“Kara,” Winn says softly.

“Hm?”

“Lena’s last name is Luthor.”

Kara slows to a stop sign and feels the tension build in the truck as Winn anticipates a reaction.

She doesn’t give him one.

“So?” She looks ahead at the intersection. Focusing on pushing in the clutch and shifting through the gears when it’s her turn to go.

“I just… I wasn’t sure if you knew. And thought maybe it’d be something you’d noticeably react to -- once you found out. And, well, what if you found out from Lena and reacted in front of her? So I--”

“Why should I care if her last name is Luthor?” Kara cuts him off.

“Kara--”

“Lionel didn’t even get charged. The evidence was circumstantial at best,” Kara dismisses as
she takes a corner just a tad too fast.

“Kara, her dad was the main suspect in your entire family’s murder.”

OR

The high school, football, murder mystery au where Kara is the star quarterback and Lena is the cheerleader.

Notes

Hi! The spooky season is upon us and I wanted to get this first chapter out in time for fall. This is my first fic, so I'll take any feedback you have.

Special thanks to @agathasyouruncle for helping nail down the main points of the murder plot line. And for helping me work through dialogue. And for generally putting up with me always talking about supercorp.

Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes
“Matthews! What was that?! What route did I call!” Kara hears Coach Carr scream at her teammate as she herself is hefted off the ground by the linesman that just took her down to the ground. Hard.

“You called a slant, Coach”

“And what did you run?”

There’s a small pause as Kara walks over to prepare to run the drill again. She avoids looking at Coach Carr’s undoubtedly red face.

“I ASKED YOU A QUESTION, MATTHEWS.”

“I ran corner, Coach.”

Kara chances a look over to see Coach Carr relax, as if calmed by the admission.

“That’s right. You ran a corner. And what does that mean for your quarterback who’s getting blitzed?”

“She’s gonna get sacked,” Mike Matthews says to the ground.

“Not ‘gonna’,” Carr says as he grabs the facemask to make eye contact with his player, “she did get sacked. If you get a blitz called on your QB, you cut the route off. You gotta help ‘em out and keep the play alive, kid.”

“Yes, Coach,” Mike says as Coach Carr lets go of the facemask and claps him on the shoulder pad.

“Alright! Set up! We run it again! QB scramble, live action, on one.”

Kara steps up behind her center already on the line of scrimmage and checks to make sure her line is in place.

“Set!” Her center drops to position. “Green 23!” she checks the two defensive lineman across from her and the defensive back across from Mike, “Green 23! Hut!”

The ball is snapped and her center locks in on one of the linemen.

The other barrels in on the left. She rolls to the right, dancing away from the defender, both hands snug on the ball.

Kara sights Mike angling away from his defender, setting the defensive back on his heels.

There’s a small opening, hands are up, and Kara releases the ball quickly into the small pocket available.

She doesn’t see if Mike catches the ball. Instead she sees the ground rushing toward her face as the defensive lineman wraps her legs up, guiding her to the ground. She hears a whistle blow, signaling the end of the play, and rolls away to see Mike coming up with the ball safely in his hands.

A smile spreads across Kara’s face as she’s picked up off the ground again. She chances a glance at Coach Carr to see that his scowl is just a smidge smaller.
“Nice hands, Mike,” Kara calls out as he tosses the ball back to her.

“Again!” Coach Carr hollers from the sideline, though markedly less gruff. “QB scramble, live action, on two.”

Kara walks up to the line again.

“Set!”

“Five minute water break, then we go into live action full offense on Danvers,” Head Coach Grant calls out to her team.

Kara pulls her helmet off and puffs out her cheeks as she squeegees the sweat from her eyebrow. She slowly makes her way to the bench, helmet dangling from her fingers. The fingers of her other hand absently play with the the new hole ripped in her practice jersey as she searches the sideline for her practice bag.

“Ay, KD!,” calls out over her shoulder. Kara turns, momentarily distracted from her half-hearted scan of the team gear haphazardly strewn along the side of the field. She sees James Olson trotting over with a dopey smile on his face, “Looking good on the field today. Passes are hitting their mark.”

“Yeah, well. The boys are keeping the pocket clear for me. Lots of time on my hands,” she gives up on her pointless search and, instead, turns to the team bottles sitting on the lone bleacher next to the track.

“You picked a good day to have a lot of time on your hands,” James grins, picking up a water bottle of his own and throwing his head back to take a swig. “See that guy up in the bleachers?” When Kara goes to look, James gives her a shove on the shoulder, “I’m pretty sure he’s from Metropolis University. Recruiting for the Bulldogs.”

Kara spots a middle-aged man with an unfortunate goatee and a shiny forehead looking down onto the field, arms crossed. There’s another man with graying hair and oversized sunglasses sitting next to him, enthusiastically talking into his ear. The Moustachio Man doesn’t look very interested with what Sunglasses Guy has to say. In fact, he seems more focused on Coach Grant pacing up and down the ten yard line, talking to her assistant coaches. Kara blows out a puff of air and turns back to James, taking her own gulp of water, “He doesn’t look very impressed.”

James moves in and lowers his voice, “Well, you’ve been throwing pretty well. How about we pull a draw when we run full offense?”

Kara grins and raises her shoulder in a shrug, “Might pull it off.”

James breaks into an easy smile and offers her a fist to bump, “Alright, alright.”

She bumps her fist against his as her eyes skip back up to the recruiter and his henchman. He’s probably another coach come from on-high to see the ‘girlie quarterback’ in action - cynically waiting in the stands for her to get picked off or get snapped in two.

She turns from the bleachers to see the cheerleading squad spilling out onto the track from the open gate downfield. She immediately spots Winn, who, judging by the unruly state of his hair, most likely rolled out of bed twenty minutes ago. She smiles to herself.

Her attention is quickly diverted to the small brunette he’s animatedly talking to. Her nose is scrunched up in an adorable smile, her tinkling laugh just barely audible from where they stand.
Kara’s throat immediately goes dry. She takes a moment to clear it and takes another sip of water, elbowing James, “Hey, there’s Winn.”

James looks up from re-tying his laces, “Yeah, they’re probably getting ready to take over the field while we’re on afternoon break. Bet he’s pumped to finally get out of the gym.”

Kara huffs out an airy chuckle, “Ha, I bet. Hey, who’s he talking to?” The last sentence comes out a little too rushed.

James looks over, then back at her with a stupid sort of glint in his eye. Kara has about one second to regret her absolute lack of chill before James is flagging Winn down, “Hey! Winn!”

Winn and the Cute Brunette both turn toward the sound of the call. Kara feels herself flush and her hands inexplicably find their way to being propped on her hips. Her spine straightens on its own. Kara’s eyes lock onto green - or were they grey - eyes. Her eyes flutter and look to the ground.

When Winn waves and starts to jog over, Kara’s heart drops to her stomach. But she quickly she realizes that, thankfully, the Cute Brunette isn’t following him. She clears her throat and self-consciously crosses her arms over her chest, internally scolding herself for being such a tool.

“Hey guys!” Winn rushes out when he reaches them. “We finally made it out of the gym! Thank god, I was beginning to worry the smell of sweat and swamp-ass was starting to seep into my hair.”

“You were right,” Kara teases, screwing up her face as if they were suddenly downwind from the Midvale fishing docks.

“You’re one to talk!” Winn shoves her while plugging his own nose. “Miss Danvers is a ripe one!” He calls out loudly, making sure everyone in close proximity could hear him.

Kara lifts up her arm to give herself a smell and shrugs.

“Who’s the new girl on the squad?” James cuts right to the point.

“You’d have to be more specific. We just got a whole shipment of new freshmen this year. Lemme tell ya, they all smell worse than my Aunt Linda’s pork roast. Like, the B.O. is real. I mean, hello deodorant-”

“The one you were just talking to,” Kara cuts him off short, then goes for casual to make up for it “the… the girl with the dark hair… Short.”

Winn casts a glance over his shoulder, “Oh yeah, that’s Lena.” He turns back to face Kara, “She’s an incoming senior. Guess she transferred in from some boarding school upstate.”

Kara casts a glance over his shoulder at Lena, trying to judge if the name suits the girl now sitting down to stretch out for before practice, “She any good?”

Winn quirks an eyebrow at her sudden interest, “Well… when we first started, she didn’t know the difference between a cupie and an awesome, which, whatever. I guess she’d never done cheerleading before. But she’s learning quick and she’s looking to be the new flier of our third squad.”

Kara brings her focus back to Winn, only having listened to maybe a third of what he had said because Lena had moved to stretch her arms above her head and maybe sliver of skin had peeked out from under her shirt and maybe she was just really cute.
Winn, picking up on the confused crinkle in her brow, crosses his arms and tilts his head, “Any particular reason you’re suddenly so interested in cheerleading when you’ve never once shown any interest in the intricacies of me literally throwing human bodies into the air?”

“No.”

Kara realizes her error in responding so abruptly when Winn and James lock eyes and exchange a knowing look.

“Don’t,” she starts, but James is already warming up for a full ribbing session.

“I don’t think it’s cheerleading she’s interested in,” he starts up.

Kara groaned and felt her shoulders shag at his teasing tone, “Please stop.”

“More like one specific cheerleader,” Winn quips.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Kara shakes her head and turns to walk away. Winn grabs the back of her jersey to stop her from leaving. Kara pretends to be clotheslined by the motion and staggers back to the conversation.

“Hey, before you trot off, any chance I can catch a ride with you after your afternoon practice?” he asks, hopeful.

James claps Winn on the back, “Only if you can get a certain cheerleader’s number for her.” Winn high fives him as Kara turns and puts her helmet back on.

“Guys, drop it. And stop saying cheerleader like that. It’s creepy,” she turns back to Winn, “I’ll meet you in the parking lot?”

“Yeah, I’ll meet you by Nel!” Winn yells the last few words after Kara’s retreating back.

Kara joins the huddle around Coach Grant with James right behind her.

Coach Grant is already explaining how the last few minutes of practice will run before their afternoon break, “Run three possessions on the twenty yard line, full offense and defense, live action, on Danvers’ call. Priority is touchdown, then first down. Run red zone D. Play is dead on my whistle.”

The huddle breaks on “Midvale” and the defensive line moves to set up on the twenty while offense forms a quick huddle.

“68 86 Ace Mod on Two,” Kara calls, all thoughts of recruiters and cheerleaders now at the back of her mind.

“Break!”

Kara approaches her position under the center. She pops her mouthguard in and scans the defense. Set up for pass coverage.

She checks her line and calls, “Set!”

Both lines drop, poised for the hike.

“Hut-hut!” Kara rushes through her cadence and explodes back from the line, ball in hand. Back
one, two, three, four more steps.

Balanced. In control.

She gives her receivers time to run.

Down field, one receiver is beating their defensive back to the center of the field. She gathers herself, fires the football hard. A lineman breaks through the offense.

She sees the ball connect with hands as she taken to the ground.

Knees, hips, shoulders, down.

She rolls over to see Kenny Li get brought down at the five.

“First down,” Kara whispers to herself as Coach Grant’s whistle blows.

“No huddle. Back on the 20! Play clock starts now.” Coach Grant calls to her players.

Kara scrambles back up, assessing the defense.

Heavy pass coverage.

Good.

Kara calls ‘22 Tight Blue!’ down the line. Then once more behind her, ensuring James hears her. She makes a show of waving Mike further down the line toward the right sideline.

“Set!” Kara, takes her time looking at her line, “Hut. Hut!”

She explodes back. One, two, three steps. Her linesmen drop back to cover her for a pass.

Kara drops and scans her receivers.

Covered.

She hears James running up on her left. Her linesmen set themselves.

At the last second, she hands the ball off to James. The center and left tackle push against their defenders. A path clears. James slips past the line of scrimmage and pushes downfield.

He’s on the fifteen.

The twelve.

He’s brought down just past the ten.

Another first down.

The whistle blows and Kara hears, “Again! On the twenty. No huddle.”

Both lines hurry back to their positions, ”93 Green F-stop, on me!”

She lines up under the center. Exhales.

“Set, hike!”
Kara drops back. Fakes the handoff to James. Scans defense.

No one open.

Hiding the ball, she turns to her fullback, ready to pitch to the right and… he’s not there. Her eyes flit over to see Mike running up to the line.

Fuck.

She tucks the ball into her elbow and she powers toward the sideline.

“Mike! MIKE!” Kara hollers, angling back toward forward progression, “Mike, block!”

Mike seems to catch onto his mistake. He adjust to block the incoming linebacker.

Barely.

She skirts around his heel and breaks through the line. Eight yards to first down.

She tilts even further forward. Digging her toes in.

Four yards.

The linebacker is on her heels.

Two yards.

Cornerback is up ahead.

She pushes forward, preparing to slide feet first. Before she can slide to the ground, she feels the linebacker give her a shove toward the sideline.

It’s not much, but she loses her balance.

She pitches forward, out of bounds, cradling the ball to her chest.

She’s laid out on the turf. Sliding on her side with the momentum. Ball knocked out of her hands.

Then she’s colliding with something soft and decidedly not covered in football pads. She rolls to her back, hoping to cushion the fall of whoever she was barreling through. She feels the person drop and puts her arms out and around to guide them to the ground.

Something collides with her helmet. Something not at all soft and absolutely not protected by another helmet.

Oh shit.

“Oh god, I am so sorry! Are you ok?” Kara starts as she loosens her grip and her victim moves to sit up. Kara spits out her mouth guard, undoes her chin strap, and whips her helmet off as she follows.

She’s met with two watery eyes and a head of dark hair and suddenly Kara is aware two things all at once.

First, she just body tackled Lena the Cheerleader to the ground.

And B, Lena is still sitting in her lap, their legs still tangled together and wow was this not the time to
“Fuck - shit - god damn!” a stream of profanities are flowing out of Lena’s mouth as she covers her nose with both hands and curls inward on herself.

“Ok, ok, here let’s get you over to the bench!” Kara says as she scrambles to untangle herself from Lena. She moves to her knees behind the dark haired girl, hand placed lightly on her back. Kara gingerly places the other hand under her elbow and guides Lena back to her feet, “Wow, I really am so, so sorry.”

“You’ve said that,” Lena says, voice sounding delicate, like she was focusing entirely too hard on internalizing another slew of cuss words.

Kara guides her over to the bench as the athletic trainer rushes over with a first aid kit. Lena sits and pulls her hands down as the trainer approaches. Blood is streaming down her nose to her chin and, “Woah, holy shit is that blood,” Kara blurts out, taking a step back.

Lena, for her part, doesn’t take any notice as the trainer pulls on a pair of gloves and begins to hand her gauze and instruct her to lean her elbows on her knees.

Kara feels a weird twist in her stomach at the sight of a deposited gauze pad and moves toward the bench, “That’s… that’s a lot of blood. I, uhm... I’m gonna sit down.”

Lena and the trainer both throw her a quick glance, “You need to sit down?”

Kara just lets out a soft ‘Mmm’ and nods as she closes her eyes and counts back from ten, focusing on her breathing.

“I’m the one who just got plowed over by a football player,” Lena replies, sounding only half offended. Maybe joking? Definitely exaggerated.

In through the nose. Out the mouth. “Yeah, but at least I’m a girl football player.” Kara says once she’s reached zero. She peeks an eye open to see that most of the blood has been cleaned up and Lena is looking at her with a cocked eyebrow.

“Your head is still hard,” Lena settles on and looks forward again.

Heard that before, Kara thinks to herself. She looks back to the field where Coach Grant is approaching. Kara stands, “I really am very sorry. I promise not to plow into you again.”

Lena gives her a bit of an up-down at that and gives her head a little tilt, looking back up into Kara’s eyes as she does. Kara’s ears burn as she realizes how that could possibly be interpreted inappropriately, and she quickly turns away to head back to where her teammates are huddled.

Coach Grant passes her on the way, “Good legs, Danvers,” the tiny woman tells her, mouth turned down, “But you missed the first down by a yard. Five shuttle runs. You take the team through. To the twenty yard line.”

Kara’s shoulders drop in disappointment, but she starts her jog back. As she approaches her teammates, she sees James coming her way, “Not exactly how you imagined your first time under the cheerleader, I bet.”

Kara keeps jogging past him, “Shut up, James.”

As she approaches the touchdown line she calls out to her team, “Alright, shuttle runs to the twenty!
On me!

Afternoon practice is light in comparison to the full contact work from that morning. Coach Carr works the team in the weightroom before moving out to the field for special teams work in just helmets. Coach Grant dismisses the team with a quick reminder that the first game of the season is only a week away.

When Kara looks to the stands after being dismissed, she sees Winn waiting for her and waves to signal she’s about to head out. She walks to the bleachers to grab her gear bag and spots him quickly descending the metal stairs. He moves to join up with Kara at the stadium entrance that leads out to the parking lot.

“There’s the girl of steel!” Winn jokes, alluding to the nickname given to Kara by the local newspapers when she first started getting playing time last season.

Kara scoffs and swats out at his head while scanning the parking lot for her old red Ford Bronco, “Didn’t feel like I was made out of steel when coach had me benching 165 in the gym today.”

“That is… the worst humble brag to ever come out of you,” Winn swats back at her hand that’s aimlessly flitting around his head.

“I said it was hard, didn’t I?” Kara throws a mischievous grin his way as they approach her truck.

Winn frowns, “Well, technically, you didn’t actually say that, no.”

She chuck her bag and helmet into the backseat and, sliding her seat back into place, clambers up into the old truck.

“Ugh. God Nel, you’re such a fucking boat,” Winn huffs out as he hoists himself into his seat.

“Hey! She can hear you!” Kara defends as she rubs the truck’s dashboard. “Shhhh, he didn’t mean it, babygirl.” Kara says to the vehicle itself, blindly grabbing for her seatbelt.

Nel rumbles to life at the twist of the key and Winn reaches to turn the radio from the local roots station before Kara slaps his hand away.

“Not today, kid,” she points her finger at him dramatically, as if to scold, “Hard day, remember? 165 pounds?”

“Honest to God, Kara, you have the same taste in music as my Aunt Stella down in Carolina. Would it kill you to listen to today’s Top 40? Ryan Seacrest may be so circa 2006, but at least he calls a bop a bop.”

“They play current stuff on this station!” Kara feels the need, as always, to defend her taste in music. “Like, all of this stuff is new music.”

“But it just sounds old.”

“No. It sounds good,” Kara corrects as she locks eyes with him in a silent challenge. In a petty move, she reaches out and pushes the volume far past a reasonable level.

As Kara pulls from the parking lot onto the highway leading back to town, the opening chords of an upbeat bluesy song start to play. One that she’s definitely heard on the more popular stations.
Kara shoots Winn a triumphant look, “See?!”

Winn reaches out to turn the music back down to a reasonable volume with a resigned “Whatever.” Despite the complaints, though, Kara can hear him humming along to the words on the radio.

“Hey,” Kara breaks the comfortable silence that had fallen over the cab of the truck, “How’s Lena?” She had seen the other girl finish her check-up with the trainer and return back to the rest of her squad before the football team had finished their morning session.

“Oh, she’ll be fine,” Winn waves her worries off with his hand, “Trainer said she didn’t have any signs of a concussion and her bloody nose was done after a few minutes. She was able to join practice once, ya know, the pain in her face subsided.”

“That’s good. Did she seem, like, mad?” Kara pushes further, knowing that she’s showing far too much interest to be at all casual.

Her lack of subtlety is confirmed when Winn looks over at her, searching over Kara’s face. “No,” Winn finally settles on, “Not mad. It’s not like you ran her over on purpose.”

Kara nods and a beat of silence passes as Kara pulls into downtown Midvale.

“Kara,” Winn says softly.

“Hm?”

“Lena’s last name is Luthor.”

Kara slows to a stop sign and feels the tension build in the truck as Winn anticipates a reaction. She doesn’t give him one.

“So?” She looks ahead at the intersection. Focusing on pushing in the clutch and shifting through the gears when it’s her turn to go.

“I just… I wasn’t sure if you knew. And thought maybe it’d be something you’d noticeably react to - once you found out. And, well, what if you found out from Lena and reacted in front of her? So I-”

“Why should I care if her last name is Luthor?” Kara cuts him off.

“Kara-”

“Lionel didn’t even get charged. The evidence was circumstantial at best,” Kara dismisses as she takes a corner just a tad too fast.

“Kara, her dad was the main suspect in your entire family’s murder.”

“Don’t.” She cuts a look over to where he sits.

“It just wouldn’t be unfounded if finding that out caused you to freak.” Winn rushes out before Kara could cut him off again.

“Please stop trying to be my therapist, Winn,” Kara sighs out as she turns down Winn’s street.

Winn is quiet for a moment as he watches the houses pass by.

“You’re right,” he starts, “I’m not your therapist.”
Kara thinks he’s going to leave it at that before he presses on, staring out the passenger window, “But I’m your best friend. And I wouldn’t have any way of knowing if ‘Luthor’ would mean anything to you because you’ve never talked to me about what happened.”

Winn pauses, “And that’s ok,” he continues, shifting to look at her, “I’ve never expected you to. But that doesn’t mean I’m not aware of what happened to your family or that I don’t still want to make sure you’re ok. In whatever way I can.”

Kara pulls to the curb in front of Winn’s house, shifting to first and pulling the parking brake. She mulls his words over, thinking back to when she first met Winn at a neighborhood block party shortly after the Danvers’ had taken her in.

His knobby knees had been grass-stained and scratched, the tail of his shirt untucked from his khaki shorts. He’d run up to her, as she stood shyly behind Jeremiah’s knee, and giggled while blowing bubbles at her face. He had run off back toward the field full of children, but Jeremiah had encouraged her to run after him.

And she had, after some time.

They’d been best friends ever since. Kara was fairly certain her friendship with Winn was one of the main reasons she’d been able to establish any semblance of a normal life. Why she hadn’t grown up to be a full-on Sidney Prescott.

Kara runs a hand through her ponytail. Grips the steering wheel. She’s probably being unfair.

“Look, Winn, I’m sorry. I know you’re just looking out for me. I don’t talk about it because I don’t—” she lets her hands slip from her hold on the wheel, “Because I can’t remember anything.”

She clears her throat and her gaze drops down to her hands, “I was there and I can’t remember anything.”

It’s a blessing and a curse. She’d spent hours in sterile rooms with children’s toys scattered about. Cops and child psychiatrists had tried to gently coax her into remembering something - anything - about the night of the murders. Any sort of clue that could help them figure out who the murderer had been. But the memories just hadn’t been there - still weren’t.

Winn reaches out and takes one of her hands, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

Kara swallows hard and blinks a few times. She turns to Winn and offers a small shrug, “After twelve years of not remembering, talking about it just feels like going around in circles.”

“I don’t need you to talk about it. But if you ever do, I hope you know that you can. To me.” Winn gives her a small smile.

Kara reaches over and ruffles his hair with a grin, “I know that, you big sap.” Winn laughs as he lets her pinch his cheek. With the mood a little lighter, she continues, “Now get the hell out of my car.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” he ducks away from her assault and opens Nel’s door, “Hey! You coming to the beach party tomorrow? Last Saturday of the summer and all that.”

“Yeah for sure!” Kara grabs onto the subject change quickly, “I’m helping Ms. Donahue set up at the farmer’s market in the morning, then I’ll head over to Swan Beach. Meet you and James there?”

Winn moves to grab his backpack from the truck, nodding his head, “Sounds good. I heard a certain… cheerleader will be there.”
Kara rolls her eyes and tsks, “Don’t be weird.”

Winn smirks and turns up the walk toward his house.

Kara watches as Winn walks through his front door. She lifts the brake, pulling out into the road.

When Kara pulls into her driveway, the house is dark, save for the front hall light that’s usually left on when no one’s home. She sighs as she slowly ambles up the porch steps, keys jingling as she looks for the house key on her ring.

As she opens the door, she hears a loud thump and tap tap tap - telltale signs that the enormous ball of white fluff her family claims is a dog has heard her come home.

Krypto tears into the entryway as she’s trying to kick her shoes off. Kara tries to move around him to chuck her football gear out of the way, only to find herself stumbling over his many legs onto the low bench pressed against the wall.

“Hi boy! Oh you are just so excited that someone is finally home!” Kara smooshes his fuzzy face to hers as he jumps up to lick her hello.

Kara finishes taking her shoes off with Krypto’s tail slapping her face. Her stomach gives a low grumble as she stands, “Come on, let’s go see what we have for dinner.”

Kara makes her way down the hallway to where the house opens up to the living room and kitchen. She gets herself a glass of water out of the kitchen tap and downs it while staring out into the large backyard through the small window over the sink.

She turns to pick up the note left in Eliza’s handwriting on the island countertop.

*Got called in last minute.  
Should be home by 9!  
Money for pizza.  
xo Mom*

Kara blows a stray hair out of her face and grabs the twenty left behind for her dinner. She looks to Krypto staring up at her expectantly, “What do ya want on your pizza?”

The dog tilts his head to the side and makes a small whining noise.

“Ew, we are not getting kibble on our pizza again.” She smiles at her own joke and takes out her phone as she moves to the soft couch in the living room. Her text conversation with her sister Alex is pulled up and she types up a quick message.

- hey. when do you get off work?

Krypto hops onto the couch and lays his head on her knee. The response comes a few minutes later as she’s searching the mobile menu for the pizza shop downtown.

- Off in a half hour.

- mom got called into the hospital. she left money for pizza. wanna come over and watch bad 90s rom coms

Kara bites her nail as she watches the three dots indicating her sister is typing back.
Kara smiles and hums happily, dialing the number for Pizza Palace.

She won’t have to spend another Friday night alone.

Kara pulls into Sunny Acre Farms the next morning before the sun has even made it to the sky. She takes the gravel road to the newly expanded barn that houses the farm store near the front of the four acre property. When she turns off Nel’s engine, she can already see Ms. Donahue and her daughter Vicki packing their trailer under the warm glow of the light mounted above the barn door. She opens her truck door and slides her seat forward to let Krypto bound out of the truck toward the other two women, tail a blur.

“Kara! Morning.” Ms. Donahue calls out as she hoists a particularly heavy-looking bag of metal parts into the trailer.

“Good morning!” Kara throws a hand out in a wave as she rounds to the back of her truck to throw the gate open. She steps back around her truck as Ms. Donahue walks over.

“Everything is packed for the stand. Just need to pack up the produce. Crates are inside.” The older woman juts her chin toward the farm store, wipes an already sweaty strand of graying hair back.

Kara nods, heads through the door, and hefts up the first apple crate she sees. Ms. Donahue moves further into the farm store as Vicki looks up from scratching Krypto behind the ears.

Kara works quietly for a few minutes before noticing the way Vicki is focusing in on the way she’s handling the apple crates, her own packing forgotten.

“School starting next week, isn’t it?” Vicki calls out as Kara slides another crate into the back of her truck.

“Yeah. Monday morning, bright and early.”

Kara is rounding the truck to grab another crate. Vicki seems to consider something before she continues, “What year are you going into?”

Kara pauses, looks up to where Vicki is watching her.

Having just graduated the year before, Vicki was spending this year helping her mom out on their family’s farm before heading off to a technical school somewhere off cape. She had been a close friend to Alex back when they were in middle school, only being a year younger. Kara knew that the way Vicki was looking at her was significant. It made her blush and look down, scuffing her steel toe boot in the dirt. She was never really any good at… this.

“Senior.” Kara replies as Ms. Donahue makes her way back towards them.

