanting my sister back...and then I got her back and it was the best feeling ever." She swallowed. "She was so skinny and weak, and part of
her had given up, but she still fought. She didn’t even realize it, but every time she ate, every therapy session, all of it was her fighting. And now look at her, she's Supergirl. A hero. She has saved so many people and…” Alex rubbed her eyes, wondering where all the tears were coming from.

Sam came up beside her, cupped her face with her hands, and looked straight into her eyes. "We will get her back. She has a lot of fight left in her."

Alex glanced into the room where Kara lay. Lena worked, glasses askew, every few minutes reaching out to touch Kara or whisper something to her. If Alex had any doubts about how Lena felt about her sister, the last few hours pretty much obliterated every one of them.

Clark had come by after going to the Fortress but only confirmed what Astra had already told her. He’d sat with Kara, whispering a few things to her, then took off to find Non.

"Should I bring in M'gann? She has this mind thing she can do," Sam said.

Alex tore her eyes away from Kara. "No, it doesn’t work on Kryptonians, plus I think J'onn has reached his limits with me bringing in two civilians already."

"Okay, but if you change your mind you know you can call her anytime."

"I know."

"I'm gonna go sit with Kara and see if Lena needs an extra set of hands or something."

Alex sighed. "Good idea, I'll grab us some fresh coffee."

She watched Sam walk up to Lena and offer a reassuring smile before sharing a few words. Lena shook her head then went back to her computer. Sam sat next to Kara, closed her eyes, and held her hand.

Alex made her way to the small area they kept coffee and other things. She prepared a new pot and hit brew. While she waited, she tried to imagine what it would be like when she was linked with Kara. She didn’t know how much time she’d have. Would they even be able to communicate? So many unknowns.

Forcing the fear away, Alex poured three cups of coffee and made her way back to the room. Sam accepted the drink with a smile, Lena motioned to the table beside her, wrapped up in something on the screen in front of her.

"I hate to be that person, but any news?" Alex asked.

Lena pushed her hair behind her ear. "Actually, I think so. Everything's calibrated. The theory is sound. I've run every diagnostic known as well as a few extras three times." She blew out a breath, rubbing her eyes.

"Okay, any idea what I can expect when you send me in?"

Sam stood. "About that, I was thinking I should go in."

Alex's eyes snapped to Sam. "No way."

Sam held her hands up. "Hear me out, I used to talk Kara down. It's what we did for each other."

Grinding her teeth, Alex put her hands on her hips. "I understand that, but you're not going in. This is a DEO operation."
"You're not being reasonable!" Sam waved her arms, her expression darkening.

***

Lena sipped the coffee Alex had brought her. "Right now, neither one of you is going in."

"What are you talking about? You said it was ready." Alex turned her attention to Lena.

"It is, but I need to be one hundred percent certain that nothing will go wrong. I need to know that this won't hurt Kara more and that whoever goes in is safe." Lena clenched her fist, she had to keep it together.

She was a genius, she didn’t deny that. She created things all the time. Developed tech that altered the world. But this, this was different. This was to save Kara. This was the most important thing she had ever done.

"Do what you need, but we're running out of time," Alex said before leaving the room.

Sam raised an eyebrow. "Want to tell me what the real issue is?"

"Are you always this perceptive?"

"Yep, now talk to me."

Lena set the mug down. "This has never been done before. I don't know what I'm sending someone into and if something happens to Alex, Kara would never forgive me. Same with you. And all I want to do is strap myself in so I can talk to her."

Sam smiled, sad but sincere. "I get it, but you need to be out here in case something happens, which it won't. Why don't you send me in now? Let me go bring Kara back. I promise I can do it."

"You know I can't make that decision. We need to wait for Alex to come back."

Sam's eyes sparkled. "Send me in."

"Ms. Luthor, Agent Danvers tells me you've come up with a way to help Kara." J'onn entered the room, Alex beside him.

Lena nodded, Sam's odd demeanor forgotten. "It's not proven but the design is sound. I can link someone to Kara's brainwaves and connect them to whatever Kara is experiencing."

J'onn stood next to Kara, a sad look on his face. "Then let's get our girl."

Alex came up to Lena and pulled her aside. "I need you to promise me something."

"Okay."

"I mean it, you need to promise."

Lena knew what it would be, and she also knew she'd keep it because Kara's life depended on it.

"I need you to keep me in there as long as it takes. Do not let anyone pull me out until Kara is safe. Understand?" Alex's grip was tight, her voice steady and firm.

"Bring her back," Lena said.
"This is a mistake. What if something happens? Alex, I can't lose you, too! Let me go in, I'm not as important as you guys." Sam tried to pull Alex off the table, but J'onn held her in place.

"Hey, that's not true, has never been true, and most certainly will never be true," Alex said.

"I second that. Sam, you're one of my best friends...I can't lose you," Lena said, the words awkward and clunky but important.

"Please, Alex, don't do this. I have a bad feeling."

Lena's stomach dropped. Alex moved from the table set up for her and went to Sam. While the two talked, Lena checked every wire, every outlet, every bit of machinery she could. After Alex shared a kiss with a teary Sam and told her how much she loved her, she went back over to the table and lay down.

"Ready?" Lena asked.

"As I'll ever be."

Lena cleared her throat. "One thing you should know, if Kara dies while you're in her subconscious, you'll be trapped there."

Alex stiffened. "Noted."

Lena attached the relay, hooked everything up to the computer and let the machine take over. She whispered a quick prayer knowing it couldn’t hurt, then she hit enter on the keyboard.

Alex went slack, but her vitals remained steady.

There was no change in Kara, which Lena interpreted as a good thing.

***

Kara set down the brush she'd been using and studied her painting. The landscape was different than anything she recalled ever seeing and the colors she painstakingly mixed were odd but familiar.

"Sweetheart, what is that?" her mother asked.

"I'm not sure really. Just something I made up I guess."

Her mother examined it, finger tapping on her chin in a way Kara recognized as thoughtful.

"I like it, it's unique. Now, if you're finished here I thought you might like to join me in prayer to Rao."

Kara brightened at the idea, it was something the two had been doing together the last few weeks. "I'd love to."

Her mother looped her arm through Kara's and led her toward the exit, but they didn’t quite make it. A woman with auburn hair and dressed in a dark outfit stood in front of them.

"Kara! Oh my god, it's so good to see you. Are you okay?" the woman asked.

"Who are you?"
Before Kara could say more, her mother had pulled her back into her room.

"That's a complicated answer, but I'm here to help you."

The woman's eyes were pleading and pulled at Kara's heart. She stepped forward, reaching for Kara. Kara stepped back. "I'm sorry, but I don't know you."

"Kara, stop talking to her. Security is on the way. We'll have this sorted out quickly."

"Mother, there's no need, it's obvious this is some sort of misunderstanding. She needs help, she needs compassion." The more she stared at this woman the more the voice in the back of her head buzzed.

The woman moved forward but kept her hands up. "Kara, please listen to me. This isn't real. You've been infected by something called a Black Mercy. All of this is a dream." She motioned to the room around them. "I'm so sorry. I know you don't want to believe me, but you need to trust me."

Kara swallowed, something about this woman was familiar. "Why should I trust you?"

"Because I'm your sister. Back on Earth, right now, you're in a coma. A stupid parasite's killing you."

"Earth?"

Alura scoffed. "Why would we send her to that primitive place?"

"Kara please, believe me, you're a hero. You're Supergirl. The world needs you, but I don't care about that. Right now I'm being selfish because I need you."

"That's enough. You need to leave," A deep voice boomed.

Kara turned at the sound of her father's voice. In her whole life, she had never heard him utter a word in anger, but right now his eyes were dark and full of hate. They weren't the eyes of the man who spent hours making her her favorite cake when she didn't feel well.

"Father, what's going on?"

The woman surged forward and grabbed Kara's arm. "I don't know how long I have. Please, this isn't real. I know you want it to be. After all you've been through…so much pain, too much, and I don't blame you for not wanting to come back to it, but I need you to come back. I need my sister." Tears flowed freely from the woman's eyes and Kara's heart lurched at the sight.

Four armed guards entered then and the woman took them out with ease. When she grabbed one of their weapons, Kara's father stood in front of her.

"I won't let you hurt her."

Tossing the weapon on the floor, the woman shook her head. "I would never hurt her. I promised to protect her and I'll keep that promise until the day I die."

The words bounced around Kara's head. She had to cover her eyes at the conflicting image she had of a young version of the woman in front of her holding a book of some sort and making an odd gesture with her hand. The floor beneath her rolled. Her painting fell from its easel.

"I…did I make that promise, too?"
The woman nodded. "Yes! Please, you're so strong, and I don't mean as a superhero, I mean as Kara. You inspire me every day. You've been through hell and back yet you inspire others, you're a beacon of hope. You give me hope. I love you."

Astra appeared, a scowl on her face. "You can't have her."

Kara's eyes popped open when the two started to fight. She moved toward them but her mother and father held her back.

"Kara, no. Stay with us. We're your family."

"I'm your family! Lena and Sam need you, and so does Clark…Kal-El your cousin. The world needs Supergirl," the woman yelled.

Astra landed a hard hit and the woman stumbled but didn't give up. Something about that, something about the image of this woman not staying down resonated with Kara making the words real.

She turned to her parents, their expressions void and eyes black. She swallowed, pulling herself away from them.

Astra had a team ready to execute Alex, and all Kara could do as the world crumbled around her was reach for the hand of a stranger and hope her instincts were right.

Sounds came to her first.

Beeping.

Crying.

Someone yelling about taking her out too soon.

Slowly, bits and pieces of her life came back to her. As reality sank in, she made herself remember the taste of Oregus cake and the perfume her mother wore. The view of the skyline from her apartment. The colors she'd forgotten. The feel of fabrics long forgotten. A reflection with no imperfections.

Each thing caused a stab of pain in her heart.

Swallowing, she forced a breath and felt something slither its way off of her.

"Look! It's dead."

Then a hand was wrapping around hers.

"Kara? Can you hear me? It's Alex. Lena and Sam are here, too."

Refusing to open her eyes, Kara held on to the image of her family.

"Something's happening at one of Lord's old facilities. It looks like Non and his people are there," Lena said, a hint of panic in her voice.

Kara pushed herself up, not able to make eye contact with anyone.

"Make that two facilities."

"Kara, you okay?" Alex asked.
She shook her head. "I will be though, what's going on?"

"Kara! You're okay," Kal ran in and hugged her and she melted into it. Flashes of a younger version wanting to team up with her made her tear up.

"Yeah, I'm okay."

