One Bridge at a Time

by DiNovia

Summary
With Carter's thirteenth birthday only months away, Cat Grant's mood—mercurial at the best of times—darkens as she tries and fails to find the perfect gift for her sweet, sensitive son. Kara Danvers, seeing her boss' distress, takes a spur-of-the-moment trip to Metropolis and to Cat's childhood home, hoping to enlist the help of Cat's mother, Katherine Grant.

When Kara returns to National City, she and Cat begin a journey of discovery— one that has the power to redefine what it means to be home.
Thank you to my wife, Lisaof9, as always, for her patience and her love and her many wonderful ideas that have helped shape my writing throughout the years and this piece in particular.

Thank you to Fictorium, who took on the tedious task of proofreading my work for me. Tracking my errant commas is probably a full-time job and you are to be commended. You helped make this work so much better.

Thank you to abydosdork, for the cover and the chapter banner you have provided! You are FABULOUS!

This is a Canon Divergence fic and it diverts after Episode 112 "Bizarro".

There are certain things I wish to fix about the Black Mercy episode and this fic was born of that desire. The first thing you'll notice is there is no Siobhan Smythe—although I reserve the right to utilize the character in future stories in this Universe, she will not be in this one.

Um....so I lied about that. I'm--uh--really sorry.
Katherine Grant peered over her wire-rimmed glasses at her daughter’s erstwhile-yet-unappealing assistant, one eyebrow raised, half in confusion and half in suspicion. The two of them stood awkwardly in Katherine’s palatial foyer amidst marble floors and Edwardian furniture, early morning sunlight streaming through the leaded glass of the entryway.

“And you’re here because…?” asked Katherine, hoping the dishwater blonde in the vulgar tangerine sweater set had a marginally valid reason to be in Metropolis, half the world away from where she should be.

Kara Danvers giggled nervously and adjusted her glasses. “Well, you see, Cat—that is—um—Miss Grant, your daughter—well, she’s being given a sort of, like, lifetime achievement award next month? So I was hoping maybe you had some photographs of her as a child doing, you know, journalist-y…type…stuff?”

Katherine Grant stared blankly at the young woman for a long moment after she finished. She wanted to snap at her about her incessant uncertainty—something like “Are you asking me or telling me?” But that wasn’t her chief concern at the moment.

“So my daughter flew you to Metropolis—without so much as a call of warning—so you could ‘pick up’ snapshots of her…what? Interviewing my drunken uncle at Thanksgiving? Frightening pets and small children with her Kodak Instamatic and those ridiculously bright flash bulbs?”

Kara wrung her hands. “Oh—ha ha—no. I mean—well, Miss Grant didn’t send me…per se. She—well, I was just, you know, in the area and I thought I’d stop by and see if you had anything you wouldn’t mind sharing?” She tried for a smile but only managed a half-hearted grimace of Oh, Rao, what am I doing here?

“You were ‘just in the area’,” repeated Katherine. “Twenty-nine hundred miles away from where you live and work.” She crossed her arms, telegraphing ever-widening waves of annoyance and skepticism. “Passing through on your way back from the coffee shop, were you?”

Kara blinked. She blinked again. “I have a cousin—who lives here—I mean, in Metropolis-here, not here-here,” she said, pointing at the gray and white marble floor. “I was visiting him and thought I could kill two birds…with…” She trailed off, wondering if it was such a good idea to reference
killing anything with stones around Cat’s mother. “But if you don’t have anything, Mrs. Grant, that’s okay. I’m sure I can find something else somewhere...else.” She glanced over her shoulder at the door, wondering how wrong it would be to dart out of it and pretend none of this had ever happened.

Kara weathered another long moment of silent scrutiny from Cat’s mother by counting the tick tocks from the grandfather clock in the library at the back of the house. At least, she assumed it was a library. Come to think of it, she assumed it was a grandfather clock. She supposed it didn’t have to be.

Finally, Katherine Grant shrugged.

“Since you’re here, I guess I can show you a few things that might suffice.” She turned and walked further into the house, apparently expecting Kara to follow her. “I’d offer you a glass of water but you’d only spill it on the Persian in the living room.”

“Oh, no, Mrs. Grant,” Kara demurred. “I’m fine, thank you.” As they walked, she wondered why there would be a Persian in the living room and why she would be likely to spill a glass of water on him or her. It wasn’t until she was actually walking across it that she realized Mrs. Grant had been referencing a Persian rug. “Ohhhhh...” she said, feeling very silly.

Katherine Grant came to a screeching halt in front of her and Kara would have run right into the woman if it weren’t for her Kryptonian reflexes. “Oh?” asked the woman. Her imperious tone did not invite dissembling.

Kara’s eyes went wide behind her glasses and she fidgeted with them again. “Ohhhhh...what a lovely home you have, Mrs. Grant!” She cast about the living room for something that might have caught her eye. There, on the mantle, set into a slightly recessed place of honor stood an 18th century ormolu-mounted flambé-glazed porcelain vase in Supergirl blue. A spotlight with a diffused focus and the palest pink tint brought out the sparkle of the glaze, setting it practically aflame. “Is—is that a Duplessis, Mrs. Grant?” she asked, gesturing nervously at the vase.

Katherine followed the girl’s movement and raised an eyebrow—so like her daughter under similar circumstances that Kara struggled to keep herself from smiling.

“You don’t look like much,” she said, casting a disparaging eye on Kara’s general appearance, “but you know your 18th century French porcelain. It is, indeed, a Duplessis. Circa—”

“Circa 1755, give or take a year,” said Kara, rushing to share a tidbit that might raise her a notch or two in Katherine Grant’s estimation. “Though the vase itself was likely imported from China for a particular client and is impossible to date with any certainty, the mounts were clearly made later in the Rococo period, when a more restrained naturalism began to displace the asymmetry and—well—wackiness of earlier pieces of the era. Duplessis was one of the principle designers at Sévres, the royal porcelain factory. His work was always in demand.”

Katherine stared at Kara for another long moment. “Tell me—is this,” she said, gesturing with an elegant flourish at Kara’s whole person, “what happens when librarians mate with art historians?”

Kara started to correct her—to explain her mother had been in law enforcement—after a fashion—and her father was a well-renowned scientist—but the awkward and unanswerable questions likely to follow made her hesitate. “W—wh—yes?”

Katherine nodded, her suspicions confirmed. “Follow me,” she said. “We’re almost there.”
The tick tocks of the alleged grandfather clock grew louder and louder until Katherine opened a door tucked into an archway at the end of a long-unused hall. She stood at the threshold, seemingly unable—or unwilling?—to cross it.

“My late husband’s study,” she said, her voice devoid of any intonation. Kara peered around the doorjamb and gasped right out loud, a gigantic, unbridled grin bursting forth before she could stop herself.

Where the rest of the Grant family home was practically a museum of marble and antiques gilded to within an inch of their lives, Jefferson Buchanan Grant’s study was an ode to modernity. It was, in fact, the prototype of Cat’s office at CatCo.

The door opened onto a spacious room outfitted with the best of Danish modern furniture. Two sleek bone linen couches faced each other across a chrome coffee table topped by a thick, rounded rectangle of glass. An expansive bone white writing desk with walnut accents faced the door and an Eames-style office chair, also white and walnut, sat lonely and empty behind it.

The wall behind the desk had three off-set floating shelves upon which sat paintings and photographs in different-sized frames. Kara hoped two of the paintings were reproductions; otherwise they would have totaled approximately five times her annual salary. Each. The whole effect reminded her of the wall of flat-screens behind Cat’s desk at CatCo, though it was neither as large nor as dynamic.

The southern wall behind the left-hand couch was all windows and a cleverly-disguised sliding glass door that opened onto a terrace. Kara could see a well-appointed garden beyond it. The northern wall held a white and walnut credenza over which hung the source of the ticking—a broad, beautiful starburst clock with walnut paddles on chrome spokes surrounding the clock face. Bookshelves flanked the credenza-and-clock combination on each side.

A massive, chrome Sputnik-style chandelier tied the entire room together and made Kara think of flying among the stars on a clear, cold night.

Kara looked back at Katherine Grant and noticed the barest hint of an upturned lip. She saw the connection Kara had made. Was she smiling?

“Yes, my daughter inherited her love for all things modern from her father. A carbon copy, you might say.”

A tiny frown notched the spot right between Kara’s eyebrows. “Maybe they were alike—in a lot of ways. But the accent colors in here are bright and citrusy—” she said, pointing out several throw pillows, one that nearly matched her sweater, “—or chrome,” she said, gesturing to the coffee table and the chandelier.

“And?” As much as this unseasoned girl irritated her, Katherine found herself unable to dismiss her outright.

Kara shrugged. “All the metallic accents in Miss Grant’s office are gold—like your Rococo pieces or the Louis XV bureau en pente I saw in the formal living room. She prefers muted neutrals in her accessories with one or two focal pieces rather than pops of color.” She pushed her glasses back up her nose. “Like you, Mrs. Grant.”

“Hmph,” said Katherine gruffly. She tried for incredulity or indifference but Kara could see she’d caught her off guard. She gestured to several shelves of uniform books. “You’ll find what you’re looking for in those. Will an hour suffice?”
Kara made a beeline for the binders, turning back to thank her benefactress with gushing enthusiasm. “Oh, an hour will be more than enough time, Mrs. Grant!” She bumped into the corner of the couch and almost fell over it. “Thank you so, so much!”

“I’ll be back then,” said Katherine, peering down her nose at the girl. “And try not to break anything, Kiera.”

“Kara,” corrected the young woman absently, already kneeling in front of one of the bookshelves with a photo album open in her lap, totally immersed in her mission.

Katherine stopped her retreat and looked at Kara, confused. “What?”

Kara looked up at her and smiled. “My name,” she said, by way of explanation. “It’s Kara, not Kiera.”

Katherine frowned and crossed her arms over her chest. “And yet I’m positive Kitty called you ‘Kiera’ when I was in National City last.”

Kara nodded, completely unfazed. “She did. She always has.” She pushed her glasses back up her nose. “I’m not entirely certain she even knows it’s the wrong name. I don’t think she’s doing it deliberately. Why would anyone call someone by the wrong name on purpose?” She thought about it for a moment, completely oblivious to whom she was speaking, and then shrugged. “It doesn’t matter either way. Not really.”

Katherine seemed appalled and, if Kara had been paying attention, she would have wondered if the older woman didn’t seem a little contrite, too. “Of course it matters,” she said. “One is your name; the other is not.”

Kara flashed her a wry half-grin. “I’d come running no matter what she called me,” she said, hurrying to add, “I mean—it’s my job and I have to. Because I’m her assistant. And that’s what assistants do. Come running.” She swallowed nervously. “Besides, she’d fire me if I tried to correct her now. It’s been over two years at this point.”

Katherine narrowed her eyes at Kara. “Hmph,” she grunted again, and she turned and walked away.

Three hours later, Kara sat on one of the bone couches, completely spellbound. Binders open to various pages littered every flat surface within arm’s reach. She flipped the page of the binder sitting in her lap and immediately covered her mouth, stifling a cry of joyous surprise.

There, centered on a page by itself, was a Polaroid of Cat Grant—aged maybe five or six—running away from the photographer (Kara assumed Cat’s father), laughing over her shoulder. She had a bright blue towel tied around her neck and a mischievous sparkle in her eyes. From the look of the dappled sunlight and distinctive foliage, Kara assumed it was taken in summertime in the garden right outside this very room.

Tears welled in her eyes.

“Oh, Miss Grant,” she whispered, running her fingers over the image reverently, every cell of her body filling with light as if she’d just stepped into the strong noontime sunshine. “You were Supergirl before I was….”

Saying it out loud like that and seeing such a comprehensive and lovingly-kept history of Cat Grant’s childhood—from her birth until, as far as Kara could tell, her college graduation, maybe?—made her belly flip in an all too familiar way. When it had first started, she’d been able to write it off as a
simple crush but lately, she wasn’t so sure. Cat Grant seemed to fill her days with happy challenges meted out with acerbic wit, and her nights with more and more questions.

Did the way Cat plucked at her unkempt collar on good days at the office mean anything? Did the glint in her eye when Kara brought her favorite “cheeseburger salad” at just the right time on bad days—without having to be told—indicate a softening of any significance? Did Cat feel the buzzing electricity between them, too—or was it just Kara reading more into every moment than was actually there?

This, for instance. She looked around Jefferson Grant’s study sadly. There was no lifetime achievement award. Kara had made it all up to gain access to these photographs, these memories. Not for selfish reasons—at least, not entirely. Carter’s thirteenth birthday was barely two months away and Cat had been struggling with what to get him. It was a delicate time for mother and son—both of them trying to navigate the transition from Carter’s childhood to his adolescence as best they could.

The purely materialistic gifts—new video games, a private tour of the Star Wars section of Disneyland, his second trip to Space Camp—those were easy things. Cat knew her son so well, listened to his wants and needs, and insisted on gifts that were small on “stuff” but big on “experience of a lifetime.” The part she was stuck on—the part that was making her more and more anxious, therefore, more and more snappish—was the emotional gift, the one that would allow both mother and son to mark the momentousness of the occasion and the importance of their relationship.

So, of course, Kara wanted to help. She knew Cat and had been getting to know Carter much better now Cat had dropped her prohibition against Kara watching him. Playing Settlers of Catan allowed for more conversation than did playing video games, so Kara opted for that route as often as she could. He was such a sweet, smart, well-adjusted young man—in spite of his unique familial circumstances—and Kara knew she would like him, genuinely and without reservation, even if he wasn’t Cat Grant’s son.

In fact, Carter’s existence was part of the reason Kara had ended things with Adam—Cat’s older son—so quickly. Carter’s feelings, whatever this thing was between her and Cat, the fact she was Supergirl and, therefore, a potential danger to anyone she cared for—take your pick. All of it amounted to one giant nope where Adam was concerned. Even if breaking it off with him had caused a bit of a freeze in her relationship with Cat—one only now beginning to thaw—she couldn’t see any way forward with him. It just wouldn’t have been fair.

Lips twisting with self-recrimination, Kara rolled her eyes at Adam’s parting words: “I thought it would be my baggage that ended things too soon.”

“Baggage,” she said mockingly to the empty room. “Ha! I have a mental baggage train that dumps extra baggage onto my own mental baggage carousel! I watch it go around and around every night. You’ve got nothing on me.”

“Talking to yourself is a sign of insanity, Kie-Kara,” said Katherine Grant from the doorway.

Kara’s head snapped up and she went as white as the couch she was perched on. She glanced at the clock on the wall and nearly leapt straight up to the ceiling before she caught herself.

“Oh my God!” She hugged the binder she held to her chest and began apologizing and looking for her long-ago cast off shoes at the same time. “I am so, so sorry! I had no idea—has it been?—there’s no way I’ve—” She finally stopped herself and looked at the woman she least wanted to anger, preparing herself to accept whatever recriminations the older woman would levy upon her. “I’m sorry, Mrs. Grant. I lost track of time.”
“You don’t say?” Katherine Grant regarded the binders scattered all over the room disapprovingly but Kara thought by the gleam in her eye it wasn’t a sincere reproach. The tray the woman held also suggested she wasn’t as upset as she seemed. “Do you think you could clear a spot or am I to leave your lunch on the floor and push it across to you as if you were some sort of convict?”

“Of course, Mrs. Grant,” said Kara, lurching forward toward the coffee table. “But you didn’t have to—I mean, I’ve been such an imposition— overstayed my welcome—” She cleared three binders from the corner of the table and backed away to allow Katherine to place the tray there. “You’ve been so kind already,” she said, gesturing to the discombobulated room.

“Nonsense.” Katherine crossed the threshold of the room with some hesitation, but forced herself forward resolutely, placing the tray precisely on the glass table. “I don’t receive many visitors these days,” she said airily, as if that fact mattered little to her. “Having you here reminded me a little of when Kitty would visit on breaks from college when she was younger. What with you holed up in here for hours on end.” She looked at Kara pointedly. “And it’s certainly clear you don’t eat enough,” she added. This time the disapproval was sincere.

Kara snorted and gave Katherine a lopsided grin. “That’s not what Cat—I mean, Miss Grant—says. She says I eat like an uncultured horse. But I burn it off really quickly—” She stopped dead in the middle of her sentence, realizing she’d been about to say with all the flying and fighting I do. Hank and Alex were right; she couldn’t keep a secret at all.

When no conclusion seemed forthcoming, Katherine finished for her. “Flying thither and yon doing my daughter’s bidding?”

Kara gulped. Katherine didn’t know how close to the mark she’d hit. “So to speak,” said Kara weakly.

Katherine gestured for Kara to retake her seat, then cleared off a spot on the opposing couch and sat herself. She nodded toward the tray to indicate Kara should feel free to eat and the young woman smiled gratefully, reaching for the precisely-trimmed sandwich cut ever-so-surgically on the diagonal. She didn’t even care what kind of sandwich it was; she was starving. She hummed in grateful appreciation around a mouthful of chicken salad.

“Speaking of my daughter,” began Katherine, watching Kara eat as if she’d never seen the like before. “She’s not receiving a lifetime achievement award next month, is she?”

The second bite of chicken salad turned to paste in Kara’s mouth and she swallowed thickly, horrified she’d been found out. “You—you didn’t call her, did you, Mrs. Grant?” she asked. Her hands trembled as she put her sandwich down.

“No, I did not. I am capable of doing my own investigating. I’m familiar with the workings of your basic search engine, after all.”

Kara nodded. “Of course you are.” She squared her shoulders and looked the older woman in the eye. “No, Miss Grant is not receiving a lifetime achievement award next month.”

“Then the purpose of this walk down memory lane?”

Kara deflated, shoulders crumpling and eyes filling with concern. “As you know, Carter’s turning thirteen soon and Cat—I mean, Miss Grant—I don’t know why I keep doing that—Miss Grant has all the other gifts picked out already—the trips and the little things he’s asked for. But she wants to get him something meaningful, too. To celebrate this big moment. Something he’ll be able to look back on with pride and love years from now, something he might pass on himself someday? But she
hasn’t found anything just right and it’s making her more and more—” Kara flailed helplessly then gestured to the books surrounding her. “I don’t know what I was thinking by coming here, not really. I just thought it would help.”

Katherine Grant stared at the girl on her couch. She felt like she might be doing that too often, but the fact of the matter was this girl had come here without Cat’s knowledge to try and find something suitable for Cat’s son’s birthday simply because she wanted to help. And Katherine knew she was telling the truth. Kara was as guileless and as innocent as Carter and probably incapable of deceit. The closest she had come was the white lie about the lifetime achievement award and she hadn’t been at all successful with that one.

After a long moment, Katherine stood and walked around her late husband’s desk. She opened the single drawer and pulled out a small wooden box. She gazed at it for a long time, her right hand resting on the box’s lid as if she were about to take an oath. Or maybe she was giving one? When she looked up, there was a…lightness about her. Not quite a smile, but not not one either. She held the box out to Kara who rose and took it from her. The younger woman opened it, glanced at its contents, and then looked up at Katherine with questions in her eyes.

“That watch was presented to Jefferson’s maternal grandfather, John Buchanan III, by the Buchanan Society of Scotland when he was elected to the New York State Senate in 1931,” she began. Her voice was soft but serious, as if this history was something precious to her. “His daughter, Catherine Jane Grant, neé Buchanan—for whom my daughter was named, contrary to popular belief—inherited it upon his death. She presented it to Jefferson when he passed the bar in 1963.” She gestured to the box from where she stood. “Open it.”

Kara did as she was told, lifting the watch gently from the velvet nest where it sat so she could open the exquisitely carved cover. Three messages were engraved on the inside of it. The first, rendered in stately but tiny block letters, read: Presented to John J. Buchanan III, on the occasion of his election to the New York State Senate, by the Buchanan Society, 1931. The second one was rendered in a lighter, flowing script and read: To my son, with all my love. I am so proud of you. C.J. Grant. It was the third message, though, that broke Kara—a message from Cat’s father to Cat.

Kara looked up at Katherine with a watery smile, tears slipping down her cheeks. She wanted to say something—anything—that would convey the depth of her gratitude. She couldn’t find the words.

Rather than be caught up in what was quickly becoming too emotional a moment, Katherine dismissed the girl with a wave. “Finish your lunch and then we’ll put these binders back where you got them from.” She returned to her seat and rolled her eyes. “I’d have Anjanette do it,” she said, referencing her housekeeper, “but I don’t think she’s been in this room for over a decade. She’ll ask for a raise.”

Later, as they reordered and returned the photo albums to their rightful places, Kara kept two out. One contained the photograph of Cat pretending to be a superhero. The other contained a photograph of Jefferson Grant on his birthday, as evidenced by the silly party hat he wore. Cat, maybe three years old, was kissing one cheek and Katherine was kissing the other. It was off kilter with a wild angle and Kara realized Katherine must have snapped it herself, without looking. She’d taken it entirely on faith alone and it was perfect. In fact, it was such a happy photograph, Kara could hardly bear it. Would Katherine be willing to part with it? With either of them?

“Let’s hear it,” said Katherine when she saw the two albums Kara had kept back.

“I’d like to—um, borrow?—two photographs. I could get them back to you in a couple of weeks if
you’re at all hesitant, but I’d like to bring something back for Miss Grant, too.”

Katherine raised an eyebrow at that admission. Kara’s voice held only earnestness—nothing at all to give her the slightest bit of pause—but she still felt she was missing something obvious.

“Show me,” she said.

They sat together on one couch and Kara pointed out the photograph of Jefferson with the two girls in his life. The smallest of smiles dusted Katherine’s lips.

“Jefferson’s 28th birthday,” she said wistfully. The photograph uncorked long-buried memories and they flowed through Katherine like spilled ink. “Kitty was just about to turn three—her birthday is four months after his. It was just us that year. No big affair, no extravagant gifts. Just a cake and some party hats. An instamatic camera. I think I got him a pair of cufflinks or something ridiculous like that.” She brushed her fingers across his image. “He was at Grossman, Grossman, and Paik, then. He loved every minute of his time there. I’m sure he would have stayed with them for his entire career if the Israeli Olympic team hadn’t been murdered in 1972.”

“What happened?” asked Kara.

“One of the murdered athletes was a relative of the Grossman brothers. Shortly after the tragedy, they bought out their other partner, Atek Paik, closed the doors of their law firm, and moved to Israel.” Katherine frowned slightly. “I asked Jefferson once if he had heard from them, if he knew whatever became of them. He told me it was better we didn’t know….” She trailed off, brows notched with concern as she relived the conversation, until she surfaced from the memory with a sudden, shuddering breath.

“Take it,” she said, popping the photograph out of the black mounting corners that held it in the album. “It will make Kitty smile and God knows she does so little of that,” she said. “And the other one?”

Kara hesitated. What reason could she possibly give for wanting this photograph other than her own deeply private one?

“This one,” she said finally, showing Katherine the Polaroid of a cape-clad Cat.

The older woman chuckled in spite of herself. “It took us three weeks to get that thing from around her neck so we could wash it,” she said, her voice brighter than Kara had ever heard it. “She even slept in it. We thought she’d strangle herself in her sleep.” She shook her head good-naturedly, clearly amused. “Those towels were $20 a piece—in 1971 dollars—but she didn’t care. What did she know of money then? She was five. She was saving the world. She was a hero.”

“She still is,” said Kara softly, gazing at the snapshot. Katherine opened her mouth to contradict that assertion but Kara looked up at her, certainty shining in her eyes. “She is, Mrs. Grant. Maybe not to you—not for a long time—but she is to a lot of people. They look to her for guidance, for knowledge, for solace in a world too often hard and frightening. She gives them hope.”

Katherine was taken aback. “You see a very different woman than I do, young lady,” she said, but there was no ire in her tone, only grudging resignation. She removed the Polaroid from its place of honor and handed it to Kara. “Keep it. Keep them both.”

Kara thanked her and tucked the photos into her purse. “Are you coming to Carter’s birthday party, Mrs. Grant?” She knew the elder Grant had been invited; she’d sent the invitation herself.
“Of course. I wouldn’t miss it.” She sighed. “Whatever may be broken between his mother and me, I won’t punish my grandson for it.”

Kara nodded, pleased by both her planned attendance and her sentiment. She had another question for the older woman but she didn’t know if she should ask it. Katherine Grant had already opened her home, her history, and parts of her heart to Kara and this question could slam all of that shut. But she thought it might be important to ask—for both of them. In the end, she let a little of Supergirl steel her blood.

“Why doesn’t Cat already have the watch, Mrs. Grant?” she asked quietly.

Katherine’s veins filled with ice, then with fire. How dare this idiot girl with no tact and no filter—the audacity—the unadulterated nerve—

It was that word—nerve—that brought Katherine up short. Her daughter’s assistant did have nerve, more than she’d given her credit for, far more than any reasonable person would have under these circumstances. Again, she felt as if she were missing something important and it niggled at her, a thought trapped unidentified on the tip of her tongue.

She noticed Kara had used her daughter’s first name again but hadn’t apologized or corrected herself. Her voice was different somehow, too—stronger, clearer, more sure. But not accusatory—not in the slightest. And that’s what saved her from Katherine’s wrath.

“What the hell,” she mumbled to herself, all the fight leaving her. She turned to face Kara more directly. “Jefferson had been saving it for when Kitty—Catherine—Cat—reached a particular milestone: the publication of her first story in the Daily Planet. The morning it was published, he called her and told her we were taking her to dinner at Davolo’s, one of our favorite restaurants at the time. She was supposed to meet us there.”

The look of heartbreak that overtook Katherine’s features at that moment caused Kara physical pain. She reached out without thinking and took both of the older woman’s hands in her own, hoping to lend Katherine some of her strength.

“I found him in that chair just after lunch,” Katherine said, nodding to Jefferson’s Eames-style desk chair. “The doctors said it must have been a stroke or an aneurysm, otherwise we would have heard something.” She looked back at Kara, stricken all over again. “It will be twenty-five years tomorrow,” she whispered. “He had the watch in his hand.”

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The next night, after an agonizingly endless day wondering what she should do, Kara found Cat Grant right where she expected to: on her private balcony at CatCo. Carter was away again—somewhere in the Big Country with his father, getting to know Wyoming (or, as Cat had said, “Why-oming”)—and Kara knew enough about her boss to know she wouldn’t want to be home alone on a night like tonight. She also knew enough to expect the tumbler of bourbon in her hand.

Cat heard the slight change in air pressure as the door to the balcony opened. She glanced over her shoulder—registering no surprise at all, Kara noticed—then turned back to her drink.

“Kiera,” she said. “Am I giving you too much to do these days? Coming in on a Sunday to burn the midnight oil?”

Kara ducked her head, the bob of her ponytail unseen by Cat. “No,” she said, shaking her head. “I came to check on you.”
Cat snorted. “Check on me?” she asked imperiously and Kara could see her gearing up for an Olympic-level bout of verbal sparring heavy on the sarcasm. Cat whirled around to confront her assistant and if there’d been any alcohol left in her glass, it would have sloshed over the rim. “Oh, Kiera, I do the ‘checking up’ around here. I have to. There’s only so much incompetence one can ignore.”

Kara didn’t flinch or react. She’d expected this, too; old, hard grief too long unexpressed gave Cat claws and she knew how to use them. Kara leveled a piercing blue gaze directly into her eyes. “We’ll do better, Miss Grant,” she said softly. “I promise.”

Cat laughed but the sound was harsh and mirthless. “You promise?” She reached for the decanter Kara only now noticed and refilled the Wedgewood cut-crystal glass with three fingers of amber liquid. “That would require—at the very least—a modicum of initiative coupled with, oh, any number of traits you lack. Strategic thinking, charisma, the gift of anticipation—“ She paused to take a sip of her bourbon and Kara took the opportunity offered.

“I know what today is,” Kara said carefully. Her voice was strong, clear, and confident. If Cat had been paying attention, she would have noticed Kara’s voice had been all those things since the conversation began. Her usual uncertainty and tendency to ramble were nowhere to be found. But Cat hadn’t been paying attention and the knowing declaration, delivered by her assistant of all people, was like a slap.

“How do you know about that?” Cat asked. She’d tried for accusatory but her voice was hoarse and broken and the question only sounded plaintive to her ears.

For the first time since the entire conversation had begun, Kara hesitated, unsure of how much to divulge. “I….  I spoke to your mother.”

The mention of her mother snapped Cat sharply into focus, the momentary slip of her control vaporizing under the dry yellow heat of ancient anger. “Ah,” she said, the sneer returning to her voice. “Mother. Of course.” She raised her glass in a mock toast. “What venom did she hiss into your ear, dearest Kiera? Wait—let me guess: my father’s death was my fault and she’s never forgiven me.” She smirked and downed half the bourbon in her glass. “How melodramatic and pathetic we must seem to you.”

“There was no venom,” said Kara. “If anything, she seemed…tired. And sad. Lonely.” She
brought one hand from behind her back and looked at the slip of stiff paper, a smile lifting the corner of her mouth in spite of everything. After a moment, she looked up, reaching out to hand it to Cat. “She sent this for you.”

Cat held Kara’s gaze with eyes promising a barrage of vitriol should the item displease her. She reached out slowly, her long fingers retrieving it from Kara’s grasp. When she glanced at it, she immediately dropped like a stone, lucky she’d been standing in front of the insanely expensive Madison Outdoor sofa Kara hated cleaning when she and Cat weren’t seeing eye to eye.

“My mother sent this for me?” Cat schooled her voice to a register often used in the interrogation of criminals. The implication, of course, was that she didn’t believe a word Kara had said. “She must have said something. Tell me exactly. And don’t embellish, Kiera. I’ll know if it’s her or if it’s your puppies-and-unicorns idealism.”

Kara swallowed carefully and stood mostly at attention, both hands behind her back again. She looked squarely into Cat’s eyes. “She said ‘Take it. It will make Kitty smile and God knows she does so little of that.’”

There was a brief, tense moment while Cat considered the statement and then she seemed to deflate all at once, sinking back into the snow white couch cushions, visibly exhausted. “That’s Mother,” she sighed. “With her trademark dig at the end.” She sat up and tiredly deposited her bourbon tumbler on the table next to the decanter, forgetting both instantly. Instead, she lifted the aging snapshot and gazed at it, her eyes softening, filling with glittering light like the stars. Kara knew Cat wouldn’t let the tears fall but she was comforted by their presence nonetheless.

“I don’t remember this, obviously,” she said, nodding to the photograph. “I wasn’t even three. We lived in a little five-room walk-up in Metropolis back then. My father had just begun his career and we didn’t have much.” She shrugged, the corner of her mouth lifting with the slightest curve. “We had each other,” she admitted without sentimentality. “It was enough.”

“Like all foundations, ours began to falter with the first crack.” She flicked her jade eyes up to meet Kara’s. “I was six when the law firm he worked at closed unexpectedly. Later—when I was in high school, I think—he told me what had happened. At six, though, all I knew was my father was gone more often, worked later and later hours, and had become more and more distant, from both my mother and me. Those were bleak years and they lasted until he started his own firm when I turned twelve.

“He still worked the same long hours, but he was happier. At least, he seemed so to me. My mother has a different opinion.”

Cat looked away as the memories pulled her into their inevitable current, her voice touched by honey now instead of acid. “I spent every minute I could with him, often in his study. He’d sit at his desk, scratching away on one of his endless legal pads, while I sprawled out on one of the Danish modern couches. Most of the time we didn’t even talk. It was enough to simply sit in the same room with him….”

Tears welled again in Kara’s eyes. She knew that feeling. Intimately. Most nights, her fantasies about Cat were of simple closeness. Her favorite lately was a daydream about a lazy Sunday afternoon, with Cat curled up at the end of the sofa in Kara’s apartment, deeply engrossed in some biography about yet another powerful woman, while Kara lay with her head in Cat’s lap, reading the latest bestseller, listening to rain falling outside. Kara often fell asleep to this one, made utterly content by it—especially when she imagined Cat’s fingers combing softly through her hair or the heat of Cat’s legs under her cheek.
Cat saw none of this, of course. She was still lost in the undertow of her childhood memories, watching her father live again. When she did look up finally, her eyes were shuttered.

“My mother didn’t understand,” she said, the sharp edge returning to her voice. “She accused him of turning me against her in an argument once. He didn’t, of course. It was her insecurity, her petty jealousy. Nothing he did could have swayed me one way or the other—either for or against my mother. She and I were just so different.” She grimaced and rolled her eyes. “And before you say anything, I am aware she and I share a certain acerbic turn of phrase. I learned it from her. It was my only defense.”

Kara cleared her throat. “She was a good teacher,” she said and Cat nearly rolled her eyes again.

“You really do try to see the best in everyone, don’t you?” Cat leaned forward and placed the photograph carefully on the glass tabletop. “She treated you horribly when she was here last. She was deliberately cruel and unforgivably hateful.”

“She was just trying to get your attention, Miss Grant. She tried to impress you first—with her travel plans and her important friends? When that didn’t work, she lashed out. Some people think negative attention is better than no attention.”

Cat narrowed her eyes at Kara for a long moment. “That’s incredibly astute of you,” she said. There was no hint of mockery or of surprise in her voice, only curiosity.

“She was very kind to me when we last spoke—well, after we got the reintroductions out of the way, that is.”

Cat gave Kara a tiny, knowing smile—just a curve of her of her expertly-tinted lips—and Kara couldn’t help but grin back.

_Honestly, _thought Cat, shaking her head indulgently. The younger woman soaked up every positive gesture from her as if it were sunshine and reflected it back tenfold, like a polished-bronze mirror.

“You remind me a little of my father,” she said, chuckling warmly for a moment before catching herself. She froze, regretting the slip immediately. Wasn’t she having a hard enough time corralling her thoughts about Kara Danvers without adding sentimentality to the mix? Every day brought a new nightmarish struggle to keep her hands to herself, to keep the girl at arm’s length. Cat often wore her sunglasses inside just to dampen the brightness of Kara’s megawatt smiles, hoping beyond hope the visual obstruction would keep her from smiling back reflexively.

_Oh, why didn’t they hit it off the way I wanted them to?_ She mentally stamped her foot thinking about her eldest son’s too-brief dalliance with her “skittish” assistant.

Cat had been overjoyed to have Kara spoken for finally—especially by Adam, the son she’d given up. She’d slept peacefully for the first time in months, no longer consumed by inappropriate thoughts about the oh-so-innocent blonde and her ridiculously endearing grins. She could turn it off—all of it, forever—if doing so meant protecting her son’s happiness. She owed him at least that much, if not more.

When Kara had ended the flirtation practically before it had begun, Cat’s reaction had been one of desperation. Without Adam as a safe, utterly unimpeachable buffer, all those feelings Cat had been fighting for so long returned with a vengeance. Lashing out by insisting on a purely professional, by-the-book employer-to-employee relationship had been her only fallback position.

_And it’s worked so well_, she thought morosely, closing her eyes briefly and sighing. When she
“I’m honored,” she said, the sincerity in her voice absolute and unrehearsed. “Will you tell me about him?”

Cat raised a single eyebrow. Where was the rambling self-deprecating denial or the over-effusive appreciation? Intrigued by a concise and understated Kara Danvers—and getting more sober by the minute—Cat stood and walked back to the balcony’s edge. Kara joined her there.

“I was fifteen when I first came to National City,” she said, nodding at the shimmering view below. The vibrancy of the city at night still thrilled her, even after all these years. “I knew as soon as I laid eyes on it I would live here someday.” She turned toward Kara slightly and scrutinized her for a moment. Making some sort of internal decision, she continued. “My father brought me here the week after I had slapped my mother during an argument.”

Kara covered her mouth with one hand, her eyes a storm of sadness and shock. “Oh, no!” she cried. “Oh, yes,” confirmed Cat ruefully. “I’m not proud of it. It was inexcusable and childish. Worse, I wouldn’t apologize for it. I don’t remember what she’d said—something cruel, no doubt. The point I’d missed? Physical retaliation is never an appropriate response to a verbal attack, no matter how infuriating.

“When he found out, my father grounded me for six months on the spot. Then he retreated to his study—our study—and, for the first time in my memory, he locked the door.”

The shadow of remembered rejection and hurt rippled across Cat’s features and Kara gasped quietly.

“I could hear him on the phone, faintly. I couldn’t make out the words but he was on it for a long time. After I was sure he’d hung up, I knocked.” The glittering starlight came back into Cat’s eyes and Kara curled her right hand into a fist to keep herself from reaching up to cup Cat’s cheek. It was a Herculean task.

“He didn’t answer,” said Cat hoarsely. “I knocked again. Then pounded. I begged. I threatened. I made every promise I could think of. I screamed. I sobbed.” She turned eyes the color of the sea off the coast of Maine up toward the sky, blinking back tears. “He didn’t answer. Not once.

“I slept in the hallway, forgetting completely about the door that led to the garden. I have no idea how long he stayed but he was gone to work before I woke. At dinner, he told me he and I would be taking a trip. We would leave Friday after school and would return a week from Saturday. He explained I wouldn’t know where we were going until we boarded the airplane and he made it quite clear I wasn’t to ask.”

Kara, pale with anxiety, licked her lips. “Weren’t you afraid, Miss Grant?”

“Terrified,” the older woman admitted. “I spent a week conjuring the most lurid, most horrifying scenarios, each more ridiculous than the last. I hardly ate, barely slept. It was a miracle I made it onto the airplane in one piece. My nails were in ruins from a week of constant chewing. I was a wreck.”

“Why did he bring you here?” asked Kara, glancing out at the bejeweled National City skyline. Cat turned her palms to the sky and shrugged. “Because it was the furthest away from my mother he could manage on such short notice?” she asked. “Your guess is as good as mine. He never told me.”
“What did you do? I mean, he didn’t bring you here to see the sights…”

Cat shook her head. “No, we didn’t do any sightseeing—not like tourists do, anyway. He rented a cottage on the ocean. It was October and colder than normal that year. Windy.”

A slight breeze ruffled Cat’s curls just then and Kara was instantly transported back in time to that beach, watching the autumn wind whipping a teenaged Cat’s hair as she stood looking out over the ocean, choppy and gray under overcast skies. The image made Kara’s whole body vibrate with the need to do something but what could she do? Cat Grant was no hugger—unless it was Carter doing the hugging—and Kara knew any gesture of comfort might break the spell of trust cast over them just now. She wanted to hold onto this moment for as long as possible so she did the only thing she could: she listened.

“He let me vent first. Gave me an hour and told me I could say whatever I wanted and he wouldn’t judge. So I did. Every hateful, awful thought I’d had about my mother, about him, about the fight and what I thought had brought it on, about why I had hit her….” Cat grimaced. “I didn’t last an hour. I heard myself—really heard what I was saying—about twenty minutes into the rant. I was disgusted. Embarrassed.” She glanced at Kara. “Ashamed.”

“When it was clear I couldn’t go on, my father, the prosecutor, who had flown me to the other side of the country just to have this conversation, held me. I didn’t know what to do at first—as I’m sure you’ve noticed by now, I’m not comfortable with casual physical contact—but he didn’t let go.” Cat waved a hand dismissively. “I cried. He held me until I stopped. It was all very Ward Cleaver.”

Kara started to point out Cat’s father probably just wanted to help her pain go away but she stopped herself. A: Cat already knew that and B: she was obviously trying to put some emotional distance between herself and the memory, to make it less immediate, less raw. The urgent klaxon in her blood insisting Kara should HELP NOW HELP NOW was getting harder and harder to ignore. She gritted her teeth in an effort to resist the compulsion.

“That week, he told me about his highly contentious relationship with his own father. They never came to blows but their shouting matches were apparently legendary in the neighborhood where he grew up. My father’s nickname in high school was ‘Bullhorn’.”

Kara covered her mouth to hide her smile, but Cat waved the need away. “Go ahead and laugh. I realize I inherited some verbal characteristics from my father, as well.”

“How did he resolve it?” asked Kara, blushing pink from having her mind read. “With his father, I mean.”

“My grandmother took him aside and gave him the same speech he gave me that week. He told me my relationship with my mother was perfectly normal—a natural part of growing up and away from one’s parents—but he cautioned me against lowering the quality of the conversation. ‘The purpose of the next generation is to rise above, Cat,’ he told me. ‘All children have the opportunity and the responsibility to learn from their parents’ and their own mistakes and to do better in the world.’”

A rare smile, sad and thoughtful, completely changed Cat’s features, softening them considerably and stripping the years away until she looked—Kara thought—much as she must have back then, fresh-faced and just getting her sea-legs in a tumultuous world.

“He showed me his watch,” she continued. “It was an old pocket watch he’d worn since before I was born and he told me to open it. There were two inscriptions on the inside of the cover: one from the Buchanan Society of Scotland presenting it to his mother’s father for being elected to office in New York State, and one from his mother to him. She’d given him the watch when he passed the
Cat crooked a finger and caught a tear before it could fall. “He told me the watch was mine. That he’d give it to me when I had my first significant success in the world.” She turned heartbroken eyes to Kara and made a small sound of grief-stricken frustration. “I wish I hadn’t refused it when my mother tried to give it to me. I was so angry, so heartsick without my father I couldn’t bear to look at it, but I want it now. Not for me—for Carter. Carter’s already so much better than I am, so much better than I will ever be. The watch would be something from the grandfather he was named for, the grandfather he never knew. It’s the perfect birthday present.”

Kara reached out to take Cat’s hand, her blue eyes filling with a light the older woman hadn’t seen in them before. Cat accepted a gentle squeeze from her and started to pull away, her self-preservation instincts kicking into overdrive with her racing heart. She’d been too familiar and Kara had brazenly taken hold of her hand. This could not continue.

Kara held on, using a little Supergirl strength to give Cat’s wrist a gentle twist. When the older woman stopped pulling away, moss-green eyes wide with shock and something else Kara didn’t want to think about too deeply, she placed a familiar wooden box in Cat’s upturned hand, then released her.

“Good night, Miss Grant,” she whispered, blushing hotly.

Then she was gone.

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Cat Grant sat at her desk, palms flat to either side of her, staring at the box. She hadn’t opened it yet. She knew what was in it. She’d recognized it instantly, of course—magically presented to her the moment she realized what she’d been searching for these long months leading up to Carter’s birthday.

She hadn’t thought of her father’s pocket watch until the very moment the memory had burbled up from the muddy acre of her soul where all the memories of her beloved father were kept. And it was Kara who had taken her there.

Kara again—waltzing through doors Cat believed to be locked, bricked over, forgotten. Always Kara, no matter how many times Cat pushed her away. Had even one of her attempts to fire the girl succeeded?

One had come close, she remembered. The one Cat regretted. Confess or leave my sight. What had she expected Kara to do? Of course she would leave, to protect herself, to protect all those who would be lost without the safety her secret afforded them, Cat included.

Except Kara had found a way to stay, a way to give Cat the out she needed. Plausible deniability. A way for Cat to save face, knowing she couldn’t back down without it.

What she didn’t understand was why?

The sight of the box sitting innocuously on her desk ignited a burning thread of anger and confusion just beneath Cat’s sternum. As the discomfort of it grew, she found herself wanting to scream at someone. Fresh out of convenient targets this late at night, she stabbed at her iPhone until she heard ringing on the other end.

“Pick up, Mother,” she hissed, pressing the phone hard against her ear, counting the distant rings.
Katherine Grant answered on the fifth ring, her voice thick with interrupted sleep and adrenaline-fueled terror.

“Cat, honey? Are you all right? Is Carter all right?”

Cat’s growing anger was momentarily displaced by her mother’s unexpected concern. Had she just called her “Cat”? And “honey”?

“Of course he’s fine. He’s with his father in Wyoming. What could possibly happen to him in Wyoming? What are you talking about, Mother?”

“Thank God,” said Katherine, sighing with relief. “As for your question, it’s three o’clock in the morning, Cat. Telephone calls at this time of the night are usually reserved for the dead or the dying.”

“What are you doing?” asked Cat, ignoring the mild jibe.

“Well, I was sleeping but the phone rang and I—”

Cat rolled her eyes. “No, Mother,” she said tersely. “You called me ‘Cat.’ Twice.”

“It is your name, isn’t it?”

“A name you’ve never used before. Not once.”

There was a long pause and Cat thought she heard her mother sigh again, the sound of it blending with the slight hum of their connection.

“I was recently reminded names are powerful, right ones and wrong ones. It’s time I started calling you by the right one, don’t you think?”

Cat pulled the phone away from her ear and checked the number she’d called. She was only marginally assured she had dialed her mother’s home even though her screen clearly showed she had.

“Fine,” she said, even more confused than she was before. “Whatever.”

Katherine waited a beat but Cat didn’t continue.

“Is there something you needed, dear?” she asked. For years, Cat had restricted her calls to Katherine to birthdays and holidays, and perhaps the odd invitation to an event where Katherine’s checkbook would be more welcome than Katherine herself. A call at 3:00 in the morning was as unheard of to Katherine as the usage of her preferred name was to Cat.

Cat looked down at the box, the laser-cut edge of her anger flaring to life again.

“My assistant,” she said, emphasizing the word assistant so it was all hisses and spits, “brought me something today. I assume she got it from you. I want to know why.”

“Just one thing?” asked Katherine.

Cat’s eyes snapped to the photograph of her father she’d carelessly left on the table outside and she went white, hurrying to retrieve it, cognizant it could be whisked away by the slightest breeze. She clutched it to her chest and went back inside, tucking it safely into the top right drawer of her desk.

“Two things,” she amended once she’d caught her breath. “Both of which had to have come from
“Why what? Be specific, Cat. Do you want to know why Kara asked for them? Why I gave them to her? Why she gave them to you, today of all days? Haven’t you figured any of that out yet?”

No, I haven’t! Cat wanted to scream. Why the fuck do you think I’m calling at this time of night? Instead, she let her usual sneer bleed into her voice. “Enlighten me, Mother,” she said.

“I have to admit it took me quite a few hours after she left yesterday to figure it out, but I think that girl’s fallen in love with you. There’s no other—“

Cat didn’t hear the rest of that statement because she’d once again pulled the phone away from her ear to stare at it incredulously. Kara was at her mother’s house yesterday? Her mother’s house in Metropolis. Twenty-nine hundred miles away. Yesterday. And Katherine Grant, Wicked Witch of the East, had let her in. Had, for some reason, given Kara the pocket watch that was Cat’s father’s most prized possession. Kara, her assistant, who her mother now claimed was in love with Cat.

“Have you been drinking?” snapped Cat. Short of this being some sort of fever dream, it was the only reasonable explanation for her mother’s bizarre declaration.

“Not for hours, but yes, of course. Haven’t you?”

Cat looked at the decanter of her favorite bourbon still sitting on the table outside, much too far away.

“That’s not the point!” she insisted.

“What is the point, dear? Honestly, I think I’ve lost the thread of this conversation….”

Cat pinched the bridge of her nose and closed her eyes.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “Did I use my inside voice?” She opened angry eyes and yelled, “WHY DID KIERA GIVE ME DADDY’S WATCH THREE HOURS AGO?”

“There’s no reason to shout, Catherine,” said the elder Katherine, letting a little maternal disapproval color her tone. “We’ve covered this. Kara came to the house yesterday. She claimed you were receiving a lifetime achievement award and she wanted to know if I would share any photographs of you showing your childhood interest in journalism. Eventually, I—“

“She couldn’t have been there yesterday, Mother. We worked late on Friday—past eleven.” She chose not to acknowledge her mother’s correct pronunciation of her assistant’s name.

“There are red-eyes from National City to Metropolis, aren’t there? She claimed she was visiting her cousin or something and had ‘been in the area.’” A familiar sharpness overtook Katherine’s voice. “I didn’t think to check her boarding pass at the door,” she said drily.

“No, of course not.” Cat took a breath and forced herself to calm down. “What happened then?”

“I’m not an idiot, Cat. I’ve used Google before. You aren’t receiving an award.”

“Obviously not,” said Cat.

“So I confronted Kara. I made her lunch first. I didn’t want her to, I don’t know, break something or cry—“

Cat dropped her head into her right hand, using her fingers to massage her forehead in an attempt to
stem the tide of the migraine she could feel starting behind her left eye.

“You made her lunch.” It wasn’t quite a question, but Katherine interpreted it as such nonetheless.

“Chicken salad on wheat,” she said. “Is that important?”

Cat chuckled despite herself. “No. I’m just trying to picture the scene, Mother. In all its domestic glory.” Why were things with Kara Danvers never what they seemed?

“Don’t be smart. She had to be hungry. She’d been there for three hours, looking through all those photo albums in your father’s study.”

Cat sat straight up, ready to demand why Kara had been allowed in there of all places. A half-second of consideration reminded her it was the only convenient option for reviewing those albums. Besides, Kara couldn’t possibly have known then how important—how private—that space was to Cat.

“Go on,” she said finally, releasing her outrage with a sigh.

“She fell apart like a cheap suit at the first question, of course. Honestly, I don’t think the girl has a deceitful bone in her whole body.”

“She doesn’t,” Cat assured her. “What did she say?”

“She said you were upset. She said you’d been searching for a gift for Carter’s thirteenth birthday but weren’t finding anything suitable. She said she wanted to help. She thought coming here to look through your childhood photographs would somehow solve the problem.” Katherine was silent for a moment. “She was right, wasn’t she?”

Cat hesitated.

“Cat, she flew out here for less than twenty-four hours just to help you find the perfect present for your son.”

“So?” Cat asked, unnerved that her mother still knew her well enough to know the source of her confusion.

Katherine made an unintelligible sound of frustration. “So, what else could it possibly mean? No one’s that good an assistant, honey.” When Cat didn’t answer, Katherine continued listing her evidence. “And then there’s you. How many times have you fired that poor girl?”

“Mother,” said Cat, drawing out the word, warning Katherine not to go there.

“She’s still there, Cat. For how many years now? And I know you had some girls who didn’t even make it through lunch.”

There was a logical explanation for all of her mother’s supposed evidence. There had to be! Cat didn’t want to be the cliché—the older woman with the hots for her pretty young assistant. She didn’t want to be splashed across the seven o’clock entertainment news shows as a washed-up has-been trying to recapture her youth with a woman half her age. Kara didn’t deserve that even if she did have a crush on Cat. And—for the sake of argument—say there was something between them, something with potential. How long could it last under the white-hot gaze of the global media machine?

“I’m hanging up, Mother. Go back to sleep.”
“All right. But before you go, Catherine Jane Grant, remember this: that girl is good and decent and kind—kinder than this world deserves. If you break her heart, you’ll never forgive yourself.”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” snapped Cat. “It’s not my heart to break.”

Honestly, did Kara go anywhere on the planet without interfering in people’s lives? Maybe Cat didn’t want to agree with her mother on this particular topic. Maybe she had been perfectly happy with the way things had been. Had Kara “Sunny” Danvers ever thought of that? Had she?

“Sweet dreams, Mother. I hope I didn’t wake the flying monkeys when I called.”

Katherine snorted. “Good night. Make sure your driver gets you safely back to your cave under the bridge at a decent hour.”

Cat disconnected the call and collapsed into her hands, exhausted and raw and a thousand other things all at once. After indulging in several long moments of maudlin self-pity, she sat up straight, squared her shoulders, and opened the box.

The watch felt warm to her touch as she lifted it from its velvet nest. She traced every intricate carving, every knob and catch and hinge with light fingertips, remembering her father’s infectious grin, his booming laughter, the smell of his cologne. Smiling for the first time in what seemed like days, she opened the cover to trace the familiar engravings inside and stopped dead, dropping the watch back into its velvet robes. Her hands flew to her mouth, a cry of unexpected grief escaping before she could stop it.

Under her grandmother’s message to her father, following the outer curve of the cover, was an inscription she hadn’t seen before, its tiny block letters reminiscent of the first one to her great-grandfather.

It read: To Cat, That’s my girl. Rise up, ever onward. J.B. Grant

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Kara arrived early at work the next morning, earlier than usual, her belly a tumult of Kryptonian butterfly fish. She knew she’d left too soon the night before but the high emotion had overwhelmed her ability to control her flight instinct and her toes were barely touching the floor as she hurried out of the office. If she’d stayed any longer, her secret would have been revealed and, no matter how much Kara felt revealing her true identity to Cat Grant would be an imminent necessity, last night had not been the night for it.

Today wasn’t the day for it either, so she’d worn an extra-heavy pair of shoes just in case. Miss Grant would hate them—they were clunky and unfashionable—but Kara hoped they’d be reminder enough to keep her feet firmly on the ground.

She hadn’t slept a wink. She’d tried—Rao knew she’d tried—but she just couldn’t get her mind to stop whirling. She knew the watch had been perfect as soon as she’d opened the cover to see the history and meaning carved into the delicate gold. It was everything Miss Grant wanted for Carter’s present and more and Kara hoped, with the last piece in place, the puzzle of Cat’s emotions over the last three weeks would settle down into something less anxious, something more...pleased.

Cat Grant’s happiness was Kara’s chief concern. It was why she had lasted so long in the position, far outstripping any previous assistant in both stamina and longevity. Kara didn’t care about the work—well, she cared, but only in so far as the completion of the tasks relieved Cat’s stress and made her boss’s life easier, better.
Run all over National City to find the freshest, most unique sushi? Absolutely! Spend hours sorting through stock footage for the perfect clips for CatCo’s 2012 Election Retrospective? You bet! Sweat every detail—from salad forks to guest list—for CatCo’s Annual Charity Ball? With pleasure!

Whatever made Miss Grant’s life easier, whatever made her and CatCo shine—those things were Kara’s real compensation for what she did. Her paycheck was just money.

She was shocked, therefore, when Cat Grant—sporting her blackest Givenchy sunglasses inside—walked right past Kara and the piping hot latte she held without so much as a glance. Instead, she stalked into her office, dropped her red Fendi bag on the bar next to the conspicuously empty bourbon decanter, and served herself a heaping glassful of M&Ms. Then she picked up the remote control from its usual place and scrutinized the wall of screens behind her desk, keeping her back to the glass wall of her office and, consequently, to Kara, as well.

The hand holding Cat’s latte slowly lowered and Kara’s nervous smile melted into a worried frown. She saw Cat’s rigid stance, saw the pointed toe of her left Louboutin tap steadily on the tile floor beneath her foot, and wondered if she’d miscalculated, horribly and awfully. But how?

Kara’s shoulders crumpled and she went to her desk. She collapsed into her chair, still holding the latte. After a moment of staring into space, she glanced at the to-go cup, and then dropped it into her wastebasket with a resounding thump.

Winn, who had watched the entire exchange unfold from the safety of his invisible desk, swiveled wide eyes back and forth between the two women.

“What did you do now?” he whispered.

Embarrassment and uncertainty made Kara sheepish. “I don’t want to talk about it,” she said, opening her laptop to stare at its blank screen.

Winn shrugged and went back to work.

Kara expected the freeze out to thaw at least a little by nine. Surely Miss Grant wouldn’t ignore her in the Monday Strategy meeting. She’d have to say something to her, give her some task or direction, no matter how small, how menial, right?

Wrong.

Kara took her usual comprehensive notes and marked the action items she knew would have been given to her with a double-asterisk, like she always did. If the other attendees noticed anything unusual—and they did—they certainly didn’t say anything lest Cat’s wrath be directed at them next.

By the end of the meeting, Kara was wishing she’d brought a change of shoes. There was no danger of her floating away now and their extra weight felt like a ball and chain, matching her mood.

She delivered Cat’s lunch precisely at noon, just like she always did, only this time she added a serving of Cat’s favorite spicy tom yum soup to her usual lettuce wrap order, hoping the heat of it would help break through the continued deep freeze.

It didn’t.

Cat ate every drop but still didn’t speak to Kara. Not once.

The younger woman now had a visceral understanding of what a teenaged Cat had gone through
outside her father’s study the fateful night she’d slapped her mother. Kara, too, wanted to pound on the walls or to scream—anything to get Cat’s attention. She wouldn’t, of course. In addition to the damage she could do with her super-strength, Kara didn’t want to be the person who lowered the quality of the conversation.

She would rise above, just as Jefferson Grant had counseled his daughter to do all those years ago.

When it was just the two of them left in the office, Kara looked up from her emails to watch as Cat bent over the day’s layouts at her table, her laser-like focus and discerning eye able to pick the shots that would have National City all a-buzz, whichever publication they ended up in. The light in Cat’s office was warm and buttery and seemed to touch the gold accents in the room with fire. Outside, in the dim bullpen lit by cold blue-white fluorescents, Kara was a moth drawn to that flame.

She’d long since given up hope for a hint of what she’d done wrong—Cat hadn’t so much as looked at her all day—but she couldn’t let things go like this.

She closed her laptop with a quiet snap and turned off her desk lamp. Gazing through the glass for one more moment, she took a deep breath and walked to Cat’s office door, opening it without knocking. Cat didn’t look up.

“Good night, Miss Grant,” said Kara, her voice clear and strong. “Don’t forget you have a seven o’clock breakfast meeting with the mayor at Carlo’s. I hope you have a lovely evening. Call if you need anything.”

She waited just long enough to see Cat wasn’t going to relent, then turned and walked out, not looking back.

Cat looked up as soon as she heard her office door open and she watched Kara walk away. When she couldn’t see the younger woman anymore, she reached up and tore her glasses from her face, tossing them carelessly onto the table.

“Goddammit,” she snarled and got up, heading straight for the bar.

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It went on that way for the entire week—Cat ignoring Kara ruthlessly, Kara trying to make everything more than perfect—until the whole building seemed on edge.

Every evening, after everyone else had fled, Kara would close up her desk and say goodnight to Cat. Then she would go home and either eat, cry, or numb herself into a stupor with stupid television until she finally fell asleep, exhausted, on her couch. An incident with a Fort Rozz escapee Wednesday night resulted in several broken bones (for the Akhenaught criminal) and Alex sought Kara out after reading the DEO medical report.

“What’s going on?” she asked her younger sister, waving the tablet with the report as if it alone was proof of a problem.

“I’m having a bad week at work,” Kara grumbled, mortified by her aggression with the escapee and riddled with self-doubt. “I don’t want to talk about it.” She stalked out of the base before Alex could stop her.

Cat, for her part, would watch Kara walk away every night, then would drink, hoping to chase her turmoil into a hole somewhere deep inside herself where it would never be heard from again. Sometimes she would angrily text her mother, quipping “You are full of shit about Kiera.” or “I can’t believe you fell for her little act.”
Katherine Grant simply texted back, “Whatever you say, dear.” and went back to sleep, knowing better than to interfere. Cat would either figure it out on her own or she wouldn’t. Katherine hoped for the former.

On Friday night, Kara came to say goodnight again and Cat heard the girl’s voice break as she said, “Have a good weekend, Miss Grant.” The sound of Kara’s stifled anguish reached into Cat’s chest and squeezed her heart so fiercely, she gasped with the shock of it. Kara froze.

In an effort to cover the reaction, Cat broke her week-long vow of silence, hissing “What are you doing, Kiera?” Her flashing eyes bore into Kara’s with a look that suggested the sound of glass breaking or nails being scraped down a chalkboard.

Kara knew she should be nervous—even frightened—but it was the first time Cat had looked at her all week and all she felt was relief. Relief so profound, so deep, it cascaded over her body like a tropical waterfall, washing away the cold sting of the past five days. She could not have stopped the watery grin that broke across her face like sunshine through a rain cloud if she’d tried.

Cat shot out of her chair, exploding with rage. “Stop it! Stop it right now!”

Kara’s smile faltered then faded. “Stop what, Miss Grant?” she asked. When Cat only glowered at her, Kara actually frowned, annoyed.