“You planning to stay on at all during the school year?” the older woman asked, clearly having heard the topic of their conversation.

“Yes ma’am.” Kara answers, bending to pick up the next crate. She hesitates a moment, flicks a quick glance over to where Vicki is still watching, then hoists the apple crate up with some extra umph and props it on her shoulder.

“Good,” Ms. Donahue states as she and Vicki move to start packing crates into their own trailer.
“Hay rides are starting next weekend. You up for filling in on tractor every now and then?”

“So long as it isn’t Friday night, Ms. Donahue,” Kara replies. She stacks her crate into her truck and slams the gate closed.

“That’s right! We’re looking at the new Stallions’ starting quarterback.” Ms. Donahue sends her a warm smile over her shoulder as Kara moves onto helping load their trailer.

“Well, how about this,” Ms. Donahue starts as the three women each grab one of the remaining crates, “you help us set up at the farmer’s market, then take the rest of the day. Go to the beach. Enjoy the fireworks that the city has planned for tonight. Then next weekend, you give me all day Sunday for driving tractor and working the store.”

Kara stacks the last crate into the trailer and straightens up. She shoots her hand out for Ms. Donahue to clasp with a smile.

“Deal.”

Kara gets to Swan Beach late enough that she struggles to find a parking spot. While the tourists had definitely dwindled down to just a few stragglers left on the cape, it was a beautiful day and everyone seemed to gravitate to the beach when the sun was shining. She finally finds something in the far corner of the lot big enough for Nel and whips into it. Taking a moment before leaving the truck, she quickly checks herself over in the mirror.

She’d ended up staying at the farmer’s market against Ms. Donahue’s half-hearted protests. The crowd around the produce stand had grown quickly in the mid morning, and Kara couldn’t bring herself to leave while they were swamped. After the crowd had thinned out, Kara had looked down to her watch to see it was 11:30. She’d hurried home to throw on a pair of chubbies, a sports bra, and a sleeveless ‘Midvale Stallions’ t-shirt.

Looking in the mirror now, Kara shakes out her ponytail left in from work and redoes it into a loose bun. She’s not bothered by her red and sweaty face; she supposes she’ll get red and sweaty on the beach anyway. She throws on a pair of sunglasses, casts herself one last look in the mirror, and nods to herself.

Good enough.

Kara reaches the top of the dune with a small cooler in one hand and her shoes and towel in the other. She wiggles her toes in the sand and lifts her chin up to the sun, humming her content. Looking down the beach, she spots Winn and James already mingling in a group of people she makes out to be a mix of teammates and friends.

As she nears the group, she can hear Colin Hix trying to rally enough people for a laid-back game of beach rugby. She’s soon spotted and someone calls “hey KD, just in time to join” from the huddle.

Cooler and towel discarded by the others, Kara jogs over to find James holding a rugby ball while Colin sets out the rules. Teams of four are picked and soon Kara finds herself with a sweaty Mike Matthews running right for her. He grins as he tries a fancy side-step, but Kara is able to get an arm around him and wrap him up.

It takes a little extra effort, but she takes him down to the sand.

Those who had gathered around to watch holler their approval as Kara pops back up and rejoins the ruck. Through brute force on Kenny Li’s part, the ball comes out of the ruck and back to Kara.
She takes off, James set up across from her. She drops the ball to her foot and gives it a little chip. The ball takes an odd bounce and makes it around James, where Kara is able to scoop it up and dive across the temporary try line indicated by coolers. She sits up covered in sand and shoots a smug smile up at James.

James rolls his eyes and offers Kara a hand up, joking, “Don’t get used to it. That’s not gonna happen again.”

And it doesn’t.

Three more times Kara tries to blow by James only to run into him like a brick wall, get scooped up, and be very mindfully plopped on the ground. "I don’t need Coach Grant on my back about wrecking our quarterback one week before the season starts," he’d defended when Kara had complained about him taking it easy on her.

Once, Kara gets called out for trying to throw the ball over-hand, to which she’d just shrugged and trotted off in the other direction.

When Kara makes a break toward the try line in the final seconds of their match, James dips his shoulder low and slings Kara over his back, heading toward the ocean. Kara shrieks in surprise, dropping the ball, and laughs as she swats at James’ back.

She lets out a loud gasp when he finally dumps her into the cold water, popping back out of the cool water. In retaliation, she charges him, grabbing behind his knee and pulling up. James hops a few times, trying to keep his balance, but the combination of Kara’s shoulder pushing him off center and his inability to stop laughing causes him to finally fall under the surface of the water, dragging Kara with. When they both resurface, Kara splashes him one more time for good measure before heading back to dry land.

James throws his fists up in victory as the onlookers applaud his team’s victory. Kara gives a soft laugh at the display and tries to run her fingers through her now tangled hair. Heading back towards her towel and cooler, Kara attempts to detangle her binder from her hair and spots Winn sitting under an umbrella with a red cup in his hand. He sends her a quick wave when he notices her looking over, motioning for her to come join.

Kara’s attention, however, is diverted to another umbrella further back on the beach. More accurately, her attention is drawn to the fact that someone under that umbrella is staring.

Lena, Kara realizes, is sipping bottled cream soda from a straw, has her sunglasses pushed atop her head, and is, by every definition of the word, ogling Kara.

Kara looks down at the drenched shirt clinging to her stomach and smiles to herself. She moves to take it off, wrings out the seawater, and bends to pick up her towel and shoes. Grabbing a water from her own cooler, she moves in Winn’s, and coincidentally Lena’s, direction.

“Hey Winn!” Kara greets as she towels herself off.

“You’re atrocious at rugby,” Winn says by way of greeting.

Kara just beams down at him.

When Kara looks back up in Lena’s direction, the brunette has her sunglasses back in place and is very decidedly not looking at Kara.
The party makes its way back to Mike’s house on the shoreline a few blocks away. There, it’s much easier to get away with openly drinking and the party goers can use a properly maintained bathroom. Winn takes over hot dog duties at the grill while James and Kara keep him company on the back deck. A small group of girls were still inside the house where Mike was helping them figure out the sound system, but the majority of Kara’s teammates had taken to the sandy expanse between the house and ocean to throw around a football.

Kara watches Winn burn the hotdogs as he rambles on about the latest school gossip.

“Did you guys hear that Lyra Strayd is in the hospital?” Winn turns his head their direction.

“Oh no! What happened?” Kara plucks a chip from the bowl in front of her.

“Well… I heard that she - oh shit,” Winn realizes a hot dog has caught on fire and uses his tongs to fling it over to the paper plate next to the grate. “I heard that she choked when she was giving her boyfriend… you know…”

Kara’s hand freezes as she’s about to pop another chip into her mouth, her eyes widen.

James spits out his sip of beer, and it dribbles down his chin, “What?!” he exclaims, wiping his face with the back of his hand.

“That’s ridiculous. Can that even happen?” Kara asks, horrified.

James and Winn share a quick glance. When James looks down at his feet, Winn turns back to Kara, “Well, logistically it’s… possible.”

Kara shoves the chip into her mouth and stands up abruptly, grabbing for the now empty bowl, “Ew. I don’t wanna know anymore.” She moves to the door, heading to the kitchen for a refill on chips, “And stop spreading that rumor. It’s really mean.” She gives Winn a pointed look, and he just raises his hands in surrender and turns back to the grill.

She makes her way to the kitchen, setting her bowl down, and starts searching the pantry closet for more food. When she emerges with a new bag of chips and a package of oreos, she spots Lena making her way into the kitchen with at least six empty beer bottles in her hands. Lena pauses for a moment, as if searching for something, not having noticed Kara.

Kara clears her throat, “If you’re looking for recycling, it’s under the sink.”

Lena throws a quick glance over her shoulder with a ‘thanks’ as she sets her loot on the nearby counter, intending to help open the cupboard. But Lena sticks out her foot and opens the cupboard with her toe and slides the small blue bin out from its cubby. There’s no trash bag in the bin and Lena turns to her with an expectant look.

“Here,” Kara crosses the kitchen and reaches down below the sink, pulling a bag out of the box stashed there. She busies herself with getting the trash bin situated in an attempt to stop her eyes from loitering too long on the simple black, high-waisted two piece hiding away beneath the loose swim cover-up Lena is sporting.

When she straightens back up, Lena unloads the beer bottles and looks back up to Kara with a small smile, “You look different without all of the football pads on.”

Kara huffs out a nervous laugh, “Good different? Bad different?”

Lena considers her a moment, eyes darting to her shoulders, then her feet, and back up, before
deciding, “Smaller… but definitely still tall,” she waves a hand in the direction of Kara’s head, referring to the nearly six inch height difference between them.

Kara can feel her ears burning at the attention. She isn’t sure how to respond, so she redirects.

“I’m Kara, by the way.”

A corner of Lena’s mouth quirks up, as if she already knew who Kara was and thought the introduction amusing. She offers her hand, “Lena.”

Kara takes Lena’s hand and can feel her eyes linger too long on Lena’s as their hands slip away from each other once more.

“Your face looks good,” Kara offers and quickly stumbles on, “I mean, like, you don’t have a bruised nose or a black eye or anything. From, you know, me accidentally smashing my head into it.”

“I’m wearing a considerable amount of cover-up,” Lena replies, the small quirk still at the corner of her mouth.

She can see the playfulness in Lena’s eyes, but Kara still cringes internally, “I really am sorry about that.”

“Well,” Lena bends to return the recycling to its place beneath the sink, “I’ve thought of a way you can make it up to me.”

Kara laces her fingers behind her back, giving Lena a look to continue, not entirely sure where this was going.

Lena crosses her arms across her chest and leans her hip against the counter, “Occupy my time.”

Kara can feel her face reacting before she can school it into a neutral look. Her eyebrows knit together and her chin juts to the side “I’m- what?”

“I’ve seemingly been cornered by Mike back there,” Lena shifts her head to look past Kara into the sitting area nearby, “and I’m… somewhat desperate to not be.”

Kara looks over her shoulder to follow Lena’s gaze back to where Mike has both arms slung across the back of the couch he’s occupying, Lena’s apparent seat being kept for her.

“Oh,” Kara replies, eyebrows raised as she turns back.

“And if you were to sweep me away to anywhere else, well, I couldn’t really be blamed, could I?” Lena finishes her proposition with a small flourish of her hand and an arch of her brow.

Kara takes a brief moment to appreciate the dignified way Lena holds herself before turning to scoop up her scavenged snacks and sweep a flourish of her own in the direction of the deck.

“Well, by all means. After you.”

They settle on a spot down the beach where they can still see the small group tossing around the football in the backyard. Kara opens the oreos and immediately offers them over to Lena before settling in to get comfortable.

“So,” Kara starts, peering into her own bag for the right chip, “You’re pretty new to Midvale.”
Lena looks over, the cream half of an oreo in her hand, “That’s not exactly a question.” Inexplicably, 
she pops the bite of oreo in her mouth without even bothering to lick the cream off first.

“Well, I guess that could lead into a lot of different questions,” Kara shrugs nonchalantly before 
looking over, “Where do you wanna start?”

Lena gives a sigh and leans back onto her elbows, lolling her head to one side, and sends a teasing 
look her way, “I don’t think that’s how small talk works.”

Kara pauses a moment, looks out to the water, then back to her toes buried in the sand, “Okay, then 
let’s play a game.”

“What kind of game?” Lena stretches her legs out, Kara notices the pale pink polish on her toes.

She looks back to where Lena has reclined, “Like a get-to-know-you kind of game. Like…” her 
gaze moves from Lena’s exposed collarbone up to the house as if she’ll find a suggestion there, 
“Like two truths and a lie.”

When Kara looks back to Lena, she’s biting into an oreo without even splitting the two halves, “I’m 
not familiar.”

“Pretty straight forward,” Kara grabs a handful of chips, “One person,” she gestures towards Lena 
with a chip, “tells two truths and then one lie about themselves. The other person,” she gestures to 
herself, “tries to guess which one is a lie! If they guess wrong, they have to drink. If they guess right, 
the other person drinks.”

“Neither of us has a drink,” Lena points out.

“Pretty low stakes then, huh?” Kara lifts her chin and sends Lena a smug look.

Sitting up from her elbows, Lena gives a soft chuckle that Kara takes as acceptance to her 
suggestion.

Kara breaks into a shy smile and gives Lena’s knee a tap with her knuckle, “You go first.”

Lena looks from Kara’s face out ot the waves, humming in thought. Kara waits patiently, flipping 
small pebbles off into the nearby brush.

“Ok,” Lena turns back to her, a small glint in her eye, “I’m a licensed pilot, I once accidentally set an 
entire chemistry lab on fire, and I’ve never driven a car.” She finishes, tucking her feet under herself 
as she does.

Kara blinks absently as she stares at Lena’s profile. The three options were all pretty absurd for one 
of them to be true, let alone two. She can see Lena’s lip curl up as her silence stretches on. 
Eventually, Lena turns her head to look Kara in the eye and let’s a clipped laugh escape her at what 
Kara imagines must a pretty dumb look.

Kara shakes her head and huffs in disbelief, “Well you brought the big guns right out of the gate.”

Lena laughs at her again and gives her an almost apologetic look, “I’m sorry, is that not how most 
people play?”

“Most people are a little easier,” Kara teasingly pouts.

“Ah,” Lena lifts her chin and leans away in mock embarrassment, “Well I don’t like to be easy.”
I bet flutters across Kara’s brain, but she tamps the thought down quickly.

Lena turns back to her, clearly still expecting her to pick out her lie.

Kara reaches over to grab an oreo and shoves the whole thing in her mouth, considering.

“Well the obvious choice for the lie would be flying a plane,” Kara thinks out loud, “But that would mean you’ve never driven a car, which is, honestly, a little crazy. And it would be pretty weird if you could fly a plane and not a car.”

Lena just hums at her reasoning.

“But not having driven a car is more feasible than flying a plane. Which could just mean you included it to throw me off.”

“So what’s your final answer?”

Kara turns back to her, hoping to find a clue in Lena’s gaze. But Lena’s wearing the best poker face she’s ever seen.

“That you’ve never driven a car. That’s your lie.”

Lena sucks her teeth for a moment, looking down at her cleanly manicured nails, “The accidental fire didn’t reach further than a single beaker. Though, the beaker did explode. But that hardly counts as setting the whole lab on fire.”

Kara feels her eyes widen and her jaw drops slightly, “The lab fire was your lie?!”

Lena sends her a wicked grin.

Kara starts at this revelation, unsure of where to start. She settles on, “you know how to fly a plane?!”

Lena nods smugly before expanding, “I took lessons when I was fifteen and was fully licensed by the time I was sixteen. My brother flies too, it was meant to be a bonding activity.” She scoffs a little to herself at that, as if acknowledging how bizarre that sounded.

“But you’ve never driven a car.” Kara doesn’t say it as a question. It’s more to remind Lena how unlikely it is for those two truths to belong to one person.

Lena simply shrugs, palms facing the sky.

“But how did you get to flying school if you couldn’t drive?” Kara asks, plucking up another oreo.

“There are ways. And for the record, just because I’ve never driven a car doesn’t mean I don’t understand the mechanics of the process. Or that I wouldn’t be successful if I tried,” Lena defends, only slightly indignant.

“Right, I mean, how much different could it be from flying a plane?” Kara flails her hands out above her head if only to show how truly bonkers she found the whole scenario.

“Drastically, I’d imagine.” Lena deadpans, before giving Kara a sidelong glance and scrunching her nose. She reaches over and snatches the potato chip bag from Kara’s lap, eating them one at a time, as if unwilling to get the oil on more than her index finger and thumb.

They sit quietly for a moment before Kara presses on, “So how have you gone this long not driving a
Lena gives another shrug, thoughtful this time, “I’ve only been old enough to drive for a few years. And until recently, I’ve been away at boarding school. That was a closed campus, so there was no real need for a car, even once I was old enough.” Lena looks back down to the bag in her hand and sets it aside, wiping her hands together.

“Why’d you leave boarding school?” Kara continues, eager to learn more about the cheerleader sitting next to her who could, apparently, fly an aircraft.

Lena looks over to where Kara’s teammates had migrated to the coolers on the deck for more beer. She turns back to Kara with a coy grin, “Food was awful.”

Kara lets out a sympathetic scoff at that.

It’s a deflection and Kara knows it. She knows there’s a more significant reason Lena decided to come back to Midvale to finish out her high school career. But Kara also knows what it’s like to want to keep some things private, to keep things light and carefree.

If only for a little while.

“Valid,” Kara giggles, and let’s it go.

A comfortable silence falls over them. Kara leans back and tucks her arm behind her head in the sand, stretching her legs out.

Lena gazes down at where she lay. “Ok, it’s your turn,” she taps her own knuckle to Kara’s arm.

Kara looks up to the sky. She notes that she can see Venus rising against the faded blue of the sky.

“My max bench is 200,” she hears Lena scoff and laugh next to her, “I like magic tricks, and I have a near photographic memory.”

In her peripherals, she can see Lena perk up at the last statement. It makes her think of the conversation she’d had with Winn the night before, and the reason she had qualified her statement with ‘near’.

Kara moves her gaze to Lena who seems to be assessing her.

“They say photographic memory isn’t real,” Lena looks at her doubtfully, trying to sniff out the lie.

“Would it be better if I changed it to ‘extremely prolonged eidetic memory’?” She maintains eye contact with Lena as she says it, almost able to see the wheels turning between the other girls ears.

Lena narrows her eyes, then seems to come to a decision, “Well, for the sake of your reputation, I hope you’re lying about the magic tricks.”

Kara lies still for a moment, then slowly sits up, scanning the sand around them. She reaches out for a perfectly sized pebble and then casts a mischievous grin Lena’s way. Adjusting herself so that she’s facing Lena straight on from her knees, she holds the pebble in her flat palm to show Lena. The other girls eyes lock onto the pebble, flick uncertain up to Kara, then back to her palm.

Kara picks the pebble up with her right hand and moves to place it in her left. She pulls the pebble back into her right hand as her left hand closes around empty space, managing a pretty clean vanish. She smirks when she sees that Lena’s eyes are still glued to her left hand. Slowly uncurling her left
fist, Kara feels herself glow when Lena grabs to inspect her hand in disbelief.

Motioning with her left hand for Lena to ‘hold on’, Kara snaps the fingers of her right hand. The pebble drops from her fingertips to her palm and she triumphantly holds the pebble up for Lena to inspect.

There’s a pause. Then, “I hate it,” Lena states while taking the pebble, her eyes wide.

Kara grabs the pebble back wordlessly and tosses it back and forth between her hands. With the pebble in her left hand, she reaches to scratch her left forearm with the empty hand. Lena’s eyes track the motion, as if trying to catch the trick.

Kara tosses the pebble to her right hand and, as she reaches across to scratch her right forearm, Lena’s eyes following the movement, she performs a perfect french drop in her right hand. She pretends to toss the pebble back to her left hand, then pulls the left hand away and reveals her empty hand.

Lena just laughs and shakes her head, looking up at Kara in something so close to amazement.

Kara unfurls a very impish smile at Lena as she slowly and deliberately leans in towards Lena, causing Lena’s throat to bob. Kara reaches her right hand up near Lena’s ear, her eye’s locked with Lena’s, and snaps.

Lena’s hands fly to cover her mouth, already knowing what will be in Kara’s hand when she pulls back. “No,” she says firmly into her hands.

Kara just lets the short laugh caught in her throat slip past her lips and pulls herself and her hand back from Lena, revealing the small pebble in her fingertips.

Lena loses her dignified composure for a small moment and flails her hands in front of her. “Oh my god,” she looks up to Kara excitedly, “I’ve never seen anyone do it in real life!” The display makes something somewhat familiar flutter in Kara’s chest and she can only let out an unattractive snort.

Still laughing, she shifts her legs out from beneath her as Lena presses her shoulder against her own and playfully pushes out her arm in an attempt to topple Kara over, “I can’t believe it.”

Kara allows herself to be pushed away, smug smile still in place. When she gets close to losing her balance, she grabs hold of Lena’s wrist to right herself. She moves her other hand to poke playfully at the other girl’s stomach and chin, as she would with Winn in this type of situation.

Lena responds to the light, tickling jabs with a surprised gasp, her fingers tightening around the spot they had found on Kara’s bicep while her other hand pushes on Kara’s chest. Something entirely familiar and definitely not in Kara’s chest swirls when her focus zeroes in on the contact.

Kara chuckles and gives one last half-hearted shove to Lena’s shoulder as she draws back, “Can’t believe what?”

Lena rights herself with a bright smile on her face, “Well, I really just can’t decide who’s a bigger nerd. You for pulling out party tricks at an actual party. Or me for almost finding them… impressive.”

Kara makes an indignant sound as a hand flies to her chest. She shoots Lena an affronted look, “Excuse me? Almost impressive?”

“Mmm, I said what I said,” Lena looks off toward the sunset, taking on a haughty front.
Kara clicks her tongue, throws her hair over a shoulder, “Whatever helps you sleep at night.” She picks up the pebble she’d used for her tricks and tosses it into Lena’s lap.

Lena turns to her abruptly, “So what was the lie?”

Kara grabs a handful of chips from the nearby bag and shoves them all into her mouth gracelessly. “I can only bench 185,” she mumbles through her full mouth.

Lena’s eyebrows shoot up, “Only? That’s at least as much as you weigh.”

“Bit more,” Kara wagers, glancing over to gauge Lena’s reaction. She doesn’t miss the way Lena’s throat does the bobbing motion again. Or the way she blinks slowly a few times.

Satisfied that Lena is at least impressed with that, Kara is content to let Lena carry the conversation form there.

Appearing to give up on that topic, Lena switches to another, “So you do have a photographic memory, then?”

“Near,” Kara corrects, “And you’re right. Prolonged eidetic memory is more accurate.”

“How long is prolonged?” Lena asks, interested in Kara’s answer in a way Kara couldn’t quite place. Almost gentle? Encouraging?

Kara shrugs, tucks an imaginary strand of hair behind her ear, “It honestly depends?”

When Lena doesn’t prod further, Kara looks over. Lena is evidently waiting for her to continue on her own.

“Well it can vary from minutes to… weeks? Months?” Kara explains.

“And it’s not just transferring memories from eidetic to short term storage?” Lena uses vocabulary that Kara wasn’t aware other seventeen-year-olds used.

She shakes her head, rubs at her eye, “No. Perfect recall.”

“Huh,” Lena looks off into the distance. The ‘fascinating’ goes unsaid, but is implied. “You must be an amazing student,” Lena adds as she redirects her attention to Kara.

That gets a snort from Kara, “Not at all.”

Lena quirks an eyebrow.

“I can only recall things I pay attention to. And I don’t really… pay attention to much,” Kara says, somewhat sheepishly, “Unless I’m like, really focusing. Like, trying really hard.”

Lena opens her mouth as if to say something, but thinks better of it. She instead turns her attention back to the setting sun in front of them, the sky now a brilliant display of pink-tinted clouds against a fading blue sky.

They sit quietly, watching as the sun slips through shades of blue, then orange, to pink.

“I think I’m at my happiest when the sky is pink,” Lena says thoughtfully when the sun finally sinks low enough to allow the sky to slip back to blue hues.

Kara smiles at the thought of Lena being at her happiest while sitting next to her. She thinks to reply,
but before she can, she hears Winn call from somewhere behind them.

“Kara! Lena!”

They both turn to see Winn approaching them across the sand. Kara looks back to Lena before standing up and grabbing her bag of chips. Lena moves to grab the oreo package and takes the helping hand up that Kara offers her. They move towards Winn.

“Hey Winn,” Lena greets him with a small wave and a smile.

Kara is less enthusiastic about having a third party joining them.

“Hey, we’re all gonna walk to the docks and take boats out for the fireworks. Mike and James have already gone down to ready their boats. You guys in?” he explains quickly, “They should be starting in fifteen minutes, now that the sun’s down.”

Lena doesn’t answer right away, casting a glance Kara’s way instead. Winn seems to take the cue and turns to Kara, waiting for an answer.

When Kara realizes that the decision has been put to her, she stammers, “Oh! Uh, yeah! Sure.”

She looks back to Lena as Winn nods and turns. Lena gives her a friendly smile, and they both move to follow Winn back to the house.

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Kara and Lena end up on separate boats for the firework show, and Kara doesn’t really see much of Lena when they return to the house. Partly due to the party having significantly grown in size after nightfall, but also because Jess Huang had swept Lena up to introduce her to the newcomers.

Somewhere between Kenny doing a keg stand with a keg that had inexplicably shown up and Mike destroying the makeshift beer pong table when he’d shoved a guy onto it after being accused of cheating, the neighbors had called the cops on the party.

Winn comes barreling into the living room yelling ‘Cops!’ and Kara is suddenly swept up in chaos.

Since she hasn’t been drinking, Kara isn’t exactly motivated to run away. She’s able to navigate her way through the drunken fray to the kitchen, searching for a suitable hiding spot. Maybe Alex is on duty and will find her and roll her eyes when she eventually discovers her. She eyes the pantry closet, considers it, then quickly crosses the kitchen to shut herself in.

Kara stands across from the cereal and flips the shutters on the door to watch her stumbling teammates leave the house out the back, toward the beach. On their way out someone hits the lightswitch and the light flooding into the closet cuts out.

Kara feels something strange tug in her chest as she stands in the darkness. Something uncomfortable. Familiar.

Suddenly, she’s hyper-aware of the sound of her own breathing. The need to be silent flashes across her - hot, like a branding iron. She needs to be quiet. Or they would hear her.

She stands frozen for what feels like an eternity. Unable to move. The house is silent. Waiting on a precipice.

Then she hears them.
Footsteps are sounding down a hallway.

Her heart beat kicks in her chest. So hard she starts to ache.

She’s aware that she’s holding her breath. She tries to force air into her lungs. But her breaths only come in shallow gasps.

Her limbs start to go numb. Knees give way as footsteps draw nearer. She’s dimly aware that she’s sliding down a wall. She doesn’t feel herself moving.

Sweat slips down her brow. A pair of boots enter the kitchen. The beam of a flashlight streaks across the door. They’re going to hear her.

Light illuminates the hands in front of her. She’s not sure those are her hands. She tries to lift them. To inspect them better. They don’t move. She stares at them, horrified.

Her eyes flit to look out the door. There’s a hand there too. On the floor. Behind a counter. In a pool of-

There’s a heavy pounding in her ear. Is that her heart? The waves of pain through her body pound along to it.

She thinks she hears an officer calling to another.

What was he saying? Something about bodies-

No.

The flashlight streaks across the door again. Footsteps draw nearer.

No. There aren’t bodies here.

She tries to scream. Tries to cry out. Tries to let someone know she’s here.

She can’t.

Her face is dripping. Sweat and tears falling from her cheek.

The closet door swings open and the flashlight is shining in her face. She blinks once. Twice.

She feels small. Like she’s five again.

“Christ,” she hears a gruff voice say, light blocking out their face. “Someone get Officer Danvers!” they call back into the house.

The name Danvers stirs something in her. Something warm and meaningful.

She feels her breath deepen. Letting oxygen back into her lungs.

She lifts her hand slowly. Blocks the light from her eyes. She sees a round face looking down at her. He’s very clearly worried.

The flashlight is lowered as lights are turned on in the room he’s standing. Her eyes flit around, recognizing the surroundings as somewhere familiar. Comfortable.

“Kara!”
A breath shudders into Kara’s body and she’s suddenly shaking. Kara realizes she’s sobbing as a familiar woman - Alex - as Alex falls to her knees by her side.