He put his hands on her shoulders and lowered his head to make eye contact. "What can I do?"

"I'll be fine, but I think we have something to deal with." She motioned toward Lena who was pointing to a monitor with two flashing dots.

"Damn, now they're at L-Corp," Lena hissed before entering a series of commands.

Glad at the distraction, and feeling guilty about that, Kara left with Kal to find out what was happening and put a stop to it.

***

Alex set her weapon on the table.

So close.

Too close.

She'd almost killed Astra.

Over the comms she heard Kara yelling at Non, about how he made her lose them all over again. How he made her come back to this place where she knew nothing but torture and pain.

Alex's heart broke at that. She removed the earpiece knowing these were not things meant for her to hear.

Now, back at the desert base, they had Non in custody. Astra was out there, but Alex knew she wasn't a threat. For now.

"What are you doing?" Alex asked, J'onn fending off two of the aliens protecting Astra while she worked on something.

"Saving your world."

"Why do I get the feeling that doesn't mean good things for us?"

Astra turned. "Is Kara okay?"

"Do you care?"

In the blink of an eye, Astra had her hand around Alex's throat. "You know I do. I told you how to save her. I know with your primitive technology it's unlikely, but did you succeed?"

Alex nodded.

Astra loosened her grip. "Good. That's good. I never meant for her to get hurt."

"Yeah, I'm sure whatever you're planning to do won't hurt her at all."

Alex dropped to the ground when Astra let go.
"I'm saving this world. She won't lose another one. You have no idea what it feels like to lose everything, she does. She'll understand."

"You don't know her at all."

Astra loomed over her. "I'm her blood. Her family."

Standing her ground, Alex braced herself. "I'm her sister and I will always protect her."

"Everything okay, Alex?" J'onn stood next to her with a mug of coffee in one hand and a plate of cookies in the other.

"No, but that's kind of the status quo." She took the mug and grabbed a cookie.

"How's Kara?"

"I don't know. She brought Non in then left. I think she needs some time."

J'onn nodded, his expression thoughtful. "I'd imagine it was hard for her. After everything she's been through to give up the perfect life. That takes a special kind of strength."

Kara's words replayed in Alex's head. "I don't know why she did it. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad she did, but I still don't know why."

J'onn met her eyes. "I have a pretty good idea."

Alex had no response to that other than to head into her office and finally let the tears fall. Tears for how grateful she was Kara was alive and well. Tears for everything Kara had to lose, again. Tears for how much shit Kara had to go through, none of which she deserved.

Later, she wasn’t sure how long, she sent a text to Kara telling her she loved her and she was here whenever she was ready, and then one to Sam then headed to M'gann's.

***

Lena surveyed the damage to her building. It wasn’t as bad as she'd expected, but worse than she'd hoped.

Once again, she had no idea what was done, but she'd narrowed down their target to the satellite system. She ordered her security and technicians to work around the clock and to take everything offline until the issue was resolved.

She'd then called Jack, and of course, he had no problem letting her piggyback off his systems so her business didn’t come to a total standstill.

With that done, she sat at her desk with a scotch in hand.

"Ms. Luthor, is there anything else I can do?"

"No, Jess. You've gone above and beyond for the day. Go home and take tomorrow off."

Jess made a face. "Are you taking the day off?"

Lena raised a brow.

"I didn’t think so. I'll see you at the usual time, with coffee." She cleared her throat. "Will Ms.
Danvers be coming in?"

Swallowing over the lump in her throat, Lena forced out an answer. "I'm not sure."

Jess nodded. "I hope she feels better soon."

And with that, Lena was alone in her office with a thousand thoughts, but only the ones of Kara mattered to her.

The expression on her face when she came to. The others didn't note it, but Lena had been watching her biorhythms and knew the moment Kara regained consciousness. The way her face morphed from sleep to pain and profound loss took Lena's breath away. All she wanted to do was run over and comfort Kara, wrap her up and promise everything would be okay. But she knew it would be a hollow promise at best. Lena knew the transition from an ideal life to reality would be excruciating as the perfect memories intermingled with the real ones and reality finally sank in.

There hadn't been time to talk, Non chose that moment to do whatever it was he was planning. Kara was gone in seconds leaving Lena, Alex, and Sam unsure what to do or say.

When Alex took off, Lena was left with Sam. They decided to leave, heading to M'gann's. They talked about random things, staying away from serious stuff. The day's emotional toll finally sinking in.

Once they arrived at the bar, M'gann took one look at them then pointed to a corner table. A moment later she appeared with a couple of drinks and sandwiches. Lena picked at hers while Sam explained everything that had happened.

When done, M'gann pulled Sam close. "I know you're mad Alex went in, but you have to know she cares about you. She'd never risk losing you. And to be honest, I'm glad, because I don't want to lose you either."

Sam, about as capable as Lena when it came to dealing with emotions, just ate her sandwich.

Lena, on the other hand, was a mess. What should she say to Kara? Should she ask? Let Kara lead the conversation? Should she even call her? Give her space?

As soon as Lena had been given the all clear, she headed into L-Corp, where she had been ever since.

She had composed over a hundred texts to Kara and deleted them all. The one she'd finally decided on was simple and sincere. "I'm here, always." A response came in quick, "I'll see you soon."

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Kara hovered over the middle of some ocean. She didn’t really care, all she wanted was the inky darkness. The lack of noise. The total alienness of if compared to her recent memories, if that's what they were. She wasn’t quite sure how to categorize them.

Anger flowed through her in a way she had never experienced. She'd almost killed Non, as it was, she was pretty sure he was blind.

Even when she'd faced off against Red Tornado, the feeling was different. Now, Everything felt raw and exposed.

"Hey, you can tell me to leave, but I just wanted to check on you and let you know I'm here if you
ever want to talk," Kal... Clark said. She'd have to get used to that, again.

"Is it dead?"

"I took care of it."

The hard tone of his voice reassured her that the Black Mercy was gone.

"Thank you."

They floated like that for a few minute or hours, Kara wasn’t really sure. Time for her had been messed up. A few months back with her family living her perfect life had actually been half a day here.

"I don’t know if this is the wrong time, but I'm glad you're here."

Kara turned to him. "You were there, well, the younger version of you. You brought me flowers and wanted to team up with me."

He smiled. "Sounds like me, except young me was super awkward."

"Oh, you were." A small smile came to her face at the memory.

"You really need to talk to my mom sometime, the stories she has...wow. I have no idea how they did it."

Kara caught a shooting star out of the corner of her eye. "Easy, they love you."

An uneasy silence settled between them and she wondered if she was back to this. After Alex and Clark had rescued her, these instances happened often. No one knowing what to say. Everyone thinking she was about to shatter. Though, to be fair, it was a crap situation. Not wanting to go back to that, to regress on all the progress she made, she took a deep breath.

"Hey, I know you're worried and Alex is climbing the walls, but I'm going to be okay."

"I know, and if you need anything you can talk to me, you know that, right?"

"I do."

"Good, I'll give you some space, plus I told Lois I'd fill her in on everything."

"Thanks for coming, I should head back, too. I need to talk to Alex."

They hugged and Kara couldn’t help compare him to the dream version and mourn the little boy she never got to see grow up.

Ten minutes later Kara landed on Alex's balcony and tapped on the window.

"Hey, come in...How are you?" Alex winced. "Sorry, that was stupid. Forget I asked that, instead imagine I asked you what flavor."

Letting out a sigh, Kara closed her eyes as she fell on the couch. "Mint chocolate chip with cookie dough."

Alex went to the kitchen and came back with two pints of ice cream and a spoon.
"This is nice," Kara said after her first bite. "We didn't have ice cream on Krypton."

Alex made a face. "That should be a crime."

Kara nodded, easing into their banter. "Agreed. Though it was nice to have some of my favorite meals, even if it wasn't real."

"It was based on your memories so all those tastes and smells are real."

Kara twitched her lips. "True, and they tasted so much better than I remember." She fidgeted with her spoon. "Astra was there. It was so weird, the first time she appeared I had this visceral reaction to her, but then she was just my aunt. Supportive and strong, believing in me."

"She's the reason you're here. She told me how to help you."

"You're the reason I'm here. Lena's the reason I'm here. Astra might have told you what to do, but you're the one who did it and Lena's the one who made it happen. I know she's my aunt, but after tonight, I don't know what she's doing, but I'm not losing any more people I love." Kara managed to keep it together, thankfully.

Alex glanced up then. "I know the feeling; I'd do anything to keep you safe. And I know it was hard and sucked to leave that place, but I'm glad to have you back."

Wiping at her eyes, Kara leaned her head on Alex's shoulder. "It was hard, I'm not going to lie, but there was a part of me that never felt right. Little things that didn't fit, but I could never figure it out."

"You're here now and that's all that matters." Alex pulled Kara close, and the two of them leaned on one another.

Kara didn't say anything. Deep down, she'd known that the life she had was too good to be true. All the hell and trauma she'd been through had left a mark, deeper than even she'd realized.

Part of her wanted to fall into that, but she thought of Clark and Alex and then Lena.

No, she wouldn't let that happen. Not if she could help it.

"I'm going to see Lena, I want to thank her."

"Good, and thank her for me, too. I can't remember if I did and she...well, she did amazing."

Kara got to her feet. "Yeah, amazing is kind of her thing."

"She really loves you, ya know?"

"I love her, too."

Alex shook her head. "I know, but that woman...she's a keeper, Kara. She'd do anything for you. She's the real deal."

"I know. And it's mutual."

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Lena pushed away from her desk, ready to call it a day, or night as the case may be. As she grabbed her briefcase, she couldn't stop the smile when she heard the familiar sound of feet landing on her balcony.
She turned, and before she could process what was happening she was being lifted off the ground and surrounded with the aroma of sunlight and lavender.

"I missed you. Sorry it took so long to get here, but I wanted to be able to be with you uninterrupted and I had a few things to take care of." Kara set her down then ran a hand down her cheek. "Hi."

"Hi, yourself," Lena said.

Kara tapped her chin, then sniffed the air. "I see you skipped eating. Can I interest you in a romantic meal?"

Lena cocked her head in thought. "Hmm, romantic you say? Would it be with you?"

Kara nodded.

"Okay, I can work with that. And where did you say it would be?"

"I didn't, it's a surprise."

Lena pursed her lips trying to keep up the façade but failed. She was too damn happy to have Kara standing in front of her. Whole, healthy, and with those beautiful blue eyes open. "Do I have to fly?"

"Nope."

"Really? Then how are we getting there?"

Kara pointed her thumb at herself. "I'm flying us there."