She knew she hadn’t done anything wrong. She’d been a perfect employee all week, had catered to Cat’s every silent whim as if they were appearing in cartoon bubbles over her head, had kept the office and CatCo running like a top despite being actively ignored—and she’d been utterly polite, efficient, professional, and productive through it all. If this wasn’t about her work then it had to be about the—

“Wait. Is this about the watch?” Kara demanded.

Cat said nothing but her eyes flicked to the floor for a nanosecond. It was all the confirmation Kara needed.

“You’ve been ignoring me and shutting me out because I gave you something that already belonged to you? Is that what this week’s been about?” Kara crossed her arms over her chest and began to pace, suspicions and scenarios rattling inside her head like a ruined mosaic she was trying to piece together in the dark. “Or was it because it came from me, your stupid fetch-it girl, and you didn’t think of it first?”

She turned angry blue eyes on her boss. “You may not have noticed, Miss Grant, but you were awful. Not having the perfect gift for Carter’s birthday was making you crazy and you were making everyone else crazy! Trickle down crazy!” Kara crossed her arms over her chest and began to pace, suspicions and scenarios rattling inside her head like a ruined mosaic she was trying to piece together in the dark. “Or was it because it came from me, your stupid fetch-it girl, and you didn’t think of it first?”

She turned angry blue eyes on her boss. “You may not have noticed, Miss Grant, but you were awful. Not having the perfect gift for Carter’s birthday was making you crazy and you were making everyone else crazy! Trickle down crazy!” Kara went back to pacing. “I didn’t know if I would find anything but I knew I had to try. If I could just solve this one problem—take away this one worry—you’d be normal again and we could all go back to not walking on eggshells around you! That’s all I was trying to do.” She turned plaintive eyes toward Cat. “I just wanted to help.”


“It—it’s my job to help you, Miss Grant,” she said, fidgeting with her glasses.

“True,” conceded Cat, “but no one has ever been as good at it as you, Kiera. I’ve had scores of assistants who said they would happily devote themselves to your job but none of them meant it.” Cat took her time walking around her desk and stopped in front of Kara with a smirk. “Oh, they’d last a few weeks, fetching my coffee and my lettuce wraps, answering my texts at all hours, putting
up with my sarcasm and my mood swings—and then they’d quit or they’d screw up and I’d fire them.” She smiled but it was a smile that slithered. “Remind me, Kiera—how many times have I fired you in the last two years?”

Kara swallowed. “Eleven times, Miss Grant.”

“Eleven times,” Cat repeated. “Yet you’re still here.” She narrowed her eyes at the younger woman, her voice dropping into a dangerously low register. “Why?”

Kara took a half-step away from her boss. “I— It’s my—“

“Is it money?” Cat asked. She considered the thought for a moment, then dismissed it. She didn’t pay Kara much but it was certainly more than enough to retire her entire collection of kindergarten teacher cardigans. “No. You don’t spend what you earn on yourself as it is.” She circled Kara slowly, asking more rhetorical questions as she went. “Are you looking for a step up, your big break? Do you think you can parlay this job into something with more meat? Here? Or somewhere else—maybe with Perry White in Metropolis?”

Kara stood stock still as Cat circled her, shaking her head in protest but unable to get a single word out.

“Is it all an act, Kiera—your bumbling earnestness, the sweet girl-next-door persona? Is it a ruse designed to get past my guard and depose me? Topple me from my forty-story throne?”

Kara went white with horror at the very idea.

“N-no, Miss Grant! I would never—”

Cat pivoted and stood in front of Kara, imperious and regal, her face closed like a fan. “Then why, Kiera? What’s behind all this kindness, this conscientiousness, this help? There must be a reason—something more believable than ‘it’s my job.’” Tears rimed Kara’s sea-blue eyes and Cat felt the walls of her emotional fortress shift and shudder. She scrambled to keep them standing but they were falling too quickly. “If it isn’t money or ladder-climbing or corporate espionage, what is it?” she cried. “Why are you still here, Kara?”

The sound of her real name from Cat Grant’s perfect lips said with such bleak need snapped something inside Kara and she grabbed the woman’s upper arms, surging into her personal space well beyond what was appropriate between employer and employee. She felt Cat’s breathing hitch and looked into darkening emerald eyes before capturing the older woman’s mouth in a desperate kiss, as torrid and unexpected as a summer storm.

Cat kissed Kara back, groaning with relief, aching as the intensity shifted and became something deeper, slower, and exceedingly intimate.

When Kara broke the kiss and pulled away, she opened eyes indigo with desire.

“That’s why,” she said.

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Continued in Negotiation
“Well, you have nerve, I’ll give you that,” Cat said, her momentary surprise fading to be replaced by a gentle smirk. Kara’s hands shot to her mouth and she started to back away, aghast at what she’d done. Cat caught her by the elbow, stopping her retreat. “It’s okay, Kara,” she said softly.

Kara searched Cat’s eyes for any hint of hesitation or of insincerity and found none. Her hands slowly fell away from her face.

“It—it is?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. Cat could feel her trembling and nodded once to reassure her. Kara then dropped her gaze to the perfect bow of Cat’s mouth. “Then may I? Again?”

Charmed beyond reason by the request for permission, Cat felt her knees turn to water. “Please,” she husked, anticipation giving her butterflies as if she was some nervous schoolgirl and not the Queen of All Media. She reached up to brush her thumb over Kara’s full bottom lip and watched the young woman shiver at her touch. Knowing she could affect Kara in such a way was a heady elixir, more intoxicating than the best bourbon.

Kara stepped close to Cat again, willing herself to stay on the ground. It was oh, so hard to do when she was sure she’d be able to fly now even if she hadn’t been born on Krypton. She cupped Cat’s face in both hands, barely touching her, and then slid her fingers into Cat’s honey-gold hair, pulling her in for another kiss. Since the first one had ended all too quickly for Kara’s taste, she took her time with this one, brushing her lips across Cat’s with feather-like pressure again and again until she made a sound of pure yearning and deepened the kiss suddenly, wantonly, as earnest in her desire as she was in everything else.
When Kara finally pulled away, Cat’s eyes were still closed. “Mmm,” she hummed in pleasure. “Of course.”

Kara—delightfully pink in the cheeks—quirked one eyebrow up and canted her head to the side. “‘Of course’ what?” she asked.

Cat opened shining green eyes and smiled at Kara, her look one of affection and tenderness. Kara melted.

“Of course you’re as good at that as you are at everything else you do,” said Cat. She reached for Kara’s hand, tugging the younger woman toward the couch. “You once tried to convince me you were average. I should have known then you were anything but.”

Cat gently guided Kara to sit, then sat herself, leaning in to steal a quick kiss as one would sneak a swipe of icing from a birthday cake before it was served. “Kissing you is already an addiction,” she said ruefully, raising one delicate eyebrow. She continued to clasp Kara’s hand in both of hers, holding it lightly in her lap. “That does not bode well for me.”

Kara smiled happily. “It does for me,” she teased, blue eyes sparkling.

Cat felt her heart clutch and wondered when she had become such a romantic. The word romantic pulled her up short and Kara saw the change in Cat’s eyes, saw the minuscule retreat. “What?” she asked. She hated the way her heart skipped a beat in fear when Cat pulled away from her, even in such a small way.

Cat studied Kara’s face for a moment, her own look inscrutable. “What are we doing, Kara?” she asked, finally. Her tone wasn’t acidic or bored or the thousand other unnerving things it could have been. It was serious and seeking. Sure. Sincere.

When Kara’s eyes went pale with confusion, Cat tried again. “What do you want from this?” she asked, indicating the two of them with a languid flourish of her hand. “From us?”

Kara swallowed nervously. She wanted to say Everything! but there was the possibility Cat couldn’t or wouldn’t give her that. Maybe Cat wanted something light and uncomplicated. Maybe the Queen of All Media, a woman who could have anyone she wanted, preferred to remain unattached.

“Um…whatever you want, Miss Grant,” Kara said, her voice shaking. She looked away lest her eyes show too much. Cat reached up and hooked her index finger under Kara’s chin, tilting it so their eyes met again.

“First, call me Cat,” she said. “I know we’re in my office and you’re my assistant, but when you’ve made my toes curl with a single kiss, you get to call me by my first name.”

Kara managed a tiny smile at the comment.

“Second, that’s not what I asked, Kara.” Cat reached out to tug at a tendril of Kara’s wheat-gold hair. “I know what I want. I want to know what you want. It matters to me.”

“I want everything,” blurted Kara, feeling the words tumble out of her mouth practically of their own volition. She took a deep breath and slowed down, wanting to be specific, needing to be heard. “I want everything possible, wherever it leads us. Whatever is best for both of us—for all of us,” she said, thinking of Carter. She fidgeted with her glasses for a moment, and then smiled. “We’re already a good team. I think we could be good together—like this—too.”
Cat sighed with relief and smirked gently. “You’ve certainly proven you can survive my mood swings,” she said. The memory of the last week, however, cast a shadow across her features briefly and her smile melted away.

“Speaking of that, I owe you an apology, darling,” she said. If Cat saw how the usage of the endearment widened Kara’s eyes, she didn’t acknowledge it. “I’ve behaved appallingly this week.”

Kara struggled to get her brain and mouth working in tandem again. It seemed all she could hear was the pounding of her own heartbeat and a little voice inside her head squealing She called me ‘darling’!

“I wondered if maybe this time I’d gone too far,” she said. She looked down at their joined hands. “I didn’t mean to—”

“Look at me, Kara,” said Cat, ducking her head to catch the younger woman’s eye. When Kara looked up, she went on. “You did nothing wrong. It wasn’t about you—not entirely. My mother said something on the telephone that night. Something I wasn’t ready to hear.”

Kara tightened her hold on Cat’s hand. “What did she say?” she asked, knowing it could be any one of a thousand casually cruel remarks. She hated the distance between the two women, hated watching their painful push-me-pull-you dance of estrangement, thinking what a waste it was with both of them living. She knew if they continued on this way, Cat would eventually be left with nothing but bitterness and a handful of unanswered questions, pricking like thorns. She would bleed regret.

“She implied you had developed feelings for me,” said Cat, careful not to define anything. It was too soon for declarations of undying love, after all. “I didn’t believe her but the suggestion was dangerous to me.” Seeing Kara’s shock and the questions in her eyes, Cat continued. “False hope is seductive, Kara. I might have revealed my own feelings in error, leading to an irrevocable change in our working relationship. I didn’t want to lose what we had chasing something I believed to be wishful thinking on my mother’s part.” Cat’s voice was level and matter-of-fact but she held herself stiffly, knowing Kara had every right to be angry. “So I pushed you away, hurting you in the process. I’m sorry.”

Kara wanted to say Your mother said that?, surprised right down to her toes. But she thought about how it must have looked, Cat’s assistant flying across country—never mind the how—to search through family photos for a few hours, looking for inspiration for a young man’s thirteenth birthday. She hadn’t been exactly subtle and Katherine Grant was no fool.

She wanted to say It’s okay, but it wasn’t. Cat’s behavior had been hurtful and hard to endure. She’d cried herself to sleep more times than she cared to count and she’d lied to Alex, who was rightfully worried, by implying James Olsen was to blame. She’d wrestled with her feelings of rejection and sadness alone, fearing no one would understand. And her usual sanctuary—Cat, herself—was the source of the pain. It had been a long and lonely week.

She wanted to say I’m not sorry because the culmination of the week’s anxiety and confusion had led to her taking a huge risk that somehow hadn’t backfired like others had and she was beyond relieved. Cat had kissed her back and it was more than she’d ever let herself imagine, than she’d ever let herself hope for. All her fantasies of closeness with Cat had been carefully innocent. She was so afraid of crossing a line that couldn’t be uncrossed she’d kept her daydreams strictly G-rated. She’d crossed it anyway—despite her restraint and in the most idiotic way possible—but her world hadn’t come crashing down around her alien ears after all. She was amazed, frankly.

She also wanted to say You don’t have to apologize to me because part of her hadn’t adjusted to the
new dynamic and was still reacting as if she was only Cat’s assistant. A newer, larger part of her instinctively recoiled from the urge to do so, realizing Cat wouldn’t be happy with that kind of relationship. It would be exhausting—for both of them—and terribly unbalanced. Cat needed, no, she deserved an equal partnership, like Kara’s parents and her foster parents had had. Anything less was unfair and Kara wasn’t a child.

Instead Kara simply said, “Apology accepted,” and she leaned in for a sweet, chaste kiss, caressing Cat’s cheek with light fingertips.

Cat didn’t know what she’d been expecting Kara to say, but it certainly wasn’t that. Those two simple words—more than anything else Kara had said this evening—gave Cat hope they could make a go of this. Thoughtful and plain-spoken, they were the words of someone with self-awareness, with maturity, with the ability to reason. They were the words of an equal partner. A woman in Cat’s position knew yes-men and sycophants, haters and naysayers, liars and manipulators and backstabbers by the score. Equals were hard to come by. And nothing turned Cat on more.

“Come here,” she growled, pulling Kara in for a very different kind of kiss. This one was hands and tongues and nips and moans wrenched from the pits of stomachs.

It boiled. It blistered. It burned.

When Cat finally pulled herself away from Kara’s intoxicating mouth, she rested her forehead against the younger woman’s, breathless and bothered in the best way. “You have no idea what you’re getting into, Kara,” she said. She tried for a cautionary tone but it was lost between tiny butterfly kisses. “I’m not easy to be with.” She laid a scalding path of little bites from Kara’s ear to the notch at the base of her throat. “I’m selfish. Set in my ways.”

Kara whimpered, her body aflame with desire. “I know,” she breathed, her hands winding in flaxen silk. She tugged Cat away from her neck so she could look into her darkening eyes. “But you’re also generous and loving. Supportive. Inspiring.” Kara’s eyes filled with azure light. “Amazing,” she whispered, before losing herself in another luxurious kiss.

Cat shook her head at Kara when they parted. “You look too hard for the good in people, darling,” she said, sighing.

“I usually find it, don’t I?” Kara said, winking at Cat.

The older woman narrowed her eyes. “On second thought,” she said, “maybe I don’t know what I’m getting into. Maybe ‘Sunny’ Danvers is too much for me.”

Kara groaned and hid her face behind her hands. “Not you, too!” she cried. She peeked through her fingers. “I was really hoping that one hadn’t made it to you yet.”

Cat raised an eyebrow. “How do you know I didn’t start it?”

Kara looked at her, dumbfounded. “Did you?” she squeaked, not sure which answer she was hoping for.

Cat smiled and shook her head. “No, but it fits,” she said, eyes flicking to Kara’s lemon yellow and white sweater ensemble. “As far as office nicknames go, you could do worse. Think of your friend, the little IT hobbit.”

“Winn,” said Kara firmly. “And before you say anything, I know you’re the one who started calling him Winifred. He’d like you to stop.”
“And I’d like him to stop throwing himself at you on a daily basis,” said Cat, grimacing disgustedly at the thought. “We don’t always get what we want.”

“I did,” said Kara, her voice low and deep, like velvet. She wanted to kiss Cat again and again, wanted to explore her exquisite mouth with her meticulous attention to detail. She wanted to discover all the sounds Cat would make when she touched her just right, all her sighs, all the little catches at the back of her throat, all her needful whimpers, and her sumptuous moans. Kara saw Cat wanted that too, but she held herself back. There was so much to lose as they negotiated this necessary adjustment—this expansion of their reality—and nothing to gain by rushing it.

Cat watched Kara’s blue eyes flare with desire and then watched, intrigued, as the younger woman deliberately tempered it, reining it in to simmer just beneath the surface. She knew why. This was not the place for them to do this, to work through the power shift from employer/employee to something more. They needed someplace more neutral, less private, and less charged with the history of their mutual longing.

“Shall we get out of here?” asked Cat, smiling knowingly at the gratitude in Kara’s eyes. “I could use a change of scenery.”

“Me, too,” said Kara, repositioning her glasses nervously.

“There’s a restaurant I like on the beach where we can talk… Have dinner overlooking the ocean….”

Kara liked the sound of that until she realized to which restaurant Cat was likely referring.

“You’re not suggesting Georgie’s, are you? It takes forever to get a reservation there—especially if you’re thinking about one of the balconies—“ Cat’s mischievous grin confirmed Kara’s suspicions. “—which you obviously are. I’m sure they’ve been booked solid for six months!”

Cat leaned in close to Kara until her mouth was level with the shell of the younger woman’s ear. “I have faith my assistant will solve that problem,” she whispered, coloring the word assistant with a seductive sibilance.

Kara shivered. “On it,” she said, reaching for her phone.

Cat chuckled.

Kara still didn’t know quite how she’d managed it but an hour later, she and Cat were seated on one of Georgie’s private balconies with Georgie herself taking their dinner order. Georgie—short for Georgina Dell’Acqua, chef and owner of two of National City’s hottest restaurants—was a friend of Cat’s from way back. Cat had been the Entertainment correspondent at the Tribune at the time and Georgie was an up-and-coming sous chef under Gualtiero Marchesi in Italy. Cat’s early coverage of Georgie’s successes had, in part, paved the way to where she stood now, as the matriarch of Italian fine dining in National City.

Despite the women’s friendship, Kara still had to do some fast talking and a little wheeling and dealing to get the balcony seating on such short notice.

Glancing over the top of her menu, Kara watched Cat chatting with Georgie, the sunset casting her in shades of bronze and gold, the ocean breeze tousling her hair, and knew her effort had been worth it. The fact Cat was conversing entirely in perfect Italian was just icing on the cake as far as Kara was concerned, despite its inspirational effect on her. She shifted slightly in her chair in an attempt to relieve the delicious ache she felt—to no avail.
With their catching up completed, Cat glanced at her menu. She took the lead here and Kara was happy for her to do so. Fine dining for her usually meant getting her donuts at the bakery instead of at the grocery store.

“We’ll start with the burrata and prosciutto caprese, Georgie. And the trout vasa. Kara, what looks good to you?”

*One of everything*, thought Kara, her mouth watering. It had been a long time since lunch. But she noticed the lamb entrée and asked, “What’s the spring vegetable tonight?”

Georgie winked at her, her coffee eyes sparkling behind her smile. “Name your favorite, bella carina, and see if I have it for you, yes?”

Kara grinned at the chef and blushed, pleased by yet another endearment—even if it wasn’t from Cat. “Asparagus?” she asked hopefully, her nose wrinkling in the most adorable way.

Georgie laughed. “I will make it pretty for you. Lamb then? Medium rare?”

Kara nodded enthusiastically, hoping her stomach wouldn’t growl out loud at the thought.

Georgie turned back to see Cat eyeing her sharply, the hint of a smile playing around her lips.

“I can’t help it, Catarina,” whined the chef. “She’s so lovely! Look at her—she’s like a morning glory that basks in the sunlight.”

Kara blushed bright red and ducked her head, embarrassed by the praise and by Georgie’s accuracy. She had been basking but Cat was the sunlight.

“She’s mine, Georgie,” said Cat possessively. Kara froze, shocked by the sentiment and the publicity of the statement. If she thought hearing Cat speaking Italian had affected her, this was entirely different. A tingling rush of warmth suffused her entire body and left her breathless. “Take my order and keep your inexplicably effective Italian flirting to yourself.”

Georgie pouted. “You never let me have any fun, Cat,” she complained good-naturedly. “Veal or scallops tonight?”

Cat smirked at the chef. “Tell Lena she owes me flowers. And veal, please.”

“We owe you so much more than flowers, mi amiga,” said Georgie seriously but Cat waved the sentiment away. If anyone else had seen, they would have mistaken the dismissal for cool indifference but Kara could see the hint of bashfulness beneath the gesture. “Wine?”

Cat glanced at Kara and asked, “May I order for you?”

Kara nodded. “Of course,” she said seriously and without hesitation.

Kara’s earnestness was more suited to a life-and-death decision rather than the simple ordering of wine, but Cat was warmed by it nonetheless. She reached across the table and took Kara’s hand in her own.

“A glass of the Barbera for Kara and the Montalcino for me, Georgie,” she said, holding out her menu.

“Right away,” said the chef, taking both menus away. Before she left, she caught Cat’s eye. “Parliamo più tardi, sì?” she asked.
Cat rolled her eyes at the woman with mock annoyance, and then smiled. “Sì,” she said with grudging resignation.

After Georgie left, Kara nodded after her. “Lena?” she asked.

“Georgie’s wife, Lena Ambrusco,” said Cat. “I introduced them.”

Kara nodded, her eyes a little wider than they had been a moment ago. Lena Ambrusco was an award-winning composer and the current musical director of the National City Philharmonic.

“Of course you did,” she said flatly. How else would an award-winning chef meet an award-winning composer if not through an award-winning media mogul?

“Georgie had been alone too long. Torino’s was thriving but she’d just bought this place. She was working overtime to get it ready for a summer open. This would have been, oh, ten or twelve years ago. Around Christmas.” Cat rolled her eyes again. “If anyone needed a break, it was her.”

Their waiter arrived at just that moment with their wine. Cat thanked him but didn’t take a sip, playing with the stem of the glass instead. She continued the memory.

“The Children’s Hospital was having its annual fundraiser at the Hilton and, because CatCo was one of the major donors at the time, I was asked to speak. Lena was playing cello as part of the string quartet that night. As soon as Georgie saw her, I knew. She certainly wasn’t any more use to me that night.”

“What do you mean?” asked Kara.

Cat grimaced delicately. “She was there to keep me balanced…focused. I hate public speaking,” she confessed. “I do it well but it’s exhausting for me.”

Kara squeezed Cat’s hand in a show of support. “I know,” she said. “You never eat after one o’clock on days when you have an evening speaking engagement like that. And you have a tendency to—kinda—pace? Before you go on?” Kara shrugged, not knowing how to describe Cat’s nervous agitation without embarrassing her. “I always make sure you have extra protein and carbs for lunch that day, for energy, and I block your schedule from two o’clock on so you have time to prepare. Only family get put through on the phone; everyone else gets the gatekeeper,” she continued, pointing to herself. “And I never schedule a meeting for earlier than ten o’clock on the morning after. So you have time to recover.”

Kara grinned guilelessly and Cat’s heart flipped backwards. The younger woman wasn’t bragging. Though she had every right to, Cat didn’t think she had it in her. The explanation was simply a list of tasks Kara performed without thinking and Cat hadn’t known about half of them.

“I don’t tell you enough how good you are at your job, Kara,” she said sadly. “There were reasons for it before—not good ones—but that stops now. I promise.”

Even warmed by the praise, Kara hesitated to say thank you. So much was changing between her and Cat—and in such wonderful ways—it was hard to look ahead to the consequences. But Kara had an overdeveloped sense of anticipation and she couldn’t help but do so.

“Will I get to keep it?” she asked, unable to hide the fear in her eyes. “I know what the policies are and how hard being with me—like this,” she said, nodding to their joined hands, “—could be for you professionally. I don’t want to hurt you or CatCo but I don’t want to lose my job either. It’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”
Cat wanted to say *Let’s not talk about this now, darling* because they had this fantastically romantic table at one of her favorite restaurants and a mango-plum sunset sinking into the sea and they were holding hands like love-struck teenagers. Cat hadn’t felt this young, this *giddy* in years—if ever—and she didn’t want to waste one second of it thinking about practicalities and repercussions, dammit! But she knew Kara was right to be thinking about these things and, frankly, this very discussion was one of the reasons they’d left CatCo tonight in the first place.

Cat wanted to say *We can’t do this* because Kara was also right about the professional difficulties facing them. CatCo had policies and a board of directors and a thousand other obstacles ready-made to keep her and Kara apart. Aside from those, Cat also had to consider the gossip—and there would be gossip. Snide remarks about their age difference or hints Cat was paying Kara for “extra services” or well-intentioned reports of sexual harassment to Human Resources were all possibilities deserving serious consideration. But Kara sat across from her, here, now, holding her hand like she would never let go and Cat had wanted her for so long, had fought so hard against the pull of her—gravitational in scope and woven inextricably, it seemed, into every atom…. She was tired of *should not*. Didn’t she make the rules? Couldn’t she say what was allowed and what was not? Besides, saying no to this now—hurting Kara like that—was out of the question. Her mother was right—she would never forgive herself.

She wanted to say *Don’t worry about it; I’ll take care of everything* because she knew she could bulldoze a solution through the barriers by sheer will alone. One did not survive as Cat Grant without a fair amount of power behind the name—and what good was the name if it couldn’t be of some practical use here? But that tack didn’t allow participation from Kara and Cat wanted her input. She was too old and too goddamned feminist to be content with eye candy on her arm and in her bed. She wanted a partner, with brains and a spine and opinions. Someone she could trust, someone who would support her, who would carry a shared load with her, side by side. Cat could get a pretty face anywhere. She wanted more.

She also wanted to say *Shut up and kiss me* because, well, look at her! It had been a very long time since Cat had wanted someone the way she wanted Kara Danvers—let alone had felt about anyone the way she felt about her. Sex, for Cat, had been an itch she scratched with carefully chosen, non-competitive partners. Her marriage to Carter’s father had disintegrated in the worst way—torn asunder by two powerful, headstrong people who had never learned to compromise. The end had been vicious and lengthy and scarring—no matter what the press so carefully said—and Cat had never found reason to risk the like again. Until now. Until Kara Danvers, with her big, sea-blue eyes and her heart on her sleeve and her ridiculously effervescent smile and the way she cared so much. Cat had been like the Tin Man, rusted, stagnant, and heartless, ruling a media empire from within a hard, empty fortress. Then sunny Kara Danvers had come along, restoring Cat piece by piece until she’d fallen right into the girl’s arms at the first kiss! But, alas, kissing Kara would have to wait—no matter how addicted Cat had already become.

Instead, she simply said, “Let’s talk about it. What would you do if our situations were reversed?”

They talked all through dinner, through a bottle of wine, and through half of dessert before they’d hashed out a plan both were confident would work. They agreed they wouldn’t advertise their relationship at CatCo. There’d be no public displays of affection or any changes at all to their working relationship, save two: Cat would use Kara’s real name and Kara would call Cat ‘Cat.’ Cat would publicly announce Kara would be expanding her duties to include an unpaid editorial internship, which would necessitate focused instruction by Cat herself, as well as by the heads of several of CatCo’s creative and logistics departments. As Kara mastered her studies, Cat would delegate more and more responsibilities and give her more and more autonomy until the entire building saw Kara as Cat’s proxy rather than as her fetch-it girl. Kara’s title and salary would reflect the changes in her duties twice: once at the end of the internship and once a year later, when they
finalized the reclassification process.

Meanwhile, Cat and Kara would quietly date and if, after six months, they were still together and planned to continue as-is, they would approach Lucy Lane and seek her legal counsel on how to move forward with the board and with Human Resources.

Cat couldn’t truthfully say the conversation had been enjoyable or even riveting, but it had been enlightening. Phrasing the problem in the reverse—as if Cat was the assistant and Kara her employer—had kindled Kara’s natural protective streak and she fought for the imaginary Cat’s advancement harder than she would have for her own. Cat had the privilege of seeing Kara’s mind at work, of seeing her methodology and how she reasoned through a problem. Previously, she had always given orders, blindly trusting they would be done. She hadn’t particularly cared about the how. Tonight, she had the opportunity to peek behind the curtain and she understood Kara so much better than she had before.

However, spending the majority of their dinner talking about practical work-related issues had extracted all the romance from their evening and Cat desperately wanted to correct their course. As necessary as the conversation had been, wasting an evening on one of Georgie’s balconies discussing fraternization law and contingency plans was a criminal offense. Kara deserved better.

The sun had long since set and their balcony was lit by candles in sconces and in mason jars all along the railing. The wind had picked up a little and it caught playfully in Kara’s hair, tugging at tendrils of burnished gold like a mischievous child. Flickering candlelight made her gestures as she talked seem even more broad and dynamic and her eyes were almost indigo in its diffuse glow.

They were alone and not likely to be interrupted again—Cat had already settled the bill—so they picked at the remnants of their desserts while Kara told a funny story involving her sister and the first time Kara had ever eaten a cannoli. As the younger woman got closer and closer to the punch line, she snorted lightly, making herself laugh even harder, and it was so damned adorable Cat couldn’t take it anymore.

“Do you have any idea what you do to me?” she asked, voice low and intense, eyes flashing with jade-green fire.

Kara fell silent and blushed, watching Cat with round eyes.

“I’m sorry for interrupting you—I swear I was listening—but you’re just sitting there, completely unaware of how beautiful you are, oblivious to my pounding heart and of how much I want you. I could watch you talk for hours, daydreaming of your perfect mouth and how you kiss me, of how I want you to kiss me and where. I could do all of that and never tell you—you’d never know.”

Cat reached across the table with her long, elegant fingers and began to draw absent-minded patterns on the back of Kara’s hand, making the younger woman tremble.

“But you’re here and we’re alone and I kissed you back today even though I knew I shouldn’t have. Even though I knew doing so would give you the power to destroy me.” Cat never took her eyes from Kara’s. She watched the unadulterated hunger rise in them, saw the pulse point at the base of her throat quicken. “I’ll ask you again—do you have any idea what you do to me?”

Kara shook her head. “No,” she whispered. “I’m too busy trying not to fly…."

Cat shivered, undone by that simple declaration. Kara saw and rose to her feet in the next breath.

“Are you cold?” she asked, pulling off her sunshine yellow cardigan. She rounded the table to Cat’s
side and draped the sweater over her bare shoulders, hissing with something akin to pain when she accidentally brushed her fingers over alabaster skin.

Cat reached up and cupped Kara’s cheek in the palm of her hand. Her touch was warm but her gaze seared. The long, leonine sweep of her neck as she looked up took Kara’s breath away.

“What do you see when you look at me…Supergirl?” she asked quietly.

Kara gasped lightly, and then threw her head back, her eyes fluttering shut. When she looked down at Cat again, Cat saw only the narrowest ring of cobalt blue around pupils blown wide open.

“Incandescence,” breathed Kara. She licked her bottom lip and trembled against Cat’s fingertips. “How long have you known?”

“Does it matter?” asked Cat, staring at Kara’s mouth. Her heart hammering in her chest as if she were tumbling off a cliff.

“No,” said Kara, and they surged together, kissing hungrily…deeply…. Cat wound her fingers in Kara’s hair and Kara wrapped her arms around Cat’s waist, pulling the smaller woman firmly against her. She felt the heartbreaking curves of Cat’s body under the tactile paradise of her Stella McCartney dress…. Heard the thundering of their combined heartbeats, like a thousand wild horses racing the sun to the horizon…. Tasted wine and chocolate and raw desire on Cat’s tongue and groaned, dizzy and drowning and desperate for more….

It wasn’t until Kara’s sweater slipped from Cat’s shoulders that they realized they were no longer tethered to the Earth—that they were, in fact, spinning in slow, sleepy circles about a foot and half off the balcony as they kissed. Cat glanced down, not half as frightened as she’d imagined she’d be.

“Well, that answers that,” she quipped, raising an eyebrow at Kara when she looked back up at the younger woman.

“I’m so sorry I couldn’t tell you before.” Kara rushed to explain. “I know you wanted me to, but Alex and Hank, they said too many people already knew and—“

Cat stopped Kara’s apology with another kiss. “Don’t,” she said. “I pushed too hard. I’m accustomed to getting what I want and I bullied you. You knew I couldn’t back down and you found a way for me to save face, for us to continue to work together. I should be apologizing to you. Again.”

Kara smiled and shook her head. “You already did,” she said. “You let me keep my job.”

Kara looked at the balcony below and lowered them slowly to its deck. Once they were safely on solid ground, more or less, Kara tried to release Cat, needing to put some distance between them, but Cat would have none of it.

“Stay,” she husked, searching Kara’s eyes. She reached up, gently removing Kara’s glasses and the barrette holding her long, golden hair back. She put both on the table beside them. “Please.”

“What do you see, Cat?” asked Kara. “When you look at me?”

“Possibilities,” said Cat carefully. She wasn’t quite brave enough to give voice to everything she was feeling. Not yet. She raked her fingers lightly through Kara’s hair. “Answers,” she added, realizing—not for the first time—Kara had a way of solving problems and answering questions Cat didn’t even know existed. The problem of her lonely heart, for example.
Kara’s heart swelled near to bursting. Seeing the wonder in Cat’s eyes reminded Kara “Cat Grant, Media Mogul” and “Cat Grant” were not necessarily one and the same. In fact, Cat’s situation reminded her a little of her own circumstances—though in reverse, obviously. Kara’s human-like vulnerability as “Kara Danvers” helped disguise and protect her superhero identity while Cat’s invincibility and iron-willed, larger-than-life Queen of All Media persona disguised and protected her vulnerability and her humanity.

That Cat Grant could or would see Kara as an answer to anything—it was a gift of immeasurable significance and one Kara swore she would never take for granted. She leaned in for a tender kiss, only to pull away abruptly, her eyes darting to the door of the balcony.

“Georgie’s coming,” she said quickly and Cat barely took a breath before swinging into action. She spun, snatching Kara’s discarded glasses and barrette from the table and shoving them into Kara’s hands. The younger woman retook her seat and angled herself away from the door just enough to hide her face from view while she reset her Kara Danvers façade. Cat seized Kara’s sweater from the deck where it had landed and swung it over her shoulders in one graceful swooping motion, smoothing a few ripples with quick strokes of her fingers. She sat just as Georgie opened the door.

“Have we overstayed our welcome, Georgie?” asked Cat smoothly, taking one last sip of wine.

“No, no, no,” said Georgie, smiling as she waved both women back into their seats. “I came to tell you we closed a half hour ago, caro. I’ll lock up in forty-five minutes. You are welcome to stay until then.”

Cat shook her head and rose, kissing Georgie on both cheeks.

“No, we’ll leave,” she said, eyeing Kara who had just gotten her glasses back into place. “Kara and I have had a long week. We should go.” She held both of Georgie’s hands in her own. “Thank you for such a lovely evening. Tell Harry the service was impeccable.”

Georgie laughed, remembering the tip Cat had left for the waiter. “You already did, Catarina,” she said, shaking her head indulgently. “I’ll call Monday, yes? We’ll have lunch.” She cut her eyes toward where Kara stood over her shoulder. “Catch up properly,” she added.

Cat smiled. “Call early before my day fills up,” she instructed and kissed Georgie’s cheek again. She reached for Kara’s hand and pulled the younger woman close, guiding her through the narrow French doors with her own hand placed possessively in the small of Kara’s back. Anthony, their driver for the evening, arrived at the entryway just as Cat and Kara exited.

“I never saw you text him,” Cat said, impressed, handing Kara’s sweater back to her. Anthony hurried around the car to open the passenger door for them.

“That’s kinda the point,” said Kara out of the side of her mouth as she shrugged back into the cardigan.

“Ms. Grant,” said Anthony, tipping his cap as Cat entered the car. “Miss Danvers,” he added, nodding to Kara as she slipped in beside her. “Where to, Ms. Grant?”

“I’ll let you know in a moment,” said Cat, dismissing him.

“Yes, ma’am,” Anthony replied. He winked at Kara, smiling at her briefly before he closed the door.

Cat raised her eyebrow in consideration of the interaction, noting Kara’s return smile. “He seems to like you,” she said and, though said as a statement, Kara heard the underlying question.
“He likes you, too,” Kara assured her. “He’s the best of the six drivers I keep on rotation for your needs. I try to get Anthony for all of your big events or for when Carter will be in the car. His safety record is spotless.” Kara nodded for emphasis, earnest seriousness notching a small v just between her eyebrows. “He’ll be your driver Sunday when you pick Carter up from the airport.”

Cat blinked, once again caught off guard by how very much Kara cared. She rushed forward and surprised Kara with a kiss, this one jumbled and a little messy, but brimming with all the emotion she felt knowing it was simply second-nature for Kara to consider her boss’s son’s safety while making everyday arrangements like this.

“Thank you,” she said, her words heartfelt and a little breathless. “You are so good to me—to us. And I’ve been so—”

Kara’s phone rang insistently, interrupting Cat. She started before digging it out of her purse, an apology in her eyes. It was Alex, of course. This late at night, it could only mean one thing. She answered it before it could ring again.

“Alex?”

“Kara, are you still at work? Where are you?”

“I—I’m—Miss Grant took me to dinner?” Kara covered the microphone with her hand and mouthed the words my sister to Cat. Cat could hear the tinny, distant disbelief of the other woman clearly.

“What? Whatever she’s asking for, say no, Kara. Promise me. Whatever she wants, it won’t be good for you. You know that.”

Kara winced and turned away from Cat so she wouldn’t hear any more. “What do you want, Alex?” she hissed, ignoring her sister’s commentary. She’d talk to Alex later, when she no longer had the taste of Cat’s kisses on her lips.

“There’s been a possible Fort Rozz prisoner sighting downtown—nine eighty-eight, the Mohikanite miner who killed his foreman and seven of his fellow miners on Etellus Major. We could use your help. Looks like he went underground—literally.”

Kara nodded even though Alex couldn’t see her. “Where?”

“Warehouse district—Ninety-first and Little Rock.”

Kara instinctively looked out the window in exactly the right direction. “I’ll meet you there,” she said, disconnecting the call. She turned back to Cat, anguished. “I—I have to go. I’m sorry. I—“

“Don’t be,” said Cat, kissing her quickly. She pushed the town car’s door open behind Kara. “Take care of yourself. Don’t be a hero.”

Kara winked at the older woman, grinning rakishly at her. “That’s kinda the point, Cat,” she said, halfway out of the car. She stopped for a moment and bit her bottom lip, trying to make a decision. “Can I come to you? After?” she asked finally.

Cat’s heart leapt. “Yes,” she breathed, eyes shining. “Please.”

Kara looked toward the city center and gripped her shirt placket in both hands. “Where?” she asked, turning back to look at Cat.

“The beach house,” said Cat, inspired by the blue of her young hero’s eyes.
Kara nodded once, and then was gone.

Cat watched her disappear into the murky darkness behind a closed shop, waiting for the tell-tale streak of red and blue letting her know Supergirl was on the job before pulling the car door closed.

Anthony keyed the intercom from the driver’s seat. “Everything okay, Ms. Grant?” he asked.

Cat pressed the button to respond, her own mask back in place instantly. “Everything’s fine, Anthony. Miss Danvers has arranged alternate transportation home this evening. Will you take me to the beach house, please?”

“Right away, Ms. Grant,” he said, starting the car before he’d finished speaking.

As they drove away, Cat watched the horizon where Kara had vanished, her green eyes filled with worry.

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Kara landed between her sister and Hank Henshaw as they peered down a hole in the alleyway between 91st and 92nd Street near Little Rock Avenue. Alex had her tactical headset on—the one with the camera—and slowly moved around the crater, stepping carefully over chunks of broken asphalt, rocks, and mud.

“Are you getting this, Vasquez?” she asked. Kara heard the affirmative response in her own earpiece. “Good.” Alex panned slightly to the left, shining her flashlight on the damage. “It’s approximately fifteen feet in diameter—“ she began, only to be interrupted by Kara.

“Closer to seventeen, actually,” said the blonde superhero, waggling her hand to show she wasn’t being exact. “Give or take.” When Alex pinned her with a long-suffering stare, Kara pointed to her eyes. “Super-vision,” she reminded her, as if to say Not my fault!

Alex sighed. “Correction: seventeen feet in diameter and goes down approximately—“

She paused and looked meaningfully at Kara who stood there, confused, for about three seconds before catching on. The blonde leaped into the air and hovered about five feet above the hole, squinting into the darkened crater for a few seconds. When she finally looked up, she flashed two sets of ten fingers followed by a single index finger.

“—twenty-one feet before the first turn. I want Bravo and Charlie teams on perimeter—full block—and I want Alpha team in the hole with my science guys, okay? I don’t want any surprises down there. Have Delta on back up in case we see any more of these assholes.”

Hank grabbed some of the larger debris and shook it to see how structurally sound it was. “None of this is stable enough to use as an anchor point,” he said. He looked up at the buildings flanking either side of the alleyway, studying them critically. “I’ll coordinate rappelling teams to get your people down.” He glanced up at Kara. “It would help to have a fly-by to see what they’ll be up against,” he suggested. He started to leave, but stopped abruptly, adding, “Good to see you smiling, Supergirl.” Then he was off.

Kara waved goodbye to him, and then landed back on solid ground.

Alex glanced over her shoulder at Kara, grunting when she saw her sister’s megawatt smile back in its usual place. “Yeah, what’s up with that, anyway?” she asked, still filming. “Don’t tell me dinner with the Frigid Bitch of the West was able to break you out of that funk you’ve been in all week.”
Kara winced. “Don’t call her that, Alex. You don’t know her—“

“I know enough,” said Alex, cutting Kara off. “I know you don’t get paid to answer her texts at three o’clock in the morning. I know she is oh-so-appreciative when you bend over backwards to be there for her but when you need something, she’s nowhere to be found.” She shot Kara a frown, mahogany eyes flashing. “She can’t even pronounce your goddamn name!”

“It—it’s—things have changed, Alex. She’s—we—“ Kara huffed loudly, frustrated. “We’re trying something new.”

Alex snorted. “Good luck with that. As long as it isn’t fucking, more power to you.”

When Kara didn’t respond, Alex abandoned her filming and slowly pivoted to look at her younger sister, eyes wide with disbelief. Kara’s cheeks burned bright red and she had her arms tightly crossed over her chest. She radiated defensiveness and embarrassment.

“Kara Ellen Danvers, you are NOT fucking Cat Grant. You tell me right now—“

“We’re not!”

Alex sighed, profoundly relieved. She rolled her eyes at the thought.

“Not yet, anyway,” said Kara softly. So softly Alex almost didn’t hear it.

“WHAT?”

Alex’s roar caught the attention of some of the other DEO agents on site and they looked at her with matching expressions of concern.

“Shhh!” said Kara, rushing forward to her quiet her sister. “You don’t understand—“

“Oh, I understand. I understand perfectly!” Alex stalked away from her sister, ripping off pieces of DEO tactical equipment as she went. “She’s taking advantage of you and I’m going to put a stop to it,” she said, her voice cold and dangerous. “Screw the fucking Mohlkanite! Let him dig up half of National City for all I care. I’m going to have a little chat—“ She emphasized the word chat by flexing her fists in her leather fighting gloves. “—with the Cat.” She grinned evilly. “She better hope she has nine lives.”

Anger swept through Kara like a wildfire and she surged forward, blocking Alex’s path. “No, you are not! You leave her alone!”

Alex narrowed her eyes. “If she wanted to be left alone, she should have left my little sister alone!” she countered. “What she did is illegal, Kara. There are laws against it for a reason. How dare she lay a hand on you! How dare she take advantage of how much you care, of how good you are at your job!” Alex held her fists at her side, rigid with rage. “Someone has to tell Cat Grant to keep her hands to herself and that someone is going to be me.”

“IT WAS ME!” shouted Kara, her own rage ignited now. “It was my hands I couldn’t keep to myself, not the other way around! I did it. I started it.” Alex looked up at her with shocked eyes and Kara felt her anger begin to fade. “It was me,” she repeated.

“What are you talking about?” When Kara shook her head, Alex persisted. “Kara, tell me what’s going on.”

Kara tried to fight it, tried to keep her mouth shut, but she wanted Alex’s support more than anything
and it had been so hard keeping it from her, so hard not to be able to talk about it with her. After a few seconds, she finally groaned and broke down.

“It’s been her—all along, Alex.” She fisted her hands at her sides, blinking back tears. “James was just a distraction. I thought he might—but it didn’t and I—couldn’t—” She hung her head. “I’d wanted her for so long and she—this week, she stopped talking to me, just when I thought things were getting better—and it hurt so much and I let you think it was James because what could I say?” She raised plaintive eyes, pale as the moon, to gaze at her sister. “I knew you wouldn’t understand. You don’t understand now.”

Alex took a deep breath, her mouth still set in a thin, grim line. When she exhaled, she consciously let go some of the anger and the fear she’d been stuck in and tried to listen—really listen—to Kara.

“I’m trying,” she said, reaching out to take Kara’s hand. “Trust me a little while longer?” she asked, catching her sister’s eye and giving her the barest ghost of a smile.

Kara nodded and began to pace in a tight circle, hugging herself again. Alex couldn’t tell if it was a gesture of comfort or of protection.

“She—it was such a long week without her voice, without her eyes on me. Without—her. Like Antarctica when the sun is gone. Cold. Quiet. Lonely.” Kara looked into the middle-distance, remembering. “I went into her office after work tonight to say good-bye—like I did every night this week—but I couldn’t take it anymore. Everything was falling apart and she must have heard it in my voice because she stopped me—she spoke to me—for the first time in a week. And she was so angry and I hadn’t done anything and she knew that—she knew it.” Kara looked at Alex but didn’t see her; she was too deep in the memory. “She accused me of all sorts of terrible—things I would never—and when I told her that, she asked me—desperate—‘Then why are you still here, Kara?’” Kara took a deep, shuddering breath, feeling it all again, feeling the shock of it cracking her wide open.

“She said my name—for the first time—and I….” She remembered the jolt of what she had done next, how it had staggered her and the astonishing heat of it filling every cell of her body. She remembered the tingle of her lips and the rush of desire that followed after it, like a spark following a gunpowder fuse. “I kissed Cat Grant,” she said. “And she kissed me back.”

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Alex Danvers didn’t know what to say. It was an unusual feeling, really; one she didn’t often experience. She didn’t have much of an opportunity to contemplate it, though.

“Uh, guys?” Susan Vasquez’ voice crackled through her earpiece. “As heartwarming as this little Days of Our Danvers episode is, Hank is inbound to your location with a rappelling team—ETA: two minutes. Also, Bravo leader is wondering where the hell the camera feed went and Dr. Solis wants to know if her team is likely to encounter xenomorphic bodily fluids in the tunnel.”

“Fuck!” said Alex, lurching toward one of the pieces of broken asphalt to steady herself. Kara, white with horror, covered her mouth with both hands. Both of them had forgotten about their earpieces. Alex thought she might throw up.

“Before you start puking, Alex, I muted both mics right after you mentioned Supergirl and Ms. Grant—um—” There was a brief silence during which all three women tried not to think about—in graphic detail—what Susan was trying not to say. “Anyway, I’m the only one who heard anything past that point. But I have to turn your mics back on because, well, we’re kinda in the middle of something here.”
Alex rallied like the hardnosed professional she was. “Right,” she said, voice tight. She swung around, searching the chewed-up ground for her headset and power pack. She snatched them up and began to reconnect the feeds. “Mics hot on my mark. In the meantime, let Dr. Solis know I’m sending Supergirl for a fly-by and we’ll know more in a minute.” She settled her headset back in place and flipped the switch on her power pack. “Camera back?”

“Camera back,” confirmed Susan.

“Good.” Alex saw Hank and the rappelling team round the corner into the alley. “I have a visual on Hank.” She took a breath and closed her eyes for half a second. “Thanks, Susan. You saved my sorry hide today.”

“No sweat—” started Vasquez, but Alex interrupted her.

“No. It means a lot to me. Your money’s no good on girl’s night from now on. Got it?” She checked her watch and glanced at her sister to see if she had recovered yet. Kara, still pale and distressed, gave her a less-than-enthusiastic thumbs up. “Mark.”

“Mark.” repeated Vasquez. “All teams: Agent Danvers has a hot connection again. You are go to communicate directly.”

“Yeah, sorry about that guys. Technical difficulties.” Alex nodded at Kara and the young superhero dropped into the crater to start her promised fly-by. “Fly-by has commenced—repeat: Supergirl fly-by has commenced. We don’t know where this thing comes out, so Bravo and Charlie teams, keep an eye out for her. Alpha leader, what’s your ETA?”

“Five minutes. Doing a final equipment check now.”

“Acknowledged. Rappelling teams are suiting up for escort now. Anchor points will be secure by the time you arrive.”

“Understood. Alpha leader out.”

Alex jogged over the edge of the pit and peered down into the inky abyss. She saw nothing. “Supergirl? What do you see?”

“Not much.” Kara’s voice crackled through the earpiece. “The tunnel—seventeen-foot diameter—south east for five-hundred—due west. No xenomorphic—disruptions to city water—electrical wiring—high voltage.”

Alex swore, wishing she’d outfitted Kara with a tactical camera of her own. She should have expected interference. “Say again, Supergirl. You’re cutting out.”

All she got back was a few crackles and a long hiss of static. “Dammit! Okay, Bravo and Charlie teams, your priority is now Supergirl. I want to know the minute anyone has eyes on her, understood?”

“Understood,” said both leaders in unison.

Alex turned and looked for Hank, relieved to see him jogging toward her location. “Vasquez, it sounds like we have some hazardous conditions underground. Run the numbers for shutting off power and water in a three-block radius around my location.”

“On it,” said Susan. “I’ve already shut down the power and water in Grid Block Zero and can do that for an additional block in each direction, affecting only industrial locations—most of which are
closed at the moment.” There was a brief silence, then she sighed audibly. “I can only extend the perimeter to the west after that. We run into residences going east and will be noticed.”

“Do it,” said Hank as he came up beside Alex. “Bravo and Charlie teams: extend your perimeter to a two-block radius. Delta team, I want you in the air. Full five-block surveillance. I don’t like being out of contact with Supergirl.” He shared a look of concern with his second in command.

“Something doesn’t feel right.”

Alex swore under her breath. “I should have sent her down there with a camera,” she said.

“Can’t fix the past,” said Hank. “Let’s see what we can do about the now. Besides, with as much interference as she’s experiencing, the camera wouldn’t have worked much better.”

Alex nodded, then stopped, a light in the east catching her eye. “Delta team, is that you over the Grantham Hotel?” she asked, pressing fingers to her ear so she could hear a little more clearly. The science team had arrived and Agent Zoe Fields, Alpha team’s leader, was coordinating their entrance into the crater. “I see a bird in the sky.”

“Negative,” said Delta leader. “We are still on the ground. The bird in the sky is from CatCo Worldwide Media. We will be airborne in three minutes.”

“God fucking dammit,” said Alex, shielding her eyes from the searchlight on the helicopter, needing to confirm Delta leader’s report with her own eyes. Sure enough, she saw a corner of the blue CatCo logo as the aircraft swung westward. “Vasquez, patch me through to the CatCo pilot now! Delta leader, get your ass in the air and intercept that bird!”

“Acknowledged, Agent Danvers. ETA for departure is one minute.”

“Agent Danvers, you are go for CatCo pilot,” said Vasquez, her tone annoyed. This latest wrinkle was the last thing any of them needed.

Alex followed the CatCo helicopter’s progression as it continued its sweep of the perimeter. “CatCo pilot, this is Special Agent Alex Danvers, agent in charge of this operation. This is a restricted fly-zone. I repeat: this is a restricted fly-zone. The media has not been cleared—“

“Agent Danvers, this is CatCo pilot. We are not live. Repeat: we are NOT live. Our instructions are to surveil and to render assistance if needed. Do you require assistance?”

Alex’s eyes nearly popped out of her head. She looked at Hank, then at the scurry of activity happening at the lip of the crater, noting half of her science team was already down and working. Another light in the sky, this time to the west, indicated Delta team was in the air. She watched as they swung east, on their way to intercept the press helicopter.

Was this really happening? Had Cat Grant really given up a Supergirl scoop just to give the DEO an extra set of eyes?

Wait—how had she even known to send the helicopter here in the first place?

She shot Hank an incredulous look and toggled her mic off, indicating he should do the same. When he did, she hissed, “Cat Grant knows.” Anger ignited underneath her sternum, making her blood boil. How could Kara be so stupid, so—

“She’s always known,” said Hank. He put a hand on Alex’s shoulder, hoping to calm her. “That little show we did for her? It just gave her a way out of the ultimatum, let her back down gracefully.” An appreciative smile ghosted over his lips. “We didn’t fool her for one second.”
When Alex gaped at him, he pointed to his head. “I can read minds, remember?”

“But she’s—“

“—never going to use it against her,” he said, reading Alex’s mind this time. “I promise you, Alex. She would die before betraying her.” He squeezed the young commander’s shoulder gently. “Your sister wasn’t the only one hiding her feelings.”

“But Cat Grant?” asked Alex plaintively. “Queen of All Media? The ruthless bitch who goes through assistants like most people go through Lays’ Potato Chips?”

“I understand you can’t eat just one,” said Hank, keeping his features carefully neutral. Only the tell-tale glint in his eyes gave him away.

“Ugh!” said Alex, shoving him. “Don’t be disgusting! Do you know how many assistants she fired before Kara? Forget that—do you know how many times she’s fired Kara?”

Hank shrugged. “None that took, apparently.”

Alex blinked. She blinked again. Hank was right. Kara was still there, was still Cat’s assistant two years and eleven terminations later. How was that even possible?

“I don’t like it,” she said, her frown damned near a pout.

“You don’t have to,” said Hank. “But you do have to figure out what you want to do with the CatCo helicopter. Before Carbone decides to take care of it himself.” He looked up at the stand-off currently playing out in the sky.

“Shit,” said Alex, following his gaze. “Shit, shit, shit!” She toggled her mic back on. “Delta leader, stand down. CatCo pilot, we thank you for your offer of assistance. Please coordinate with our pilot on a surveillance perimeter and report all sightings to him.”

“Copy that, Agent Danvers. What are we looking for?”

Alex frowned. “Supergirl, for starters. And then anything that looks like it’s digging craters in the earth. You’ll know it if you see it. It won’t be subtle.”

“Acknowledged. CatCo pilot out.”

Alex covered her face with both hands and then scrubbed at her eyes. She was tired, cranky, worried, and irritated. It had already been a long day and then to find out—

“You’re going to have to find a way to come to terms with it,” said Hank, reaching over to key Alex’s mic off. He followed with his own. “It’s new and fragile—and incredibly important to both of them.”

“Can’t you shut that off?” asked Alex, waving in the general direction of Hank’s head. “I’d like to freak out in private, if it’s all the same to you.”

Hank frowned, hurt by the implication. “I do shut it off,” he said firmly. “I have to—otherwise this world is too loud. Sometimes it’s hard to ignore—especially when you’re standing right here. When you’re in such turmoil.”

“Turmoil.” Alex snorted. “That’s a good word for it.”

“But why?” Hank asked. “I don’t understand.”
Alex laughed mirthlessly and rolled her eyes. “No, you wouldn’t, would you? She’s not your sister. The one with the biggest, most trusting heart you’ve ever met. The one who’s so innocent, she still giggles at puppies and claps her hands when she sees an ice cream truck!” She crossed her arms tightly over her chest. “Kara doesn’t have one cynical bone in her body…and I’d like to keep it that way.”

“That’s not up to you, Alex,” Hank insisted. “She doesn’t need that kind of protection anymore. She’s discovering who she is, who she wants to be. She deserves this, too, doesn’t she? She’s not a child.”

“Of course she does,” said Alex, waving her hand dismissively. “Just not with that spoiled, rich, narcissistic bitch who never met a person she couldn’t destroy.” She turned pleading rust-brown eyes to look into his. “She’ll hurt her, Hank. She’ll break her heart.”

Hank shook his head. “You can’t possibly know that,” he said.

“She already has,” said Alex acidly. Then she walked away.

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Kara hovered at a stand-still, roughly two football fields to the west of where she’d begun this little fly-by flight and almost six-hundred feet below the surface. Although not at all symmetrical, she saw the tunnel seemed to be spiraling downward. Toward what, she had no idea.

“Alex?” she asked. “Alex, can you hear me?” She listened for any change in the crackles and static of her earpiece but heard none. Sighing, she continued to follow the tunnel, figuring she’d better see where it ended, at least. The faster she found the end, the faster she could get back to Cat and… other things.

She felt heat rush to her cheeks and grinned goofily, glad of the darkness and the void under National City that hid her face from view. It was a long way to go to keep people from seeing her reddened cheeks and her ridiculous grin, but she’d take it. And this deep underground, with nothing but her x-ray vision to guide her, she wasn’t likely to come across anyone or anything interested in her or her belly filled with butterfly fish.

“I am really going to have to work on this over the weekend,” she said aloud to herself. “Or everyone at work is going to know.” The thought of what she hoped might happen later being telegraphed on her face for everyone to see on Monday morning made her blush even harder.

Kara thought it should be illegal to feel this way—giddy and wild and like she was going to burst with joy. Now she understood the Earth saying ‘over the moon’, feeling like she could fly circles around it, if she wanted.

She’d never felt this way with anyone else before—not that there’d been many others. A couple of crushes in high school that never made it past the giggly making out stage. A couple of guys in college who drifted away when she showed no interest in taking anything beyond second base. A douche bag who’d gotten a little handsy on one date thought Kara demurring to go back to his room because she had “an older sister who wouldn’t approve” was just a challenge to be overcome, like winning beer-pong or going to class with a hangover.

“Bring her along if she’s cute,” he’d said. “The more the merrier.”

Kara had solved that particular problem by breaking his nose.

Afterward, she’d decided to focus exclusively on her studies. Maybe, she’d reasoned, she lacked the
innate procreative drive or the right hormonal makeup for Human romance. Of course, she wanted to have what her friends had with their significant others—all of it. Maybe it just wasn’t possible for a Kryptonian.

“Oh, it’s possible,” she said, her lascivious smile returning as she remembered kissing Cat Grant. “I just needed to find the right person.”

Another thought occurred to her, causing her giddy grin to fade. What if—in her eagerness and nervousness—she hurt Cat? Like, physically injured her when they—they—

“I can’t even say it out loud,” she said morosely. What kind of lover am I going to be if I can’t say the words?

She landed on the rocky tunnel floor and began to pace. This was exactly the kind of conversation she should be having with her older sister, exactly the kind of support and guidance she needed, but Kara didn’t have to be a mind reader to know Alex wasn’t going to be much help in this department. Not as long as Cat Grant was in the picture.

Even so, Kara was determined to take the bull by the horns, so to speak, and help herself out of this predicament as much as she could. For the rest—well, she’d have to hope Cat would be just as remarkable a mentor in lovemaking as she was in everything else.

In the meantime—as far as the saying of the words was concerned—there was no time like the present.

“Lovemaking,” she said aloud firmly. She felt the rush of heat to her cheeks yet again and she crossed her arms over her chest, frowning. If she couldn’t say the words in an empty tunnel six-hundred feet below National City without blushing, she’d never be able to anywhere else. Remembering the embarrassment of the overheard conversation from earlier, she removed her earpiece and held it muffled in her hand.

“Sex,” she said. “Sexual intercourse. Copulation. Coitus. Fornication.” Growling with frustration, Kara curled her hands into fists at her sides, accidentally crushing the earpiece into dust. She hated how sterile and cold the words sounded and felt, hated how there was no emotion in them, no tenderness, no connection.

She pictured Cat laughing at her innocence and felt her cheeks burn with mortification and anger instead of the shy longing she’d been experiencing all night. Just the thought of Cat’s imagined scorn made her want to punch something. Something big.

Kara fought the urge and started over, taking a deep breath to calm herself. “Lovemaking,” she repeated, but this time she said the word less harshly, less like it was her enemy. “Intimacy,” she said and she felt again the messy, desperate kiss she and Cat had shared in the back of the town car after leaving the restaurant. Cat’s eyes had been so open, so indescribably green when she’d pulled away and her lips had looked so irresistible, parted and slightly swollen. Kara had no problem falling into the memory again and again, allowing the imaginary Cat to provide what the real Cat couldn’t at the moment: support.

“Teach me how to make love to you, Cat,” she whispered, losing herself in a pair of remembered forest-green eyes. Her fantasy was so complete, she felt the earth move.