“Kara, shhh, you’re safe,” Alex inspects the closet as she pulls Kara against her chest. She shifts her attention to Kara’s body for any signs of harm. “Shhhh, I’ve got you, Kara. You’re okay now.”

Alex pulls Kara into her lap, pressing her chest to Kara’s back. She’s still gasping for air between sobs.

“Count my fingers, Kara.”

Kara doesn’t quite process the command. “Count my fingers,” Alex lifts her hands and slips Kara’s on top of them. She realizes what Alex wants her to do. Slowly, she presses her left pinky down on Alex’s, “One,” she’s able to mutter.

“Good, now the next one,” Alex encourages.

Kara moves to Alex’s ring finger. Her middle. Index. Thumb. Two, three, four, five. She’s counts over onto Alex’s right hand, up to ten.

“Again,” Alex says softly.

Kara starts back at Alex’s left pinky. Counts through. Starts again. Then again. Again.

Kara loses track of how long she sits in Alex’s lap, counting her fingers. Slowly, her breathing evens out and her heart rate comes down slightly. Kara feels her body go slack with exhaustion and she falls more firmly into Alex’s embrace.

“Can you tell me what caused you to panic, Kara?” Alex asks as light as a feather, wiping away hair that had been plastered to Kara’s face.

She’s silent for a moment. Looking into the closet before her. She takes a deep breath.

“I… I think I-” her voice catches in her throat. Alex’s hold on her tightens slightly.

“I think I remembered.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

As if able to feel the stare, Lena looks over to where Kara is readying to take the field. A genuine, eye-crinkling smile breaks over Lena’s face as she gives a small wave. Then her eyes slide over Kara’s body, taking in her full gameday uniform, and honest-to-god winks at Kara before directing her attention back to where Winn is organizing their squad for a lift.

Maybe it’s the extra confidence her uniform lends her, but Kara doesn’t fumble like she normally would at the gesture. Instead, her heart gives one extra hard thump as she smiles to herself and pulls her helmet back on.

The whistle blows to signal the start of the game, the Condors kickoff, and her team makes a decent return run.

Then Coach Grant is slapping her shoulder pad and she sets off toward where the official is placing the ball.

Show time.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so I know this took forever to post, but this chapter was harder to pin down than I expected. My initial goal was to have this whole fic done by Halloween, but life got a little chaotic (hello job change), I got sidetracked by @jazzfordshire smut, and I was sucked into zelda: botw and I just NEEDED to fight Calamity Ganon, okay?

I hope you all will indulge me with this story even though the spooky season has officially ended. And I definitely intend to post chapter three sooner than a month.

Fingers crossed.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kara blinks awake at 11:27 in the morning, burrowed into her down comforter with a leg sticking out from under. She squirms to peer over the pillow fort she’d constructed in her sleep and finds Krypto’s head nuzzled into her pillow, a paw stretched out and resting on her arm. She reaches to stroke his face delicately only to have a sleepy tongue lick at her palm and a fuzzy head wriggle into her hand. Filling her lungs with a deep yawn, she lets her eyes flutter closed again. Her thoughts turn back to the night before as she absently scratches behind Krypto’s ear.
Jeremiah had pulled up to Mike’s house in his sheriff’s car last night and had all but run to Kara when he saw her wrapped up in one of the crinkly blankets EMTs use for shock patients. Alex had thankfully kept the scene relatively discrete by letting Kara sit in the passenger seat of her cruiser with the door ajar. When he reached her, Jeremiah had dropped to his knees, a hand on each of Kara’s shoulders, and silently searched her face for signs of harm. All Kara could manage were a few disoriented blinks before he pulled her into the crook of his neck, pressing a soft kiss to her temple.

Kara remembers fisting the rough material of his uniform in her hands, but hadn’t been able to focus on the words passing between Jeremiah and her sister. When he finally looked back to her face with a ‘Let’s get you home, love’, Kara had felt the full force of her exhaustion hit. He’d helped her shift fully into Alex’s cruiser with promises of figuring out how to get Nel home in the morning.

Beyond that, it’s hazy. Kara vaguely remembers walking through the front door into Eliza’s deathgrip. She remembers a glass of water being forced into her hands for her to drink before she was sent off to bed.

Kara lets out a slow breath as she rolls onto her back, stretching her arms above her head and curling her toes. Her body feels like it was run over by, well, a linebacker twice her size, and her knee twinges from when she’d stumbled on her way up the stairs last night. Krypto lets out a low grumble at the shift in pillows and moves to scoot closer to Kara’s body heat.

“He always did seem to like you most. Probably because you’re such a furnace.”

Kara lifts her head to see Alex standing in the doorway in a soft cotton robe over her pajamas and a coffee cup in hand.

“Did you stay the night?” Kara forgoes remarking on Krypto’s apparent preference.

Alex gives a small nod, “I did.”

Kara can tell she’s giving her space. Not walking on eggshells, per se. But waiting to be invited in.

“How are Mom and Dad?” she asks, which is enough of an invitation for Alex to make her way from the doorway to her bedside, placing her mug on Kara’s desk as she passes.

“A little spooked,” Alex sighs out as she lays across the foot of Kara’s bed, scratching at Krypto’s belly. “But they’ll survive.”

“Are they mad?” Kara asks in a voice softer than she intended.

“No, just worried.”

“There was drinking at the party.”

Alex lets out a short scoff, gives Kara’s exposed foot a firm shake, “I think that’s the least of their concerns. All things considered.”

Kara allows herself to relax back into her pillow and close her eyes at that.

“I’m sorry. That you had to… that you found me. Like that,” Kara stumbles over her words, always uncertain after having been so publicly vulnerable.

She feels Alex shift until she’s positioned herself to give Kara’s legs a loose cuddle through the comforter. Alex doesn’t say anything right away.
Then, “Do you remember when you first moved in with us?”

“Vaguely,” Kara admits, shifting to give her sister more room on the bed.

“You had been… distant. At the beginning,” Alex starts, seeming to consider her words with care. “Entirely understandable now. But as an eight year old, I didn’t understand why my new sister didn’t want to play.”

Kara feels a lump form in her throat at the reminder of the broken child she’d been when she had first joined the Danvers household.

“You cried a lot,” Alex presses on and Kara can’t help an incredulous snort at the oversimplification.

“Well, you did!” Alex defends, “You cried a lot, and you would never let Mom or Dad comfort you.”

Kara remembers how she had refused to let Eliza hold her when she cried. How she would squirm away from Jeremiah’s reassuring touches. Because they weren’t Mom and Dad.

Not yet, anyway.

“Then one night after dinner,” Alex continues, “There was this huge thunderstorm. I mean, shaking-the-house huge. It was enough to scare tough eight-year-old me.” Kara scoffs at that softly.

“You curled up next to me on the couch and hid your face in my shoulder and absolutely shook every time there was thunder. But you let me pat your back and try to comfort you. And I promised from that moment on, that I would do anything to keep my baby sister safe,” Alex gives her calf a squeeze and Kara feels moisture collect at the corners of her closed eyes.

“Even if that means protecting her from the things we can’t see,” Alex finishes.

There’s a long stretch of comfortable silence until Kara gives a soft sniffle, “Thank you, Alex.”

Alex just tuts her tongue when she sees the tears slipping from under Kara’s closed eyes and moves to playfully wipe them away with her robe, “Still a crybaby, I see.”

Kara can only let a wet laugh out at the tease as she snifflces back whatever other tears were trying to make an escape.

Alex sits up and pats Kara’s leg, “Come on, Mom and Dad are keeping some leftover pancakes for you. And if you aren’t downstairs in ten minutes, I’m going to eat them.”

Alex stands and retrieves her coffee cup, making her way out of Kara’s room with Krypto following behind.

Kara stretches out her arms one more time before she finally throws back her covers to head downstairs.

“There’s the sleepy head!” Jeremiah’s deep voice calls out from the kitchen when Kara collapses on the sofa in the living room, the sweet smell of syrup filling her nose. She lets out a grumble in response and pulls the blanket folded on the back of the couch across her lap.

Eliza moves from the kitchen to the living room with a stack of pancakes, “Good morning, sweetheart.” Swatting at where Alex’s feet are propped on the coffee table, she takes a seat across
“Hi Mom,” Kara gives her a small smile as she sits up to take the offered plate, immediately moving
to dig in with the fork Eliza passes over, almost as an afterthought.

“You really gave us a scare last night,” Eliza is looking at her closely, as if reassuring herself that
Kara really is ok.

“Yeah well… I scared myself,” Kara gives a noncommittal shrug as she shovels half a pancake into
her mouth.

“How are you feeling this morning?”

“Tired,” Kara responds truthfully around her bite of food.

Jeremiah rounds the kitchen table with a glass of milk, handing it to Kara when he reaches her. Kara
takes a grateful gulp as he shoves his hands into his jeans’ pocket, “We think you should set up an
appointment with Dr. Nondas.”

Kara spares a thought for the therapist she’d been seeing since she was ten. When she was sixteen,
she’d been allowed to scale back her visits to as-needed, instead of the required bi-weekly visits she
had made as a kid. She couldn’t really blame her parents for thinking last night qualified as ‘needed’
in regards to her mental health. So Kara just looks down to her plate as she sets her glass of milk on
the coffee table and gives a nod.

Eliza leans forward to stroke a reassuring hand against her cheek and card a hand through Kara’s
tangled blonde curls. Then she’s pressing a kiss to the top of Kara’s head as she stands and moves
back to the kitchen, leaving Kara to watch HGTV with Alex while she finished her breakfast.

On Monday morning, Kara walks into her first period physics class to find Winn and Lena already
sitting at a lab table. Winn waves his hand to call her over and Kara ducks her head to scoot around a
group of guys congregated around someone’s phone at the front of the room.

“So,” Winn starts as he takes in Kara’s uggs and slightly-too-large sweater “We need to have a talk
about your life choices.” As if to soften his snarky comment, he nudges a strawberry-frosted
doughnut her direction.

She quickly snatches up the offered doughnut, “Good morning to you too, Winn.”

Lena looks up at the sound of Kara’s voice from where she’d been rummaging through her tote and
a friendly smile breaks over her face, “Hey Kara.”

Kara smiles around her totally reasonably sized bite of pastry and clears her throat once she’s
swallowed it down, “Hey! You bought into the insanity of early morning physics too?”

Lena runs a hand through her hair and hums out an amused sound that makes something in Kara’s
stomach flutter appreciatively, “Well, you know. You’re here too.”

Kara snorts as she settles into the chair across from Winn, “Not really by choice. Winn bullied James
and me into taking physics with him this semester. Said it would look good on college applications.”

She shoots a glare Winn’s way as she takes another bite of her doughnut.

“Well it will,” he grumbles before charging ahead, “But can we actually talk about those shoes. And,
like, don’t get me wrong. I’m all about your whole athleisure look. Very jock. But, uh. Leggings on
the first day of school?"

Kara looks down to her outfit and, for the first time, feels self-conscious about her appearance in the presence of Lena’s thin pastel sweater tucked into a red pleated skirt.

“Says the guy who exclusively wears varsity sweaters in the fall,” Kara tosses back half-heartedly, to which Winn just tilts his head knowingly.

Kara rolls her eyes, “Don’t be a jerk. I didn’t really have time after practice this morning to get ready. And I have gym third period, so I was just going to change after that.” She fiddles with the cuff of her sweater nervously. She’d figured it would be relatively painless getting through physics and intermediate comp looking like a mess, but she’s re-evaluating that decision with Lena’s eyes taking her in.

James comes ambling through the door and takes the seat across from Lena as the bell rings. Kara nods a greeting as the teacher clears his throat to begin class.

The first fifteen minutes of class go by quickly as Mr. Lichter walks everyone through the course syllabus and classroom expectations. When he calls for everyone to pair up, Kara shoots a look Winn’s direction.

James quickly snuffs that idea out, “Uh, not this time, Danvers. You got to be partners with brainy-pants in chemistry last year. It’s my turn to be paired with Winn.” It’s early in the morning and Kara just barely holds back a pout as she grabs her backpack to move.

“No offense, Lena,” James adds hastily as Winn moves to takes Kara’s spot. Lena shrugs a shoulder and locks eyes with Kara.

“None taken. I’ll take Kara,” she responds as a smug look comes over her face that has Kara tripping into Winn’s now vacant seat beside her.

Kara takes a steadying breath as she pulls a water bottle from her bag, “I have to admit. I don’t think being a physics lab partner is going to be my strong suit. I’m really more like… moral support.”

Lena lets a soft laugh fall from her lips as she reaches out to rest her fingers on Kara’s bicep. “I’m sure we’ll make do,” she says in a way that Kara is sure is meant to be reassuring. But Kara’s too focused on the way the warmth of Lena’s hand seeps through the fabric of her sweater to really be assured of anything.

She throws a quick glance across the table to see James pressing a fist to his mouth and Winn’s eyebrows tickling his hairline, both boys zeroing in on the casual touch. Lena doesn’t seem to notice anything other than Kara nodding hastily in response as the hand is withdrawn from Kara’s arm.

Mr. Lichter’s voice cuts across the room, grabbing the table’s attention, to explain that the new pairs will be partners for the rest of the semester and that the remainder of class will be spent playing an introductory game of Jeopardy. Kara is halfway to slumping her head against the table in defeat when she’s given a thread of hope, ‘Textbooks and online resources are allowed. Just remember, you’re on a time crunch!’

Each lab table ends up being a team and, to Kara’s surprise, her team is tied for second place in the last four minutes of class.

She’d even been able to get a question right.

“This is the opposite of matter.”
“Uh. What is... anti...matter?”

It’s down to the last category and their team could win if they get the largest point category correct. It’s Lena’s turn to answer when Quentin Dox calls, “Bits and Bobs for 500.”

“Boson particles have superpartners called fermions, which are divided into six types of quarks and six types of leptons. This beauty of a quark has a charge of negative one third,” Mr. Lichter reads out with a self-satisfied set to his shoulders.

Before Kara, or anyone else for that matter, can even start to comprehend what the question is trying to ask, Lena’s finger is delicately dinging the bell in the middle of the table. Mr. Lichter’s head snaps up and his eyebrows furrow as he calls on Lena to answer.

“What is the bottom quark.”

The room waits as Mr. Lichter blinks a few times and shakes his head once, “You seem familiar with subatomic particle theory, Miss Luthor.”

A smile curls at the corner of Lena’s mouth as she taps her pen against her notebook, “We all have our hobbies.”

“Wait, is that right?” Quentin calls across the room.

“It is. Team superfriends wins,” Mr. Lichter nods back to the rest of the class.

“Well damn, Nancy!” Kara exclaims in disbelief as she turns wide-eyed to Lena.

“Language, Ms. Danvers,” Mr. Lichter scolds over the scuffle of students beginning to pack their things.

“So, Kara,” James starts, looking over at Lena as she throw her notebook into her bag, “Any chance you’d want to switch partners?”

“Not a chance, Olsen,” Kara huffs out as she shoulders her backpack and looks over to Lena, “I know a good thing when I see it.”

Lena, at least, has the decency to attempt to look bashful as she waves and heads to join the crowd flooding out of the classroom. Kara waves at her retreating back momentarily before realizing that she actually has to follow after her to leave the classroom.

“I’ll catch up with you guys at lunch?” Kara calls over her shoulder to Winn and James as she pushes through the throng of students to catch up to Lena just outside of the classroom.

“Hey,” Kara breathes out as she finally pulls up beside Lena, “Where did you say you went last year? Some sort of genius boarding school?”

Lena lets out a clipped sort of laugh before pressing her lips together and looking over to Kara, “Something like that.”

“Well,” Kara hitches a thumb over her shoulder as they round the corner into the history hallway, “You sounded pretty smart back there.”

“Mmm, was a lucky guess,” Lena hums back as she scans the row of lockers and slows in front of one that Kara realizes must be hers.

“I seem to recall you writing it off as a hobby to Mr. Lichter, actually,” Kara points out as she leans
against the locker next to Lena’s.

“You and that confounded photographic memory,” Lena teases with a playful look tossed in Kara’s direction, half her attention focused on the handle that won’t lift on her locker.

“Here, let me,” Kara intervenes after Lena pulls at the locker handle in frustration.

With one hand lifting on the handle, Kara shoves her shoulder into the metal locker door with just the right amount of force, popping the lever up and swinging the door open. She turns to Lena with a victorious smile plastered on her face.

Lena rolls her eyes as she shakes her head, but Kara’s pretty sure she can see a smile hiding in the corners of her eyes and her heart gives a small thud at the sight.

“Hobbies aside, I’ll probably need all the help I can get if I’m going to survive physics and Winn’s wardrobe commentary at 7:45 in the morning. Any chance you’d wanna be study buddies?” Kara rushes out as she focuses on the speckled tile of the hall floor and readjusts the backpack hanging from her shoulder.

Lena switches out her notebook and closes her locker again before turning to face Kara head on, smile finally reaching her eyes, “I don’t know, you did get one question right.”

“Okay, but that actually was luck on my part,” Kara says, sneaking a glance up at Lena’s gaze as she absently knocks her knuckles against the metal locker door she’s leaning against.

“Guess you’re lucky I’m a very indulgent partner, then.”

Before Kara even has the chance to get flustered over the hidden implications in that statement, Lena is asking for Kara’s phone, which is quickly fumbled out of her pocket and pushed into Lena’s hands. Lena enters her number under a new contact while Kara looks on, swallowing around the nervous lump in her throat. And, if Kara’s being completely honest, she’s left a little shell-shocked as Lena turns to walk away, casting a playful glance over her shoulder as she goes.

Kara is still leaning against a locker staring at where Lena had disappeared around a corner when the one minute warning bell rings. She startles out of her daze and realizes she’ll have to run to make it to class on time.

Rolling her eyes at her own lack of chill, she turns toward the english hall and takes off.

During lunch, Kara spots Lena coming out of the checkout line in the cafeteria. She notices that there are a few wisps of hair falling from the bun Lena had thrown her hair into and that the tray she’s holding consists of a salad, carrot sticks, and a carton of chicken noodle soup. The lunch looks slight in comparison to the double cheeseburger, curly fries, and chili currently sitting on Kara’s own tray.

Feeling only slightly more confident than this morning now that she’s appropriately dressed in her favorite short-sleeved dinosaur button-up tucked into jean shorts, she hurries to catch up to Lena before she heads into the lunchroom.

“Lena! Come sit with us?” Kara tilts her head in the direction of where she knows James, Winn, Mike, and the rest of her friends were already sitting.

Lena turns from where she had been apprehensively peering among the sea of students and gives Kara an appreciative smile and nods her head, seeming relieved.
Kara returns the smile as she makes a quick pit stop at the condiment station just inside the lunchroom.

Lena hovers beyond her shoulder while she waits for Kara to stop assaulting her cheeseburger with ketchup. Kara’s eyes flit to where she fiddles with a napkin dispenser, uncharacteristically nervous.

“So. I heard about the party on Friday. About when the cops came,” Lena starts tentatively as she withdraws her hand from the dispenser and instead focuses on tucking a flyaway behind her ear.

Kara looks up from where she’s covering her fries in mustard, brow furrowed. She glances from Lena’s bottom lip caught in her teeth up to where Lena is averting her eyes back out over the lunch tables.

“What exactly did you hear?” Kara pushes, not sure what the rumor mill had cooked up about the emotional breakdown she had in Mike’s kitchen closet.

“What I presume to be absolute garbage considering you spent a good chunk of the night with me and you never once had a drink,” Lena is still looking out over the room as she answers, then shifts her attention back to Kara, “But I thought you might want to be clued in to at least 63% of the student population thinking you were so drunk that you stumbled into a kitchen closet, threw up, passed out, then got busted by the cops.”

Kara forces out an indignant scoff and reaches a hand up to scratch the back of her neck, “Wow, people can be really awful.”

Lena tilts her head in agreement, “You’re not wrong.”

Kara moves away from the condiment station, ensuring that Lena’s moving with her, before making an attempt at an explanation, “Well, actually, uhm. My sister, she works for the Midvale Police Department. So. When the cops showed up, I thought it’d be funny to hide and have her find me. And, I did hide in a closet! But… I guess… well, it turns out that I’m actually pretty claustrophobic. And I… just kind of-”

“You don’t have to explain yourself to me, Kara,” Lena interrupts her nervous rambling with a sincere look, “I know you didn’t actually blackout. You don’t owe me or anyone else an explanation.”

Kara bobs her head and mumbles out a short ‘ok’ as she guides them through the tables scattered around the room.

“And I’ll be sure to let the next person I hear spreading that rumor know that I was with you all night and that they’re wrong,” Lena offers with a determined set to her chin.

Kara huffs out a relieved chuckle and ducks her head, “Already willing to tarnish your reputation for me?”

“I think there’s about a three week freeze-out period where my reputation will be nothing but new girl,” Lena muses as she spots the table surrounded by Kara’s teammates, “Besides. You’re the high school quarterback. I doubt any damage will be permanent after you clinch the first victory.”

Lena nudges Kara’s side with her elbow and Kara can’t do anything but beam down at her as they approach the table.

——

“Winn! Wait up!” Kara closes her U.S. History textbook and jogs over to catch Winn on his way out
of cheer practice. She’d been itching to talk to him alone all day.

“Kara? What are you still doing here? I thought you guys only had morning practice today?”

“We did, but I thought I’d hang around and see if you needed a ride,” Kara replies as she comes to a stop in front of him, trying to tuck the heavy book back into her backpack.

“Oh, well I was just gonna catch a ride with Siobhan since I’m on her way,” Winn gestured over his shoulder back into the gym where Kara could see the other girl making her way towards them.

Kara grabs Winn by the elbow and starts pulling him in the direction of the exit, “Could you send her a text that you found a different ride?”

“I- sure, yeah. I’ll do that right now,” he mumbles as he struggles to pull his phone out of his pocket while Kara’s hand still grips his elbow. She notices and let’s him go quickly, allowing him to send off a quick text and repocket his phone.

“Is this…? What’s going on, Kara?” Winn asks as they both push through the doors to the nearly empty lot and head toward Nel sitting a few parking stalls down.

“I need to talk to you,” is all Kara offers as Kara unlocks the doors and they both pull themselves up into the truck.

“Well, obviously. I mean, while I love the subtle undertones of subterfuge, do you think you could clue me in?”

Kara tosses her backpack into the back of the truck from where she’s sitting in the front and turns her body to fully face Winn, “I remembered.”

Winn’s mouth opens and closes a few times, thinking of something to say. He eventually furrows his brow and settles on, “What?”

“I remembered something about my parents’ murder.”

Winn’s eyes bug out a little in surprise, but Kara keeps talking before he can say anything.

“I was in Mike’s kitchen pantry and it was dark and I had this weird panic attack... thing,” she’s looking around the cab of the truck, gesticulating frantically with her hands, “But I saw stuff. Or I had a flashback. I- I’m not really sure? But I felt like I was five years old again in that closet. And I heard the police say something about bodies, Winn. And I saw this hand laying in a pool of blood.”

“Jesus,” Winn whispers as Kara catches her breath.

“And I’m… I’m not really sure what any of it means. Am I going crazy?”

“No!” Winn reaches a hand out quickly to rest on her shoulder, “No you aren’t crazy. Crazy repressed, maybe-”

“Winn.”

“But this is… good! Right? It’s progress?”

“I don’t know,” Kara groans out as she turns to slump her head against the steering wheel.

“Why do you think it happened?” Winn asks after a beat of silence.
Kara shrugs from where she’s leaning against the wheel, “I’m not really sure. I just had this overwhelming feeling that someone was going to get me. That I needed to hide.”

Out of the corner of her eye, she can see Winn rubbing at his chin as he stares blankly out the windshield, thinking.

“Do you think maybe that’s what you felt? That night, I mean. Like you needed to hide,” Winn asks, thinking out loud.

“Chances are pretty high that the feeling of needing to hide was pretty prevalent the night my parents were slaughtered in our family home, yes,” Kara replies sarcastically, but her words lack their usual bite.

“Well maybe needing to hide from the cops triggered your response,” Winn says, looking over to Kara, “Or maybe the environment. The small space of the closet. The darkness.”

Kara thinks back to Saturday night and how her chest had tightened when the lights went out, how the flashlight cut through the slats of the closet door.

“That,” she finally sits up, nodding her head, “could make sense. All of that. What you just said.”

“Do you know anything factually about that night? Like, have you been told how the events happened? Where you were, where you were found?” Winn asks gently.

Kara shakes her head, “No, at first they didn’t tell me anything like that because they didn’t want to create false memories. And when I got older I... didn’t really want to know anything. About how they were killed. I didn’t want to know what I couldn’t remember.”

Winn gives her shoulder a soft squeeze and rubs her shoulder blade before letting his hand fall away. He takes a deep breath and when he speaks, he sounds hesitant. Like he doesn’t want to spook Kara with his next words.

“It might be worth it. To look over the records. And validate that what you saw or felt are memories. That you remembered something.”

The suggestion sits heavy in Kara’s gut. She’s not entirely sure she really wants to know the intimate details of how, exactly, her parents had been killed. It’s not the first time she fears it might open a pandora’s box of violent memories that her psyche has probably shut away for good reason.

She picks at the plastic of the steering wheel and nods her head, looking over to where Winn sits, “I think you’re right.”

Winn offers her a sad smile as she starts the truck and pulls away from the school.

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Kara ends up texting Lena on and off all week under the guise of needing help on the first physics assignment. She quickly learns that Lena has a ridiculously large stockpile of terrible physics jokes.

- *How does a German physicist drink beer?*

- *No, Lena. Please no more jokes.*

- *With ein Stein.*

Kara’s delighted when she receives a message from Lena on Friday morning as she’s pulling on her
varsity jacket.

- *Saddle up, qb. It’s gameday.*

The message warms Kara’s body with a nervous energy that carries her through the day. In class, the constant murmuring about the upcoming game against the Opal City Condors is like an ambient buzzing at the back of her mind. People clap Kara on the back as they pass her in the hall with a ‘Ride hard, Danvers’ or a ‘Saddle up, Stallion’.

Kara’s sitting on the wooden bench of the locker room, suited up and anxiously chewing at a hangnail, when Coach Grant breezes in to take her to the boy’s locker room where the rest of the team waits. Kara stands after she hears the squeak of the door and bends to grab her helmet still resting next to where she had been sitting. When she straightens up, Coach Grant is standing in front of her with a clenched fist perched on each hip. Kara stands awkwardly, waiting for her to say something. The silence stretches on for a moment as her Coach seems to regard her, and Kara opens her mouth to say something.

Coach Grant holds up a finger to cut her off and exhales, “A lot of people in this small town think I’m crazy for making you my starting quarterback this season.”

Kara clenches her jaw and looks over the top of Coach Grant’s head as she adjusts her helmet from one hand to the other.

“By tomorrow morning - by the end of the night - those people will be talking about tonight’s game. The whole town will be talking about the game. And your name will be on the tip of everyone’s tongue. Analyzing every play you call. Every pass you make. Every hit you take. They’ll be creating the dialogue that narrates your story this season.”

Kara looks down to the laces of her left cleat and grips her free hand around where her shoulder pads sit under her chin. She isn’t really sure how any of this is meant to be motivating. Her nerves flutter uncontrolled in the pit of her stomach as her thumb runs over the red fabric of her jersey.