"Ah, playing the literal card I see."

"Yep, so ready to go? Though, to be honest, if you don't want to fly we don't have to."

Lena slipped on her coat. "And if we don't fly how long will it take to get there?"

Kara looked at Lena then made a face. "Three weeks give or take, it depends on how good a swimmer you are."

Lena sighed, "Right then, flying it is."

"You could call it being cradled in the arms of the person who loves you and will keep you safe no matter what on your way to a delicious meal."

Before Lena had a chance to respond, she was being lifted and then soaring into the air.

As promised, she was cradled safely and her focus was so centered on Kara's warmth that she forgot what they were actually doing until Kara laughed as Lena realized they were back on the ground.

"I'm starting to think the whole 'I hate flying' thing might not be true."

"I guess it depends who I'm with." Bright blue skies above them threw Lena off, then a squawk, rushing water. "Where are we?" She turned around, spotting a blanket with a basket on top.

Kara held up a finger. "One second." In a flash she was gone then back, this time wearing a pair of dark blue pants and white button up.

She took Lena by the hand and led her toward the blanket. "This is the island of Dominica. It's quiet
here. I found it by accident and now when I need a break or just to breathe, I come here."

Lena sat down, glad she'd kept the sweats Alex had given her. "I see, and I bet they don't have takeout here."

Kara shook her head. "Sadly, they don't. So, take a look." Opening the basket, Kara took out sandwiches, a cooler which held sushi, a salad, and an assortment of cheeses and fruits.

When Kara uncorked a bottle of wine and poured a glass for Lena, she was both charmed and concerned. She put a hand on Kara's arm.

"Hey, you know I don't expect you to be fine after everything, right? Like it's okay to be mad or sad, to need time?"

Kara froze. "I know, I guess I just didn't want to dive into the serious stuff right away, plus I wanted to thank you. You invented technology to enter my consciousness and save my life on the fly. How are you so amazing?"

Lena felt the blush creeping up. "I did what I had to do, and I think it's fair to say when it comes to you, you inspire people to do the impossible."

"Well, yeah…I mean, okay, but…thanks. Alex, too, she wasn’t sure if she said it."

Sipping her wine, Lena selected a bit of cheese and popped it in her mouth. "Alex doesn't need to thank me. I'm just happy she trusted me enough to help." That's when the realization hit Lena. Alex, I will kill anyone who hurts my sister, Danvers, had entrusted Lena not only with her life but with Kara's as well.

"Are you okay? You don't look so good." Kara moved closer, putting a hand on Lena's thigh.

"Fine, I just…I'm fine." She randomly picked at the plate and popped it in her mouth, realizing it was a strawberry.

"If you say so."

They ate, well picked at things really, for a while.

Kara shifted position so she was lying on her side with her head resting in her hand. "It was weird at first. Like, I had this feeling inside of me that something wasn’t right, but it would get smothered when my mother or father would appear. I spent a lot of time memorizing the view and colors because it felt important?" She examined a bit of sushi before handing it to Lena and taking a sandwich for herself. "I studied a lot, most of it was just remembering stuff from when I was a kid and preparing for the Guild test."

"And you remember them? The colors and view?"

Kara nodded. "I'm going to paint them so you and Alex can see."

Lena swallowed the bit of food. "I still want that Danvers original, you know."

"I have something special in mind for that, don't worry." Kara gave one of her shy smiles that endeared her even more to Lena.

Moving so she was in the same position as Kara, Lena smiled. "I can't wait."

"You know, time passed differently there. It felt like months. I spent time with my family. Astra was
there and Kal. I'd sit out with my father and talk for hours. He even made me an Oregus cake, and it was amazing. I'd forgotten that about him, he made me those."

"Tell me about it."

"It takes a long time to make, not sure why though, might just be my father really was bad in the kitchen. But, it tastes like orchids smell is the best way to describe it. There's a blue glaze on it that's like warm honey and the cake is really moist and smells like vanilla."

As Kara went on to describe several different dishes she remembered, Lena took mental notes on all of them. She knew she wouldn’t be able to recreate them exactly, but she was confident she could get within the ballpark.

Finally, after a couple of hours, the food was gone and the time had come to talk if Kara's fidgeting was any indication.

"I think I was able to break out of it because it felt too good to be true." Kara's blue eyes, now full of sadness, met Lena's. "I never felt right there. There was this pit in my stomach like I was just waiting for something bad to happen."

Lena reached out and took Kara's hand in hers.

"I wanted it to be real, for that to be my mother hugging me and my family saying they were proud of me, but deep down I knew."

"I'm so sorry."

Wiping at her eyes, Kara shook her head. "You have nothing to be sorry for. I got to experience some good moments, and yeah I know they were idealized and losing them again hurt just as much as the first time, but certain things are stronger now. Like the smell of my mother's perfume." Kara closed her eyes. "When I first landed on Earth, I kept my shirt in a bag and would take it out when I was lonely, which was all the time. That smell, it comforted me and then it was gone. Now, I have it back."

Lena sensed Kara's sadness. "You know you don't have to put a strong front on for me?"

"I know, I'm not. Maybe I am? I don't know. Tomorrow might be different or next week. Right now, I'm with you and I'm happy."

"I'm happy, too. Seeing you like that was really hard. I talked to you, while I was working. Silly things, but it made me feel close to you." Lena looked away.

"Hey, I'm okay. I'm right here." Kara wiped at Lena's tears then took her hand and placed it over her heart. "I'm not going anywhere without one hell of a fight. I have a lot of amazing people in my life that I love and something really special with you that's worth fighting for. That was one thing I thought in there. When I'd see my parents together, I kept thinking how much I wanted that and there was this feeling is the best word, that I did have it."

Lena cupped Kara's face with her hand. "It is pretty special."

And then Kara moved closer, her lips trembled, and the tears started. "I miss them so much. I don't want to make you or Alex or Kal feel bad, but I miss my parents and my home and..."

Lena held onto her as Kara cried over the loss of her world for a second time. Lena held tight, rubbing Kara's back, leaving butterfly kisses on her head and cheek and arms, anywhere. Lena
murmured words of love and support until her voice was hoarse.

They fell asleep at some point and Lena merely nodded when Kara nudged her to say she was flying them home. Lena didn’t even think when she grabbed Kara's hand and pulled her into the bedroom and flopped onto it.

Lena woke for the second time sometime in the afternoon, she guessed. She and Kara were tangled together. Kara behind her, hands wrapped around Lena possessively.

"Morning." Kara kissed the back of her neck.

Lena turned and could only stare at Kara. With the sun behind her highlighting her hair and those big blue eyes, she reminded Lena of an angel. "I love you."

Kara raised her brows, but a small smile appeared on her face. "I love you, too, and I'm sorry about yesterday."

Lena put a finger over her lips. "Please don't apologize for that. I'm glad you let yourself grieve and felt comfortable enough to do it in front of me. I know you're Supergirl, but when you're with me you don't have to be strong."

"Thanks, I think I'm probably going to take you up on that during the next couple months…years."

Lena moved her finger then leaned in. "However long you need me." Then she sealed her promise with a kiss she hoped magically transmitted everything she was feeling.

Kara mumbled into the kiss. "Might be a long time."

Lena smiled, making sure their lips never lost contact.
"So, things are better?"

Kara stopped picking at the armrest of the couch and met Dr. Grey's eyes. "They are. It was hard at first. A lot of my anger resurfaced when I realized it was all a dream. When everything that happened came rushing back. I just…it just…something always goes wrong, doesn't it? And when it does I just have to deal with it."

Dr. Grey let out a breath. "Life seldom goes as planned. In fact, the more we try to control it the more chaotic it seems to get. The best you can do is set goals and work to reach them. Celebrate achievements no matter how small they may seem. Enjoy the good moments, hours, days. Love the people in your life. Let them love you. Before you know it, just dealing with it won't be so hard, nor will it be as often."

Kara twisted the fidget spinner between her fingers in an attempt to not ruin the cuffs of her shirt. Lena had given it to her, so she had added incentive to keep it in good shape.

"I know. Having friends to talk to really helps and the stuff I've been learning with you. I just worry sometimes people might get tired of it. Like they'll see this dark cloud that hovers over me all the time."

"Kara, I know for a fact that will never happen. I know it's hard to see it that way. You feel that cloud is part of you, but in time it will fade, float away. New clouds will come, I won't lie, but you're strong and smart and have a really great support system. And I'm pretty sure, you do more than you realize for your friends and family."

“I try.”

“That’s all you can do, and from what I see you succeed.”

After her session, Kara sent a text to Alex letting her know they were on for movie night. Then she did a few odd jobs around the city, before heading back to L-Corp.

In her office, she eyed the pile of data that had been collected on the last test run of an irrigation system that would help keep crops alive in areas suffering from droughts.

A smile came to her face when she heard familiar footsteps in the hallway outside her office. A moment later, a knock.

"Come in," Kara called out.

The door opened and Lena popped her head in. "Busy?"

Kara stood. "Pretty sure I'm always gonna have time for you."

Lena closed the door behind her. "How has your day been?"

Shrugging, Kara met Lena halfway and when they hugged, Kara melted into it. "Perfect now. You?"

Lena sighed, not letting go. "Long, but things are looking up."
Pulling away a few inches, Kara raised an eyebrow. "Really? You hate those fancy dinner things you have to do with the board members."

Lena poked Kara. “It’s called schmoozing, and you are correct. I do hate them, however, tomorrow I have a friend coming over for dinner."

"Really? Must be a good friend."

Lena nodded. "A very good one."

Unable to resist any longer, Kara leaned down slowly and captured Lena's lips with her own. Their grip on one another tightened, the kiss deepened, hands wandered, buttons were undone.

Kara could not touch enough of the skin revealed to her. Where Lena's hands went, a trail of warmth remained. They moved toward the couch where Kara settled them with Lena straddling her lap.

They broke apart a moment to catch their breath, foreheads touching.

"I don't think I'll ever get tired of this," Kara murmured.

Lena nodded, cupping Kara's cheek.

Kissing once again, Kara let herself go with it. She'd been working on the anxiety and bouts of insecurity as well as fear of hurting Lena. Now, she was able to enjoy these moments, to do more.

Before she could doubt herself, Kara flipped them so she was lying on top of Lena. She kissed her way down a lean neck then touched a button before looking to Lena for permission.

At Lena's nod, Kara slowly undid the button marveling at the exposed flesh. She traced a finger over the top of an exposed breast covered by a lacy black bra then let her lips follow the same path.

Lena arched up, moaning. "God, that feels amazing."