Then it moved again—much more violently—and Kara snapped to, struggling to keep her feet. Dirt and rocks cascaded down on her from above and she turned toward the as-yet unexplored part of the tunnel, engaging her x-ray vision as she took off, her fantasy forgotten.
She followed the lazy spirals of the tunnel further and further downward, dodging more debris as the shockwaves seemed to increase in both intensity and frequency. Alarmed, she sped through the remaining length of the passageway until she found the source of the tremors.

The Mohlkanite was easily ten feet long from the top of his armor-plated skull to the end of his hammer-like tail. His body seemed to be encased in thick, overlapping scales and long claws—longer than Kara thought were strictly necessary—dug through the rock and earth like it was chocolate cake.

“STOP WHAT YOU’RE DOING!” she shouted, but the Mohlkanite ignored her.

Another tremor shook the ground and Kara lurched, thrown against the side of the cavern. When she’d righted herself again, she reached down to snag a rock, launching it at the back of the Mohlkanite’s head. Kara didn’t throw it as hard as she could have. With only her x-ray vision to guide her, anything full-strength would have been deadly.

“HEY! YOU! STOP!”

The rock bounced harmlessly off the creature’s carapace and he looked back at her, snarling.

“Yooouuu ssssstopp!” he said, his voice a low, rumbling hiss, like a cantankerous radiator on steroids. He turned back and continued to dig, faster than he had been before, almost desperate in his movements.

Kara started looking around for a bigger rock when another violent shockwave hit. It threw Kara to the ground and tons of dirt and rock crashed down around her head. As she fought being buried, she saw a flare of white-blue light and watched the Mohlkanite stop moving, watched as the light enveloped him. In fact, he seemed to absorb it, his arms stretched out to either side in a pose Kara sometimes used when savoring a particularly sunshiny day. As he absorbed the light, the ground slowly stopped shaking.

Kara dug herself out of a would-be tomb and lurched toward the Mohlkanite over boulders and cracked earth.

“What are you doing?” she asked authoritatively, hoping he wouldn’t see her fear and confusion.

“I…fffffffieeeeed,” he hissed.

“Feed?” asked Kara. “Feed on what?” She increased the range of her x-ray vision and saw they were standing directly next to what appeared to be a fault line. A strike-slip fault line, to be exact. And considering where they stood—roughly eight-hundred feet below the western edge of National City’s warehouse district—this would be the tail-end of the Lamar-Atchison Fault Line, the reason why none of the buildings in this area were residences. None were over three stories tall, either, making it the perfect location for warehouses and industrial parcels.

“Are you absorbing the energy—the kinetic energy of the earthquake?” she asked.

“Yeeessssssss,” the Mohlkanite hissed. “I fffffffieeeed.”

“Are you causing the earthquakes?”

Before he could answer, another rumbling, rolling quake caused the ground to roil under their feet. The Mohlkanite turned back to the narrow crevice he’d unearthed just in time for another flare of the white light. Kara shielded her eyes while he consumed his highly unorthodox meal. When the tunnel darkened again and the world had stopped bucking, she looked up.

Kara’s mind whirled. “Wait—so you knew an earthquake was coming to this fault line—to this place here—and you came to feed from it because you eat kinetic energy. Yes?”

The Mohklanite grinned, his mouth filled with pectinate rows of needle-sharp teeth. “Yesssssssss.”

“Which means my sister and her science team are—“ Kara looked above her, squinting hard, extending her x-ray vision as far as it would go. It was nowhere near powerful enough to see through eight-hundred feet of packed earth and rock. “—are right at the epicenter,” she breathed. The quake had to have been over a five on the Richter scale with two powerful aftershocks.

She turned to the Mohkkanite, desperate. “My sister and a lot of other people—people from this planet—were working at your entry site when the quakes hit. I have to go to them. There could be people who are trapped, who are injured.”

“Ssssssoooofffffft oooonnnnes?  Liiiiiiiiike yooouuuu?”

Kara shook her head. “Softer than me. Much softer.”


Kara nodded, relieved. “Yes. Yes! Please help me save them.”

The Mohklanite leapt straight up in the air and dug his way into the rock above him, an avalanche of dirt and debris falling in his wake.

“Yes!” said Kara, cheering him on for a half-second before taking a running start to open an escape shaft of her own. She raised one fist to act as a drill bit and spun, super-speed making her a red and blue blur of motion. She chewed through the barrier between her and her sister at an amazing rate, passing the Mohklanite quickly, pushing herself to the limits of her speed in an effort to get there faster.

The closer she got to the surface, the less dense the earth became and the more it smelled like seawater and garbage. She growled with the effort until she exploded out of the ground with a mighty roar, right into the middle of a massive rescue effort. She narrowly missed one of the DEO helicopters as she shot into the sky further than she’d planned. She corrected her course and engaged her super-hearing, regretting that move almost immediately. A torrent of voices crowded into her head all at the same time.

“Whoa—was that? Command, I think I saw—yes! I have a visual on Supergirl. Repeat: Delta Leader reports visual on Supergirl—“

“Medic! Medics over here!”

“Does anyone see Director Henshaw? Does anyone have a visual on Director Henshaw?”

“We need lights here! Bring every light and shovel you can get your hands on!”

Snatches of a hundred shouted orders combined with the noise of helicopters and rescue equipment until Kara thought she would go mad. She tried sorting them, isolating each voice for mere nanoseconds, searching frantically for the one she needed to hear more than any of the others.

“Say again, Delta Leader?” said a familiar voice. “Do you have eyes on Supergirl?”
That one.

Kara did a quick pass around the rescue site until she saw her sister standing at the lip of the original crater, a hand pressed to her ear. A frenzied ant hill of rescue personnel and digging equipment surrounded Alex and she was shouting to be heard over the din.

Kara dropped out of the sky next to her, kicking up a cloud of dust and debris.

“He does! He did! I’m here!” she said, engulfing her sister in a gigantic bear hug. When she pulled back, grinning with relief, she saw the makeshift sling on her sister’s arm. “Are you okay? Alex?”

“It’s my wrist,” Alex scowled, her face caked with mud and dried blood from a cut on her forehead. “It’s nothing. I’ll live. We’ve got bigger things to deal with right now. We’ve got fourteen people unaccounted for and at least ten on their way to area hospitals, three of them in serious condition.”

Kara nodded, all business. “Where do you need me?” she asked, her features hardening with steely determination.

“Alpha team and my scientists were a hundred feet into the main burrow when the earthquake hit, collapsing this end of the tunnel. We still had communications but they were choppy—cutting out. Then the first aftershock hit and we haven’t heard anything from them since.” Alex looked up at Kara with anguished eyes. “Hank was with them and I haven’t seen him or….”

“I’m on it, Alex,” said Kara grimly, understanding what her sister was leaving unsaid. J’onn J’onzz was nearly as strong as she was and would have no problem moving rocks and debris. The fact that he hadn’t said more about his likely fate than anything else.

Kara dropped into the crater and surged past the bucket brigade passing shovels down to the people desperately digging out the collapsed opening. A cheer rose up around her but she ignored it.

“I NEED EVERYONE TO MOVE BACK!” she shouted, voice loud enough to be heard over the frenetic rescue operation and the helicopters circling above. “MOVE AWAY FROM THE TUNNEL NOW!”

She used her x-ray vision to ascertain the extent of the damage. She saw that the collapsed tunnel opened into an air-pocket about thirty feet in front of her and there were several people there, some moving and some not.

“Earpiece!” she shouted and one of the DEO agents up at the surface dropped one down to her.

Kara shoved it into her ear. “Vasquez, can you hear me?”

“Got you, Supergirl. What do you need?”

“Kill the chatter to this earpiece and to the ones belonging to our missing. If they are receiving transmissions, I want them to hear only me. I only want to hear them and you, got it? On my mark.”

“On your mark, Supergirl. When you’re ready.”

“Mark,” said Kara. “Alpha team, Science team, this is Supergirl. If you can hear me, I’m coming. I’ll be entering the first air pocket from the east. It’ll be fast, so move as far west as you can go. Cover the injured and your heads. If you can hear me, do this now.”

Kara watched the people trapped in the first cavern for any sign of movement. After a few seconds, two of the humanoid images began to help the others to the back of the fissure. Tears flooded Kara’s
eyes and relief bubbled up from her toes. “They heard me!” she cried, laughing with a watery half-sob. “They’re moving!”

A deafening cheer rose up around her and she scrambled to the back of the pit to give herself as much of a running start as she could. She looked up, shouting, “Medics, be ready. I’m going in….” She stretched her fist out in front of her in the classic Supergirl pose and grinned, feeling power flood her cells. “Now,” she said and she shot forward into the earthen barrier like a red and blue cannonball. She was just as loud as one, too.

Thirty seconds later, she reappeared right where she’d started, carrying one of the Alpha team members, a young man with a head injury. He lay limply in Kara’s arms. A medic team with a litter gently took him from her and hurried up to the surface where they loaded him into a waiting LifeFlight helicopter.

Kara turned back to the escape shaft she’d created just in time to help four others out of it. They came in pairs, helping each other out of the darkened cave, covered in dusty blood and dirt. Dr. Solis and two of her scientists were in this group. Only slivers of the yellow of their jumpsuits still showed through the mud and grime and they were all injured in some way, mostly cuts and broken bones.

Alpha leader Zoe Fields was the last out. She held a field dressing to a deep cut over her eye but seemed otherwise sound. Dirty, but sound.

She grabbed Supergirl’s arm. “I’ve still got a scientist and eight members of my team unaccounted for, Supergirl,” she said. “Please help them.”

“I will, Agent Fields,” said Kara, passing the DEO agent off to another pair of medics. “I’m going back in now. We’ll get your people out.”

Fields squeezed her arm in gratitude and gave Kara a weak smile. “Thank you, Supergirl.”

Kara nodded and was just about to head back into the darkness when the ground began to shake with a rumbling shudder.

“Aftershock!” shouted several of the rescue personnel and people scattered in multiple directions, trying to keep from being buried.

But it didn’t feel like an aftershock to Kara. For one thing, it wasn’t very powerful. For another, it was localized. She leapt up and out of the pit just in time to see the Mohlkanite surface sixty feet to the west of her location. He was carrying an unconscious Hank Henshaw.

The DEO agents nearest the Mohlkanite exploded into action, lining up in formation and readying their weaponry as others bolted toward them, intending to join the fight.

“No!” said Kara. She leapt into the air and came down in front of the Mohlkanite, putting herself between him and the agents, clearly protecting him and Hank. “No! Don’t! You don’t understand!”

Alex started running when she saw the standoff.

“Vasquez,” she barked. “Patch me through to Supergirl!”

“Done. You are go for Supergirl, Alex.”

“Supergirl, stand down. Let us capture the—“
“NO!” roared Kara. “Alex, he’s helping me! He volunteered when I told him people were trapped! Please, he’s helping! He’s not attacking!”

Anger shuttered Alex’s features. “He caused these quakes, Supergirl! He’s dangerous! A killer!”

Kara shook her head. “He didn’t cause them; he stopped them! He sensed the quake somehow and burrowed down to where it started. He feeds on kinetic energy, Alex! He stopped them from being worse. Please let us get Hank to the medics. Please.”

Alex’s jaw flexed as she gritted her teeth. “He’s an escaped prisoner;” she ground out. “We can’t trust him.”

“I know, Alex,” said Kara, putting up her hands in a sign of surrender. “I know what his record says.” She looked at her sister, blue eyes pleading. “But when I told him there were people trapped, people who were injured, he didn’t hesitate. He could have escaped. He could have disappeared. We would never have found him. But he didn’t, Alex.” She looked over her shoulder and gave the Mohlkanite an encouraging smile. “I trust him.”

After a long, tense moment, Alex sighed and shook her head. “Agents, stand down. Medics, collect Director Henshaw.”

Kara released a heavy sigh and helped the medics lower Hank into the litter. Alex came up beside her sister just as the medical team hurried away.

The Mohlkanite touched Kara’s shoulder with the tip of one long claw. “The oootherrrrrs beeellllloooow are allllllliiiiiiive. Thetheeeey nnnneeedd hellllllllllllpp.”

Kara looked at her sister expectantly and the older woman sighed.

“Go,” she said. “I’ll organize med transport.”

Kara grinned and jumped into the fresh crater, followed by her new friend. Alex, annoyed, had Vasquez relay messages to the medics. When the two aliens returned, they each carried two of the missing. Medic teams were waiting at the edge of the crater to receive them.

One last trip below and all the missing were finally accounted for and were receiving medical attention.

Alex Danvers and a squad of DEO agents met Supergirl and the Mohlkanite after the last med team left them.

Alex looked up at the Mohlkanite, giving him her best no-nonsense glare. “Your record from Fort Rozz says you killed eight people—a foreman at the mine where you worked and seven of your fellow miners,” she said.


Kara shot Alex a meaningful look and Alex shrugged. “He could just be saying that, Kara. Criminals aren’t known for their honesty.”

Kara rested her hand on the Mohlkanite’s arm. “We can at least look into it, can’t we? We owe him that much.”
Alex glanced over her shoulder at what was left of Grid Block Zero and her science operation. She watched as emergency personnel packing up the rescue equipment high-fived each other, grinning. They knew a victory when they saw it and Alex did, too. All fifteen of her missing people had been found alive and were free from the wreckage—in less time than it had taken for the first responders to arrive on scene. It wasn’t the outcome she’d been expecting, that’s for sure.

“If anything goes wrong,” she warned, turning back to Kara with an indulgent half-smile, “it’ll be on your head.”

Kara rolled her eyes. “What else is new?” she asked.

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Continued in *Need*
Thank you, again, abydosdork, for the wonderful chapter banner. I am so lucky to have you working on this project with me.

Regarding my version of the Kryptonian language: I am taking my inspiration from the words El Mayara (used in the show) and from my studies of Hebrew. The Kryptonian website did not have the words I needed in their lexicon, so I have decided to split from canon Kryptonian and make my own headcanon version.

Also, this is the house I used as Cat's beach house: http://shubinanddonaldson.com/projects/urban-spa-residence/

Cat Grant could not remember a time when she felt more apprehensive, less in control.

There were those three terrifying nights in Grozny when she was covering the first Chechen war and the only coping mechanism available to her in the darkness and chaos had been her own voice, humming little snatches of whatever classical music she could remember from her childhood piano lessons. Then maybe a few frightening moments during Adam’s birth, when she was young and impressionable and her name carried less weight. When pain and the uncertainty inherent in the question What if? was still new, still had the power to wrap around her heart and squeeze it dry.

But nothing since—unless she counted the occasional sting of the question What next?, the thrill of the chase during large-scale negotiations, or the little nibbles at the edges of her stronghold that were a consequence of ruling a worldwide media empire. She didn’t count them, though, which made her current predicament all the more alarming.

She sat on the teak double-chaise on the sleeping terrace off her master suite at the beach house, curled up with her iPad and a cashmere throw, nursing her second bourbon. She tried to keep herself
from biting the edge of one thumbnail while she watched the footage being streamed to her by the helicopter she’d sent to watch over Kara. She was losing that battle.

The pilot, Trent, had his orders and was following them to the letter. None of the footage he was shunting her way was going out live—not tonight. Cat didn’t give one good goddamn about any story. All she wanted was Kara safe and whole and uninjured.

All she wanted was Kara found.

Were the earthquakes a coincidence or was the escaped alien causing them? Had the alien captured Supergirl or were the earthquakes the result of some epic battle for dominance below ground? Did this shadow agency for whom Kara’s sister apparently worked even know what the alien was capable of or had they just sent Kara into a hole in the ground, blind?

Minutes crawled by and Trent continued his perimeter sweeps with no sign of the tell-tale red and blue, of Kara’s tow-head and big blue eyes. Instead, he guided first responders to help the trapped and the wounded, providing light and guidance where both were sorely needed. Cat made a mental note to take the pilot to lunch when this was all over. In her experience, monetary recognition was always better received when it was given personally from employer to employee and Cat intended to show her appreciation of Trent’s actions tonight with a sizeable bonus. One he thoroughly deserved.

The longer there was no sign of Kara, though, the less composed Cat became. She had the viscerally inappropriate urge to launch her iPad off her balcony just to hear the satisfying crunch it would make hitting the cliff face below. She didn’t, though. Reasonable people did not destroy property when angry or frustrated.

Or frightened out of their minds, she added, wanting to be honest. She had been reasonable about Kara…once. Hadn’t she?

How had it happened? How had this young woman, this alien from another planet with powers beyond imagining, worked her way inside Cat’s heart so deeply, so completely, it felt like she had always been there—organic and innate, like the center of every cell?

Is this how it would be—their relationship? Would Cat ever become accustomed to feeling her heartbeat in her throat when Kara was off saving the world, to feeling fear leap against her skin like a hunted doe, crashing through the underbrush steps ahead of the hunter?

How could she bear it?

A blur of red and blue shot past the CatCo cameraman and he pulled the lens off the rescue operations below him to find the source of the disruption. He caught the bobble of a black helicopter after a near collision and then found and focused on the cause of it: Supergirl hovering in the sky, looking pained and caked with dirt, but whole.

Cat chided herself for the tears that flooded her eyes…and for wanting to hug the iPad she had nearly thrown off her balcony once tonight already. And that’s when she knew, knew how she would bear scenes like this playing out over and over throughout her future with Kara, how they would—because it was clear to her now where her heart lay and how intertwined their lives had become.

“Together,” she whispered, a little drunk on relief and on love. Her smile trembled at the thought and she pressed one curved finger against her lips to still them.

You’d better get used to thinking that word, she cautioned herself, because you’ll be saying it soon enough.
When the scene changed from Kara hugging her sister—what was her name? Alex?—to her standing in front of a wall of rocks and dirt, Cat snatched her phone from the table next to her and pressed a single button.

“Get me sound,” was all she said before she hung up.

The fact she only had to refresh the feed on her iPad once before her request was granted pleased her greatly and she swiped the volume slider up until she could clearly hear Kara’s voice as she ordered people away from the tunnel. She held her breath with Kara while everyone waited to see if the trapped agents had heard her and then laughed with her when she confirmed they had, heart swelling with pride as the cheer of the crowd went up around her.

When the cameraman swooped in for a close-up of Kara’s face just before she broke through the collapsed tunnel, Cat could have kissed him. He didn’t just catch the perfect shot of Kara’s confident and joyous smile; he nailed it, and Cat felt the tiniest twinge of remorse that she could never use it.

It was the consummate representation of everything Supergirl stood for: strength, confidence, and the joy in helping others. It was also too recognizable, too detailed. It would lead Maxwell Lord and others like him straight to Kara Danvers—something Cat wouldn’t risk. Not now, not ever.

Even though she could never use the footage, Cat could no more suppress her finely-honed journalistic sensibilities than she could sprout wings and fly. The images of Supergirl clapping arms in camaraderie with the black-clad tactical soldier were film gold as were the images that followed, the ones of her standing between guns aimed by her alleged allies and the very creature she’d been sent to help capture.

The explicit esprit de corps of the first scene and her promise to find the agent’s missing comrades… that was all Supergirl.

This, though…. Inserting herself into the conflict to diffuse it, appealing to whatever better angels might exist? This was all Kara.

When Cat had said “You look too hard for the good in people, darling,” she hadn’t meant for the word people to be defined so broadly. That—that thing—that whatever it was—it was easily ten feet tall and had a mouth filled with shiny, sharp teeth, enough to rival any shark. It held the tall, African-American agent—Agent Mulder she’d once called him—like a rag doll in its arms.

Kara fought for the creature anyway. Against her own sister and on the strength of a single good deed, but she fought and she won. This? This Cat could use, would use. The cameraman—bless him—had widened his focus to capture the whole scene. Supergirl’s features gave a general impression of determination and seriousness but not enough detail to give her identity away. The soldiers in black—even Kara’s sister—all had their backs to the camera and it would be easy enough to hide Agent Henshaw’s face by traditional means.

The public needed to see this scene, needed to bear witness to Supergirl standing up for the misunderstood alien against her own team. The inference, of course, would be “If Supergirl is willing to stand up for him, she’d stand up for someone like me, too.”

Cat had yet to meet a single human being who didn’t harbor, somewhere deep down in the bottom of his or her soul, the idea that he or she was a monster, a fraud, a failure. Seeing Supergirl defend a creature who visibly resembled their own worst fears about themselves? They couldn’t help but respond.

That would be the lesson learned tonight and every time the footage was viewed. That was what Cat
could teach, as honest and as iconic as a helping hand, as inspirational as Supergirl herself.

“Vous are worth standing up for,” she would tell them. “Stand up for yourselves.”

Knowing she likely had a few more hours until she would see Kara, Cat took her phone and her iPad into her home office, flipped the power on in her mini-command center, and got to work. She didn’t surface again until nearly four in the morning, but by then most of the major networks were playing her footage practically on loop, she had sent the front-page story for the Sunday Tribune to print, and she had a two-page editorial ready to go for the next issue of CATCO Magazine, complete with a heart-stirring personal confession about how Supergirl had inspired Cat Grant to forgive herself.

Cat knew—better than most—the type of point/counterpoint relationship one needed to engage in with the public in order to control the story. A glimpse of confessional honesty here might mean the emotional loyalty of her audience later…and a loyal audience was the foundation of Cat’s entire empire.

She never took them lightly.

At the moment, however, Cat was keyed up and desperately tired at the same time and the last thing on her mind was her audience. Dawn would come soon and, she hoped, would bring Kara with it. She had so much to say to her and no energy left to say it.

Cat sighed. She would manage somehow, like she always did: by the seat of her pants and with a lot of skill.

She scrubbed at her sandpaper eyes and realized how grimy she felt. Not rescuing-people-from-collapsed-tunnels grimy but still concerning for someone as fastidious and precise as Cat was about her appearance. She turned off the screens in her office, plugged in her iPad to charge, and grabbed her phone, heading back into the master suite and her bathroom.

She filled the tub and stripped out of the yoga pants and loose tank top she’d put on shortly after Anthony had dropped her off at the house. She lowered herself into the hot, clear water and relaxed for fifteen minutes, dozing briefly before rousing to bathe and wash her hair. Then she dried herself carefully in front of the vanity mirror, looking at herself critically, noting a scattering of freckles here, a wrinkle or two there.

All in all, not a bad reflection. Cat’s vanity was an extension of her perfectionism and she had always held herself to the highest standards. It was habit now, almost as unconscious as locking the door or putting on one’s seatbelt before starting the car. And Cat was not naïve—she knew her looks played an integral part in her ability to acquire and maintain power. The public as a whole was a fickle animal and beauty was an asset, subjective and superficial, yes, but one she wielded with expertise.

And then Kara had come along. Kara—whose alien anatomy allowed her to see so much more than just what was on the surface, whose idealism and innocence unearthed layer upon layer of depth in every person she met. Cat remembered their kiss on the balcony at Georgie’s and the way Kara had looked at her just before they’d crashed together…like Cat was the sun itself, hung in the sky for her eyes alone.

Cat wondered if she’d ever experienced anything like it before. Knowing her own beauty was one thing; seeing it reflected in Kara’s eyes was quite another. Even now, her stomach flipped at the memory of Kara’s obvious adoration and Cat found the sensation gratifying in ways she would have mocked only a few days ago.
Shaking her head at herself, Cat donned her favorite fragrance, something evocative of late afternoon sunshine and lemon groves on Tuscan hillsides, and then dressed slowly, choosing light linen pants and a sleeveless layered silk shell. She towel-dried her hair and re-made her face with a much lighter hand than she used for work. Afterward, she finger-combed her hair into place, preferring to leave it damp so it would dry in the salt breeze.

When she was satisfied, she returned to the double-chaise on the sleeping porch with her phone and a glass of juice, trying hard not to be impatient. She had never been good at waiting but Kara was worth waiting for. Cat reconciled herself to the contradiction as best she could, and used the time to read various Internet commentaries regarding Supergirl’s latest heroics.

Dawn was still a while away but Cat noted a soft lightening of the night skies. The cotton panels that shielded the sleeping porch from direct sunlight in the daytime snapped and danced in the ocean breeze. The inexorable susurration of the waves crashing against the cliff below became the breath of the world asleep and Cat truly appreciated these few moments of relative peace she’d been afforded, regardless of the reasons why.

She gasped lightly a moment later, though, feeling an electrical charge in the air around her, feeling the tingle of it against her skin. She recognized it instantly and looked up to see Supergirl—Kara—land quietly at the other end of the balcony.

Cat stood and stared, the gray cashmere throw she’d tossed over her legs slipping to the deck, forgotten. She was hyper-aware of Kara’s presence, of every detail of her appearance. Clean—no, more than clean—scrubbed pink with the faintest dusting of freckles across her nose and cheeks, like stars. Strong and sound—with no visible injuries, no evidence of mud or dirt on her boots, her suit, or her long, red cape. Nervous—hugging herself lightly, eyes big and round and apprehensive, as pale as the sea in the moonlight. Overwhelmed—shivering with adrenaline and the chill of the coming dawn.

“You’re okay,” said Cat. It wasn’t a question, not quite, but Kara nodded eagerly in answer, confirming the observation, rushing to reassure Cat, to assuage her worry.

Kara stared back at Cat and her silence howled in the few feet between them, like wind whipping down a long, lonely chasm.

“I’m…” Kara’s voice, already soft, faltered and broke. She licked her bottom lip and dropped her hands to her sides, fingers twitching, wanting to fidget with a pair of glasses not present. She curled her hands into loosely-held fists and willed herself to be still.

“I’m yours,” she said, and it was a question—and a prayer and a promise and a thousand other things, all shining in her bright blue eyes.

“Oh, yes,” breathed Cat and she surged forward, taking the two steps from the terrace in one bound before flying into Kara’s arms. She kissed her, hard and desperate, pouring all the terror and all the relief, all the realizations of the past few hours into its depths, drinking Kara in, clutching at her as if she couldn’t believe she was real, was hers.

Kara broke from the kiss, chest heaving as she fought to catch her breath. Her eyes were a storm of need searching for a verdant shoreline in which to moor, for a harbor all her own. Seeing it, seeing no doubt in Cat’s eyes, she dove back into their kiss and splayed large hands around Cat’s slender waist, lifting until she felt Cat’s legs wrap around her.

Kara groaned with the sensation, pulling her mouth from Cat’s and bracing herself against the wall, her knees all but giving out. When she felt she could move again, she headed into the house toward
what she hoped was a bedroom with a wide, welcoming bed. Her knees found it and they tumbled into it together, into cloud-like bedclothes, cool and crisp in the early morning air.

Kara dragged her scalding mouth down the long column of Cat’s neck, over sensitive porcelain skin, the inferno of her hunger reaching a fever pitch.

“Teach me how to make love to you, Cat,” Kara begged, her voice in ruins.

Cat looked up into Kara’s eyes, into rings of cobalt blue around an ocean of stars—all the stars Kara had ever known. She saw Kara’s need, her stark desire, but also the plea beneath her words and she understood.

“We’ll learn together,” whispered Cat, reaching up to caress Kara’s cheek with the backs of her fingers. Because this was worldbuilding at its most elemental level. Two realities colliding, creating a sum greater than its parts, a place where something new could grow and be and live, wild and brave. None of Cat’s previous romantic encounters could ever have prepared her for something like this….

Cat undressed Kara in silence, seeking the younger woman’s help by tugging at catches and closures she didn’t understand. Kara covered Cat’s hand with her own to show her how to release them, and watched, shivering, as Cat’s fingers learned her suit’s secrets one by one. Kara gasped every time Cat lowered her mouth to newly-revealed skin, every time she felt the fierce heat of Cat’s tongue or the nip of her teeth.

Cat, bold, left the bed to kneel at Kara’s feet, sliding the zippers of Kara’s blood-red boots down inch by inch until she could remove them. When they were gone, she pulled Kara to her feet and swept her hands from Kara’s broad shoulders to her muscular calves, ridding her of what was left of Supergirl’s armor. When she rose again from the floor, she trailed her fingertips along the same pathway, watching the younger woman quake at her touch.

“Now me, Kara,” she instructed, her voice the merest whisper, the gentlest invitation.

Kara raised trembling fingers to the hem of Cat’s silk shell, blushing to the roots of her hair before skimming it up and off Cat’s body in one fluid movement. Cat’s hair crackled with a burst of static electricity before falling in tousled curls around her face. Kara didn’t know where to look.

Cat smiled and reached for Kara’s hands, covering them with her own as she brought them to her bare skin.

“It’s okay,” she said, guiding Kara’s hands lightly, setting them free to explore. “I won’t break.”

“I might,” joked Kara, her voice a shadow of its usual self. Then all thought was lost as she covered one of Cat’s breasts with her open hand and felt Cat’s nipple tighten against her palm.

Kara slammed her eyes shut and threw her head back in surrender, releasing a long, shuddering sigh. When she opened her eyes again, they were nearly black, and the hint of a feral smile touched her lips. Her hands, once hesitant, were now sure and she curled her long fingers around Cat’s torso, brushing her thumbs over dusky nipples until Cat let her head fall back with a whimper, eyes fluttering closed as she sank into the sensation of Kara’s touch.

Unseen, Kara ducked her head and took a nipple into her hot mouth, pressing Cat to her.

“Oh, God,” groaned Cat, arching her back into Kara. She wound the fingers of one hand into long, golden hair and steadied herself with the other, digging her blunt nails into Kara’s shoulder. She bit her bottom lip to keep from crying out again, but lost that battle when Kara flattened the tip of her
tongue, flicking it lazily against the underside of the pebbled peak, humming against her skin with carnal satisfaction as she felt Cat melt in her arms, giving her whole body to the safety of Kara’s strong hands and the knowledge she would never let Cat fall.

Kara pulled her mouth away from its important work and looped Cat’s arms loosely around her neck. She bent and gathered Cat into her arms, lifting them both into the bed with a little Kryptonian assistance.

“That’s handy,” said Cat, raising one intrigued eyebrow at Kara.

Kara treated Cat to a lopsided grin—one so casually confident, it took Cat’s breath away.

“I’m full of surprises,” Kara said, leaning over Cat to capture her lips, teasing them open with earnest determination, and dipping her tongue inside, taking the tiniest taste of Cat’s offered passion. When she pulled away, she tapped Cat’s side, adding, “Lift your hips.”

Cat inhaled sharply, staring up at Kara with darkening eyes, a hint of wildness bleeding into them.

“Brazen,” she husked, doing as Kara ordered. “That’s a new color on you.” Kara hooked her thumbs into the waist of Cat’s linen pants and the straps of her lacy, barely-there underwear and swept them down Cat’s legs and off her body, dropping them off the side of the bed without looking. Cat felt her heart hammer in her chest. “I like it,” she breathed.

Kara didn’t hear her. She was…spellbound. Cat Grant, the most beautiful, most powerful, most inspiring woman in the world, lay bare beneath Kara and she was lost.

Cat cupped Kara’s cheek in her hand, lifting her eyes up to meet her own. “Don’t be afraid to touch me, Kara,” she whispered.

Kara shook her head. “I’m not,” she said softly. “I’m afraid of not being able to stop.”

Flattered and made nearly speechless by the utter sincerity of Kara’s words, Cat drew her down into a deep, languid kiss.

“One bridge at a time, darling,” Cat admonished gently, breath hitching as Kara lifted herself to settle deliciously between her long legs. “One bridge at time.”

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Kara Zor-El was an incredibly quick study where all things Cat Grant were concerned—from memorizing Cat’s comprehensive CV word for word to recognizing (at last count) 1,181 of her non-verbal communication cues to curling the fingers of her right hand just so and applying just exactly the right amount of pressure against that small, slick spot nestled behind the heartbreakingly fragile butterfly of Cat’s pelvic bone until Cat’s voice was ragged from crying out Kara’s name. She took her time discovering Cat. Like a sculptor who patiently coaxed the clay’s true form to the surface, Kara unearthed the gift of Cat’s pleasure touch by touch, treasuring every groan, every sigh, every whimper, and every rolling shudder she was able to elicit.

Kara honestly couldn’t decide which her favorite was—the taste of Cat’s trembling orgasms on her tongue or the feel of her fingers deep inside Cat when she arched her back, begging Kara, “There, Kara, oh there…. Please….”

Or is it this? she thought, spooned behind Cat as the older woman slept, holding her blissfully in her arms.
The sun was up now and had been calling to Kara for about an hour, but she ignored it, happier by far to be wrapped around—

_Around the woman I love._ She hid an untamable smile against Cat’s shoulder blade and held the woman in question just a tiny bit tighter.

It still seemed so surreal to Kara. Had she really kissed Cat in her office after work? Had that only been last night? Had they then gone to dinner on the beach? Had Kara really divulged her true identity only to discover Cat knew, had always known? Had they kissed under the stars? _Did Cat Grant really scream my name like that?_ Kara wondered, feeling the prickling heat of a blush flash over her whole body.

“Mmmm, yes, I did, darling,” purred Cat, stretching with hedonistic abandon before turning in Kara’s arms to press soft, wet kisses against Kara’s neck. “Shall we see if I can return the favor?” When Kara didn’t respond, Cat pulled away to look at the younger woman…only to find her wide-eyed and frozen, staring at her dumbly. “Kara? Darling? What is it?”

“Well…how exactly did you do that?” Kara asked, her voice much higher than normal.

Now it was Cat’s turn to stare. “Do what? What did I do?”

“You…uh…you answered a question I didn’t ask…um…out loud.” Kara whispered the words _out loud_ and she didn’t know why.

Cat’s eyes sharpened. “I most certainly did not,” she said, dismissing Kara’s claim out of hand. “You asked ‘Did Cat Grant really scream my name like that?’ I heard you quite clearly.”

Kara nodded slowly. “You—uh—yes, I did, but I didn’t actually _say_ that—like with words—well, yes, with _words_, but not with my mouth. Out loud, I mean. Because you were sleeping and I didn’t want to wake you and I was so— It’s like a dream, waking up with you in my arms, and I was remembering and trying to convince myself it was all real and then I remembered when I did that thing and you—” Kara blushed bright red and smiled shyly.

“And I screamed your name,” said Cat, leaning in to nuzzle Kara’s neck again. She gave her a gentle nip just beneath her ear. “Like that.”

“Like that,” agreed Kara, eyes fluttering shut. She wanted to surrender to Cat’s touch more than anything in the whole world but, technically, Cat had just interacted with Kara telepathically—something even Hank, a member of a telepathic alien race, wasn’t able to do—and that felt ever-so-slightly more important right now. She pulled away from Cat’s heavenly mouth and looked her dead in the eye. “But Cat, I never said what you heard. I only thought it.”

Cat saw how serious Kara was, how important this was to her, and she tempered the desire simmering beneath her skin so she could give the young woman her undivided attention. She arranged several pillows behind her to recline against as they discussed the issue.

“Okay. Let’s say—for the moment—I somehow heard your thoughts and responded to them. What does that mean?”

Kara sat up and faced Cat, hugging her knees. “I—I don’t know. I mean, it’s never happened to me before. I don’t know it’s ever happened to _any_ Kryptonian before.”

“Is there any way to find out?” asked Cat. “If it’s happened before, I mean?” She thought back to what she knew of Superman’s history. “I assume you arrived in a vessel similar to the one that
brought Superman to Earth when he was a child. Would it have any information for you?”

Kara shrugged. “No,” she said, but it came out more as a question than a certainty. “Kal’s pod had more information on Krypton than mine did because I was older—twelve—when I left. I was supposed to teach him everything I knew but Kal’s father put a lot of information in his pod just in case we were—well, there were no guarantees.” The blue of her eyes faded, brushed by old sadness. “That we both survived—it’s kind of a miracle, really.”

Cat leaned forward, her green eyes liquid with emotion, and gave Kara a sweet, soft kiss.

“One I will always be grateful for,” she whispered. The thought occurred to her again that she should know more about Kara’s life—all of it, but especially her life on Krypton and her family there. She made a mental note to ask her about it later.

*One bridge at a time,* Cat reminded herself.

That thought—or rather her having had the thought—gave Cat an idea.

“So, you’ve never experienced anything like this before and you don’t know of any reason why it should be happening.” Cat got lost in thought for a moment and Kara had to keep herself from grinning. She recognized the famous Cat-Grant-has-an-idea expression when she saw it.

“Why don’t we test it? See if it happens again?”

Kara’s eyebrows crowded her eyes for a moment. “You mean, like a science experiment?”

“Exactly!” said Cat. She reached to the bedside table for the notebook and pen she kept there for when inspiration hit. She opened it to a blank page and wrote both her own name and Kara’s name at the top, underlining each. Then she tore the next page out of the book and ripped it in half.

“Write down a thought on this piece of paper,” she instructed, handing the pen and one of the torn halves of paper to Kara. “Something odd that I’m not likely to guess, something nonsensical even. When you have it written down, begin to concentrate on it. We’ll time it—give me thirty seconds to hear you. Does that sound long enough?”

Kara smiled ruefully. “It sounds perfect,” she said, wishing she’d thought of it. Then something else occurred to her and she reached out, placing one hand on Cat’s arm. “Thank you for humoring me, Cat. This—“ she said, gesturing to the two of them, “is all so new to me and I’m still learning things about myself—about what I can and can’t do—every day.” She smiled softly. “Thank you for believing me.”

“Of course, darling,” Cat said, squeezing Kara’s hand before releasing her. “Now write down a thought.” She looked Kara up and down, letting just enough of her need for the younger woman to show in her eyes, reminding Kara they had unfinished business. “Chop chop.”

Kara blinked, distracted by those words and the look Cat had just given her. After a second, she jump-started herself and began writing. When she’d finished and had folded her paper in half, Cat was ready with her watch.

“Start concentrating…now,” she said and Cat closed her eyes, attempting to clear her mind enough to hear whatever Kara was concentrating on. Myriad thoughts immediately rushed to fill the void and she breathed through a flash of impatience and the notion this whole exercise was absurd. Kara just didn’t remember speaking the words aloud! How could it be anything else?

After wading through those two thoughts, Cat wondered how many seconds had passed, weighed
her need for Kara’s sinfully gorgeous body against her need for coffee, registered the sound of seagulls sailing the skies outside, and thought about checking her email briefly before returning to what she really wanted to be doing right now.

*Which, of course, is Kara,* she thought, a salacious grin accompanying her crass play on words.

As she sat there and the seconds ticked away, she never once heard Kara’s voice in her head or any thought she would have attributed to the young woman.

Kara knew the thirty seconds were almost up. She continued to sing the opening line of the song she’d chosen in her head and reached out to curl her fingers around Cat’s wrist to let her know she could stop listening.

—hippopotamus for Christmas. Time’s up.

Cat’s eyes shot open and she jerked her wrist out of Kara’s grasp. Kara saw the white all the way around Cat’s startled ice-green irises.

“What? Did you hear something?”

Cat swallowed carefully. Surely, she hadn’t. Surely, it was just a fragment of a memory popping into her head at exactly the right moment. But Cat couldn’t remember a single instance where she would have heard Kara singing Christmas carols—especially *that* one: Gayla Peevey’s *I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas.* Fifth on her list of most hated Christmas carols of all time, right under Bing Crosby’s *Mele Kalikimaka.* Carter had been especially fond of the hippopotamus carol the year he’d turned five.

“Cat?” asked Kara, concern filling her eyes.

Cat swallowed again and took a shallow breath. “Only a hippopotamus will do,” she said, completing the opening stanza of the song, her voice barely above a whisper.

Kara covered her mouth with one hand, her eyes as big as plates. Shaking, she lifted the folded piece of paper from her lap and handed it to Cat. Cat opened it, read it, and then closed it again. She knew what it said.

“It didn’t happen until you touched me,” Cat said, careful to keep her voice even. She didn’t understand what any of this meant—she would, eventually; she was sure of that—but she didn’t want to give Kara any reason to worry. “I wasn’t expecting you to—perhaps that’s why. My eyes were closed; I didn’t see you.”

“Maybe,” said Kara and Cat could see she was too late. Kara’s eyes were fretful, anxious.

They tried the experiment three more times with Kara touching Cat each time. They were unsuccessful.

They tried in the other direction, too, with Kara listening for Cat’s thoughts, to no avail.

“I’m sorry,” said Kara after Cat put the notebook back on her bedside table. She sat huddled in a knot under the sheet, hugging her knees, her eyes pale and drawn.

“Darling, for what?” When Kara’s only answer was to look away, Cat sighed. She moved to sit beside Kara and wrapped her arms around the younger woman, kissing the back of her head. “What is it?” she asked. She kept her voice soft. Twelve years of mothering Carter had taught her much about the care and feeding of a sensitive heart.
Kara looked up at Cat, her eyes rimmed with tears. “Aren’t you afraid, Cat? Of what I could do—what I am doing?” She dashed the tears from her eyes before they could fall. “I don’t know what’s causing this or if there’s any way to fix it! And say we figure it out and we do fix it—what’s next? What? How many ways can I hurt you, Cat?”

“Exactly the same number of ways I can hurt you, Kara.” When Kara shook her head, preparing to argue, Cat kissed her—a brief touch of her lips meant to disarm, not to inflame. Then she pressed her lips to Kara’s temple and blinked back tears of her own. “Exactly the same number,” she whispered harshly, combing her fingers through Kara’s hair. “How many times did I push you away? How many times did I belittle you, or mock you, or bully you? Hmm? And for what reason? My cowardice.”

“You are the bravest person I know,” said Kara fiercely.

Cat chuckled mirthlessly. “Sure, against a hostile take-over by my board of directors or facing a murderous ex-employee with power issues—figuratively and literally.” She stroked Kara’s hair, and her expression softened when she looked at the younger woman. “But I didn’t have enough courage to tell a beautiful, intelligent, caring young woman how I felt about her. If left to me, you and I would still be stuck in that silent hell I devised.”

Part of Kara wanted to believe Cat, wanted to fall helplessly into her arms and forget all her doubts. The other part? The other part wanted to run far away, where she couldn’t hurt anyone ever again.

“You didn’t sign up for this….”

Cat raised an eyebrow. “And you signed up for this? A selfish, power-hungry, fifty-year-old single mother with delusions of grandeur?”

Kara burst into tears. “But I love you!” she cried, dissolving into sobs.

Cat gasped and tears flooded her own eyes. “Oh, Kiera, darling….” She cupped Kara’s face in her hands and swiped hot tears from the younger woman’s cheeks with her thumbs. She peppered Kara with kisses, tasting the salt on her skin. “I love you, too,” she whispered, laughing and crying at the same time. “Haven’t you figured that out yet?”

“You do?” asked Kara, hiccupping as her sobs slowly subsided. “It’s not too fast?”

There was so much hope, so much love in Kara’s eyes; it took Cat’s breath away.

“Why do you think I fired you eight times this year alone, Kara?” she asked, wiping tears from her own cheeks. “Why do you think I pushed you toward Adam?” Cat sighed and shook her head, steeped in guilt, bitter like forgotten tea. “There were days when your smile was the only thing that kept me going.” She looked at Kara, haunted, and reached out to tug at one tendril of her hair with trembling fingertips. “And there were days when your smile filled me with such longing it was unbearable.” She smirked self-consciously. “If you think about it really hard, I’m sure you can guess which ones.”

“But Adam?” Kara shook her head. She wondered where Cat had ever gotten the idea she was the slightest bit interested in him as anything other than Cat’s long-lost son.

“At least if you were with him, you’d still be close,” Cat confessed. “I could even show you affection—safe, neutral, completely justifiable affection.” She closed her eyes briefly, ashamed now of her rationalizations, of manipulations that had hurt three people, herself included. “It was the ghost of what I really wanted, but I convinced myself I could live with it. That it would be enough.”
Cat expected to see disapproval in Kara’s eyes after that admission. Instead, she saw empathy.

“And I tried to make it work, thinking if I just waited long enough, everything I felt for you would magically transfer to him,” she said. “You’d be in my life as more than just my boss and maybe that would mean we’d become closer.” Kara’s eyes lit up with a memory. “When you brought me coffee that morning, I remember thinking *It’s not what I want but it might be enough.*” She grimaced and the light in her eyes disappeared. “Then he kissed me—just before Bizarro attacked—and I knew.”

“Knew what?” asked Cat.

Kara smiled sadly. “That I’d rather be with you—even if nothing ever changed between us—than live a lie with Adam. He deserved better.” She raked a hand through her unkempt hair and shrugged. “I did, too.”

Cat leaned in to kiss Kara, just the lightest, most loving touch of lips. “Your heart astonishes me, darling,” she said. “Thank you for thinking of Adam—especially when I wasn’t.”

Kara reached up and tucked a lock of Cat’s hair behind her ear. “Do you think he knows? That he got caught in the middle of us?” she asked. “I’ll tell him,” she offered, wanting to protect Cat’s fragile relationship with her estranged son. “It should come from me.”

Cat shook her head. “He knows. He figured it out fairly quickly, actually.”

Kara stared at Cat, dumbfounded. “How?”

Cat shrugged. “He confronted me about your name. Or rather, about why I didn’t use your real name and, instead, insisted upon calling you ‘Kiera.’ My rationale for the choice did not impress him. From there, it was a decidedly small leap to the real reason.”

Kara paled visibly. “Was he mad?”

“He was. For about a week. He felt used, I think. Then he told me he understood.” Cat smiled ruefully. “It’s safe to say he’s moved on now,” she said. “He started our monthly call this month by asking ‘Have you told Kiera how you feel about her yet?’”

Kara hid her eyes behind one hand. “What did you say?”

“I ignored him until he apologized.”

Kara nodded, commiserating with Adam. “I’ve been there before,” she said. A second later, she remembered something. “Wait. You called me ‘Kiera’—like, five minutes ago.”

“I did,” agreed Cat. “It would seem I’m reclaiming the name.”

“Re…claiming?” asked Kara.

“Mmmhmm,” hummed Cat, leaning in to nuzzle that spot she loved on Kara’s neck, the place right below her ear. “I’ve used it at CatCo so long, people associate it with me being a heartless bitch.” Cat nibbled her way up until her mouth was level with Kara’s ear. “Now when I ‘slip up’ and say it at work, no one will know I’m really saying, ‘I love you.’”

“No one but me,” said the younger woman breathlessly, her heart in her eyes.

“That’s the point,” teased Cat, turning Kara’s head just enough to capture her lips in a kiss that spoke
volumes. Before they could get too lost in the fairytale, though, Cat pulled away. “I know this is a lot to ask—especially since you were so attentive to me this morning—but would you be terribly upset if we postponed making love again for just a little while longer?” she asked. “You see, I want to take my time with you.” She kissed Kara’s cheek. “I want you to know how much I’ve wanted you.” She kissed the corner of Kara’s mouth. “I want to spend hours finding out how many different ways you’ll say my name when you come—“

Kara inhaled sharply, her eyes turning indigo in a flash.

A sensual smile curved Cat’s lips. “But I need to wake up a little. I thought I’d take a quick shower.”

Kara’s stomach chose that moment to howl like a starving wolf. She blushed.

“Apparently, I’ll be making breakfast,” she declared, glaring down at her middle, annoyed by its interruption. She leaned into Cat to give her a quick kiss. “Take as long as you need,” she said. Her eyes danced when she smiled. “I’m not going anywhere.”

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Twenty minutes later, Cat followed her nose to the first floor, lured by the smell of coffee, toast, and eggs. She stopped in the kitchen first, shocked to see it spotless and dark. Where were those delicious smells coming from?

She headed through the dining room—also dark—and paused by the edge of the long, farmhouse table, as yet unseen. Kara was on the balcony, seated at the vintage Eames patio set with her hair tied up in a hasty knot at the back of her head, soaking up the sun. In fact, she had her face turned to the light and was grinning with such unabashed joy, Cat couldn’t help but grin, too.

*She really is a morning glory,* she thought, only now realizing how accurate Georgie’s comment from the night before had been. Even the way Kara looked at her took on a deeper meaning as Cat watched the younger woman bask. What had she said she saw when she looked at Cat? Incandescence?

Cat prayed she’d never see the day when that was no longer true.

Done sun-worshipping for the moment, Kara looked down at the table and shoveled another spoonful of whatever she was eating into her mouth. The image prompted Cat’s empty stomach to grumble and she took another step toward the balcony, only to stop again when she saw what had to be her place at the table.

Kara had angled a deck umbrella so Cat’s seat was entirely in the shade. A place setting had been arranged there with the precision of a five-star restaurant and Cat saw meticulous attention had been paid to her preferences and needs. Ice water in a glass goblet, exactly four ounces of cranberry juice in a Wedgewood tumbler, an oversized mug containing something hot, and sliced fruit—what looked like melon, plum, and strawberries—on what she assumed was a chilled plate, all surrounding a plate containing a single slice of nine-grain toast cut on the diagonal and spread with fresh avocado and sea salt. A soft-boiled egg in an egg cup sat in the center of it all, like a round queen on a tiny throne.

Cat gripped the back of the chair next to her, overcome. No one in her life had ever been so observant, so attentive, or so thoughtful—no one had ever cared enough or understood enough or had even taken the time to learn the whys and wherefores of Cat Grant’s standards. Except Kara Danvers, the one who’d said an emphatic yes to devoting herself entirely to “the job” on her first day
and then had elevated that devotion to an art form. Kara Danvers, the one Cat never saw coming, not until it was far too late.

*If that mug contains a latte, I might propose on the spot,* she thought…and then quickly put the thought out of her head, just in case.

Cat opened the sliding glass door and joined Kara in the sunlight, noting the younger woman was wearing her discarded black tank top from the night before. Loose and shapeless on Cat, it was the opposite on Kara and she tried not to stare.

“This looks lovely, darling,” she said, leaning down to bestow a smiling kiss on Kara’s lips. Cat’s loosely-tied silk robe gave Kara a tantalizing view of bare skin and Cat, pleased, watched the pulse point at the base of Kara’s throat quicken.

As she straightened, Cat licked her bottom lip, surprised by a spicy sweetness on her tongue—one that tasted suspiciously like cinnamon and chocolate.

“Is that ice cream?” she asked as she sat, taken aback. A heaping plate of eggs and toast sat in front of Kara, untouched.

Kara nodded and grinned sheepishly, lifting the round half-gallon container she was holding in her lap so Cat could see.

“Well, it was,” she said, cheeks pinking with embarrassment. “I’ve almost finished it now. I eat dessert first a lot of the time—especially if I’ve been…active…within the past twenty-four hours. I need the calories and Alex always says if anyone has earned the right to eat dessert first, it’s me.” Kara grinned again and dove back in for another spoonful.

Cat wondered if Alex meant Kara had earned the right because she was Supergirl or if she’d earned it because of everything she’d lost. She suspected it was a bit of both and the time was coming—soon now—when Cat would insist on hearing the story of Kara’s life. From the beginning. Every word.

It had all been so different with Superman—with Kal-El—an infant saved from a burning planet by parents who’d made the ultimate sacrifice. His story was practically biblical in scope, reminding many of the story of Moses. And like the Egypt of the bible story, it was easy to forget Krypton was a real and complex planet, with millions of inhabitants whose lives had been cut short—tragically and unfairly. Kal-El had only been born on Krypton; he wasn’t a product of their culture or their history and he didn’t remember his home except through instructional recordings sent along with him in his pod.

The age difference between Kara and Kal-El meant Kara carried the whole of Krypton’s legacy in her heart. That she still had room in it for love and joy was a testament to the parents who had raised her, both her natural ones and her foster ones. It was time Cat got to know them, all of them.

But not today.

Instead, she took a sip of her latte—held at the perfect temperature via Kryptonian methods, no doubt—and said, “Let me guess—you can’t gain weight on our fair planet.”

Kara licked her spoon clean. “I can,” she said hesitantly. “I mean, I did after I got here, while I was still growing. And if I needed to increase my muscle mass now, I *could*—but I’d have to eat around the clock and triple my average daily caloric intake. For a few weeks, at least.” She wrinkled her nose, finding the thought distasteful. “It wouldn’t be pretty.”
“We’ll be keeping that little tidbit to ourselves,” said Cat dourly. “Otherwise we’ll lose half our readership.”

Kara laughed. Cat did not. It was Kara’s first clue something might be wrong.

Cat cracked her egg and expertly lifted its crown-like shell. It was perfectly cooked, with an unctuous amber center, as beautifully golden as a setting sun. She tore a corner from one half of her avocado toast and dipped it into the egg carefully.

She scrutinized Kara closely for a moment, noticing the longer the younger woman sat in the sun, the more she seemed to glow. Not in the beachy sand-and-surf way but from within, as if she somehow pulled the light inside her and stored it there. Perhaps she did, for all Cat knew.

How depleted had Kara been when she’d landed on Cat’s balcony this morning? What kind of injuries—if any—had she suffered during the earthquakes and the subsequent rescue operations? What kind of injuries could she suffer, period? Where were the chinks in that beautiful armor? How many ways were there to exploit those weaknesses and how many of Kara’s enemies were devising new and horrible ways to do so, even now? How close had Kara come to death? How many times was Kara’s presence at her desk in the morning a bona fide miracle Cat simply had not recognized?

And why—when their night had been so full—did the day feel so suddenly empty?

“If you don’t mind me asking, what is your average daily caloric intake?” Cat took a bite of her toast and regarded Kara with shuttered eyes. She sat utterly still except for the small movements of her mouth and throat as she ate, radiating an aura of precise control. Kara’s finely-honed system of red flags—the ones specifically attuned to Cat—awakened with a start.

“About eighty-five hundred, give or take,” said Kara cautiously. “It really depends on the day—on my level of physical activity, how much sunlight I’ve had, whether or not I’ve flown and how far—things like that.” She scraped the last bite of ice cream out of the container but dropped it and the spoon and pushed it away, finding her appetite gone.

“And what kind of day did you have yesterday?” asked Cat, her voice brittle and crackling with ice. She picked up her mug and took a sip of her coffee, never feeling its warmth. Everything she’d felt last night—even moments ago—seemed to be falling away from her, slipping through her fingers to be trapped under a thick plate of cold, silent glass, no longer immediate and accessible.

No, she thought. Just that one word, without intonation, without urgency or intent. And she didn’t know if she meant No, please stay or No, please go.

Kara searched Cat’s eyes for a hint of what had happened, of what had gone wrong. Her brain screamed at her, yelling GO GO GO until the sound became almost pain, became a pressure behind her eyes she had never felt before. She didn’t know what to do so she sat rooted to her chair, trying not to press her hands to her ears.

Cat looked at Kara across from her and thought how deceptive her looks were, her kindness was—how they hid her true strength and power. For some reason, Cat was reminded of her father, of his booming voice and his barrel chest and his larger-than-life personality and how those things had hidden his goodness, his integrity, and his tender heart.

She’d lost her father to a crack in his armor no one had even known existed and her mother and she had both withdrawn—Katherine narrowing into a tight little fortress of anger and bitterness while Cat launched herself into a trajectory of accomplishment meant to elevate her above the pain. It hadn’t. Kara had pricked the bubble of that particular illusion with one simple gesture, reminding Cat her
father still lived on in her heart and would, always...if she knew where to look.

And if I lose Kara, who will remind me of her place in my heart? she wondered bleakly.

Kara didn’t know what was happening to her. The screaming in her brain was getting louder by the second and had now become the impetus to move but she didn’t know to where. She fought it as long as she could, trying to focus on Cat and her needs, trying not to cry out with frustration that had no identifiable source, but the GO GO GO became an order she could no longer disobey and she lurched up out of her chair, knocking it over backwards.

She stumbled toward Cat and fell, reaching out to protect the smaller woman from the impact of her body as they collided. Her left hand slid over Cat’s bare right thigh under her robe and something happened the moment they touched. A connection—like the shockwave of a silent implosion—shook them both and Cat felt the glass between her and her emotions shatter, love and warmth and tenderness—her own and Kara’s—rushing in to melt the icy tendrils of fear that had paralyzed her.

Cat gasped and pitched forward just as Kara rose from the deck, carrying them both upward, wrapping Cat up in her arms and pulling her into the sunlight, into her own warmth. She slid one hand up to cradle the back of Cat’s head and curled herself around the smaller woman as much as her body would allow, roughly kissing Cat’s temple, utterly relieved. The pressure and the screaming in Kara’s head were gone, as was the overwhelming need to move. In fact, she didn’t want to move at all right now. As long as she had Cat in her arms, everything was fine.

A single phrase bubbled up through her fading agitation to merge with the wash of peace and calm now flowing through her.

“El Mayara,” whispered Cat, hands fisted in Kara’s tank top. She closed her eyes, absorbing Kara’s serenity and her love, seemingly through the younger woman’s pores.

Kara swallowed around the knot of tears in her throat. “Stronger together,” she said hoarsely and she kissed the top of Cat’s head, trying not to cry.

Cat looked up at Kara and brushed her fingertips over the younger woman’s cheek.

“What’s happening to us?” she asked softly, confusion warring with worry in her eyes.

“I don’t know,” said Kara, her blue eyes serious but tranquil, too. “But I think it’s past time for a call to my cousin in Metropolis.” She took a deep, steadying breath. “An excruciatingly awkward call.”

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Kara paced and held her cell phone to her ear, counting the rings on the other end of the line.

Curled up in her chair, Cat distracted herself by watching the sway of Kara’s hips as she walked, wondering where she had found the gauzy slip of fabric she’d fastened around them in a barely-there sarong. Inquiring minds wanted to know.

“What?”

Kara breathed a sigh of relief when Kal finally picked up.

“You okay?” he asked, a trace of concern lacing his rich, resonant voice. Kara had called the ‘official business’ number. Something was up.

“Yes,” said Kara, glancing quickly at Cat. “And no,” she added. “Would it be okay if I put you on
“Sure, Kara,” he replied and Kara placed her phone on the table so she and Cat could both hear. “What’s going on? You sound...stressed.”

Kara nodded and started to pace again, wondering how she was going to get this all out. She looked up to Kal as if he was an older brother—a distantly older brother who had grown up and away from home long before Kara had arrived on the scene. He was important to her largely for their shared history and for his support, but they had not ever been close, emotionally speaking. A fact which was making this conversation just that much more difficult to have.

Looking at Cat reminded Kara why the conversation was vitally important and she took a deep breath.

“I’m going to get right to the point because we’re—um—we’re having a pretty weird day here and I’m not sure what’s happening and it’s happened—like—four times now and every time it gets a little less scary but it’s still weird, Kal, and we’re both a little—“

Cat was grateful when Kal finally interrupted.

“Whoa, Kara—slow down,” he said, chuckling. “Let’s get the preliminaries out of the way first.”

“Preliminaries?” asked Kara, stopping short in her pacing.

“How about you introduce me to your friend? Why don’t we start there?”

Kara cast a pleading look at Cat and Cat nodded once, stifling a smile. The topic might be serious but Cat was certainly enjoying watching a nervous, unsettled Supergirl have the sex talk with her older cousin.

“It’s Cat Grant, Superman,” said Cat, putting Kara out of her misery. “I apologize for the interruption to your Saturday.”

“No apology needed, Miss Grant,” said Kal warmly. “It’s a pleasure to speak with you finally... though I’m a little surprised. I didn’t know you were on the list of those in the know.”

“It’s a recent development,” conceded Cat. “Though it wasn’t particularly difficult to put two and two together. One doesn’t run a worldwide media conglomerate without mastering one’s attention to detail.”

Kal laughed. “I imagine not,” he agreed. “Kara has always spoken very highly of you. Now I see why.”