“It’s important that, right now, you realize that you are the one controlling the dialogue that’s running in your head tonight. So start scripting a positive result. Find your mantra for when it gets tough. For when you get tired. For when you’re under so much stress you can’t think straight. Find the mantra that will remind you you’re more than capable of overcoming. You’re strong enough. And smart enough.”

Kara blinks a few times. She’s never heard such direct assurance from the woman before.

“How does she want to be remembered.

“Tonight you set the tone for your story. How do you want to be remembered?”

Kara’s snaps her eyes up to where Coach Grant’s is studying her.

“Being quarterback - leading this team - you’ve fought for it. It’s yours. So take it.”

Kara nods her head as she mulls over the words. Coach Grant turns on her heel to leave the locker room and Kara follows quickly after, moving through the hall and pushing through the door to the opposite locker room. The team is already spread around a whiteboard where Coach Carr stands, waiting for Coach Grant to return.

Once Kara situates herself between James and Mike, Coach Grant walks the team through their game plan one last time before reassuring the team of their capacity to win. There are more words of
motivation, but Kara doesn’t pay them much attention. She’s already found her manta.

How do you want to be remembered?

It’s Kara’s turn to hype her teammates up, and she starts the customary singing of Thunderstruck as her team stands to stomp their feet and prepare to leave the locker room. As soon as everyone is standing, she turns to the corridor leading to the field, slaps the red ‘M’ painted on the doorway, and starts a slow jog. The deep voices of her teammates reverberate off the stone walls as she pulls her helmet over her head.

She can hear the song they’re currently singing play over the PA system of the stadium and gradually tilts into a sprint. The lights of the field are pouring in through the end of the corridor and she can see the breakaway banner being held up by the cheer squad. As the raspy vocals of the recording sing ‘you’ve been... thunderstruck’ over the field, Kara lowers her head and punches through the thin paper.

The home crowd is on their feet and cheering into the warm August air as the team pours out onto the field. Adrenaline pulses through her body as Kara leads the team down to the opposite end zone, where she bends to sweep her fingers over the grass before turning and heading toward the home team’s bench, slowing to a jog.

Kara scans the crowd as Coach Carr hands her a ball. She squeezes the leather, testing her grip, and spots her parents sitting at the front of the stands just behind the fifty yard line. Eliza’s calling her name and Kara can just barely hear it over the roar in the stands. She returns the eager waves of both Jeremiah and Alex before lining her fingers up on the laces and chucking a pass to where Kenny stands ten yards away.

The late summer air is electrified with the energy radiating from the spectators and players. Red is splashed across the bleachers and the smell of popcorn and boiling hotdogs wafts from the concession stand. The marching band is playing their pre-game music from the stands as Kara revels in the moment.

When all the players are on the field and gathered to their respective sideline, the national anthem is played and the officials are calling captains for the coin toss. Kara calls ‘heads’ to win the toss. She turns to walk off the field and her eyes lock onto a familiar face.

Lena is standing on the sideline with the rest of the cheer squad, clearly getting organized for the next set of stunts. There are red and silver ribbons tied into her ponytail and Kara can’t help but notice how the turtleneck flatters her sharp features or how the sleeves of the uniform highlight the elegance of her arms. Nothing about the uniform is overtly revealing or sexual, but Kara stills feels her face flush as she takes in the sight.

As if able to feel the stare, Lena looks over to where Kara is readying to take the field. A genuine, eye-crinkling smile breaks over Lena’s face as she gives a small wave. Then her eyes slide over Kara’s body, taking in her full gameday uniform, and honest-to-god winks at Kara before directing her attention back to where Winn is organizing their squad for a lift.

Maybe it’s the extra confidence her uniform lends her, but Kara doesn’t fumble like she normally would at the gesture. Instead, her heart gives one extra hard thump as she smiles to herself and pulls her helmet back on.

The whistle blows to signal the start of the game, the Condors kickoff, and her team makes a decent return run.
Then Coach Grant is slapping her shoulder pad and she sets off toward where the official is placing the ball.

Show time.

——

The Midvale Stallions take the lead in the first half with three touchdowns - two touchdown passes from Kara and a touchdown from James after a twenty-two yard run. The Opal City Condors keep the score close going into halftime at 21 - 14, and after a missed field goal from the Stallions and a nine yard touchdown form the Condors, the game is tied by the fourth quarter.

Kara’s line is set up on the Condor’s forty-five yard line with just under a minute left on the game clock.

She steps to the shotgun positions and looks over her line.

“Green 64!” Kara shouts over the chaos in the stands.

“Huuut. Hut.”

The ball snaps into her hands.

She rolls to her left. Passes the ball off to James who takes off toward the right sideline.

Mike runs in front of him, sets up to block the outside linebacker.

James comes around the tight end, breaking past the line of scrimmage.

Kara watches on as he crosses the fifty yard line as the Condors’ cornerback approaches. James stumbles out-of-bounds on the Stallions’ forty-eight to stop the game clock.

Kara approaches the line and a quick huddle forms around her. She glances up to see twenty-eight seconds left of the game.

She expects pass coverage on the next play and makes the call for a draw.

She just needs to get in field goal range.

And it worked when she ran it with James in practice.

“22 Tight Blue on one.”

The huddle disperses on ‘Break’ and Kara settles under the center.

“Blue 22! Hike!”

Her cadence is quick and she drops back three steps, scanning her receivers.

No one is open as James comes up behind her.

She shoves the ball into his hands as he sprints by.

The offensive linemen aren’t as effective at clearing a path as James needs. He’s stopped just inches shy of a first down. The clock is left ticking.

23… 22… 21…
With no timeouts left, Kara scrambles to organize her line.

“Late! Late 96 89! On me, on me!”

Three of her receivers situate themselves on the line to her left. Mike approaches the line to her right.

The clock ticks down to fourteen seconds.

“Set!”

Her line drops. She settles behind the center.

“Hut! Hut!”

For a moment, she only hears her own heartbeat in her ears.

She inhales.

“Hike!”

The line springs to action as her receivers take off.

She drops back one, two, three, four, five steps. Gives her receivers time to run.

Scanning her receivers, no one has cut their route off for the pass yet.

A defensive lineman breaks through the line and hurtles toward her.

Ball snug in her hands, Kara dances to her right and out of the pocket.

She’s making her way toward the sideline when she sees Mike beat his linebacker. He’s on the fifteen yard line when he finally looks back for her pass.

Taking one step to plant her foot mid run, Kara launches the ball into the air as arms wrap around her waist from behind.

Her eyes remain on the ball spiraling through the air as she slams into the ground. A hush falls over the crowd.

She rolls to her knees as Mike catches the ball near the five.

5... 4... 3...

With a final burst of speed, Mike evades the linebacker and throws himself into the endzone.

“TOUCHDOWN STALLIONS!”

The stands erupt in sound as the bench storms the field.

Kara is being picked up from the ground and is surrounded by her teammates in seconds. James picks her up under the arms and hoists her into the air, giving her an enthusiastic shake before putting her back down. Multiple hands are hitting her helmet and patting her shoulder pads and she can’t do anything but beam behind her facemask.

As the receivers sprint back to the impromptu mosh pit, Kara spits her mouth guard out and pulls her helmet off while Mike is shuffled to the center beside her. They exchange a complex handshake before Kara turns to the stands, helmet raised.
The team follows suit, each player turning and raising their helmet in recognition of the spectators still hollering and exchanging thrilled hugs.

The cheer squad takes the cue and together chant, “Ride hard!”

Kara’s whole team immediately responds, “MIDVALE!” as they pump their helmets.

The crowd notices and joins in on the next, “Ride hard!”

“MIDVALE!”

“RIDE HARD.”

“MIDVALE.”

The crowd dissolves into hollers of approval as the team finally disperses to make their way from the field back to the locker room.

Kara searches the sidelines for Lena as she walks. Turning over her shoulder, she spots her high-fiving Siobhan good-naturedly. Kara turns fully around, walking backwards off the field, keeping her gaze on Lena until the brunette looks up.

When their eyes lock, Kara lifts her chin as she feels a sly smile creep over her lips.

Still riding the high off their victory, she gives Lena a playful wink of her own.

There’s a message waiting on Kara’s phone from Winn enthusiastically informing her of a bonfire at his house when she finally emerges from the locker room post-shower. She jangles the truck keys in her hand and she looks down at the invite. Her muscles are sore and she really could use the extra sleep. But the thought of missing out on a night of celebration leaves Kara with an empty feeling in her stomach, so she tosses her gear into the back of Nel and begins the drive to Winn’s house before she can talk herself out of it.

By the time she has parked Nel on the curb and starts the short trek up the sidewalk to the small stoop, the front door is thrown open and Winn - followed by James and Mike - runs out of the house to meet her.

“The woman of the hour!” Winn calls giddily as he approaches, arms spread wide as he swoops her up in a tight hug and spins.

She laughs into Winn’s shoulder as James and Mike jostle her around good-naturedly. There’s a familiar song spilling out onto the front yard that Kara doesn’t quite know the words to. She looks up to the house where, through the open door, she can see familiar faces in animated conversation on the living room couch and teammates gathering around the kitchen island carrying on some sort of game including red plastic cups.

When she crosses the threshold into the house with Winn, the whole house cheers and a red cup is pushed into her hands as her name is called out across the space. Everyone looks on expectantly as Kara looks down to the drink she’s holding. Pausing for a moment, she looks over to Winn, then takes a long pull, emptying the cup in one go. She raises the cup above her head obligingly as the house breaks into another round of cheering and the music is turned louder.

The attention slips from Kara as she stacks her empty cup inside another abandoned cup next to a bowl full of car keys that definitely don’t all belong to the Schott family. Kara tosses her keys
amongst the others as Mike offers her another red cup that she silently declines. Winn is disappearing
down a hall with the bowl in hand and James is directing her to an open spot on one of the couches.

“Gonna let yourself cut loose tonight?” he asks, obviously alluding to the fact that she’d accepted the
drink at the door so easily.

Kara just shrugs her response, a dopey smile firmly in place. It’s not that she’s morally opposed to
drinking - granted, she’s never done it in a group setting. Usually it’s just her and Winn sitting on the
beach, each with their own forty.

If she were more honest with herself, Kara would admit that not having any control over the tragedy
of her childhood or the events that followed had her grasping for a sense of autonomy at an early
age, that she’s carefully constructed a sense of self-control and agency over the last decade that she’s
often reluctant to release to the clumsy hands of alcohol.

But tonight, she feels less need for that control. A little more comfortable in her own skin. A little
more… normal? Or at least, she wants to feel normal. She supposes there’s a distinction between the
two.

“We’ll see how the night goes, I guess,” she says as she fiddles with a still-damp curl resting on her
shoulder.

An hour passes where Kara is allowed to just soak up the comfortable energy of the room before
she’s roped into the game of flip cup at the kitchen island with Winn and James. It’s their second
round through and she’s staring down Kenny after throwing back her cup when the front door
pushes open. Kara looks up and her plastic cup slips from where she was trying to perch it on the
edge of the counter.

Lena Luthor is pushing through the door and unironically strutting into the house, poised a top black
heeled boots with dark waves cascading down her back. Kara’s heart drums in time with the
fluttering beats of the song playing over the kitchen speakers, as if Lena had timed her entrance for
this exact purpose. Kara gulps as she bends to retrieve her cup from the floor. Lena is heading her
direction and Winn is shoving his elbow into Kara’s side - whether to draw her attention back to the
game or to nudge her in Lena’s direction, she’s not sure.

But Lena’s already walking past Kara, heading for the sliding door that leads out to the bonfire. She
throws a wave Winn’s direction and shoots Kara an alarmingly coy grin as she passes. There’s a
buzzing in her body that isn’t entirely because of the beer when a waft of delicately spiced perfume
follows in Lena’s wake - suddenly, Kara feels the need to follow after her. Still staring blankly at
where Lena had disappeared into the backyard, she realizes her mouth is hanging open. Snapping it
shut, she turns, blinking, back to where the other five are looking at her, slightly bemused, and
hitches her thumb over her shoulder.

“I’m gonna…” she trails off as she turns, heading for the door.

She hears wolf whistles and laughing and what she thinks is Mike calling ‘Hey, ride hard, KD’ to
her retreating back. Her face flushes, but she flips him off without stopping on her way through the
doorway.

The night air has cooled and Kara finds the soft breeze refreshing as it tousles her hair and clears the
slight haze from her head. She heads down the steps of the back porch two at a time and scans the
backyard. Kara spots Lena in the crowd by the fire next to Jess and Sam Arias, facing away from
The flickering flames cast shadows across Lena’s profile, turning her sharp features soft, a startling contrast to the girl who just walked through a party with more self-confidence than a seventeen year old girl ought to have. The realization that she finds Lena beautiful like this, all soft edges and warm smiles, is enough to make Kara lose her nerve. She stops just a few paces beyond the porch and starts weighing the pros and cons of turning right back around to her teasing friends.

The decision is made for her when Jess nods her head in Kara’s direction, causing Lena to look over expectantly and wave when her gaze lands on Kara. She returns the wave somewhat sheepishly and shoves her hands deep into the pockets of her jeans before making her way over to the group.

“If it isn’t Midvale’s very own superstar,” Jess says as Kara approaches. It’s enough to cause Kara to chuckle nervously at the ground.

“Hey Jess. Sam,” she nods her head at each girl before turning to face Lena.

“Hey,” Kara greets a little lamely, unable to keep the smile from her voice.

Lena tilts her head almost knowingly at Kara’s sudden shyness, “Hi.”

“Nice game tonight, Kara” Sam says, drawing Kara’s attention, “You work under pressure really well. Comfortable out of the pocket too.”

“Thanks. Pressure was a big theme this summer during camp,” Kara feels her shoulders relax incrementally at the familiar topic.

“Paid off tonight,” Sam replies, taking a final gulp of her drink.

Jess turns abruptly to Sam and places a hand on the other girl’s arm, “Sam and I were actually about to go grab drinks. Do either of you want one?”

Kara glances over at the definitely not empty cup in Jess’ hand before looking back over to Lena.

“Yeah, thanks,” Lena says, sparing a quick smile for her friend. Kara finds herself nodding as well before Jess takes off with Sam following close behind.

Kara looks back to where Lena is looking up at her, still a few inches shorter even in heels.

“So, that was a pretty fun start to the season,” Lena begins when Kara just stares quietly into the fire. She strides over to the bench when Lena bobs her head yes and sits down, hands now shoved into the pockets of her varsity jacket. She can feel her heel start to bounce when Lena takes her seat beside her, close enough that their shoulders brush.

“So, that was a pretty fun start to the season,” Lena begins when Kara just stares quietly into the fire.

“Yeah! It’s always really fun to win in front of a home crowd,” Kara enthusiastically latches onto the continued topic of football.

“That last touchdown pass. Very impressive,” Lena says in a tone that straddles the line between teasing and flirting. Though Kara isn’t sure if there’s a difference between the two when it comes to Lena.

“Well, you did a very nice job… cheering,” Kara adds with finality. Looking over with a cheeky,
close-lipped grin. Lena bumps her shoulder into Kara’s and it’s enough to ease any remaining nerves. The brief physical contact makes Kara wish she could brush her fingertips over Lena’s cheek and tuck the stray hair there back behind her ear. She shoves her hands further into her pockets to push the temptation down.

“A nice job cheering, huh?”

“Yeah! You know, you guys are basically an integral part of the team. Great for morale,” Kara gets out, fumbling a little to get out the right meaning.

The overall message must not hit it’s mark because Lena is shooting her a pointed look that clearly conveys she isn’t buying it.

“Listen, I’m gonna level with you,” Kara begins, dropping all pretense, “I don’t know a thing about cheerleading.”

Lena shrugs her shoulders and shakes her head in amusement, “Honestly? Me neither.”

Kara draws her chin back in surprise as she turns toward Lena, “Really? How’d you get into it then? As a senior?”

“It seemed like the thing to do,” Lena replies, as if that’s all she needs to say. But the incredulous look on Kara’s face must tell her it’s not, “It wasn’t a thing at school. Where I went, I mean. Boarding school isn’t exactly your typical experience. I thought being a high school cheerleader would give me a taste of an average teenage life.”

It’s one of the first real tidbits she’s gotten from Lena that wasn’t also shrouded in some sort of obscure half-truth. The honesty of the moment sits comfortably in Kara’s belly.

“A bit of a cliche, you know,” Kara points out when a beat passes.

Lena heaves a big sigh and wraps her arms around herself, “I think that’s what I’m going for.”

They sit quietly after that, watching the others gathered around the fire, content to wait for Jess and Sam to return with their drinks. Kara notices the way Lena is huddling in on herself. It registers that the flames aren’t as warm from where they sit and that the sleeves of Lena’s dress are a sheer material. Kara identifies these three points but it doesn’t quite click in her head until a visible shiver runs through Lena.

“It’s getting pretty cold,” Kara says, already shrugging out of her jacket, “here, you can put this on.”

She opens the jacket for Lena to slip into. Lena eyes it, preparing a half-hearted protest.

“No, really,” Kara gets out before Lena can try to decline, “I’ve still got my hoodie and I, like, naturally run a little hot anyway.”

Lena concedes and scoots closer to slip her arms into the sleeves as Kara settles the thick material over her shoulders. Lena immediately pulls the jacket tight around herself and buries her hands inside the cuffs. Kara can’t deny that the sight has warmth buzzing through her body, even at the loss of the extra layer. She might not be able to wrap her own arms around Lena, but seeing her soak up the body heat from the jacket might be the next best thing.

“Look who’s a cliche now,” Lena sasses from where she’s nuzzled into the soft collar, unwilling to move away.
A laugh bubbles up in Kara and spills out into the night air. She shrugs, “Thought that’s what you were going for?”

They’re close enough now that Kara’s arm can’t comfortably fit in the space between them, so, rather than move away from Lena, she settles her arm on the tabletop behind her.

Her arm is around Lena, sure. But it’s *totally* innocent. They’re friends. Friends put their arms around each other. Right?

Right.

Kara watches Lena’s fingers toy with one of the buttons absently before she’s turning back towards Kara abruptly. And all at once, Kara feels the air rush from her lungs.

Because Lena is looking at her in the soft glow of the fire and the delicate lines of her cheeks are red from cold and the dancing flames have turned the black of her pupils liquid. And Kara never understood why some would describe anticipation as ‘hanging in the air between them’ but it’s true. Lena’s mouth is parted, whatever she was about to say dead on her lips, and this moment feels so fragile that Kara’s afraid to move - to breath - because the way Lena is looking at her right then makes Kara want to lean forward the few inches that separate them and taste those lips, brush her fingers along that jaw.

Someone to her right throws another log onto the fire, spitting sparks into the night sky.

Kara blinks, clears her throat, looks back out towards the pit. Lena seems to take a second longer to collect herself, looking down to her hands. She finally tucks the stray hair behind her ear, but she doesn’t scoot away, much to Kara’s relief.

“How did you get into football?” Lena asks, not acknowledging the moment and very deliberately looking back toward the house.

“My cousin Clark, actually.” Kara responds, thinking back on all the times Clark would visit from Smallville when she was younger. Football was the only thing they could enjoy together without the stifling history of their family.

“Did he go to Midvale, too?”

Kara shakes her head, thinking of the last time she’d seen Clark. She was eleven and sitting on the hood of his car overlooking the ocean. He was looking out over the water when he’d said goodbye.

’Someday, when you leave this place, and you’re free from everything that ties you here, you’ll understand what it’s like to finally be able to breathe. You’ll understand why I won’t be coming back.’

“No, he moved when I was really young. But he and the Kents visited a lot growing up,” she offers simply instead of delving into the entire backstory.

“Kent? As in, your cousin is Clark Kent?” Lena asks, curiosity clearly piqued.

It’s a little surprising to Kara that Lena recognizes the name, “You know who he is?”

“My brother Lex owns the Metropolis Sharks. And even if he didn’t, it’s hard to avoid recognizing professional football players in this country. Especially one as well-loved as Clark Kent,” Lena responds as if her family owning a football franchise wasn’t a revelation in itself.
“Wait, your family owns a football team?” she turns to give Lena a disbelieving look.

“One that your cousin apparently plays for, yes.”

“Huh,” Kara huffs out.

“Following in your older cousin’s footsteps, then? Picking up some unnamed family legacy?”

Kara scoffs, “Clark’s not a quarterback. Last time I checked, he had a lousy arm. So if by following in footsteps you mean breaking into his boys club and doing it better than he can, then yes.”

It comes out a little bitter. Remnants of unprocessed feelings finally coming to the surface over her last living blood relative actively choosing to untangle himself from her life.

Lena must pick up on the subtle change in tone because she just hums in agreement and abstains from responding.

“I do like him,” Kara admits after a particularly long stretch of silence, “I just don’t really know him anymore. I haven’t seen him since he left for college to play football for the Bulldogs.”

Lena peeks her hand out from the jacket sleeve and places it lightly on Kara’s knee without looking over. She gives a gentle squeeze, “Families are complicated things.”

Kara scratches under her chin with the hand that isn’t stretched behind Lena, “It’s just a really long time.” She tries for lightening the mood and adds petulantly, “He probably can out throw me now.”

The comment has Lena snorting as she removes her hand from Kara’s thigh and instead leans her head onto Kara’s shoulder, “I really doubt that, Kara.”

Kara isn’t able to meet with Dr. Nondas until the following Wednesday after the game and, truthfully, she gets less out of the appointment than she got out of her conversation with Winn the week before.

She comes away from the office even more determined to confirm that she really had remembered part of that night. Dr. Nondas had expressed similar reservations Kara initially had, saying that her subconscious may be keeping those memories from her for her own protection. But it was her subconscious god dammit, and she could do with it what she very well pleased, thank you very much.

Which brings Kara to where she is right now, standing outside of Jeremiah’s home office, digging her socked toes into the plush carpet, bracing herself to round the corner into the room. She raises her hand to knock on the open door and Jeremiah looks up from where he’s sifting through a stack of papers on his desk.

“Hey bud,” he greets, taking the reading glasses from where they’re perched on top of his head and plopping them onto his nose.

Kara leans against the door frame, clasping her hands behind her back, “Hey Dad.” She stops short, not quite ready.

Jeremiah looks up, a small crinkle in his brow when the reason for her visit isn’t readily apparent, “What’s up? How was your appointment with Dr. Nondas?”

“It was okay,” she pauses, curls the toes of her left foot against the carpet and pushes down to crack
them, “I, um, I actually had some questions. About… all of that.”

At that, Jeremiah looks over from where he was replacing a file in a drawer behind his desk. He removes the readers from his nose and tosses them down, attention now fully on Kara.

“All right,” he gestures to one of the chairs settled across from his desk, a slightly confused look now painting his face.

Kara sits down a little rigidly, twirling the tie of her hoodie around her finger. She knows Jeremiah can sense her nervous energy, she knows that he relaxes back into his chair and uncrosses his arms in an attempt to make her feel more comfortable. It would work if she weren’t about to ask him about the details of the murder of her parents and Clark’s parents.

Jeremiah sits patiently. He isn’t expectant. In all honesty, he looks like he could be content to just sit quietly in the presence of one of his daughters. Like he’d prefer that to returning back to his paperwork.

Kara thinks she should just rip off the bandaid.

“Were you there?,” she blurs out, recognizing by the confused furrow of his brow that she needs to elaborate, “The night my… The night they were murdered.”

A look that Kara could almost identify as panic flashes across Jeremiah’s face and regret begins to pool in the pit of her stomach. Could she really ask this of the man who raised her? To dig into the violent details of the night that broke her as a child? To potentially tear apart the progress they’ve all worked so hard to make?

But the look is quickly gone as Jeremiah sits forward and affects what Kara imagines is the Police Chief persona he uses to reassure and protect, “Yes.”

Kara reconsiders her original line of questioning. Adjusts to lift the burden of opening a Pandora’s box from Jeremiah’s shoulders.

“Was anyone else there?”

Jeremiah cocks his head, thinking, “My partner was with me. Collins was Chief of Police then. But the FBI took over pretty soon after. Some Agent named Jones took on the case. There was… a lot,” he pauses and looks up to where Kara sits, “a lot of commotion that night. I can’t remember all the names and faces off the top of my head. But I could find it in a police report somewhere.”

The offer is there and it’s genuine, Kara can tell. But she’s not sure she can ask him to do it. If she’s going to do this, to jump down the rabbit hole - so to speak - she wants full responsibility. The process of finding the answers herself, instead of having them handed to her, will make it feel more real.

So she just shakes her head, “No that’s okay.”

It takes a moment for Jeremiah to realize that she isn’t about to ask for more details. The almost imperceptible twitch at the corner of his mouth signals his relief and Kara knows she made the right decision.

“Thanks, Dad,” she says as she stands up. She leans over the desk and presses a kiss to his temple before leaving the office, pulling the door shut behind her.
After school the next day, Kara crosses the parking lot outside of the police station and pushes through the heavy door leading into the reception area. The woman behind the desk immediately recognizes her, “Kara, dear! What bring you to this neck of the woods?”

“Hi Mrs. Li,” Kara waves as she crosses over to the desk, “I was actually hoping to file for a records request.”

“Well, let me just grab the form for you,” Mrs. Li is spinning away from the desk in her chair to a large file cabinet behind her. She opens one of the lower drawers and pulls out an official looking sheet. “Here we are,” she turns back to Kara with a cheery smile, “there’s also a $25 filing fee. You can take a minute to sit down and fill the form out here, or take it home and come back once you have it filled out.”

Kara nods and takes the paper from her. She’s moving to sit down on one of the bright yellow plastic chairs when Alex pokes her head out from around a corner, “Kara?”

“Hey Alex,” Kara says as she takes the yellow chair without the giant crack running through the seat.

“What are you doing here?” Alex asks as she walks down the narrow hallway to where Kara sits.

“I’m filling out a form,” Kara responds as she starts to fill in her name and date at the top of the paper.

“Form for what?” Alex asks as she peers over Kara’s shoulder, “A records request?”

Kara clicks the pen in her hand a few times before looking up at where Alex hovers, “Yeah, I was hoping to get a look at my parents’ file. I just wanted to verify some stuff.”

She expects Alex to pick up a line of questioning about why she would even want to do that, but instead, Alex is just chewing at her lower lip. She takes up the broken seat next to Kara before she speaks again, “What prompted you to want to look into the case?”

It isn’t exactly what Kara expected her to ask, but she answers anyway, “Well, I think what happened in the closet was a memory, like I told you. But I don’t really have anyway of knowing it’s a memory. And I thought maybe the file would have some sort of answer. Or at least give me a name of someone who had an answer.”

“Did you talk to Dad?”

Kara nods, “Yeah, but he couldn’t really remember much about who was there.”

Alex places a hand on Kara’s shoulder, looking at her intently, “Kara, police records… can be alot. There are witness statements, and detailed descriptions of the scene, and pictures.”

“I know.”

Alex takes the hand from Kara’s shoulder and scratches at her eyebrow with her thumbnail, “The police station was broken into last night.”

“What?!?”

“Or, the archives were broken into. The place was all smashed up and a few boxes were missing.”

“Well shit.”
Alex levels her with a look before continuing, “Kara, your parents’ file was in one of the boxes.”

Kara blinks rapidly as she looks forward, “Well that’s… inconvenient.”

“Inconvenient,” Alex deadpans, “Sure.”

Kara snaps her head back to look at Alex, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t really think much more than general vandalism and theft. But now you’re here. And it’s just…” Alex trails off.

“Suspicious,” Kara finishes for her.