Kara could only hum her agreement.

A knock at the door had them both bolting upright and adjusting their clothes.

Lowering her glasses, Kara rolled her eyes but smiled. Before she could say anything Lena wiped her face.

"Lipstick."

Kara blushed, mumbling, "Come in."

The door swung open and Sam entered, a smirk on her face as she looked between the two of them. "Oh, was I interrupting something? Good."

Lena sat on the couch, perfect eyebrow raised. "Not at all. We were just going over the results of the latest trials."

Sam sat in the chair in front of Kara's desk. "Uh huh, sure. I bet you get this flushed over results all the time."

Kara knew her face was red, like really red. "They were good results."

"Really good?"
"Yes," Kara blurted.

"You're going to make her die from embarrassment," Lena said, then motioned to Kara to come back to the couch.

Sam laughed. "Pretty sure that can't happen, but I should test that theory out just to be sure."

Kara pushed her glasses up. "How about we don't do that?"

Sam made a face. "Anyways, I was just stopping by to make sure we're still on for Sunday?"

"Yes," Kara and Lena said at the same time.

"Good. So, I just have to get her there, right?"

Lena laughed. "This was your plan you know."

Sam bit her thumb. "Yeah, I know. Was it a good one? Think it'll work?"

Kara walked over to Sam and put a hand on her shoulder. "It was a great plan. Just relax. Between the three of us, we thought of everything."

"Right, okay then. I have to go study. You two resume with the hanky panky."

"Sam," Lena called out. "Paybacks are a bitch."

"Good thing I'm so sweet and innocent then," Sam said before scooting out and closing the door behind her.

Arousal still ran through Kara, a newly identified sensation, but one she was quickly getting used to and enjoying quite a bit thank you very much. "I'm not sure if I should sit next to you."

Lena pursed her lips. "Five more minutes then we go back to work."

Twenty minutes later, Kara sat at her desk with a goofy smile on her face and images running through her mind that made it hard to walk let alone concentrate.

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Alex checked her phone when it buzzed.

"Hey, what's up, Kara?"

"Just wanted to make sure we were on for movie night. You didn’t text back."

"Yep, sorry, I’ve been working. I have a few things to finish up here and then I'll pick up what I need to make dinner so you can patrol."

Kara cleared her throat. "You sure you want to make something? That's so much work."

"I can cook! Trust me, I got this."

"Okay, I'll keep an ear out for fire alarms just in case."

"You're a brat."

"I prefer to think of myself as a realist, rational, level-headed..."
"If I burn anything it'll be your thesaurus."

Alex ended the call, happy Kara was doing so well. The amount of strength and resilience in her awed Alex.

"Agent Danvers, we've got something you should take a look at."

She glanced at the man at the computer terminal, a new hire that reviewed any unusual cases that the NCPD got. Thinking a moment she recalled his name. "What is it, Agent Demos?"

He put the file up on the main screen. A decapitated body lay on the beach. "This is the second one in a week. So, I went through their unsolved cases archives and in the last six months they've had seven other cases just like this in the last six months."

Alex scanned the information. Autopsies on prior victims all proved they were aliens. The victim from this morning had visible claws. "Seven? How are we just hearing about it now?"

Demos shrugged. "Can't say for sure, but the officers investigating the crimes aren't exactly on top of their paperwork."

"Thanks. Keep me updated."

"Yes, ma'am."

She headed straight to J'onn's office, a gnawing feeling in her gut.

"Agent Danvers, what can I do for you?"

"I think someone's targeting aliens and then killing them." She sent the file from her tablet to his desk monitor with the swipe of her hand. "Most recent discovery was this morning."

He scanned the information. "Nothing linking them. All different ages, species, and professions. Three of them are known to be violent in my experience, but none of them have any record." He got to his feet. "I don't like this. Let's take a look at the crime scene. Maybe they missed something."

Half an hour later, Alex let out a frustrated breath. "Nothing. Just like all the other scenes according to the file. This is just a dump site. Whoever did this killed them somewhere else."

J'onn nodded, his eyes red and scanning. "They also know how to identify aliens."

Alex eyed the docks for any sign of…something. "We need to find out how and why they're being targeted."

"Let's go talk to the detectives investigating it."

Heading to the car, Alex pulled up the file. "That would be Draper and Warren."

Forty-five minutes later, and a useless discussion with two men who appeared not to give a damn about dead aliens, they were back in the DEO.

"Was it just me or did they seem more interested in what kind of donut to have rather than getting help from the FBI on their cases?"

J'onn rubbed his chin. "Indeed. We'll come at this tomorrow morning with fresh eyes. See what else turns up."
"Yeah, a serial killer is just what we need on top of trying to figure out what the hell Astra is up to on top of locating Lillian."

"Any luck?"

Alex pinched the bridge of her nose. "I spent all day going down a rabbit hole of false leads and old CADMUS files. Lillian's up to something I just have to figure out what and then find her and stop her. Oh, and Astra, too, while I'm at it."

J'onn gave her a sympathetic look. "We'll stop them, don't worry."

"I'm not worried about that. I'm worried about Kara. How much more crap does she have to go through? It'd be nice if she could catch a break."

J'onn sat at his desk. "I agree, but she is doing a lot better than a year ago. She's grown into quite a capable young woman."

Alex glared at the ceiling. "I know. I just hate that there's only so much I can do."

"Well, if I recall you're supposed to be watching movies with her tonight. I'm pretty sure that helps her."

"I'm also making dinner, wish me luck."

"Uh, why don't you just grab some take out? It's late."

Incredulous, Alex shook her head. "Et tu, J'onn?" With a dramatic sigh and grin, she left the office and picked up what she needed to make dinner. By the time she had everything, she had time to spare and grabbed a pint of Kara's favorite ice cream for dessert.

Arriving at Kara's she didn't expect her to be home, so she let herself in and went to work. She pulled out her tablet and followed the directions. While waiting for the sauce to thicken, she walked around and spotted a new painting in the corner, hidden away. Scrunching her forehead, Alex walked over to it. A beautiful city that glowed red was in the center. Ships hovered, people dressed in Kryptonian garb walked around. On the outer edges, the red color grew darker, almost black and took on the form of flames. So powerful, she could smell the smoke.

"Oh, Kara…"

Then the alarm went off. "Dammit!"

She ran to the kitchen and shoved the pan into the sink and ran cold water on it. The pot, which had contained pasta, she designated a threat and put in the trash. Pulling the batteries out of the smoke alarm, she sighed.

"Take out it is."

Half an hour later, Kara landed outside. "Good, you're here. I'm starving. Give me ten minutes, I need to take a shower."

When a clean and casual dressed Kara came out, Alex smiled. "Hey, anything exciting happen today?"

Kara plopped on the couch next to her sister. "A mugging, a carjacking, and some jerk being mean to his kids."
Alex opened a box of pizza. "Good job, here's celebratory pizza."

Kara sniffed the air then examined the loft. "Why are there scented candles?"

"Smell nice."

"And there's a fan."

"I like the breeze."

"Windows open when it's freezing out?"

"You know you put off a lot of body heat when we watch movies."

Kara hid a smile. "I take it making dinner did not go as planned?"

Alex glared at her. "I am a highly trained agent. I have a medical degree. I will master cooking one day."

Kara nodded, a solemn expression on her face. "But today is not that day."

"First, no more memes for you. Second, can we watch the movie? I had a long week and just want to relax."

Kara finished her slice of pizza and grabbed two more before settling back. "Whatever you need."

Alex fidgeted, something she did when her mind was preoccupied. Kara nudged her.

"Where's Sam?"

"Studying."

"Everything okay with you two?"

The smile that appeared on Alex's face whenever she thought about Sam, appeared. "Yeah."

Kara snagged a pot sticker. "Then what's going on?"

Alex's face returned to being impassive. "Nothing."

"Alex…"

"I've been thinking about Astra and what she has planned and it's making my gut twitch."

Raising an eyebrow, Kara blew out a breath. "You sure that's not from something you cooked?"

Alex swatted her on the shoulder. "Ha ha. Look who thinks they're a comedian now."

"It's one of my powers."

"Uh huh, anyways. No changing the subject, have you heard from her?"

Kara shook her head. "I doubt I will. I have no intention of joining her and she knows it."

"And, I should tell you that there's a possible killer out there targeting aliens. We've found several unsolved cases. All of them decapitated."
Cocking her head to the side, Kara stared at Alex. "Precision decapitation? Like the wound was cauterized?"

"Yeah, that's what the autopsies said."

"That's how they put people to death on prison ships. They had this thing that was like a guillotine but with a laser."

Alex pulled out her phone. "How do you know about that?"

"I heard my mom and Astra arguing about it when I was a kid."

Alex held up a finger. "I need to make a call."

Kara leaned forward and piled three more slices of pizza onto her plate and grabbed a tray of potstickers. "Take your time."

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Lena forced a smile, shook hands with the head of a company she forgot the name of, and moved on. A discrete glance at her watch let her know she had two more hours of this left to endure.

"Ms. Luthor, there's a gentleman that would like to speak with you."

"Thanks, Jess. Lead the way."

Jess opened a door on the side and led Lena out to an empty patio. "I thought you could use some air. It looked like it was getting a little stuffy in there."

Lena's shoulders relaxed. "Oh, God, thank you."

Taking in a deep breath, Lena looked toward the sky and thought of Kara. "I hate these shareholder meet and greets."

"Thankfully, they're only twice a year."

Lena sat and motioned to Jess to do the same. "That's about two times too many. How's this one going?"

"Good so far. A few mumblings about the mishap in Japan, but they're happy with how you handled it. Growth has been steady so no complaints there. And the move to National City has improved press coverage and therefore public opinion."

Lena laughed. "I'm sure that has more to do with the photo ops Supergirl has given."

Jess smiled. "Those definitely don't hurt."

Checking the time, Lena frowned. "I suppose it's time to go back in."

"I'll keep an eye on things."

A very long three hours later, Lena made her way home. Once inside, she kicked off her shoes and undid the zipper on her dress letting out a moan of relief. Leaving a trail of random things, she made her way to the bathroom and started a bath. She scrubbed off her make-up, threw her hair into a
ponytail and let herself sink into the warm water with a sigh.

Her mind wandered to work a few times. A mental list made of calls she needed to make, people she needed to avoid, and a few departments she wanted to audit based on tidbits she’d overheard that night. Not that they were doing bad things, just that their budgets were not meeting their needs.

Toweling off after a good soak she went into her office and sank into her father's old couch. The faint smell of him still lingered and she closed her eyes. Before she got too comfortable, she pulled out her laptop and checked to see if the programs she’d started had finished.