Cat couldn’t help but smile at Kara’s blush and the way she shook her head and walked away from the phone, her posture screaming Oh God, just kill me! If Kara was this upset over just the introductions, Cat hesitated to think how the rest of the conversation was likely to affect her.

“The feelings are quite mutual, I assure you,” she said, catching Kara’s eye and lifting one elegant eyebrow. Kara visibly melted and her soft, answering smile gave Cat hope she’d be able to get through this in one piece.

“So how can I be of assistance, ladies?” Kal asked. When he didn’t get an immediate answer, he prodded, a touch more concern evident in his voice. “Kara?”

Kara bit her bottom lip so hard, she would have bit right through it had she been human.
No time like the present, she thought, rolling her eyes. When she’d said the same thing to herself earlier today, she really wasn’t expecting this particular outcome.

“So…Kal…tell me about Kryptonians and telepathy.” The young woman winced at how lame that sounded and Cat had to look elsewhere to keep from laughing at Kara’s consternation.

“O…kay,” said Kal, confused but game. It was clear he hadn’t expected this to be the focus of their discussion. “Broad topic but I’ll see what I can come up with. Kryptonians are immune to a wide range of the communications techniques employed by most telepathic races, as you know.” He paused for a second. “You do know that, right?”

Kara rolled her eyes. Of course she knew that; she lived it on a daily basis. “Yes, I know,” she said, flapping her hands at the phone in an unseen effort to get Kal to hurry up.

“Right. Anyway, from what I understand, the structure of our brains won’t allow those with a general skill in telepathic communication or manipulation access to penetrate our thoughts.” He sighed briefly. “I don’t know if this was true on Krypton, but it’s certainly true on Earth. I suspect it’s part of our brains’ specialized immune system and our immunity is as amplified by Earth’s yellow sun as is our strength.”

Kara nodded, only half listening. None of this was helping the slightest bit.

“Okay. Great. Thank you for that.” She began to pace again, reviewing and discarding seven versions of her next question before finally blurring, “Are there forms of telepathy Kryptonians themselves experience? You know, like maybe after a big…event…in one’s life?”

She winced again and wondered how long she’d have to lie at the bottom of the ocean to drown herself. Which she was definitely going to do right after this phone call.

“I’m…not sure I’m following you, Kara,” said Kal. “A big event like a trauma?”

“Not exactly,” began Kara but she immediately revised her response when she saw Cat’s face sharpen with annoyance. “Not at all, actually. No trauma. Not here. Nope.” She hugged herself tightly and spun away from Cat, not able to endure those piercing eyes looking at her while she fumbled for these words. “More like an…intimate…event?”

There was a long, very pointed, very specific silence on the other end of the line.

“I…ah…. I didn’t know you were seeing anyone, Kara,” Kal finally managed. He cleared his throat as if he was going to continue but he didn’t. Cat thought she could hear him drumming his fingers on a wooden surface in the background. Eventually, he asked, “Do I… Do I know him?”

Kara goggled at the phone. “Him?” she squeaked.

Cat, once again, came to the rescue.

“We haven’t had the pleasure of meeting yet, Superman, but I assure you I’m looking forward to it when we finally do.”

A thump, a flurry of bangs and clunks, and the sound of something glass crashing to the floor preceded another long silence.

“Oh. I— Oh. “

Kara rolled her eyes and walked away from the phone again. She threw her hands up to the sky in a
Cat tried her best to cut through the awkwardness of the moment—for her own sake as much as anyone else’s. Kara’s mortification about the deeply personal nature of this conversation buffeted her like a category five hurricane, making it hard to concentrate.

“Another recent development,” she continued, “though I admit to harboring feelings for Kara for some time. I consider myself fortunate she took it upon herself to press the issue.” She reached out for Kara’s hand and kissed the back of it tenderly when it was offered her, looking up at Kara with loving eyes. “Very fortunate,” she husked.

“I…see,” said Kal and the tightness in his voice suggested he was trying very hard to choose his words carefully. “And since becoming…ah…romantically involved, you’ve been experiencing some form of telepathy?”

“It would seem so—“ began Cat only to be interrupted by an impatient young Kryptonian.

“She can hear my thoughts, Kal!” Kara cried, snatching the phone off the table. She raked her fingers roughly through her hair, undoing the twist at the back in frustration. “Not all the time—not every—but—“ She resumed her pacing. “Anyway, we tested it—to make sure it wasn’t a fluke or something—and it worked! Well, it worked the first time. Not so much after that.” She paused and stared into the distance for a moment, as if trying to work out exactly why that had been the case, before another thought occurred to her and she flipped around, building up another head of steam. Cat was afraid she would wear a hole right through the deck at this rate. “And then—then a little while ago I started to feel this pressure behind my eyes and in my ears—like—like something was telling me to get up and move! But I didn’t know what to do or where to go so I just sat there until I couldn’t anymore. It felt like my head was going to explode if I didn’t move right now and I got up and fell into Cat and—and—“

Cat uncurled herself from her chair at the table and rose, placing her hand lightly on Kara’s bare shoulder. The younger woman’s rigidity and tension disappeared instantly and she turned, seeking the comfort of Cat’s arms.

“Something happened when we touched,” Cat explained, finishing the story for Kara. “I was overreacting to a fear of mine and had begun to shut down emotionally. Everything seemed cold and remote. Distant.” She reached up to place a single kiss on Kara’s jawline. “Kara’s touch brought me back from that place.”

“And as soon as I touched Cat, all the urgency, all the pressure in my head, the compulsion to move—it just disappeared.” Kara let Cat tug her off the balcony, through the open sliding glass door, and into the living room where Cat arranged them in a comfortable tangle in the corner of the pillow-backed sofa. “As long as I had her in my arms, everything was fine.”

“Are you, by chance—how do I ask this? Are you in physical contact right now?” asked Kal and both women could hear the smile in his voice.

They talked over each other in reply.

“Why do you ask?” “How did you know?”

Kal chuckled. “Well, for one, Kara stopped rambling.”

“Hey!” Kara bleated in protest.

“It’s true, darling,” said Cat good-naturedly. She sat tucked into Kara’s side with her head pillowed
on Kara’s shoulder and one arm draped across Kara’s chest.

“Doesn’t mean I have to like it,” grumbled Kara, pouting.

Kal cleared his throat to get their attention. “Still here…” he said, laughing. The easy back and forth between the two women told him much and, though loathe to interrupt, he had some information he thought would help them.

Kara blushed beet red. Even Cat was caught off guard.

“We apologize, Superman,” she said. “Please go on.”

“First, call me Kal, Miss Grant.”

“Then I insist you call me Cat, Kal. Only my non-Kryptonian employees have to call me ‘Miss Grant.’”

“I...ah...I don’t work for you,” said Kal, sounding slightly out of his depth.

“Yet,” amended Cat, a predatory gleam in her eye.

“Really?” asked Kara, exasperated. “You’re head hunting? Now?”

Cat winked and shrugged as if to say You can take the woman out of the office but you can’t take the office out of the woman.

Only slightly mollified, Kara reached out and tugged Cat’s legs over her own, absently gliding her fingertips up and down Cat’s shin. Cat purred.

“I’m sorry, Kal,” Kara apologized. “We’ve kept you long enough. Thanks for all your—”

“I think I may know what’s causing your newfound skills.”

Both Cat and Kara sat upright, looking down at the phone on Kara’s thigh as if they couldn’t believe what they were hearing.

“Skills?” asked Kara softly. “You mean it isn’t something bad?” She sounded so young, so uncertain, and so in need of reassurance, Kal was reminded of the day he’d found her in that field, miraculously alive after having been lost in the Phantom Zone for all those years.

“Kara, does it feel like something bad?” Kal asked gently.

Kara looked into Cat’s shining emerald eyes and fell into them, lifting one hand to cradle Cat’s cheek in her palm.

“No,” she said honestly. “It feels like something important. Something big and wonderful.”

“And for you, Cat?”

Cat combed her fingers through Kara’s hair. “It feels transcendent,” she murmured, losing herself in Kara’s sky-blue eyes. She wondered if this was what it felt like to fly.

“Hmm. I would expect so.” Kal paused for a moment and Cat could hear the clack of keyboard keys. “Kara, I’m sending you several Kalex files which I think will be helpful to you both. In the meantime, have you ever heard the words Daat Kyashar?”
Kara pulled her gaze from Cat and looked at the phone, her face a perfect picture of confusion. “Spirit bridge?” she asked, attempting a translation.

“Close. The elongated vowel in daat has a slightly different meaning—‘soul bridge’ would be the English equivalent. It’s an ancient form of haptically-reinforced telepathy, rare on Krypton after the Age of Discipline. Scientists who studied the phenomenon posited it was an extension of the immune system meant to protect pair-bonds and their offspring.”

“Possibly in response to living in a harsh environment, yes?” asked Cat. “If memory serves, the Age of Discipline was preceded by both the Age of Expansion and the Cultivation Age. Both suggest a time of limited resources, upheaval, drastic changes in population size, and conflict.” Cat looked at Kara’s open mouth and snipped, “I do read, Kara. Surely, you don’t think I would just name a new superhero winny-ninny without proper investigation?”

Kara narrowed her eyes at Cat’s little joke. “The word is willy-nilly,” she said warningly.

“Is it?” asked Cat.

“And I was going to tell you to stop me if you needed anything expl—you know what? Forget I just said that.”

Cat glared at the phone. “Said. What.”


“I’ve had practice,” he said ruefully. “In any case, Cat’s supposition echoes one of several Kryptonian theories. It’s possible the harsh environment of Earth—conflict, upheaval, the battles you engage in, Kara—awakened a genetic imperative that was then amplified by Sol’s yellow light. When you and Cat…ah…renegotiated the nature of your relationship—“

“Oh, you’re getting better at that,” complimented Cat, scoffing lightly at the prudish nature of both Kryptonians. Honestly, were the words had sex so hard to say?

“Thank you,” said Kal. “Anyway, as I was saying, it’s possible the Daat Kyashar was reawakened in Kara. When Cat entered the picture, it naturally extended to her, too.”

“But she’s better at it than I am, Kal,” said Kara plaintively. “She can hear my thoughts, feel my emotions. Every time I tried with her, I failed.”

“It’s haptically reinforced, Kara. The more the two of you—Rao’s light, this is difficult—the more you engage in physical contact, the deeper and more reliable the bond becomes. I’m assuming the change in your relationship was recent?”

Kara glanced down at their state of relative undress and blushed.

“Reasonably,” said Cat, noncommittally. Unless there was an urgent medical need, she saw no reason to embarrass the man any further.

“Then it’s still growing…learning…. The beginning of this kind of connection is delicate. You’ll find yourselves wanting to be in constant contact, even if it’s just standing shoulder to shoulder at the kitchen sink while you’re doing the dishes.”

Cat mouthed Superman does dishes? at Kara, shocked.
“How exactly do you think they get done?” hissed Kara under her breath. “Not everyone has staff.”

“That was just an example,” said Kal and Kara swore she heard his eyes roll. “If I may continue?”

“Of course,” said Cat, trying not to smile at Superman’s irritation.

“You’ll notice a certain amount of emotional and physical hypersensitivity. Bright lights, loud sounds, everything will be amplified until your brains finalize the new pathways needed to accommodate your expanded abilities.”

The words brains and new pathways worried Kara. “Is it dangerous, Kal?” She looked at Cat anxiously, wondering what she would do if something happened to the older woman as a result of something Kara’s Kryptonian genetics had foisted upon her—upon them—without warning.

“Physically? No. As I said, the most you’ll be aware of is hypersensitivity. There are… other… dangers, though.”

“Such as?” asked Cat. Now it was her turn to worry.

“Emotions, thoughts, memories—they’re all connected and can all be affected by this bond. You’ll have to be very careful about identifying which are your own and which are your partner’s and under no circumstance should you attempt to manipulate your partner’s feelings or memories. Not even as an experiment. The violation to your partner’s brain will kill the bond.” He became very quiet and his voice took on a depth of sadness Kara couldn’t remember hearing from him before. “Once severed, it is impossible to repair.”

Kara felt tears well in her eyes. “Did that happen to you, Kal?” she whispered.

“Yes,” he said. His voice was strong and even but the intensity of just that single word sent shivers up Cat’s spine. “My…. Our relationship was new. I didn’t know about the Daat Kyashar or our people’s history with it at the time. I thought reading her mind was harmless. Just another power to explore, to experiment with.” He paused and both Cat and Kara felt waves of remorse and regret from him, deafening in the silence. “When she began to have second thoughts about our relationship, I panicked and wiped her memory of it in its entirety. It was an accident. I didn’t even know I could do it until it was done. But it broke the bond…before I even knew one existed.”

“Oh, Kal!” cried Kara. Tears slipped down her cheeks. “I’m so sorry!”

“I am, too, Kara,” he said. “If telling you this saves you from the same heartache, though, living with my mistake will be easier.”

Cat wanted to reach through the phone and pull the man into her arms, wanted to hold him and let him cry—whatever would ease his burden. She hated that she would have to make do with words.

“Thank you, Kal,” she said, voice thick with emotion. “I am sorry for your loss but I am grateful you would share it with us in the hope of saving us the same grief. Please know your lesson will not go unheeded. El Mayara, Kal-El, son of Krypton.”

Kara pulled Cat closer, rested her cheek on the top of Cat’s head, and wept.

“That is all I could ask. El Mayara, Catherine Grant, daughter of Earth. El Mayara, Kara Zor-El, daughter of Krypton. May your love light a thousand worlds with its joy.”

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Continued in *Naissance*
Thank you, once again, to abydosdork for the wonderful banner.

Thank you, too, to krystalgoderitch, who pointed out a lack of clarity in the section just after the Daat Kyashar completes the full connection. I have re-written a few lines in that scene to make it clear that Cat had not, in fact, lost her memory, but was, instead, reacting to Kara's loss of consciousness.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Cat disconnected the call and put Kara’s cell on the Nakashima coffee table so it wouldn’t get lost. As she moved, she rearranged Kara and herself on the couch, tucking Kara’s head under her chin, holding her close.

Kara continued to weep and Cat felt her jumble of confusing emotions mostly as a sodden ball of sadness, as heavy and as dense as a wet wool sock. If she concentrated very hard, she could discern a thread here or there—a fragment of familial grief tied to Kara’s and Kal’s shared loss of Krypton or a sliver of empathic pain centered mostly around how Kara would feel if the same thing had happened to her, to them. Cat found she couldn’t hold onto the particulars for any length of time—there were too many emotions and they were packed too tightly together—so she let go, instead, concentrating on the word open, feeling her own emotional landscape stretch and widen, like a balloon filling with air or a ship’s sail catching the sea wind.

“I’m here,” she whispered into Kara’s hair. She kissed the top of the younger woman’s head. “Kara, I’m here.”

Kara clutched at Cat, trying to pull herself closer, beside herself with grief.

“Don’t let me do that to you—to us,” she sobbed. “Please, Cat…. It’s so sad and he was all alone.
He had no one to talk to and, oh, how much it must have hurt when he....” She looked up at Cat, heartbroken. “When he realized what he’d done.”

Cat held Kara’s face in her hands and kissed her forehead. “I know, darling,” she said.

Kara wasn’t satisfied. “No, I mean it!” She fisted her hands into the collar of Cat’s silk robe and shook her lightly, desperate for her to understand. “Promise me you won’t let me do that to you!”

Cat leveled her most severe authoritarian look at the younger woman.

“Kara, I need you to listen to me,” she said, her voice tight with the effort it took not to raise her voice. “I hear you. I hear you and I will do everything in my power not to let anything like what happened to Kal happen to either one of us.” When Kara failed to respond, still shaking, still rigid with despair, she went on, her tone gentler than before, beseeching. “We have forewarning, my darling. We have the files from Kalex—whatever the hell that is—and Kal’s knowledge to help us get through this. I promise you, we are going to be okay. Kara? I promise.”

Kara’s eyes didn’t seem to see her and Cat felt panic rise in her throat like acid, spilling down her cheeks in hot rills. “Please, darling,” she pleaded. “You’re scaring me.”

Cat’s distress seemed to break through to Kara where nothing else could and she flinched, gasping as if awakening from a nightmare. As she slowly came back to herself, she noticed the ache in her heart had eased but was not completely gone. When she felt she could breathe again without wanting to cry, Kara sagged forward and pressed her forehead to Cat’s, feeling a bubble of peace and tenderness surrounding the knot of anguish still burning in her throat, soothing it.

Kara recognized it for what it was—Cat’s love as expressed by the Daat Kyashar—but it felt unfinished, somehow. Narrow and inadequate, like draining a lake through a straw. She reached up and touched the spot over Cat’s heart with her fingertips.

“Why can’t I hear you in my head, Cat?” she asked, her voice very small. She pulled back from Cat so she could look her in the eye but the contact was fleeting. “You heard me right away—even in your sleep! And I can tell it’s getting stronger for you. You’re picking up Kryptonian phrases now.” She sighed and Cat was afraid she might cry again. “Is there something wrong with me?”

Cat hooked her index finger under Kara’s chin and lifted it so their eyes met. “There is nothing wrong with you, my love,” she whispered, smiling gently. “Except, perhaps, that you are too attentive a lover and, selfishly, this morning, I let you be.”

“I don’t understand,” said Kara, her confusion evident.

“I can’t imagine why not,” said Cat, aggravated. “What with Kal-El completely unable to utter the word—“ She stopped and started again, forcing herself to be calm. “I think the pathways in the brain your cousin was talking about begin to open during lovemaking, darling—specifically during orgasm. And I think he used every euphemism he could think of to avoid saying those words aloud.”

“But we—”

“Yes, we did, but you were so intent on discovering how many ways there were for me to say your name we fell asleep before I could make love to you.” Cat flashed her a lovesick smile. “You were so eager to please and I was flattered by your single-mindedness, by your…appetite….” Cat’s eyes darkened with predatory intent and her tongue darted out to wet her lips. The effect on Kara was powerful and immediate. “Let’s just say, I plan to be as selfless and as…” Cat’s gaze slithered
sensuously down Kara’s body, taking in the scrumptiously too-tight tank top and the diaphanous sarong tied sweetly around her slender hips. “…meticulous with you as you were with me, darling.”

She untangled herself from Kara’s embrace and pulled the younger woman off the couch, gratified by the quiver of anticipation she felt through their bond.

“Now?” asked Kara, her question coming out in a little breathy squeak. She held onto Cat’s hand like it was a lifeline.

“Now,” confirmed Cat, casting a look of purely wanton desire over her shoulder. She drew Kara up the stairs behind her, releasing her hand only long enough to shrug out of her silk robe, letting it slip from her shoulders and off her arms to the polished stone beneath their feet.

Kara stumbled as it fell.

In the bedroom, Cat paused to gaze at Kara, tracing the outline of her with trembling fingertips, chasing shivers as she caused them. Her exploration stopped at the nadir of the scooped-neckline tank top Kara wore and she plucked at the cotton fabric.

“You’ll have to keep some clothing here—and at the penthouse,” she said, her voice low. “So you won’t have to borrow mine. This doesn’t fit,” she noted. “Not that I’m complaining.” Cat set her fingers adrift to caress the gentle swell of Kara’s breast straining the fabric.

Kara watched Cat’s fingers, entranced. “I don’t mind.” She looked up and bit her bottom lip nervously. “It smells like you.”

Cat’s heart leapt at Kara’s admission. “And this?” she asked, flicking the knot over Kara’s hipbone, the one keeping the slip of navy blue gauze around her waist.

Kara nodded to the north-facing windows with their sand-colored muslin shade panels and Cat followed her gaze, noticing one was missing a draped valence. She looked back at Kara, a single eyebrow raised.

Kara smiled and ducked her head. “I saw it in the window and I just couldn’t resist it,” she said, doing her best bad Southern accent.

Cat’s mouth dropped open. “Oh my God, are you quoting Carol Burnett to me?” She grabbed Kara by her top and pulled her into a deeply intense and enthusiastic kiss. She was slightly out of breath when they parted. “How do you even know about that? The Carol Burnett Show aired many years before you came to this planet, Kara Zor-El, and I know for a fact they have never released it into syndication.”

“In my second week at CatCo, I was taking notes for you during a conference call with the Geneva office. You made a comment about one of the executive’s assistants—comparing her to ‘Mrs. Ahwiggins.’ Nobody understood your reference and you said, ‘This meeting’s over. The minute I have to explain the genius of The Carol Burnett Show to anyone, I’m wasting my time.’” Kara grinned. “You told me to send every employee at the Geneva office the Time-Warner Best of The Carol Burnett Show boxed set and said I could reschedule the meeting only after they had watched them.” She gave Cat a pointed look. “I overnighted myself a copy and spent that weekend snorting ice cream out my nose, thank you very much.”

“I love you,” Cat blurted and Kara inhaled sharply, stunned by the suddenness and the depth of the declaration.

“For snorting ice cream out of my nose?” she asked, wonderingly.
Cat nodded, completely serious. “Yes. And for knowing the safety records of my drivers and for playing Settlers of Catan with Carter just so you can talk to him longer, and for the millions of little things you do for every single person in your life that make them feel like they are important and worthy. You don’t see it because you think you’re being nice but it is so much more than that.”

“People are important and worthy, Cat. More than they know, much more than they give themselves credit for… There’s so much about them that’s exceptional, that’s beautiful—starting with the fact they even exist!” She sighed. “They don’t see it—a lot of them—and the ones who do ___”

“We call them crazy and dismiss them,” finished Cat sadly.

Kara nodded. “I’m only treating people the way they deserve to be treated.”

“Which is what makes you exceptional,” said Cat, reaching up to press a loving kiss to Kara’s chin. “Kara, you change people. I’ve seen it. For God’s sake, my own mother called me ‘Cat’ on the phone last week and she has never used that name with me, not once in my entire life.” She reached up and brushed Kara’s long hair back from her eyes. “You changed me,” she said, softly. “And I am not easy to change.”

“Maybe not,” said Kara, her blue eyes shining. “But you are so easy to love,” her voice hitching with emotion.

Cat rolled her eyes but Kara saw the whisper of pink that touched her cheeks, too.

“Come here, sweet talker,” said Cat huskily, pulling Kara down into a searing kiss. When they parted, Cat drew one perfectly-manicured fingernail down the seam of the tank top. “Time for this to come off, darling,” she said, looking up at Kara with hooded eyes. “Chop chop.”

Kara’s heart skipped a beat and she whipped the top off in the blink of an eye.

“I really love when you say that,” she admitted, voice rough with desire. She made the mistake of reaching for the knot at her hip only for Cat to grab her wrist, stopping her cold.

“That. Is. Mine.” Cat ground the words out between gritted teeth, her throat taut with barely restrained need. Electricity crackled between them and the moment hung there, suspended, until they crashed together in an exquisitely erotic kiss. Kara broke Cat’s hold on her wrist and cupped the back of her head in both hands. Cat fumbled with the knot in the gauze for two seconds before becoming frustrated, tearing the whole thing loose with one impatient yank. Then she pushed Kara backward, knowing Kara was letting her, knowing she wouldn’t be able to if Kara didn’t want to go. Somehow, the fact Kara could make herself utterly immovable made her blatant consent just that much more achingly delicious.

They tumbled into the bed, kissing deeply, and Kara rolled, pulling Cat along with her, until they were tangled together in the center with Kara’s longer frame draped over Cat. When Kara pulled away to trail hot, wet kisses down Cat’s throat and lower still, Cat was momentarily torn between surrendering to Kara’s hunger or sating her own. She could feel Kara’s lust through the Daat Kyashar, swift-moving and powerful, like a forest fire. But underneath the inferno, she felt a sharp, silver thirst stretched thin, like a wire. It called to Cat like a Siren.

“Kara, darling….” she murmured. “You first….”

Kara shook her head petulantly and continued kissing her way down Cat’s flawless body.

“Want….” she said, scraping her teeth lightly over Cat’s ribcage before taking one pebbled nipple
into her mouth.

Cat hissed and arched into Kara, pleasure arcing through her body like lightning.

“I know what you want,” she breathed. She wound the fingers of her left hand into Kara’s hair at the back of her head and tugged just hard enough to get her attention. When the younger woman looked up at her, she added, “But I also feel your need.” She pulled gently but insistently and turned with Kara in the bed until the younger woman lay beneath her, resplendent and wanton.

Cat leaned in close to Kara’s ear and whispered, “You’ve always taken care of me, my darling—making sure my needs were met, my desires fulfilled….” She nuzzled a particularly sensitive spot high on Kara’s throat and then bit her there, carefully, groaning when she felt Kara shiver against her. “Let me take care of you now….”

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Cat Grant never did anything by halves. She believed if something was worth doing, then it was worth giving everything she had to it. This tenet had provided the backbone to every area of Cat’s life—her career, her role as a mother, her interpersonal relationships—and had failed her only once.

She had tried to make it work with Carter’s father and she defied anyone to say she hadn’t given her all—especially when their marriage was new. But success required equal effort by both parties and her ex-husband just didn’t have it in him. Something Cat had realized too late.

Cat craved partnership, connection, and depth. Mutual interest. Support and trust. Love, the verb; not love, the noun.

He had said he wanted the same things but his claims had proven counterfeit. The only real and wonderful thing he’d ever given her was Carter, her beautiful boy, her sweet, sensitive son.

Fast forward to the present and Cat knew she’d finally found what she’d been looking for—someone willing and able to offer all those things she’d craved for so long.

And you were right in front of me, she thought, gazing at Kara with such utter amazement. The whole time.

Cat Grant didn’t believe in fairytales. She wasn’t even sure she entirely believed in this—the Daat Kyashar and everything happening between them. But she did believe in Kara and the woman trembling beneath her, sighing at Cat’s every touch, deserved her complete and undivided attention.

As she caressed Kara, discovering the places that made her hiss, that made her breath catch softly in the back of her throat, she fitted herself to Kara’s side, reveling in the waves of pleasure radiating from the younger woman.

She could feel her own thoughts, her own emotions rushing out to meet them only to have them crash against an invisible barrier, like a storm surge against a sea wall, refused again and again. Undeterred, Cat kissed that spot she loved just under Kara’s ear and spoke to her.

“Because you can’t hear my thoughts in your heart yet, I’ll whisper them to you…..” she said, fingertips still exploring, still seeking. “You have waited long enough to be adored…to be loved….

“I am so grateful—of all the people on this planet who would leap at the chance to be loved by you—you chose me. I will do everything in my power to make sure you never regret that choice….”

“I could never….” breathed Kara, her eyes sapphire against the crisp white sheets of the bed. She
struggled to get the words out, breath stolen by Cat’s relentless caress.

“You are so much better than I am, darling,” Cat continued, tracing delicate patterns across Kara’s skin. “Your heart is so big and you are so kind—kinder than any of us deserve. When you smile at me, when you look at me with those big blue eyes like I’m the sun, my heart aches. It has since the first day I noticed that smile was mine alone.”

Cat ran the flat of her palm down the inside of Kara’s thighs, encouraging them to open with just the slightest whisper of pressure. Kara arched her back and groaned, hips rocking, seeking. She ached fiercely for Cat’s touch, for Cat’s fingers inside her, biting her lip in frustration when they swept close and then away, like the sea against the shoreline.

“I never had a chance, did I? You change everyone you meet for the better but I thought I could resist you. I thought I was beyond your reach. Like a faraway star. But you, Kara, you can fly….”

Oh, Kara wanted to fly. Her whole world had become the sound of Cat’s velvet voice, her silken caresses, and the delicious longing both had ignited in her body, her soul.

“And here I am, now, changed. In ways I never expected, in ways I never could have fathomed, not in my wildest dreams….”

Cat dipped her fingertips into Kara’s wetness and stroked lightly, fleetingly, drifting away again when Kara cried out, hips bucking.

“All these years, believing I was what I did—the power, the performance, the pulse of the world…."

Cat’s fingers returned when she whispered the word pulse, stroking more firmly now, groaning when she discovered the depths of Kara’s heat, her wetness. Kara, breathless, wondered how she would ever survive this sweet, tortuous ecstasy.

“Only to have you teach me something else entirely,” continued Cat, slipping inside Kara fully, now, deeply. Her heart thundered in her chest and she was having trouble speaking, trouble breathing because—dear God—this woman was everything….

“That I’m a woman first….” she said, thrusting gently.

“A woman always….” she whispered, finding the rhythm Kara needed, their movements syncing like she knew they would. She leaned over Kara and kissed her, drowning in her, wholly lost in the magnitude of this moment, body aching with desire, heart brimming with tenderness. When she pulled away, there were tears in her eyes.

“A woman in love…with you….”

“Cat,” breathed Kara, her voice in tatters. She rocked her hips in time with Cat’s fingers and felt as though she was narrowing and expanding at the same time, coalescing and becoming brighter, hotter, wilder…. “Please….”

She threw one arm over her eyes.

Cat immediately tugged it away.

“Look at me, darling,” she whispered. “I want to see your eyes when it happens…."

A shadow of fear crossed Kara’s face. “But…but….” What about my heat vision?
Cat gazed down at Kara, her absinthe eyes filled with an unshakeable belief in her.

“I trust you, Kara,” she said, the words carrying a level of conviction neither woman was expecting. “Let me see your eyes...” she begged. “Let me fly...”

Kara’s breath hitched in the back of her throat just once before the Universe, collapsing in on itself in ever smaller, ever hotter spirals of yearning, suddenly shattered, exploding outward, filling every empty space, every void, every hollowness that ever was with incandescent auric light. Somehow, Kara kept her eyes open and the moment she came, crying Cat’s name, she felt the bond between them knit itself together, winding, coiling, completing itself in frenzied desperation. When the last connection between them clicked into place, a white-blue orb of light barreled through the new pathways in Kara’s brain and she slammed her head backward into the bed, her yelp of surprise cut short as she lost consciousness.

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When Kara regained consciousness a moment later, she was overjoyed to feel Cat Grant in her mind, the whole confusing, muddled, beautiful jumble of her, and she gleefully registered at least a hundred of the woman’s thoughts all at once, wanting to cry with sheer, overwhelming relief.

One of the loudest, though, made her laugh right out loud.

I bet that cow, Lane, can’t say she ever fooled a lover into unconsciousness!

“Do you want to tell Lois or should I?” Kara asked when she opened her eyes, her usual megawatt smile shaded with wickedness.

Cat, understandably more concerned that Kara had just passed out, had no idea what she was talking about.

“Oh my God, Kara, are you all right? What happened to you?” Then, finally hearing Kara’s question, she asked, “Do I want to tell Lois what?” Remembering her errant, lust-fueled, self-congratulatory mental high-five at Lois Lane's expense, Cat went white. “You heard that?” In the next second, her eyebrows plunged low between her flashing eyes and she scowled. “Of all the profound and beautiful things I was thinking, that's the one you hear?”

Kara sat up and cupped Cat’s face in her hands, kissing her soundly, still smiling.

“Yep,” she said. “If you think about it, it’s only fair. The first one of mine you heard was about you screaming my name.” Kara grinned. “And, to answer your questions, I’m fine,” she said. “I’m more than fine; I’m fantastic! What happened is you made love to me—which was amazing, by the way—and when I came—” Kara blushed at the word but her smile was anything but shy. “—the Daat Kyashar completed its connection between us and all the backed up, well, traffic—for lack of a better word—from your side of the bridge overwhelmed me for a second. So I took a leeeeeeetle nap.” She held her thumb and forefinger together and squinted one eye behind it to show how short the nap had been, giggling at the look of complete confusion on Cat’s face.

Cat blinked. Twice.

“Are you drunk?” she asked, gaping at the younger woman. She felt her lips curving into a smile despite her best intentions and pouted. The resultant bewildered expression was more than a little amusing to a certain Kryptonian.

“Yep,” said Kara again, bouncing happily in the bed. “On you,” she added, leaning in to steal a kiss. Then she pulled back abruptly, overcome with a strange look of urgency. “I’m sorry—could
“Excuse me for a minute?” she asked, backing off the other side of the bed. She edged toward the open glass doors leading to the balcony, the look on her face becoming odder and odder. “I just have to—“

Cat caught a hint of what was about to happen and she reached out to stop Kara.

“Wait!” she said. “Don’t you at least want your—“

Kara turned on her heel, took a running leap, and shot off the deck like a missile, heading straight up into the noontime sun.

“—cape?” finished Cat belatedly, letting her hand drop to the bed.

Laughing in spite of herself, Cat got up and sauntered to the balcony’s railing, propping her head in one hand as she watched Kara fly.

The girl was doing loop-de-loops.

In the nude.

Shouting for joy.

She was a shooting star of pure delight and Cat couldn’t help the indulgent grin that lit up her entire body.

*My life has become a nauseating Hallmark Channel romcom,* she thought, shaking her head. *With aliens.*

*You love it and you know it, you big sap!* came Kara’s reply. Cat couldn’t deny it.

She shielded her eyes against the sun and watched tiny Kara burn off her excess adrenaline by executing ever more ridiculously complex flight maneuvers. She worried an errant jetliner would pass and she’d end up having to buy off bank executives and vacationers to keep them from selling their grainy cellphone videos of Supergirl in the nude to the highest bidder.

*Are you finished showing off yet?* she asked.

Kara turned and headed back to the beach house in an instant, landing on the balcony next to Cat with a thump that rattled the windows. She swept Cat up in her arms so quickly and with such confidence, Cat’s breath caught in surprise. The delicious reminder of the younger woman’s strength and the hungry gaze of her sky-blue eyes didn’t help.

“No,” said Kara simply and she carried Cat back to bed.

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Hours later, several things, all equally important, woke Kara Danvers. First and foremost were the smells. Garlic, ginger, green onion, soy, fish sauce…. Her mouth began to water even before she opened her eyes.

Second was the feel of Cat’s thigh, warm and soft, beneath her cheek and her arms around Cat’s reed-thin waist. Kara took a deep breath and filled her lungs with the scent of her lover—salt breezes, petrichor, and a whisper of citrus and sunshine. Her contented grin was as wide as the summer sky.

Third was the sensation of Cat’s right hand absentely stroking Kara’s hair and Kara was instantly
transported back to the little G-rated fantasies that used to help her sleep—before any of this had happened. Looking back on them, they seemed hopelessly superficial and juvenile compared to the real thing. The real thing, she decided, was much better.

“So much better,” she sighed happily, snuggling into Cat’s lap. She wished she could purr.

“Careful with the cat references, darling,” said Cat absently, lifting her hand to scroll forward on her iPad.

Kara pouted. “I’m happy,” she said defensively. “Like, really happy. I just want a better way to show it, that’s all.”

Cat smirked and raised one eyebrow over her Fendi reading glasses. “You mean other than terrifying pilots over the Pacific?”

Kara tucked her head closer to Cat’s body and blushed. “You must think I’m the biggest dork,” she said, her voice muffled by the sheet.

Kara, look at me.

Kara peeked up at Cat with one ice-blue eye only to see Cat smiling widely, easily.

You make me want to fly, too.

Kara grinned and kissed Cat’s thigh beneath her. She glanced outside only to see the sun had moved significantly since she’d last seen it.

“What time is it?” she asked, confused. “And what is that incredible smell—other than you?”

“It’s 5:11,” said Cat, glancing at the display on her iPad. “And the smell is our dinner. We’ll eat at 6:30—if you can wait that long. If not, I can have something sent up to tide you over. A plate of potstickers, perhaps?”

Kara extended her super-hearing and heard the sounds of garlic hissing in the bottom of a wok and vegetables being chopped.

“Someone’s here? Cooking?” Kara pulled the sheet up to her nose and froze as if she expected fifteen starched-white servants to come marching through the bedroom door at any moment.

“Not ‘someone,’” corrected Cat. “Chef Suen of Ming Yue. And while he may be wearing white—as chefs are known to do—I can assure you he won’t be marching through this bedroom door, so you can relax.”

Ming Yue was one of National City’s five-star Chinese restaurants and Kara had been there exactly twice—one as a gift from Alex at Christmastime just after she’d been hired at CatCo and once by herself to celebrate her decision to embrace being Supergirl. She still sometimes dreamed of Chef Suen’s potstickers.

“Just how many chefs do you know, anyway?” asked Kara. “And how do you know about my obsession with potstickers?” Now she knew what delectable morsels lay in her future, Kara wasn’t sure she could wait until 6:30 to eat.

“Kara, everyone within a five-block radius of CatCo Plaza knows about your obsession with potstickers,” sighed Cat tolerantly. “You follow that lurid orange food truck—what’s it called? Stuck on Yu?—around downtown like a puppy.”
Kara giggled. “You have a point.” After a minute spent yawning and blinking sleep out of her eyes, she levered herself up and planted a casual smooch on Cat’s cheek. “Love you,” she said, resting her head on Cat’s shoulder. Seeing Cat with her iPad, though, caused a crumpling of her eyebrows. “Are you working? And why are you up? You should still be sleeping. Did something happen?” She swung her head around to look for her phone on the bedside table only to see it wasn’t there.

“Slow down, darling,” said Cat, stroking Kara’s arm lightly. “Your phone’s still downstairs where we left it and nothing has happened. I’m not working; I’m keeping a promise. To you.” She showed Kara the iPad’s screen and Kara gasped.

“The Kalex files? But Kal sent those to my personal email account! How did you get my password?”

Kara felt Cat’s incredulousness loudly and clearly through their bond.

“Putting aside the strategic advantage I have today that I did not have yesterday,” she said pointedly, “had I been left to more traditional means of password cracking, I could have managed it easily. My initials and my birthdate, Kara? Really?”

Kara bared her teeth in an ersatz grin and shrugged sheepishly.

Cat chuckled. “Your problem—as expressed in the vernacular of the Eighties, a dismal and soulless decade—is ‘You got it bad, Danvers.’” She kissed the younger woman on the forehead sweetly. “Also, you need to change your password. Or, if my assumption is correct, all of your passwords.”

“Yeah,” said Kara slowly. “Um…that’s going to take a while.”

Cat smirked and continued to read. Kara watched her, concerned.

I’m worried about your lack of sleep, Cat, she sent, laying her hand gently on Cat’s arm. You’ve had less than I have and I don’t need that much.

“I had two hours,” said Cat, glancing at Kara. “Apparently it was enough. In fact, I feel quite refreshed.” She waved a hand imperiously. “My skin is clear, my crops are thriving…all is well.”

Kara gaped at Cat’s words, recognizing them instantly. “You’re on TUMBLR??” she sputtered, shock radiating through their connection, as jarringly loud as standing in a clock tower at high noon.

Cat snorted. “I’m the Queen of All Media,” she said. “Of course I am.” She looked Kara up and down. “So are you.” As two different people.

“But—“ You’ve always known, haven’t you?

“Yes?” Since the day you broke your arm and Supergirl was nowhere to be found. That ridiculous skit with your shapeshifting friend only confirmed it for me.

“Nothing.” I never should have kept it from you.

“That’s what I thought.” I know why you thought you had to. I’m glad you know differently now.

“I love you, Cat.” I am so in love with you.

Cat put the iPad down in her lap and cupped Kara’s cheek in her hand, kissing her slowly.

“I love you, too,” she said, letting the true depth of her feelings for the younger woman free rein of their connection for just a moment. Kara’s whole body lit up like a Fourth of July sparkler in
“Now, would you like to know what I’ve learned so far? Before we dress for dinner?”

Kara nodded and snuggled closer, thinking she could get used to spending her weekends like this, tangled up in bed with Cat Grant, reading and loving and laughing. Very used to it. Very quickly.

The historic accounts of the Daat Kyashar were steeped in a strange hybrid expositional style featuring both mystical and scientific language, not unlike, thought Cat, what a treatise of Greek Mythology written by 21st century geoscientists who all had treasured minors in Classical Studies might look like. As Kal had said, several theories were presented for the evolution of the phenomenon, including one similar to the supposition Cat had put forward. She summarized these for Kara, noting evidence—for any of them—was in short supply.

“What about personal accounts? Literature or journals or even medical records of Kryptonians who lived with it?” asked Kara, thinking of Krypton’s great libraries, filled with so many books, so much information. As a child, she loved to go to Kryptopolis’ Grand Archive, the golden temple of knowledge as far as she was concerned. Just thinking about it—about trips there with her father who would let her run free in every corner as she searched for something new to learn, about his tolerant smile as he carried endless scrolls and tomes and illuminations home for her to study—brought a smile to her face.

Cat balked at answering and Kara felt it—her retreat—as if she were physically backing away from a doorway.

“Tell me,” she insisted. “Cat, I’m not a child anymore. Tell me.”

“No, you’re not,” said Cat carefully. “And I know that. I do. But you can’t blame me for not wanting to cause you pain. Talking about your home, your planet, your family—I would expect it to hurt no matter how old you were.” She sent a gentle swath of support and understanding through the bond and felt Kara accept it, grudgingly at first, and then with gratitude.

“It’s—” began Kara, then stopped. “Well, it’s not okay,” she said, shaking her head. “But I’ve lived with it for a long time now.”

Cat saw the number thirty-nine in Kara’s head and tagged it for later discussion.

“Please tell me,” continued Kara. “I need to know. We need to understand what’s happening to us. This is the only way.”

Cat nodded, intent on proceeding cautiously. Being the potential cause of Kara’s tears was so repulsive an idea to her, she felt physically sick at the thought.

“Kalex is limited by the amount of information sent with Kal and with you. Jor-El sent more information about Krypton’s history and existence with Kal than your father did with you, presumably because of Kal’s age and the possibility that his teacher—you—might not—” The words make it stuck in Cat’s throat as grief and pain unexpectedly overwhelmed her and their connection. Instantly, everything inside her began to turn black and wilt, falling into ash and dust.

Kara grabbed Cat’s chin gently but firmly and forced Cat to look at her, her eyes filled with determination and purpose.

“Cat, I made it,” she said, using the steel of Supergirl’s voice to cut through Cat’s agony, a silver
sword of light against the darkness. “Look at me.” Maalkhati, see me. I’m here. I’m yours. Maalkhati, hear me.

Kara watched the light slowly return to Cat’s eyes, turning them from cold celadon to lush fern.

“Your…queen?” Cat asked haltingly, marveling at the translation of the Kryptonian word Kara had chosen. There was something more intimate, more significant and formal about her version of the word than Cat’s self-chosen title, which was mostly bluster.

A brief but sincere smile pulled Kara’s lips upward. “You always have been. My inspiration, my ideal.” She looked down at her hands. “Every hero needs a hero of her own.”

“Tell me about it,” said Cat, ducking to catch Kara’s eye, giving her a little watery smile.

_If I’m your queen, what does that make you?_ she wondered.

_Your biggest fan?_

Cat rolled her eyes. “If we don’t get this thing between us under some semblance of control soon,” she said, “I’ll be putting my dentist’s grandchildren through graduate school.”

A discreet bing from Cat’s phone drew the older woman’s attention and she read the brief text.

“Dinner will be ready in thirty minutes. Shall we table this discussion until then?”

Kara nodded, suddenly nervous. “Cat? What am I going to wear? I can’t exactly go as Supergirl, can I? And I _really_ can’t wear that window thingy in front of Chef Suen.”

Cat smiled. “I gave your measurements to my personal shopper hours ago. She brought three options for you, including lingerie and shoes—though if you prefer to go without either of those things, I have absolutely no objection.” The hint of emerald in her gaze as she looked the younger woman up and down set Kara’s blood on fire. “She delivered them to the guest room in the back of the house if you’d like to go pick something out.”

Excited, Kara rushed forward and gave Cat a slightly miss-aimed kiss. “Don’t use all the hot water!” she called, already halfway down the hall.

_Tell you what—why don’t we ‘go green’ and conserve? You can join me when you’ve finished trying everything on._

Kara had never, ever been so grateful for super-speed in her life.

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Kara dressed in the guest bathroom in the back of the house, partially so she wouldn’t be underfoot while Cat dressed and partially because she wanted to surprise Cat with her choice of outfits. Even so, Kara felt every inch of the distance separating them as if it was the tooth of a serrated knife. Kal had not been remotely exaggerating when he’d said they’d want to be in constant contact during the bond’s naissance. She blushed, thinking of the poor tiles she’d cracked in Cat’s shower twenty minutes ago as they’d—ahem—utilized water conservation techniques not officially approved or recommended by California’s Water Commission.

Of the three outfits delivered by Cat’s personal shopper, Gagan Dani, Kara had chosen the fitted-silhouette crewneck sleeveless mini-dress in sky blue for their dinner date. There’d been a note attached to it that had read _Favorite if KD_ in Gagan’s distinct handwriting, followed by a winky
smiley. Kara had covered her eyes in horror when she’d seen it. Of course Gagan had recognized Kara’s measurements! She’d only been dressing her for CatCo formal affairs for over a year now!

Kara half wanted to know if Cat intended Gagan to know the identity of her house guest and half didn’t. If she did, Gagan would be the fourth person outside the two of them who were aware of the change in the nature of their relationship.

“No—fifth,” she said to her reflection in the mirror. “If Alex and Susan know, so does Hank.”

If Cat didn’t intend for Gagan to know, well, that could present some problems—for everyone—and Kara really didn’t think they needed any more of those at the moment. They had enough on their plate as it was.

Gagan had clearly made assumptions of her own, though. In addition to three perfectly-sized outfits with matching shoes and lingerie, she’d provided a toiletries bag with all of Kara’s usual cosmetics and fragrance choices. Kara touched the White Musk to each of her wrists, then looked in the mirror and bit her lip, blushing hotly before applying a vertical line of scent below her navel and slipping into her skin-tight dress, smoothing it down with shaking hands.

She angled herself in the mirror so she could see the back of the dress and smiled.

“You did say underwear was optional,” she breathed, happy with what she saw.

Having also opted to forgo footwear, Kara was almost able to surprise Cat in the dining room downstairs. Almost.

Cat stood with Chef Suen at the wall of windows that overlooked the ocean, conversing with him in perfect Cantonese. The old man cut a fine figure in his white chef coat and red scarf and he held Cat’s hands in both of his, bowing and smiling with every word she said. The deep creases around his eyes spoke of decades of smiles and he never let Cat’s hands go, not even when she looked up and saw Kara in the entryway.

In fact, Cat gripped his hands firmly with a visceral response for just a second and he laughed, teasing her in Cantonese until she blushed.

“The young lady is your date?” he asked, his English perfect though heavily accented.

“Oh?” said Chef Suen, looking from his friend to Kara and back, a slow smile making its way into a wide grin. “Ohhh!” He left Cat and took Kara’s hands in his own, cupping them like a bird’s nest filled with springtime eggs. Excitedly, he began to speak in Cantonese and before Cat could even begin to translate for her, Kara answered him herself, the slightly nasal twang of her accent pitch perfect. Another surprise Cat tagged for later discussion.

Suen Ping asked Kara a series of rapid-fire questions in his native tongue—How long have you known each other? How did you meet? Is she not beautiful, like snowflakes falling in the firs? What is your favorite Chinese food?—and she answered each one as quick as she could, smiling and bowing along with her new friend.

Kara cast a glance at Cat leaning against the credenza, watching them with interest. She wore a short-sleeved white crewneck sheath dress by Alexander Wang and her famous crystal-encrusted, four-inch-heel Jimmy Choo pumps. Cat was beautiful—more beautiful than any woman Kara had ever seen—and the ensemble did remind Kara of a deep, silent snowfall in the mountains under ice-crystal stars. One discreet glimpse underneath it and Kara decided she liked the optional lingerie rule
very much indeed.

*Eyes front, young lady,* sent Cat, chuckling when Kara blushed at being caught.

*Master Suen made a comment about how beautiful you are,* replied Kara archly. *Failing to agree with him would be disrespectful to you both.*

Cat smirked. *And the x-ray vision?*

Kara blushed even hotter but said nothing. Instead, still speaking with Chef Suen, she told him she’d visited his restaurant twice and that her two favorite dishes were his pork guotie—the famous potstickers—and his tea-smoked duck.

Elatedly, he told her those were among the dishes The Lady—his honorific for Cat—had asked him to prepare for them tonight and he looked at the lady in question to ask if dinner should begin.

“*Zài wǔ fēnzhōng,*” she suggested, smiling kindly.

Chef Suen nodded and bowed, agreeing. “*Yes, five minutes,*” he said, heading back to the kitchen.

Kara waited until he’d gone before turning to Cat with slightly worried eyes, saying, “I think Gagan knows it’s me.”

Cat ignored her. She had much more important things on her mind.

*Turn around,* she ordered. *Slowly.* The feral look in her eyes brooked no disobedience.

Kara swallowed, mouth dry, and did as she’d been told, turning a full three-sixty inch by inch until she met Cat’s eyes again.

“Of course she knows it’s you,” said Cat, her frank appreciation of Kara’s choice of dresses belied by her airy tone. “She’s been dressing you for CatCo events for over a year now. I’d be concerned if she didn’t know. That would smack of inattention.” She took another long, lingering look at Kara in that exquisite dress and added Gagan to the list of people getting a bonus this year. “Did she leave a note?”

Kara nodded hesitantly. “‘Favorite if KD.’ It was pinned to this one.”

“And the other outfits?” asked Cat, finally reaching out for Kara’s hand and drawing her in for a chaste kiss before pulling out a chair for her at the table.

Kara sat and started to describe them but Cat stopped her with a gentle nudge she sent through the bond.

*Show me,* she said, taking her place next to Kara. Cat had instructed they be seated together at one end of the formal mahogany plank table and Chef Suen’s granddaughter and sous chef, Chuntao, had arranged it beautifully, allowing for intimacy and conversation both. The chrysanthemums in a tea bowl between them were a lovely touch. *Remember what they looked like in the mirror. I’ll be able to see with you.*

Kara stared at Cat for a moment, and then closed her eyes, placing her hand on Cat’s thigh to steady herself. She chose to remember the Chiara Boni off-the-shoulder gown first. It was floor-length and stunning, in a cobalt blue that nearly matched Kara’s eyes. It had felt so decadent and luxurious Kara couldn’t imagine wearing it to anything less important than the Oscars.
There’d be a riot on the red carpet if I took you to the Oscars in that. Cat grinned like her namesake. Would you like to go?

Kara’s eyes popped open. You can see what I see? How are you doing that?

I’m not sure yet. Cat felt Kara’s alarm and sent a ribbon of soothing calm along their connection. I promise I’m being careful. Several of the accounts from Krypton—the few included in the files—mentioned some couples bonded this way were able to communicate with more than just feelings and emotions. They could transmit visual data, knowledge, even touch. Cat imagined gliding her fingers down Kara’s outer thigh to see what would happen. She was not surprised to see Kara flinch, glaring down at the exact spot Cat had imagined touching.

Kara retaliated by imagining kissing the corner of Cat’s mouth softly…slowly…enticingly…

Cat gasped and pressed her fingertips to her tingling lips.

Kara grinned evilly. I think board meetings just got a lot less boring, she sent.

Cat smirked. And risk any one of those tiresome stuffed shirts hearing the sounds you make when you come? I’d murder everyone in the room first.

Kara was still recovering from that little confession when Chef Suen and his granddaughter entered with four large platters of beautifully plated food. Once placed, they hurried back to the kitchen to retrieve the rice and various sauces for each dish.

Chef Suen finished the presentation by pouring ice water from a carafe into two glasses. Cat insisted two additional glasses be brought to the table and she poured the water for these herself, handing one to Master Suen and one to Chuntao.

She raised her glass so it was slightly lower than Master Suen’s and said, “With good friends, even water drunk together is sweet enough.” The chefs, grinning warmly, each had a sip of water.

After the toast, Chef Suen insisted the two ladies take their seats and he served them a little of each of his dishes before bowing low. “My granddaughter and I hope our humble food pleases you. Please…..” He gestured for them to eat. “Enjoy.” Then they took their leave.

Kara eyed the gigantic bowl of potstickers with longing.

“Eat as much as you need to, darling,” said Cat, nodding at the bowl. “I’ve been an abominable host. I’ve done nothing but wear you out.”

“Do you hear me complaining?” asked Kara, serving herself more of everything. And then more on top of that.

No, but I know you’re starving. And you need to keep your strength up.

“Oh?” asked Kara, grinning around a mouthful of heavenly potsticker goodness. “Why?”

Cat raised one eyebrow and let her eyes slide down Kara’s body. Because sometime tonight, you’re going to be straddling my hips—in that dress—while I fuck that grin right off your beautiful face. That’s why.

Kara slowly stopped chewing and swallowed heavily, looking at Cat with wide eyes. She swallowed again and tried to feel anything but her blood pounding in her veins.
Cat felt Kara’s predicament through the bond and berated herself for what she’d done. She reached out to touch the younger woman but thought better of it, dropping her hand back in her lap. Instead, she sent something through their connection, something she hoped would help.

After a moment, Kara sighed in relief. The raw carnality gripping her so fiercely seconds ago had all but released her, smothered under something that felt like a warm, soft blanket.

“What is that?” asked Kara, finally finding her voice. She sank into the warmth as she would a hot bath and felt all her muscles relax.

“Something I learned from the Kalex files,” said Cat. “We—each of us—have the choice to, well, raise or lower the bridge between us at will. Like a drawbridge, temporarily suspending all or part of the Daat Kyashar as needed.” She looked down, contrite. “In this case, I held everything back but the tenderness I feel for you.” She gave Kara an apologetic half-smile. “I’m sorry, darling. I forgot how difficult it is to temper desire when it’s new, when spending a week in bed with your lover seems like too little time and nothing matters beyond the next kiss, the next encounter. And since the Daat Kyashar is still in its naissance phase, all of that is heightened—for both of us. I wasn’t thinking.”

Kara reached up and drew her fingertips down Cat’s cheek, smiling when the older woman looked up at her. “Nothing does matter for me beyond our next kiss,” she whispered. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. When she opened them again, she was mostly recovered. “But I need to know how to do what you did. There are things I never want you to have to go through because of me.”

Cat nodded, knowing Kara was talking about the things she experienced as Supergirl, knowing she wanted to protect her even though Cat would willingly take the worst of whatever Kara suffered without complaint. However, the skill would be helpful in their day-to-day lives, too, generally speaking. Especially in this first flush of love and discovery when they still had to keep CatCo running, still had crises to avert and people’s lives to save.

As they ate, they taught each other control, honing their skills with the utmost care, making sure they knew at every step which thought or emotion was Kara’s and which was Cat’s. They learned how to quiet their anxiety-laden brain chatter and to dampen negativity, frustration, and even desire so they wouldn’t overwhelm each other. By the time they were finished eating, they’d even taught themselves how to suspend the entire bridge temporarily and how to reconnect it.

You’re so good at this, thought Kara after they’d re-established the connection a second time. You should teach a class.

I thought I was, came Cat’s arch reply and Kara laughed.

Cat loved the sound of that laughter and more, that she was the cause of it. She leaned forward and caught Kara’s lips in a soft kiss laced with promise. “Will you take a walk with me?” she asked. “After we get all this cleaned up and put away?” She glanced at the remains of their dinner then looked up into darkening indigo eyes with ones that reminded Kara of sunlight dappled through summer leaves. “There’s a path up to a spot on the bluffs I’d like to show you. It’s beautiful on a clear night. You can see the stars.” Kara heard Cat’s heart rate increase, felt the tiniest thread of desire flare to life along their connection.

“I would love to,” she whispered, leaning in for another kiss, this one slow and deep and needful. The thread of their desire soon synced with the beating of their hearts and grew like wildflowers on a hill until the opening bars of the “Star Wars” theme interrupted them.
Cat pulled away, completely unable to hide her smile. “It’s Carter,” she explained, reaching for her phone. “He always calls the night before he travels, just before he goes to sleep.” She swiped the answer bar and grinned into the phone. “Carter, honey? How are you? How was your last day in Wyoming? Did you have a good time?”

“Hi, Mom! It was great! We went on a wildlife tour today because Dad didn’t want to go horseback riding before having to get on a plane tomorrow—I think he’s sore or something—but the tour was great. I saw some deer and an eagle in a nest and there were some really cool bear tracks near a puddle on the trail, but no bears,” he said sadly. “I would have liked to have seen a bear.”

“As your mother, I’m glad you did not,” said Cat and Kara felt a flutter of fear ripple through Cat’s heart. “Are you packed and ready to come home?”

“Yes—and Dad sent the email with the flight stuff in it already. It should be in your inbox.”

“I’ll check when we get off the phone,” said Cat smiling. He was always so organized. “I miss you, Carter. I can’t wait to see you tomorrow,” she added warmly.

“Me too, Mom,” he replied but his tone was less enthusiastic than Cat was expecting.

“Carter, honey, is something wrong?” She reached for Kara’s hand and Kara took it, scooting her chair closer, brows crowding over her eyes.

“No,” he said but there was clearly something on his mind. Finally, he came to some sort of internal decision and continued. “Mom, I know my first day back is usually a you-and-me day but would it be all right if I invited a friend over? Just for dinner?”

Surprised by the request, Cat looked at Kara as if to ask Do you know anything about this? Kara shrugged and shook her head. Carter hadn’t mentioned any new friends from school or, in fact, any friends at all the last time she’d been with him.

“I’m sure that could be arranged,” said Cat slowly, her curiosity piqued. “May I ask who?”

“It’s—um—Mom, do you think Kara would come to dinner?” he asked, and Kara’s hands shot to her mouth in surprise. “She hasn’t been over in a while and I miss her,” he continued.

Tears welled in Cat’s eyes and she reached out to pull Kara’s hands away from her face, bringing one to her mouth to kiss it lightly. She cleared her throat and said, “Why don’t you ask her yourself?”

Now it was Carter’s turn to be shocked. “She’s there? With you at the house?”

“The beach house, yes,” said Cat, correcting him. There was a long pause as Carter considered that information. In his experience, the only people who ever came to the beach house other than his mother and he were either an employee of his mom’s on some errand or—once or twice—someone his mother was dating.

“Are you working? A big project for CatCo or something?” he asked, and Kara could hear the confusion in his voice.

“There’s no project, no,” Cat answered. She hadn’t planned to tell him like this—about her and Kara—but she also hadn’t expected Carter to be thinking about the younger woman or missing her as he so obviously did. Cat wondered how he would react. Kara’s worried eyes met hers at just that instant and Cat felt her apprehension, as well.
There was another long pause on the other end of the phone and Cat could almost hear the wheels in Carter’s head working out the particulars.

“Mom,” he said, finally, his voice stern. Kara could hear his heartbeat through the telephone, fast and light, like a baby bird’s. “I’m going to ask you a question and I don’t want you to get mad and I really don’t want you to mess with me. This is serious, okay? Like serious serious.”

Cat knew it wouldn’t do to be heard smiling at Carter at this moment so she hooked her index finger over her lips and pressed down savagely. “Serious serious,” she said. “Got it. Go ahead.”

Carter took a deep breath and asked, “Mom, are you and Kara…dating?”

Cat fell in love with her son all over again in that moment, hearing the slight tremor of hope in his voice, knowing the courage it must have taken him to ask the question. She knew, somehow, he was holding his breath, waiting for the answer. So was Kara, she saw, sitting right across from her.

“How would you feel if I said yes?” she asked, winking at the younger woman.

Carter blew out a frustrated breath. He knew a classic evasion when he heard it. “Moooooooom,” he cried, keeping it just short of a whine. “Just answer the question! Are you and Kara dating?” Kara could hear a faint refrain of “Pleasepleaseplease” said under his breath.

“Yes,” said Cat, “Kara and I—“

Cat’s confirmation was cut short by the cheers of her son, cheers so loud she had to pull the phone away from her ear or risk permanent hearing damage.