And Alex must recognize something in her eyes because she’s turning her full body to face Kara, “I know I might as well be saying this to a brick wall, but maybe consider cooling off on this for a while ok? Just until we find the person that broke in.”

Kara scratches at the back of her neck and looks down at the form, “I don’t know, Alex.”

“Just think about it,” Alex juts in, her eyebrows knitting in concern.

Kara nods her head and stands to toss the form into the garbage.

“Hey you coming for dinner tonight?” Kara asks as she moves toward the door to leave.

Alex pops her lips on the responding ‘yep’ as Kara disappears through the door.

Kara makes it approximately two weeks before her curiosity wins out. She’s sitting in the public library waiting for Lena to come help her study for their upcoming physics test when she wonders if the library has newspaper clippings that date that far back. Probably, right? Libraries do stuff like that.

She grabs her backpack and makes her way over to the circulation desk. She knocks on the dark wood counter and looks around for the librarian. A younger woman pokes her head around a corner and walks behind the counter, “Can I help you?”

“Hi, yes. I was wondering if you guys have, like, a collection of old newspapers,” Kara asks.

“Yes. But our newspaper archive isn’t finished being digitized. If you’re hoping to find anything less than twenty years old, you’ll have to use the microfiche,” the woman points over Kara’s shoulder at something that looks a little bit like a computer from the nineties.

Kara turns back around to face the woman, skeptical, “Could you, uh, show me?”

After about ten minutes of explaining and setting up, Kara is scrolling through twelve-year-old issues of the local newspaper.

She stops on a headline from a few weeks after the murder. Under the headline, there’s a picture of five-year-old Kara being carried from her childhood home in the arms of a police officer. The caption below is short: *Kara Z. Orelle, daughter of former Mayor, is carried from the scene by responding officer Sam Lane.*

It’s strange to see her birth name in print. Even stranger that she found the exact information she had been looking for. But she’ll just consider herself lucky.
“Kara?” a familiar voice speaks just behind her shoulder.

Kara turns to face Lena.

*Maybe not so lucky.*

Lena is focusing intently on the screen, brows thoroughly furrowed, and a guarded expression on her face.

“Why are you looking at old article clippings of my father?”

*What?*

“I… I’m not?” Kara truthfully has no idea what Lena is talking about.

Lena shoots her an icy look before pointing at a much smaller headline just to the right of the article she’d been reading. There, she recognizes a much younger Lionel Luthor pictured under a headline ‘Luthor named as murder suspect’.

And of course that would be what Lena focuses on. Or rather, think that’s what Kara is focusing on. There’s no reason, in Lena’s mind, for Kara to be interested in the decade old murder of a former Midvale mayor and family when her new friend’s father is being accused of murder a few bylines down. Because Lena doesn’t *know*.

“No! Lena, honestly I wasn’t even looking at that article,” Kara rushes out. But Lena just crosses her arms protectively, face drawn. Kara scrambles to explain and ends up jutting her finger at her own picture on the page, “That’s *me.*”

Lena blinks once, brow furrowing even deeper as she pulls her arms even tighter around herself. She looks to the picture of Kara in Officer Lane’s arms, then back at Kara, apparently trying to crack some sort of code.

“I don’t think I understand,” Lena states slowly, “You’re Kara Orelle.”

Kara nods.

“And your family was murdered,” Lena clarifies softly as that fact seems to register.

Kara just nods again.

“And my father was accused of that murder.” This statement seems less of a question. Lena seems to bristle only slightly as she says it, for the first time looking uncomfortable in her skin.

“Technically, yes. But that really isn’t what I’m looking up,” Kara offers.

Lena is quiet, eyes still trained on the picture of her father. She seems to come to some sort of decision as her eyes finally flutter over Kara’s face, “Then what *were* you looking up?”

“It’s kind of a long story.”

When Kara finally pulls into her driveway after leaving the library, she feels a little exhausted. Explaining the backstory of her childhood to Lena, and the more recent developments in her own memory of that backstory, goes about as smoothly as she could have hoped. Lena was appropriately sympathetic, but didn’t look at Kara as if she were a broken person who needed to be fixed. If anything, Lena seemed somewhat withdrawn. As if her own family’s ties to Kara’s tragic backstory
held her back from getting any closer, from offering any tangible comfort.

It’s not exactly an alternative outcome Kara appreciates. But at least it’s not pity. And she really can’t blame Lena for being a little overwhelmed.

Kara slides out of Nel, throwing her backpack over her shoulder as she pulls her phone out. She’s walking through the front door and tripping over a waiting Krypto when she pulls up Alex’s number. She listens to the ringtone while walking up the stairs to her room, Krypto following closely behind.

Alex answers as Kara flops onto her bed, “Hello?”

“Hey dude,” Kara responds.

“What’s up, punk?”

“I had a quick question.” Kara responds as Krypto nuzzles into her bed covers. She can hear a running sink over the line and the gentle clink of a plate.

“Shoot.”

“Do you know an Officer Sam Lane?”

“Yeah. He retired a couple of years ago. Why?”

Kara bites her lip and doesn’t immediately respond. Alex notices.

“Kara.”

“I read an old newspaper clipping naming him as the responding officer the night of the murder. I think he might have been the one who found me.”

The other end of the line is quiet for a moment. Kara imagines Alex closing her eyes, trying to refrain from scolding her, “Well what are you gonna do with that info?”

It’s not exactly a scold, but Kara can hear an edge of exasperation in Alex’s voice.

“I was gonna ask. If he found me. And where.”

“That’s all you want to know?”

Kara thinks on that, “That’s all I want to know. For now.”

She can practically hear Alex nodding her head, “Ok.”

“Ok. Goodnight, Alex. Love you.”

“Goodnight, Kara. I love you, too.”

Two days pass and Kara’s still in bed on a Saturday morning when Alex comes bursting into her room.

“Alex? What are y-”

“Kara,” Alex cuts her off as she crosses the room and crouches down beside the bed, leveling Kara with a stoic look.
It’s enough to make Kara clamp her mouth shut and gulp around a dry throat. Alex looks worried, and she never looks worried without a good reason.

“Kara. It’s Sam Lane. He’s dead.”

Chapter End Notes

I've been listening to a lot of music while writing WHWD, and I decided to make a playlist that kind of captures the vibe I'm going for. Maybe this will make up for taking so long to post?


Anyway, the songs are applicable up to the end of chapter two. I'll add more as I add chapters.

As always, come say hi/scream at me on tumblr @srfanning.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Kara pushes a few bites of her cereal around in the milk as she hears the front door close behind Jeremiah. She casts another glance Eliza’s direction before ducking her head and taking another bite. Eliza, still nursing a mug of coffee, turns to the business section of the paper. Kara watches the steam from the mug lazily curl into the air for a few moments. She takes a deep breath as she places both palms flat on the table and clears her throat.

Eliza spares her a glance over her glasses before shuffling the paper again, moving past the business headlines in favor of the sports section.

“Mom, how do women have safe sex? Like, together?”

Chapter Notes

emerging from the bog to deliver to you

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There’s a damp, earthy smell on the early October breeze as Kara makes her way off the practice field toward the parking lot. Goosebumps prickle across her cooling skin as she snaps the buttons of her jacket all the way up to her chin. The walk down the path is dotted with bear oak and pitch pine and red maple trees. The leaf bearing trees are just starting to turn and the fall colors usually brown out by late October around Midvale, so Kara takes her time - unwilling to miss even a moment of the reds and yellows splayed out above her.

Most people travel an hour up coast to go leaf peeping on the lawn of the massive university there, but Kara’s favorite way to take in the fall colors is a leisure driving tour of the winding roads that connect the small towns strewn about the cape.

As she internally weighs the likelihood of a weekend drive, Kara spots Winn leaning against the stone wall outside the school doors animatedly chatting with Lena. She walks closer and rolls her eyes when she hears the topic of conversation.

“I can not believe you think Man of Steel is a bad movie,” Winn is arguing, waving his hands above his head frantically.

“The movie dresses Superman, a historically Jewish-coded superhero, in Christ-like, messianic qualities that preclude his trademark personification of Tikkun Olam, wherein the responsibility to improve the earth and leave it better than you found it is placed solely in the hands of the everyday people, not in the hands of a savior. Nevermind the fact that the dark, edgy superhero storyline is boring, and honestly, getting a little tired,” is Lena’s response when Kara finally pulls up beside them.
Kara clears her throat, drawing the attention of both, before interjecting, “Winn, you just like Man of Steel because Henry Cavill doesn’t wear a shirt for, like, the first five minutes. You literally fell asleep an hour in.”

Winn crosses his arms over his chest and huffs indignantly in Kara’s direction, “Well. It’s no fun when you both team up against me.”

Kara rolls her eyes again at the disgruntled look on Winn’s face and nods in Lena’s direction, “Hey, Lena.”

The responding smile on Lena’s face is genuine as it reaches her eyes, “Hey!” Lena replies, “I’m actually meant to catch a ride. So I’ll see you guys around?”

Kara nods her head as Winn calls after, “Yeah, see you tomorrow!”

They quietly watch as Lena quickly paces away and slips into the backseat of a black car waiting in the distance.

“Well that was… sudden,” Winn remarks as Kara readjusts the strap on her shoulder uncomfortably. She just shrugs when he turns his gaze on her.

“Yeah, I guess,” is the only response she has. Kara is just as thrown by the less than warm reception she’s been getting from Lena the last few weeks.

“What’s up with that?” Winn pushes on, and she can tell he’s digging for gossip, “I thought you guys were, like, bosom buddies now.”

Kara shifts her weight nervously and averts her gaze, “I think I kinda freaked her out.”

She can feel Winn sizing her up in her periphery, “What do you mean by ‘freaked her out’?”

Kara lets a puff of breath escape her lips as her shoulders sag.

“I may have told her that my parents were murdered and she may have put it together that her dad was accused of that murder and now…” she waves vaguely to where the black car had been parked in an effort to encompass the two weeks worth of reserved smiles and sudden exits on Lena’s part.

“And you think that freaked her out?”

“Well yeah! Don’t you think that’s a little… much?” Kara passes a hand over her forehead, frustrated that Winn doesn’t see how complicated the revelation of a murder in your family could be.

When Winn doesn’t respond immediately, she looks up to where his eyebrows are furrowed and his hands are shoved into his pockets. Kara looks at him expectantly before he finally speaks, “Have you considered that maybe… she thinks you’re a little freaked out?”

Kara tilts her head, incredulous, “What?”

Winn shrugs, stoops to gather his bag, and turns to head towards Nel, leaving Kara to follow after him. “Well… her family has been accused of murder. She’s probably wondering what you think of meeting someone whose dad was accused of murdering four people.”

At Kara’s own silence, Winn turns around to face her just as they approach Nel, “Have you actually talked to Lena about all this?”

Kara sheepishly tucks her chin behind the collar of her jacket and gives yet another noncommittal
Winn rolls his eyes and rounds to his side of the truck as Kara digs the keys out of her pocket. Once they’ve both clambered into Nel, Winn adds, almost to himself, “Plus, she’s probably sad because she thinks you won’t want to bone her now.”

“What?!” Kara whips around to face him, jaw hanging open, “Winn!”

“Please, I’m not saying anything we both don’t already know,” Winn waves her off dismissively.

“I - we... Winn we don’t even know if she’s into girls!”

Winn pulls his chin back in surprise and blinks owlishly at Kara. A long silence stretches between them until Winn finally whispers, “Oh my god.”

“And even if she was into girls, there’s like, no chance she’d be into me,” Kara insists as she gestures to herself.

“Oh. My. God!” Winn repeats, louder this time, “are you serious?!”

“What? I am serious! We have no way of knowing!”

“Christ on a fucking bike, Kara. You’re... useless!”

“Unless you know something. Wait, Winn. Do you know something? Has she told you anything?”

Winn just groans and let’s his head sink back into the headrest, “For the love of God, Kara. Please, just talk to Lena.”

Kara huffs out a muttered ‘fine’ as she turns to shove the key into the ignition and pull out of the school parking lot.

After dropping off Winn, Kara pulls into the her own driveway to find Alex’s motorcycle already parked in front of the garage. Krypto slides into her legs as she walks through the front door and calls out a curious ‘Alex’ before tossing her football bag on top of the front hall bench and shucking her shoes off.

She eventually finds Alex tucked away in Jeremiah’s study, typing away furiously on the outdated desktop before her. When Kara knocks on the open door, Alex looks up and shoots her a tired smile.

“Kara, hey. I didn’t hear you come in.”

Kara bobs her head and hitches her thumb over her shoulder, “You the only one home?”

“Yeah, Dad’s working late at the station and Mom ran out to grab something for dinner.”

“What are you up to?” Kara asks as she crosses the soft carpet and plops unceremoniously into the chair situated in front of the desk.

Alex pushes herself away from the keyboard and stretches her arms above her head, taking the offered chance at a break. ‘I’m just trying to wrap up some paperwork. Computer at the station runs like Uncle Dan. Which is to say... it doesn’t.”

Kara nods again before continuing on, “I hear the station is holding a memorial service for Officer
Lane this weekend.”

“Mmm,” Alex acknowledges as she twists in her chair, trying to crack her back. “A lot of officers that served with him throughout the state weren’t able to make it in time for the funeral.”

“How are the girls?”

“Truthfully, I haven’t seen much of Lois. Bumped into her at the grocery store the other day, but I think she’s headed back to Metropolis soon. Went out for drinks with Lucy after the funeral, though. She seems to be taking it pretty hard.”

Kara bites at her thumb nail, thinking. “Has there been a determined cause of death?”

She knows the official cause of death. It had been in the paper and the news. Officer Sam Lane had fallen down a flight of stairs at his home in Midvale. He died on the scene from injuries sustained therein. But that’s not really what Kara is asking, and Alex picks up on it.

“There weren’t any signs of forced entry,” Alex begins, resting her chin in her hand and furrowing her brow, “though there were a handful of ways someone could have gotten into the house without force.”

Kara leans her elbows on her knees at that, “What do you mean?”

“Unlocked back door. No screens on the downstairs windows. A bulkhead with a padlock that wasn’t locked.”

“And what does that mean in terms of the police?” Kara pushes on, biting her lip.

“Well, there will be some further investigation. Coroners looked for signs of struggle before the cremation. The scene has been examined for any indication that anyone else was present during the fall. But truly, there isn’t much to show that Officer Lane’s fall was any more than an unfortunate accident.”

Alex is quiet for a moment, looking over Kara’s face before adding, “You know that if his death wasn’t an accident, it’s not your fault. Right?”

Kara exhales as she leans back into the chair again, throwing her hands up halfheartedly, “I don’t know, Alex. It all seems a little too weird to just be coincidence.”

“Ok,” Alex says calmly, standing and coming around to sit on top of the desk in front of Kara, “I admit. It is suspicious. Like, extremely suspicious. But that still doesn’t make Sam Lane’s death your fault.”

“No, I mean it! The night before I try to look into my birth parents’ murder, the file is mysteriously stolen from the station archives? A few days after I find the person who could verify where I was during that night, they die before I get a chance to talk to them?” Kara trudges on. “It’s like someone keeps anticipating my every move and stops me in my tracks!”

“Ok,” Alex says calmly, standing and coming around to sit on top of the desk in front of Kara, “I admit. It is suspicious. Like, extremely suspicious. But that still doesn’t make Sam Lane’s death your fault.”

“If I’d never looked into it, maybe Sam Lane would still be alive.” Kara rubs her hands over her eyes, finally voicing what’d been rattling around in her brain for the last few weeks.

Alex reaches out and captures one of Kara’s hands with her own, waiting for Kara to look up at her, “Only one person can make the active choice to end someone’s life. And that’s the killer. You aren’t
a killer, Kara.”

Kara feels some of the tension drain from her shoulders with the small assurance.

Alex squeezes her hand before letting go to look back at the paperwork on the desk, “And if what you’re saying is true, and if someone really is trying to cover something up… well, there’s probably something there worth uncovering.”

Kara watches as Alex stands up and moves back behind the desk, attention piqued as she asks, “Do you think I should keep looking?”

Alex’s eyes snap back up to Kara’s with a pointed look, “No.”

Kara feels her shoulders slump.

“It’s literally my job,” Alex continues a little more gently, “and if there’s any merit to what you suspect, it’s dangerous too.”

Kara tilts her head in agreement at that.

“So, please Kara, listen to me when I ask you to back off on this one.”

Before Kara can reassure Alex of her intent to not interfere, she hears the muffled sound of Eliza coming through the front door and hollering ‘Girls! Thai takeaway is here!’. Kara and Alex lock eyes briefly before Kara is scrambling backwards out of her chair and Alex is chasing after her, knocking papers off the desk as she goes.

“Kara, don’t you dare put a finger on my chicken satay! Kara!”

My neck cranes back to look up at her face. It’s familiar. There should be kindness and warmth. But there isn’t. She lowers herself onto her knees to look at me.

“I need you to be a good girl now,” she says as she pushes me back.

Then, I’m in a small place. Dark and scary. My tiny hands are streaked with light. I look up to see her through a small crack.

‘Momma?’ I hear a scared voice say.

She just raises a finger to her lips. Whispers, “Let’s play a game of hide and seek, little Kara.”

Then her face shifts. Stiffens. Something red drips from her mouth. Her eyes. Her nose.

‘Momma!’ the scared voice cries again.

She opens her mouth and an inhuman sound drops out. Loud… Like a muted bell…

Kara bolts upright in her bed, sweating and breathing hard, as the sound of a phone’s message alert goes off. Her eyes dart around, taking in the blue-grey light of early morning splashed across the room, as she tries to get her bearings. She focuses first on the Cranberries poster hanging above a desk, the sweater hanging from the closet door with ‘Danvers’ written across the back, then the white fluffy dog sleeping at the foot of the bed.

The message alert goes off once more and it clicks into place that she’s home. She leans over to
snatch her phone from where it’s charging on the bedside table. A quick check tells her she has three unread messages from Alex about tonight’s football game and that it’s already 6:17am.

She slept through her first alarm, Kara realizes with a start.

Sighing, she tosses her phone back onto the bedside and swings her legs out over the edge of her mattress. She spares a moment to scratch Krypto’s belly and run a hand over her face before muttering to herself, “Saddle up, Danvers.”

The game against the Ivy Town Wolverines is the last in a long run of home games for the Midvale Stallions. It’s also the game that’s proving to be the biggest threat to the sizeable winning streak the Stallions have built over the first half of the season. By the end of the third quarter, James has fumbled three passes, Mike is out with a minor ankle sprain, Coach Grant has snapped her clipboard and looks to be well on the way to snapping a second.

Kara shakes her head as she checks the scoreboard after the Wolverines score another touchdown. The Stallions are down by fourteen with only a little over half of the fourth quarter left. She turns toward the bench to retrieve her helmet, sparing a glance toward the stands while the kick-return team takes the field. Her eyes lock first with Winn, who gives her a reassuring thumbs up, before sliding over to Lena.

The smile Lena offers her is shy and as hesitant as the wave she directs her way. Kara gives a tight-lipped smile in the general direction of Winn and Lena before turning away and pulling on her helmet. She pops in her mouth guard as the whistle blows, signaling the end of the return run, and jogs onto the field with the rest of her offensive line.

Kara guides the team slowly but surely down the field with well executed passes and successful first or second down conversions. The line advances until they’re on the forty yard line, then the twenty-five, the twenty.

The ball is on the fifteen yard line when Kara steps up behind her center, hopeful for a third down conversion.

“Green! 21! Hut hut!”

The ball snaps into Kara’s hands. She drops back, scans her receivers.

She sees Kenny Li streak across the endzone. Her eyes track his path, waiting for an opening.

But something snags her eye. Standing just beyond the goalpost, beside the small group of newspaper photographers, is a woman.

The woman has a face that claws its way out of Kara’s memory. A face that causes Kara’s heart to beat loud in her ears as her feet stutter briefly.

Mom?

Then, someone crashes into her from behind. Her head snaps backward as the wind is forced out of her lungs. She’s wrapped up, arms trapped and knees buckling. The ball stays firmly between her hands as the ground races toward her face, no way to stop it. On impact, her helmet flies loose and her face gets pressed into the dirt.

There’s a moment where everything goes silent. Then, the crushing pressure on her chest is relieved, her tackler rolling away. Whistles are sounding off across the field. There’s a distinct buzz of anger
from the home stand. Kara’s distantly aware that the ball popped loose when she collided with the ground.

Kara rolls onto her back, slowly taking stock. Air is hard to get into her lungs, so she focuses on that as one of her offensive linemen kneels beside her.

*In through the nose. Out through the mouth.*

She brings her hands up in front of her face. Flexes them a few times. Happy with the motion, she wiggles her toes in her boots.

A few more of her teammates gather around her, but she waves off the ‘*Hey, KD, take it easy*’ and ‘*Nice and slow, Danvers*’ as she tries to sit up.

She’s already fully sitting up and perched on one knee by the time the trainer arrives. After a few quick questions, Kara is up on her feet, helmet in hand. The trainer helps her gingerly make her way back to the sideline.

But not before Kara casts a glance back over her shoulder, searching for the face of a memory.

For the face of a ghost.

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The Wolverines hand the Stallions their first loss of the season and it sits sour in the pit of Kara’s stomach. She’s grateful that the hard hit she’d taken didn’t do any lasting harm - just a stiff neck and bruised ego. But she doesn’t like losing and it must have shown on her face, because Eliza was quick to cave to her request to go hang out with James and Winn despite her concern about Kara’s stiff movements.

Kara pulls up outside of Winn’s house and pulls the parking brake when Nel shudders to a stop. She looks out at the warm light streaming from the large bay window of the living room and turns the key out of the ignition. Hesitating, she drums her fingers on the steering wheel while chewing the inside of her cheek.

There’s something she can’t quite shake about the woman she had seen in the crowd.

She’d spent no less than seven minutes staring blankly at the wall of the locker room attempting to convince herself she hadn’t seen the ghost of her mother. By the end of it, she’d decided that she probably didn’t remember her mother’s face well enough to recognize it anyway, despite her dream that morning.

In fact, she bets the stupid dream is the whole reason she thought she saw her mother in the first place.

Kara grinds her teeth in frustration. She feels like she’s bending over backwards to rationalize what she saw, but the alternative is even *more* ridiculous.

It’s not like her mother could still be alive.

Kara pulls back, mentally slamming the door shut on that particular line of thinking. She reaches her hands out and grips the steering wheel hard, grounding herself. Emotionally, she feels her control slipping.

She’s suddenly aware of her throat tightening as her eyes start to sting with unshed tears. Baffled,
Kara takes in a deep breath, willing herself not to cry. She forces herself to control her breathing as she tries to figure out why her body is responding this way.

She isn’t even that upset?

Just then, the front door of the house slams open, grabbing Kara’s attention. Winn is standing on the stoop gesturing at her.

“What’s taking so long, Grandpa? Need a hand out of that boat?” he shouts out over the lawn, causing Kara to let out an amused huff.

She honks Nel’s horn and flips Winn the bird.

Resolving on scheduling an appointment with Dr. Nondas as soon as possible, Kara pops the car door open and slides delicately from the driver’s seat.

“Can still kick your ass, Schott,” Kara calls across the lawn as she ambles slowly up the walk.

“Never doubted it, hot shot,” Winn defends, waving her threat off dismissively before continuing, “so it’s pretty small right now, but I guess Siobhan and some other people are gonna be coming from another party in a few hours.”

Kara nods, grateful she won’t have to be around a large group so soon after the game.

After a quick hello to Winn’s mom, Winn leads Kara through the house and down to the basement where the party seems to have congregated. James and Mike are in front of the TV setting up Winn’s Nintendo Switch. Jake Donovan and a few other members of the cheer squad are gathered around a pool table, apparently deciding who gets to play next. Kara spots Lena leaning against a pool cue as she chats with Sam.

“Kara!” James calls over, causing Lena’s attention to slip from Sam over to where Kara is making her entrance. “Wanna get in on some Super Smash?”

“Heyyy there Olsen, might wanna establish some context,” Jake calls over his shoulder.

“Nah, man. Intentional,” Mike cuts in from the couch, “Kara, wanna smash?”

Kara rolls her eyes before casting a quick glance to where Lena has zeroed in on Mike.

“Want two broken ankles?” Kara shoots back, not even sparing him a glance as she takes the offered controller from James.

Out of the corner of her eye, she can see Mike readjust his foot on the pillow it’s propped on before indignantly replying, “S’not broken. Just sprained.”

As Winn takes his own controller and James gets the game set, Kara just responds, “You boys ready to get wrecked?”

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About an hour later, Mike rage quits with a, “Fuck you, Kara. And fuck Kirby, too!”

“Dude,” Winn cuts in, “You wanna *fuck* a monster?”

“Woah, no. I’m-“

“I wouldn’t say Kirby’s a monster,” James joins in, “I’d say more of a… puffball?”
“I didn’t say I wanted to fuck a monster,” Mike back pedals.

“Puffball,” Winn interjects.

“Whatever. I don’t wanna fuck Kirby.”

“I bet Kirby doesn’t wanna fuck you either,” James supplies.

“I just meant like. Fuck him. Like ‘fuck that guy’. In a ‘I hate that guy’ kinda way,” Mike explains.

“Hey!” Kara defends, “Kirby is like. My soul. We’re basically the same person-”

“Puffball.”

“-so either way,” Kara continues, “I’m offended.”

“Yeah, Mike. Super insensitive,” Winn adds as he makes to switch out Super Smash Brothers with Mario Kart.

“You would be lucky to get smashed by the Kirbster,” Kara huffs.

“Technically, we all just spent the last hour getting smashed by the Kirbster,” James says absently.

“Kirby isn’t even real,” Mike frantically responds.

Kara gasps and clutches her chest.

All three stare at Mike in shocked silence until he squirms uncomfortably. After several beats, he slowly gets to his feet, mumbling something about needing a soda, before heading up the stairs to the kitchen.

“Hey!” Winn calls over his shoulder to the rest of the room, “Anyone wanna jump in for Mario Kart?”

Kara is decidedly worse at racing than smashing. After missing the top eight in three championships, she passes her controller off, content with watching Winn cuss out Princess Peach whenever she falls off Rainbow Road.

Every so often, Kara finds herself casting a glance Lena’s way. She’s moved from her perch next to the pool table over to one of the oversized couches. Sam and Jess have been with her all night, seemingly engrossed in their own conversation. But the occasional hoot or holler from the group still grabs her attention.

Kara thinks of what Winn had said earlier about sitting down and clearing the air with Lena. She spares a moment for his comments about Lena potentially liking Kara too, but shrugs it off quickly.

She settles on at least trying to talk to Lena before the night is over. And as she comes to the decision with a soft nod to herself, Sam and Jess are offered a turn at Mario Kart, leaving Lena alone on the couch.

Kara flexes her suddenly clammy hands and bounces her heel, weighing the merits of just going over and taking up the empty space beside Lena. It’s the small smile Lena offers when she notices Kara staring that has her getting ready to push up from her seat.

But before she can get up, something - or rather someone - is dropping into her lap, sending a sharp
pain up her back and into her stiff neck.

“Hey girl of steel!” Siobhan Smythe is laughing into her ear as Kara tries to school the look of pain on her face.

“Siobhan,” Kara hesitates, shooting a look to where Lena is watching the interaction, “I didn’t realize you were here yet.”