One had.

She smiled, pleased with the results. Entering the password to start the second round, she bit her lip and hoped it worked.

About to go to bed, her phone buzzed. A smile formed the moment she saw Kara's number pop up.

"Hey, I thought you had movie night?"

"I did, then Alex got a work call and had to go. How was your meeting?"

Lena poured herself a scotch and made her way out to her balcony, grabbing Kara's sweater out of habit. "I survived."

"Of course you did, Jess was there. She's tougher than me."

Laughing, Lena had to agree. "So, what are you doing now?"

An audible clearing of the throat on the other end of the phone. "Missing you."

"I miss you, too."

"Are you up for some company? I know we have plans tomorrow, this would be just a quick thing."

Lena nodded, and before she could say the words, Kara was landing on her balcony.

"I was in the neighborhood."

The sight of Kara in her suit, blonde hair long and free, blue eyes getting brighter, Lena could only nod and swallow...hard.

Kara dashed inside and changed, then reappeared with something.

Lena pulled herself together. "What is that?"

Kara bit her lip and it took everything in Lena not to pull her close and kiss it.

Kara's face turned red. "Ah, well, remember a while ago you said you wanted a Danvers original? Well, I finally finished it. I was going to do one of the pictures you liked but then I thought of something else that made me think of you and I hope you like it because I worked really hard."

Putting a hand on top of Kara's, Lena spoke, "Breathe. I'm right here and there's nothing to be nervous about. I know for a fact that if you made it I'm going to love it."

Kara nodded. "Right." She handed the picture over to Lena.
It was about three by four feet in dimension and wrapped in cloth. Lena undid the knots with care and when the wrapping fell away, the image in front of her stole her breath.

She didn't know what she'd expected, but this blew her away. Kara had painted a waterfall with crystals on either side. Flowers of a design she'd never seen in colors she had no name for wove their way through the crystals and reflected a rainbow into the water below. The basin, where the water fell, was smooth as glass, reflecting everything above it perfectly. An altar with bright red flames emanating from the center stood off to the side. Kryptonian symbols that Lena could partially read were etched onto the side. What truly got her attention though, were the two birds hovering above the falls. Tails long and majestic forming a frame around the image, interwoven at the bottom. Their wings barely touching one another, one with green eyes and the other with blue.

"It's amazing." It wasn’t enough, but it was all Lena could manage.

"You're crying. I'm sorry." Kara walked up to her, panic in her eyes and wiped at Lena's tears.

Lena took Kara's hands in her own. "It's okay, trust me. They're good tears. Thank you for this."

Kara swallowed. "That's Fire Falls." She pointed at the center. "Those are the steps you take when you go up and ask for permission. And that line of colors represents all the unions that have been blessed." Kara glanced down at their entwined hands. "My parents took me there as a girl."

"Tell me about it?"

Kara turned redder, if possible. "It's a sacred place. People go there with their intended to ask for their union to be blessed."

"And each union has its own color?"

Kara nodded. "Each color is unique."

"That sounds like a beautiful tradition."

"Yeah, it was. I didn’t appreciate it then."

Lena didn't push. "Let's take it inside. I know where I want to put it."

"Really? You want to hang it up?"

"Of course."

Lena led Kara into her office. "I know it must seem silly to put it in here, but I spend most of my time here and I think it would be nice to have something to look forward to seeing."

After Kara mounted it, Lena stood back and admired it a few moments. "You truly have a talent you know."

"It's just a thing…a hobby."

Lena tilted her head to the side. "No, it's more than that."

Kara shuffled her feet. "Thanks. That means a lot."

Grabbing her hand, Lena led Kara to the hallway. "Wanna make out?" Lena wiggled her eyebrows to lighten the mood.
"Hmm, with you?"

Lena swatted her on the stomach. "No, I was going to ask the doorman up."

Kara scrunched her forehead. "Nick or Joe?"

Quirking a brow, Lena stood with her arms crossed. "Do you have a preference?"

"Yep." Then Kara leaned in and kissed Lena senseless.

Her feet left the ground and she knew she was floating. As long as Kara's arms were around her, she didn't care where. Soft pressure at her back as she was laid down and the familiar smell of her sheets made her eyes pop open.

Kara hovered over her, eyes burning with arousal. She grabbed the tie of Lena's robe then met Lena's eyes. Nodding, Lena watched Kara's face to make sure everything was okay. They'd messed around, kissed and let their hands wander, fell asleep wrapped up in each other's arms, but this was a first. Kara had hidden most of her body away from the world, including Lena.

Undoing the knot, Kara pushed open the robe, her eyes widening. Self-conscious, Lena tensed.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, I just...nervous I guess."

Kara traced the top of Lena's breast making her way hesitantly around a nipple with such a gentle touch Lena almost cried. "You're perfect," Kara murmured.

Lena sucked in a breath. "So are you."

"I have scars."

Lena cupped Kara's face with her hands. "All I see is the kindest, sweetest, bravest, smartest, most beautiful soul I've ever met. I love all of you." She then proceeded to place soft kisses on Kara's forehead, cheeks, nose, and then finally her lips.

Kara's closed her eyes then reached for the hem of her sweater and removed it. Lena didn't move, not that she could if she wanted to.

"My God, Kara. You're stunning."

"You...really think so?"

Lena raised her hand halfway, waiting until Kara nodded. "I do. I think you're the most beautiful person I've ever seen." And when Lena touched Kara's stomach and made her way up, the rest of the night was spent getting to know each other in a way both craved, needed and were both finally ready for.

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Kara stretched. Her body relaxed in a way she'd never experienced before. Next to her, Lena slept. Unable to resist, Kara traced the contours of her face with her finger.

"Morning," Lena's eyes opened slowly, a soft smile appearing on her face.

"Morning," Kara replied before stealing a kiss. "How are you?"
Lena rolled over and stretched. With a mind of its own, Kara's hand reached out and pulled Lena closer.

"I'm fantastic. You?"

"Great." Not sure what to do seeing as Kara had never been in this position before, she let Lena take the lead, or at least hoped she would.

"How about breakfast?"

"Sounds great."

Kara slipped out of bed searching for her clothes.

Lena came up behind her and handed her some socks. "Any reason you wear two pairs? If it's a material thing I can work on something."

Kara accepted them, wishing she had the fidget spinner on hand. "It's not that."

Lena squinted. "Do your boots chafe?"

Swallowing, Kara turned her gaze to the wall. "It's silly. I…my feet were always cold when I was…you know in that place and when I got out and didn't have my powers they still got cold all the time. I guess it's just habit now."

Lena put a hand on top of Kara's forearm. "Hey, it's okay. I will make sure to have socks on hand at all times."

"You don't think it's silly?" Kara met Lena's eyes and saw nothing but acceptance in them.

"Hardly. You're talking to a woman who has a stuffed bear on her nightstand."

They finished getting dressed, stealing shy looks at one another and kisses here and there then headed into the kitchen. By the time Lena had finished pouring Kara a cup of coffee, her phone rang.

"Sorry, I have to take this. It's Alex."

"Go ahead."

"What's up?"

"Where are you? I stopped by your place this morning."

"Uh…Lena's?"

"Oh, cool. Did she like the painting?"

"Yep."

"You sound weird. You didn't ask her to – "

"Nope, I did not."

"Then why are you acting…oh…you two…"

Kara hid her rapidly blushing face from Lena. "Yes."
"Right. Good. That's great. Meet me at the DEO when you um...when you're done. We have a lead in that case I was telling you about."

"Got it." Kara could not end the call fast enough.

"Need to go or do you have time to eat?"

Kara debated a moment. "I can eat something fast?"

Lena turned and pulled several items out of the fridge.

"I'm sorry. It's just there's this killer targeting aliens and I don't want Alex to go after them on their own."

"Okay, first, please be careful. And second, don't worry about it. In fact, let me take this moment to remind you never to apologize for doing what you need to keep your sister, the city, and the world safe. Deal?"

"Deal." Kara came up behind Lena, kissing her on the cheek. "Can I help?"

"Nope, I have this handled. Go get ready and it'll be done by the time you get out."

Kara did as told, taking a shower and going about her morning routine, using a dash of super speed. If she kept moving she didn’t think about last night. Not that she didn’t want to. Not that the night was terrible. Quite the opposite in fact. However, the new feelings and emotions swirling around her head today had her way out of her comfort zone. And if she were honest she wanted to nothing more than to return to the bedroom.

Lena had seen her. All of her. And she still thought Kara was beautiful. Lena had kissed the scars. Ran her fingers along them. Not once showing any disgust. Kara had cried of course, for so many reasons. All of them good. A weight Kara didn’t even know she'd been carrying disappeared, or at least lessened dramatically.

Taking a breath she went back into the kitchen and smiled at the plate of food waiting for her. She laughed at the bowl of fruit in front of Lena.

"Hey, not all of us have your metabolism."

Remembering exactly what Lena looked like naked, Kara stuttered, "You have nothing to worry about." Then she stuffed as much food in her mouth as possible.

When done she cleared the table quickly and headed to the balcony. "Still on for later?"

Lena nodded. "Yes, have a good day."

Kara stole a kiss, maybe more than one, before heading into the DEO.

When she arrived, Alex merely raised a brow. "Come look at this."

On the screen, several aliens were displayed. "Are they all victims?"

"Yes."

Pointing to one then another, Kara frowned. "Those species aren't violent. Why would this killer go after them?"
Alex crossed her arms. "After you told me about the method of execution I got an idea. I called in and well, I was right." Another file appeared. "These are their Fort R’ozz files."

Kara sucked in a breath. "They were prisoners."

"Yeah, and whoever's targeting them knows that and according to the list. He' next."

An image of an older man appeared, someone who easily passed for human.

"What do we know about him?"

"His name is Alphonse Luzano. He's a professor of Astronomy at the university. No record. Students love him."

"I'll keep an eye on him."

Alex grabbed her arm. "We have a team watching him right now. You can do nightshift with me."

"What time is nightshift?"

Glancing at the file, Alex pursed her lips. "Start at say six? It's when he gets out of class and the most likely time for someone to grab him. I'd like us to be there."

"Okay, I just need to let Lena know I'm gonna be late."

"Let's go to my office so you can tell me all about Lena. Well, not everything. That'd be super weird and awkward, but you know what I mean."

Kara let herself be dragged to the office and caught the pint of ice cream tossed at her.

"I figure you're gonna need that."

"I'm not that bad." But Kara still popped the lid off and dug in, she wasn't about to say no to ice cream.