“YES! Yesyesyes!” he shouted and Cat imagined him pumping his fist and jumping on his bed at the hotel. “I knew it! I knew it! This is so great, Mom! This is the best news EVER!”

“It is?” asked Cat, wonderingly. This was not the reaction she had expected—not by a long shot. Happiness, yes, but the best news ever?

“Are you kidding?” he asked, his incredulity clear. “I see the way you look at her, Mom. You look at her like everyone else in the world looks at Supergirl. Like Kara’s your hero and you can’t wait to see her every day but you don’t ever say anything and instead you call her ‘Kiera’ and it’s so STUPID, Mom, because she really likes you, too! Everyone can tell!”

Cat was stunned by Carter’s vehemence and by his usage of the word stupid but she let that go—this time—because it was clear he was very serious and very passionate about this subject.

“They can?” she asked, a little taken aback by his assessment.

“Mom, have you met her? Have you seen the way she looks at you?”

In fact, she had. Kara was sitting right in front of her with a smile as wide as the moon, holding her hand so tightly it was just shy of painful. The young woman’s eyes were filled with so much love Cat thought she might drown in it.

“How does she look at me, honey?” she asked, tears strangling her voice.

“Like you’re the first day of summer vacation, Christmas morning, chocolate pecan pie, Space Mountain, bedtime stories with hot cocoa, making snow angels under the stars, and winning Settlers of Catan all in one, Mom! Like you’re her hero. Haven’t you ever noticed?”
Cat pushed the phone into Kara’s hands, overcome, laughing and crying and trying to keep Carter from hearing either one of those things. She rose from her chair and walked to the windows in an attempt to regain her composure. Kara followed Cat with her eyes, worry staining them as she tried to wipe away the tears in her own eyes and get a handle on the phone all at the same time. She wasn’t managing very well.

“Hey, Carter,” she said in a watery voice. “Your mom gave me the phone for a minute. Did you have something you wanted to ask me?”

“Kara, is Mom…crying?” Carter sounded very worried.

“A little, yeah.” Kara was not going to lie to him. Not about his mother. Not ever.

“Did I say something wrong?” His voice was so small and fearful Kara’s heart lurched in response.

“No, no, no, buddy,” she said, rushing to reassure him. “You said everything right, I think. Sometimes people cry when they’re really, really happy and your mom just needed a minute to, you know, pull herself together.” She paused for a half second before asking, “So, would it be okay if I came with her to pick you up at the airport tomorrow? I know your first day back is usually a Carter-and-Mom day but I haven’t seen you in a while and I thought, you know, since I was here already….”

“Yes! I was going to ask you to come over for dinner but I’d rather it be a me-and-mom-and-Kara day. If that’s okay.”

Fresh tears rolled down Kara’s cheeks. “That’s very okay,” she said.

“Okay.” Carter paused for a moment, and then asked, “Kara, are you crying, too?”

Kara chuckled. “Boy, nothing gets past you, does it? Yeah, I am.”

“Is it because you love my mom and that makes you happy?”

“Partially,” she said, unable to stop the answering grin that overtook her at his question.

“What’s the other part?”

“Well,” she said, taking a deep breath before launching into her explanation, “I was really worried about how you would—you know—react to all this and I didn’t want you to think I was stealing your mom away from you or that anything was going to change very much because I want you to be happy and I know you’re happy with the way things are already—you know—with your mom and you, like you are, and I don’t want to mess that up. But you seem okay with it—with her and me—you know—together—and I’m kinda relieved because—”

Carter stopped her. “It’s okay, Kara,” he said.

“It is?”

“Yeah. You won’t be messing anything up because that’s kind of a thing with mom and me.”

“What is?” asked Kara, not sure she followed.

“You know,” Carter said shyly. “That there’s enough love to go around.”
“Is this okay?” asked Cat as she tugged Kara up the sloping, sand-lined pathway to the bluffs. They were both barefoot but the sand was soft and Kara could still feel the remnants of Sol’s warmth in it. She tried not to wiggle her toes too much lest she impede their progress.

“Of course it is, Cat,” said Kara, still a little surprised by how easily Cat’s name fell from her lips now. She turned her face into the salt-tinged breeze, letting it catch her unbound hair, the wind lifting it like the cape she wore sometimes. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

Cat pursed her lips, pensive. “Because it’s selfish of me.” She looked over her shoulder at Kara, eyes troubled. “To want to keep the world at bay a little while longer. Monday looms with our many responsibilities. All I want is more time with you.”

Kara stopped and let her fluid alien gravity arrest Cat’s forward momentum just enough that she rebounded gently into Kara’s waiting arms. “Is it selfish if both of us want the same thing?” she asked, threading her fingers through Cat’s honeyed hair, as fine as silk. “I’ll take all the time with you I can get.”

Cat rested one hand over Kara’s heart and looked up into her eyes. “You’ll have to share me tomorrow,” she said, her tone unreadable.

Kara shook her head. “That doesn’t count,” she said firmly. “Carter isn’t the world, Cat; he’s your world.” She leaned down to kiss Cat softly, pressing the flat of her palm gently against the curve of Cat’s belly through the fabric of her dress. “You made him inside of you, from stardust and hope and pain. Half of everything Carter is—half of everything he’ll ever be—comes from you. It’s not sharing when he’s that much a part of you.”

“Where were you twenty years ago?” asked Cat, tears glittering in her eyes. She scrubbed them away before they could fall and, remembering Kara’s age, added ruefully, “On second thought, don’t answer that.”

A fleeting sting of guilt skittered through the Daat Kyashar, startling Kara. Of all the things she’d imagined might worry Cat about their newfound relationship, their age difference simply hadn’t occurred to her. Largely because there wasn’t one. Not really.

“I feel like we should be sitting down for this,” Kara said, grimacing slightly, “but I’m actually older than you are, Cat. If that’s what you’re worried about.”

The clang of shock that rang through their connection almost made Kara laugh.

“What?” It was the only word Cat Grant could manage at the moment, so she said it again. “What?”

“It’s complicated. Complicated enough that my foster parents here on Earth decided to pretend it didn’t happen, really, but I was developmentally equivalent to the Earth age of twelve when I left Krypton. When my pod got stuck in the Phantom Zone, my already-slowed metabolic functions were slowed even further, but they didn’t stop.” She shrugged. “Physically, my body aged just over a year while I was in the Phantom Zone, but twenty-five years passed here on Earth.”

Calculations sparkled through Cat’s brain like heat lightning. “So if you’d arrived here with Kal, you’d be fifty-one now.”

“And change,” added Kara, her fondness for accuracy showing. “It was easier for everyone else if we—the Danvers’, I mean—didn’t acknowledge it. I looked thirteen, after all. But I was in a state of semi-conscious suspended animation for twenty-five Earth years. My pod’s educational program was active in shifts the entire time—Earth’s history, geography, science, art, religion, languages, and
And there it was—the final piece of the “Kara Danvers: Amazing Assistant” puzzle clicking into place with a neat little *snick*, bringing the entire picture suddenly into focus. Kara’s perfect Cantonese with Master Suen, her preternatural ability to pluck relevant facts seemingly out of thin air, her beyond-her-years understanding of the foundations of design, her exceptional editing skills, her intuitive understanding of cultural norms and the challenges of international communication…. Hell, it even explained her accuracy with time zones.

It also explained the number thirty-nine Cat saw when Kara had said she’d lived with Krypton’s death for a long time. Cat lifted her hand to cup Kara’s face in her palm. A slow, deep river of sorrow flowed through their connection.

“My mother’s face was the last face I saw before the pod put me under. Kal’s was the first I saw when I woke up. I promise I wasn’t alone, Cat. Not in any way that mattered.”

“Your mother—“ Cat cast about for the name.

Alura. *Alura In-Ze,* sent Kara and Cat saw a shifting image of a statuesque brunette with intelligent eyes and a loving smile.

“Alura was a strong woman,” said Cat, wondering how any woman from any planet would have the strength to put her only child in a tiny vessel and send her into the vast Universe with nothing but a prayer to guide her. “I see where you get it from.”

A shadow crossed Kara’s face. “Not strong enough, I guess. She couldn’t save Krypton. She promised me she would.” It was an old hurt, coloring Kara’s eyes like a fading bruise, more confusion and disappointment, now, than pain.

Cat smiled sadly. “But she did.” When Kara looked at her with questions in her eyes, she added, “She couldn’t save the planet—it was too far gone, too damaged. So she saved its memory instead—in the joyful recollections of a child.” She reached up and kissed Kara’s cheek, whispering, “She saved you, my love.”

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Continued in *Nature*

Chapter End Notes

I used a single line from Season 1 Ep 19 "Myriad" ("You changed me...and I am not easy to change.") that I thought was better placed in this chapter for my universe.

The writers for Myriad are:

Jerry Siegel ... (based on characters created by) and
Joe Shuster ... (based on characters created by)

Greg Berlanti ... (developed by) &
Ali Adler ... (developed by) &
Andrew Kreisberg ... (developed by)
Yahlin Chang ... (written by) &
Caitlin Parrish ... (written by)

Caitlin Parrish ... (executive story editor)
Abydosdork, as always, has come through with another perfect banner for this chapter. Please send her love for her work. I am so lucky to have such talented people willing to spend their free time assisting with this project.

Kara awoke with the dawn on Sunday, excited and restless and nervous all at once.

Cat, lying sprawled across the young woman and utterly spent from a blissful night of lovemaking, grunted somewhat inelegantly. She could feel Kara’s excitement through the Daat Kyashar, hissing against her awareness like the bubbles of a crisp Prosecco.

“If the first number on that clock is less than an eight, Kara, so help me…” Cat let the threat hang there unnamed. She was too tired and too damned happy to think of a suitable punishment anyway. She did not open her eyes.

“Shhhh…” Kara rolled to her left and tried to extricate herself gently from Cat’s arms. “Go back to sleep,” she whispered, kissing Cat’s cheek.

Cat clung to Kara for a moment, a soft sound she would deny was a whimper crossing her lips before she could stop it. Then she released her, curling up into a cat-like crescent moon under the sheets.

“Bring coffee when you come back,” she mumbled and Kara smiled, waiting until Cat’s heartbeat and breathing both assured her Cat was asleep again before padding downstairs to the kitchen to find something to eat.

She ended up with a dozen leftover potstickers, a box of Special K, and a half-gallon of milk, all of which she took onto the balcony to eat while she waited for the sun to rise. The sounds of the world
waking up—the crash of waves against the cliff-face below, the cry of gulls taking to the sky, the snap of the wind against the shade panels upstairs—brought a smile to Kara’s face. In just a few hours, Carter would be home. Carter, who had taken the news of Kara’s new place in his mother’s life better than she’d ever expected, who had—apparently—seen it coming long before either of them had.

“Kids,” she said out loud, shaking her head.

After polishing off an entire box of cereal spoonful by spoonful and indulging in a longer sun-soak than she’d intended, Kara cleaned up her mess and headed back to the kitchen to make Cat’s coffee—only to discover they were out of, well, everything. Cold Chinese leftovers were good enough for Kara but not at all sufficient for Cat Grant, Queen of All Media. Plus, Kara kind of wanted to spoil Cat a little. Especially today.

She padded back upstairs and donned The Suit, as she called it now. She was just zipping up her left boot when Cat stirred.

“Kara?” Cat opened one eye and saw Supergirl by the open balcony doors, haloed by sunlight, cape fluttering in the breeze. She gasped and sat up, fully awake now, awe and desire both rolling through her body and their connection before her fear caught up, skittering after her initial reaction like a small red crab across a tile floor.

Kara blushed first, and then frowned. “Nothing’s wrong,” she whispered, taking two long strides to reach the bedside. She gently pressed Cat back into bed, kissing her eyes closed again. “I’m just going out for a few things and I need to be dressed. It’s still early, mon ange. Go back to sleep.”

“Hurry back,” Cat said, a sweet smile erasing the creases of her frown as she sank back into the pillows. “And, by all means, continue speaking to me en français, mon cœur.”

Kara grinned. “Oui?” she asked, nuzzling Cat’s neck. “Tu aimes ça?” She kissed her way along Cat’s jawline until she reached her ear, breathing, “Alors, bien sûr. Mon soleil, ma lune, mes étoiles….”

Cat moaned softly and pulled Kara into a deep kiss before pushing her away, palms flat against her shoulders. “Go,” she said. “Now. Before I drag you back into this bed and have you do unspeakably wonderful things to me with that gorgeous mouth of yours.”

“Nnngh,” groaned Kara, pouting. “Don’t tempt me.” She gave Cat one final kiss and whispered, “Be back soon,” before heading out to the balcony. Once there, she took a few deep breaths and did what she could to lessen the impact of her leaving for Cat, dampening everything in both directions except the sensation of Cat’s heartbeat, like a radar ping, steady and sure.

The separation would be uncomfortable for both of them no matter what Kara did, but it would also be brief. Long-term physical separation during the naissance phase of the Daat Kyashar had the potential to cause physical and neurological damage to both members of the bonded pair, according to the Kalex files. Kara couldn’t risk that.

She meant to just pick up a few things at Les Abeilles, the little French market she liked in town, but everything looked so wonderful and she was so in love, she ended up with bags stuffed with pain au chocolat and croissants and madeleines au citron and macarons aux framboises and brioche. A pint of juicy strawberries like plump rubies, a pint of glistening garnet raspberries, a wedge of Petit Basque, a crock of fresh goat cheese with herbs de Provence, a small jar of lavender honey, a bag of Ethiopian Yirgacheffe coffee beans, a pound of butter, and a quart of fresh cream in a glass carafe rounded out her order.
At the register, the woman who owned the shop tried to shoo Supergirl away, saying, “For you, all is free. Take it.”

Supergirl shook her head and insisted on paying, grateful again for the two secret pockets she’d asked for when Winn was building The Suit. She’d made a decision early on—Supergirl always paid in full; her help was not for sale. Thus, she always had cash tucked away for just such occasions. She’d never regretted it, not once. Integrity was its own reward.

Outside in the sunshine and so very ready to return to Cat, she ran into an old man walking a small white dog. He had a newspaper rolled up under his arm and he grinned at her, his teeth very white.

“Doin’ a little shopping before the church crowds break, eh, Supergirl?” he asked, laughing when she blushed. “Gettin’ in before the crush.”

“Something like that,” she said, smiling breezily despite her discomfort. The forty feet between the bathrooms at the beach house had been a walk through the park compared to the howling ache she was experiencing now. It was as if she’d left half of her heart tucked into bed with Cat while the other half, ragged from being torn apart and stretched paper-thin over eight miles, slowly bled to death in her chest. She’d been confident the errand would be doable if she kept the trip short. That confidence waned with each passing second.

She nodded at the paper under the man’s arm. “Is that the Tribune?” she asked.

The old man handed it to her. “Sure is. You’re on the front page—again.” He winked at her. “Keep it. I read it in the park while Gracie was chasing squirrels. We always read the paper at the park, don’t we, girl?” He stooped low and patted the little Bichon Frise between her ears. She yipped and clacked her nails against the sidewalk, wagging her butt to beat the band.

Supergirl put the paper in one of the bags and leaned over to give Gracie a pat, too, the ache she felt making her head throb and her skin feel too tight. No matter how she felt, she knew it wouldn’t do to be rude. It wasn’t this kind man’s fault her heart cried to be somewhere else. “Well, thank you, Gracie and thank you, Mr.—?”

“Washington. George T. Washington, if you can believe it. My mother thought it would make me sound important, I guess.”

“Washington. George T. Washington, if you can believe it. My mother thought it would make me sound important, I guess.”

“Thank you, Mr. Washington. And you are important. You and Gracie both.” She leaned in to give him a kiss on the cheek. “No matter what your mother named you,” she added, forcing herself to grin at him. These moments, when she had the opportunity to make someone’s day without having to save them from certain death first, meant so much to Kara—even feeling the way she did. Holding up buildings or snatching planes out of the sky saved lives, yes, but so could a smile, if offered at just the right moment. Kara never forgot that fact.

She winked at Mr. Washington as she lifted off the ground and he waved—a little awestruck—as she flew away.

Back at the beach house, Kara stripped out of The Suit as quickly as she could, stuffing it in the tiny closet in the foyer. There was no need for modesty here unless they had guests and a quick extension of her super-hearing told her Cat was still the only person in the house, right where she’d left her—although things had definitely changed. Cat was no longer restfully asleep. In fact, her heartbeat raced as if she were being chased and she was breathing shallowly, rapidly—as if in pain. Kara re-engaged the Daat Kyashar as quickly as she could, sending Cat? Are you all right? as soon as their connection was re-established.
Nightmares came Cat’s reply and Kara tasted the sour tang of terror through their bond, receding as Cat woke more fully. *I'm all right,* Cat added, feeling Kara’s worry.

Kara sent a flood of tenderness to soothe the rough edges left by her absence and headed for the stairway, intent on holding Cat until the residual adrenaline and discomfort washed out of her. She knew the errand and the distance were responsible for this and she blamed herself. She shouldn’t have gone.

*No, darling, don’t.* Cat returned the tenderness but Kara felt how it wavered, as if offered with trembling hands. Instinctively, she sought the source of Cat’s fear, surprised when she felt that pathway gently but firmly closed to her.

*It’s nothing. I'll be fine in a minute,* sent Cat. *I just need to catch my breath.*

Kara hesitated, biting her lip. The nightmare was obviously not nothing, but Cat clearly didn’t want to share and Kara wouldn’t pry—no matter how worried she was.

*Are you sure?* she asked. Helping, protecting, defending—these were the pillars of her nature as Supergirl and any threat to Cat Grant, real or imagined, flipped those switches in Kara hard. Her hands twitched at her sides and she could feel the impetus to act ratcheting up inside her. She set her jaw and widened her stance in preparation to fight, even though she was naked and alone in the kitchen and there was no apparent threat.

Kara felt Cat’s chuckle through their bond. *Down, Tiger,* she sent and Kara relaxed, sensing Cat was finding her equilibrium now—or at least enough of it to fuel her usual sarcasm. *It’s not as if Leslie broke out of wherever your sister’s little Area 51 friends are keeping her and attacked while you were gone. I had a bad dream. I’m fine.*

Kara almost laughed, thinking it wouldn’t be likely Leslie Willis—aka Livewire—would ever see the light of day again. Not if she had anything to say about it, at least.

*Okay. If you’re sure,* she sent, turning back to the kitchen counter and her bags from the market. *I’ll be up in a few minutes with your breakfast. Stay where you are.* She opened cupboards until she found a tray, dusting it with a quick blast of super-breath. Then she reached over to turn on the espresso machine.

*Bring your cape when you come upstairs,* was all she got in reply.

Fifteen minutes later, Kara carried the breakfast tray up the stairs, her cape bunched in one hand and a pain au chocolat jammed into her mouth. Cat was dozing again, now that she’d recovered from her nightmares. Kara set the tray on the dresser, put her pastry next to it (minus a bite), and tiptoed over to the bed, cape in hand.

“Réveille-toi, mon ange,” she whispered. She fluttered a corner of the cape against Cat’s cheek and followed the tickle of it with a light kiss. The brief physical contact did more to soothe the lingering effects of their separation than anything else. “J’ai apporté ton petit-déjeuner.”

“Mmmmmm,” purred Cat, opening leaf-green eyes alive with energy and something decidedly wanton. There was no hint of distress in them. “What else is on the menu?” she husked, her tone suggestive. She tugged Kara down and met her with a scorching kiss, broken only when the smell of coffee hit her nose. “Oh my God, what is that?” she asked, looking over Kara’s shoulder.

“Ethiopian Yirgacheffe with fresh cream,” said Kara, mildly annoyed to have been prioritized behind a cup of coffee. She straightened and brought Cat’s breakfast tray to her, all annoyance vanishing.
when she saw Cat’s greedy “gimme” hands and her look of ecstasy when she took her first sip of the vibrant, aromatic brew.

Three sips in, Cat finally noticed the rest of the tray, with its brioche bun and croissant, crocks of butter, honey, and goat cheese, a small bowl of fresh berries dusted with a hint of sugar, a wedge of nutty Petit Basque, and a single madeleine—all sitting atop the Sunday Tribune.

“Inspired by the language, darling?” she asked, one eyebrow arched high. She reached out for Kara’s hand.

Kara allowed herself to be pulled into the bed, munching happily on the pain au chocolat she’d retrieved from the dresser, and nodded. “So many good things start with the word French,” she said, struggling to keep a straight face. “French toast, French bread, French roast coffee, French fries, French-cut green beans….” She ticked them off on her fingers, absently licking chocolate from her thumb.

Cat snorted at the last one. “Come here, you,” she said, pulling Kara in for something else beginning with the word. She tasted the dark chocolate on Kara’s tongue and moaned into the kiss, deepening it even further. She considered forgoing her breakfast all together but thought better of it at the last minute, glancing wickedly at Kara’s cape where it lay on the bed.

Kara saw the look and shivered, her whole body suddenly alight with flame and heat. “I’ll go shower,” she said, exiting the bed a bit unsteadily. “To give you a chance to finish your breakfast.” Now that she knew what Cat wanted the cape for, she was having a hard time keeping her hands to herself.

“I guess you’re not the only one who needs to keep her strength up,” said Cat matter-of-factly. Then she dipped two fingers into the tiny bowl of honey on her tray and lifted them to her mouth, watching Kara with eyes that were almost black as she slowly licked the sticky golden sweetness from them.

Kara whimpered, rooted to the spot where she stood, staring at Cat’s talented tongue as it chased a drop of honey from the corner of her mouth.

“Hurry back, darling,” said Cat, fluttering the fingers of her other hand at Kara in an impertinent wave. “I’ll be waiting….”

Kara nodded eagerly and fled to the master bath, thanking Rao the whole way for every honeybee that had ever lived.

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On the way to the airport, Cat—sipping from her second cup of the Yirgacheffe with a deeply satisfied smile—directed Anthony to stop by Kara’s apartment so the young woman could “pick up a few things,” adding, for the driver’s sake, how nice it was going to be to finally see where she lived. Kara’s surprise—at both suggestions—was palpable in the back of the town car.

“Are you sure?” she asked and the question had so many layers, Cat struggled to identify them all. Are you sure it’s a good idea I spend the night with Carter home? Are you sure you want to see my little plebeian apartment with no view and three whole rooms? Are you sure you want to risk being seen in this part of town at all?

“Of course, I’m sure,” said Cat aloud. She put a hand on Kara’s knee to stop her litany of unspoken fears and sent, Are you sure you can spend the night alone when spending thirty minutes down the
hall from one another to dress last night felt like it did? I know I can’t.

Cat was right; they’d been barely forty feet apart last night and they’d both felt every inch as if it were a mile. A mile stretched over broken glass. For Kara, the brief trip into town this morning had been worse, despite the precautions she’d taken. She was grateful Cat had only experienced nightmares from the ordeal—and she still felt guilty about that. She shuddered imagining what a night across town from one another might feel like.

As for your apartment, darling, I’m looking forward to seeing how National City’s very own superhero spends her downtime—what little she gets.

Kara smiled self-consciously and tried to remember if she’d left dirty dishes in the sink the last time she was home. Cat caught the corner of Kara’s worry and tugged at it, causing Kara to look up into her laughing eyes.

“Relax, Kara,” she said over-brightly, for Anthony’s benefit. “Someone recently reminded me not everyone has staff.”

Kara smiled weakly at Cat. “Yeah, well, you’re about to see what that looks like, up close and personal. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“I consider myself sufficiently warned,” Cat smirked.

Once there, Kara ran ahead a few steps and was through the door staring at her empty sink with relief by the time Cat joined her, nickel in hand.

“What’s that for?” asked Kara, taking it from her gingerly.

“The nickel tour? Three rooms shouldn’t cost me fifty cents.”

Kara pushed the coin back at Cat. “Considering you can see ninety percent of my apartment from where you’re standing, it should be free.” She ducked her head and gave Cat a kiss on the cheek. “Look around if you want. I’ll just go get—“

Kara’s phone chose that moment to ring and her face crumpled into a disappointed frown when she saw Alex’s name on the display.

“Alex?” she asked, answering on the second ring. She took a few steps toward the bedroom so she didn’t have to see the disappointment she knew would soon appear in Cat’s eyes. A call from Alex usually meant Supergirl was needed. “What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong?” Alex scoffed. “What’s wrong is where the hell have you been, Kara?”

Kara frowned and continued to the bedroom, catching Cat’s eye to let her know she’d only be a minute. Cat waved her off and wandered toward Kara’s painting nook, curiosity dancing along their connection.

“So you don’t need Supergirl?” asked Kara, watching Cat wistfully. She wanted to be with Cat when she saw her paintings for the first time.

“I’ll share, darling. I promise,” Cat assured her. You handle…that. Kara nearly snorted at the derision Cat aimed Alex’s way.

“What? No. I need to know where my baby sister has been. You told me you were going home when you left the DEO, Kara. That was over twenty-four hours ago. What, you get lost on the
Kara closed her eyes and erected a temporary barrier in the connection between her and Cat, not wanting Cat to “hear” any of this—this—this whatever it was. Jealousy? Misguided maternal instincts? She didn’t know. She yanked an overnight bag out from underneath her bed. This so wasn’t the way she wanted to have this conversation with Alex. For starters, she’d always imagined her sister would be supportive.

“You’re not going to like my answer, Alex, so can we skip to the part where you’re happy for me and just leave it at that?”

There was a brief, angry silence on Alex’s end of the phone. “You were with her.” It was more of an accusation than a question but Kara heard Alex’s hope she was wrong running underneath it. And somehow she had managed to color the word her with more venom than a three-letter word ought to be able to hold.

Kara frowned, pulling something off a hanger on one of her clothing racks blindly and shoving it into her bag. “I still am, actually. We’re on our way to the airport to pick up Carter.” She pulled something else off the rack—something orange this time—and shoved it into the bag, too.

That statement pulled Alex up short for a minute. “As in Jimmy Carter, ex-POTUS?” Was Cat Grant that much of a media whore that she’d interrupt a weekend rendezvous with her sister for an exclusive interview with a former president?

“No,” said Kara, rolling her eyes. She could hear Alex’s irritation in every word. “As in Carter Grant, Cat’s son.” She yanked open her underwear drawer, grabbed a random handful of items, and dropped them on top of the other things in her bag. “He was in Wyoming with his father this week. He’s coming home today.”

“So she’s got you babysitting, then.” Alex’s sarcasm was biting and Kara finally bit back.

“Alex, stop it.” She threw her haphazardly-packed bag on her unmade bed and hugged herself as she paced back and forth in front of her bedroom windows. “I know you don’t approve. You’ve made that very clear. But the last time I checked, I don’t answer to you about my love life. So if you can’t be supportive, I’m going to have to ask you to just shut up about it, because it’s already hard enough I can’t talk to you—my sister—about someone really wonderful and important in my life. I can’t keep defending her to you, too.”

Alex snorted. “There is no defense for her,” she said, regretting it almost immediately.

“You know what? I’m done.” Kara grabbed her bag off the bed and slung it over her shoulder as if it, too, had offended her. “I’m hanging up now. Call back when you decide you can be a grownup about this.”

“Wait! Kar, wait!” Alex sighed loudly and Kara could tell she was trying to talk herself down from whatever ledge she’d climbed up on. “I’m worried about you,” she admitted finally. “This is all so new to you and it’s easy to get caught up in the moment and not see any of the red flags, any of the reasons why it’s a bad idea—I know! I’ve done it, too! It’s flattering…to be wanted that way. And you can’t help but jump in, feet first, hoping you’ll figure it out as you go. But Cat Grant is older than you—“

Kara opened her mouth to argue that point but Alex barreled on.

“—and I swear to God, Kara, if you start in with the Phantom Zone right now, I will fucking fight
you. I’m not kidding.” Kara closed her mouth, but anger seethed beneath her skin like a lake of fire. “Cat Grant is older than you and your boss! Jesus, Kar.” Alex sighed again. “You deserve so much better than a jaded has-been who’s using you to spice up her life a little.”

“And who would be better for me, Alex?” asked Kara, irritation dwarfing the tears in her voice. She walked to the farthest window and lowered her voice, trying to keep some semblance of control. It was so very hard to do. “James, maybe?” she hissed. “How convenient for you if he left Lucy Lane all alone in the big city, hmm? Don’t try to deny it, Alex. I saw the way you looked at her.”

“Nice. You learn that shit from her? You come home for the first time in two days and—“

“Wait,” said Kara, her eyes sharpening dangerously. “How do you know I’m home? Are you tracking my phone?” She entered a few commands on the screen then gave her phone the once-over with her x-ray vision, finding nothing out of place. “What did you do, Alex?” She scanned her bedroom first, then the rooms beyond, finding the tiny sensors attached to her front door and to the loft windows. Then she saw the transmitter behind one of her framed prints.

Kara whirled around, angrier than she’d ever been with Alex, rage roaring through her veins and through the blocks she’d put up in the Daat Kyashar like a gasoline fire, exploding outward, an ever-widening bloom of emotion she simply could not contain. The skin around her eyes started to glow red.

“YOU’RE SPYING ON ME?”

Cat, who’d been looking at Kara’s books in an effort to distract herself from the painting nook until she could go through it with Kara, had never moved so fast in her entire life. One second, she was reading the spines of a stack of coffee table art books on a shelf next to what appeared to be a non-functional 1970s vinyl album turntable. The next, she had her hand on Kara’s back and was pulling the phone from the young woman’s white-knuckled grip.

A tangle of fury and hurt and betrayal blasted through the Daat Kyashar at Cat and, with it, several images it took a moment for her to sort and comprehend. When she finally did, cold outrage tightened every muscle in her body.

“Agent Danvers?” she asked, her voice clipped and razor sharp. “Cat Grant. Am I to understand you installed some sort of motion sensors in Kara’s apartment to track her movements?”

“I—It’s really none of your business, Miss Grant,” sputtered Alex, momentarily caught off guard.

“If you could put Kara back—“

“On the contrary—anything affecting Kara this profoundly is very much my business. Especially if you chose to betray her trust as a direct result of my involvement with her.” Cat’s voice sharpened dangerously. “Is that the case, Agent Danvers? I advise you to choose your next words very carefully.”

“Betray her trust?” sneered Alex. “I think you’re mistaking me for someone else, Miss Grant,” she said, emphasizing Cat’s name. “I’m not the one fucking her assistant to feel young again.”

“No! Alex—” Kara began, reaching for her phone, horrified by Alex’s words and by how they sliced into Cat, a hair’s breadth from the secret doubts of her heart. The knot of tears in Kara’s throat broke like a storm and she fought to keep the flood at bay, not wanting Alex to know how close to the mark she’d come.

Cat held the phone away from Kara, cupping the young woman’s face in one hand, gazing lovingly
into her pale blue eyes for a moment—just a moment—but long enough to quiet Kara’s distress. Cat’s look, calm and resolute, told Kara not to worry.

*She’s lashing out, my darling,* she sent, leaning in to kiss Kara’s forehead. *She’s worried about you and I haven’t earned her trust yet. Let me handle this before either of you say something that can’t be unsaid.*

Kara searched Cat’s eyes briefly and then nodded, folding herself into Cat’s side and wrapping her arms around her, smaller, somehow, than she usually seemed.

Cat tucked Kara’s head under her chin and brought the phone back to her ear. “I’ll let that pass for the moment, Agent Danvers, because I know you’re afraid for your sister. Fear often inspires recklessness.” The ice in Cat’s voice melted somewhat. “You don’t know me or my motives and you want to protect Kara. I can understand that. I applaud it, even.” She cleared her throat but her voice still broke when she added, “I would do anything to keep Kara from being hurt.”

“*Then we agree on one thing,*” Alex said acidly.

Cat nodded. “I think you’ll find we agree on quite a bit more,” she said softly. “Come to dinner at my penthouse tonight. Ask me anything you want. I promise you complete candor and a decent meal. Do you eat pasta?”

Alex hesitated, but her curiosity got the better of her. She didn’t know what she was expecting, exactly, but a dinner invitation wasn’t it. “*What time?*”

“We’ll eat at six-thirty, but feel free to join us earlier—if you’ve succeeded in removing the sensors from Kara’s apartment in time.” Cat paused for a moment to let that suggestion sink in. “And Agent Danvers?”

“Yeah?”

“My twelve-year-old son will be with us, so please leave the vulgar language and your temper at the door. Am I understood?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Alex, responding automatically to the snap of authority in Cat’s voice.

Cat nodded again, placated for the moment. “Kara will text you the address. We’ll see you tonight.”

She disconnected the call before Alex could respond and threw the phone onto the bed next to Kara’s overnight bag, turning her full attention to the woman in her arms. She walked with her to the sea-sage couch in the living area and sat, pulling Kara with her.

“We have to get to the airport,” protested Kara, weakly tugging in the opposite direction. “Carter—”

“There’s plenty of time, Kara, darling. You made sure of that.” Cat held Kara and rubbed her back, trying to get her to relax. “You need a minute so we are taking one. We won’t be late.”

Kara didn’t argue the point—she could use a minute or ten, preferably in Cat’s arms, to pull herself together—but she still felt guilty about it, enough that it slipped through their connection like the sting of a paper cut.

“Hey,” whispered Cat, lifting Kara’s chin so she could see her eyes. “This isn’t up for debate. You’re always there when I need you. You’re allowed to need me, too.”

“She’s not usually so…unreasonable,” Kara said, rushing to make excuses for Alex, still trying, even
now, to broker some sort of peace. “I’m sorry she was rude to you—”

Cat stopped Kara’s apology with a tender kiss. “First, it’s up to Alex to apologize for her rudeness. It’s neither your fault nor your responsibility. She’s an adult. Let her make her own amends—or not. Whatever she decides.” She ran her fingers through Kara’s hair. “Second, I’m not upset with your sister.” She smirked seeing Kara’s disbelief. “Believe me when I tell you I have heard worse.”

“But—”

“Kara, she wants to protect you. My guess is that’s been her job since you came to this planet—whether she wanted it or not,” she said, seeing in Kara’s eyes she’d guessed right. Cat squared her shoulders as if preparing for battle. “Let her do what she’s trained to do. I can handle it. I promise.”

Kara let a smile tug at her lips. “It’s not you I’m worried about,” she admitted. “Alex really has no idea what she’s gotten herself into.”

Cat affected a haughty air. “I’m certain I have no idea what you’re talking about, Kiera,” she said. “It’s pasta and civilized conversation. What could possibly go wrong?”

Kara wiped her eyes and shook her head. “You do remember I left my family Thanksgiving to come into work, right? Like, that’s a thing that happened. Me—abandoning a table full of super yummy home-cooked food to sit at my desk at CatCo all night. Just saying.”

Cat grimaced faintly before standing. “I do see your point,” she said, reaching out for Kara’s hand. When she pulled Kara off the couch—or rather, when Kara pretended to let Cat pull her off the couch—she leaned in for a kiss, the gentlest reminder of their connection. “We should go. You’ll need your glasses and your barrette for Carter—I don’t think we should overwhelm him with all the news in one day,” she said facetiously. She looked toward Kara’s bedroom. “I’ll get your phone and your bag.”

Kara nodded and hurried to her bathroom to put up her hair. Cat, surprised by the lightness of Kara’s overnight bag, opened it to see what it contained. Inside, she found a pair of purple leggings resembling a wad of grape bubblegum, an orange cardigan better suited to an elementary school crossing guard, nine pairs of virtuous white cotton underwear seemingly issued by the local convent, and a single pale yellow sock with a pom-pom on the back. She had no choice but to fix it; Kara couldn’t waltz around the penthouse in her underwear and a lurid cardigan for a week, after all.

Cat cast a disappointed glance at the painting nook—sacrificed now in the interest of time—and plopped the bag back on Kara’s bed as she set about re-packing it. Her long-suffering sigh could have been heard on the moon.

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At the airport, Kara couldn’t tell who was more excited—she or Cat. She watched Cat carefully as she checked in with the gate agent, showing her ID again and nodding at the younger man’s instructions as if she hadn’t heard them a million times before. Carter traveling alone via airplane was second nature for both of them by now—Carter’s father lived in Midway City and didn’t see the point in flying to National City just to drop off his son—but Kara could feel the sweet, chaotic cocktail of Cat’s emotional state through their bond and realized a mother’s worry for her child’s welfare was never very far away. It hummed in the background of their connection like an electric fan but Kara sensed the power that lay beneath it. Cat would move Heaven and Earth both to protect her son—with her bare hands, if need be. Woe to the person who dared threaten him.

In fact, the very thought of something harming Carter set Kara’s heart pounding and the sensation
startled her with its intensity. She’d always been protective of him—even before the he-almost-died-on-an-experimental-train-and-Supergirl-saved-him thing—but this felt different somehow, deeper and more personal. She wondered if the Daat Kyashar had heightened Cat’s understanding of herself as a mother, broadcasting it to Kara as important information now that it had come to the forefront of Cat’s mind. It must be that, Kara assured herself. Whatever it was, the depths of it was making her a little dizzy.

As the first trickle of travelers disembarked the airplane, Cat’s excitement jumped two notches higher and Kara couldn’t stop grinning. No one would have known looking at Cat that she was practically vibrating with joy and anticipation. The only outward sign she gave—other than her incredible smile—was the frenetic tapping of her left foot.

Cat saw Carter first and everything about her, inside and out, lit up like the World of Color light show that ended every night at Disneyland. She waved animatedly and crouched down slightly, opening her arms wide as he dropped his backpack and ran into them.

“Mom!” he said, holding onto her tightly. The airline attendant assigned to Carter smiled—as did other passengers as they passed by—but Cat didn’t see them. She had her eyes closed, breathing her son in. She felt tears well unexpectedly in her eyes.

“Oh, Carter,” she said, holding him close, not wanting to let him go. “I’m so glad you’re home. I missed you so much.”

Kara watched mother and son reunite, tears of her own pricking the corners of her eyes. Love flooded their bond—so much of it, Kara feared being swept away by it—and her dizziness increased a hundred-fold.

“I missed you, too, Mom,” said Carter, pulling back to grin at Cat. “I have so much to tell you! And Kara!” he said, swinging around to look for his friend. “Where—? Kara!” He found her not far away, trying to give Cat as much space as she needed. He ran to give her a hug, saying, “You’re not going to believe what we—” but whatever he was going to say was cut off as soon as Kara put her arms around him.

There was a sensation, quiet and immediate, like the impact of two soap bubbles colliding in mid-air, joining together to form a larger, single bubble before floating away on the breeze. All of Kara’s dizziness disappeared in an instant and she gasped. Because, before she’d put her arms around him, Carter had been very firmly defined as “Cat’s son” in Kara’s mind and body, no questions asked. Now, that definition didn’t seem so certain. Or rather, so exclusive.

Cat felt it, too, and pressed the flat of her hand to the base of her throat, startled, her pulse pounding. She met Kara’s eyes over the back of Carter’s head and saw the young woman’s alarm, the whites showing all the way around her bright blue irises.

Clearly Carter felt something, too, because he pulled back slightly and turned toward Cat. “Mom?” he said uncertainly. “Something just—”

Cat flipped instantly into take-charge mode. She signed the attendant’s paperwork and showed her ID one last time, relieved when the woman didn’t seem to notice anything wrong. When she was finished, she scooped up Carter’s backpack as if it weighed nothing and hurried to where he stood, ushering Kara and him into motion like a mother hen goading recalcitrant chicks.

“We’ll talk about it in the car, honey,” she said. “Here, take your backpack,” she added, helping him put it on. She reached for Kara’s hand to steady her, feeling all of Kara’s worry and confusion as it poured into their bond. It mirrored her own.
It’s okay, darling, she sent. We’ll figure it out. She checked an arrivals display for the current time as they passed, adding, Do you think Kal would be available if we need to call him?

Kara shrugged imperceptibly but kept their pace, wanting to be in the back of the car already so she could look at Cat’s iPad. She didn’t remember reading about anything like this in the Kalex files.

For his part, Carter didn’t need a telepathic connection with either woman to know something was wrong. The tension surrounding his mother and Kara was so thick he could practically see it, like a cartoon thunderstorm hanging over their heads. He didn’t know exactly what the problem was but it definitely had something to do with what had just happened at the gate and it definitely had both of them rattled. What he did know was twofold and serious enough for him to know he should keep his mouth firmly shut—at least until they were at home or somewhere no one else could overhear them.

The first thing he knew he’d actually known for a while. Or suspected, at least. After all, Cat Grant, Queen of All Media, had not raised a stupid child and a pair of glasses and a barrette were not a convincing disguise. Kara Danvers and Supergirl were one and the same.

The second thing he knew was weirder and he still didn’t understand really how he knew or even how it was possible. He wasn’t sure if he even cared about the how or the why—if there was one—because the what was kinda freakin’ awesome. Because the second thing he knew was Kara was now, for all intents and purposes, his second mother.

The real questions was: how was he going to tell either of them that?

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By the time they reached the car, Cat had everyone moving like a well-oiled machine. Kara had texted ahead to let Anthony know they were on their way and Carter handed off his backpack to him to be stowed in the trunk practically the moment the driver came into view. Anthony already had the passenger door open for them, waiting for their arrival, and Cat helped first Kara, then Carter inside the car, slipping in after them and pulling the door shut behind her. When Anthony took his place in the driver’s seat, she toggled the intercom and said, “The penthouse, please.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said and Cat relaxed only when the car began to move.

Kara immediately reached for Cat’s Prada bag and grabbed her iPad, opening the Kalex files before they’d traveled ten feet. Cat reached across the back of the seat to squeeze Kara’s shoulder, the expression on her face half shock, half abject disbelief, both of which she was only allowing herself to feel because her family was safe and on their way home.

And that was the crux of the problem right there. That word. Family.

Because fifteen minutes ago, using that word to describe what she and Kara had, what they were building together—seemingly as fast as they possibly could—would have been anathema to Cat Grant. Fifteen minutes ago would have been too soon to use that word. It would have been Ground Zero for endless hours of anxiety and second-guessing and hyper-critical self-evaluation. It would have jinxed them—as a couple, certainly, and individually, as well.

Cat had a very complicated relationship with the concept of family. Growing up, she’d been her parents’ Alsace-Lorraine, annexed by one or the other when communications failed and occupation seemed the only way forward. Her father’s death had heralded Cat’s own Independence Day, in a way. Without Jefferson Grant as an anchor point, as passionate and as stately as France, Cat sailed further and further away from Katherine’s stoic Teutonic disapproval and the cold détente they
shared.

She’d tried for something different with Carter’s father and had somehow ended up with more of the same—though with hotter tempers and bloodier battlefields. Even while pregnant, Cat hadn’t referred to them as a family, not even one in the first stages of growth. It had seemed beneath them—a holdover from a bygone era. Families—even the ones depicted on television then—seemed to break too easily and Cat did everything she could to circumvent becoming yet another statistic in that regard.

It hadn’t worked, of course, and she was left raising her son alone. Cat’s nature as someone who overcame more challenges before breakfast than most people faced in a month lessened the burden of single-parenting, to be sure. However, the word *family* seemed simultaneously too big and too empty a word to describe just the two of them—as if they would drift like ghosts in its long, drafty halls, haunted by what they didn’t have.

The moment Kara had put her arms around Carter at the gate had changed all that.

Now, Cat knew right down to the marrow in her bones they—all three of them—were a unit, bound by love through the Daat Kyashar. A *family* unit—“a bonded pair and their offspring” just like the Kalex files had said. El Mayara, stronger together, anchored to a steel spike that felt like it pierced the world, no longer drifting.

Apparently, the fact Carter wasn’t Kara’s biological offspring didn’t matter to the Daat Kyashar. It had just accepted him, swallowing him whole into their connection without hesitation, like a sponge drinking him in. Cat felt him like an echo, sensing his heartbeat inside her again like she had when she was pregnant with him. She knew she would always be able to find him now, would always know whether he was safe or not, would always—God and Rao willing—be able to feel him next to her heart.

It was an unimaginable gift and she was so very grateful.

And so very terrified.

Kara, on the other hand, was mostly just terrified. Even by Kryptonian standards, what was happening between her and Cat—and now between her and Cat and Carter—was like nothing she’d ever heard of before. Even Kal’s reassurances were wearing thin.

If the Daat Kyashar, an ancient and uniquely Kryptonian immune response, could manifest with humans, what else could it do? What else *would* it do, seemingly without any warning and with no regard to the standards of privacy, autonomy, and consent? She paged through the Kalex files as if possessed, hoping beyond hope there’d be a troubleshooting section or a FAQ or something. Was that too much to ask? A simple step-by-step guide or how-to, maybe entitled *What to Do When Your Daat Kyashar Malfunctions*. Or *Avoiding Accidental Lifetime Commitments While Engaging in Consensual Sexual Relations with Humans*. Or better yet: *Presumptive Adoption through the Daat Kyashar: Your FMLA Options*.

The last one actually tugged the corner of her mouth upward, its gallows humor exactly what she needed at the moment. She stole a glance at Cat and saw the same smile on her lips, knowing she had been broadcasting wildly since she’d hugged Carter and sure Cat was overwhelmed, trying to weather two competing tornados of confused emotion. Cat’s tiny smile did more to reassure Kara than any words would have and she tried to relax a little bit, deliberately taking a deep breath and attempting to assess the situation rationally instead of freezing and panicking as she had at the airport gate.
The first thing she noticed was the reverberation of Carter in her mind and heart, connected to but independent from the larger, more intimate connection she had with his mother. The information she received from it was limited to a general impression of his overall wellbeing and the sensation of his heartbeat, an additional radar ping—though weaker—to home.

And that was the crux of the problem right there. That word. *Home.*

It had always been such a troubling, complicated, and frightening word for Kara, linked exclusively to her home on Krypton and everything she had lost. She’d come to Earth dragging both Fort Rozz and a wailing emptiness the size of a planet behind her and she’d run from both. It wasn’t until Alex’s plane had come screaming out of the sky that Kara Zor-El started running toward something—something out from under the shadow of Krypton, something in the light.

For so long *home* had been a place—a dead hole in the sky where her planet used to be, the white farmhouse in Midvale, her loft apartment in National City. It wasn’t until she’d almost lost Alex that she realized home wasn’t a place, it was the people in it, the people she loved.

And that made the word even more frightening, because losing people was something Kara was pretty good at and she really didn’t want to lose any more of them. Her bones might not be breakable, but her heart certainly was—and she’d already lost two fathers and a mother and a *planet,* for Rao’s sake. How many more loved ones could she lose before she was just as dead and empty as the galactic coordinates where Krypton used to be?

But this—Cat and Carter and what they had—felt so *right.* She’d thought CatCo was becoming her home, but it wasn’t CatCo at all. It was Cat—had been Cat for so long Kara couldn’t remember a time when she didn’t feel pulled to her, the moon to Cat’s sun, reflecting Cat’s incredible light, holding it inside her. What had begun as admiration and inspiration had become so much more. It was easy to admire Cat Grant—especially from afar. She seemed so perfectly balanced, so sure and strong, so *together.* Who wouldn’t admire a woman like her?

Kara, however, knew where all the cracks were, where the façade began and where it ended. She’d seen fear in Cat’s eyes and she’d seen the size and shape and depth of her heart. She’d handed Cat her Lexapro with her morning latte for so long, neither woman even registered the event anymore. She’d seen Cat unbalanced by the most inconsequential off-hand remark, but she had also seen her rally in the face of a crisis, holding the entire city together with steel in her blood, steel she’d forged herself.

How could Kara not love her? And Carter, too, for that matter? The Daat Kyashar was just an afterthought—a side-effect of something that had been there from the beginning, growing stronger every day. It made sense for her. It was part of her DNA, no matter how latent, and Kara welcomed it completely.

The question was, could Cat? And if she changed her mind, what would Kara do then?

Carter sat between his mothers in the town car, pensive and quiet. Kara zipped through page after page of some document on his mom’s iPad as if she were cramming for a test and he felt her disquiet as if it was his own. His mom, on the other hand, looked completely calm, except for the tapping of her left foot and the fingers she combed relentlessly through his hair, as if the light touch reassured her somehow. He knew her well enough to know she was anything but calm, however, strength was as much a part of her persona as it was a part of Supergirl’s, and she did what she could to radiate it in the face of uncertainty.

And that was the crux of the problem as far as he was concerned. That word. *Uncertainty.*
Or rather, the lack of it.

For the first time in his life, Carter felt...settled. Anchored in a way he had never felt before. His parents had split up before he was a year old and he had never known anything but joint-custody and flying back and forth between two identical rooms thousands of miles apart. He’d learned the words “unaccompanied minor” before he’d learned his multiplication tables and somehow scheduling holidays and birthdays three years in advance only added to his sense of insecurity.

Home had never been a place because the places themselves changed too often. He had more stamps in his passport than he’d had birthdays, which had been the case practically from his birth. And family was a weird word to use to describe what he had when he spent more time with his nanny than with anyone sharing his DNA.

Kara had begun to change all of that from the moment she’d become a part of his mother’s life—and not just because she was phenomenal with Cat’s calendar. Kara’s longevity as his mother’s assistant and the stability she’d provided Cat naturally radiated outward, like the ripples in a pond after a stone has been dropped into its depths. The longer Kara stayed, the better things got—for both his mother and he—and Carter began to hope she’d never go away. Finding out his mother was dating Kara was one thing. What happened at the gate was something entirely different and Carter knew now—whatever happened—both women would always be there for him, would, in fact, unhinge the sky and pull down the stars for him if he asked. Together. A team.

“‘The best team,’” he said under his breath, smiling.

Kara stopped paging through the Kalex files and Cat stopped combing her fingers through Carter’s brown curls. They’d both heard him.

“What was that, sweetheart?” asked Cat.

“I was just saying we’re a team now—you, me, and Kara. The best team, because—even though we’re pretty strong on our own—we’re stronger together. Like—like a triangle, Mom. We support each other.”

Kara blinked at Carter, her brain stuck on two specific words he’d used. “‘Stronger together?’” she asked, her voice wavering ever so slightly.

Carter turned to look at her, his smile widening. “Yeah! Did you know the triangle is one of the strongest shapes? Especially if the pressure on it comes from the outside. That’s why we make bridges and stuff from them. They distribute force and mass evenly to all parts.”

Kara glanced at Cat. “And—um—that’s okay with you? That we’re a team—you, your mom, and me?” She looked down at the iPad in her hands. “Because you didn’t really get a say in it and I—”

Carter grabbed Kara’s forearm. “But I did.” He looked back and forth between his mother and Kara, wondering how he could explain it, how he could make them understand. “Since Kara came to work at CatCo, Mom, everything has gotten better, hasn’t it? You get to come home earlier most nights and you’re a lot happier than you were before she came, aren’t you?”

Cat nodded slowly. “Kara is the best assistant I’ve ever had,” she agreed.

“But it’s more than that. At least, it has been for a while now.” He frowned slightly, still unsure how to say it. It wasn’t as if he’d had a lot of experience. “She takes care of you and you take care of her and both of you take care of me.” He swallowed. “Isn’t that what family does?”

Cat paused and blinked rapidly to hide the tears welling in her eyes. She pulled Carter close and
kissed the top of his head. “Yes, sweetheart,” she whispered. “That’s what a family does.” She looked across the car at Kara and smiled softly, reaching out her hand. Kara took it, her blue eyes shining with tears of her own.

“Then that’s why it worked,” said Carter, pulling back from his mother’s hug to look at her, his eyes serious. “What happened at the airport gate, I mean.” He turned to Kara, all earnestness and innocence. “See, whatever it was, I think it’s like a computer program. You know how code has to be written just right before it will work? Like sometimes programmers have to compile over and over again until they figure out all the bugs, but when they finally do, it’s like magic, because—before—there were just lines of code and a compiler filled with red errors. But after, when it goes through, the code disappears and the thing it was for—the thing they wrote it to do—just…exists.” Carter looked back at his mother. “Like binary, Mom. After all those zeroes, we finally got a one. Kara’s our one.”

“But Carter—” Kara tried to find her voice, overwhelmed by what Carter was saying. Could it really be that easy? Was she making it harder than it had to be? And what did any of that have to do with consent? “How does all that mean you had a say?”

Carter looked up at Kara shyly. “Because,” he said quietly. “I was really hoping it would be you.”

At the penthouse, Cat sent Carter off to his room to unpack and get changed.

“Normal protocol still applies, young man,” she said, raising one eyebrow when he protested. “Kara has to unpack, too.” She ruffled his hair and kissed him on the top of his head. “If you’re done before we are, have a snack. There are oranges in a bowl in the refrigerator.”

“Okay,” he agreed grudgingly. “But don’t take too long.” He zipped off down the hallway with his backpack and Cat shook her head at him as he went. When she turned, seeking commiseration from Kara, she saw the young woman standing there, bag in hand, as if she expected to be turned out on the street at any moment.

“Kara, darling,” she said, reaching out to draw her fingers down Kara’s arm. “You’ve been here before.”

“Not like this,” said Kara and Cat felt the murky, fish-out-of-water feeling plaguing Kara through their bond. There was something else beneath it—something more than just a garden-variety case of self-doubt and insecurity—and Cat narrowed her eyes briefly, wanting to solve the puzzle of it. “Not as your—” Kara hesitated and looked down. “I—I don’t know what to call this, Cat. What’s happening between us.”

Cat pulled Kara’s bag from her hands and put it down on the hardwood floor. Then she stepped into Kara’s personal space and encircled the young woman’s waist with her long arms, looking up at her with an inscrutable gaze.

“May I kiss you?” she asked finally, her voice quiet.

When Kara nodded, Cat stretched up on her tiptoes and kissed Kara softly, slowly. She kept the touch light until she could feel Kara’s complete attention on her, then she pressed the tip of her tongue against Kara’s top lip, asking for a deeper connection. Kara whimpered and opened her mouth to Cat, sinking into the kiss. She wrapped her arms around Cat’s waist and pulled her closer, drinking her in, until she finally had to pull away, dizzy and breathless. She pressed her forehead against Cat’s and sighed, still troubled.
“I’m choosing you, Kara,” said Cat, realizing in a flash of insight what the problem was, why Kara was suddenly shy and awkward and insecure again. “I’ve been choosing you—over and over—since you walked into my office at precisely 10:15 the morning I hired you.” Cat reached up and let the backs of her fingers drift over Kara’s cheek. “I think that’s what Carter was trying to tell us. This—the Daat Kyashar and everything it means—wouldn’t have happened if I didn’t want it to—if I didn’t want you as much as you want me.”

“Really?” Kara’s blue eyes were filled with hope and fear both. “What if you change your mind one day or wake up and think ‘Oh my God, what am I doing? What did she do to me?’” The very thought of forcing Cat to do anything without her consent made Kara’s skin crawl and she started to pull away from Cat’s embrace, horrified and sick with revulsion.

Cat wouldn’t let her go. “Kara, look at me.” When Kara finally looked up, Cat held her gaze with steady, clear, green eyes. “You’re strong—stronger than anyone on this planet. With the possible exception of Kal, but my money’s still on you,” she said, smirking briefly. Kara’s lips shaded upward for just a second and Cat continued. “As strong as you are, my darling, you could not have forced this. You heard Carter—either it was going to work or it wasn’t. All or nothing. One or zero.” She smirked again and leered at Kara gently, looking her up and down. “And you are no zero.”

Kara blushed, pleased, but didn’t respond.

“I know you’re brave, sweetheart,” Cat said finally, choosing her words ever so carefully. She reached up to sweep a lock of Kara’s hair behind her ear. “But are you really going to argue with our son? About something like this?”

Kara gasped and her knees buckled. Cat steadied her with an iron grip on her forearm, tightening her hold around Kara’s waist, hoping it would be enough to keep her standing. “I’ve got you,” she whispered.

“What did you say?” Kara asked, barely audible, her voice cracking under the weight of the question.

“You heard me;” said Cat, her gaze unwavering. “I know what I feel, Kara, and I know what happened at that airport gate and I know what it means.” She let the love she felt curve the bow of her mouth into a soft smile. “Stronger together. Or—as Carter put it—‘the best team.’”

“It’s so fast to know, Cat….”

“When it mattered—when the stakes were highest—you have never hesitated. You left Krypton and everything you knew so Kal-El would be safe. When those criminals tried to bring down your sister’s plane, you saved her and everyone on board without a second thought. When I arrogantly named you Supergirl because I wanted a superhero of my very own, you tore your whole life into two to become National City’s protector. You have never let anyone—not even me—stop you when you thought you were doing the right thing. Is that true?”

Kara nodded.

“And does this—what we have between us and with Carter—does it feel right to you?”

Kara nodded again, taking a shuddering breath before tears crested and broke over her lashes. “More than anything I’ve ever done,” she breathed. “More than anything I’ll ever do.”

Cat cupped Kara’s face in her hands, brushing her tears away with her thumbs. “I loved you before I
woke up hearing your voice in my heart, Kara Zor-El. The Daat Kyashar didn’t change how I felt—it simplified matters.” She leaned in to kiss Kara’s cheek. “It reminded me family—the kind I’ve always dreamed of—was possible, if I had the courage to say yes to it.” She let her certainty show in her eyes and whispered, “I’m saying yes.” She ran her fingers gently through Kara’s hair. “What are you saying?”

And there it was; the choice. Believe Cat or don’t. Begin or end. Courage or fear. Yes or no. In the end, it was just that simple—and Kara had always known her answer.

“Yes,” she said, her brightest megawatt smile breaking across her features like a sunrise. “Yesyesyes!” Cat laughed when Kara picked her up in her arms and whirled her around once, the room spinning wildly. When she set Cat on the floor again, Kara’s eyes were indigo with purpose. “Yes….” she breathed, ducking her head to capture Cat’s lips in an intensely earnest kiss.

Carter came skidding into the kitchen at just that moment, groaning in disgust. “Really? Moooom!” When he saw Kara’s bag still on the floor, he protested even more. “And hey, you haven’t unpacked yet! I washed up, changed my clothes, and sorted my laundry. What’s the deal?”

Cat pulled away from the kiss with a knowing smile. “One day you’ll feel differently about kissing someone you love, Carter,” she said, raising an eyebrow at him. “But until then, Kara and I will try not to scar you with our public displays of affection too often. I promise.”

“You also said Kara would be unpacked by now,” he pointed out, shaking his head.

“If you’re in such a hurry,” said Kara, wiping the remnants of her tears from her cheeks, “why don’t you help me unpack? Your mom can cut up some oranges for all of us and we’ll eat them on the balcony. Then you can tell us what you want to do for your first day back, okay?” She looked up at Cat. “Does that sound like a plan?”

Cat shrugged. Far be it from me to argue with Supergirl, she sent, smirking gently. “Go on,” she said, shooing them out of the kitchen. “My part’s easy. You two have to find enough space in my closet for all those horrid cardigans.”

Carter grinned and scooped Kara’s overnight bag up from the floor. “Don’t listen to her,” he said, rolling his eyes in a move mirroring Cat almost exactly. “Sweaters are cool and yours match your outfits. That makes them double cool.”

“Oh, it does, does it?” asked Kara, pleased by the unsolicited compliment. So pleased, in fact, she looked over her shoulder and stuck out her tongue at Cat, sending, See? Someone appreciates my fashion sense.

Don’t let it go to your head, sent Cat, snickering. A month ago, he thought ant farms were ‘double cool’ because they were both insects and pets. And no, that argument did not sway me on the ‘Can I have an ant farm, Mom?’ question.

That’s a pretty good argument, though—

NO ANT FARMS, sent Cat and Kara raised her mental hands in surrender, shaking her head a little, her ears ringing as if Cat had actually shouted.