“I am where the party is,” Siobhan says wistfully, sweeping her arm across the room. Kara can smell the alcohol on her breath and realizes that the situation could deteriorate quickly. Siobhan gets a little handsy when she’s tipsy.

“Hey, who’d you come here with, Siobhan?” Kara asks as she scans the room for other newcomers.

“Kenny and Vasquez. But it doesn’t matter, Kara. I came here for you.”

At that, Kara looks back to the suggestive look on Siobhan’s face.

“Uh,” Kara dumbly responds as she shifts slightly away from Siobhan, “I don’t-”

“I know the first loss of the season really sucks,” Siobhan continues, “but, like, you could still… you know. Get it.”

Kara stymies the groan that fights its way out and Siobhan follows the nervous glance Kara shoots Lena’s way.

“I’m not- we don’t…” Kara stutters out as Lena makes her way to her feet, “Siobhan we’re not really-”

“Kara, could you help me out in the kitchen?”

Kara looks up to see Lena looking directly at Siobhan as she asks the question.

Relief floods Kara at the opportunity to put some distance between herself and Siobhan, “Yeah! Yep. Yes. I will… help you in the kitchen.”

Kara shifts a little awkwardly and eases Siobhan off her lap, even as the other girl pouts at the loss of contact. She hurriedly follows Lena up the steps despite the achy feeling that weighs her limbs down.

They round the corner into the kitchen and Lena makes her way to the fridge, grabbing a Coke for herself and Kara. The relief Kara felt is quickly replaced by the nervousness from earlier as she accepts the offered soda.

“Uh, thanks! For that back there,” Kara supplies, nodding her head in the direction of the basement door.

“No worries,” Lena replies, waving Kara off and taking a sip from her can.

There’s a pause as Kara teeters on the edge of continuing.

“Siobhan and I aren’t…” Kara starts, “I mean, we’ve never-”

She stops and considers last fall when she and Siobhan had made out after Kara’s first game as quarterback. She had chickened out, though, when Siobhan had tried to take it further.

“Well, I mean I guess we have…” Kara corrects, and when Lena arches her brow she stammers on,
“not like that! I just mean that we-”

“Kara, you really don’t need to explain anything to me,” Lena interjects, attempting to cut off the rambling.

“Well,” Kara scratches behind her ear, “maybe I want to explain. To you.”

Lena seems to soften at that, as if touched by the gesture.

Just then, Vasquez comes into the kitchen to grab a glass of water from the tap, effectively cutting off Lena’s reply.

“Hey Briana,” Kara starts, filling the new silence of the kitchen, “Siobhan is downstairs. Can you make sure she gets home tonight? And let me know?”

“Sure,” Vasquez agrees as she sips at her water, “I’ll text you when I drop her off.”

“Thanks,” Kara gives her a smile before Vasquez ducks through the basement doorway.

Once again, the kitchen falls quiet as Lena leans against the counter and Kara flicks the tab on top of her can.

Kara takes a deep breath, clears her throat, swallows, “Uh. Do you maybe wanna go somewhere? To talk?”

Lena straightens up at that, pushing herself off the counter. She regards Kara before nodding, “Sure. I was actually thinking about going home. If you wouldn’t mind driving me?”

“Yeah, of course! Right now?” Kara perks up.

“If that’s okay…?” Lena responds hesitantly, and at that, Kara takes a final gulp of her soda before setting the half empty can in the sink. She gestures Lena toward the front door as she digs her phone out of her pocket to shoot Winn a quick text.

“The big red truck on the street is Nel. She’s mine,” Kara calls out as she looks up from her phone and follows Lena out of the house.

Kara half jogs to catch up and opens the passenger side door for Lena, offering a helping hand up and into the cab. She takes just a moment to appreciate the light brush of Lena’s fingers against her palm before she’s rounding the front of the truck and hopping into the driver’s seat.

“So. Lena, Nel. Nel, Lena.” Kara makes the quick introduction while trying to find the ignition with her key.

“It’s nice to meet you, Nel,” Lena offers with a quick pat to the dashboard in front of her.

Once Nel rumbles to life, there’s a short awkward pause. Suddenly, Kara’s hyper aware of her surroundings. Nel’s cab smells like Lena’s spicy perfume. The cold leather seeps through the fabric of her jeans. A dog barks from a neighboring backyard, and a black car across the street starts its engine.

“So,” Kara starts, “where to?”

And then Lena’s typing her address into Kara’s phone, the emergency brake is lifted, and they’re on their way.
They drive a few blocks, quietly listening to the radio, before Kara finally speaks up, “Uh, so I wanted to apologize.”

“Apoloize for what?” Lena replies, looking over.

“Well. I mean things have been a little… weird between us lately.” Kara struggles out. She looks over at Lena for verification.

“Weird,” Lena seems to consider, then nods her head, “Sure. Things have been a little weird.”

Kara makes a left turn where directed and heads toward the center of town.

“I guess I’m apologizing in case I did anything to make things… weird,” Kara explains.

Lena picks at her thumb nail as she considers Kara’s words, “You haven’t done anything, Kara.”

“It’s just,” Kara takes a deep breath, “things weren’t weird until I told you about my dead parents. But then I did tell you. And now things are weird. I know it can be a lot. So I’m just really sorry if I freaked you out.”

She exhales as she pulls up to a stop sign. She turns to look at Lena.

Lena’s head is cocked as she thinks through what she wants to say.

“Having parents that you lost under tragic circumstances is hardly something you have to apologize for, Kara,” she says slowly, then she reaches out to rest her hand lightly on Kara’s forearm, “please don’t think that’s the sort of thing to send me running for the hills. I don’t scare quite so easily.”

It’s said with a sad smile and Kara takes it at face value. She nods as she pulls away from downtown and heads up the road leading to the cliffside houses overlooking Midvale Bay.

“So then, why were things weird?” Kara asks.

The question has Lena pulling her hand from Kara’s arm and chewing on her bottom lip. Kara has to redirect her focus on the set of headlights in the rearview just to avoid getting distracted.

In an uncharacteristic display of nerves, Lena lets out a breath that shakes a little, “I was worried that I didn’t… or, rather, that it wasn’t my place to be friends with you.”

“What?!” Kara responds, dumbfounded.

“You have to admit that there’s something a little sinister about befriending someone whose family was allegedly murdered by your own.”

And in a moment of clarity, Kara realizes that Winn was right. As usual.

“Lena, your Dad totally didn’t murder my family,” Kara rushes out, as if the thought itself is ridiculous.

“Sometimes that doesn’t always matter,” Lena replies, more to herself than to Kara.

“What does that mean? Of course it matters!” Kara asks as she makes a turn down a road heading to what the locals refer to as ‘Snob Hill’. She notes, almost absently, that the headlights in her rearview make the same turn.

“An accusation of murder isn’t exactly a shining mark on someone’s reputation, Kara.”
“He wasn’t even tried,” Kara supplies. “There was literally zero evidence. He wasn’t even in town!”

“In the circles my parents run, reputation is the only thing that matters. Not the facts.”

Kara scoffs and grumbles, “What kind of circle is that?”

“Social ones.”

Kara huffs a sigh and gives a resigned reply, “Well, your parents’ friends sound like assholes.”

That has Lena barking out a sharp laugh and nodding in agreement. She mutters ‘friends’ under her breath in disbelief before looking over at Kara. She regards her as Kara pulls through the entrance of a gated community. Lena gives a wave to the gate attendant who nods back.

The same pair of headlights easily pulling through the gate has Kara shifting uncomfortably in her seat. She eyes her phone to check the distance to Lena’s house and comes to a decision.

“Ok, so not to come off as totally paranoid,” Kara starts, “but the car behind us has definitely been following us since Winn’s house.”

Lena crinkles her brow at Kara and turns to check over her shoulder, “Oh. That’s just Hector. My driver.”

“You have a driver?” Kara asks disbelievingly.

The surprise must show on Kara’s face because Lena lets out a soft chuckle, “I do.”

Kara lets that information roll around in her head for a bit. She isn’t quite sure where to go from there.

“Explains the whole flying but no driving conundrum,” she settles on.

“Quite nicely, I thought,” Lena replies, and her voice sounds a little smug.

Kara’s mind lingers on the fact that Lena let her drive her home despite having someone on call for that exact purpose. Her thoughts are interrupted by Lena’s soft voice.

“Kara, do you actually know who my parents are?”

She takes a moment to try and scrounge up any information she has on Lena’s family - outside of the tie to her birth parents. She vaguely recalls an article about Lionel Luthor being involved in a local election of some sort or other. Remembers the name appearing on the side of a building at the hospital just outside of town.

“Lillian and Lionel Luthor?” Kara tries sheepishly. Lena looks like she just barely refrains from frowning at the response.

“No. I mean what they do,” Lena clarifies as Kara slowly pulls up to the destination her phone has indicated.

Kara can’t stop her jaw from dropping as she takes in the hulking expanse of house - if you could call it that - in front of her. She gives her head a shake and remembers that Lena’s waiting for an answer.

“Something important, I gather,” Kara responds as she pulls through another smaller gate and makes her way down a stretch of cobblestone driveway that’s probably clean enough to eat on. She pulls
around a large, bubbling fountain that’s illuminated by warm lights. She stops Nel in front of the massive stone house sprawling out over an immaculate lawn.

Kara looks over to where Lena is observing her quietly and snaps her mouth shut.

“You live here?” Kara all but squeaks.

“Have you ever heard of L-Corp?” Lena sweeps past Kara’s own question.

Kara shakes her head slowly, “Not in any meaningful way.”

“It’s one of the leading biotech companies in the country,” Lena explains, then adds slowly, “and was formerly known as Luthor Corp.”

The last five minutes of their conversation suddenly snaps into focus.

An accusation of murder in the family isn’t just bad for a reputation. It’s bad for business.

“Oh,” Kara says. Lena doesn’t say anything, almost seems uncomfortable at Kara’s revelation.

Kara makes sure she captures Lena’s gaze before continuing, “You know. All that reputation stuff? It doesn’t really matter to me.”

Lena huffs out a disbelieving laugh as she looks up at the front door awaiting her, “You might be the only person.”

“I doubt that.”

Lena turns back to search Kara’s face. Whatever she finds there must seem genuine enough, because she lets out a small puff of air before continuing, “It’s a little ironic.”

“What is?”

“I’ve been shipped off to boarding school every year since I was eight,” Lena starts with a sad smile, “Since the very beginning, I was the girl whose daddy was a murderer.”

Lena stares out the window, pausing before continuing, “Children latch onto a thing like that. It becomes an epithet of sorts.”

Something pulls in Kara’s chest at the words. The shape of this story is familiar to her.

“And these were people so far removed from it - from this place. All having an opinion on the matter, spreading rumors,” Lena looks over to Kara, “so it seems a little far fetched that it doesn’t seem to matter at all to the girl it should matter the most.”

Kara softens at that and reaches a hand out to rest on top of Lena’s.

“And it just stuck,” Lena continues with a heavy exhale, “even after the allegations were dropped. It was different, somehow. As if everyone believed he was capable of killing. Which was almost just as bad.”

“Well that’s dumb,” Kara says.

Lena just raises a questioning brow in her direction.

“Well. I think we all have the ability to kill. It’s the reasoning behind it that differs from person to
person,” Kara offers in explanation, regretting how dark that sounds as she says it.

Lena just hums in acknowledgement as she stares absently at the fountain, mulling over Kara’s words.

A silence falls over the cab and Kara can feel Lena getting ready to get out of the truck.

Not ready for Lena to go quite yet, Kara scrambles for a topic, “Rumors really suck. People started this rumor that a girl was in the hospital after choking on her boyfriend’s… you know. But she just had mono.”

Lena’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise and Kara can feel her face flush, a sinking feeling in her gut at having further spread the rumor.


“Right?” Kara responds, running a nervous hand through her ponytail, “I mean, she’s fifteen. She’s just a freshman! I’ve haven’t even done… you know… stuff like that.”

It drops out of her mouth before she can stop it, and the silence of the cab returns full force.

Lena clears her throat and hums in agreement.

Kara twists her fingers together, hems a bit before asking, “Have… have you?”

She asks because they’re friends. And friends can talk about this stuff.

Lena looks ahead before directing her attention back to Kara, “I have.”

“Oh,” Kara bobs her head, fumbling a bit with her words, “I didn’t- I didn’t mean that to sound like we shouldn’t be… not you and m- I mean, I’m not judging you at all for having… done stuff.”

Lena’s brows rise at her rambling, but doesn’t try to cut her off this time, waiting to see where the words take her.

Kara takes a breath to collect herself, “Are you still? Is he still together… with you?”

The look on Lena’s face can only be described as dumbfounded at Kara’s question. She looks out the passenger window for a long moment as she picks at her thumbnail. When she turns back, she’s giving Kara the same look as the one time she tried to walk Kara through Quantum Theory just for fun.

“Kara, I went to an all girls school.”

Kara furrows her brow as she tries to find how that’s relevant to their conversation, “…ok?”

“And I didn’t see many boys. Or any at all, really.”

Kara’s eyes widen, her mouth dropping open.

For the second time that night, she realizes that Winn was right.

“Oh!” Kara manages to get out.

Lena doesn’t offer anything else, just settles back into her seat and watches as the gears click into place.
“I didn’t realize that you— that this was…” Kara tries helplessly, gesturing between them.

Lena picks up on her meaning and leans forward, shaking her head frantically, “No! It’s not.”

At the words, Kara flushes with embarrassment and her eyes skitter away from Lena’s, “Oh.”

But Lena reaches out and lifts Kara’s chin to look her in the eye, “It doesn’t have to be. Honestly, I’ll take anything you’re willing to give me, Kara.”

Kara’s brain short-circuits a little at the gentle touch to her cheek, and Lena must misunderstand the silence because she’s pulling her hand away with a regretful look.

Reaching to grab the retreating hand, Kara rushes to say, “I didn’t know that this was all, you know. Or that we could be. Uh. More.”

A slow smile warms its way across Lena’s face as she registers Kara’s words, “If you’d like.”

“If I’d like,” Kara repeats dumbly, still a little shell-shocked from the revelation. A silence full of unspoken intent drops between them again and Kara can feel a different kind of tension building in the cab.

Lena seems to collect herself faster than Kara, shaking her head a bit and forcing out a small laugh, “As much as I’m enjoying watching the steam come out of your ears, I’m going to leave and let you work this one out for yourself.”

“Ok,” Kara nods numbly. Before she knows what’s happening, Lena is leaning across the space between them and pressing a quick kiss to Kara’s cheek.

“Goodnight, Kara,” Lena says quietly as she pulls away, the warmth of her breath rippling goosebumps down Kara’s neck.

Then Lena is slipping from the truck before Kara can even form a response.

“Goodnight,” Kara says to the now empty cab as she watches Lena pass through the front door. Slowly, she shifts Nel into first and pulls away into the night.

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Saturday morning starts at 4 a.m. for Kara as she rises before the sun and pulls on the pair of jeans lying in a heap on her bedroom floor. In the front hall, she shoves her feet into a pair of boots and draws a warm flannel across her shoulders while Krypto whines behind her.

Relenting to the pitiful sounds coming from the oversized dog, Kara opens the screen door behind her and ushers Krypto over to Nel and into the cab.

When she arrives at Sunny Acre Farms, the sky is just starting to turn from the inky black of night to the steel grey that precedes sunrise on the cape. Kara makes her way to the stone bake-house situated behind the farm store, Krypto in tow. Firing up the ovens in the cold room, she pulls the pre-made apple pies and turnovers from the freezer and readies them for baking.

The majority of her morning is spent baking premade pastries and bagging apples that had been picked by Vicki the previous day.

When the sun finally burns the first rays of light over the horizon, Kara takes a moment for herself and appreciates the delicate way the sky blushes pink at the morning light.

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When Kara finishes her chores at the farm just before 10:00 a.m., the sun is shining bright and warm, and the parking lot is already more than halfway full. The smell of freshly-baked apple treats usually works wonders at enticing customers to stop in at the farm store. Her boots crunch over the gravel as she heads toward Nel, whistling for Krypto when she pops the driver door open.

Krypto hops excitedly from the front seat to the back seat, and then to the front again. He circles himself in the front passenger spot and collapses in a huff against the leather material. Kara laughs as she looks on, and thinks back to the night before when Lena had been sitting in the space Krypto now occupies.

A smile warms her face as she pulls onto the county road leading to Midvale-proper and her fingers on the steering wheel tap along to the nervous fluttering in her stomach.

There hadn’t actually been very many words exchanged that indicated Lena wanted to date Kara. But there certainly were words expressing interest in Kara. Which had hope tugging away on Kara’s heart.

But there was also a sliver of uncertainty sitting heavily in Kara’s gut. What if Lena’s interest had nothing to do with dating at all? What if Lena just wanted to dip into the more physical points of interest? What if her interest was as casual as Siobhan’s, with no promise of anything more?

The thought makes her mouth go a little dry.

Kara couldn’t deny that she was definitely interested in Lena like that. But it was entirely new and unexplored territory for her.

Lena’s admission of having sex, of having experience with other girls, flashes across her memory.

What if Kara is bad at sex? Or what if she’s comparatively bad at sex?

What if she isn’t even a good kisser?

The thoughts rattle through her brain as Nel slowly rumbles through downtown.

Without much forethought, Kara pulls down a sidestreet and makes her way toward a back alley. She slips into a parking stall tucked behind a dumpster, pulls the brake, and turns the keys from the ignition.

Taking the stairs two at a time, Kara ambles up a metal staircase and knocks on the door to an upstairs apartment that overlooks the town’s main street.

“Alex!” Kara calls as she pounds on the heavy door, “it’s me, open up!”

A few moments pass, but then she hears shuffling behind the door as she keeps up a continuous knock. The blinds of the window next to the door part to reveal a sleep-mussed Alex glaring out at her.

The door swings open to a slightly grumpy Alex, “Kara. It is Saturday.”

But Kara just brushes past Alex into the apartment and blurts, “How do you tell if a girl wants you to ask her out?”

She whirls back around to look at Alex expectantly when there isn’t an immediate answer. But Alex is still standing with the door wide open, an annoyed expression on her face, “You barged in here at 10:00 a.m. on my day off to ask for girl advice?”
Kara just nods her head once and perches her hands on her hips, clear invitation for Alex to continue.

Alex rolls her eyes and closes the door. She scratches at the back of her head as she crosses the small living room to the kitchen. Kara moves to follow, and takes a seat at the table as Alex sets about starting a pot of coffee.

Kara begins to worry that Alex is purposefully ignoring her presence when Alex finally talks, “Who’s the girl?”

“A friend,” Kara offers, “her name is Lena.”

“How long have you been friends?” Alex is heaping spoonfuls of coffee grounds into the filter in her coffee maker.

Kara thinks, “Since August. So a couple months?”

Alex pushes a button on the machine and turns around to look at Kara, crossing her arms, “What makes you think she wants you to ask her out?”

Kara flushes a little at being asked so directly.

“Uhm,” she clears her throat, “well. It came out that she’s into girls.”

Alex nods her head, indicating she’s listening.

“And then we sort of… awkwardly avoided talking about being interested in each other,” Kara admits a little sheepishly.

“So that’s what has you thinking that she wants you to ask her out?” Alex asks, a little confused.

“Well, no,” Kara replies, remembering the soft hand to her cheek and the even softer words from Lena’s lips.

*I’ll take whatever you’re willing to give me.*

The memory soothes a little bit of the anxiety in Kara’s chest.

“She sort of put the ball in my court. Then kissed my cheek goodbye.”

Alex rolls her eyes and massages the bridge of her nose, “Pretty clear cut, Kara. Ask her out.”

“Yeah?” Kara asks, a tinge of hope in her question.

“Yes,” is Alex’s firm response.

“Okay. So then, like, what about sex? How do les-”

“Nope! No. Uh-uh,” Alex is interrupting as she pushes forward and pulls Kara out of her chair.

“Alex!” Kara protests as she’s dragged toward the front door, “you aren’t even going to give me a big sisterly speech on the merits of practicing safe lesbian sex?”

“Go ask Mom,” is all Alex responds and she pushes Kara onto her front step and soundly closes the door.

____
When she gets home, Kara finds herself joining her parents at the breakfast table after fixing a bowl of Froot Loops. Eliza is busying herself with the morning paper, clearly settling into her Saturday morning routine. Jeremiah finishes the last of his eggs and toast before turning to Kara as she sits down, “I was thinking of heading down to the marina after breakfast to work on the catboat’s engine. Wanna tag along?”

Kara takes a bite of her cereal before answering around a mouthful, “No thanks. I’m kinda tired after this morning.”

Jeremiah just nods his head before finishing his juice as Kara casts a sidelong glance in Eliza’s direction. He stands to rinse his dish in the sink before pulling on his jacket and stooping to kiss Eliza on the cheek, “I’ll be back for lunch.”

“Bye, love you!” Kara calls over her shoulder as Jeremiah makes his way down the front hall, Krypto following with his tail wagging.

Kara pushes a few bites of her cereal around in the milk as she hears the front door close behind Jeremiah. She casts another glance Eliza’s direction before ducking her head and taking another bite. Eliza, still nursing a mug of coffee, turns to the business section of the paper. Kara watches the steam from the mug lazily curl into the air for a few moments. She takes a deep breath as she places both palms flat on the table and clears her throat.

Eliza spares her a glance over her glasses before shuffling the paper again, moving past the business headlines in favor of the sports section.

“Mom, how do women have safe sex? Like, together?”

Eliza stills at the question, save for the fluttering of her eyes before they focus back up to where Kara is looking into her mostly empty bowl of milk. A beat passes, and then Eliza is sitting up from the comfortable slouch she had adopted, setting her mug down, and neatly folding the paper closed.

Her voice is unassuming when she speaks, “Kara, are you-”

“Gay?” Kara interrupts, wanting to rush through this part of the conversation, “Yeah, really super gay. I’ve known since I was in middle school, and I know I dated that guy Mike back in freshman year but, well, we all make mistakes. And I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner, I wasn’t scared or anything. Obviously I wasn’t scared, you and Jeremiah have already done this with Alex. But I just didn’t think it was really that important until now. So. Yeah.”

Kara flinches a little at the word vomit, but a warm smile breaks across Eliza’s face as she rests a hand on top of Kara’s, “I was actually just going to ask if you were currently sexually active.”


“Well,” Eliza says as she affects a posture more suited to the doctor’s office than the breakfast nook, “knowing your own sexual health is the first step to ensuring you and your partner are both safe while engaging in sex. Once you do become sexually active, you should go into the OBGYN at least once a year to be tested for STIs. Maybe more often, depending on your familiarity with your partners.”

Kara’s thankful for the professional tone of the conversation. As it is, she’s already shifting uncomfortably in her chair.

“There are also different barrier methods available to women who sleep with other women,” Eliza continues, “Dental dams are recommended for sex that’s oral in nature. Particularly when
transitioning from one type of oral to another.”

Kara furrows her brow at the different types of oral bit and opens her mouth as if to ask, but Eliza just holds up a finger to indicate she’d rather Kara work through that one on her own.

“Condoms are also recommen-”

“What?!” Kara has to interrupt this time. “What would two women need a condom for?”

But as she asks, Kara connects the dots and immediately flushes at the realization. Eliza just thins her lips as if trying to stop herself from laughing.

“Meticulous hygiene is also important for any items brought into the bedroom experience,” Eliza tacks on as Kara begins to question the benefits of actually having this conversation.

Eliza makes sure she has her gaze before shedding some of her professional bedside manner, “But Kara, at the end of the day, the most important part of sex is communication. Talk to her. Ask about her previous partners. If she’s been tested. Make sure you both understand what the boundaries are. Always, always make sure you have consent. And don’t do something if you both aren’t ready for it.”

Kara averts her eyes out the window, “You’ve really got this whole spiel down.”

Eliza chuckles lightly at that, tilting her head thoughtfully, “Well, we’ve been through this once before with Alex. It’s also my job.”

Kara cracks a smile at her mom’s light-hearted tone, “Yeah, sorry you weren’t able to churn out a straight kid.”

Eliza just tsks her tongue and throws an arm around Kara’s shoulders to pull her in for a side hug, “Believe me, Kara. Out of all the things your father and I worry about as parents, our children being gay is genuinely not even on the list.”

She releases her after a warm squeeze and pats Kara’s cheek, “Congratulations, though.”

At Kara’s confused look, Eliza adds, “Coming out. It’s an exercise in love and patience to allow yourself the chance to discover such an important part of who you are. And I might not be the first person you’ve told, and I’m probably not the last, but it’s an act of honesty and trust every time you do it. So thank you, and congratulations.”

Kara swallows against the emotion caught in her throat and nods, “Thanks, Mom.”

Eliza smiles again before turning back to her mug of coffee and skimming over the sports headlines. Kara assumes that’s the end of the conversation and stands to take her bowl to the sink.

As she’s turning to head upstairs to her room, Eliza’s teasing voice pulls her to a halt.

“Oh, and Kara? Be sure to bring her to the house sometime. Your father and I would love to meet her.”

Kara’s cheeks somehow find a way to burn even hotter as she ducks her head and scrambles up the stairs.

The rest of the weekend passes lazily and Kara spends most of it on the couch icing her neck and
When Monday morning arrives, Kara finds herself rushing into her early physics class as the bell is ringing. She nods to Winn and James and smiles brightly at Lena as she sits down beside her. A small smile breaks over Lena’s face as she tucks a non-existent stray hair behind her ear and clears her throat. Kara could swear the tips of Lena’s ears turn a little red, but she doesn’t have much time to verify that before Mr. Lichter launches into his lesson plan.

Kara taps her pencil impatiently and bounces her heel throughout the entire class, much to Winn’s annoyance - if his pointed looks are anything to go by. She had spent a lot of time game-planning over the weekend and now as the time drew closer, Kara was getting nervous. She just needed to talk to Lena and then maybe she’d feel less antsy.

She’s in the middle of doodling a series of concentric circles in an attempt to calm down when her head snaps up at the sound of Mr. Lichter calling her name.

“Uh…” Kara starts, looking around the classroom, “Sorry, what did you say?”

Mr. Lichter frowns a bit before repeating his question, “What is the force of gravity on Earth?”

“Oh!” Kara scrambles to remember, “Uhm, it’s…”

Next to her, Lena coughs quietly and Kara is distracted enough to spare her a glance. Kara notices Lena’s finger subtly tapping at something written in her notebook, and she quickly realizes Lena is helping her.

“9.81 meters per second,” Kara rushes out.

“Per second squared… Units matter folks!” Mr. Lichter corrects as he nods and turns back to the equation up on the board.

When Mr. Lichter’s attention is sufficiently focused back on the board, Kara turns to Lena and mouths a silent ‘Thank You’. Lena spares her a wink before refocusing back on the lesson.

The bell to signal the end of first period finally rings and Kara shoves her notebook into her backpack and bounces to her feet. Winn and James both send her a questioning look at her eagerness as they stand, but she looks down to where Lena is still collecting her things and just waves them off. They share a confused look with each other before turning to leave, calling out their goodbyes from the doorway.

Lena looks to where Kara is waiting before straightening up to sling her tote bag over her shoulder and leading them both out of the classroom, “Hey! How was your weekend?”

“It was alright,” Kara responds, going for casual as they head down the hallway leading to Lena’s locker, “I pretty much spent it on the couch resting.”

Lena hums softly and cocks an eyebrow, “Is ‘resting’ code for watching TV and eating ice cream?”

Kara mocks indignation and clutches her chest as they approach Lena’s locker.