"So, the painting?"

They sat on the couch, angled so they faced one another.

"She liked it."

"Uh huh, and did you explain the meaning to her?"

"Yes?"

Alex squinted. "That wasn’t convincing."

Kara gestured with her arms. "I mean I told her the basics."

"But not the things you added in…things specifically for her?"

Shoving a spoonful of ice cream in her mouth, she tried to organize her thoughts. And failed. "No, I wasn't ready and I didn’t want to freak her out by going on one of my mumbling spirals."

Alex laughed. "Please, you do that ordering dinner. What's really going on?"

Kara sagged. "We've been seeing each other for months. And I love her, a lot. But I realized I
needed to share all of me with her before I asked something like that."

"Hey." Alex put a hand on her shoulder. "Is that why you? Kara…"

"Nope. That’s not it at all. Remember how you told me I would just know? That it would feel right? Well, it did." More ice cream. "I mean, I was still scared, but not of hurting her. Training at the fortress helped with that. I was afraid of her thinking I was ugly or being terrible at….you know….it."

Alex bit her lip. "It?" Her eyes widened. "It, right. Yeah, we don't need to talk about the actual act of it…unless you need to? I mean I'm totally okay with talking about it. If you need to talk about it that is."

"So, the ramble is a family thing?"

"Apparently. Man, you didn’t have to sit through Mom and Dad having the talk with me. I thought I was going to die."

"I'm sure they did fine. And I'm positive it was more fun than what I had to sit through when it came to the birthing matrix and creating the perfect child from two specimens and deciding what Guild you wanted them to go into. It was like sitting through a class you hate with added awkwardness."

Alex set her carton of ice cream down. "I bet. I can ask mom and dad to give you the talk now if you want. I'm sure they'd love to."

"Pass."

Alex got serious for a moment. "Really though, you're okay? Everything went fine?"

A goofy but content smile formed on Kara's face. "It went perfect. Like you said, we both just figured it out and she made me feel beautiful."

"That's 'cuz you are, doofus. I know your scars make you self-conscious, but I assure you that as a person who has seen the way Lena Luthor looks at you, she sees way past them."

Kara rubbed at one of the more obvious ones, to her, on her cheek. "I know. I think I'm the one who's afraid of them to be honest."

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Not wanting Kara to think about her scars and also having excess energy to burn, Alex poked Kara. "Come spar with me?"

Kara nodded. "Yeah, it's been a while."

"Loser buys dinner?" Alex wiggled her eyes.

"As usual."

Alex pulled Kara to her feet. "Should I just place my order now?"

"Hey! I might win."

Alex walked out the door. "Right."

An hour later, Alex leaned against the wall and let herself slide down to the floor where Kara was
sprawled out.

Kara turned her head. "I think I like the purple lighting the best."

"Me too."

Alex made sure to limit the time the sparred and had the emitters at the lowest setting. She hated doing it to Kara, but also knew that teaching her how to fight and defend herself was one of the most important things she could do. Luckily, J'onn helped out a lot and during those times Kara didn't have to be weakened.

"I was talking to Eliza the other day. She wants us to come up for a visit."

Alex wiped at her brow. "It has been a while hasn't it?"

Kara closed her eyes and sighed. "Uh huh. And someone told her about the Black Mercy."

"It was like she know, Kara. She can read me better than J'onn!"

Getting to her feet, Kara spoke, "Uh huh. Anyways, I need to see her this weekend so. Probably go tomorrow."

Alex blew out a breath. "Need back up?"

"Nah, I got this."

"We should shower then get something to eat. The professor gets off work in a couple of hours and I want to be there just in case."

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Alex leaned forward to get a better view of the exit of the building. The professor, according to his schedule, should be leaving any minute. She tapped her earpiece. "Any time."

"I hear something," Kara said.

Perking up, Alex got out of the truck and surveyed the area. "What?"

Before Kara had time to answer, the professor rounded the side of the building and made it halfway through the small plaza in front before their killer showed up.

Alex ran forward, gun drawn. "Stand down."

Kara landed near her, pulling the professor behind her.

Moving her eyes for one second, Alex missed the chains coming at her, but she felt the impact when they wrapped around her waist and flung her against a column.

"Alex!"

"Get him," she managed to gasp out.

Kara grunted with effort and when Alex got to her feet she saw Kara in the air, four sets of chains wrapped around her. Alex fired on the man, but the shots didn’t even phase him. His armor something she’d never seen before.
"Why are you doing this?" Kara ground out.

Alex called for backup but knew they wouldn't arrive. Something told her this killer had taken them out already.

"Hey, leave her alone," Alex called out in hopes of distracting the killer enough to give Kara time to escape.

Another chain, this time around her leg. "No one escapes The Master Jailer."

When she came to, J'onn's face hovered over her.

"What's going on?" Sheets beneath her, bright lights. "When did we get to the DEO? Where's Kara?"

"I don't know what happened, by the time I got there he was gone and you were on the ground. You took a pretty hard hit."

Alex went to sit up but J'onn put a hand on her shoulder.

"He had these chains and armor. My bullets bounced right off of him." She put a hand on her forehead, hoping the dizziness would pass. "Oh, God, he took Kara. And what about the back-up team we had in place?"

J'onn shook his head. "They're alive, but in bad shape."

A memory surfaced. "Call Clark. He made a tracker for Kara in case she was ever taken. We can find her."

A frown. "I tried that. Whoever has her knows how to bypass Kryptonian technology."

She forced herself to stay calm. To not freak out that her sister had been taken by a serial killer who had a thing against aliens.

J'onn's soothing voice broke into her thoughts. "Is there anything you can remember? Anything at all?"

Alex thought back. He'd appeared out of nowhere. Marched up to the professor with purpose. No fear. "The way he moved. Precise. He has training. And his gear was not from around here."

"Military?"

"Hand me my tablet." Alex accessed the Fort R'ozz files. "I'm thinking more like a guard on a ship full of all sorts of alien prisoners."

J'onn nodded. "Good theory. We've been operating on the assumption that only prisoners survived."

Alex tossed her tablet onto the bed. "The data's too damaged to identify the guards."

"We'll find him. You get some rest while I check the scene."

"I'm fine."

At J'onn's raised brow and the throbbing in her temple, Alex blew out a breath. "Fine, but just for a couple of hours."
Lena eyed her two creations. One she hoped worked and the other she hoped was close to the original. Tapping her fingers on the counter, she forced herself to calm down. It wasn't a big deal. She'd done all sorts of things for Kara...but now, after last night everything carried more weight. Not that it was a bad thing, it just felt more meaningful.

Though, if she were honest, everything was meaningful when it came to Kara.

Taking a breath, she checked the time. Her phone rang, bringing a smile to her face until she saw Alex's name pop up.

"Hello?"

"Hey, It's Alex. Can I come up?"

"Of course."

Three and a half minutes later, not that Lena was counting, Alex knocked on her door and Lena almost ripped it off the hinges opening it so fast.

"Where's Kara?" Lena stood back. "Wait, what happened to you? Are you okay?"

Alex rubbed her eye. "We ran into some trouble. Kara was taken, but I promise we'll get her back."

Lena reached for the wall to support her. "Kara was taken? Who could take her? Did they have Kryptonite? Do you know who it was...was it Lillian?"

Lena's mind filled with a dozen worse case scenarios. Lillian was the one with the means, the knowledge, and a vendetta.

"It wasn't Lillian. It was someone who's been targeting aliens."

Lena paled. "Killing them? Someone who could take Kara?"

Alex paced a few steps. "Yes. I know! We're gonna find her. I just need something, a clue, a hint, anything to follow."

Biting down on the panic rising in her, Lena forced herself to think. "Okay, what can I do?"

"Help me? You're the smartest person I know. Is there any way we can track Kara?"

Lena cocked her head to the side. "Not that I know of. Is there no evidence from any of the crime scenes? What about the detectives investigating it? They have to have some idea? They've been at it for months. And the aliens, what do they have in common?"

Alex opened her mouth then closed it then opened it again. "They were all on Fort R'ozz."

Lena pursed her lips. "That's the prison ship? What about the records? Surely the people who worked on it kept records?"

Alex's head snapped up at that. "Thank you, I knew I could count on you. I'll let you know as soon as we know anything."

And with that, Lena was left alone with nothing but her fear of losing Kara.
She went back to her office and stared at the boxes on her desk then turned and stared at the painting Kara had given her the night before.

The night Kara had finally felt comfortable enough with Lena. Trusted Lena enough to bare herself. A night that had been terrifying for Lena as well because of the emotions and feelings running through her. Because of the realization of just how much she loved Kara.

She knew the painting was significant. Knew Kara was trying, in her way, to communicate something to Lena that was hard.

"Nothing’s going to happen to her. We have too much left to do." With a nod, she grabbed her laptop and went to her desk.

The next upgrade on Kara's suit was going to be a tracker because this was never going to happen again.

She leapt out of her seat when there was a knock on her door. She ran to open it, her heart pounding because only one person could get past the security. "Kara?"

Instead, Sam stood there with M'gann. "Sorry, just us. Thought you could use some company."

"How did you get past security?"

M'gann merely raised an eyebrow. "I have a few skills. And one of them is cooking." She held up a bag of food from the bar.

"I'm not really hungry."

M'gann smiled sympathetically. "I'll just put it in the kitchen."

"We have beer, too," Sam said.

Lena sagged. "I should have thought of a tracker to put on her suit? How could I not think of that?"

Sam grabbed her arm and dragged Lena to the couch. "Because you can't think of everything."

M'gann appeared and sat. "Have you heard anything?"

"Not since Alex was here." Lena glanced at her watch and realized two hours had passed.

"I'm sure it'll be fine. Kara's tough." Sam popped open a beer, not her first from the looks of it.

Lena remained silent, not sure what she felt other than scared.

"That girl has been through a lot, she'll get through this, too." M'gann offered a reassuring smile.

"I hope so."

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Kara sucked in a breath and tried to pull the bars apart, again. Her heart pounded in her chest and she felt the familiar ache from when she'd first been rescued. Her breaths came in rapid gasps and she counted to 1,000. Then she repeated the process in twenty different languages backwards.

Every few moments she'd try to wake up the professor who was passed out in the cage across from
her.

When she'd woken up, she'd thought Lillian had her. Kara's powers were gone, but she didn't feel sick or achy.

Panic kicked in and had been trying to take over. Every time she felt it winning she used one of her coping techniques, thought of Alex and Lena and Sam and Kal and M'gann and J'onn and Eliza and Jeremiah...all the people in her life that made it worth living. This time, she knew Alex was going to show up and until then she just had to stay alive and maybe find a way out of this mess and save the professor.