No ant farms, she repeated. Got it.

As she followed Carter down the hallway toward Cat’s suite of rooms, she thought of the last time she’d been there. It had been under such different circumstances, she almost felt like it had happened to someone else.
Cat’s day had run longer than anticipated on a night when she was supposed to make an appearance at a fundraising event for the mayor. Fearing traffic would be horribly snarled by the time Cat was free, Kara had gone to the penthouse to pick up Cat’s dress, shoes, and lingerie, taking the time to make up a little toiletries bag, as well, complete with her favorite robe.

Cat’s last meeting of the day had ended ten minutes later than expected and the media mogul had been in a foul mood because of it, thinking she would surely be late to the mayor’s event. Instead, Kara had handed Cat a tumbler with two fingers of bourbon in it and had told her everything she needed was in her private ensuite, noting a town car was on call and would be waiting downstairs to take Cat to the hotel when she was ready.

The look of gratitude Cat had given Kara at that moment had fueled weeks of silly grins and Kara had wondered how long she could go on being secretly in love with her boss before someone figured it out and she got fired, once and for all.

Except that’s not what had happened and Kara felt a little incredulous knowing she would be staying the night at the penthouse tonight, in Cat’s bed and in her arms, right where she belonged but where she never thought she’d be. She stood at the doorway to Cat’s bedroom as Carter tossed her bag onto the king bed, heading to the white dresser to see where he could make room for Kara’s things.

It’s our bedroom now, my darling, corrected Cat from the kitchen.

Kara blushed and went over to help Carter with her bag. I like the word ‘our,’ she sent, smiling when Cat confirmed she felt the same. When she looked up, Carter had cleared one drawer in the dresser and was about to unzip Kara’s bag to unpack it. She reached for it instead.

“Oh, I’ve got that part, Carter,” she said, pushing her glasses up her nose. “You don’t have to wait on me.”

“Do you have anything that needs to be on hangers? My mom has some room in her walk-in but that’s in the bathroom.”

Kara didn’t know if she had anything needing to be hung up because she didn’t actually remember packing the bag. She’d been too distracted by Alex and their argument.

“I’m…not sure,” she said. “If I do, I’ll let you know.” She pulled out a spring green sleeveless dress and its matching cardigan and laughed. “I guess I do,” she said, showing it to Carter.

He grinned and darted into his mom’s bathroom, returning with a handful of hangers for Kara within seconds. “There you go. I brought a few. When we get everything unpacked, I’ll show you where to put them.”

“You’re pretty good at this,” noted Kara, smiling as she slipped the dress and sweater onto a ridiculous puffy, pink, silk thing that felt like it would break in her hands. “Do you help your mom when she needs to unpack, too?”

“I did when I was little,” said Carter, shrugging. “Not so much now—though I would if she wanted me to. She hasn’t been traveling as much these days. Since you started working for her, I mean.”

In reality, Cat traveled about the same amount every year, needing to make appearances at her major holdings across the globe on a regular basis so her “subjects” never forgot who was in control. The difference was Kara arranged the trips to coincide with Carter’s trips to see his father whenever she could so Cat would be home with him more often than not. Also, having something productive to do when Carter was gone helped Cat miss him less. Or at least lessened the impact missing him had on
“Do you like that?” asked Kara, deciding not to correct Carter. What he didn’t know clearly wasn’t hurting him. “That your mom travels less?”

“Yeah, I guess. I like having her home more. And she’s happier. Traveling is hard for her sometimes. It makes her tired—especially if one of the international offices isn’t doing so well.” Carter looked thoughtfully at Kara. “Though since Supergirl came to National City, all Mom’s offices have been doing pretty well. People are interested in her, want to learn more about her, and I guess Mom helps them do that.”

Kara nodded, skillfully putting away her underthings while Carter was distracted. “Your mom has supported Supergirl from the beginning. She even named her.”

“Did that bother you, Kara? When she did that?” he asked.

Kara shook her head and scoffed. “No—why would it?” She remembered her initial protests to the name, though, and decided to be a little more forthcoming. “I mean, the word ‘girl’ bothered me for a few minutes—until your mom explained she was a girl, too, and that didn’t diminish her success and power. I hadn’t thought of it like that.” She put away a stack of tee-shirts and two pairs of jeans, leaving out the part where she’d almost gotten fired for arguing the point.

“Does she know?” asked Carter and Kara chuckled.

“Does your mom know I didn’t like the word ‘girl’ at first?” She dropped a pair of purple leggings in the drawer on top of the jeans. “Uh, yeah. I was a little upset and not at all good at keeping my mouth—”

“No,” said Carter, shaking his head. “Does Mom know—” He looked around furtively and lowered his voice, just in case. “—that you’re Supergirl?”

Kara’s wide, round gaze snapped to Carter. “What?” she squeaked, adjusting her glasses. “I’m not —”

“Come on, Kara,” he cried. “I’ve met Supergirl, remember? You saved my life!”

Uh, Cat? she sent, panicked. Carter just asked me if you know I’m Supergirl....

Pride and satisfaction inundated Kara through the Daat Kyashar followed by a smug He is our son, darling. What were you expecting?

“But—” Well, I wasn’t expecting to have this talk while unpacking my underwear into your dresser, that’s for sure!

“Did you really think a pair of glasses and a barrette would fool me?” Carter gave her a pointed look. “My mom says I’m very observant.”

He’s very observant, Kara. I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s suspected this for some time only to have it confirmed for him by what happened at the airport today.

Kara nodded, a frown pulling her eyebrows low over her eyes. “She does say that, and you are, but —”

“Kara, nothing else makes sense!” Carter punctuated his exclamation by pounding his fists on his mother’s bed, though the gesture lost some of its gravitas when the only sound it produced was an
airy boof. “I know what happened at the gate this morning—when I hugged you. Stuff like that doesn’t happen on Earth. It has to be Kryptonian.” He looked at Kara, his eyes pleading with her to trust him. “And the only Kryptonian I know is you.”

Kara bit her lip and hesitated, but only for a moment. Everything was happening so fast! Friday morning she was single and pining in misery for a boss who wasn’t speaking to her. Today, she was as far from single as she could be without a wedding ring; Cat Grant was not only speaking to her, she was whispering sweet nothings to her when they made love; and—through the unfathomable mystery of an ancient Kryptonian immune response—she had de facto adopted Cat’s twelve-year-old son. Kara was having a hard time keeping up. But she’d made a promise never to lie to Carter about his mother and she wasn’t about to start now.

“She knows,” she said, dropping an orange and white floral print dress and its hanger next to her bag. She came around the side of the bed and enfolded Carter in her arms, closing her eyes when she felt him tighten his around her. She prayed to Rao the truth about her would never bring him harm.

“Nothing gets by you, huh?” she asked absently, reveling in how it felt to hold him now versus the first time he’d hugged her, months ago after the train incident. Then, a hug from Carter Grant was an unexpected display of affection from the pre-teen son of her boss. Now, holding Carter was like holding sunshine and it filled Kara with hope and love and pride and a thousand other things she never thought she’d understand, never thought she’d ever have the chance to know.

Was this what Alura had felt holding her that last time in the launch bay? Kara had been Carter’s age then and Krypton was collapsing around them. Kara had been so frightened, was trying to be so brave for her mother. Was it possible Alura had felt the same—trying to be brave for Kara’s sake but desperately afraid? How hard it must have been for her to wrench herself out of Kara’s arms in those last dire moments. How frantic and despairing her mother must have been watching Kara’s pod scream away from Krypton, knowing it would be the last time she ever saw her child.

The sudden light pressure of Cat’s hand upon her back soothed the grief-stained memories bubbling up inside Kara and she looked up at Cat with somber blue eyes.

*I understand now,* she sent, and Cat both saw and felt a shift in Kara’s internal emotional landscape. *I will protect him as long as breath remains in my lungs or blood remains in my veins. He will want for nothing.*

*I know, my love,* replied Cat, laying her hand on Carter’s head. Aloud, she said, “Our snack is ready on the balcony if you two are done unpacking.”

“Almost,” said Carter, grinning, unaware of the moment playing out between his mothers. He pulled away from Kara’s hug and looked back and forth between the two women. “Can we hang out at home today—just the three of us? We could play Settlers of Catan and maybe some Mario Kart. Or we could watch a movie! I have *The Force Awakens* on Blu-Ray.”

Cat made a show of considering the plan. “I don’t know,” she said, her tone one of mock hesitance. “Aren’t we missing something important?”

Kara and Carter looked at each other blankly, wondering what could be missing from such a perfect-sounding afternoon.

Cat crossed her arms and pinned the two of them with an exasperated glare. “Honestly,” she said, shaking her head. “I can practically hear Kara’s super stomach growling from here.”
“PIZZA!” said Carter and Kara at the same time and Cat rolled her eyes as both of them tore out of the room, racing each other to the phone. Then she looked at the bed.

_How did I end up with all the cardigans?_

Kara’s laughter through their bond felt like fireworks, tasted like strawberries, and sounded like heaven.

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Continued in _Nurture_
Nurture

Chapter Notes

Abydosdork has provided you with yet another brilliant banner. This one captures the tone of one scene exactly. Please show her some love!

Fictorium beta-ed this chapter ages ago, it seems. But she always makes everything better. :)


The link above is the home on which I based Cat's penthouse and the building in which it resides. The photograph of the dining room is present in the banner, if you'll notice. Because Abydosdork knows her shit. :)

Cat Grant couldn’t count many perfect days in her memory. She wasn’t even sure she believed they existed, thinking of them in the same way she thought of unicorns or socially-progressive Republicans. A few, of course, had come close—though not the ones people usually ticked off on their adorable little bucket lists.

Her wedding to whatshisname, for example, had been a disaster. He’d been hungover, she hadn’t eaten in three days and was dangerously near to collapsing throughout the ceremony and for half of the reception, too, the florist had been caught in a drive-by shooting and was forty-five minutes late to the church, and all of that had been topped off by Katherine Grant, her overbearing, critical, and viciously sarcastic mother who hadn’t attended the wedding so much as stalked it like prey. Nothing—not one miniscule detail—had met her mother’s impossible standards and as soon as they’d reached the acceptable time to take their leave, Cat and her new husband had all but fled.

Carter’s birth had been wonderful and beautiful and painful in all the normal ways, but it had been
hurtful, too, because Cat’s marriage had been falling apart for the better part of that year and whatshisname had arrived at the hospital much, much later than was acceptable. He’d claimed a meeting and a silenced cell phone had kept him from seeing Cat’s repeated calls.

“I jumped in a cab as soon as I got your message, Cat,” he’d said, annoyed by her emotional display between contractions. “What’s done is done.”

The day Cat had discovered that he hadn’t been in a meeting during Carter’s birth—that he’d, in fact, been in a hotel room with his mistress, worrying a hole in the Ritz-Carlton’s carpet while questioning his fitness and ability to be a father (or so he claimed)—Cat had cut him out of her life. She’d called—in order—her lawyer, her accountant, a lock-smith, and a moving company, and had spent the day with eight-month old Carter on her hip in his yellow ducky pajamas, erasing all traces of her soon-to-be ex-husband from her home. They were divorced a year later.

No, Cat Grant didn’t have perfect days. She had perfect moments.

Like cuddling nine-month-old Carter, curled around him in her bed, tears wet on her cheeks after a particularly vicious phone call from his father, and having her son look up at her to whisper “Mama” for the first time, his wide eyes knowing, even then.

Like taking a rare lunch break during the frenetic early days of CatCo’s transition to a worldwide media conglomerate to zip home and see eleven-month-old Carter simply because she missed him, only to have him take his first laughing steps right into her waiting arms.

Like hearing the doctor say—after hours of waiting under harsh hospital lights one night when Carter was four, with only her nanny and bad coffee to keep her from flying apart at the seams—“He’s going to be fine, Miss Grant. The seizure was likely caused by his high fever. Carter’s CAT scan and MRI were both normal. As soon as we get that fever down, you can take him home.”

Like receiving her first Pulitzer. And her second.

Like hiring Kara Danvers at 10:15am one bright September morning just over two years ago.

Like this moment, right now, right here—sitting at the dining room table with Kara and Carter, playing their third game of Settlers of Catan, laughing at Kara’s indignation about being outmaneuvered yet again by Carter.

Today—the entire day, in fact—had been damn near perfect in every way, despite that little scene with Alex at Kara’s loft and their alarming moment at the airport gate with Carter. After ordering enough pizza to feed a frat house, the three of them set about having as much fun together as three people could pack into a finite number of hours. They started with Mario Kart—at Cat’s insistence, no less—and Kara ended up gaping at Cat with unadulterated shock when she won the first and second races both, steering Peach through each course as if she’d been born in the back of a 1981 Dodge Mirada driven by Richard Petty himself.

When the pizza arrived, they switched to watching The Incredibles on the curved 78” TV in the media room. Carter chose it because, he said, “I have a superhero family, too. I thought it would be fun to watch together.” After Carter and Kara had their fill of pizza, Cat curled into her hero’s side as they finished the movie. Carter explained that Kara was Mr. Incredible because of her super-strength and blonde hair and Cat was Elastigirl because she was the mom and because she often said she was “stretched too thin” or “overextended” or that she had to be “too many places at once,” following that declaration with a waggle of his eyebrows.

“Get it?” he asked and Cat reached over Kara to give him a playful shove.
“Yes, I got it,” she said, her tone one of barely constrained annoyance while inside she beamed, proud of his intelligent and creative play on words. The Queen of All Media had, after all, started out as a writer and words were every writer’s joy. And sometimes their pain, too.

“Wait—if I’m Mr. Incredible and your mom is Elastigirl, who are you?” Kara asked.

Carter thought about it for a long time, answering, finally, “Probably Jack-Jack, because I’m still finding out what my superpowers are.” Then he shrugged and added, “But I wouldn’t say no to being Edna. She ROCKS!”

Kara laughed, looping one long arm around Carter’s shoulders and ruffling his hair with such natural affection and ease, it was as if she’d done it a thousand times before. The fact she hadn’t—that Cat was witnessing the blissful effects of the Daat Kyashar as it nurtured the new bond between her lover and her son—took her breath away. So much so, she surprised Kara with a kiss when the young woman looked up—a needful kiss underpinned by a joy so tender it ached. She was breathless when she pulled away and she licked her bottom lip, wanting more but cognizant of Carter’s nearness and her promise to keep the public displays of affection to a minimum.

*What was that for?* Kara asked through their bond, touching trembling fingertips to lips that still tingled.

*For loving him. For showing him your love in real and tangible ways he can feel and respond to and remember. For loving me. For being here with us today. For this connection and everything it’s brought us.* Cat glanced away, embarrassed by her inability to explain. She felt she was making a clumsy mess of it. *I don’t know. I wanted to say thank you.*

Kara pulled her fingertips away from her own lips and caught Cat’s chin in them, turning her back to look at her. She ran her thumb along Cat’s bottom lip, her touch feather light and fleeting.

*Loving you is easy—has always been easy. And completely out of my control—like tripping over my own feet, she sent, her blue eyes liquid with adoration. Loving Carter is second nature to me now—like breathing or blinking. I don’t have to think about it; I just do.* She slid her fingertips up along Cat’s cheekbone and into her silken hair, cupping her cheek in her palm. *You shouldn’t thank me for things I can’t help doing.*

Cat was just about to kiss Kara again when Carter said, “I can see you, you know.”

“Well close your eyes,” Cat retorted, kissing Kara thoroughly but briefly when Carter dutifully covered his eyes with his hands.

“Are you done yet?” he asked, his voice muffled. Cat could tell he wasn’t really upset—he was enjoying teasing the two of them—but she sighed aggrievedly anyway.

“Yes, your highness,” she said, rolling her eyes. “It’s safe now.”

“Not from cooties!” he said, scrunching his face into a grossed-out scowl.

Cat and Kara shared a devilish look between them, and then pounced.

“Oh no! Not cooties!” said Kara overdramatically as she launched herself to the opposite side of Carter faster than the human eye could track and began her tickle-assault.

“Remind me, Carter, honey,” said Cat, beginning her own assault from his left. “Did we get you vaccinated for cooties before school started this year or not? I can’t remember.”
Carter, squealing with laughter, held up his hands in the classic “time-out” formation. “I surrender!” he shouted. “I surrender!”

Now, watching as Carter plotted his third win at Settlers of Catan, Cat glanced at the clock, hesitant to throw a curve ball into what was rapidly turning out to be the best day in recent memory. But it was getting late and she had impulsively invited Kara’s sister to dinner earlier in an effort to allay the older Danvers woman’s fears. Cat would have to begin preparing that dinner soon.

“Ha!” said Carter, after he rolled for his next move, surprising both women with his outburst.

“Not again!” whined Kara, face crumpling with disappointment.

“Yep,” said Carter, gathering the resources he was owed by the roll. “Double ore and double wheat gives me enough to build a road. That gives me the longest road, which lets me play my Longest Road card for two Victory points!” Then he held up the last development card in his hand. “And I have the Palace card,” he said, throwing it down on the table. “Which gives me my final Victory point. For the win!”

Cat grinned at Carter, proud of his strategic gameplay tactics and his proven adaptability against a variety of opponents and their own changing strategies. He’d played against Kara only a dozen or so times but he still recognized and was able to counter her three basic approaches to the game. The few times she’d won had been due to luck alone—none of which she’d had today.

Cat herself would have won on her next turn. She had both the Largest Army and the Library cards in her hand and would have played her third Knight at the next opportunity—giving her the three Victory points she needed to win. It just so happened Carter had rolled a six on his last turn, giving him exactly the resources he needed—although she knew enough about his own approaches to this game to know he would have attempted to barter with Kara for anything he lacked in order to build that last segment of road, counting on her inexperience and her distraction to get what he needed.

Cat also knew he would never have tried that tactic with her.

“Excellent work,” she said to Carter, gathering up the cards and paraphernalia from her side of the board. To Kara, she said, “Maybe we should get you a book on Settlers strategy, darling. To increase your chances of winning.”

Carter shook his head, bothered by the suggestion. “She doesn’t need a book, Mom. I’ll teach her. Next time, she and I will be a team and we’ll take you on.” He looked at Kara. “You’re already really good at the game, Kara. You just need to incorporate your opponents into your plan of attack now. It’s hard at first—holding every person’s possible moves in your head at once and trying to maximize your opportunities while minimizing theirs. But it gets easier after a while and, soon, you won’t even have to think about it. It will just come naturally.”

Kara and Cat both stared at Carter, blinking at him in shock. Kara because his innocent Settlers of Catan lesson was specifically applicable to other areas of her life—areas she was still learning about and perfecting, specifically as Supergirl. His advice was surprisingly good.

Cat was shocked not only by Carter’s understanding of the intricacies of attack and counter-attack stratagems but also by his succinct explanation of them—and by the compassionate and encouraging way he’d delivered his offer of assistance to Kara, careful to praise her abilities and her potential while minimizing the obstacles to her success. It was such a deft and thoughtful proposition, Cat wondered where he had learned such a thing. She knew business leaders and politicians and university chancellors who hadn’t mastered that style of mentoring.
“As much as I’d like to see that plan in action,” said Cat, “I’m afraid we have to clean up and start getting ready for dinner.” She noticed the change to Kara’s expression and her quick glance at the clock, shocked it was so late. “We’re having a guest and I promised pasta. I thought I’d make my famous carbonara—with steaks grilled on the terrace, too, for our heartier eaters.” She winked at Kara who smiled in spite of her obvious discomfort. “Carter, I’m putting you in charge of setting the table and prepping the salad. Deal?”

“Deal,” said Carter, agreeing automatically to his mother’s mild demands. His confusion was still evident, though. “Who’s coming for dinner?” he asked, looking back and forth between his mothers. “I thought it was just going to be us today.”

When Kara made no move to explain, Cat cleared her throat and did it for her, sending a soothing cascade of support through the Daat Kyashar as she did so.

“I invited Kara’s sister to join us—”

“Alex is coming?” asked Carter, a grin splitting his face, his eyes alight with curiosity and excitement. He’d only ever heard stories about Kara’s older foster sister. Meeting her was going to be awesome! Noticing his mother’s slight grimace and Kara’s air of apprehension, his excitement faded. “Something’s wrong,” he said, certain of it. “What’s going on?”

Cat wondered just how much “insider information” Carter was getting through their connection and how much of his insight was skill alone. If it was skill alone, she wondered what she could do to help him hone it—because letting it founder un-nurtured would be a terrible waste. She’d have to discuss possibilities with Kara later, after they’d gotten through this latest family crisis.

Kara, worrying the gray Settlers of Catan game piece known as the Thief back and forth between her hands, finally spoke up. “Alex and I had a…disagreement earlier and your mom invited her to dinner tonight so we could work it out.” She looked away from Carter’s dark, discerning eyes, and quietly added, “I don’t like fighting with her so I’m a little nervous about seeing her.”

Carter thought about that for a minute. “What was your fight about?” he asked.

Kara looked at Cat who shrugged imperceptibly to let her know it was up to her how much she said or didn’t say on the topic. It didn’t seem particularly important to keep the knowledge from him—especially since he’d be present throughout the dinner and would likely pick up on the tension whether they told him of its existence or not. And since he already knew Kara’s big secret, this topic seemed minor in comparison.

“Um…two things,” said Kara. “Alex is having a hard time with me…uh…dating your mom because your mom’s also my boss and that can sometimes be a really tricky situation…for everyone involved. She’s worried about me because she’s older and she thinks she knows better.” She put the Thief in the Settlers box and looked up. “The second thing is I found out she was spying on me today.”

Carter frowned. “Spying on you how? Like tracking your phone or putting a GPS tracking device in your purse or something?”

Putting aside her questions about what he was reading these days and whether or not she should take a more active role in monitoring his Amazon purchases, Cat said, “I’m not sure it matters how—“

“Yes, it does,” said Carter, interrupting her. “It matters a lot!”

“In what way?” she asked, surprised by his vehemence.
“So, Alex must know Kara is Supergirl, right? And didn’t you tell me she was a cop?”

Kara grimaced. Not seeing the point in keeping Alex’s identity secret anymore—she wondered how Cat ever managed to surprise Carter at Christmas—Kara said, “Well, that wasn’t exactly true. She’s a government agent, part of the group that helps Supergirl.”

Carter threw his hands up in the air. “That’s exactly what I’m talking about!”

Cat gave her son a narrow and warning look. “Care to share with the rest of the class?”

Carter sighed, then brought his hands down in front of him, firmly framing an expanse of, well, nothing on the table. “Okay, so Alex is part of the agency working with Supergirl. Part of her job must be keeping track of her so they know where she is at any given time, right? Because if—I don’t know—a bus is falling off a cliff or a meteor is hurtling toward Earth from outer space, they have to know where Supergirl is so they can figure out if she’s going to make it in time or not.” He looked at his mother with one of her own patented ‘Is this too challenging for you?’ looks.

“I mean, saving lives is not easy, Mom. It’s not just ‘Oh, look at me! I stopped a building from falling over and all these people are saved. Yay!’” Carter flailed his hands over his head in the most ridiculous way, and Cat and Kara both were careful not to look at one another lest they dissolve into helpless giggles. “A lot of logistics and surveillance and tracking go into that,” he continued. “Not to mention the bad guys who’d want to attack Supergirl and maybe kidnap her and stuff. So if Alex was tracking Kara’s phone or had tagged her with a GPS tracker, it would be understandable. Because she’s just looking out for her sister and for Supergirl. Like she’s supposed to!”

Kara blinked, not having thought of any of this before. “And if she put sensors on my door and windows at home?” she asked, interested to see Carter’s interpretation of that act. Maybe she’d jumped to the wrong conclusion here. Maybe Alex wasn’t spying on her after all.

“Is that what she did?” asked Carter. When Kara nodded, his face fell. “Oh, well, that might be okay, I guess. Or maybe not. It kinda depends.”

“On what?” asked Kara.

“Well, if she had them there as an additional security measure—like to stop break-ins or something, that would be pretty normal, right? I know you told me once that you don’t live in the greatest part of the city—did she add them when you moved there to protect you?”

Kara shook her head. “No. They weren’t there until sometime yesterday morning. I…uh…. I wasn’t home at the time.”

“You were with mom. At the beach house.”

He said the words so matter-of-factly, Cat inhaled sharply, surprised by his nonchalance and his maturity both.

Now, though, it was Carter’s turn to grimace. “That’s not so good, then,” he continued. “That means she was waiting for you to trip them. But it doesn’t mean she was being mean, though!” He hurried to explain, afraid of hurting Kara’s feelings or of offending her. “She probably thought she was doing the right thing. She could have called you. She could have found you if she really wanted to, I bet. Instead, she put in some sensors to let her know when you got home. That way she could talk to you—or whatever—alone.”

And Alex’s plan might have worked in exactly that way had Kara not been with Cat when she’d tripped those sensors, had she not been distracted and nervous and a thousand other things at that
Kara rose from her seat at the table and came around to Carter’s chair, turning him so she could kneel in front of him.

“Thank you, Carter,” she said, looking up at him with solemn blue eyes. She pulled him into a hug and continued. “Thank you for reminding me things might be better than they seem on the surface. You are so thoughtful and kind and I hope you know how proud your mom is of you—how proud we both are—though what I think doesn’t really matter—”

Carter pulled back from the hug and cut her off. “It does to me,” he said. “I mean, after what happened at the airport—but even before that—though maybe not in the same way? Whatever that thing was—the code that finally went through?—it changed us, you and me.” He swallowed and looked at Cat, knowing what he wanted to say, knowing the easiest way to explain it, but afraid of hurting his mother’s feelings.

Cat smiled at her son, realizing again how lucky she was to have him in her life and the importance of nurturing and encouraging his empathy and compassion. Faced with the choice of raising Carter as a man and all that entailed in this culture versus raising him as a human being, Cat had chosen the path less taken. These moments—more than anything else—reminded her it had been the right decision.

“It’s called the Daat Kyashar, sweetheart,” she said, pausing in the cleanup of the Settlers game. “The ‘code’ that went through. It’s a form of Kryptonian telepathy originally intended as a means of connection and protection for families many years ago on Krypton, when conditions there were harsh and unpredictable. Somehow, it became active in Kara here and—because of Earth’s sun, we think, and because of how Kara and I feel about each other—it began to manifest in me, even though I’m not Kryptonian. Then, when Kara hugged you at the airport today, it expanded to include you.”

“Telepathy?” asked Carter, excited. “Like reading minds?”

“Sorta?” said Kara, not sounding very sure at all. “The connection is strongest between your mom and I and we can communicate through it. With you, though, we think it’s mostly like a—a—” She remembered what he’d said about Alex monitoring her and her eyes lit up. “It’s like a GPS tracking device. Your mom and I will always know where you are and, more importantly, how you are—for instance, if you were hurt or in danger. But we won’t be able to read your mind or hear your thoughts or emotions or anything. And you won’t be able to hear ours.” She shrugged and looked at Cat uncertainly. Both of them knew she didn’t really have any concrete understanding of how this would all work, especially with the addition of Carter. She was basically winging it—and had been since the whole thing had begun. “Right?”

Cat looked thoughtful. She had wondered, briefly, when it had first happened, whether the Daat Kyashar would make things awkward for them all. Having a teenaged boy privy to some of her and Kara’s more private moments would be entirely inappropriate, for instance. However, so far, she hadn’t seen any indication of that being the case. And she’d been watching.

“If it were possible, darling, he would have heard us already,” she said, sounding more certain that Kara had about the topic. “We’ve had three conversations through the Daat Kyashar since the airport alone—not including this one, she sent, scrutinizing Carter closely for signs he could hear them. She saw none. He doesn’t seem to hear us that way.

Kara—also watching Carter and coming to the same conclusion—nodded, relieved.

Carter, oblivious to the women’s confidential conversation, absorbed this new information. “Daat
Kyashar,” he repeated. “Did I say it right?” he asked, looking to Kara for confirmation. When she gave it, he added, “You know what it means, right?” He looked back at his mother. “I knew as soon as she hugged me, Mom, but we were in a public place and I couldn’t say anything right then. And after—when we were in the car—you both seemed upset, so I didn’t want to make you more upset by asking a lot of questions. But you know what it changed for Kara and me? I can say it?”

Cat glanced at Kara softly and drew a veil across her thoughts. Her son might not be able to hear their senza voce conversations, but that didn’t mean he didn’t understand what had changed for him. The last thing she wanted to do was spoil his moment.

She turned her gaze back to Carter, smiling at him softly, too. “Of course you can,” she said, emotion deepening her voice.

“Can say what?” asked Kara, looking back and forth between Carter and Cat, confused. Somehow she’d fallen behind in this conversation and she didn’t know how. And she wasn’t getting any help from the Magical Mind-Reading Mystery Tour at the moment either, thanks to Cat.

“What you think matters to me—because you’re my mom now, too,” said Carter, smiling shyly at Kara.

Kara went still—as still as Cat had ever seen any person get. She didn’t blink, she didn’t move, she didn’t breathe. Even her emotional landscape was frozen solid, except for one tiny whirlwind of thought lodged somewhere near the lump in her throat, thrashing like a wild animal in a cage.

YouwillnotcryyouabsolutelywillnotcryyouhavebeencryingallweekendandthisisjustgettingridiculousnowsoYO

Cat chuckled indulgently, sending, It’s okay if you do, you know. You’ve not been entirely alone in that regard. Do you really believe he didn’t know the instant it happened? If you and I both realized what had changed, why wouldn’t he?

“Hey, Mom?” said Carter, turning to look at Cat, unaware of the interruption to their private conversation. “When is Kara moving in?”

Cat’s gaze snapped back to her son and she sat there, unable to answer him, her pulse pounding against her skin like the timpani in the 1812 Overture. She opened her mouth once, then closed it again, words—for once—failing her in the most spectacular of ways.

Oh, great, thought Carter, looking back and forth between his mothers, both of them unmoving and unresponsive. I broke my moms!

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Alex Danvers pressed the green button at the bottom of the video monitor station located next to the glass entrance doors of Cat Grant’s building. Closer inspection of the glass doors revealed they were nearly four inches thick and likely bulletproof. She whistled low, genuinely impressed.

Privilege has its perks, she thought to herself.

The video monitor switched from the logo of the building and its motto—The Prague, Cosmopolitan Living in the Jeweled Heart of National City—to the image of a man with broad, chiseled features and the classic high-and-tight cut of an active Marine.

“Ms. Danvers?” he asked.
Alex nodded and reached for her wallet, awkwardly juggling the bottle of wine she’d brought to her other hand while she struggled to free her driver’s license to show him as Kara had instructed. Finally, she held it up to the camera so the man could see. “Yes,” she said simply. “Guest of 505.”

“Welcome to The Prague, Ms. Danvers,” said the concierge and a discreet chime indicated the door would now swing open to admit her. Alex was surprised by how light it was as she pulled the ornate bronze door rod, slipping her license into her jacket pocket temporarily, knowing she would need it again. Kara had given her very specific instructions. The man from the video feed met her at the concierge desk.

“My name is Christopher,” he said, handing her a crisp business card. “If you should need anything during your stay with Ms. Grant, please do not hesitate to contact me or my associate, Neves.” He nodded over her shoulder and Alex turned her head just enough to register the presence of a petite woman standing by a wall of screens, monitoring live security footage. She was slightly shorter than Alex and had a rope of curly, dark brown hair braided down her back.

Neves nodded at Alex. “Ma’am,” she said by way of greeting.

Alex’s eyebrows crept up a notch. It was clear the concierge and his “associate” both doubled as security personnel. It was also clear they were both military, though they seemed young to have retired commissions in favor of this cushy job. Alex made a note to ask Cat about it—if she even knew. She suspected the life stories of the building staff were things Cat Grant would consider beneath her.

“May I see your ID?” asked Christopher. She slipped her ID from her pocket and handed it to him. He checked it carefully, handing it back only when he was satisfied. Discerning gray eyes looked her up and down briefly.

“May I offer you the services of our weapons safe, Ms. Danvers?” he asked, his tone professional and knowing. “Unfortunately, regulations do not permit weapons above the lobby level.” When Alex narrowed her eyes at him, he said, “You’re running heavy on your left. Shoulder holster with a Glock, if I’m not mistaken. Should I be addressing you as ‘Detective’, ma’am?”

Alex shook her head, impressed again. “Agent is my title, but you can call me Alex,” she said, chuckling. “Might as well.”

Christopher smiled. “Neves will show you to the weapons locker and then will escort you upstairs to Ms. Grant’s home. She has a private elevator. Access is restricted to residents and staff only.”

“Not surprising. That’s kind of a thing with her.” Alex shrugged when Christopher didn’t respond, turning to find Neves waiting for her in the classic ‘at ease’ stance. “Lead the way,” she said, noting the woman’s wide dark brown eyes and her muscular build. Neves’s background wasn’t as easy to discern as Christopher’s had been.

The weapons locker was located in a recessed room next to the wall of screens and was accessed by fingerprint. Neves opened the safe via silent keypad and then opened a caged cubby hole within it marked ‘505’, again with her fingerprint.

“Wow,” said Alex, stowing the bottle of wine on a small table in the corner. She unholstered her Glock, checked the safety, then unloaded it before handing it to the brunette for her to store. “This is some high-tech equipment.”

Neves gave Alex a tight smile but said nothing.
Alex snagged the wine bottle by its neck and watched the brunette lock up the safe. “Christopher is obviously a former Marine,” she said slowly. “Can’t quite place you. Navy?”

“Army, ma’am. Aircraft division.” Neves gestured for Alex to exit and locked the room behind them. She headed back to the main lobby and to a specific elevator, which she keyed open with a badge on her hip.

“Aircraft division?” Alex repeated. “Helicopters?” When Neves gave her a curt nod, Alex tried not to stare. She had a new respect for the woman. “Active duty?”

Neves looked at Alex discerningly for a moment as if gauging her trustworthiness. She activated the elevator finally and said, “I piloted Apaches in Afghanistan for three years, ma’am. Kandahar province.”

“Damn,” said Alex, the expletive filled with respect. “And call me Alex,” she added. “I get ma’am ed enough at work. Today’s my day off.” She tilted her head and smiled at Neves.

Neves smiled back and Alex noticed this one reached her eyes. “Yes, ma’am,” she said just as the elevator stopped. “Alex.”

Alex smirked as the elevator announced its arrival with a quiet ding. Two things happened in rapid succession: Neves straightened to parade attention in the blink of an eye and the elevator door slid open to reveal Cat Grant—though a drastically different Cat Grant than Alex had been expecting.

For one thing, the woman was barefoot, wearing a white pleated skirt falling just above her knees and a sleeveless white poplin blouse, looking breezily comfortable. A Navy blue apron emblazoned with the CatCo logo completed her outfit. For another, she was perhaps less precisely made up than Alex had ever seen her, but more relaxed, looking less like the Queen of All Media and more like one of those gluten-free moms of leisure that shopped exclusively at Whole Foods.

“Agent Danvers, welcome to our home,” she said, her smile genuine but wary, not quite reaching her eyes. “And Neves, thank you for escorting our guest upstairs.”

Alex exited the elevator and looked back at Neves, watching—surprised—as she grinned easily at Cat. “Of course, Miss Grant. My pleasure.”

“I’m making carbonara and grilling steaks for dinner tonight. We’ll have plenty for you and Christopher. If I call downstairs when it’s ready, will one of you come up to get your plates?” Neves’ grin turned almost predatory. “I’ll be here before you can hang up the phone, Miss Grant,” she promised. “I love your carbonara.”

“Well, it’s not Torino’s,” demurred the CEO, “but it will suffice. See you around 6:30.”

Neves nodded. “Yes, ma’am. Have a lovely evening.” She caught Alex’s eye just as the door began to slide shut. “Nice to meet you, Alex,” she said.

“You, too,” replied Alex, watching until the door closed. She frowned, taken aback by the familiarity between Neves and Cat Grant and by Cat’s offer to feed the two staff members. It was a generous and thoughtful gesture and did not in any way fit Alex’s Type-A Rich Bitch image of the woman. Feeling confused and a bituntethered now that Neves had departed, she turned back to Cat and forced a half smile, knowing it fell so short of reaching her eyes, she wondered why she’d even bothered.

“Call me Alex,” she said to Cat. “Day off and all that.” She reached out to hand the older woman
the bottle she held. “I figured red would go with pasta and Kara texted about the steaks, too.”

Cat took the bottle and looked it over. It was a good, moderately-priced Zinfandel from a year with excellent reviews. “It’s perfect,” she said. She was impressed but carefully did not let it show in her expression. Why shouldn’t Kara’s foster sister be as cultured and as remarkable as Kara? What did Cat even know about the woman other than what she did for a living, what she’d done this weekend to cause this little brouhaha, and that she had a rather predictable penchant for all-black clothing? Speaking of that… “May I take your jacket?” she asked, setting the bottle on the marble kitchen island next to a crystal decanter she had set out earlier.

Alex shrugged out of her favorite motorcycle jacket and handed it to Cat, remembering to snag her license from the pocket at the last minute, and returning it to her wallet. “Is Kara here, Miss Grant?” she asked. She kept her voice light but she was more than a little disconcerted Kara hadn’t met her at the door.

Cat hung Alex’s jacket on a modern-looking chrome coat rack near the elevator and leveled an inscrutable look at the DEO agent. “First, please call me Cat,” she said. “You’re a guest in my home and Kara’s sister. I think we’re beyond the need for formalities now.” She crossed back to the kitchen island and picked up a slim black tool, expertly uncorking the wine Alex had brought. She poured it into the decanter to breathe. “And yes, Kara’s here. She and Carter are upstairs on the terrace tending to the grill—something she felt was an urgent need.” She cut her eyes at Alex disapprovingly. “Though I’m certain there’s a healthy dose of avoidance mixed into that decision, too. She knows you’re here, of course. She heard you drive up.”

Alex scoffed, not pleased by how comfortably Cat Grant threw around those little gems about Kara’s powers. “So it’s all out in the open now,” she said acidly. “Was it a condition of this—” She flicked her hand in a gesture meant to encompass both Cat and the absent Kara. “—new arrangement between you two? She had to come clean?”

Cat carefully set the now-empty bottle on the counter and took a deep, steadying breath. No one had said this was going to be easy, after all. “So that’s your move here? Full steam ahead, guns blazing?” She looked Alex up and down, raising one eyebrow at her expectantly.

“I’ve always preferred the direct approach,” said Alex, smirking. “I thought you would, too.”

Cat nodded her head once. “I do,” she said. “Fine. Direct approach it is.” She leveled a murky green gaze at Alex and said, “I’ve placed no conditions on Kara regarding our relationship—this new arrangement,’ as you put it. She and I discussed how we can best proceed to protect both our working partnership and our private life. Not that you’ll be interested, but it’s a solid and workable plan.” She made a short but genuinely pleased sound. “Of course it is; Kara developed most of it.”

“And what about Kara’s other life?” Alex barely kept herself from sneering at Cat. “You’ll understand if I don’t quite trust ‘the Queen of All Media’ to let a story like that go—even if you are ‘dating’ my sister.” Alex made the mistake of using air quotes around the word dating and recognized her misstep almost immediately. Everything about Cat narrowed and sharpened the instant she did it, transforming the older woman into the human personification of the deadliest blade, clearly ready to strike.

“First of all, if I’d have wanted to run that story, I would have done so—months ago, when the coincidences kept mounting and Kara’s excuses got thinner and thinner until their ridiculousness demanded I take action.” Cat ground her teeth, but steeled herself for the next admission, knowing the risk she was taking to show her vulnerability at this point, aware she was offering a broad and tempting target as she did so. “I gave Kara an ultimatum then; I’m sure you’re aware of it. It was —”
She closed her eyes briefly, twisting her lips into a self-recriminating scowl. When she opened them, remorse stained her gaze. “I made a mistake, Alex. I knew it and I did nothing to rectify it. Seeing the two of them together simply gave me a way out of the mess I’d made. It didn’t change what I knew.”

Alex considered Cat’s words. Hank had told her this much, had told her their ruse hadn’t worked the way they’d intended. But what had kept Cat from acting on the knowledge she had for all that time? Cat Grant could have had the biggest scoop of the century and she’d let it slip through her fingers. It didn’t make any sense.

“And second?” Alex asked finally, choosing to sit with Cat’s admission for a while before addressing it. That Cat Grant would admit to any mistake—let alone one as damning as that—had caught Alex off guard.

Cat blinked at the younger woman, surprised she was getting a reprieve, no matter how brief it might be. “Second, nothing on Earth could compel me to put Kara or her alter ego at risk.” Fractured images of dangers too numerous to count and too horrible to contemplate flooded Cat’s mind and heart, her throat closing around the resultant fear like a fist. “I love her, Alex,” she said hoarsely, the shock and relief of saying those words out loud to someone who wasn’t Kara paling in comparison to the worry caused by imagined future pain.

Those were precisely the wrong words to say to Alex Danvers and they ignited the fury that had been simmering just beneath her skin since Friday, when all this nonsense had been brought to her attention. Kara, however, was at Cat’s side before Alex could even open her mouth and Alex heard the thumps of someone smaller and lighter taking a nearby stairway two steps at a time, seconds behind her.

“Kara? What happened?” The unseen owner of the voice had to be Cat’s son. His tone was worried but not surprised or frightened, despite having just witnessed a demonstration of her sister’s superhuman speed. Alex’s nostrils flared, incensed Kara had entrusted her secret to a child.

“Mom?” he asked. He skidded to a stop when he entered the kitchen, falling silent immediately. He saw the tension between the adults and watched them—especially Alex—warily.

Kara stood slightly in front of Cat with her right hand flat against Cat’s belly and her left hand extended toward Alex as if attempting to stop oncoming traffic. “Alex, don’t. Please.”

“Do NOT tell me what to do, Kara Ellen Danvers,” spat Alex. “Don’t you dare. You’re in enough trouble as it is.” She glared at her sister with equal parts disbelief and disappointment showing in her hazel eyes. “You told a kid? A kid? It’s bad enough half of CatCo seems to know, but this is—”

“She didn’t tell me anything!” said Carter, inserting himself between Kara and her sister, cutting Alex off. He was angrier than Kara had ever seen him, and she was shocked to have that sentiment repeated by Cat through their bond. “She didn’t have to! I may be a kid, but I’m not just any kid—I’m Carter Grant. My mother is a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist who taught me to watch people, to question everything.”

He seethed with righteous indignation and Kara was about to interrupt him, wanting to spare him the stress of this whole sordid situation, only to have Cat stay her through the Daat Kyashar.

Let him do this, darling, sent Cat. Let him defend you. It means so much to him.

Carter continued to rail at Alex, made unstoppable by the unfairness of it all. Why was Kara to blame? What had she done other than love him and his mom?
“Did you know Supergirl saved my life once—let me be a hero beside her? I stood as close to her on that train as I’m standing to her now.” He scoffed and glanced over his shoulder at Kara. “Was the glasses-and-ponytail disguise your idea? Because if it was, it sucks! I mean, look at my mom. She owns more pairs of glasses—in more shapes and colors and sizes—than anyone I know, but no one seems to have any trouble recognizing her when she puts them on or takes them off.”

Pride swelled in Cat’s chest and she fought to keep from laughing with wicked delight at that last bit of her son’s reasoning. It was so on point, it should have drawn blood. But—as proud as she was and as pleased by Carter’s newfound ability to stand up and be heard, especially in someone else’s defense—Cat knew this wasn’t his fight.

“Carter,” she said, intending to distract him momentarily so she could redirect his anger.

“No, Mom,” said Carter firmly, turning to look at his mother. “She said Kara was in trouble but Kara didn’t do anything wrong. I mean, she couldn’t help it—what happened to us. She didn’t know being with you would connect us telepathically. How could she?”

Kara’s eyes went wide at Carter’s revelation and she looked at Alex, who was so purple with rage, Kara feared she might have a stroke.

“Would what?” Alex bellowed, her eyes snapping to Kara’s, hoping to see denial or confusion in those sky-blue eyes, once so familiar to her, now so changed. She saw only fearful confirmation.

Before either Alex or Kara could speak, Cat stepped forward, intending to put a stop to this unpleasantness before it spiraled completely out of control. She’d had her fill of frayed tempers and loud voices and hostility. This was her home, her sanctuary, and she would be damned before she saw Alex Danvers spoil this day with her stubborn refusal to listen—to any of them.

“Enough,” she said, the whip of command making her voice sound dense and solid, like a slap. “Kara, I forgot to get dessert. Please take Carter to Hummingbird’s and pick up a dozen cupcakes, won’t you? Alex and I need to have a talk. Alone.”

“What?” Kara put her hand on Cat’s shoulder and turned her, shaking her head. “No, Cat. It’s my responsibility. She’s my—”

“It’s me she doesn’t trust, darling,” she said sternly, though her gaze was pleading. “As much as you want to, you can’t fix this.” Alongside that verbal declaration, she sent, If Alex and I don’t clear the air—if this festers and gets worse—it will come between the two of you and that’s the last thing I want. I can handle her. I promise.

“Are you sure?” Kara looked at Alex nervously and her sister snorted mirthlessly.

“Worried I’m gonna shoot her? Don’t be. My Glock is locked up downstairs.” Alex sneered at Cat, looking her up and down like she was nothing of consequence. “Besides, my winning personality should be enough.”

The merest hint of a threat toward his mother snapped against Carter’s heightened emotion and he started toward Alex in a rage, only to be caught by Kara as she scooped him into the air, lifting his feet fully off the ground. He reached out to Alex with clawed hands and thrashed against the blonde, the futility of that act made clear to him in short order.

“Carter, you know I can’t let that happen,” said Kara softly. “Physical retaliation is never an appropriate response to a verbal attack, no matter how infuriating.” She quoted, glancing at Cat as she said the words, remembering the story behind them and Cat’s shame at what she’d done. She
wasn’t about to let Carter experience the same thing, no matter how angry he was at Alex—how angry they both were.

Carter finally stopped fighting Kara and brought his hands to his head instead, staring at Alex intently, clearly hoping for some offensive assistance from the Daat Kyashar.

Kara smiled and shook her head at him indulgently. “Whoa there, Professor X,” she whispered, not unkindly. “I don’t think it works that way. Besides, that would be a pretty Voldemort move, wouldn’t it?” She changed her restrictive hold into something more along the lines of a hug and set him back on the floor. “And you don’t strike me as the Death Eater type.”

Carter grudgingly gave up his plan for psychic retaliation and crossed his arms over Kara’s, returning her hug. “I’m not,” he agreed. “I’m just angry, I guess. I’m sorry.” He mumbled the apology but Kara both heard and felt its sincerity.

When she was certain he wasn’t going to do something ill-advised, Kara released him and turned him around to look at her. “Angry’s okay, buddy. But in our family, we don’t let anger lead to violence.” She winked at him and grinned. “Besides, someone very small and wise once told me anger and hatred led to the Dark Side. And I don’t know about you, but I’d much rather be on Rey’s team than on Kylo’s.”

Carter rolled his eyes at Kara. “Are you done?” he asked, a tentative smile tugging his lips upward. “Or do you think you can squeeze a Star Trek reference in there somewhere, too?”

“’Resistance is futile,’” she quoted, her voice devoid of intonation as she moved to tickle him into submission. “’You will be assimilated. Your distinctiveness will be added to our own.’”

Carter laughed as he squirmed away from her. “You’re a little late on that one,” he teased. “Like—by six hours? That happened at the airport this morning.”

Kara looked at Carter quizzically for a moment until she realized, yes, what happened to them at the airport was somewhat analogous to assimilation into a hive mind—without all the cybernetic zombie parallels and the lack of emotion, of course. She shook her head at him.

“I’ve been out-nerded by the King of All Nerds,” she grumbled, bumping him with her side and grinning.

“Don’t you forget it,” he said, winking at her.

Alex watched the exchange between Kara and Carter with barely concealed astonishment, wondering where the hell this Kara had come from, with her confidence and her self-assurance and her highly-developed maternal instincts. When Cat joined them, Alex watched as Kara looped her arm around the older woman’s waist, drawing her closer, leaning in to nuzzle her cheek before Cat bent to say something to her son. The whole scene was so tooth-achingly sweet and domestic, Alex caught herself smiling.

The smile turned into a scowl of disapproval in the next moment, though, as Alex reminded herself that—even though Kara claimed to have been in love with Cat for years—the two of them had only admitted their feelings for one another this weekend. As tempting as it might be to believe they’d been together forever—especially after that little scene—Alex knew the truth. Somehow, Cat and her sister had gone from Mutual Crush to Married with Children overnight and things like that just didn’t happen. Not even when half of the happy couple was from a planet twenty-seven lightyears from Earth.
Kara caught Cat’s lips in a soft kiss and Cat hummed, pleased by the touch. “You need to go,” she said, reaching up to tuck a lock of Kara’s hair behind her ear when they parted. “Hummingbird’s closes in an hour. You’ll be stuck with eight carrot cake cupcakes and I know how much you hate those…”

Kara wrinkled her nose in obvious distaste. “Carrot cake isn’t a cake; it’s a lie told by mediocre vegetables in order to convince nice, unassuming people to eat healthier,” she groused, pouting.

Cat harrumphed. “I know I must have told you this before, darling, but there is nothing healthy about carrot cake. Trust me.” She smiled at Kara and shook her head. “You just don’t like it because it’s not chocolate.”

“Not true!” said Kara indignantly. “I like plenty of things that aren’t chocolate. If you want to believe a dishonest vegetable, be my guest.” She bent down. “Come on, Carter,” she said quietly. “Let’s go before all they have left is carrot cake and I end up crying in a bakery. Again.”

Those simple words disintegrated all of Carter’s good will and the relative peace Kara had achieved with him in an instant. He shook his head, incredulous the question of leaving was even still on the table. “I’m not going anywhere.” He crossed his arms over his chest and stood his ground. “I’m not leaving my mom alone with her,” he said, gesturing at Alex with his chin. “And you can’t make me.”

Kara and Cat both said basically the same thing at the same time, though in entirely different tones of voice.

“I kinda can, actually,” said Kara, half apologetically, reminding Carter she had a few extra powers going for her where strength was concerned.

“Oh, yes I can, young man,” said Cat authoritatively, crossing her own arms and staring him down. “If I say you’re going with Kara to Hummingbird’s, then that’s where you’re going. End of discussion.”

Carter recognized that particular tone of Cat’s as the You’ve Reached the End of the Line, Buddy last resort voice. She didn’t use it with him often, but when she did, he immediately stopped resisting her demands and apologized to her. This was the first time he’d ever considered ignoring her outright.

Kara felt Carter’s determination but also the fear and the recklessness winding through it, two dangerous threads in an unstable situation, exacerbated by the naissance phase of the Daat Kyashar. If he pulled one or both of them, the consequences could be dire.

“We’ll come right back,” she promised him quickly, trying to cut him off at the pass. “Your mom will be fine. We’ll be gone fifteen minutes—twenty at the most. And I’ll stay connected the whole time. She won’t be alone, okay? She’ll have us—both of us. Our triangle of support, remember?”

Carter looked at Kara warily, as if he wanted to believe her but didn’t trust Alex enough to make that leap. “Stronger together?” he asked, the fight leaving him again, this time for good.

“Stronger together,” agreed Kara, smiling at him. She ran her hand through his hair and put her arm around his shoulder. “Ready to go?”

Carter glanced at Alex one last time. “Yeah,” he said darkly. As he walked away, he tossed a final thought over his shoulder at the brunette, like a grenade. “Be ready when I get back. You owe both of my mothers an apology and I want to be here when you pay up.”
Kara—in the middle of texting Anthony to have him meet them downstairs—covered her eyes with one hand, wondering if anyplace on the planet would be safe from Alex at this point. Surely there was somewhere on Earth she could hide, right? Someplace Alex wouldn’t find her? Someplace with good schools and a decent Wi-Fi connection and no DEO outposts….

Cat caught herself chuckling at Carter’s bravado and cleared her throat. “Carter,” she said warningly, raising an eyebrow at him.

“Yeah, yeah. We’re going.” He stalked to the elevator and pressed the call button viciously.

Kara turned to Cat, ducking her head to kiss her softly. When she pulled back, she pressed her forehead to Cat’s and said, “Call if you need me.” Underneath that she sent, I mean it. It would take seconds. Less if I put my mind to it.

“I will,” said Cat, reaching up to cup Kara’s cheek in her hand. “Hurry back,” she added huskily. Kara nodded and pulled away, retrieving her purse and hurrying after Carter, fumbling for her access badge as the elevator dinged its arrival.

“Be back soon,” she mumbled, waving weakly as the elevator door closed.

Cat watched until she couldn’t see them anymore, and then turned to Alex. “Would you like a glass of wine?” she asked tiredly. “I could use the liquid fortitude myself.”

“What I want is answers,” snapped Alex, watching as Cat poured herself a healthy glass of the Zinfandel she’d brought. “What the hell is going on? What did Carter mean I owe his ‘mothers’ an apology? And what do you mean you ‘love’ my sister? And why is Kara acting as if you two have been married for ten years instead of dating for two days? As far as I know, this—this—has been going on since Friday. It’s barely been forty-eight hours!”

Cat took a sip of the wine and cast a baleful look at Alex, leaning casually against the kitchen counter behind her. “Are you finished?”

Alex shook her head. “No, I’m not finished!” She put her hands on the marble island and leaned forward menacingly. “On top of everything else that doesn’t make sense, your kid lets loose with some bullshit telepathy story that sounds like it came from a Syfy Network movie-of-the-week. A bad one, starring David Hasselhoff and William Shatner. Telepathically connected, Cat? Really?”

“For what it’s worth,” said Cat, “I had a hard time believing it, too.” She grimaced with discomfort as the town car carrying her family sped further and further away from her, pulling at their connection uncomfortably, like an over-stretched rubber-band. “It wasn’t until Kal-El confirmed it for us—”

“Wait.” Alex put her hands up, palms outward. She seemed more blindsided than angered by the mention of Kara’s cousin, though both emotions were present. “Kara called Kal? About something like this?”

Cat frowned. “Of course she did,” she snapped. “Who else would she call? It’s not as if she has a primary care physician she can just—”

“That’s me,” said Alex, interrupting Cat. She snorted when Cat blinked at her.

“What’s you? What are you talking about?” Cat leveled a piercing gaze at Alex, thinking—for the first time—the sheer lack of information she had about Kara’s life and family might be more than just an oversight. It could also be a liability.
“Kara’s ‘primary care physician’? It’s me. I’m a xenobiologist, an internist, and a biomedical engineer with the DEO, Cat. My primary responsibilities as Kara’s handler are her physical and mental health and wellbeing.”

Cat opened her mouth to respond, and then closed it again, finding nothing helpful to say. Questions, half-formed and disorganized, buzzed around her skull, aggravating her growing headache.

Alex twisted her mouth into a grim line and continued to explain. “I trained to fight so I can be in the field with her, where she needs me most. I’m also a section leader, but my unit is the science team, not the soldiers.”

“But she’s—”

“—not invincible. You know that better than others. Remember when she broke her arm?”

Cat did. Vividly. She nodded, not trusting herself to speak. Intellectually knowing Kara had certain vulnerabilities was one thing; watching several of her worst nightmares playing in a loop over and over in her head was another.

“Why wouldn’t she have called me?” wondered Alex, half to herself.

Cat rolled her eyes. “Do you really need me to answer that for you? I would have assumed you were capable of basic math. Your lack of support when she came to you about me added to the incident with the sensors?”

Alex sighed darkly, conceding Cat’s point. “Maybe you should tell me what happened from the beginning. Start with that monumentally stupid kiss Kara thought was such a good idea,” she said mockingly. “But leave out all the mushy stuff—and anything not rated PG-13. This is my sister, for God’s sake.”

Cat smirked, but did as she was told, telling Alex the whole story—from Kara’s moment of unguarded desperation on Friday night to the minute less than an hour ago when Alex had driven up to the condo. She alluded to her and Kara’s lovemaking with clever euphemisms whenever it became pertinent to the conversation, surprised and, frankly, relieved Kara was a sexual creature at all considering her family’s clearly Puritanical views on the discussion of sex and sexuality. Cat was especially careful to report what Kal had told them about the Daat Kyashar in general and his own history with it, offering to give Alex a copy of the Kalex files he’d sent if she thought they would be helpful. She did.

“I know it’s only been forty-eight hours, Alex, but I’m already thinking in terms of ‘our’ now—as in ‘our’ home, ‘our’ life together, ‘our’ son. Carter knew the instant things changed for them—when Kara hugged him at the airport gate today. I did, too. Like the Kalex files say—a bonded pair and their offspring.” Cat saw the difficulty Alex was having in believing all of this and she snorted in rueful commiseration. “Believe me, three days ago, I would have been right there with you,” she said, nodding at Alex’s frown. “I would have mocked anyone who’d come to me with a story like this…in every possible way. I’m not the fairytale type—unless the fairytale ends with the princess being the dragon after all, and she’s taken over the world.”

Alex grunted. “Gotta admit, that sounds more like you than this does.” She shook her head and began to pace back and forth in front of the kitchen island. “So you love my sister, are—in fact—bonded to her by some sort of haptic telepathy that’s been hiding in her Kryptonian DNA all this time, even though you’re human and things shouldn’t work like that. And she’s so head over heels for you, she thinks you’re a rainbow-painted unicorn donut who created the Universe for her as a
plaything. Carter—poor kid—has two archetypally divergent superheroes for parents now—I’d start putting money away for his future therapy needs, by the way—and what? We’re all supposed to relax because Kal gave you a couple of bytes of second-hand data and a cautionary tale about how he was a dick to Lois Lane once?” She laughed hollowly. “You’ll have to excuse me if I’m a little hesitant to board the crazy train just yet.”

Cat gaped at Alex, exasperated. “What is it you want from me, Alex? Proof?” The pounding in Cat’s head, which was getting worse the longer she and Kara were apart, jacked her irritability up a few notches, making her snappish and witchy. “What proof can I offer that will satisfy you? Do you want me to marry Kara? Is that it?” She glared at Alex with darkening eyes and shoved her discomfort to the periphery of her consciousness, wanting to be absolutely clear. “Your wish is my command. Is tomorrow soon enough for you? Would you rather it be today? We’ll need a county clerk or a minister—do you know any? Are you one? Would you like to be?” She gestured vaguely toward her home office and her computer there. “I understand you can complete a simple form and become ordained right online—then Kara and I could marry tonight. Should we do it before or after dessert, do you think? Thank God I sent her out for cupcakes or we’d have to do it during the salad course and what a nightmare that would be!”

Alex stopped pacing and held onto the edge of the kitchen island, wide-eyed, watching as Cat Grant, Queen of All Media, came unglued right in front of her. “What?” she asked tentatively, not certain she wanted Cat’s attention—such as it was—focused even more intently on her than it was already.

“Or do you want me to sign over CatCo to her? This house? This wine opener?” Cat picked up the handy bar tool and pitched it across the room where it bounced off the elevator door, clattering to the floor harmlessly. “Everything I own? I’d do that, too. This—all of this—” She gestured at her belongings with hands that fluttered like a cote of doves jostling for the same perch. “—it’s just money. Stuff. Things. Kara could have it all if she asked for it—if she wanted it. She doesn’t, of course; she’s not that type of person. But I want you to know she could ask for anything from me.”

Cat advanced on Alex like a woman possessed and Alex wisely backed away from her—until she was pressed against the dining room table with no avenue of escape.