“I am an athlete, Lena!” She pauses before tacking on, “I was playing Madden and eating ice cream.”

Lena rolls her eyes as she unlocks her locker, “Is there really a difference?”
“There’s a huge difference. I was basically studying. Training even,” Kara jokes as she leans against the locker next to Lena’s.

Lena shoots her an exasperated look and deposits her physics textbook on the top shelf of her locker. Rolling so her back presses fully into the locker she’s leaned against, Kara chews her lip as she tries to pluck up the courage for her question.

Lena must notice the sudden absence of conversation because she shoots Kara a curious look before shutting her locker.

“So, uhm,” Kara starts, clearing her throat when the words come out shaky, “I was wondering if you were busy this week?”

Lena turns to fix her with a knowing look and settles into a lean against her own locker, “Do you mean outside of school?”

She can feel herself redden, “Yeah. Besides school, I mean.”

A smug smirk tugs at the corner of Lena’s mouth and Kara internally groans, because of course Lena isn’t going to make this easy for her.

“I could be free,” Lena responds, as if making plans to meet Kara outside of school for study sessions and hangouts isn’t a totally normal and common occurrence.

“I was wondering…” Kara fumbles. She’s nervous and her palms are sweaty, which is so stupid because Lena is looking at her like she already knows what’s coming and she’s going to say yes. But then maybe that’s why Kara’s sweating?

She pushes herself off the locker and turns to face Lena, hands firmly on her hips, “I was wondering if you wanted to go on a date. With me. In like, the romantic way.”

Lena’s responding smile essentially dissolves Kara’s insides, “Yes. I would.”

Kara nods, very matter-of-factly, “Ok. Great.”

“You know, your forehead does this crinkle thing when you’re really focused on something,” Lena teases as she reaches out a finger to poke at her brow.

Kara laughs, the tension dissolving from her shoulders, and swats her hand away playfully, “Is that really all you’re thinking about right now?”

Lena tilts her head in defense, “It’s really cute.”

Kara scoffs and shoves her hands into the pockets of her jeans, “How does Friday sound?”

Lena’s brows raise as she pushes off her locker, “Friday we’ll both be in Blüdhaven for your game against the Nightwings.”

Her eyes widen at the realization that she completely forgot, “Right! So, Saturday then?”

Lena nods as her lips thin, trying to smother a laugh, “Saturday it is.”

“Deal,” Kara says. Not knowing what else to do, she shoves her hand out for a hand shake.

Lena actually laughs at that as she claps Kara’s hand and pumps it once. Kara gives her a dopey grin over her shoulder as she moves to head to second period, “See you then!”
Kara. I’ll see you at lunch,” Lena calls after her.

Kara just sends her a shrug of the shoulders before disappearing down the next hallway. And if she does a hammed up version of her celebration dance once she’s out of sight, Lena never needs to know.

“You what?!” Winn exclaims loudly enough that the librarian supervising fifth period study hall pointedly clears her throat from behind her desk.

“I asked Lena out on a date,” Kara states simply.

“Kara, literally three days ago you thought she was icing you out.”

“Well, you were right,” Kara admits, “about, like, everything. Oddly enough.”

“It’s not odd, I’m always right.”

“Oh, sure. Whatever. So she was keeping her distance because she thought I wouldn’t want to be friends. And she’s into girls and stuff. And then she kissed my cheek—”

Winn gasps loudly enough that the girl at the next table over shoots him a glare and Kara nudges him so his jaw closes.

“And I thought that all those things added together probably meant I could try asking her out,” Kara finishes quietly, trying not to disturb any other library-goers.

“You needed all of those things to clue into the fact that she totally digs you?” Winn scoffs, “Kara, she practically glows whenever she talks to you. And, she tries to hide it, but she definitely checks out your butt in uniform at games.”

“She does not,” Kara swats out at his arm. Winn just shrugs as if to say ‘I don’t make the rules’.

“So,” Winn starts, folding his hands neatly on the desk, “homecoming is a month away. Do you think you’ll ask her to the dance?”

Kara hesitates, nerves fluttering in her chest, “You mean, if I don’t completely bungle the date and she still wants to be seen in public with me afterwards?”

“Right.”

“Yeah, she’d be the one I’d want to ask,” Kara settles on, not at all convinced she won’t mess up the date with Lena.

“Adorable,” Winn murmurs under his breath. Kara can see the wheels turning in his head and, frankly, it’s a little unsettling. Given Winn’s track record with secret plans and his consistent cheer squad interactions with Lena, the unsettled feeling is warranted.

“Please don’t be weird,” Kara begs.

“I’m not being weird,” Winn quickly defends.

“You are. Your eyes have that weird glint.”

“My eyes don’t glint, Kara. They glimmer.”
And with that, Kara resigns herself to whatever weird fate Winn is planning.

The rest of the week goes by in a blur. Kara spends a good chunk of her free time consulting with Alex on good date ideas to only then filter them through Winn, who turns out to be a harsh critic.

You can’t take Lena to the mall, Kara. What are you, 12?

By the time gameday rolls around, she’s confident she has a solid date lined up for the next day.

She’s on the bus home after locking down a commanding win over the Nightwings when her phone vibrates with a text. She unlocks her phone to a picture from Lena with the caption ‘RIDE HARD STALLIONS’. The picture is of her and Winn in the cheer squad’s van. Lena is giving a thumbs up with a happy smile while Winn is in the background, both fists in the air and face scrunched in mid cheer.

Kara snorts into the milkshake she got when the team stopped for dinner. She recruits James and Mike for a response and the picture ends up being her trying to shove her entire double cheeseburger into her mouth, Mike hanging a handful of fries out of his mouth, and James attempting to chug his entire soda in one go. Kara laughs at the resulting picture and captions it ‘we do work’ before hitting send.

Lena shoots back a chat with a cry laughing emoji which is quickly followed with ‘So what’s the plan for our date tomorrow, Super Star?’

She’s smiling stupidly down at her phone as she types out her response ‘it’s a surprise’.

‘Not even a little hint?’

‘nope.’

‘Winn won’t tell me what you have planned either.’

‘because winns a good friend’

‘Could you at least tell a girl what to wear?’

Kara takes a minute to think about her answer without giving anything away.

‘we’ll be outside. so wear reasonable shoes. and probably dress for chilly conditions.’

‘I swear to god, Kara. If you make me exercise...’

‘you’re a cheerleader lena. which is a sport. which involves exercising on the daily.’

Lena only responds with an emoji sticking its tongue out and Kara laughs as she clicks off her phone and goes back to eating her burger.

It’s mid morning by the time Kara pulls through the gates to pick up Lena. She’d spent the morning down at the marina making sure everything was ready to go. After stopping by the house to pull on a thicker wool sweater to keep her warm, and after caving to Krypto’s whines and letting him hop into the truck, Kara had set off for the giant stone mansion perched atop the cliffs of Midvale.

By the time she’s pulling to a stop in front of the steps that lead to the front door, her stomach is flipping over anxiously and there’s a slight shake to her hands. She ambles up the steps and pauses.
Would anyone actually hear her knocking on the door of a house this big? She shrugs to herself and raps her knuckles over the thick wood.

Almost immediately, the door opens to reveal Lena standing in an entryway leading to a foyer with an impressive imperial staircase. The warm look on Lena’s face is enough to relax the tension that had wound its way through Kara’s frame.

“Hi!” Kara says brightly, sending a beaming smile Lena’s way.

“Hi yourself,” Lena smiles back as she spreads her arms wide for outfit inspection after pulling the door closed behind her, “will this suffice?”

Kara looks over Lena’s soft jeans and sensible shoe choice.

“Almost perfect,” Kara responds with a firm nod as they descend down the stairs.

“Almost?”

Kara holds her fingers up for her to wait as she opens the passenger door and roots around in the back of the cab. When she finds what she’s looking for, a toothy smile blooms across her face.

“Here, you’ll probably want this,” Kara says as she passes her letterman’s jacket to Lena, who takes it with an amused tilt to her mouth.

“Very smooth,” Lena comments as she pulls the jacket on over her loosely fitted sweater. Kara looks her over and nods her approval.

“You look pretty cute in a varsity jacket. You should get your own,” Kara says as she circles around to her side of Nel.

“Hmm,” Lena hums as she climbs up through the already open door, “I like this one, actually. Might keep it.” Lena pulls the jacket tighter around her shoulders as she says it and the words send a different set of nerves fluttering through Kara’s chest.

Krypto pokes his nose into the front seat in a valiant attempt to say hello to the newcomer, and Kara chuckles nervously as Lena dodges stray licks at her face, “I hope you don’t mind I brought a friend.”

But Lena’s laughing as she playfully scratches behind his ears, “Hope your friend doesn’t mind being third wheel, then.” Another grin is spreading over Kara’s face as she watches Krypto nuzzle into Lena’s face while she cooes about how he’s such a good boy.

Kara shifts into gear and heads off before adding, “His name is Krypto, by the way.”

“It’s very nice to meet you, Krypto,” Lena says in a mock serious tone, and Krypto is just cheeky enough to offer her a paw at hearing his name. Lena throws her head back in laughter as she takes his paw and shakes it. The incessant sniffing over Lena’s body that follows is enough for Kara to roll her eyes at Krypto’s antics and inform Lena that she keeps treats in the glovebox for when he does tricks.

Once Krypto’s curiosity is sufficiently satisfied some time later, Lena clears her throat, “So where are you taking me on this mystery date?”

“The docks,” is Kara’s only reply.
“You’re being intentionally vague,” Lena complains.

“Yes. Do you know how to swim?”

“Kara,” Lena groans.

“Do you?” Kara presses.

“I do, quite well, actually. But I am not jumping in the Atlantic in the middle of October.”

“It’s really more of a ‘just in case’ sort of question,” Kara reassures.

After a few moments of quiet contemplation, Lena pipes up, “You’re taking me on a boat.”

“I am,” Kara says just as she’s slowing down to turn into the small parking lot for the marina.

“What kind of boat are you taking me on?” Lena asks, her tone tinged with an excitement that’s starting to shine through her eyes.

Kara gives herself a mental high-five at Lena’s clear interest as she scans the docks before pointing out the 22 foot Nonsuch Catboat moored to the dock, “That kind.”

Lena’s eyes widen a little bit when she spots the sailboat and grabs for Kara’s forearm, “You’re taking me sailing?”

“Yeah?” Kara responds, not sure if the grasp on her arm is a good or bad sign. But the blinding smile on Lena’s face quickly reassures her that she made a good choice.

“I love sailing!” Lena says, practically bouncing in her seat.

“Perfect!” Kara responds, her own excitement starting to seep into her voice, “So you know how to sail?”

“Not a clue, actually,” Lena admits, “Lex used to take me out on his boat when we both still came back to Midvale for summers.”

“What kind of rig did he sail?” Kara asks, happy to talk boats.

“I have no idea,” Lena admits again, a bit sheepishly, “It went really fast, though?”

Kara lets a laugh roll out of her at the vague categorization, taking the keys out of the ignition and popping her door open. There’s a smile firmly in place as she rounds over to Lena’s side of the truck to help her down and let Krypto out of the backseat, “You know, the fast bit is really more a testament to your brother. A boat is only as skilled as the person sailing it.”

“That sounds annoyingly familiar,” Lena wistfully remarks as she watches Krypto take off toward the dock, only pausing briefly to check the two were following him before hopping into the boat waiting there.

Kara walks Lena through the most important aspects of the boat and explains the tasks she’ll need Lena’s help on, being sure to demonstrate proper sailing safety as she goes. When she’s confident Lena is comfortable with the boat and her charge, and once Krypto is secured in his doggy life vest, Kara starts the inboard motor and eases the sailboat out of the slip. As they clear the marina, Kara lets Lena take the tiller with clear instructions to ‘keep her heading into the wind’ so that she can set about hoisting the sail.
Quickly enough, Kara catches the wind and trims the sail to send the boat cutting across Midvale Bay. She tacks and jibes over the choppy water as the bright afternoon sun warms her face. Laughter bubbles from Lena whenever she’s able to send the boat flying as fast as it can go across the waves, and Kara finds herself chasing after the delighted sound of her laughter rather than the wind itself. Her success sends something tumbling in her chest.

The feeling only swells when Kara finally luffs off the wind and averts her attention to where Lena is stretched out on the deck with Krypto spread across her legs. Wiping the small bit of sweat that’s gathered on her brow from working the boat, Kara almost regrets having to interrupt the moment to ask Lena to help her drop the sail. She maneuvers the boat back toward the leeward side of the bay and they work together to get the sail tucked away and the anchor dropped. Once Kara is satisfied that the anchor is buried sufficiently in the sand, she takes a moment to duck into the cabin. When she emerges again, it’s with the picnic basket she’d packed that morning and a few extra blankets.

“Hope you’re hungry,” Kara says as she joins Lena and Krypto in the cockpit of the boat. She passes the blankets to Lena and sets about arranging the lunch she brought for the afternoon.

Lena hums happily as she tucks into the sandwich Kara had handed over, “You take me on a boat, you cook for me. You better be careful, or I’ll start to think you’re a bit of a romantic, Superstar.”

“Making a couple sandwiches and buying pre-made hummus hardly counts as cooking,” Kara defends as her face flushes red at the teasing.

“Still. Here I am. Sitting on a boat on a beautiful day with a cute dog and a surprisingly tasty sandwich. And one very charming Kara Danvers.”

Kara’s smile is so wide at the compliment that she’s sure her face will crack. She scratches behind Krypto’s ear and gives him a carrot to quiet his begging. Lena looks out over the water as she pops open a lemonade, head tilting toward the warm sun.

“So when did you stop coming back to Midvale for the summers?” Kara asks, thinking back to their earlier conversation in the parking lot.

“I think I was nine the last time I spent a summer here,” Lena says, eyebrow crinkling as she thinks it over.

“What’d you do with your summers instead?” Kara murmurs around her entirely-too-large bite of sandwich.

“I took classes.”

“Ew,” Kara groans, “You’re telling me you’ve been going to summer school since before you were in middle school?”

“I guess I am, yes,” Lena replies, sparing a fond look for Kara’s ridiculous eating technique.

“What is there to learn that could possibly be better than spending your summers on the beach?” Kara asks skeptically.

Lena is quiet for a moment, looking thoughtful as she nibbles on a piece of cheese, “It started off with physics and chemistry classes, actually.”

“Physics? In the summer?”

Lena nods, continuing as if testing the waters, “Then I dabbled with programming. And moved to
robotics pretty quickly from there.”

“So you’ve been spending your summers building robots?” Kara asks, a little mystified.

“Until the last two summers, where I’ve been interning in R&D for L-Corp,” Lena clarifies, her fingers starting to twist in her lap.

“Wow, that’s so cool, Lena!” Kara chirps happily, not quite sure where the nervousness is coming from, but wanting to soothe it anyway, “I bet colleges will be tripping over themselves for you.”

Lena’s fingers seem to lock together at that and her bottom lip disappears between her teeth. Kara watches as Lena takes a deep breath and flattens her palms across her knees, “I’m actually already admitted to MIT.”

Based on what Kara knows about Lena, the revelation isn’t exactly surprising. A smile still blooms across her face and something that feels like vicarious pride swells a little in Kara’s chest.

But before Kara can get out her congratulations, Lena charges on, “I’ve already been taking classes, actually. I’m graduating this spring with my high school diploma and a degree in Computer Science and Engineering.”

The words are rushed out of Lena so quickly that it jostles Kara a bit and she can feel her face reacting before she can school it. Lena is watching her intently, and Kara has the overwhelming feeling that her reaction to this information is important.

But there’s only one real thought bouncing around her head, so she asks, “God, how do you find the time?”

The tension in Lena’s shoulders relaxes a little as she huffs out a small laugh, “Well, I did say I’ve been in summer school since I was nine. Online classes, too.”

There’s a small hint of regret in the comment that Kara doesn’t miss. A tug of sympathy rushes through her when the comment couples with the glum look on Lena’s face.

Kara tilts her head and softly asks, “So how did you end up at Midvale High?”

The corner of Lena’s mouth ticks up, “I was able to convince my Father to let me spend my senior year here. A last ditch attempt at something fun before I’m supposed to start working at the company.”

“It sounds like you’re not that excited about it. Working for the company, I mean.” Kara observes, digging into her second sandwich of the afternoon.

Lena shrugs as she finishes her own sandwich, wiping her hands on a paper towel, “No one’s really asked me. It’s just expected that I will.”

Kara tilts her head at that, “What would you do, if you were to choose?”

Lena hefts out a sigh and Kara can tell she’s just barely restraining from shrugging her shoulders again, “I guess I don’t really know. The option to choose something else has never been real enough for me to consider.”

She’s thoughtful for a moment before she continues, a playful smile on her face “But I’m doing exactly what I want right now, and that’s what matters.”
“Oh yeah?” Kara asks, a smile tugging at her own lips.

“Mhmm. I have real friends who seem to like me for who I am. I’m on the cheerleading squad. And I’m being schmoozed by the hot shot quarterback of the high school football team.”

Kara laughs loudly at that, “Glad I could be of assistance.”

Lena joins in with her laughter, “I mean it! Friends? Dating? None of that’s easy when your classmates are at least four years older and they’re all intimidated by you.”

Kara concedes the point as her laughter fades off. She notes how lonely it sounds, and she truly means it when she says, “Well, I’m glad you came back to Midvale, then.”

Lena hums through her smile as she reaches to scoop hummus with a carrot, “What about you?”

“Me? Pfft,” Kara scoffs with a wave of her hand, “Quarterbacks aren’t really my type.”

The bad joke is worth it when Lena throws her head back in laughter and shoves at Kara’s shoulder, “No, what do you want to do? For the future?”

Kara thinks on it for a minute. “To be honest? I have no idea,” Kara admits.

“Not even if you could choose anything?”

“Truthfully, the thought of having to go to work everyday until I retire or die sounds horrible,” Kara jokes.

“What if it’s something you like doing?”

Kara just gives an unenthusiastic shrug.

“Well,” Lena continues, setting the hummus aside and scooting closer to Kara until their knees are bumping, “What sort of things do you like?”

She thinks for a moment and offers, “I’m good with my hands.” She raises her palm and waggles her fingers in Lena’s direction.

Lena zeroes in on the motion and arches a knowing brow at Kara.

Kara feels herself go red and she draws her hand back before stumbling on, “I - I mean I like to work with my hands. Like, I help Jeremiah with the sailboat all the time. And I like the physical work I do on the farm.”

“That’s a pretty good starting point,” Lena offers as she squeezes Kara’s knee reassuringly.

Kara considers what else she enjoys before adding, “I write too.”

There’s a look of surprise that crosses Lena’s face that has Kara continuing on, “I started with journaling. It was recommended to me when I was younger, as a way to process, or whatever. But I’ve sort of expanded from there.”

“Ah,” Lena says teasingly, “That must be where the romance comes from. Your writing sensibilities.”

Kara scoffs at the tease and bumps her shoulder against Lena’s. “Shut up,” she teases back as her ears burn.
Lena giggles as she leans into Kara and nuzzles into her shoulder there, “You blush too easily, you know.”

Kara grumbles as she brings her arm up to wrap around Lena’s shoulder. They seem to release a communal sigh as they settle into each other and burrow down into the blankets around them. A sense of calm washes over Kara as Krypto spreads across their laps and all three sit back to enjoy the rest of the afternoon.

Another hour passes out on the water before Kara and Lena finally set about heading into the marina. They work around each other comfortably as Kara guides the boat into the slip and secures it to the dock. After a quick acknowledgement that it’s still early in the afternoon, Kara suggests heading downtown for a cup of coffee to warm back up. At Lena’s eager agreement, they hop in Nel for the quick trek to the local coffee shop - making a brief pit stop to drop Krypto off at the house.

Downtown Midvale is buzzing with Saturday afternoon traffic, and Kara gets stopped more than once by booster club dads and passersby wanting to talk about rushing strategy or congratulate her on the Friday night win. Lena looks on quietly, a soft smile hiding in the corner of her mouth, as Kara nods politely and greets those that stop by.

They chat over their pumpkin spiced lattes, which Lena begrudgingly finds delicious - ‘Really, Kara? Don’t you think that’s a little… basic?’ ‘It’s a fall classic, Lena!’, and enjoy the quiet din of the shop as the Saturday crowd goes about its business.

Drinks finished, Lena leads them out of the coffee shop and onto the main street where shops are taking advantage of the beautiful weather with various displays set out. They meander together through the racks and people as the sun shines down on them. Neither paying all that much attention to the stands they pass, both content to just walk along the path in each other’s company.

“So,” Kara starts, redirecting her gaze to Lena after having been thoroughly distracted by a particularly cute dog licking at a bowl of ice-cream, “Why don’t you talk about MIT more often?”

Kara thinks of the nervous way Lena had averted her eyes when she told her about graduating in the Spring. She looks for signs of the same nervousness, but Lena seems relaxed as she draws her hands across the colorful scarves hanging from a rack.

Lena considers the question before answering, “It usually changes things.”

Kara furrows her brow in a way that prompts Lena to continue, “When people find out. It changes how they treat me. Either I’m some prodigal genius and they gush about how smart I am and put unrealistic expectations on me, or I’m an intimidating genius that people don’t really know what to do with and try to avoid.”

Kara bobs her head, thinking for the second time that day how lonely it all sounds.

“I don’t really want to be a genius, though,” Lena explains, furrowing her own brow as she examines a necklace hanging from a display, “Or, maybe I just want to be more than a brain? I want to accomplish something outside of a classroom. Do something more important than schoolwork.”

Lena seems to struggle for a moment as she tries to find the right words, and Kara waits patiently for her to continue, “I just want to be a normal teenage girl.”

“A normal teenage girl with a wicked sense of curiosity,” Kara offers, shrugging her shoulders nonchalantly.
Lena looks over at her then, a soft look on her face, “You still treat me the same, though. It doesn’t seem to phase you, or intimidate you at all.”

Kara thinks of all the ways Lena intimidates her that have nothing to do with her intelligence. She shrugs her shoulders again, “It’s not really a surprise to learn that there are people out there a whole lot smarter than me. I’m not exactly a good study.”

Lena tilts her head at that, quiet as she takes in Kara. “I hope you know you’re the furthest thing from being a ‘dumb jock’,” she reaches a hand out and rests it on Kara’s forearm, “Sure you’re the best quarterback in the state under pressure and you can squat as much as the guys on the team,” the statement comes out a little breathless, “But you’re also one of the only quarterbacks in the state that’s given the leeway to make their own playcalls. You can read a defensive line and make a snap decision. Not to mention, you effectively lead 10 teenage boys down a football field regularly.”

Kara preens a little at her words.

“You calculate how to move bodies around obstacles to reach a goal. I calculate the rate at which the universe expands,” Lena finishes with a shrug of her own.

“What, really?” Kara asks, incredulous, “Why? Why would anyone need to know that?”

Lena scoffs and rolls her eyes, reaching out to shove at Kara’s shoulders, “People look to you, Kara. You’re a natural leader who follows her intuition. There’s value in that, too.”

There’s a softness to the look they share as Kara let’s Lena’s words sink in. Rarely is Kara celebrated for following her gut, and having Lena acknowledge it as its own form of intelligence has something tightening in her chest.

“Thank you,” Kara says quietly, smiling down at the ground.

Lena responds by reaching out and giving Kara’s hand a gentle squeeze that resonates throughout her entire body. But, instead of pulling her hand back, Lena laces their fingers and slides her palm against Kara’s, leaving their hands intertwined as she looks back to the necklace display.

An unnamed desire itches at the base of Kara’s skull while Lena chats happily with the saleswoman - the kind words still swirling in her mind. The content gleam in Lena’s eyes combines with the easy way she traces her thumb over the back of Kara’s hand and it settles an odd emotion at the back of her throat. Not altogether unpleasant, Kara leans into the feeling and, when the saleswoman moves away, gives a soft tug to Lena’s hand that brings them face-to-face.

Kara hears a small intake of breath as she steps into Lena’s space, her own body thrumming with the proximity. She focuses her gaze on Lena, conveying her intent - asking permission in a way. The response is an encouraging lift of the chin that has Kara’s hand tangling into dark hair as Lena’s eyes flutter closed. Kara leans to close the distance, but hesitates just out of reach. There’s a nudge to her nose in clear invitation, so she bridges the gap.

And just like that, Kara’s senses are overcome with everything Lena. Her lips are soft when they meet Kara’s, softer than the fine hair at the base of Lena’s neck as Kara draws her closer. The smell of her perfume is sharp, but underneath the spice and the earthy smell of coffee is something so distinctly Lena that Kara wants to taste. So she draws her even closer and tentatively nibbles at Lena’s bottom lip.

It pulls… not exactly a sigh, but something more abstract, out of Lena. It’s not anything Kara hears, but feels. And she wants to do it again.
The saleswoman softly clearing her throat is enough to send Kara reluctantly pulling back from Lena. She smiles sheepishly, but before she can even open her mouth to get out a half hearted apology, Lena is grabbing her arm and pulling her around a corner into the nearby alleyway.

Partially hidden behind a fire escape, Lena falls back against the sun-warmed brick wall and pulls Kara back in.

When their lips meet this time, the feeling sears through Kara’s body. The languid but intense way Lena licks and nips at her lips all but melts her bones and she sinks into the feeling. And when she finally parts her lips and her tongue meets Lena’s for the first time, it actually does succeed in pulling a small sound from Lena.

The sound vibrates softly against the palm she has cradling the side of Lena’s neck and it sets her body humming like summer cicadas. Kara presses in, pushing Lena more firmly against the brick at her back, and dips into Lena’s mouth again and again and again.

The sensation resonates throughout her - at the back of her neck where nails dig into her skin, across her chest as Lena leans into her, low in her belly when hips involuntarily push forward. When her palms slide across Lena’s hips and feel warm, bare skin, she feels like she’s been set on fire.

Kara’s certain she leaves her body when Lena’s devastatingly persistent lips trail to her neck. Her mouth goes slack and she lets out a sound that would be embarrassing in any other situation when those lips move to nibble at her ear. Searching hands move from their place on her shoulders down the slope of her chest and Kara unthinkingly pushes into the contact. Lena’s hands continue down, lingering at the plane of Kara’s stomach, before slipping under Kara’s sweater.

The cool hands against the burning skin of her stomach has Kara tensing, suddenly unsure of herself.

Lena must sense her hesitation and pulls back slightly. Her eyes flicker up to search Kara’s, pupils blown wide, and Kara feels acutely vulnerable - like Lena could read her very soul in that moment.

But the intense look on Lena’s face softens as she reassuringly scratches her nails against Kara’s stomach. The hands pressed over her bare skin resurface from underneath the sweater and wind around her waist. Lena nuzzles her nose up against Kara’s before resting their foreheads together and huffing out a breathlessly delighted chuckle.

Kara catches her breath and clears her throat before asking, “What’s so funny?”

Lena lets out another light chuckle before responding, “It’s all a little unfair.”

“What is?” Kara doesn’t pull back or open her eyes, but her brow crinkles anyway.

“Just… you,” Lena pokes lightly at Kara’s chest, “It’s one thing that you can maneuver a sailboat, look stupidly gorgeous even when you sweat, and are incredibly kind to everyone you pass. But now I know you can kiss like that.”

Kara lets out a laugh at the indignant tinge to Lena's words, “I guess I’m not seeing how that’s all bad.”

“Because, Kara,” Lena pushes lightly at her shoulder, “My whole life is different now that I know I can be kissed like that!”