No stress.

"Where are we?"

Kara stopped pulling at the bars. "I don't know, but we're going to get out of here."

He stumbled a few times getting to his feet. "I'm not so sure about that."

"It'll be fine. I promise."

"I hope so."

Unsure what to say next, Kara just smiled and hoped it looked reassuring.

"I knew your mother."

"I suppose you hate me, too?"

His eyes widened. "No. Not at all. I committed a crime and was sentenced."

"What did you do?"

"My wife was ill. We spent all our money on medication and when we ran out I...well, you do anything for the people you love. I got in with the wrong group and got arrested on my first outing as a drug smuggler."

Kara's heart fell at the realization this man had been sentenced to a prison ship with violent aliens because he did whatever he needed to to help his wife.

"Did my mother know the circumstances? It seems excessive."

"Perhaps to you, knowing the laws here, but things were different there. Not perfect, just different. In a way, I owe your mom the life I've been able to make here or I'd be dead like everyone else."

"Where are you from?"

A sad smile formed on his face. "Starhaven."

"I went there as a child. The air smelled of spices."

"Yes, it was truly a beautiful place."

Footsteps then a door swung open. The man in armor appeared. "Shut up!"

"Why are you doing this?" Kara demanded, happy to sound authoritative.
"It's my job. He's a criminal and needs to be treated as such."

Kara grabbed the bars. "He was helping his family! That's hardly a crime to die for."

"My job is to dole out justice. That's what I'm doing."

"What you're doing is wrong."

"You don't deserve to wear that crest. Your mother sentenced them...him," he pointed to the professor. "To prison, and you want to question her? Protect them?"

"She didn't sentence them to death!"

"I had hoped you'd join me. Sadly, you'll be joining the others."

He left the room and Kara tried to come up with a way out of this mess. She focused on her breathing going over possible ways to get out of this mess. She slammed her fist against the bars, yelping when she heard something break.

"It's the light."

"What?"

"He has a light that mimics the effects of the red sun of Krypton. It takes your powers away."

Kara had wondered about the red glow but got side-tracked when she realized she was trapped in a cage. Now that she had calmed down, a bit, she examined it. Maybe she could break it? Block it?

The man in armor interrupted her internal musings when he returned and pulled the professor out.

"Hey! Stop it, you don't have to do this."

The man pushed the professor to his knees and locked him into the device she knew would decapitate him.

"Please! Don't hurt him." Kara struggled against the bars, pushing, pulling, hitting.

The professor smiled sadly. "It's okay."

Her heart broke at the comment because she knew what it was like to accept death. To feel like it was your fate.

"No, you have to fight!"

She stumbled back when an explosion ripped through the ceiling. Bright light streamed through and she reached for it, not quite making it.

Alex rappelled down with two other agents. Relief flooded her face when she spotted Kara but was short lived when the man attacked her from behind.

The professor went to Kara, trying to undo the lock on her cage.

Kara's heart pounded, adrenaline flooding her system as Alex was maneuvered into the device. Then in a move so quick, Kara barely caught it, Alex aimed her weapon at the ceiling.

The man said something but Kara missed it because she was too busy tearing the bars apart while the
yellow sun infused her body.

She grabbed the man by the neck and threw him against the wall while pulling Alex up.

"You're okay?"

Alex nodded. "You?"

"Yeah. I knew you'd come."

"Good, that's good." Then Alex hugged her. "I was so scared."

"Me too."

Pulling away, Alex cleared her throat. "Okay, well, Supergirl, you should get out of here and let us do our thing."

Kara made a face, she knew they didn't want people to know how close she and Alex were but this was different.

"I'm sure you have other things to be doing, other people to talk to."

*Lena.*

"Right, I need to do that. And I'd like to take the professor home."

"Of course."

Maybe she flew a little too fast, but the professor seemed to get a kick out of it.

"Thank you, but why aren't they taking me back into custody?"

"Your students need you more."

And then Kara was in the air and on Lena's balcony. She tapped on the door and a few seconds later it was ripped open. A teary-eyed Lena grabbing Kara and pulling her close.

"Are you okay?" Lena pulled back and examined Kara.

"I'm fine. Sorry to worry you."

"Hey, come here! You're not allowed to worry us like that again," Sam slurred.

Kara grinned and gave her a hug.

"She's right you know." M'gann wrapped Kara in a tight hug. "Good to see you."

Lena took Kara's hand in hers. "You're bleeding!"

"No, it's fine now." Lena did not look convinced. "I promise. I'm okay."

"Promise?"

Kara nodded.

"Okay, well, it's late and I need to get this one back to her place before she passes out," M'gann said. "There's food in the kitchen, I figure you're hungry."
Kara's stomach growled on cue. "A little."

"Thanks, M'gann, Sam, for coming over," Lena said.

"Of course we'd come, don't be a lunatic. You're my family." Sam shook her head before swatting at Lena then ambling toward the front door.

Kara let her shoulders relax once she was alone with Lena. "It's really nice to see you."

Lena nodded, smile tight, eyes watery.

"I'm okay. It's fine now."

"It's just...the thought of losing you terrifies me."

Kara stepped forward, making sure to meet Lena's eyes. "What can I do?

Sucking in a deep breath, Lena let it out slowly. "Right now? You change, then we'll eat and then I have a couple of surprises for you?"

Kissing Lena on the forehead, Kara smiled. "Sounds like a plan."

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Alex tossed her keys on the table then shrugged out of her coat letting it fall to the floor. She opened her fridge, forcing herself to turn away when she saw it was packed full of food and a sticky note from Kara.

    Hey,

    Know you've been busy, got you food so you don't die of scurvy.

    Love,

    K

She braced herself, trying not to think of what had almost happened. They found her. Alex got there in time. Kara was fine.

"Ugh."

Her phone ringing was a welcome distraction. "Hey."

"Alex, it's M'gann."

"Why are you calling on Sam's phone? Is something wrong?" Back on alert, not that she had fully stopped, Alex had her coat on and keys in hand.

Mumbling in the background. "Sam had a bit too much to drink and keeps asking for you. I know it's late and you had a super long night..."

"I'll be there in ten minutes, don't worry about it."

"Wait, I don't want you driving this tired. I'll get her to you."

The line went dead before Alex had a chance to say anything. Two minutes later, she was opening her door.
"Hey."

"Hi, special delivery." M'gann smiled with a roll of her eyes as she carried Sam in like she weighed nothing more than a bag of potatoes. "Where do you want her?"

"Put her in my room. No way I’d be able to get this giant in there on my own."

"Alex! I missed youuuuuu." Sam reached out and almost stabbed Alex in the eye.

"I see that."

After M'gann set Sam down, Alex walked her to the door. "Thanks, again."

"No worries, how are you by the way? I know when stuff happens with your sister…"

Alex bit her lip. "Yeah, I get a bit stressed out. She's okay and that's what I'm trying to focus on."

"If you ever need to talk, you know where I am."

Smiling, Alex spoke, "I'll keep that in mind, you might regret it."

After locking up, getting a glass of water, then a bucket just in case, Alex went to her bedroom.

"Hey, you awake?"

"Um hmmm, how you?"

"Fine, drink some of this." Alex held the glass while Sam took a few sips.

"Was worried."

"I know, me too." Alex began to pull away but a surprisingly strong grip stopped her.

"Lay with me."

Alex crawled over Sam and hugged her from behind. "How's this?"

A breath and the smell of beer hung in the air. "Good. I like when you hold me."

Alex nuzzled Sam's shoulder. "I like it, too."

"Is Kara okay, really?"

"Yes, she is."

"I didn’t hurt her?"

"What? Of course not."

"Sometimes I dream…I dream I hurt her."

Alex scrunched her forehead. "What do you mean?"

"Dunno. Just dreams. Bad ones."

And then Sam was snoring.
Alex let herself fall back onto the pillows and thought. Sam had been saying strange things lately, as well as drinking more than usual. If Alex didn’t know better, she’d swear Sam was trying to drown her sorrows, so to speak.

She ran her fingers through Sam's hair. "I'm going to help you figure this out."

***

Lena wiped her hands as Kara finished up her third burger. "You sure you're gonna have room for dessert?"

Kara blushed and nodded. "Yeah, I always get an energy burst when I get my powers back and it makes me super hungry."

Not wanting to dwell on the fact Kara had been powerless and in a cage, Lena focused on something more relevant. "That red light you were talking about. Is there any way the DEO could use it when you train so you don't have to be exposed to Kryptonite?"

Kara cocked her head to the side. "Yeah, I bet they could. I mean they'd have to make sure it doesn't affect Alex."

"Of course. And if it was safe, you'd feel comfortable with it?"

"If you mean would it make me flashback, probably at first, but after a few times I'd be fine."

Lena took Kara's hand in her own. "It never ceases to amaze me just how strong you are."

Kara swallowed. "No, I'm just me."

"Well, just you is amazing, which is why I have a surprise for you. Wait here."

Lena went to her office and grabbed two items. One she slipped into her pocket, unsure if it was the right time. The other she adjusted the box then made her way back into the kitchen.

Kara's eyes widened. "What's this?"

Lena noted the squint. "Hey, no peeking!"

"That's a lead-lined box!"

"I knew you'd peek."

Kara pouted and Lena couldn’t resist placing a small kiss at the corner of Kara's mouth before presenting her with it.

"Okay, it's probably not one hundred percent accurate, but based on what you told me I did the best I could. And we can change stuff to improve it."

"Uh, okay?" Kara removed the top, a smile splitting her face. "Is this...you made an Oregus cake?"

Lena held up a hand. "I tried to make one. We don't exactly have all of the ingredients, but M'gann was able to help me track down most of them as well as someone who had a variation of the recipe."

Kara licked her lips while she lifted it out of the box. Setting it on the table like it was the most precious thing, Lena realized she was crying.
"Hey, what's wrong?"

Shaking her head, Kara stared at the cake. "Nothing. It's amazing…thank you." She pulled Lena close and kissed her. "I love you."

"I love you, too. Now, let's try this thing shall we?"

Kara cut them both slices and Lena waited while Kara took her first bite.

"Well, how is it? Okay?"

"It's perfect." Kara smiled at her while taking another bite.

A bit more relaxed, Lena took a bite of her own and had to admit it was rather tasty, in that unusual I've never tasted something like this kind of way.

"Do you like it?"

Lena nodded. "I do. It's not what I expected."

Kara finished her piece in contented silence. "Thanks for making this. I know it was probably a pain, but I appreciate it more than you know."