“Nothing—and I mean nothing—is off the table where she is concerned,” continued Cat. “If she wanted to adopt a baby or a giraffe or half the foster kids in National City or if she wanted to fill the guest bedroom with puppies or if she wanted to quit her job to run an ice cream truck or if she wanted to stay at home all day and eat fucking potstickers until the smell of garlic exuded from her pores, I would want it, too.”

Cat clung to the back of one of the dining room chairs with a white-knuckled grip, the tendons in her hands and throat taut with the effort to keep herself upright. Her headache was edging into blinding migraine territory and she was afraid she might throw up eventually…maybe…if she managed to make it through the next few minutes without collapsing. Vomiting would be a relief, frankly.

“Kara could walk into this room right now and ask for an ant farm and I would say ‘Of course, darling,’ and smile at her because—even though the very thought of such a thing makes my skin crawl—Kara’s happiness means more to me than almost anything else on this planet. I would catch the little bastards and put them in the container myself if it would make her smile just once. I’d do it and she’d never see me shudder, because—for whatever reason—she chose me, Alex….”

“And what a catch you are, Cat,” said Alex, laughing derisively. “You’re right about Kara—she’s not interested in your money or your name and she’s too blinded by love to see she’s getting sucker punched here. What I can’t understand is why you can’t see what a bad idea this is. Are you so hard up for fresh meat you’d risk losing CatCo? I can’t imagine your board of directors will be too happy
Cat rolled her eyes and crossed her arms over her chest, the very picture of the words over it. “Trust me, I can name a hundred more reasons why Kara and I are a bad idea than you can and not even break a sweat. But they don’t change the fact she chose me—after everything I’ve done and knowing full well who and what I am.” She leaned forward and braced herself against the dining room chair again, desperate for Alex to understand. “She loves me, Alex, and—God help me—I’m not strong enough to say no to her. I’m not.” Cat shook her head, and continued, her voice breaking. “She knows I would give her anything she asked for. Anything at all. What am I supposed to do when she tells me all she wants is my heart?”

“Jesus,” said Alex, rolling her own eyes. But instead of meeting Cat’s gaze again when she was through, she looked at her feet, taken aback. She didn’t know what she was expecting tonight—something superficial with the word cougar written all over it and a power dynamic stuck somewhere in the 1950s sounded about right. Instead, she’d seen Kara as she should be, as Alex always hoped she would be—confident, radiant, and happy. She’d seen a side of Cat Alex guessed few people saw, realizing the woman hid depths only the bravest might attempt to explore, to expose. Leave it to Kara to be the one to do it…and all in the space of a single weekend. More importantly, Alex saw what they were together—Cat and Kara and Carter, all three. They were a family; no ifs, ands, or buts. And as happy as Alex was for Kara, and for what she’d finally found, that realization still stung.

Cat Grant had not won two Pulitzer Prizes by being an idiot. The one thing she could honestly say she did better and more successfully than writing was reading—specifically reading people and all the things they left unsaid. All the twitches of left eyes and the pursing of lips and the shuffling of feet—these gestures were a secret language and Cat had made it her business—both literally and figuratively—to become fluent in it. Alex Danvers wasn’t as hard a nut to crack as she’d expected her to be. The young agent’s failure to look at Cat again after her personal revelation told her much. The uncertain tilt of her head and the way she stared at her feet filled in the rest of the blanks. Alex was afraid of losing the only sister she’d ever known—the one she’d made a career of protecting—to someone she felt she couldn’t compete with. The very idea was so ridiculous, Cat was almost angry. Almost being the operative word. She sighed and tried to school her voice to a less irritated tone than the one she felt bubbling up through her nausea.

“You know, there’s something she wants, something she needs, that I don’t have the power to give her, Alex—no matter how much money I have or what weight my name carries.”

Alex glanced up at Cat with guarded eyes. “What’s that?” she asked.

Cat glared at Alex, both incredulous and annoyed she had to spell it out for the woman. “You! For God’s sake, Alex, she wants her sister back! Do you think I wanted this—to come between the two of you? Do you think I could even come close to being a substitute for what you two have? Kara needs you. She will always need you, no matter who else she has in her life.” She paused, then added, “You were the first, you know.”

“The first what?” Alex clearly had lost her footing in this conversation and she didn’t know how to get it back. If she’d ever had it at all, that is.

“The first person to remind her home wasn’t a place; it was the people she loved. Loving you made living on this planet bearable for Kara. You’re the reason why she kept showing up, day after day, year after year. You’re the reason she runs toward burning buildings and bank robberies and why she stands between her fellow Kryptonians and the people of this planet. To make you proud, to be worthy of being called your sister. She risked everything—her secret, her freedom, her life—for you
when she kept your plane from crashing, Alexandra Danvers, and she still does, every damned time
the DEO needs Supergirl’s help. All she wants in return—all we want—is your support. So you
need to make a decision—either you’re on the crazy train or you’re not. And if you’re not, consider
this an invitation to get the fuck out of my house!”

Alex stood stock still for a long moment, watching Cat catch her breath, letting Cat’s words wash
over her. She was right, of course—about everything. She had a way of seeing through people that
made it difficult—if not impossible—to hide from her. Cat reminded her a little of her father in that
regard—although Jeremiah was infinitely more gentle in his approach. Of course, Jeremiah hadn’t
built a worldwide media powerhouse from the ground up, so Alex thought she could probably cut
Cat a little slack on that point.

Alex took a long, hard look at the older woman, noticing the strain around her haunted green eyes
now, and the grimace of pain that flashed across her features as she raised one elegant hand to
massage her temple. What had Cat said about the bond—that distance during the naissance phase
could cause discomfort in the short-term and permanent damage if left too long? If Kara’s trip to the
cupcake bakery was causing Cat to suffer like this, what was it doing to Kara?

“Oh, what the hell,” she said, her voice resigned. She pushed off the edge of the dining room table
and walked past Cat to the kitchen counter, retrieving her abandoned wine. She trudged back to Cat
and handed it to her, offering a truce with it. “You look like you could use this.”

Cat took the glass from Alex and took a long swallow of the ruby-dark liquid, hoping it would help
settle her stomach. She glowered at the younger woman, but said nothing. Burning a hole into the
back of Alex’s skull seemed the sole intent of her unwavering gaze.

“I’m in, all right?” Alex threw her hands up in surrender. “I’ve had tickets for the crazy train since
the day Kal-El showed up on our front porch thirteen years ago with Kara tucked under his cape,
staring up at us with those huge, sad blue eyes. And even though it sometimes feels like I’ll never
get off this train—not for as long as I live—I can’t honestly say there’s anywhere else I’d rather be.”
She sighed and shook her head, blinking back tears. “She’s my sister, Cat. Of course I’m in.”

Cat put her wine glass on the dining room table, closed her eyes, and let out a long, heartfelt,
shuddering sigh. When she opened them, she smiled at Alex warmly, and this one reached her eyes.

“Welcome aboard,” she said, relieved. She was just about to add something else when a curious
frown notched the space between her eyebrows and her gaze seemed to focus inward. After a
moment, she blinked, clearly stunned, and then glanced up at Alex, looking a little greener around
the gills than she had just a moment ago.

“Now that we’ve gotten that settled, can I interest you in a real drink?” she asked, heading toward
the walnut buffet along the wall. She opened one of the cabinets and retrieved a bottle containing a
honey-caramel-colored liquid. Then she snagged an Old Fashioned glass from the row of them lined
up against the back of the buffet’s surface, wrenching open the bottle to pour two fingers of liquid
into it.

“What do you like? Whiskey neat?” Cat’s voice was airy and high and sounded completely
unnatural. Somehow, it was the most chilling thing Alex had ever heard. “Would you like to join
me in a scotch? Or three?” She turned to Alex, honest-to-God terror in her eyes. “Did I mention
Kara and I can listen in on each other’s conversations unless we engage a privacy barrier? It’s an
important point because, without it, during the last five minutes, Kara would have heard me offer to
marry her tonight and I would have—inadvertently and unwisely—agreed to, in order, a baby, a
giraffe, foster children, puppies, an ice cream truck, enough potstickers to choke a horse, and an ant
farm.”
She pulled another glass from the silent platoon of them arranged on the buffet and splashed a few fingers of liquid into the bottom of it, too. “Based entirely on the fact Kara is now crying in the back of the town car while looking at wedding dresses on her phone, I failed to engage that barrier.” Cat turned, her lips pulled into a slightly desperate version of a smile. “Graciously, she has declined the ice cream truck and the giraffe, has tabled the discussion of a baby and the foster children for a later date, has taken a rain check on the potstickers, and has offered to explain to our son that he can have one puppy or an ant farm, but not both. So…” She handed Alex the glass she was holding.

“Scotch?”

Alex took the glass from her. “I feel like I should say something but the only thing I can think of is ‘Better you than me,’” she said, taking a sip. She raised her eyes at the drink’s balanced smoothness, backed by a hint of clove, and wondered how much it cost per ounce, sure it was more than she made in a month. She added, “Doesn’t seem particularly helpful.”

Cat shrugged. “At least it’s honest,” she said, downing her scotch in one swallow, ignoring the taste in favor of its medicinal properties. She reached for the bottle and poured another, tossing that one back, too.

Alex tried not to stare. Something told her Cat could drink her under the table if she put her mind to it. Her and half the DEO, probably.

“What?” asked Cat, noting Alex’s hastily re-directed gaze.

“You know, the way Kara talks about you, you’re like some freakish combination of everything that’s perfect in the world. According to her, there’s nothing—and I mean nothing—you can’t do. It’s a little intimidating, to be honest. I was actually nervous coming here tonight—and I don’t get nervous.” She downed the rest of her own scotch and accepted another when Cat offered it. “I bought the whole Queen of All Media thing hook, line, and sinker.”

Cat thunked her empty tumbler on the buffet and retrieved her wine from the dining room table. The Brora single-malt had done its duty, taking the edge off her migraine and the butterflies in her belly, but she still had carbonara to make and steaks to grill. Getting drunk tonight was out of the question.

“And now that you’ve met me?” she asked, raising one eyebrow at Alex. It didn’t surprise Cat to know Kara had exaggerated her virtues—that was practically a given with the girl. But it did surprise her to learn Alex had been apprehensive about meeting her based on Kara’s report.

Alex swirled her scotch around the bottom of her glass, watching its caramel-colored pirouettes for a long moment before letting a snide half-grin pull at her mouth. “Jesus, Cat, you’re a human disaster,” she said, her hazel eyes sparkling with unshared laughter. “Glad I’m not the only one.”

Cat snorted. “Oh, you’re not. Trust me.” She looked into the bottom of her own glass, remembering a particular September morning two years ago, when her 10:15 had shown up in a raspberry cardigan and the most hideous dress Cat had ever seen. “The hell of it is I can’t even blame her for it. If you can believe it, I’m less of a disaster now than I was before she showed up in my office.”

Alex chuckled. “Yeah—she has that effect on people. It’s so easy to focus on the big flashy super powers—the heat vision or the super-strength—while forgetting some of her best work is loving people into becoming better versions of themselves.”

“I call it the Better Angels Effect,” said Cat.

“You would,” Alex said snidely. Then she thought about it. “It’s a good name for it.”
“And ridiculously enough, that really is why I get paid the big bucks,” said Cat, smirking. She lifted her wine glass and clinked it to Alex’s tumbler in an impromptu toast. “To our better angel. Long may she fly.”

“Long may she fly.”

They both took a sip from their glasses, lost in thought, nearly identical soft smiles tugging at their lips. After a moment, Cat’s entire demeanor changed and the Queen of All Media made her reappearance…via a sharp and predatory shit-eating grin.

“So, Alex…what’s this about Kal-El and Lois Lane?” she asked, her voice all ersatz innocence and Dorothy Parker-esque curiosity. She sidled up to the younger woman and added, “And don’t you dare leave anything out.”

Alex blinked at Cat and then groaned.

Great, she thought. Just great! Lois is going to murder me in my sleep. Fuck!

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Ten minutes later, Cat let Alex off the hook, laughing at her expression of pure, unadulterated relief.

“Oh, thank God!” said the younger woman, collapsing against the top of the kitchen island. “I really thought you knew, Cat. Kara’s gonna kick my ass when she finds out about this.”

Cat went to her Sub-Zero side-by-side and started pulling out items she needed for dinner. “You forget she already knows,” she said, gesturing at her temple with a carrot, reminding Alex of the Daat Kyashar and the special access it granted. “She says she knew it would come out eventually. She’s just happy she can blame it on you when Lois finally figures out I know. Which won’t take long, by the way.” Cat smirked at Alex before her focus went inward again as she listened to yet another broadcast from Radio Krypton—as Alex was now calling it. “Kara says she’s going to seat you next to Lois at Thanksgiving so ‘you can think about what you’ve done.’”

“It’s going to take me a while to get used to that, you know,” said Alex, nodding in Cat’s general direction. “The fact my sister is dating the Queen of All Media kinda pales in comparison to her accidentally vaccinating you and Carter with telepathic Kryptonian antibodies.”

Cat was about to make a tart response when she gasped lightly and turned toward the elevator, her entire face lighting up. “They’re home,” she said softly, abandoning the carrots and Romaine lettuce on the countertop to wipe her hands on her apron.

Alex was shocked by how much better Cat seemed after just the few seconds it took to say those words. The lines of pain around her eyes had eased and her color was improving, going from green-tinted pallor to rosy-cheeked health practically in the blink of an eye. She watched as Cat caught her bottom lip in her teeth, listening to the elevator as it inched its way up five floors, scrutinizing the door for the merest hint of movement, like a cat stalking prey. Hell, Alex half expected Cat to execute a human equivalent to the butt-wiggle cats did just before they launched themselves at their target; she looked that eager.

When the door opened, Carter rushed out with the pink box from Hummingbird’s, seemingly no worse for wear. He cast a glare at Alex and glanced around the kitchen and dining room, checking to see if everything was in its place. Alex could tell he was expecting trouble.

“Mom, are you okay?” he asked, breathless, heading directly for Cat. Alex imagined how he must have been in the elevator on the way upstairs—champing at the bit, ready to hit first and ask
“Kara was crying in the car but she wouldn’t say why—only that you were okay and I could ask you when we got home. And I felt, like, this weird panic, just for a second. Did something happen? Why was Kara crying?”

Cat pulled her eyes away from Kara with Herculean effort, removed the pink box from Carter’s hands to stow it on the dining room table, and gathered her precious boy into her arms, sighing with relief as the ruffled feathers of their connection smoothed out again. It was the first time they’d been apart since the Daat Kyashar had staked a claim on Carter, too, and Cat was relieved he didn’t seem bothered by anything but the unknown status of her wellbeing. She’d realized too late how little she knew about the naissance phase’s effects on the offspring in the equation and had spent the entire separation second guessing her decision to send him with Kara.

I…I shielded him from most of it—the distance and your anxiety both, sent Kara, hoping to reassure her. She gasped when Cat’s gaze snapped up to meet her own, green eyes filled with a curious mix of need and…was that nervousness? I could tell he was starting to feel uncomfortable after the first few minutes so I kinda—I don’t know—traded his discomfort for warmth?

Cat nodded her understanding and looked back at Carter. “Something did happen but I need to talk to Kara about it first, okay?” She glanced at Alex for a second and added, “However, I will tell you Alex had nothing to do with why Kara was crying and she and I have resolved our disagreement.”

“So she removed the sensors she put in Kara’s house?” he asked, looking from his mother to Alex and back again. “She’s okay Kara’s part of our family now, too? She’s not mad anymore?”

Cat looked blankly at her son for a moment, having forgotten entirely about the sensors. “I—”

Alex came to Cat’s rescue, shaking her head and mouthing the words human disaster at her. “Yeah, I took out the sensors.” She looked up at Kara with contrite eyes. “It was a bad idea anyway,” she added. “I shouldn’t have done it. I’m sorry.” She looked back at Carter and added, “And as far as Kara being part of your family, that just means mine unexpectedly got a little bigger, that’s all. I’m…adjusting.”

Kara flashed Alex a watery smile of thanks before seeing Cat again, her attention drawn inexorably to the smaller woman. She licked her bottom lip and her fingers twitched at her sides, longing to touch what was still out of reach. Alex rolled her eyes, swearing she could almost hear Kara growling.

“Hey, why don’t you two go check on the grill while Carter and I talk?” she suggested. It was clear the two women needed a moment to get themselves back together, so to speak, and Alex wanted that moment to take place as far from her as humanly possible. She also thought the kid didn’t need to see what was about to happen. It was bad enough he was present for what was clearly Olympic-level eye-shagging.

Kara glanced back at Alex. “Are you sure you’ll be okay down here for a few minutes?”

“We’ll be fine,” said Alex flatly. “Now, go! Before the whole place burns down!” She wasn’t talking about the grill upstairs anymore and Kara knew it.

Kara grinned. “Thanks,” she whispered, darting over to where Cat stood to snatch at one of her hands, pulling her into the stairwell and up to the terrace as quickly as she could without using super-speed.

Alex watched them go, lips twisted into a grudging smirk. When she turned back to Carter, he was
looking at her warily, as if sizing her up.

“You owe them both apologies,” he reminded her.

“I know,” she said, nodding. “But I owe you one, too, so we’re…uh…we’re gonna start there. Okay?”

Carter said only, “Okay,” drawing the word out a little because he’d been caught by surprise.

Alex ran her hand through her hair and sighed, suddenly needing to look anywhere but into this kid’s intense eyes, staring at her as if she’d kicked a puppy right in front of him. Which, if she thought about it, wasn’t too far off the mark.

“So, first thing you should know about me is I have poor impulse control. Also, I suck at apologies. And feelings. And really anything that isn’t science-based or related to drinking alcohol. I’ve been told I’m a decent dancer, but that’s not particularly relevant at the moment.” She sighed again and forced herself to look at Carter. “But just because I suck at stuff like this doesn’t mean I don’t have to do it. Sometimes we have to do stuff we don’t want to because it’s the right thing to do. So here goes….”

She took a deep breath and said, “I’m sorry, Carter. It was wrong of me to threaten and belittle your mom and to mock your family situation. I know what I did made you angry and probably frightened you a little bit, too. If I were you, I wouldn’t like me very much right now and I don’t blame you if that’s how you feel. But I really would like to get to know you and your mom better so maybe we can be friends. What can I do to make this up to you?”

Carter stared at Alex for a long, silent moment until the tiniest smile ghosted across his face, indicating the possibility of a thaw between them. “First,” he said, “you don’t suck at apologies. That was a pretty good one—in my opinion, at least.”

Alex gave him a lopsided smile. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. Apologize to my moms the same way and we’ll be even. Deal?” Carter stuck out his hand, wanting Alex to shake on it.

“Deal,” she said, taking his hand, surprised by the strength of his grip.

Having settled that, Carter turned to look at the kitchen. “Mom asked me to set the table and to prep the salad for tonight. Since they’re going to be a while,” he said, rolling his eyes conspiratorially at Alex, “maybe you could help? How are you at chopping vegetables?”

“I’m fantastic at chopping vegetables,” said Alex. “I also make a mean balsamic vinaigrette.”

“You’ll fit right in around here,” said Carter, grinning at her for the first time. “That’s Mom’s favorite. If you start the salad, I’ll set the table and then come help you. And while I’m setting the table, you can tell me about all the ‘science-based’ stuff you’re into. Okay?”

“You’re letting me play with knives and talk about science? At the same time? Kid, you and me are gonna get along just fine,” she said, winking at him as she headed toward the kitchen and the abandoned salad-makings.

Carter smiled, made happy by that prospect. “Do you play Mario Kart?” he asked. Even though the question seemed to come out of left field considering the rest of their conversation, Alex recognized it as Carter’s attempt to find common ground between them. The more common ground, the larger the foundation for friendship.
“Only as Bowser,” said Alex, grinning evilly.

Carter scrunched up his face, horrified. “Ew! Bowser? Really?” When Alex looked askance at him, he added, “Oh well. Nobody’s perfect, I guess,” winking at her before heading to get the plates for the table.

Alex could only laugh.

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At the top of the stairs, Kara whisked Cat into an alcove away from the lights and the prying eyes of the neighborhood and began to touch Cat all over. Cat hummed with pleasure until she realized Kara’s touch was less sensual than searching.

“Aren’t you okay?” Kara asked, worry creasing her forehead and clouding her eyes. “I felt your headache, the nausea… I should have dampened our connection but I promised Carter I wouldn’t, in case you needed me—”

Cat grabbed Kara’s wandering hands in her own and pulled the young woman closer. “Darling, I’m fine,” she said, smiling broadly, relieved to be back in Kara’s orbit again, where she belonged. Kara clearly wasn’t convinced. “If you doubt that, by all means, kiss me and make it all better.”

A fire-engine-red ribbon of desire sent through their bond underscored the suggestiveness of Cat’s tone and Kara blinked, electricity washing through her as if she’d been hit full on by one of Livewire’s attacks again. She bit her bottom lip, but still hesitated, her eyes very blue.

Cat drew Kara’s hands to her hips and settled her own on Kara’s shoulders, stepping well within the young woman’s personal space. “What are you waiting for?” she breathed, her liquid emerald eyes giving Kara all the permission she should need.

Kara wanted nothing more than to lean in and kiss Cat, hard, to taste her again and their connection. She could smell the sharp amber spice of Cat’s perfume—Jimmy Choo Signature, of course—and something fresh and grassy, and it made her mouth water. She had the sudden urge to bite Cat’s neck where it met her shoulder, near her racing pulse point—not hard enough to break the skin, of course. Just hard enough to make her desire known, to claim Cat in a way she hadn’t yet.

She had only ever had an inkling of this kind of desire—when Cat had promised to “fuck that grin right off your beautiful face” the night before—and it had felt all-consuming and a little bit dangerous, like deep-sea diving in the middle of the night with nothing but a tiny flashlight to guide her. She’d done a lot of diving like that during her “teen” years when her emotions felt too big and this small blue-green planet seemed too small to contain them. The silence and the depth and the sheer unknown of the night sea, with all its teeming life, served as a place of both sanctuary and daring for Kara, allowing her to skate the fine line between what was safe and what was not, all while hidden from view.

How strange to find that space again in the depths of one woman’s eyes….

One exceptionally gorgeous, utterly amazing, and altogether breathtaking woman who had offered to marry her—tonight. Which seemed like something they might need to address.

“I—I know you didn’t mean it—not really,” Kara blurted, clearly anxious. “I know you were trying to make a point to Alex and you were angry and frustrated by her stubbornness—she can be so infuriating; just ask my foster mother—but I wanted to let you know I would—if you wanted to someday.”
Cat, still suffering residual effects from their separation, was having a little trouble following the thread of Kara’s thought.

“Would what, darling?”

Kara looked down and plucked nervously at the hem of Cat’s shirt beneath her fingertips. After a moment, she took a deep breath and looked up, her eyes piercingly blue and filled with love.

“Marry you,” she said softly before ducking her head again. “Not tonight, obviously, because that’s just crazy, but another day, maybe? If…if you really want to?” Kara heard Cat’s heartbeat triple in time and looked up. “I would,” she repeated hesitantly, not sure how to interpret the look in Cat’s eyes. “Just so you know.”

Cat, trembling in Kara’s gentle hold, her eyes filling with glittering stars, whispered, “You would?”

Kara nodded earnestly, a shy smile touching her lips. “It’s always been you,” she said. Behind that, she sent, **There could never be anyone else for me. Not in this Universe or any other. Don’t you know that?**

Cat laughed self-deprecatingly and shook her head. “There’s a big difference between knowing something and believing it, Kara. I don’t think I dared—even with the Daat Kyashar and everything that’s happened. I’m just—”

“Everything,” said Kara in a rush, cutting Cat’s insecurities off before she could voice them. “You’re everything to me, Cat.” She looked into the shadowy ball of self-consciousness Cat clutched close to her heart, angry and sad that a woman like Cat could ever feel those things about herself, that she would even entertain the possibility of truth in them. “I don’t care what Alex said or what your mother might think. I don’t care what anyone thinks—not even you, Catherine Jane Grant. I love you. I know you love me. Carter is happy and healthy and loved. That is all that matters. Anyone who says any different can take a flying leap off your balcony at CatCo for all I care.” Her eyes flashed a dangerous cobalt blue. “I’ll happily show them the way,” she added darkly.

Cat blinked, caught a little off guard by Kara’s anger, so out of character for the young hero. It pressed into their connection like a wall of spikes and Cat was glad it was meant in her defense rather than was aimed at her. Cat wondered—and not for the first time—if Sol’s yellow light didn’t affect Kara’s emotions in the same way it affected her physical capabilities, which is to say, heightened them. It would explain Kara’s ‘Sunny Danvers’ nickname, for one thing. And her capacity for love, for another.

Once her surprise wore off, though, Cat realized just how fascinated she was by this brief glimpse into Kara’s wrath. Having a superhero ready to do battle in one’s defense was a heady thing and more than a little sexy and she let that realization flood their connection, changing the tenor of their conversation in an instant. The image of a furious Kara taking her right there against the wall was practically enough to make Cat come on the spot.

“Kiss me,” she commanded, eyes bright and wanting. *Claim me the way I know you want to.*

Kara surged against Cat and kissed her deeply, groaning as the contact sent a shockwave of sensuality through their bond. The last remnants of their separation sickness evaporated under the heat of their kiss and Kara twisted her fingers into the fabric of Cat’s skirt, pulling her closer and closer still, drowning in her….

Cat moaned and fisted her hands in the plackets of Kara’s white oxford hanging open over the white
tank top she’d worn, the last of the outfits picked for her by Gagan. Kara’s curious fingers wandered upward, untying Cat’s apron strings so she could slip under Cat’s blouse, skimming up over soft skin to caress her small breasts and sensitive nipples, plucking at them until Cat wrenched her mouth from their kiss just to breathe.

Kara imagined her mouth on Cat’s neck again, imagined laying a molten chain of hot and hungry kisses from the spot just beneath her right ear down to the place where Cat’s blood beat like a drum for her, imagined how the sting of her teeth against that ivory expanse would feel reflected through the Daat Kyashar.

Cat threw her head back, baring the very spot Kara imagined feasting upon, and whispered, “Kara… please….”

Kara pushed Cat deeper into the alcove and the shadows it afforded, pressing her against the wall while she trailed tongue and lips and teeth down the creamy column of Cat’s neck to the notch at the base of her throat where her blood pounded.

*No marks,* she promised breathlessly as she bit down oh, so carefully, thrilling at the sharp silver arc of pleasure and pain that shot through the Daat Kyashar at her touch.

“Oh, you absolutely will mark me, Kara Zor-El,” ordered Cat, her voice dark and daring, like tinted glass. “Just keep it where only you and I can see it.”

Kara pulled away from her wanton work and looked at Cat with indigo eyes, the sexy Cheshire grin that slowly stole over her features taking Cat’s breath away. In the next second, she tore her glasses from her face and dropped to her knees, knowing exactly the spot she longed to claim as hers alone. She impatiently pushed the apron and blouse out of the way and drew the waistline of Cat’s skirt down just far enough to bare her hip bone, darting forward in a rush of teeth and tongue to take ownership of the soft, sweet spot at the base of Cat’s iliac crest where hip met thigh.

Cat hissed and threw her head back again, slamming it into the wall with such force, she saw stars. She wound her fingers into Kara’s long hair and held her firmly as the young woman nipped and sucked and marked her, crying out with the unbearable decadence of it all.

Kara rode the swell of Cat’s pleasure and pain with such surgical precision, with such exquisite expertise that Cat’s knees buckled. Kara steadied her until her mission was accomplished, until the petals of her wine-dark blossom of longing began to bloom against Cat’s pale skin. When she was finished, she rose from the terrace slowly, sensuously, savoring the heat of Cat’s body beneath hers and the scent of her arousal. She ached for deeper, more intimate contact between them but hesitated, wondering if they hadn’t already been away too long.

“Take what you want, my darling,” said Cat, her voice ragged with need. “Dinner can wait.” *I’m so close,* she sent, pleading. *So wet for you. Please…. I need you inside me…."

“Rao, yes,” murmured Kara, ducking her head to capture Cat’s lips in a kiss that quickly deepened. She hitched Cat’s skirt up and lifted her, groaning into their kiss when she felt Cat’s legs wrap around her hips. She slid her right hand between them, swept aside Cat’s silk panties, and dipped her fingertips into her searing heat. Assured Cat was beyond ready, Kara slipped two fingers inside, swallowing Cat’s groan as she did so. She found the balance needed to keep them both upright and braced her left elbow against the wall, cradling the back of Cat’s head in her hand to protect it.

Cat pulled away from their kiss and threw her arms around Kara’s neck, holding on as Kara claimed her, as Kara fucked her, as Kara took what she wanted, fingers plunging deep inside her, so deep…. 
“Yes, Kara,” she breathed, rolling her hips to meet Kara’s every thrust. “God, yes….”

Kara hid her eyes in the crook of Cat’s neck, whispering “I love you, I love you, I love you,” her voice broken and desperate. Through their bond, she cried Maalkhati over and over, feeling Cat roll into her, feeling Cat’s muscular thighs tighten around her hips, her long legs holding on, her heels digging into the backs of her knees. She felt Cat’s orgasm as it began to bloom at the base of her spine, wild violet and sparkling silver and blood red, red, red with every beat of her hammering heart. Kara weakly lifted her head from Cat’s shoulder and begged, “Look at me, Cat. Please….”

Cat did, turning her wide green eyes to look into Kara’s, and they were so close, so close there wasn’t anything else between them. Just eyes and fingers deep inside and need and so much love, so much light, so much life and Cat breathed Kara’s name just once as she came, falling into those oceanic eyes as the firestorm took her, shattering her again and again, only to have all her pieces held lovingly in the cup of Kara’s hands afterward, gathered sweetly, like wildflowers by a child.

As they slowly came back to themselves, Kara breathless and tearful, Cat unsteady and adoring, Kara sighed against Cat’s neck, whispering, “You are so beautiful, Cat. With my fingers inside you, coming undone like that. You’re so beautiful, it hurts.” Tears filled Kara’s eyes. “Why does it hurt, Cat?”

Cat lifted her hand and let her fingertips drift down Kara’s cheek. “Because we want so much to stay in this moment, perfectly alive, perfectly in love, for as long as we can. Because—even as we wish for it—we can feel the moment slipping through our fingers.” She kissed Kara’s forehead, whispering, “There’s a reason the French call it ‘la petite mort,’ my darling. Every moment of joy carries with it a shadow of loss.”

“Is it like this for everyone?” asked Kara, her voice small. She lowered Cat’s feet to the deck and they untangled themselves from their intimate embrace only to slip into one another’s arms, Kara seeking comfort and Cat offering it.

“For everyone capable of true joy, yes,” Cat said gently. “For everyone who recognizes their own mortality and the inevitable end of all things, good and bad.”

“How do you bear it?”

Cat’s eyes glittered in the dim light. “Not as bravely as I would hope. In your arms, though, I can bear anything.”

Kara dropped her forehead so it rested against Cat’s. “You’ve always been my sanctuary,” she said softly. “Even before I knew how I felt about you. With your arms around me, you feel like home.”

“Oh, darling,” breathed Cat. She reached up and drew Kara down for a tender kiss, one steeped in the motto of the House of El—El Mayara, Stronger Together—warm and healing. When they parted, she looked up at Kara, a serious cast to her gaze. “I wasn’t just trying to make a point to your sister, you know,” she said. “When I said I’d marry you tonight, I meant it—every word of it. I can have a judge here by the time you’ve had your second cupcake.”

Kara shook her head, her long blonde hair shivering with the movement. “I want to do it right, Cat—with our families and friends around us, with rings and dresses and a pretty cake…. The Daat Kyashar, by its nature, had to be just between us and Carter.” She leaned in to kiss Cat briefly, following it with one of her patented megawatt ‘Sunny’ Danvers smiles. “When I marry the love of my life, I want the whole world to see it.”

Cat blinked back tears. “If you don’t stop talking like that, Kara Danvers, we are going to be late to
dinner in our own home.”

“We could always order out,” Kara reminded her, leaning in for another kiss, this one a little less tender, a little more seductive.

Cat pulled abruptly away from Kara’s too-enticing mouth, scandalized. “Over my dead body,” she said archly. “I promised your sister a home-cooked meal and that’s what she’s going to get. Even if I have to take a shower and change my clothes to do it.” She stepped out of Kara’s long arms, missing them immediately. “Honestly, Kara! It’s as if you’re deliberately sabotaging my relationship with Alex. How many shots at this sister-in-law thing do you think I’m going to get before she decides to cut her losses and have me murdered in my sleep by her Operation Treadstone assassins?”

“What?” Kara blanched and watched, horrified and confused, as Cat turned on her heel and headed to another doorway on the terrace—one she hadn’t seen before. “Cat—no—I—”

Oh, you are too easy, sent Cat, laughing evilly at Kara’s consternation.

Kara narrowed her eyes. Oh, yeah? she returned, her tone defiant. You won’t be saying that tonight, that’s for sure.

Cat laughed even harder, looking over her shoulder as Kara followed her. Promises, promises, she said mockingly. You and I both know all I have to do is kiss your neck in that spot that makes you melt and you’re mine. She raised an eyebrow at the blonde, daring her to dispute that fact—especially as she imagined herself doing the very thing she’d described, pleased by the shuddering gasp of Kara’s that resulted.

Okay, came Kara’s contrite reply. You may have a point. Irritated, she followed that concession with a petulant question. Where are you going?

“The master suite has its own private access to the terrace,” Cat said. You don’t think I’m walking through the kitchen and dining room looking like this, do you? she added.

“Looking like what?” asked Kara, clearly at a loss. Cat looked just fine to her. More than fine, in fact. She looked fantastic. Radiant…. Exultant…. Glowing….

The phrase you’re searching for, darling, is ‘freshly fucked,’ sent Cat. A quick and thorough shower is in my immediate future. If you’re nice, I might let you hold my towel.

Kara hurried after Cat. I’ve been told I’m very nice, she sent. I’ve also been told I’m quick and thorough.

Cat’s nostrils flared at the arc of raw desire that struck her like lightning through their connection.

We’ll just see about that, she sent, her tone a little more breathless and anticipatory than she’d intended. Chop chop, Kiera.

In retrospect, Cat supposed she should have expected Kara to beat her to the master bath once she’d invoked those two simple words. Annoyed with herself, she wondered why she hadn’t thought of saying them sooner.

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Continued in Navigation
Thank you to abydosdork once again for such a wonderful and evocative banner for this chapter. I love the coloring, which conveys uncertainty to me, somehow, and the looks on each of the characters' faces, capturing a wide range of emotion. Lovely!

Thank you, also, to fictorium, my official beta on this project, who genuinely makes my writing better with every suggestion.

Thank you, too, to krystalgoderitch. She and I had a conversation around consent that opened my eyes to a few things I hadn't considered and, as a direct result of that conversation, I changed a few sentences in this chapter. Since consent is canonically something very important to Kara Danvers--and a huge part of my Kara's concerns regarding the Daat Kyashar--I am pleased by the result.

Carter thundered down the stairs, through the dining room, and into the kitchen with two steaks on a platter.

“Here’s the first two!” he shouted, skidding to a halt in his bare feet on the hardwood floor. He overshot his mother by a foot and had to back up, grinning at her sheepishly. “Kara says they’re a perfect medium rare.”

“No running!” said Cat, exasperated, goggling at her son. “What am I supposed to do if you drop those on the floor? There’s a hundred dollars’ worth of Wagyu beef on that platter.”

Carter smirked as Cat used her tongs to plate each steak alongside a generous helping of her carbonara. “Kara would eat it,” he said. “She eats anything!” He winked as he rushed to rinse the platter in the sink before running back upstairs with it.
Alex snorted. “He has a point,” she said, smiling as she took a sip of wine. “Once, at game night at her place, Kara dropped a Triple Chocolate Decadence cake from Georgia on My Mind—that bakery at Fifteenth and R downtown?—on its head on her dining room floor. We watched, horrified, as she grabbed a fork from the dish drainer in the sink, sat down on the floor next to it, and started shoveling it into her mouth.”

Cat blanched and stared at Alex, swallowing thickly as her germ phobia made a sudden cacophonous entrance into the evening’s festivities. “Thank you, Alex,” she said sourly. “Even if someone had invented brain bleach by now, there would not be enough of it in the western hemisphere to erase that image from my vast and detailed imagination.”

“Oh, it gets better,” said Alex. “When she noticed us all staring at her with various expressions of disgust and horror, she said, ‘What? It’s a floor picnic! Like that episode of Friends? Grab a fork and dig in!’”

Cat scowled. “It’s bad enough every female between the ages of fifteen and fifty sported The Rachel at some point during the Nineties—myself excluded, of course; now I learn Aniston has corrupted a poor, innocent alien, convincing her it’s socially acceptable to eat food directly off the floor?” Her eyes darkened. “Remind me to ruin that woman’s career in the morning, won’t you? It shouldn’t take much. She’s done most of the hard work herself, what with that dismal movie about drug-trafficking in a Winnebago. Remind me what that insult to moviegoers everywhere was called? We’re the Losers?”

“We’re the Millers,” said Alex. She laughed and gestured at Cat with the rim of her wine glass. “The look on your face….”

Cat raised an eyebrow at Kara’s older sister. “Just for that, I should call downstairs and ask Christopher to come up and pick up the dinners I promised.” She gave Alex a pointed look while she added a serving of the salad she and Carter had made together to each of the plates in question. “Instead of letting you borrow my elevator badge to deliver them in person. To one particular person, perhaps?” False innocence dripped from Cat’s tone like honey.

Alex started, shaken. Then she groaned. “How did you—? We were— It was one second of interaction. Less! You couldn’t possibly—” Realizing her protests were, in fact, proving Cat’s insinuation correct, she blew out a long, frustrated sigh and then chuckled, shaking her head at herself. “Now I see how you destroyed The Donald on live television last year,” she said. “That obvious, huh?”

Cat shrugged and reached for two burgundy cloth napkins, laying them out on the counter. “Only to those who would recognize the interest,” she admitted. “Carter’s too young to be thinking that way yet—thank God. Though I won’t be dodging that particular bullet for much longer, I know. As a straight, white male, Christopher isn’t quite that nuanced in the area of Sapphic curiosity, and Kara would have to be standing next to you, watching you ogle Neves in that perfectly-tailored Boss suit of hers, to catch on.” She smirked, her eyes softening at the thought as she rolled silverware into the napkins, tucking the fabric so each set was secure. “Even then, your odds are only fifty-fifty.”

“Is that how she caught on to you?” teased Alex.

Now it was Cat’s turn to chuckle. “If you’ll recall from our earlier conversation, it was Kara who threw caution to the wind this past Friday, pressing her luck by kissing me in the heat of the moment. Based upon her shock after the deed was done, I would have to say she was uncertain—at best—regarding the existence of any interest on my part.”

Alex nodded, accepting Cat’s supposition at face value. Kara certainly hadn’t played the “Does Cat
like me?” game with her, that’s for sure. Considering Alex had believed Kara’s crush was on James until Kara had corrected her at the dig site on Friday, she doubted her sister ever gave the likelihood of reciprocation by Cat a second thought. The other possibility—that Kara had spent two years listening to those questions rattle around the inside of her skull like marbles, with no support to speak of? Well, that just made Alex feel really, really guilty.

“Kara tells me it’s always been you—that she knew pretty early on how she felt,” said Alex. “I always assumed it was James she was interested in. Shows you how well I know my own sister, huh?” She pushed aside her guilt for the moment and raised both eyebrows at Cat. “When did you know? How you felt about Kara, I mean.”

“Fifteen seconds after she tried to convince me she was the most average, unremarkable, cardigan-wearing worker bee in the entire history of the administrative support field,” said Cat, smirking at the memory of Kara eschewing any suggestion of exceptionalism or rarity as if the concepts were water and she was a duck’s back. “At least, I recognized the potential for trouble with a capital T. I hired her on the spot, of course. Then I spent every second afterward trying to keep her at arm’s length.”

“I see how well that worked out for you,” said Alex, rolling her eyes.

Cat pulled a serving tray out of one of her cupboards, standing on her tiptoes to reach it. “I am not to blame for this,” she said, disavowing any responsibility for the circumstances as they were now. “I did everything I knew how to do. I held Kara to impossible standards, I withheld praise, I never asked about her personal life, I mocked her clothing on a daily basis, and I called her by the wrong name.”

She stalked to the refrigerator and pulled it open with a little more force than necessary, grabbing two bottled waters from the door before nudging it shut again with her hip. “I fired her eleven times, Alex. Eleven! Once because I’d accidentally spent thirty minutes in a strategy meeting daydreaming about handing her a bouquet of yellow daisies just to see her smile. Do you know how difficult that is to write up as a terminable offense?” She placed the two dinner plates, the cutlery, and the two bottled waters she’d just retrieved onto the tray and looked up at Alex, pained. “I even tried to push her toward Adam, my oldest. All because I was afraid.”

“Of what?”

Cat folded her arms over her slight frame and looked away, shaking her head. “I could tell you it was because of what the board would say or because of our age difference or because I thought she deserved better. There’s truth to all of that.” She looked back at Alex, her gaze equal parts vulnerability and encouragement. “But the real reason? I was afraid she would break my heart—and because of that fear, I would have missed out on everything Kara’s offering me. Her heart, her love, her support….” She picked up the tray with the two dinners and handed it to the DEO agent. “Don’t be me, Alex,” she said. “Be brave. Who knows what could happen?”

“Neves might not even be interested,” mumbled the brunette, finding it a little strange to be getting life advice from a woman she’d seriously been considering murdering only a little while ago. The fact it was pretty good advice only served to increase her sense of turmoil.

Cat snorted. “I’ve known her long enough to say I don’t think you have anything to worry about.”

Alex looked up, a spark of hope flashing in her mahogany eyes. “Really?”

Cat shook her head indulgently and smiled. “My badge is on the table next to the elevator. Tell them to save room for dessert. I’ll send you down with cupcakes after dinner.” The media mogul shrugged as if to wash her hands of the outcome. “If you don’t come back with at least her
telephone number after that, I’ll have to assume the problem is you.”

“Thanks, Cat,” said Alex sincerely, giving the older woman a shy, lopsided grin. “I….” She hesitated, not knowing how to say exactly what she wanted to say. “I’ve been wrong about people before and usually that’s a bad thing. They either let me down or hurt someone I care about and things go to shit pretty quickly after that.” She leveled a grateful look at Cat. “This may be the first time in my life being wrong about someone has been a good thing.”

Cat beamed at Alex, the lump in her throat belied by her smile’s brightness.

“I’m glad we worked it out,” she said. And if her voice was a little rougher than it had been and her eyes were a little shinier than they were a moment ago, well, all things considered, it was a small price to pay for familial harmony.

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Later, Cat raised her eyebrows in question when Alex returned from that cupcake run.

Alex blushed and said two words. “Lunch. Wednesday.”

Cat smirked. “I guess I was right after all,” she said.

Alex snorted. “Something tells me that’s a pretty regular occurrence with you.”

Kara, who was halfway through her second Chocolate Peanut Butter Bomb cupcake, looked from her sister to Cat and back.

“What am I missing?” she asked around a mouthful of cake and buttercream frosting, her voice comically muffled. She took a moment to swallow and added, “What about lunch on Wednesday?”

Cat, proud as a peacock—as if she’d had something to do with it—announced, “Your sister has a date.”

Alex rolled her eyes and flushed even hotter. “Come on, guys….”

“What?” Kara’s eyes widened. “Since when? With whom?” She sent an exploratory feeler along her connection with Cat, hoping to speed up her information gathering that way. She was surprised to feel the pathway—well, not so much blocked as veiled, a gentler rebuff than simply shutting the door on her.

Oh, no you don’t, sent Cat. Let Alex tell you. It’s her story to tell.

Kara smirked. That didn’t stop you from announcing it at the dinner table, she noted.

Cat shrugged, innocent as always.

Carter laughed. “Dude,” he said, pointing at Alex. “You are so red.”

Alex covered her eyes with one hand. “Not cool, Cat. Not. Cool. Your kid is—“

—reporting the facts?” asked Cat, grinning at Alex. “You are a little pink in the cheeks. Something you’d like to share? You might as well….?”

“Right. Because that’s so easy to do with all of you staring at me.” Alex took a deep breath and pulled her hand away from her eyes, looking nervously at each of them. “Neves and I are going to lunch on Wednesday. It’s her day off and—as long as I’m not needed elsewhere,” she said.
emphasizing the word elsewhere and glaring at her sister, as if Kara had any control over when Supergirl might be needed, “I can take a couple of hours.”

Kara blinked, shocked. “Neves? As in Neves Montenegro—from downstairs? The Neves that’s the assistant concierge of this building? That Neves?”

Cat hooked her index finger over her lips to stifle her smile. “How many women named Neves do you think Alex knows, sweetheart?”

Carter laughed.

“Okay, the tips of my ears are burning now, guys,” protested Alex. “Can we not—”

Carter shook his head sadly at her. “You’re gonna have to have thicker skin if you’re gonna be a part of this family, Aunt Alex,” he said. “Trust me.”

The conversation came to a grinding halt and every eye in the room turned to Carter. He gulped.

“What?” he asked. “She is my aunt now. Isn’t she?”

A slow, ecstatically happy grin stole over Kara’s features even as Cat pursed her lips, concern overshadowing her own instinct to smile.

“Yes…technically,” Cat said gently. “But maybe we should let Alex decide if she’s comfortable—”

Alex saw Carter’s own cheeks flare red with embarrassment and she made a flash decision to put a stop to his obvious discomfort. “She is,” she said firmly. She shot Carter a grin of her own, one colored by both solidarity and mischief. “I’ve always wanted to be The Cool Aunt. You know, the one that hypes the kid up on churros and ice cream at the amusement park, and then brings him home just in time for him to puke everywhere?”

“Ewwwww!” said Carter, laughing. He laughed even harder when he saw his mother’s chalk-white, horrified face.

Kara clapped her hands over her mouth, trying not to snigger at Cat’s misery. If anyone could be called the personification of the phrase Be careful what you wish for, it was Cat Grant. Her frozen grimace—half revulsion, half dismay—spoke of someone who was realizing all the ramifications, positive and negative both, of a particular course of action. It was a beautifully tragic moment and Kara fought the giggles bubbling up from her belly, glad of her superhuman strength.

Alex snickered at Cat’s apparent distress. “Kid,” she said, glancing at Carter. “I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.” She leaned across the table and gave him a high five, which he returned enthusiastically.

Not to be outdone, Cat narrowed her eyes at Kara’s sister. “Wonderful,” she said, her voice deceptively light and friendly. “Then Carter can stay with you for two weeks when Kara and I go on our honeymoon. His father is unavailable, you see.”

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Alex and Kara both stared at Cat, one in surprise and one with consternation. Carter shot upward out of his chair, one hand raised in victory. His joyous whoop of excitement made Cat laugh.

“What?” sputtered Alex, frowning at Carter and his wild outburst. She sat forward, outraged. “You’re engaged?” She looked from Cat to Kara and back. “You’ve picked a date?”

Cat smiled as if she, herself, had eaten the canary. “Of course we’re engaged,” she said easily. “Did
I indicate at any point during our discussion tonight that I wasn’t one hundred percent serious about marrying your sister?”

When Alex slowly shook her head, Cat raised both of her eyebrows. “Exactly,” she said. “But no, we haven’t chosen a date. Not yet.” She pinned Alex with a competitive glare. “Let’s just say Carter’s father won’t be available regardless of the date,” she continued. “He simply can’t get away.”

“I am so out of my league,” said Alex glumly, slumping back into her chair. What was she supposed to do with a teenager for two whole weeks?

Now it was Cat’s turn to snicker. “Don’t you forget it,” she said, winking at the younger woman. Her face fell, though, when she caught sight of Kara’s darkening eyes and the beginning of a frown on her usually smiling lips. A tentative glance at Kara’s emotional landscape through their bond revealed a rolling, churning sea of hurt and confusion. Cat’s heart sank.

*May I see you in the other room, please?* sent Kara tightly.

Cat nodded worriedly. *Of course,* she sent and she rose from the table, her spine impossibly straight though she felt like slinking from the room.

“If you’ll excuse us for a moment?” she said to Alex, indicating Kara with a nod of her head.

Noticing the mood had just shifted wildly but completely in the dark as to why, Alex nodded. “Uh…yeah. Sure,” she said, confused. Then she caught sight of Kara’s face and gulped. She recognized the I’m-both-angry-and-disappointed-in-you look Kara was aiming Cat’s way. She’d been on the receiving end of it enough times over the years. Usually after one of her benders. “Carter and I will start clearing the table.” She looked at the young man in question, weakly adding, “Okay, buddy?”

Carter nodded so quickly, his head appeared to be piston-operated. He was slightly more sensitive to his mother’s moods than Alex was, and if their concern at the airport this morning had seemed like a thunderstorm to him, brooding and distant, this now felt more like bleak winter, harsh and biting cold. “Yeah,” he said. “Okay.”

“Thank you,” said Cat sincerely. She turned without a word and headed down the hallway toward the bedrooms. Kara rose from her seat at the table slowly and glanced briefly at her sister and her son, her eyes filled with an undefined sadness. Then she followed Cat.

Alex hissed as she watched Kara go.

“That doesn’t look good,” she muttered, turning wide eyes to Carter.

“Yeah,” he said, his look of worry identical to Alex’s. “Looks like Mom messed up—big time,” he said. He looked at the dishes on the table and the ones stacked in and around the sink in the kitchen. “We should probably—”

Alex was out of her seat and headed toward the kitchen in the blink of an eye. “Way ahead of you, kid,” she said. “Waaaay ahead of you. You start bringing in the stuff from the table and I’ll start rinsing and loading the dishwasher. Anything that doesn’t fit, we’ll do by hand. I’ll wash if you dry. Deal?”

Carter nodded slowly, still staring down the hallway after his mothers. “Deal,” he said. After a moment, he snapped his head toward Alex, pinning his aunt with a shrewd look. “On one condition,” he added.
“Oh?” she asked, turning on the faucet to fill the sink with warm, sudsy water. “What’s that?”

“I’m only going to be a kid for five more weeks—then I officially become a teenager. You have until then to find a new nickname for me.” He winked at Alex to show he wasn’t *that* upset. “Or I start calling you ‘dude’ all the time.”

Alex stared at Carter for a minute and then chuckled. “Sure, *kid,*” she said, making a point of emphasizing the offending word. “I think I can manage that.”

Carter groaned and started stacking the dishes from the table. “Glad to hear it, *dude,*” he muttered under his breath.

Unbeknownst to each other, both Carter and Alex stopped in their tasks for a moment to look toward the back of the house, hoping whatever had gone wrong could be made right in short order. His awareness the discordancy between his mothers had been heightened by the Daat Kyashar brought no comfort to Carter and Alex felt responsible for the whole thing somehow.

Neither of them had the slightest idea what they could do fix it.

-----

Cat entered their bedroom stoically, though her heart was heavy with the knowledge she and Kara would share the space together as a couple for the first time while in conflict. Her mind raced. She’d had enough of a glance at Kara’s distress through the Daat Kyashar to know it was in response to her and Alex’s little game of one-upmanship but the exact cause of Kara’s upset wasn’t clear. In the few moments she’d had to consider what to do—the length of time it’d taken her to walk from one room to the other—she’d already run the emotional gamut from defensiveness to cold dismissal to genuine sorrow—and that was before she was even sure what was wrong! She didn’t think there was a number high enough to accurately quantify her level of anxiety.

“*Emotions, thoughts, memories—they’re all connected and can all be affected by this bond. You’ll have to be very careful about identifying which are your own and which are your partner’s and under no circumstance should you attempt to manipulate your partner’s feelings or memories.*”

Kal-El’s warning rang loudly in Cat’s ears and she schooled her features to impassivity as she turned and waited for Kara to join her, using the time to take a quick mental inventory of her own feelings. She remembered telling Kara once that she would have to “look for the anger behind the anger” to get at the root of the real problem plaguing the young woman at the time. She guessed a repeat of that particular refrain would not be welcome, but it was still good advice. Perhaps today, it was meant for Cat, herself.

This kind of conflict—the give and take between lovers—was not something Cat excelled at as a general rule. It required listening and compromise and an unselfish spirit—none of which she was known for. Her success and the success of CatCo required clear, concise direction, an uncompromising vision, and a surgically-precise egocentrism that nurtured both. While she wasn’t completely inexperienced with the softer skills employed in more intimate relationships, Cat knew she used them most effectively with Carter—and Kara was many things, but a child was not one of them. Treating her like one would be a nightmare.

Looking up as Kara entered the room, Cat found she was grateful for two things. One, Kara *was* known for those softer skills. They were, in fact, part of the reason she excelled at her job—or, rather, *both* of her jobs. They were also traits Cat loved and admired about the young woman. As much as her heat vision and her ability to fly were superpowers, so were Kara’s thoughtfulness and altruism. She hoped Kara’s and her complementary natures would help them navigate this first
disagreement successfully, like two oars pulling for the same shore rather than two captains shouting conflicting orders on a sinking ship….

The second thing Cat was grateful for was the Daat Kyashar itself. It was a resource Cat could not and would not ignore. The insight it provided into both Kara’s and her own emotional state was only part of its inimitable value. It also acted as map and compass both, cementing their foundation as a family unit and reminding Cat where they had the potential to go…if they trusted one another enough to be vulnerable and open when it would be so much easier to shut the proverbial door.

Cat focused on that word again now, just as she had Saturday morning with Kara lost in despair. Open she counseled herself, letting her assumptions and defensiveness fall away like dead leaves carried by a cleansing breeze. Noticing how desperately she wanted to cross her arms, she forced herself to keep her hands at her sides. It was a hollow victory.

With eyes as dark as a summer squall, Kara entered the room and did not stop until she walked right into Cat’s personal space, trembling as she curled into the smaller woman, encircling Cat’s tiny waist with her long arms.

Shocked at first—she hadn’t expected to begin this way—Cat felt the tension in her body melt away as she folded Kara into her arms. They stood that way for a long, silent moment until Cat finally sent, Tell me.

Kara tightened her hold around Cat and sighed, releasing a torrent of confusing images and emotions through their bond. When the initial flood found its equilibrium and began to level out, Cat felt one concept and heard one word repeated: Joke.

Cat ducked out from under Kara’s head where it rested on her shoulder and cupped the young woman’s face in her hands.

“Joke?” she asked quietly, her eyes searching Kara’s for any hint of meaning.

Kara looked away, lips pressed firmly in a tight, thin line. She fought the question perched, bitter and unwanted, on the back of her tongue, certain she didn’t want to know the answer. And yet….

A tentative dip into their connection surprised Kara. She felt very little resistance from Cat—much less than she expected to feel—and the word she heard over and over was as simple as it was profound.

Open.

The question Kara fought burst from her like a bullet shot wildly and way off target, but still dangerous, still damaging.

“Is our engagement a joke to you?” she whispered.

Cat felt as though ice water had been poured into her skull. It bathed the back of her eyelids and flowed down her spine, making her eyes round and her posture ramrod-straight. Everything open about her slammed shut in an instant, like storm shutters in a gale-force wind. She pushed herself backward out of Kara’s arms, enraged.

“What the hell kind of question is that?” she hissed.

Cat’s tone cut Kara’s voice off like a wire garrote wound around her throat. Unable to make a sound, she hung her head, withering under the glare of those flashing green eyes.
I’m…I’m sorry. I just—

The memory of Cat foisting Carter on an unsuspecting Alex for the length of their honeymoon spilled through the Daat Kyashar like tears, sharp and clear, fresh and recent. Behind it came two scenes, shifting, unstable, and unfocused: Kara and Cat sitting down with Carter to show him Kara’s ring and a family dinner at any one of a half a dozen seemingly interchangeable—or undecided?—human holidays, where they told family and friends, only some of whom Cat recognized. Cat watched these scenes filled with laughter and love until they eventually faded, swallowed up by Kara’s sadness and hurt.

Oh, no, she sent, finally understanding the mistake she’d made. Oh, darling….

Cat took a deep breath and unshuttered herself, window by symbolic window. It was an accident, of course—what she’d done. One born of her natural competitiveness and her ignorance of Kara’s expectations…although she felt she should have anticipated at least the gist of them.

This was Kara’s first and, hopefully, only engagement. Of course, she’d want to experience the romance and traditions surrounding what was often—too often, in Cat’s opinion—billed as a cornerstone event in every woman’s life. Just because she was a jaded divorcée who viewed most weddings with a jaundiced eye didn’t mean Kara would feel the same. And Cat had just stolen Kara’s thunder with two of her favorite people.

“I made quite a mess of this, didn’t I?” she said softly, reaching out cautiously, letting her fingers drift lightly down Kara’s arm.

Kara looked up, eyes glassy and blank. “A mess of what?” she asked flatly.

You’re being much more patient with me than I would be if our situations were reversed, sent Cat alongside a river of understanding and regret. She twined her fingers with Kara’s and tugged her hand gently, looking up at her with contrite eyes. May I hold you? she asked.

Kara fell into Cat’s arms.

“I’m sorry, Kara,” whispered Cat as she stroked the back of Kara’s head. “I wasn’t thinking. Worse, I didn’t ask what you wanted or were envisioning for us. Telling Carter and Alex about our engagement that way was callous and thoughtless of me. I’m sorry I hurt you. I’m so sorry I ruined your big moment with both of them.”

“Our ‘big moment,’” corrected Kara, pulling away slightly so she could look into Cat’s eyes. “And you didn’t ruin anything. Not really.” She made a harsh, frustrated sound and rolled her eyes at herself. “How were you supposed to know what I was daydreaming about? I can’t expect you to read my mind, Cat.”

“Says the source of the telepathic immune response that allows me to do just that,” replied Cat, looking at Kara pointedly.

Kara shook her head. “I shouldn’t take that for granted, though. Neither of us should.” She sighed and some of the hurt shadowing her eyes bled away. “The way I understand the Kalex files, what we’re experiencing now? Hearing each other’s conversations and thoughts all the time unless we consciously shut each other out? The Daat Kyashar won’t always work that way. You and I and Carter, we’re still individuals. We have autonomy. Once the naissance phase begins to fade, so will this heightened connection between us. At some point, we’ll be more intentional in our usage of the bond.”
“A new normal,” said Cat, running her fingers lightly through Kara’s hair. “Where the Daat Kyashar becomes more of a tool, less of a constant.”

“Exactly.” Kara’s eyes crinkled with a tentative smile. “You’ll still be able to surprise me with flowers at my desk, for instance,” she said, leaning in to nuzzle that spot near Cat’s ear she loved so much. “I’ll still be able to sneak into the shower with you before work some days.”

“I do love to start the day on a high note,” breathed Cat, leaning into Kara’s caress. “That used to be seeing you by the door to my office with my latte ready and waiting for me, by the way.”

Kara smirked against Cat’s silky skin. “Now when you see me in the morning,” she said, her voice husky with desire, “it’ll be me that’s ready and waiting for you.”

Cat growled and turned her head, capturing Kara’s lips in a blistering kiss.

“Well, you’re definitely hotter than a latte,” she said, heart thrumming in her veins when she pulled away. She stopped herself from kissing Kara again, knowing if she did, they’d end this conversation in bed, distracted by their need for one another while the issue at hand remained unresolved. The Daat Kyashar and their eventual adaptation to it was merely a tangent; how they planned to handle their engagement was still the meat of the issue.

Cat sighed and looked up at Kara. “We’re getting ahead of ourselves, aren’t we?” she asked.