A toothy grin spreads across Kara’s face as she pulls Lena back in, swaying a little on her feet.

“I can kiss you like that anytime you’d like,” she says as she swoops down to brush her lips gently
It seems to steal a little of Lena’s breath as she presses up into Kara. But she’s quickly laughing against Kara’s lips and pushing lightly against her shoulders, “Hmmm… Maybe not in the alley?”

Kara cocks her brow, “You didn’t seem to mind when you pulled me down here a few minutes ago.”

Lena rolls her eyes as she pushes herself up off the wall and runs a hand through her hair, “Come on Girl of Steel. It’s probably time to take me home.”

In the backseat of Nel, Lena kisses Kara like she’s the most important thing in the world.

She kisses Kara until she believes she’s the most important thing in the world.

Kara is at her locker with Winn on Monday morning when he calls “Hey Lena!” over her shoulder. When she turns, she’s surprised to see Lena wearing her letterman’s jacket - Danvers clearly stitched across the arm. Her heart bucks a little in her chest and her face could split with the smile that spreads over it.

“Hey Winn, Kara,” Lena greets with a coy wink in Kara’s direction.

Winn gives Kara a knowing look as Lena continues on to her own locker. Kara rolls her eyes at his eyebrow waggle and shoves at his shoulder.

“So I guess your date went off without a hitch,” Winn asks, barely keeping the excitement out of his voice.

The memory of her day with Lena has her smile widening even more, “Yeah, it was pretty awesome.”

“Ok, details?” Winn pushes conspiratorially.

Kara shoves a book into her bag before closing her locker and turning in the direction of the physics hall, “We went sailing - which I think she thought was cool. Then we hung out downtown a little. And then we… kissed?”

“You kissed?!” Winn squeaks as he jerks Kara to a halt.

Kara huffs and readjusts her backpack on her shoulder, “Yes. We kissed.”

“And?!”

“Winn,” Kara groans.

“Kara. Please. This is, like, huge for you and your useless ass. I need the juicy details.”

“I won’t kiss and tell,” Kara argues and they round a corner.

“Ugh, fine,” Winn huffs, “At least tell me about homecoming.”

“Homecoming?” Kara asks, screwing up her face in confusion.

“Yes. Homecoming. Are you taking Lena?”
“Uh,” Kara responds, “I haven’t really asked her yet.”

Winn just scoffs and rolls his eyes as Kara remembers something she’d been thinking about since her date with Lena.

“I actually do have a favor to ask, though,” Kara starts tentatively.

“Oh yeah?” Winn perks up, “Shoot.”

“I want to campaign for Lena as Homecoming Queen,” Kara states simply, thinking about Lena’s desire to have a normal, cliche high school experience.

Winn is quiet for a moment before responding, “You know you’re basically a shoe-in for Homecoming Queen, right? You’d be running against each other.”

Kara shrugs, “I’m not really planning to run or anything. And besides, if I campaign for her, anyone who would vote for me would send their votes to Lena.”

The longer Winn is quiet, the more the look of scheming glimmers in his eye, and Kara takes it as a good sign.

“Alright,” Winn finally nods and offers his hand to shake, “let’s do it.”

Kara takes his hand and pumps it once before they turn to enter the physics classroom.

That weekend, Kara finds herself in the backseat of Nel pressed firmly on top of Lena in the movie theater parking lot. This time, Kara freezes up - again - when Lena subtly rocks against the knee Kara has slotted between her legs. Lena senses her hesitation and pulls back to gently brush away a stray hair that’s fallen from Kara’s bun while she sends her a reassuring look. But whatever Lena goes to say is lost when Kara’s stomach rumbles loudly, leading to Lena laughing and recommending a milkshake at Bobbie’s.

Which is how Kara ends up shyly smiling over at Lena as she reaches across to dip her fry in Kara’s chocolate milkshake.

Lena makes a happy sound at the combo before clearing her throat, “You seem to get nervous when things head in the direction of sex between us.”

Kara knocks her knee against the tabletop at the straightforward callout and flushes as she opens her mouth to respond, but Lena holds up a hand to save her from babbling. Kara doesn’t miss the slight shake to Lena’s hand as she reaches out for Kara’s before continuing, “And that’s absolutely okay. I just wanted to let you know that I’m acknowledging your boundaries and the last thing I want to do is push them. Just talk to me, ok? It’s easier if you tell me where the line is instead of me trying to blindly feel it out.”

Kara clears her own throat before responding, “It’s not that I’m not interested. I definitely do want to… you know. I’m just a little, uh. Worried?”

Lena tilts her head a little, “What worries you?”

Kara blows out a nervous breath and her heel starts to bounce, “I’m, uhm. I’m worried that I won’t be any good at it. Or I won’t be... as good as other people you’ve, uh, done stuff with.”

Lena squeezes Kara’s hand as she seems to think over her words. She bites at her lip, zoning out on
something over Kara’s shoulder for a moment, before refocusing.

“Sex isn’t really something you get better at because you’ve done it before,” Lena starts slowly, “In fact, I don’t think it’s really a skill at all. It’s more like, it’s good if you pay attention. If you listen to what the other person is telling you with their words and with their body. So, me having sex before doesn’t mean I’m necessarily amazing at it. And you never having sex doesn’t mean you’re going to be awful at it. It just depends on how we work together.”

She says it casually and with a shrug of her shoulders, as if the implication of having sex with Lena doesn’t burn through Kara’s insides. But the words do soothe her anxiety just a little.

“And if we have sex and it’s awful?” Kara hazards to ask.

Lena’s response is another casual shrug, “Then we work on it. So we both feel like we’re being heard.”

Kara scratches her thumbnail over the gouge in the corner of the wooden table as she nods her head. Lena nudges her hand a little until Kara looks back up, “But not until you’re ready. Until we’re both ready, ok?”

“Ok,” Kara responds, swallowing down the lump in her throat.

“Good,” Lena says as she reaches over to dip another fry into Kara’s milkshake.

Kara halfheartedly swats at her hand, “Lena that’s gross!”

“No. It’s delicious, try it,” Lena replies as she dangles a fry in front of Kara’s mouth.

Kara eyes Lena suspiciously as she haltingly opens her mouth and takes a bite.

The look on Kara’s face must be all the confirmation Lena needs before she’s laughing and teasing with, “Told you!”

Kara scoops a small bit of whipped cream off the top of her milkshake and reaches out to smear it on Lena’s nose, which Lena dodges and ends up getting along the side of her cheek.

Lena huffs and flicks her straw wrapper in the direction of Kara’s head and Kara just laughs when it ricochets off and rolls under a nearby table.

“So then, what do you like?” Kara asks, trying to go for casual.

Lena furrows her brow, “What?”

“You know,” Kara starts, a smug smile spreading over her face, “Sex stuff. What kind of sex stuff do you like?”

And for maybe the first time, Lena blushes bright red.

“Kara!” She admonishes as she swats at her hand and looks around to make sure no one is eavesdropping.

“What?” Kara asks innocently, “I’m just trying to be a good listener!”

The answer she gets is an impressive eye roll and a well aimed french fry bouncing off her forehead.
It’s the end of practice on Thursday night and Kara is looking forward to getting out of her sweaty pads and taking a hot shower to soothe her sore shoulders. She’s looking over to where the cheer squad is still practicing on the track when James runs up beside her.

“Hey Kara, nice practice today,” James says as he claps a hand on her shoulder pad, “check out the cheer squad. They’ve been practicing this cool routine all afternoon.”

Confused at James’ inconspicuous attempt at shifting her attention, Kara turns to where three pods have formed facing her on the field.

Winn stands in the front facing the pods and clapping out the cadence as each pod lifts their flyer into the ‘prep’ position - the flyer standing on the hands of each base at shoulder height. It takes a moment, but Kara realizes that each flyer is holding a poster board with words written out in bright red lettering.

The first pod bears ‘Will you go…’, the second ‘to HOCO…” and Kara knows what the third board will say even before Lena is hoisted up to the top of the third pod. The third and final board that Lena holds says ‘WITH ME?’ and Kara can’t help the delighted laugh that bubbles out of her or the bright smile that pinches at her cheeks.

The cheer squad claps as each pod dismounts and Kara and James join in as Lena shyly makes her way over to Kara with a bright yellow sunflower in hand. James steps back to join where the rest of the football team looks on as Lena approaches.

“This was all Winn’s idea,” Lena starts with a sheepish smile on her lips, “he said if he didn’t intervene, we’d both be too stupid to ask and we’d never make it to homecoming.”

Kara laughs again and shoots a playful glare over Lena’s shoulder to where Winn watches on.

“He’s, unfortunately, usually right,” Kara admits.

“So, what do you say?” Lena asks, offering over the flower.

“I would love to go to homecoming with you, Lena,” Kara answers as she takes the flower. And she feels so full of happiness that she stoops down to give a quick kiss to Lena’s lips, causing the entire football team and cheer squad to whoop and cheer.

When Kara pulls back she teases, “You really are one giant cliche, aren’t you?”

And Lena just rolls her eyes and leans in for another kiss.

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The weeks fly by until the Stallions are beating the Gotham Knights twenty seven to zero at the homecoming game.

Students and returning alumni are nearly spilling out of the stadium seating and the air vibrates with the crowd’s excitement.

Kara kneels and watches as the clock runs out, and when the final whistle blows, the stands erupt. Her team whoops and jostles each other in celebration as they make their way back to the sideline. And when she scans the home bench, she finds Lena waiting on the sideline in Kara’s alternate jersey, the sight bubbling something overwhelming in her chest.

Pulling off her helmet, Kara comes to a stop in front of Lena as the Homecoming Committee rushes onto the field.
“Hi,” Kara breathes out, brushing the sweaty flyaways out of her face.

“Hi yourself,” Lena says as her eyes travel down and back up Kara’s uniform in an entirely conspicuous way, “you played an impressive game.”

“Did I? I thought you didn’t know anything about football?” Kara teases as a cocky smile spreads across her face before she can stop it.

Instead of responding, Lena reaches a hand out to tug Kara down by the collar of her jersey. The kiss is happy and warm and only serves to elevate the pure joy spreading through her after their victory over the Knights. Kara pulls her in close and lifts until Lena’s squealing against her lips as she spins them both around.

She puts Lena back on her own feet as Winn claps her on the shoulder pad and James goes in for their celebratory handshake. There’s a quick debrief from Coach Grant as the crowd mills about in the stands waiting for the crowning of Homecoming court.

Kara tucks Lena under her arm as Ms. Ender, the homecoming advisor, checks the mic from the quickly constructed platform with two makeshift thrones at centerfield.

“Ladies and gentleman,” echoes across the field as the crowd quiets, “it is my pleasure to announce to you this year's Homecoming King and Queen.” There’s a pause as the crowd cheers before the voice continues, “This year’s Queen is someone relatively new to Midvale. Though she’s certainly a familiar face around the football field. Please join me in congratulating Homecoming Queen Lena Luthor!”

The crowd bursts into cheers as Lena stiffens at Kara’s side. Kara pulls away and beams down at Lena as she looks back with a clearly confused expression.

“Go on!” Kara encourages, nudging her gently toward the platform.

Lena takes a few steps before glancing back at Kara and Winn. She huffs out a disbelieving laugh before turning and waving toward the crowd as she walks the rest of the way to centerfield. Kara turns to Winn with an approving look as they exchange an enthusiastic high five.

The crowd looks on as the delicate looking crown is placed atop Lena’s head and she’s passed a red rose boutonniere. An occasional whistle or cheer escapes the crowd while Lena nods to the instructions she’s given. She remains standing as Ms. Ender’s voice filters across the field once more, “And now, with an overwhelming majority of the student body petitioning to break from tradition this year, your Homecoming King is someone that the community has rallied around time and again right here on Friday nights. Please welcome Homecoming King Kara Danvers!”

The crowd goes absolutely wild as Kara feels her entire body flush.

Her eyes dart to Winn, “What did you do?”

But Winn just laughs and shrugs, that dangerous glimmer back in his eye, “The student body has spoken.”

Kara looks back toward the screaming crowd before looking over to the raised platform on the field. Lena’s laughing a little disbelievingly, and when their eyes lock, she waves her hand to beckon Kara to her.

Kara hands her helmet off to James and tightens her ponytail, suddenly hyper conscious of her dirty uniform and post-game funk.
She ambles over and hops onto the platform beside Lena and gives her a small smile.

“I imagine this is Winn’s doing,” Lena guesses as Barry Allen, last year’s King and the Stallions’ previous starting quarterback, approaches Kara with a crown on a pillow.

Kara nods, “Though I gotta admit, this is pretty large-scale, even for Winn.”

Lena lets out a light-hearted laugh as Barry steps in front of Kara with a smile, “Congrats, KD.”

He passes her a small, white corsage, “That’s for Lena. You’ll exchange the flowers before posing for a picture. Then you can sit and the press will snap a few shots for the papers.”

Kara nods as she takes the delicate flowers. Barry pauses before lifting the crown and teases, “You do know how to put on a corsage, right?”

Kara just rolls her eyes and punches at his arm good-naturedly, “Shut up, Barry.”

He laughs as he lifts the crown and places it lightly on her head, “Yes, your majesty.”

He turns to leave quickly before Kara can get another punch in. So, instead, she turns her attention to Lena.

“May I?” Lena asks, indicating the boutonniere in her hand. Kara nods and swallows as Lena steps into her space, making to pin the flowers to her jersey as Ms. Enders’ voice continues to sound off.

“I look an absolute mess,” Kara mumbles as she reaches for Lena’s wrist. The skin is warm against her palm and, much to her horror, there’s a shake to her hands as she goes to tie the ribbons there.

Lena clicks her tongue and reaches up to tuck a stray hair behind Kara’s ear, “You and I both know that I think sweaty is your best look.”

Kara’s hand nearly slips from the knot she’s pulling tight as her cheeks flush hot. There’s a cheeky look on Lena’s face as the crowd cheers for something being said over the speakers.

Lena just shrugs as Kara finishes tying the corsage to her wrist. But when Kara goes to pull her hand back, Lena captures it with her own and her eyes turn sincere, “I’m glad you’re up here with me.”

Kara cracks a smile at that, “Because you know you can make me squirm in front of the whole school?”

“No,” Lena scoffs, “Because I like you.”

Kara hums, happy with that, “I like you too.” And she stoops down to place a soft kiss across Lena’s lips. It isn’t until there’s a loud burst of cheering from her left that Kara remembers they have an audience, and she pulls back sheepishly.

“So,” she starts, “the school’s here.” Lena just arches a brow.

“Hope you’re cool with everyone knowing we’re, like, a thing,” Kara adds.

But Lena huffs out a laugh as she shakes her head, “Kara, the whole school already knows. You’re not subtle. At all.”

“Cool,” she responds. And then she turns to the crowd, raising their joined hands in the air to even louder cheers. And as they step away to their respective thrones, cameras clicking the whole time, Kara thinks that maybe what she’s feeling for Lena is a whole lot more than just ‘liking’ her.
They’re sitting on Kara’s couch post-dance, both changed - Kara out of her maroon pantsuit and Lena out of an understated dress Kara’s sure is worth at least a few hundred dollars based on the material alone. She’s finishing the last slice of pepperoni pizza as she looks over at Lena in a pair of her softest sweats and Midvale Football zippered hoodie. The soft way Lena’s hair falls over her shoulder has Kara sighing out a content hum as she stretches her legs out in front of her.

“So,” Lena starts, turning her attention away from where Mythbusters is playing on the TV, “how’d you and Winn convince the school to vote for me?”

Kara furrows her brow a little, “Honestly? It didn’t really take much. People like you, Lena.”

An incredulous look has Lena’s own brow furling.

Kara straightens and turns to face Lena fully, “I mean it. The cheer squad loves you. The Key Club couldn’t get over how you planned the last volunteer opportunity at the local pet shelter. Colin went on and on about that one time you helped him change his tire when you saw him on the side of the road. All I really had to do was let people know you were running and they all voted for you on their own.”

“So no bullying?” Lena asks, teasing.

Kara lets out a short laugh as she stands to throw the pizza box away, “I’m almost a little offended you think I would. No bullying, I swear.”

Lena’s quiet a moment, “How did you get people to vote for a girl for King?”

Kara just shrugs her shoulders as she makes her way back to the couch, “You’d have to ask Winn. He’s had a plotting vibe coming off of him for the last couple weeks, so I imagine that was all him.”

Lena nods slightly as if she’s picked up on it herself, “It really does seem like something only he could pull off.”

Kara flops herself down beside Lena and slings her arm across the back of the couch as Lena settles down into her side. A quiet moment passes as they watch the men on the screen shoot what looks like a handmade cannon at a watermelon.

When Kara clears her throat to talk next, her fingers nervously tangle into the string of her hoodie, “So, my parents are gone for some post-football date night thing, and they won’t be back until late.”

Lena leans back from her side and shoots her a coy look. The type of look that draws Kara’s attention to the curl at the corner of her mouth before continuing, “Do you want to maybe go hang out upstairs?”

There’s a brief look of surprise that flashes across Lena’s face, and Kara can feel her own heart trying to beat out of her chest. And maybe Kara sees Lena’s throat bob visibly when she quickly nods her head in agreement.

They make their way upstairs and Kara twists her fingers together as they reach the threshold of her room.

“Well. This is mine,” Kara offers a little lamely as she waves Lena through ahead of her. Lena takes her time exploring the space, pausing at the various childhood trophies and few books in her bookcase. Kara hems and haws on the threshold before closing the door behind her. She fumbles out
her phone and sets soft music to play over her speaker.

It has Lena turning to send Kara a knowing look before leaning against the bed and mumbling something about ‘writer sensibilities’ with an amused smirk playing at her lips.

“Is this?” Kara struggles against the slight shake in her voice, “Is this ok?”

Lena’s face is open and genuine as she nods.

When Kara finally finds herself standing in front of where she leans against her bed, Lena reaches a hand out and smoothes her fingertips up the side of Kara’s neck, scratching back into her hairline. It pulls an approving hum from Kara as she closes her eyes and slides her hands over Lena’s waist, pulling her into her chest. She rests their foreheads together as she begins to slowly sway them to the faint acoustic playing over the speaker.

And Lena waits. As if she were perfectly happy to just sway in the middle of Kara’s room all night. It’s the type of patience that gives Kara the courage to lean her head down and brush her lips against Lena’s. It’s tentative at first, but grows quickly from there, as it tends to do. When Kara pulls Lena flush to her body and dips into her mouth, both hands cradling her head, an almost whimper pulls from the back of Lena’s throat.

Its heady effect rolls through Kara as she slides her hands down Lena’s thighs and hoists her around her waist. Lena makes a startled sound as she wraps around Kara, seeming to revel in being so easily maneuvered.

When Kara moves them onto the bed, hovering over Lena, she hesitates, “Is… Can I?”

“Yes,” Lena replies, eyes dilated as she leans back on her elbows, “I want you to.”

And whatever metaphorical fire has been burning in Kara’s gut since the first kiss is verifiably doused with gasoline at the words. It sends Kara’s hand reaching for the zipper of Lena’s hoodie and slowly pulling it down. When the zipper is halfway down her chest, she realizes that Lena isn’t wearing a bra and her eyes snap up to where Lena is watching her intently.

Kara keeps eye contact as she finishes with the zipper and pushes the soft material over and down Lean’s shoulders. Feeling like it’s still impolite to look, she pushes Lena further into the mattress with her kiss. Settling more fully between her thighs, Kara feels like she’s never felt so surrounded, so fully consumed, before.

It’s like she’s somewhere just below the surface, drowning in her senses when she drops down to where she fits against Lena. She’s lost to it and she’s grounded only by the pull of fabric when her shirt pulls up and over her head, by the way her hand spans fully across Lena’s lower back, the breathy sound Lena releases as they press together, the stutter of her hips when an exploratory finger slips below her belt.

Which is probably why Kara misses the sound of someone moving through the house until there’s a pause in the music and Kara hears a creak on the staircase. She freezes as her attention draws to her bedroom door, and Lena leans up, whispering, “What’s wrong?”

But Kara only responds with her finger to her lips when there’s another creak closer in the hallway. Scrambling off the bed, Kara grabs the softball bat leaning against her desk. She grips her bedroom door knob and looks over her shoulder to where Lena’s zipping her hoodie back up. Another creak sounds just outside her bedroom door; Kara raises the bat and, taking a deep breath, rips the door open.
“Holy shit!” Winn stumbles away in surprise, protecting his head with the hand he had raised to knock on her door.

“Winn, what the fuck?!” Kara shouts as she lowers her arm.

“Me what the fuck? You what the fuck!” Winn responds as he stands upright again, “Why do you have a bat? Why aren’t you wear -”

He cuts off when he notices Lena still sitting on the bed and averts his eyes quickly to the floor, “Shit. I’m interrupting something.”

“No Winn. I just like hanging out with my good pal Lena. Because that's what I do in my Calvin’s,” Kara’s sarcasm cuts a little hard, but she doesn’t think she should be blamed if she’s a little frustrated.

It’s then that James and Mike come around the corner, Krypto in tow. And Kara can see the exact moment Mike notices Lena.

“Oh my,” Mike says, eyes flicking to where Kara stands shirtless and connecting the dots. Kara rolls her eyes and instinctively moves to put herself between Mike and where Lena sits, hair mussed and a dark bruise forming at the base of her throat.

“This is the best day of my life,” Mike all but breathes out. Which is exactly when James grabs him by the collar of his shirt and starts to shove him back around the corner, shooting Kara an apologetic look as he goes.

Kara runs a hand over her eyes, “Could you all, like, go away?”

“Would love to, but you weren’t answering your phone, and you didn’t answer the door.” Winn says by way explanation. Which effectively clarifies nothing for Kara.

“So you thought that was enough reason to dig out our hide-a-key and amble in? What could possibly be that important?”

“Someone’s in the old house, Kara,” Winn rushes out, and Kara feels something drop out of her stomach, “We saw a flashlight through the windows when we were driving to James’.”

Kara’s grip tightens on her bat and her heartbeat kicks up. She looks over her shoulder to where Lena looks back - a little confused.

Turning back to Winn, she considers her options and sighs, shoulders deflating.

“Fuck.”

“—It’s probably just some drunken jackasses breaking in for a story to spread around school on Monday,” James says as Kara drops out of his Jeep. She looks up the lawn and tightens the grip on her bat as she takes in the sight of her childhood home.

“Midvale’s very own murder house,” Kara mumbles a little bitterly.

“Let’s just go in and spook ‘em out,” Winn says, already heading up the path toward the front door.

It takes Kara a moment to move toward the house. Cedar shingles siding the house are peeling and rotting. Posts from the porch railing scatter about the long dead rose bushes. A cupola on the roof has broken slates like crooked teeth. The sight sets her heart pounding and sends an ominous feeling up
her spine, but a short flash of light in a downstairs window has Kara shaking the feeling off and trudging forward.

She pulls up beside Winn, who’s waiting for her at the door. The notice in the window announcing the house as ‘CONDEMNED’ settles coldly in her chest. When she sends Winn a hesitant as Mike and James come to a stop behind her, he gestures for her to go first.

As she reaches for the doorknob, she’s not surprised to find the door creak open without much effort. It’s clear the door has been kicked in and the sight has her heart racing with emotion she can’t quite identify.

She pushes forward into a foyer that floods Kara with a sense of distorted recognition. The others follow her in, using the last remnants of the sunset to guide them.

“Alright, Mike and James, you guys wanna look upstairs? Winn, you can come with me,” Kara says quietly.

Splitting up, Kara leads Winn deeper into the house. They pass through a formal dining room with a cobwebbed chandelier hanging from the ceiling and a broken stained-glass window that contorts the rays of light slipping into the room. On the floor, she kicks the rock she can only assume was used to throw through the window. Her teeth clench as something hot spikes through her body.

She leads them through a creaking, dark hallway with graffiti defacing the wall.

The front room of the house is littered with empty beer cans.

By the time they’re heading to the kitchen at the heart of the house, Kara has an iron grip on the bat and the growing, unnamed emotion has her body taught.

She pulls to a stop at the threshold of the kitchen. There’s a moldy smell, and cabinet doors are hanging crookedly or missing altogether. The refrigerator and oven are missing from their places. There’s a chair in the corner missing a leg that Kara recognizes from a dining set.

Her eyes are quickly drawn to the pantry closet tucked behind a kitchen island. She unthinkingly moves to it, aware of Winn moving around somewhere behind her. She flips the slats of the door open before reaching to open the door.

“Kara,” Winn says softly from just over her shoulder. She’s aware of his hand landing gently on her shoulder, which she’s sure is supposed to be reassuring.

But as she looks into the darkness of the closet, she names the feeling that’s been growing inside of her.

She’s angry.

Absolutely shaking with rage.

And before she can think it through, she’s shrugging off Winn’s hand and shouting, “Alright asshole, get the fuck out of my house!”

“Kara!” Winn hisses, sounding worried.

She ignores him and moves to the hallway that leads to the basement stairs. Winn follows closely behind her, and when they both hear something shuffle in the basement, they lock eyes. There’s a sound like someone is trying to sneak up the stairs, and Winn’s eyes grow in panic.
Kara sends him a sharp look to stay quiet and posts up against the wall next to the staircase.

When a grown man holding a knife appears, Kara’s anger takes over as she swings as hard as she can at the hand holding the knife. The man drops the knife with a surprised grunt. Kara swiftly brings the bat down again at his stomach, hunching him over. The knife clatters to the floor and she kicks it over in the direction of Winn’s gasps before a fist connects with her ribs.

She drops the bat and falls against the wall as she’s pinned by her attacker. She’s quick to bring her knee up and into his groin, and pushes him away as he crouches in on himself. Her knee connects with his face solidly, which brings him upright. He manages to dodge her next throw, but not Winn swinging the dropped bat upside his head. He stumbles forward, but knocks away Winn’s next swing and lands a punch on his jaw that sends Winn falling away. But it opens an opportunity for Kara to tackle him to the ground, using her knee to push his face into the floor.

Winn’s quickly helping Kara weigh him down and calling for Mike and James.

When Mike and James find their way into the kitchen, Kara looks up and numbly says, “Call the cops.”

Alex shows up to the scene first. Police cars flood in behind her. The man, identified as Maxwell Lord, is taken into custody.

“We found twenty gallons of gasoline in the basement. The guy had a lighter. He was here to burn the house down,” an officer says to Alex.

The officer takes in Kara where she and Winn are being checked over, “You really take down a fully grown man? A 17 year old girl?”

Something about his tone has Kara’s fist clenching again, but Alex turns to him, “Officer Collins, if you could please get statements from James Olsen and Mike Matthews…”

He stares blankly at Alex for a moment before turning away, muttering under his breath.

“Why would he want to burn the house down?” Winn asks from beside Kara.

Alex looks at him, then over to Kara, “That’s for the police to look into.”

It’s directed at Kara. She can feel the frustration and fear vibrating off Alex in waves, but is tired enough that it rolls off of her.

She’ll deal with the fallout in the morning.

After she’s slept for twelve hours.

When Alex knocks on her bedroom door later that night and tells Kara that her childhood house has been set ablaze, Kara only thinks ‘Let it burn’.

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the wait. scream at me about it on tumblr @srfanning. first time writing any
variety of kissing or physical intimacy hopes it's fine. and also, please enjoy the chapter
with the scene that inspired this entire fic. returning to the bog now

End Notes

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