"I'm glad. There was one other thing I wanted to talk about. I wasn’t sure if it was the right time, but after what happened…"

"I'm okay. I admit it sucked and I know I'll have some nightmares and all that, but I was reminded that I have friends and family and a whole lot of things to help me when I stumble. For example, an amazing girlfriend who makes me a cake because she pays attention to the little things."

Lena nodded. "Yes, But I also want to help you. Do things to help keep you safe or at least safer." Pulling the tiny box out of her pocket, she set it in front of Kara. "I've been working on this with Alex."

This time Kara opened the package with hesitation. "With Alex?"

"What happened with the Black Mercy, neither of us ever want you to go through that again. So, we ran lots of tests but were finally able to isolate a toxin that can kill it."

Kara picked the small vial out of the box. "You mean if it latches on to me it'll die because of this?"

"Exactly."

"I'm following so far, but how does it work?"

Lena sat straighter. "Well, that was the hard part to figure out. Infusing your suit was an option but you aren't always in it. Injecting you with it, well, there would be no way to predict the side effects or if your body would just eliminate it. So, I developed this." Lena pulled a velvet bag out of her other pocket. "The Black Mercy's first instinct is to control, and it does that by wrapping itself around the host's neck. So, with this, the moment it senses the Black Mercy, small needles will eject and poison it before it has time to fully sync with you."

Kara accepted the bag Lena handed her. When she pulled on the strings to open it a necklace fell out. She swallowed, a tad nervous. It was meant to keep Kara safe, nothing more. However, the level of detail Lena put into it to make sure Kara would like it, made it obvious that it was more.
A delicate, woven chain made of Nth metal. Throughout were sensors Lena had designed to pick up on the chemical signature of the Black Mercy and react to immediately. Two birds, one with red eyes and the other with blue, connected the two ends together.

"It's beautiful." Kara undid the latch and smiled. "I love it."

Lena walked behind her and grabbed the two ends. She brushed Kara's hair away and put attached the clasps. "It can go under your suit so you don't need to worry about people seeing it." She ended her statement with a light kiss on the back of Kara's neck that gave them both shivers.

Kara turned and rested her hands on Lena's hips. "Thank you. It means a lot that you thought of doing something like this."

Lena raised her arms and rested then on Kara's shoulders then laced her fingers together. "I guess you could say I have a vested interest in your well-being. This necklace has the toxin in it, that vial I gave you is back up. Alex and I both have one just in case as well."

Leaning forward, Kara captured Lena's lips in a soft kiss full of meaning. Lena's stomach flipped and warmth spread throughout her body.

Then Kara was lifting her and walking toward the bedroom. All Lena could do was hang on, knowing Kara would never let her fall.

Kara laid her down with such gentleness. No one had ever treated her like this. Touched her in a way that made her feel beautiful, cared for, and cherished. Then Kara's lips were on her neck, making their way down. Lena dug her nails into Kara's back, arching into the contact.

When they contact broke, Lena met blue eyes full of hunger and passion. A new look on Kara, but one Lena very much enjoyed.

Kara unbuttoned Lena's blouse then slid it off her shoulders. Not once did Kara break eye contact. Unable to stop the growing need in her, Lena reached forward and tugged on the Henley Kara wore. In a swift move, Kara had it off revealing she wasn't wearing a bra.

Lena traced a finger along Kara's collar bone, hesitant, making sure to keep an eye on Kara. "Hey, it's okay." Kara put her hand on top of Lena's and placed it over her heart. "I love you and I trust you."

Lena swallowed, a mix of emotions fighting for control. "I love and trust you, too."

Then Lena gently pushed Kara onto her back and straddled her. They kissed, soft at first, then with more passion as their hands explored each other.

Time had no meaning. The only thing that mattered was Kara, right here, right now, with Lena.

Lena kissed Kara's neck. Dipping her tongue in the curve where it met her shoulder. She bit on an ear lobe lightly and whispered words of love to Kara. Beneath her Kara squirmed, arms wrapping around Lena, pulling her closer.

Moving down, Lena kissed the top of Kara's breasts. Taking her time she circled her nipples with her tongue, slowly. Smiling when Kara arched into the contact. Lower still, she gave the same attention to Kara's stomach, grinning when the muscles tensed. She placed her lips on one hip bone, lightly kissing it, then dragged her tongue across the expanse of Kara's stomach, until she reached the other hip bone and placed a kiss there.
She lowered herself more until she was positioned between Kara's legs. She looked up to check on Kara and was met with wide blue eyes.

"Please don't stop."

And Lena did not. She kissed the inside of Kara's thighs, the backs of her knees, used her hands to gently massage and caress any part of Kara within reach, then she moved in closer. Inhaling and letting her own arousal spread through her like wildfire.

She delivered small kisses in a decreasing circle. Underneath her, Kara shifted and moaned.

Then Lena used her tongue, tasting everything. Dipping inside. She could have stayed there forever but knew Kara was close. Moving up just a bit she began to suck. Kara's hips arched off the bed, but Lena stayed with her. Making gentle circles then applying pressure until Kara was shaking beneath her.

Lena moved up, pulled the blanket above them, then wrapped Kara in her arms. "I love you."

Kara turned. "Yeah?"

Lena nodded.

Kara didn't say anything, but Lena did realize that there were many other ways you could tell someone you love them and Kara did just that for the rest of the night.

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Kara set out the last of the dishes.

"Think it looks okay? I made all her favorites," Sam said.

"It looks great. Just relax, she'll love it."

Sam chewed on her thumbnail. "I don't know. I had to get out of her place quick this morning and I think she was suspicious."

Taking Sam by the arm, Kara dragged her a corner. "Listen, she's a government agent. Everything makes her suspicious. She has no clue we're doing this and the fact we're doing it here ensures she'd never find out about it."

"Listen to her, she's got a point," Lois interjected.

Sam glanced around. "True. Are you sure having it here was the best idea?"

Kara shrugged. "It's literally the last place on earth anyone, including her, would suspect us to do something fun."

A breeze, then J'onn cleared his throat. "Ladies. I'll be right back."

Kara smiled when she saw Eliza. "Hey, it's so good to see you."

Eliza gave her a hug. "You too, I'm so glad you're okay."

"I am. I'm more than okay, actually. Wait here…wait…Sam, come here."

Sam crept toward them, her face tense. "Hi, Mrs. Danvers."
Eliza beamed. "Finally, the woman my daughter can't stop talking about. Please, call me Eliza."

"You two talk, I'll be right back." Kara left them, making her way down winding hallways she'd memorized.

She ran a hand along them until she arrived at the door she was looking for. She pushed it open. "Lena?"

In the center of the room, Lena stood by a table fiddling with a gadget.

"What are you doing?"

"I wanted to design a tracker for you so that...well, so we know where you are. I heard the one your cousin made was disabled. I intend to fix that issue."

Kara approached her. "I appreciate the thought, but Eliza's here. Maybe we can work on this together tomorrow?"

"Right, your foster mom, now." She set the item in her hand down and smoothed the front of her shirt. "You sure you want me to meet her?"

Kara made a face. "I'm positive. Come on."

Hand in hand they walked toward where Eliza now stood with Jeremiah and Sam. J'onn was off to the side with Kal and Lois. From the looks of it, an embarrassing story about her cousin was being shared. A sense of peace settled over Kara, the only thing missing was Alex and M'Gann.

"Eliza, this is Lena Luthor."

Lena's hand tensed, tried to pull away, but Kara refused to let go.

"I hear I have you to thank for Kara being here."

"Uh, well, it was a team effort. I just helped."

Eliza raised a brow. "Helped? As it was explained to me you designed a way to enter someone's subconscious and interact with them. And you did so under stress within a short window of time. I'd say that's a bit more than helping."

"Alex was there, too." Lena's tone bordered on accusatory and Kara barely hid her laugh with a cough.

Shaking her head, Eliza reached out and took Lena's free hand. "You're just as stubborn as I imagined you'd be. It's a pleasure you meet you."

"You too, Kara and Alex have told me so much about you, they were lucky to have you."

"I think it's the other way around, but don't tell them that. I'll never hear the end of it." Eliza winked.

Some of the tension in Lena's hand eased up and Kara exhaled.

"Okay, M'gann's on the way with Alex." Kara kissed Lena on the cheek. "I have to get in position."

As she was walking away she heard Eliza thank Lena for bringing back Kara's smile.

A moment later an agitated Alex walked in with M'gann behind her. "Kara, where are you? What
technical problem could you possibly be having that needs my attention?" Then she stopped.

"What…Kara?" Alex's eyes went over the group collected. "J'onn…Kal…Sam?"

"Surprise," they yelled in unison and Kara dropped the banner and balloons.

Alex put out her hand on instinct to catch a falling bit of confetti. "What's going on?"

Sam walked up to her and put an arm around her waist. "Happy Birthday!"

Alex squinted. "It's like two months away."

"Exactly, and you being the super suspicious person you are would never suspect we'd throw the party now!" Sam grinned, obvious pride in her plan. "Or that'd we'd throw it here."

"True. And thank you." Alex leaned in and kissed Sam, brief but sweet.

The fortress sparkled with multiple colored lights. A neat feature Kara had discovered after pestering Kal for weeks that a secret fortress should have a better lighting system. The crystals throughout acting as prisms. Being able to fly meant streamers were everywhere and confetti bombs were set to pop for the duration of the party.

Several tables were set out with food and drinks, at the ready. Kelex sported a bowtie and flitted around with a tray of hors d'oeuvres. Music played throughout, another neat thing was the near perfect acoustics of the place.

The rest of the night went smoothly. Clark taking care of any emergencies that popped up. J'onn and M'gann hitting it off. Eliza and Jeremiah talking to Sam and Lena, inviting them both to family dinners and letting them know they were welcome for all holidays. The obligatory embarrassing stories about Alex were told, which Kara laughed along with because many of them she was hearing for the first time.

Lena bonded with Jeremiah in one of the labs designing something for Kara's suit. Eliza and Sam talked about ways to keep Alex safe when cooking. Lois told Kara stories about Kal's first forays into being Superman.

Kara had no clue how she had gotten so lucky. Things weren't perfect. Astra was up to something and Lillian still lurked out there.

There would always be threats.

But, when she looked around the room. When she saw this collection of people, her new family, she knew there'd always be hope and love as well.

She no longer needed the comfort of lies, the truth was far better.

Chapter End Notes

This is the end for now - it was becoming a beast to keep up with - Going to work on a sequel and see if I can come up with a good plot! Thanks to those who have been reading, comments much appreciated!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!