Kara nodded. “A little,” she said. “If it makes you feel better, it’s not really our fault. Things have been moving so fast. Alex was right—it’s been just over forty-eight hours. Even if I do feel like we’ve been together forever.” She let a lopsided smile tug her lips upward. “Both of us are pretty driven,” she said, shrugging feebly, knowing that fact didn’t really explain anything. “We haven’t had a lot of time to…um…reflect.”

Cat snorted. “We’ve barely taken the time to sleep,” she pointed out, gazing at Kara appreciatively. “When exactly were we supposed to ‘reflect’?”

Kara smiled shyly. “I was kinda hoping to tonight,” she said. “I thought we would talk after we went to bed and I could hold you until you fell asleep in my arms.”

“You’re expecting me to keep my hands to myself, then?” asked Cat innocently, reaching up to kiss the corner of Kara’s mouth. “You’re the one with super-strength, love; not me.”

Kara blushed. “I figured since we’re both, um, early risers, so to speak, we could….” She bit her lip, imagining a much nicer way to be woken up than by the harsh, strident beeping of an alarm clock.

Cat caught a glimpse of Kara’s fantasy—all long legs and arched back—and hummed her approval. “Mmmm,” she purred, smiling devilishly. “I would be thrilled to stand in for your alarm, my darling…if you’d be willing to reciprocate another morning?”

Kara nodded eagerly and tried to ignore the heat creeping down her neck and across her chest. “I could do that,” she agreed, shyly dropping her eyes first to Cat’s lips and then further downward, unable to keep their eye contact as she continued to blush sweetly. “Anytime.”

Cat’s heart ached with love at the sight of her. The demure tilt of Kara’s head, the impossible pinkness of her cheeks, the way she couldn’t look at Cat at just that moment because of how exposed she felt….

Cat wondered how one small, fist-sized muscle could contain the whole of what she felt for this
woman. It didn’t seem possible. In fact, it seemed fantastical. Like that ridiculous blue Police Box
time machine on that campy British sci-fi show she watched with Carter, Cat’s heart was so much
bigger on the inside. And yet it still felt like it would burst sometimes, filled to the brim with Kara
and all they held between them. It was so different from what she’d always known, so different from
what she’d come to expect of life and love. Maybe those traditions she’d spent her lifetime
dismissing weren’t so hackneyed and tiresome after all. Maybe she’d been scorning something she
never thought she’d have.

Cat hooked an index finger under Kara’s chin and tilted it so she could look into Kara’s eyes. “We’ll
talk tonight,” she promised with a soft smile. “As long as you want. Tell me what you’re thinking.
Show me your dreams.” She ran her thumb along Kara’s bottom lip, delighting in the little shiver it
inspired. “I’ll do whatever I can to make them come true.”

“You already have,” whispered Kara, her heart in her eyes. It was just the sort of look Cat would
have mocked as lovesick and sappy had she seen it on somebody else. On Kara, though, reflecting
what they had together? What could she do but answer it with her own?

After a moment spent gazing into the blue of the open sky, Cat chuckled darkly. “You realize we
have a snowball’s chance in hell of keeping our relationship a secret tomorrow if we look at each
other like this every five minutes,” she said. “I’ll have to wear two pairs of sunglasses just to get past
you and my latte without grinning like an idiot.”

Kara grimaced knowingly, conceding Cat’s point. “On the plus side,” she said, “you’ll have an
answer for Adam when he calls. Provided he asks the same question he did last time.”

Cat snorted. “Is that supposed to make up for the fact my mother was actually right? About
something having to do with me?” She scowled, the thought of Katherine Grant preening with smug
satisfaction grating at her like the time she’d been cornered by Gilbert Gottfried at an awards dinner
—the ten longest, most irritating minutes of her life. “She’ll be insufferable at Carter’s birthday
party, you realize. You’ll reminisce about her last visit as if it was a benevolent, Percocet-induced
dream starring Lady Gaga rather than the catastrophe it was.”

Kara giggled. “Do you have that dream a lot?” she asked, leaning in to kiss Cat’s frowning mouth,
hoping to tease her smile back. When she managed it finally, she offered Cat one of her own
megawatt smiles—a particularly adorable one with a scrunched-up nose. “And don’t worry about
your mother,” she said happily. “I can handle her.”

Cat didn’t know whether to laugh at Kara’s overconfidence or cry at her naïveté. No one alive could
make the claim they had ‘handled’ Katherine Grant and Cat doubted anyone ever would—
Kryptonian with a Pollyanna-complex or not.

“Those,” she said warningly, shaking her head, “are famous last words.” When Kara only grinned at
her more brightly, completely undeterred, she snorted. “Fine. Have fun digging your own grave. In
the meantime, we have a guest and a kitchen in need of cleaning. Let’s go take care of them first,
hmm?”

“Yep,” said Kara agreeably. “Right behind you. Just going to…uh….wash my hands.” She
 glanced at the door to the master bath and Cat raised an eyebrow, not buying it for a minute but not
sure what her fiancée was up to. She wasn’t getting any help from the Daat Kyashar either. A
murky opaqueness met her one and only inquiry.

Deciding what she didn’t know wouldn’t hurt her, Cat acquiesced. “Don’t take too long,” she said
as she left the room.
Kara listened until Cat was in the dining room, and then grabbed her phone from where it was charging on the nightstand. She brought up the Internet and quickly looked up a number, dialing it immediately.

“Hi, yes,” she said when her call connected. “I’d like to order two—er, three—three dozen pink and white carnations….”

*Challenge accepted,* she thought to herself.

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Sometime later, Alex made her way up to the terrace where Kara and Carter were supposedly “cleaning up”, only to find them having a lightsaber battle with a pair of grill tongs and a long-handled metal spatula. Carter was apparently playing the part of Rey to Kara’s Kylo Ren and the whole thing was so fucking adorable, Alex was afraid of going into sugar shock. Or rather, even *more* sugar shock. The Mocha Mambo cupcake from Hummingbird’s had started her down that road already.

Kara saw Alex before Carter did and she called a time-out, causing Carter to look around, his face falling as soon as he saw the black-clad DEO agent.

“Aww, you’re leaving, aren’t you?” he asked. He knew it was getting late, that he had school in the morning and his moms and newly-minted aunt had work, but it had been a nearly perfect day and he didn’t want it to end.

“Not yet,” said Alex, hating to disappoint him. “But soon,” she admitted. She wasn’t usually a kid person but she found Carter to be different than most, which was a point in his favor. A pretty big point. And not at all surprising considering his mother. *Or mothers,* she reminded herself. “Hey, maybe I can come back, say—next week? I’d love to kick your a—” Alex caught Kara’s disapproving glance and amended her challenge. “Er—butt in Mario Kart. My Bowser will wipe the course with you. Who do you play? Yoshi?”

Carter laughed. “Nah, that’s Kara! She likes his big nose. ‘I’m-a Luigi, number one!’” he said, quoting his favorite driver in the bad Italian accent the two Mario Brothers were known for. “I like his green shirt. And sure! You can come back anytime you want.”

Alex grinned. Leave it to Carter Grant to pick the not-as-famous Mario Brother for his driver just because he liked the color of his clothing. “Great! Bowser will have no problem driving right over Luigi.” She smiled evilly at Kara. “And Yoshi, too.”

Kara scowled. “Ignore her, Carter,” she said, taking the spatula from him and hanging it next to her tongs on the grill. “She’s all talk. I bet she wins one race. And only if your mom isn’t playing.”

Alex stuck her tongue out at Kara and Carter laughed again until he saw the moment between the sisters turn serious.

“I should go get my stuff ready for school tomorrow,” he said, looking from Alex to Kara and back. “Come say bye to me before you leave, okay?”

Alex winked at him. “Yeah, I will,” she said, her smile genuine. It had been a long time since anyone cared enough to want to specifically say goodbye to her at the end of a visit. She waved as Carter darted down the stairs and found herself thinking of Jeremiah again, Carter’s sweetness reminding her of her father, of how happy this—all of this—would have made him. The only thing Jeremiah had ever wanted for Kara was for her to be safe, to be loved.
What Alex wouldn’t give to be able to tell him he’d gotten his wish….

“Thank you, Alex,” said Kara quietly. When Alex turned questioning eyes toward her, she added, “For being nice to Carter. I know— I mean, it must be weird with everything the way it is and—”

“He’s a good kid,” said Alex, interrupting Kara’s rambling. “And I really have always wanted to be an aunt. I didn’t think that’d ever happen—what with you being an alien and all.” She gave Kara a lopsided grin and shook her head. “Leave it to you to find a way.”

She walked over to the edge of the terrace and looked out at the tree-lined neighborhood and its cobblestone walkways lit by golden streetlamps, so different from her own neighborhood or the warehouse district where Kara’s loft apartment stood, so warm and welcoming, safe and sound. She felt rather than saw Kara join her at the railing.

“I was wrong,” she said finally. Her voice was quiet but strong.

“Alex—”

Alex turned to Kara with sad, remorse-filled eyes. “Let me apologize. Please.”

Kara stared at her sister, a little surprised. “Okay,” she said softly.

Alex sighed and reached out to hold Kara’s hands in her own, making a point to look directly into the younger woman’s eyes. “I was wrong. About Cat, about you…about a lot of things. I said some terrible—” Her eyes darkened at the memory of what she’d said to Kara and she pressed her lips in a hard line, angry with herself. “—and I let you think it was because I was afraid for you. But that wasn’t true…. At least, it wasn’t the whole truth.” She tightened her hold on Kara’s hands but looked down at her feet, ashamed of herself. “I was afraid of losing you,” she admitted, her voice small and broken. “I was afraid you wouldn’t need me anymore.”

“What?” Kara was as shocked as she had ever been. She pulled Alex into a bear hug, holding her as tightly as she dared. “Alex, no! I’ll always need you. Always.” She felt Alex’s wiry frame shudder with relief. “You’re my sister and I love you, Alex. Nothing will ever change that.” She ducked out from under Alex’s chin to look her squarely in the eyes. “I promise.”

Distraught, Kara pulled Alex back into her arms, running through everything she’d said to her in the last week or so, searching for anything that might have caused this. “Did I say or do something—”

Alex shook her head against Kara’s shoulder and pulled back. “No, Kara. You didn’t do anything wrong.” She wiped a few unshed tears from her eyes and gave her sister a watery smile. “You’re in love,” she said, as if that fact were a secret between them and wasn’t entirely obvious to anyone who looked at Kara. “And Cat loves you. I don’t think you know how much—even with that thing going on.” She flapped her hand randomly at the sky, indicating the Daat Kyashar. “Hank tried to tell me. I didn’t believe him until I saw it with my own two eyes.”

A frown notched the space between Kara’s brows. “Hank tried to tell you what?”

“That you weren’t the only one hiding your feelings. That Cat would rather die than betray you.” When Kara looked at her guardedly, Alex continued. “She would, Kara. In a heartbeat. Even I can see that and I can’t read minds.” She grimaced a little, those particular words igniting a worry in her. “In fact, we should probably talk about that. Privately,” she added pointedly.

“About what?” asked Kara, taking a half-step away from Alex, fear bubbling up from the pit of her belly. She caught the errant emotion before it rolled through her connection with Cat, quickly erecting a barrier between them so she and Alex could talk without being overheard. “What’s
Alex pursed her lips, concern driving her features to lose their sisterly softness, making them narrow and sharp under the terrace’s diffuse lighting. It never ceased to amaze her how far-reaching anything touching Kara’s existence could become. Even the simple act of falling in love had already started dominoes falling and Alex had no idea where they would stop.

“You know Hank can’t read you—that your Kryptonian brain won’t allow it,” she began.

Kara nodded. “I know.”

“But he’s read Cat before—specifically when you guys did that little skit to throw Cat off your scent. That’s when he says he became aware of how she felt about you.”

Kara caught the edge of Alex’s concern and ran the scenario through to its inevitable conclusion herself. “So if Cat can read me and Hank can read Cat, that means Hank might be able to read me now, too—like through a backdoor.” She peered at Alex, trying to untangle the full scope of her worry. “You’re afraid there might be others with the same ability—that they might find the same backdoor.”

Alex nodded. “It’s not just reading your mind—though that would be trouble enough….” She wondered how much she should say, knowing she could be putting everyone she cared about in danger. “Hank can also control minds. He doesn’t, of course, but if there are other aliens like him—who can control minds like he does—and they find that backdoor….“ She paused to let that scenario sink in, watching, pained, as Kara’s eyes went pale with fear. “It would be a nightmare, Kara. Think of the damage you could do under someone else’s control. Think of how long it would take us to stop you.” Knowing what she would be called upon to do—what she would have to do—to bring a rogue Supergirl down nauseated the DEO agent. “Think of what that would do to Cat and Carter. To Mom. To me.”

“What are you saying?” breathed Kara, eyes wide. She crossed her arms over her chest and turned away, looking out over the neighborhood again, shocked by how cold it seemed suddenly, by how dark and sinister and empty of comfort. “Are you asking me to—” Her throat closed around the words and she found she couldn’t say them, no matter how loudly they clanged against the inside of her skull. “Alex, I can’t—I can’t—”

“I’m not saying you should leave them,” said Alex. She put a hand on Kara’s shoulder and squeezed it, trying to lend support where there was little to be had. “I would never ask that of you.” She sighed again. “But I think Hank needs to know about the Daat Kyashar. I think we need to bring him in on this—”

Kara shook her head sharply, resolute. “No, Alex.” She turned and pinned her sister with a hard, ice-blue glare. “No. The DEO can’t have them. If Lane finds out, he’ll take them—” The sheer terror she felt at the possibility of her family falling into General Lane’s hands nearly overwhelmed the barrier she’d drawn across her connection with Cat and she redoubled it, not wanting her to hear one word of this. Angry tears stung the corner of her eyes. “He’d tear them apart,” she cried, desperate. “You know he would, Alex. You know what he’s like.”

“I’m not talking about the DEO, Kara—” Alex began, trying to explain, but Kara’s eyes went black and everything gentle and sweet about her turned to stone, brutal and unyielding.

“I’ll kill him,” said Kara, her voice devoid of intonation—flat and utterly certain. She turned her bleak eyes away from Alex and looked toward the horizon, violent, fear-driven images crashing through her brain. “I will kill anyone that dares lay a hand on them. No one will ever take my
family from me again. I promise you, Alex, I will leave nothing for you to bury. He will be wiped from existence—"

Alex grabbed Kara’s shoulders and turned her, shaking her. She’d never seen Kara like this, had never known Kara to threaten anyone’s life—let alone to do so steeped in such darkness or with such menacing finality. “Kara, stop. Kara, look at me—”

Alex felt a gentle hand on her back and turned to see Cat shaking her head at her. “Let me,” she whispered and Alex instantly released Kara, backing away from her sister to give Cat more room.

Cat took Alex’s place in front of Kara and cupped her rigid, waxen face in both hands.

_Darling, we’re safe. Carter and I are safe. We’re here with you_, she sent. She grasped one of Kara’s hands held fisted at her side and smoothed it open, laying it over her heart, holding it there._Listen for our heartbeats. We’re safe. Come back to us, love._

Alex watched the silent, tension-filled dance between Cat and Kara with rapt attention. She could practically feel Cat’s calm, steady presence reaching into the darkness to drag her sister back into the light and she wasn’t at all surprised when Kara gasped abruptly, blinking as if coming out of a trance.

“Cat,” whispered Kara and she pulled the smaller woman into her, lowering her forehead so it met Cat’s, her long blonde hair curtaining them from view. They stayed that way for a long moment before both women looked up at Alex, Cat with questions in her eyes and Kara with an apology in hers.

“Now,” said Cat, raising one eyebrow at the brunette expectantly. “What’s this about Director Henshaw and a backdoor into Kara’s beautiful brain?”

Alex frowned. _That’s the one and only time I’ll make that mistake_, she thought dourly. _I should have brought Cat in from the beginning._

In fact, it was Cat’s levelheadedness that eventually brought Kara around and the couple agreed to let Hank—and Hank alone—in on the full extent of the Daat Kyashar. Cat was shrewd enough to understand the danger she and Carter posed to Kara and she agreed they—as a family—should take any and all reasonable precautions to ensure Kara’s safety and the safety of National City at large. Alex, in turn, promised any and all interviews regarding their unique circumstances would be held at the penthouse, off the books and well outside the reach of the DEO.

“I mean it, Alex,” warned Kara, her eyes flashing and her voice clipped, low and tight. “If I hear one word about this at the DEO—if I see one memo or one byte of data in their servers about this—if anyone so much as says her name—”

Alex held up her hands, smart enough to know when she was outgunned. “I promise: not one word.” She was hurt Kara would believe her capable of such an egregious breach of familial loyalty. “They’re my family now, too, you know,” she muttered, flicking her eyes to Cat, hoping beyond hope she’d find a little bit of jade-colored support in those discerning eyes. She knew she didn’t deserve it—not after what she’d put them both through today—but she thought it would be a nice gesture.

Cat smirked, keenly aware of the power she held, sensing Alex’s hope and the knife’s edge she waited upon. The brunette was right, though; they were family and Cat had done many things in her lifetime, but turning her back on her family was not one of them. If she could still call Katherine Grant to wish her a Merry _fucking_ Christmas every year, surely she could put in a good word for her
future sister-in-law.

Alex watched as Cat ran her hand down Kara’s arm and looked up at her sister, all soft voice and batted eyelashes.

“She promised, Kara,” she said. “I’m sure it will be fine.”

Kara narrowed her eyes at Alex briefly, then finally acquiesced. “Okay,” she said, grumbling cantankerously under her breath, still posturing protectively while Cat continued to soothe her. Alex knew better than to smirk openly, but she caught Cat’s eye and the two women shared a knowing look. Alex was surprised how good something that simple could feel—having someone else who knew about Kara and the glorious, sweet, terrifying, and unbelievably complex vortex of events she brought to life around her. Someone who understood how exhausting it could be. Someone who wouldn’t have it any other way.

“It’s getting late,” she said finally, smiling at the two women. “I should go.”

“Not before you say goodbye to Carter,” Cat reminded her. “He thinks his new aunt hung the moon. He’s still talking about how smart and funny you are.”

Alex blushed. “Yeah, well, he’s pretty great, too,” she said, grinning. “He must get that from his mom.” Before Cat could respond, she added, “Hey, thanks for inviting me to dinner. I’m glad we were able to talk things out but I’m even gladder we did it over carbonara. You’re a fabulous cook, Cat.”

The older woman ducked her head, pleased by the compliment. “And that’s how you get invited back,” she said, a warm smile curving her lips. “You’re welcome any time, Alex. I hope you know that. Though,” she said cheekily, her eyes dancing with laughter, “something tells me you might be stopping by for more than just my cooking.”

Alex rolled her eyes, but steadfastly admitted to nothing. Cat finally relented. “Go on,” she said, nodding toward the stairwell. “We’ll be down in a minute. Kara will take you to the lobby.”

Alex nodded. “See you downstairs,” she said to Kara. Then she disappeared through the terrace door.

Cat watched her go, then looked up when she noticed Kara gazing at her.

“Let Christopher know Alex needs her own elevator badge when you go downstairs, darling,” she said. “I don’t want her to have to wait for one of us every time she wants to visit.”

Kara pulled the smaller woman against her, hugging her from behind. “I love you, Cat,” she said, eyes tracing the thoughtful curve of Cat’s cheek.

Cat melted into the embrace, tucking her head under Kara’s chin and placing her hands over Kara’s larger hands where they rested on her hips. “I know,” she said simply, her eyes fluttering closed on the tail end of a sigh, taking the opportunity—no matter how brief—to shut out the noise and clamor of their lives for just one moment.

She wanted to catch her breath. She wanted that rarest of all gifts: time. She never seemed to have enough of it—even before all of this—but now, with Kara filling all the empty, lonely corners of her heart with the golden exuberance that had earned her the nickname “Sunny” Danvers, Cat felt a little as if her life were stuck in fast forward. Not that that was a bad thing—although having the opportunity to reflect a little here and there was a concept that was growing on her.
One kiss, she reminded herself wonderingly, chuckling, thinking how ridiculous it was that something so small could have changed so much. *It was just one kiss.*

“That kiss had a two-year-long running start,” said Kara. She nuzzled the back of Cat’s head, reveling in the light floral scent of her honeyed hair. “There was nothing ‘small’ about it.”

Cat raised a single eyebrow and nodded, conceding Kara’s point. She craned her head to look up at the young woman with grateful green eyes. “You were very brave,” she said softly.

Kara snorted. “That wasn’t bravery, Cat,” she said, shaking her head in disbelief at Cat’s assessment of her actions. “That was *stupidity.* That was frustration. That was an idiot alien—who knew better—taking one too many chances because she was *so tired.*” She grinned down at Cat. “I’m just lucky you didn’t fire me!”

“Oh, yes. Because the first eleven times I tried that were *so* successful,” said Cat, rolling her eyes. She turned in Kara’s arms, reaching up to press a contemplative kiss to the young woman’s lips. “Besides, my kissing you back would have negated cause for any termination proceedings.”

Kara laughed out loud, looking down at Cat as if she’d just declared she intended give up running CatCo to become a marine biologist. “Right,” she agreed mockingly. “Because not having iron-clad cause has stopped you before.” She brushed her lips across Cat’s forehead indulgently and tightened her arms around the smaller woman. “Remind me again what my ninth termination said? ‘For egregious misuse of company resources, specifically, disrupting the critical thinking and reasoning abilities of the Chief Executive Officer for approximately thirty-three minutes during the Monday Morning Strategy Meeting held April 25th, resulting in lost revenue estimated at approximately $2.5 million.’ I never did figure out what that one was all about,” she said. “I don’t remember doing anything—”

Cat groaned and hid her face against Kara’s chest. She said three words, all muffled by their proximity and Kara’s shirt, and all completely nonsensical...as far as Kara was concerned.

“The fucking *daisies*....”

Kara caught a flickering and unfocused image through their connection. It was of Cat holding a bouquet of yellow daisies and she felt something suspiciously like butterflies in her stomach, but none of it made any sense without context.

“The what?” she asked, eyes wide.

Cat sighed deeply, and then looked up, cheeks pink with embarrassment. “I fired you because I’d spent half of that meeting daydreaming about giving you flowers—yellow daisies, to be precise.” When Kara’s eyebrows climbed upward, she hurried to explain, realizing, of course, there was no justification for any of it. “It was the first time you’d worn the white A-line dress with the lemon yellow belt and cardigan—the one you wore this past Friday, as a matter of fact. It was Spring and you were happy that morning—happier than usual—and as you were sitting in the meeting, taking notes like you usually do, I couldn’t help but look at you.

“You couldn’t stop smiling and I started wondering what might make you smile that way—specifically, what I could do to make you smile that way.” Cat rolled her eyes at herself. “I don’t know where the idea for the yellow daisies came from—a combination of your outfit and that silly plastic plant on your desk, perhaps—but I spent thirty minutes daydreaming about giving them to you just so I could see you beam like sunshine at *me,* for once—”

“It was you,” Kara blurted, interrupting Cat’s explanation.
“What?” asked Cat, confused.

“The reason I was so happy that morning—the reason I couldn’t stop smiling. It was you, Cat.” Kara laughed, the sound of it dusted by exasperation. “Ten minutes before that meeting, you handed me a stack of files—the research I’d done for the summer features for CATCO Magazine. There was a Post-it Note on the top file that had four words on it, in your handwriting: ‘Good work. Thank you.’” She looked away, suddenly shy, and shrugged. “I still have it,” she admitted. “The Post-it, I mean.”

“You do?” The thought of Kara clutching a teal CatCo Post-it Note with four words of praise written on it as if it was some sort of talisman made Cat want to laugh—but not for the reasons anyone might have guessed. She’d spent so much time and energy keeping Kara at arm’s length only to discover they’d both been fighting the tide on something beyond anyone’s control. How many of these moments had there been? How many times had they both been dreaming of the same thing only to turn away from each other at the last second, believing it wasn’t possible?

Cat reached up to sift long, blonde hair through her fingers. “We’re quite the pair,” she said, lips curved in a sardonic smile. I can’t believe we wasted so much time, she added, a hint of sadness winding through the thought.

“Maybe it wasn’t wasted time, Cat,” said Kara, a hopeful optimism shining in her sky-blue eyes. “Maybe everything was supposed to happen like this—so we would know. So we would be ready.” She scrunched her face up in a comical look of alarm. “Can you imagine us trying to figure out the Daat Kyashar and everything it meant, say, after I brought you Chipotle for lunch that time?”

Paling visibly, Cat shook her head slowly back and forth. She whispered one word, low and horrified.

“No….”

Kara nodded and grinned, her expression both smug and knowing.

“Maybe,” she said, leaning down to bestow a teasing kiss upon Cat’s willing lips, “the lesson we’re learning here isn’t ‘We wasted time.’” She leaned in for another, this one a little deeper and more insistent. “Maybe,” she continued, breathless when she pulled away, “it’s ‘Let’s not waste any more.’”

The white-hot, electric blue flash of desire Kara sent along their bond made Cat groan out loud. “Oh….” she sighed. She tilted her head and offered her neck to the young woman, remembering their earlier tryst on the terrace. Kara remembered, too—if her sexy growl and the sharp sting of teeth against Cat’s throat were any indication. “Oh, yes,” she breathed. “I agree….”

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Kara, asleep in the small hours of Monday morning, felt immersed in warmth, her skin alive with sensation, a soft, slow, steady thrum of life humming through her veins like a current. She was as relaxed as she had ever been, filled with a pervasive lassitude not unlike drifting down a slow-moving river, fingers trailing in the water, napping in the sun. She sighed in her sleep.

A few minutes later, a frisson of energy buzzed through that lazy current, pinging against her awareness just enough to reveal a growing need simmering beneath her skin. She slept on but her breath caught in the back of her throat and she moaned softly, once.

“Nngh.”
A few minutes more, and Kara floated in a realm of effervescence, sensation dancing along her nerve-endings, pooling in the most wonderful places. She arched her back and rolled her hips upward, still asleep but seeking sustained connection with whatever was causing the wondrous pressure, aware now of an ache building below her navel.

The ache grew and grew, dragging Kara up from the depths of her sleep with a relentless single-mindedness expressed as a languid caress. Every cell in her body seemed to shake off its restorative slumber in favor of the sticky-sweet, electric-honey wakefulness tugging at her consciousness, as bright and immediate as late summer sunshine.

Kara’s fingers clutched at the sheets beneath her hands, and she panted, blood drumming through her veins in concert with her hammering heart. She felt as if she were diving upward into light, stretching toward it, grasping, nearly desperate, as if reaching for something important that was just out of reach.

“Please….” she begged, voice ragged and soft.

In response to that single word, the languid caress focused and narrowed and Kara woke suddenly, breathlessly, with Cat’s name on her lips in a strangled, urgent cry. She came and came hard as she came to, hands fisted in the bedclothes and back arched high off the bed. Her chest heaved as she fluttered and shivered against Cat’s tongue, continuing to come even as the smug CatCo CEO slowed her movements, easing Kara down from her ecstatic height. When Cat finally pulled her mouth away from its loving work, she pressed a kiss to Kara’s inner thigh and slid her left hand up across Kara’s hip and belly to tug lazily at one pert nipple.

“Good morning, darling,” she whispered just the alarm on Kara’s phone began to beep softly from the bedside table.

“Jesus, Cat,” swore Kara, reaching blindly for her phone to shut it off. She tossed it onto the bed when it quieted and tried to get her breathing under control. She could feel her blood everywhere in her body, throbbing insistently against her skin, rushing in her ears, flaring behind her eyes in beautiful red and purple bursts.

Cat chuckled, chin pillowed against the back of her hand which was resting on Kara’s other thigh.

“More effective than caffeine?” she asked, tone cocky and self-satisfied.

“And hotter,” said Kara, still trying to find her voice. She reached for Cat. “Come here,” she said, smiling.

Cat crawled up the bed to give Kara a brief, heartfelt good morning kiss, but rolled away from the young woman’s wandering hands, ending up standing beside her, wrapped in the top-sheet.

“As much as I’d like to stay in bed with you all day, darling,” she said, “we can’t. I have an early meeting at City Hall, remember? I’ll make do with just caffeine today.”

“Leaving me flustered and frustrated?” asked Kara, gawping at Cat. “You’re sure that’s the best way to start this week off?”

Cat smirked. “You’ll manage. I have faith in you.” She leaned over the bed and gave Kara another kiss. “The real test is whether or not I blow our cover in the first five minutes,” she said, drawing her fingertips lightly down Kara’s cheek. “You’ll notice I’ve already called you ‘darling’ twice.”

Kara looked up at Cat with worried eyes. “Cat—what if—”
Cat put one finger over Kara’s lips, halting her anxious questions. “We’ll deal with whatever comes, Kara. Together.” Love, steady and certain, shone in her eyes. “I’m not worried.”

“You’re not?”

Cat shook her head. “No matter what, I’ll be coming home to you and to Carter tonight. That’s the only thing that matters.” When Kara’s eyes lit up and a sweet smile curled her lips, Cat nodded, pleased. “I’m going to get in the shower. There’s another master suite in the guest bedroom down the hall; consider it yours. Since you’re likely to be done getting ready long before me, will you make sure Carter is up and fed before you leave?”

Kara grinned at her. “I’ll make pancakes. I’m in the mood for them anyway.”

Cat rolled her eyes. “I suppose they’re healthier than donuts,” she groused, heading for the master bath. “And his appetite is already showing signs of transitioning to the teenage boy bottomless pit model—though I don’t think even he will be able to put away eighty-five hundred calories a day.” She turned pleading eyes on Kara just as the young woman sat up.

“Don’t worry,” said Kara, bouncing out of bed, excited to be up now that food was in the picture. “I’ll make sure he gets some fresh fruit, some full-fat calcium, and some lean protein, too. And his lunch is packed and ready to go—as long as he doesn’t mind leftovers.”

Cat rolled her eyes again—this time at herself for doubting Kara in the slightest. “Clearly you have this well in hand,” she said from bathroom doorway. “Come give me a kiss before you leave, all right?” She gave Kara an appraising look, then dropped the sheet and disappeared into the ensuite, her hips swaying in that delicious way Kara loved so much.

Kara groaned out loud at the sight and sent You’re killing me—you know that, right? Cat laughed through their bond. Something tells me you’ll survive, she sent.

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The morning’s ride up to the fortieth floor took the longest it ever had. Kara smoothed her skirt for the hundredth time and looked around at the rest of the elevator’s occupants, trying to discern whether or not they were looking at her any differently than normal. If nothing else, she thought the ache in her chest caused by the separation from her family should be written all over her face. No one, however, seemed to notice anything amiss.

Greg and Eliana from Mail Services had said hello to her with their usual friendliness and Raj from HR had grunted his response to her greeting like always, nose deep in his large latte with extra shots from Noonan’s. Raj wasn’t a morning person and Kara had yet to have a coherent conversation with him before ten o’clock. Alice, the CFO’s long-time personal assistant, who liked to come in early so she had a solid hour without interruptions to respond to emails and calendaring requests, smiled at Kara shyly when she said hello to her, seemingly pleased just to be noticed.

“I like your dress,” she said, gesturing at Kara’s grass-green outfit with a flick of her hand. “That’s a great color.”

Kara thanked her and offered her a tentative smile, relieved no one seemed to be staring at her, eyes narrowed by suspicion. It was just like the elevator ride she’d taken after she’d made her first public appearance as Supergirl—wondering whether anyone was going to notice she had the same faint scar over her eye as their new hero, the same general build, the same color hair. No one had noticed a thing, though, and, slowly, throughout the day, Kara had let go of her fear.
Today, her colleagues all departed the elevator car one by one, seemingly none the wiser to something Kara felt should be obvious. When she was finally, blissfully alone, she pried the top off Cat’s latte and gave it a quick blast of heat vision before the doors opened on her floor, remembering as she did so to sway out of the security camera’s field of vision at the last second.

Winn—up out of his chair and on his way to refill his mug from the community coffee pot in the breakroom—saw Kara as she came around the corner into the bullpen and detoured toward her, a frown stamped firmly into his square features.

“Hey,” he whispered harshly, “what happened to you this weekend?”

Kara’s eyes went wide. “Wh-what?” she squeaked, stopping dead in her tracks. Had she lulled herself into a false sense of security only to be found out by those who knew her best? “What do you mean?”

“I thought we were gonna hang out—you know, go see the new Captain America movie or whatever. Because you were having such a terrible week with—” Winn nodded toward Cat’s empty office. “—with whatever’s gotten into Cersei Grant, Lady of CatCo Rock.”

Kara scowled at Winn’s new nickname for Cat but before she could communicate her displeasure, James walked up with a steaming mug of coffee, giving the two of them a wide, easy grin.

“Leave her alone, Winn,” he said, his deep voice booming in the empty bullpen. “You saw the footage from Friday. She was probably exhausted after that.” He looked at Kara, eyebrows raised. “I bet you spent all weekend in bed,” he said, taking a sip of his coffee.

Kara stared at James blankly, thinking, stunned, Well, he isn’t wrong. She shook the memory of whom she’d spent all weekend in bed with from her brain before it could take hold, hoping to prevent one of her trademark blushes from blazing across her cheeks.

“Oh…s-sorta?” she stammered, a frown notching the space between her own eyebrows. “I was pretty wiped out….” she finished lamely, letting the boys fill in the blanks with whatever they felt most comfortable believing. “It was a long week.”

“See?” said James, good-naturedly smacking Winn on the shoulder with the back of his large hand. “I told you she just forgot. No big deal, right?”

Winn didn’t seem particularly placated but he grunted in assent. “Yeah,” he said. “No big deal.” He stormed off to get his coffee and Kara was struck both by how weird everything felt and by how normal at the same time. The world hadn’t changed as drastically for everyone else in her life as it had for her. Even so, James and Winn both seemed stuck in a past that was so out of date as to be irrelevant and Kara had to remind herself it had only been sixty or so hours since her whole life had been transformed.

James watched Winn stomp away, frowning at his friend’s dark mood. “Don’t pay any attention to him, Kara,” he said, thinking someone should urge the man to move on already. Kara clearly wasn’t interested. “Are we still on for game night Thursday?” he asked.

Kara snapped her head in James’ direction, thinking his nonchalance was, perhaps, a tiny bit rehearsed. She didn’t know why she thought that exactly—he’d asked the same question of her before—but something in the tone of his voice…in the tilt of his head….

“Lucy was looking forward to it, is all,” he said mildly, and, with a start, Kara realized he was lying. She doubted he’d even discussed the get-together with Lucy, and would, instead, spring it on her at
the last minute, hoping she’d say yes just because she didn’t want to seem impolite. She had no idea how she knew all that, but she did. The words seemed written in stone in her brain, carved in letters two feet high: HE’S LYING. But why? Why would James lie about something so trivial? What could he possibly hope to gain?

Kara frowned, but before she could confront James, she became aware of a particular heartbeat—one she knew as well as her own—climbing upward toward her one story at a time. She turned toward Cat’s private elevator, unable to stop a relieved smile from breaking across her features, her frown obliterated in its wake.

“She’s here,” she said, breathing freely for the first time since she’d left the penthouse that morning. She hurried to get her tablet and her notepad ready, forgetting about James, his question, and his deception instantly. She was standing in her usual spot with Cat’s latte in hand before James could even blink.

“We’ll—” he began. Realizing Kara was no longer paying him the slightest bit of attention, he muttered, “We’ll talk later,” and slunk away, not sure what had happened exactly, and not at all happy about it.

Two floors away from the elevator doors opening, Cat sent, Brace for impact, darling, a smirk clearly present in her thoughts.

Kara’s heart leapt but she managed, somehow, to keep her face from reflecting that joy. She took a deep breath, praying she wouldn’t forget herself completely and launch herself into Cat’s arms as if they hadn’t seen each other in months. The butterfly fish that now seemed her constant companions invaded her belly once again.

The elevator came to a stop with a quiet ding and the doors opened, revealing Cat Grant in a tapered-waist, colorblock Aidan Mattox mini-dress, five-inch Valentino slingbacks, and her oversized, jet-black Givenchy sunglasses. A black Fendi bag hung from the crook of her elbow and she gave Kara a cursory once-over.

“It’s not easy being green,” she noted, treating the rest of the bullpen—now filling with bustling employees—to a long-suffering sigh. She took the latte cup from Kara’s hands, brushing her fingertips across the backs of Kara’s fingers in the transition. “Come along, Kiera,” she said, tapping her foot outside her office door. “Or would you rather I call you ‘Kermit’?”

Kara tried not to beam at the usage of her ‘old’ name, hurrying around the smaller woman to open the door for her. “Miss Grant,” she said, as quiescent and affable as ever despite how unsettled she felt calling Cat by her ‘old’ name. She saw the hint of a smile playing around Cat’s lips as she passed and she quashed one of her own in response.

I need a code word for when I want to say ‘I love you back,’ she sent. Cat stopped and turned toward Kara, causing the taller woman to stumble awkwardly as she attempted to keep from colliding with her.

No, you don’t, sent Cat in reply. She just barely kept herself from reaching out to lightly touch Kara’s cheek. It’s always in your eyes.

“No,” she said, ignoring Kara as she visibly melted at her unspoken words, “tell me about my day. Then I’d like to make some changes to the agenda for this morning’s strategy meeting.” She pulled off her sunglasses and her green eyes found Kara’s, dancing with emotion for a split second before she turned away, dropping her bag on the corner of her desk and taking her seat like the queen she was.
Kara nodded and opened her tablet, wondering if she’d ever get used to the feeling of wanting to grin all the time while not being able to do so.

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At 8:30am, Georgie called as instructed, hoping to catch Cat for lunch. The chef was a little caught off guard to hear Kara answer Cat’s line, but she recovered like a star, even getting a bit of light-hearted teasing in before hanging up. Kara did her best not to blush.

She made reservations at Shibusa, Cat’s favorite sushi restaurant, for the two of them; even though Cat had suggested Kara join them. When Kara demurred, nervous they’d be seen and their secret discovered, Cat pouted through their bond.

*Don’t,* sent Kara from her desk, rolling her eyes so hard it was almost painful. *The only reason you want me there is so Georgie won’t be able to grill you about me. Nice try.*

*Traitor,* came Cat’s highly put out, one word reply.

At 9:00am, Cat convened the Monday Morning Strategy meeting as she did every week, but this time she began it by announcing the plans for Kara’s editorial internship. Looking around the room at the department heads that were likely to be her mentors and instructors over the next year, Kara was surprised to see the thing that had flummoxed them the most was Cat having called her ‘Kara’ for the first time professionally. That one small act did more to show Cat’s confidence and investment in Kara’s abilities and in her professional future than anything she’d said and, by the end of the meeting, several people had volunteered to be a part of her training team.

After staying behind to schedule preliminary meetings with her team—her internship was to begin on the first of the month to give her a few weeks to make arrangements for or to finalize any outstanding projects that would get in the way of her studies—Kara returned to her desk only to find a bouquet of yellow daisies waiting there, their long stems wrapped with blue satin ribbon.

“Oh,” she said, the word barely audible and filled with wonder. Kara knew instantly who they were from and sunshine flooded her eyes. She dropped her tablet and notepad on the edge of her desk and lifted the bouquet in her arms, clutching the soft, luscious blossoms to her chest. She buried her face in them, eyes fluttering closed as she breathed in their scent, and then opening again, searching for the smile she knew she’d find drenched in jade-green. Cat’s bright, attentive eyes stared back at her through the thick glass of the executive suite’s walls.

“I signed for them,” said Winn, unaware he was interrupting. His tone was a peculiar mixture of helpfulness and suspicious distrust. “Who’re they from?” he asked.

Kara turned to look at him, her face falling when she saw the look in his eyes. His smile was completely and obviously fake, mustered solely to feign interest long enough to discover the identity of his rival. She immediately blocked her connection with Cat, forcing herself not to look worriedly over her shoulder at her. The less Cat knew about this, she reasoned, the better.

Kara found herself wishing—again—the gentle rebuff she’d given Winn a few weeks ago when he’d tried to kiss her had actually taken, more so now than ever before. It was one thing to have a friendship made awkward by unrequited feelings; it was quite another to experience the same thing while involved with someone else. Protecting Winn’s feelings took a definite backseat to fostering trust and transparency in her relationship with Cat, and Kara all but deflated, knowing she’d have to have a firm discussion with him sooner rather than later. If for no other reason than to save him from Cat’s wrath. *Her* tolerance for such behavior would be short-lived and absent any second chances.
“I don’t know,” Kara lied, making a show of looking for a note or card. “There wasn’t a card?”

Winn shrugged and offered her a weak smile. “A secret admirer, I guess,” he said, his lack of enthusiasm palpable. “Yay for you.”

“Winn,” she said, taking a step toward him, only to be interrupted by the jarring ring of her telephone. She turned and headed back to her desk, gently returning the flowers where she’d found them and snatching the receiver from its cradle.

“CatCo Worldwide Media,” she intoned, grateful for the interruption and yet feeling guilty, too. “Cat Grant’s office. This is Kara. How may I help you?”

“Hey, it’s me,” said Alex. “You got a minute?”

Kara looked around, searching for her cell phone. It was just where she’d left it—stuck haphazardly in the outside pocket of her purse—and she grabbed it, checking the display. There were no missed calls.

“Alex?” she asked, turning back toward Winn just in time to catch him throwing up his hands in annoyance. “What’s going on? Why are you calling me on my work phone? How did you even get this number?”

Unseen by Kara, Alex rolled her eyes. “First, I’m not even going to justify that last question with an answer. Try Googling Cat Grant sometime and see what comes up. Second, I called this number so you wouldn’t worry it was a—er—cape-related emergency.”

Now it was Kara’s turn to roll her eyes. ‘Cape-related emergency?’ she thought. Smooth, Alex.

“Okay,” she said, drawing out the word. “Then how can I help you?”

Alex sighed. “I talked to Hank this morning. He’s as surprised as we were, of course—not about you and Cat—“ Kara sat bolt upright and looked around, hoping no one had overheard. “—but about, you know, the other thing....”

“Yes, I know,” hissed Kara, trying to keep her voice low.

“As you can imagine, he wants to see you guys as soon as possible...so I guess I’m calling to get him on your boss’ calendar.” Alex smirked, thinking ‘boss’ wasn’t exactly the word she wanted to use to describe Cat, but she was trying to be mindful of Kara’s feelings. She thought ‘overnight wife’ had a nice ring to it. Kara wasn’t likely to agree.

Kara sighed. “Hold on,” she said as she reached for her tablet. She keyed in her password and flipped to Cat’s master calendar, looking at a sea of color-coded appointments for anything not yet taken.

“Tonight’s out,” she began, half to herself and half to Alex. “We’ll be here late with the layouts.” She hummed to herself, eyebrows crowding low over her eyes as she concentrated. “Wednesday she has two back-to-back broadcast interviews late in the afternoon and that’s family dinner night, too, so that’s out. And there’s no way she’s going to do this on a weekend, especially one when Carter’s home, so it looks like either Tuesday after seven-thirty or Thursday are his best bets. Though we can only give you an hour on Thursday—eight to nine—because Carter’s attending a Robotics lecture at UCNC that evening and will be home later than usual.”

“Jesus, Kar, look at you—all Carol Brady with a wi-fi connection,” teased Alex. “Put us down for Tuesday, then. God knows we’d hate to interrupt ‘family dinner night.’” The way she said ‘family
“Alex,” Kara whined, turning away from Winn in case he was eavesdropping. Which, considering everything else going on, he probably was.

Alex laughed. “Relax, Carol, I’m just yankin’ your chain. We’ll be there at seven-thirty unless something comes up. I’ll even bring dessert this time—a thank you for dinner last night.”

“Chocolate pecan pie?” asked Kara hopefully. She wasn’t above begging at this point. After all she’d endured over the last sixty-plus hours, she figured she was owed.

Alex groaned. “All right, deal. I’ll even throw in some ice cream.”

Kara opened her mouth to make a suggestion there, too, only to be cut off by Alex.

“Nope. My choice on that one. The world can’t revolve around you all the time, you know.”

“Fine,” said Kara, scowling. “Just please—no raisins. I mean it, Alex. Nobody likes them. Ice cream with raisins is just as bad as—”

“As carrot cake,” finished Alex, knowing the refrain well. None of this was news to her, having spent thirteen years with a food-vacuum named Kara for a sister. “Yeah, yeah. I remember.” She also remembered—vividly—the absolute betrayal Kara had suffered the time her favorite ice cream shop had come out with a new Fall Flavor. Carrot cake ice cream—complete with raisins—had instantly gone on Kara’s ONE GIANT NOPE list. Oh my God, the ranting. She could still hear the ranting. “See you tomorrow.”

Kara nodded. “Tomorrow,” she said, hanging up the phone. She turned and clutched the tablet to her chest, intending to head to Cat’s office to notify her of the new appointment. As she did so, she saw the daisies again and a smile bloomed on her lips. She scooped them up and hurried to the breakroom to search for a vase, planning to display them prominently on her desk for as long as possible. Even if no one would ever know who they were from, for Kara Danvers, at least, there was no version of reality in this Universe or any other where work took precedence over flowers from Cat Grant.

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Tuesday night, at exactly seven-thirty, Kara and Cat both waited in the foyer at the penthouse, having been notified by Neves that Alex and Hank had arrived and were on their way up. Cat’s stillness as she stood, serene, in her ink-black Michael Kors mini-dress and four-inch Manolo Blahnik snakeskin heels was a stark contrast to Kara’s frenetic pacing and her carnation pink A-line dress topped by a slouchy, snow-white cardigan.

Cat had sent a highly-reluctant Carter to his room to start on his homework so the adults would have a chance to discuss the Daat Kyashar and its ramifications before bringing him in on the debate. Based on her level of agitation alone, Cat was considering sending Kara to join him.

Kara heard the thought and curled her hands into fists at her side.

“I’m nervous, okay?” she snapped, shooting Cat a look that was half annoyance and half petulance. “My sister and one of my bosses are coming to run tests on us. Tests that have never been done before—tests that haven’t been rigorously reviewed for safety or efficacy by any scientific or medical community—that, therefore, have no known metric for evaluating their success or failure.” She growled, frustrated. “Essentially, I am submitting my wife and my son to a shadow agency with no oversight as subjects for experim—mmmpf.”
Kara caught Cat as she flew into her arms, surprised to find herself on the receiving end of a deeply intimate and desperate kiss, knocked completely off balance, both figuratively and literally. She stumbled backward into the credenza behind her, one hand instinctively bracing them so they wouldn’t fall, the other tangled in the soft curls at the back of Cat’s head. Cat held Kara in arms like steel bands and insistently pressed one leg between Kara’s thighs, trying to get as close as she could to the young blonde. Her heart was a drum only Kara could hear.

Wha—? A dense barrage of emotion and imagery barreled through the Daat Kyashar and into Kara’s mind, cutting her startled question off before she could fully express it. A sweet, swirling, aching tenderness surrounded a kernel of understanding and certainty in Cat like the brightly-colored candy shell enveloping the almond in a Jordan almond. Kara had no frame of reference for Cat’s emotions but a tentative attempt at peeling them apart showed her a brief comparison of the times Cat had been called ‘wife’ and how every time before the moment Kara had used the word sadly came up lacking.

For Cat, there was a joy in sureness. So much of her life was spent on the edge of the known, where facts and figures danced in and out of reliability depending on the source. She didn’t just report the news, she made it. She and others like her decided what knowledge the public had access to and the lens through which they saw it. The power and influence inherent in her position came at a price, though—facts and figures could and often did change. The broader the input surrounding a particular event, the more tumultuous the context. Certainty was a luxury none of them could afford.

Hearing the words ‘my wife’ in Kara’s resolute, utterly irrefutable tone reminded Cat she possessed an unbelievable gift in Kara’s devotion. Kara’s confident conviction in referring to Cat in such a way, before any paperwork had been registered or a ceremony completed, cracked Cat’s heart like an egg, reducing years and years of protective emotional concrete to dust in an instant.

Not trusting herself with words at that particular moment, Cat relied upon their connection and the slow, brilliant depths of their kiss to explain how she was feeling, certain Kara would understand. And she did. Oh, how she did.

They were, in fact, so busy coming to this understanding, neither of them heard the quiet ding of the elevator as it came to a stop, nor the rasp of its doors opening right in front of them.

Alex gaped at the women tangled up together in the foyer for half a second, and then covered her eyes with her free hand. “Augh! Jesus, Cat!” she swore, gesturing blindly at the CEO with her other hand, the one carrying the promised pies and ice cream. “Try to control yourself for five minutes, will you? You’ve got guests!”

Hank carefully kept his features stoic despite wanting to laugh at Alex’s blusterous outrage—so different from the seething turmoil she’d been mired in only days ago. He watched as Cat deliberately ignored Alex while she and Kara slowly separated, watched as the media mogul took the time to cup Kara’s cheek in her hand before turning to look at his agent.

“Alexandra,” she said, moving out of Kara’s embrace and stepping forward to take Alex’s free hand in her own, leaning in to press a single, light kiss on the brunette’s cheek. “It’s always lovely to see you.” She did not attempt to explain, excuse, or otherwise defend her actions—which were consensual and had taken place in her own home—and instead let the usage of Alex’s full name and one carefully-arched eyebrow communicate her feelings on being interrupted. After she was certain she’d made her point, Cat turned to Hank, extending one elegant hand.

“Good to see you again, too, Director Henshaw,” she said, referring to their original meeting during that regrettable affair with Leslie Willis. Her eyes widened for just a moment when she looked into
his and she blinked, stunned, before covering her surprise with a lopsided smile. “So it was you,” she said, nodding appreciatively at the man. “I had wondered who Kara’s shapeshifting friend was.” She grinned when his eyes widened at her statement, adding, “Are you able to fly on your own or did the Supergirl persona give you that ability?”

Hank’s darkening scowl coupled with the astonished looks both Danvers sisters were giving her made Cat laugh. “Relax,” she said, motioning everyone into the dining room where a stack of dessert plates and forks waited on the table for them. “I recognized his eyes—or rather, the world-weary look of determination in them. The memory Kara accidentally shared just now simply confirmed it for me.” She winked at Hank and said, “Don’t worry; I can’t read everyone’s mind. That’s your area of expertise, if I’m not mistaken.”

Underestimating Cat Grant was something intelligent people did only once and J’onn J’onzz was nothing if not intelligent. He unshielded his mind, opening the selective filter he kept in place a little wider so it included everyone in the penthouse. He wasn’t surprised when nothing changed.

“I can’t read everyone’s mind, either, Miss Grant,” he said, sighing. “There’s a short list of people who I cannot reach—” He looked pointedly at Alex as she put their dessert on the dining room table. “—which apparently just got a little longer.”

“What?” asked Kara, shaking herself out of her unusual reticence. Between her anxiety about the unknown tests and Cat’s emotional display just as Alex and Hank were arriving, she was feeling a little off kilter.

Hank frowned and looked to Cat. “Would it be all right if we sat down, Miss Grant?”

Cat closed her eyes briefly, berating herself for her terrible manners. “Of course. Please forgive me.” She gestured to chairs around the table and everyone sat—except Alex, who made a detour to the kitchen to put the ice cream she’d brought into the freezer. “And please, call me Cat.”

Hank nodded. “If you’ll call me Hank,” he said, waiting until Alex had rejoined them at the table before continuing. “As I was saying, there’s a short list of people on this planet I’m unable to read. It includes Kal-El, Kara, and the Kryptonian guards and prisoners from Fort Rozz.” His mouth twisted into a grimace and he glanced at Alex. “We can add Cat and her son to that list now.”

Kara reached for Cat’s hand, relieved, and Alex frowned at Hank. “What do you mean?” she asked.

“I mean, the tests we planned to do—they’re unnecessary. As you know, during that little scene we put on a few months ago, I had the privilege of hearing Cat’s thoughts—”

Cat paled, her heart skipping a beat. “What?” she asked weakly, pressing a hand to the base of her throat. She felt irrationally exposed.

“It was brief,” said Hank, trying to reassure her. “And unintentional. It’s something I call ‘proximity backwash.’ When a person has strong feelings and I’m standing or, in this case, hovering close to them, the emotions can overwhelm the filter I usually have in place and I ‘hear’ some or all of what the person is thinking. Your emotions were running pretty high that night; your thoughts punched right through.” He looked around the table at each of the women and shrugged. “The point is—I can’t hear her now. Not intentionally, not accidentally, not in any way. Her mind is closed to me—just like Kara’s. A brief check of the rest of the house indicates the same is true for her son.”

Cat’s relief showed plainly on her face while Kara looked confused and Alex looked thoughtful.

“Is it the Daat Kyashar?” asked Kara. “I mean, I realize it must be—but how?”
“From what Alex has told me and from what I read in the Kalex files Kal-El sent you, the Daat Kyashar acts as protection for all those within its field of influence—the bonded pair and offspring referenced,” he said, leaning forward in his chair. “Normally, all members of the bonded group were Kryptonian. In your case, your triad consists of one Kryptonian and two humans. It’s my guess that the Daat Kyashar took the path of least resistance in order to provide the broadest, most effective protection—in other words, it’s helping Cat and Carter’s human brains mimic the Kryptonian characteristics that keep me from being able to read you.”

And that startling hypothesis led to a host of other questions, most of which they didn’t have answers for.

For instance, what other Kryptonian characteristics might Cat and Carter’s brains mimic?

Were their brains only mimicking the characteristics or were their structures changing somehow?

If the Daat Kyashar was changing the fundamental structure of their brains, might it also be able to change Cat and Carter in other ways—say, on a cellular level?

If it could and did, would they eventually exhibit some or all of Kara’s superpowers?

And how did kryptonite fit into this picture? Could it affect Cat and Carter now? Would it disrupt or weaken the Daat Kyashar itself?

Twenty minutes of heated discussion brought no consensus. Hank wanted to do more focused medical examinations, complete with blood-work and PET scans—but both Cat and Kara were vehemently opposed to that plan.

Alex wanted to do a controlled experiment using an ounce of kryptonite to see if it affected the Daat Kyashar in general or Cat and Carter specifically, but Hank and Kara nixed that plan.

Cat wanted to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, in part because she had no interest in becoming a lab rat herself, but mostly because there was no way in hell she was going to submit her twelve-year-old son to a government agency for random experimentation—not now, not ever.

Meanwhile, Kara wondered how successfully Cat could run CatCo from Kal’s Fortress of Solitude—because packing everything up and moving there for the foreseeable future seemed like the best plan of them all.

With her initial fears of a backdoor hack into Kara’s brain assuaged, another more effective method of controlling her sister slowly occurred to Alex. Cat Grant was already a tempting target via her well-publicized, mutually-appreciative relationship with Supergirl. Once Cat and Kara’s relationship became general knowledge—and let’s face it, that was going to happen sooner rather than later with the two of them constantly mooning at one another—one someone, someone like Non, was going to get the bright idea to kidnap Cat or Carter or both, dealing double the damage he could generate just on his own. Alex had only seen a ghost of the potential destruction Kara could and would rain down upon anyone who threatened her family; something told her it would be much, much worse if a scenario like that ever played out in real life.

“It appears we’re at an impasse,” said Cat, looking around the table, her expression cool and remote.

Alex’s features darkened. “About the testing? Sure. Okay. I’m actually fine with the wait-and-see option—” she said, glancing at Hank to stall any protest he might give, “—because we know so little about the Daat Kyashar and all of that knowledge has been filtered through a sieve named Krypton. The Daat Kyashar on Earth is a whole other ballgame as far as I’m concerned, and we scientists?
We’re big on taking a look around before we start poking things with sticks.” She frowned and turned her eyes toward Kara. “But we have another problem.”

Kara groaned. “What now, Alex?” she asked, exasperated. She’d just begun to relax, thinking they’d dodged the first bullet easily and had at least bought themselves some time on the second. This third bullet seemed to be coming out of nowhere and she tensed accordingly.

“We’ve eliminated Cat and Carter as a vector for possible telepathic attacks but they’re still a threat in other ways. Once your relationship is public—and don’t try to tell me you’re capable of keeping this a secret for any length of time, Kara Danvers.” Alex pointed in Kara’s general direction with a raised index finger, perilously close to shaking it at her like Eliza had done to Alex so many times.

“After what I’ve seen, I give you a week—a week—before there’s a TMZ article about the Queen of All Media being off the market.” She raised both eyebrows at her sister and backed off on her intensity only when she saw Kara’s reluctant acceptance of her point. She sighed and started again, putting her hand back on the table. “Once your relationship is public, Non and Astra are going to take a second look at Cat as a way to control you.” She looked at Cat and sighed, an apology written in her eyes. “They would be stupid not to—and they’re not stupid.”

Kara leaned forward, her eyes flashing. “I can protect her,” she said. “I can protect both of them.” The ferocity of her determination pressed into the room, thickening the air like a wave of tropical humidity, making everyone feel a little claustrophobic.

“Not all the time,” countered Alex, putting up her hands in surrender when she saw defensiveness leap into Kara’s eyes. “No one’s saying you wouldn’t do everything in your power, Kara, but you can’t be with them every minute of every day. You can’t be in two places at once. There are more of Non’s forces than there are of you—even with the DEO’s help. And they’ve wanted to take you down since the minute you showed up.” She looked at both women, pleading with them, curling her hands into fists in front of her, pounding them lightly on the table. “We need a backup plan.”

“What sort of—?” began Cat, but a single word from Kara cut her off.

“No,” said the blonde and her voice was more Supergirl than Kara Danvers.

“Kara—”

“I said no, Alex, and I mean no.”

“But, darling—” began Cat, completely at a loss as to why Kara would be so adamantly against the help Alex was offering. If these two aliens—Non and Astra—could be a danger to Carter or to herself, why was Kara saying such an emphatic no to her sister’s desire for a contingency plan?

A brief perusal along their connection shocked Cat. It was as if the word no was made of lead twelve feet thick. It didn’t just block the Daat Kyashar; it seemed to make it disappear—like the time David Copperfield, that smarmy collection of ego and eyebrows, had made the Statue of Liberty disappear.

“Non and Astra are not the only people who want to control Supergirl,” said Kara without taking her eyes from Alex’s, letting the weight of her words bore into her sister. “There are people in the DEO—people with more power than Hank and Alex combined—who would be happy to use any means necessary to get me to do exactly what they ask when they ask it.” She pulled her eyes away from Alex and turned to Cat finally, the intensity of her look softening. “The people I work with as Supergirl are nice people, Cat. They’re good at their jobs. They want to help capture the Fort Rozz prisoners and to protect National City. But the others, higher ups like General Lane—”
“General Lane?” asked Cat, eyebrows diving low over her eyes. She looked at Hank. “Sam Lane?” she persisted, surprised when he nodded in the affirmative.

“He won’t ask nicely. He doesn’t see me as an entity with rights; he sees me as an asset—to be used at his discretion and in whatever way he wishes. Failing that, I would be shipped off to some secret lab somewhere and studied until he’d extracted every iota of tactical data my body could provide. Then he would…dispose of me.” She looked at Alex and Hank defiantly, daring them to defend the man, daring them to contradict a word of what she’d said. When they didn’t, she continued, sneering, “He tortured Astra with liquid kryptonite when he had temporary control of the DEO a few months ago.”

Kara returned her gaze to Cat, her heart breaking in her eyes. Cat felt the Daat Kyashar flicker in and out of existence as her lover’s emotions began to break through the impossibly high walls she’d erected. “He injected it into her veins over my protests, Cat. I heard her screams. I watched my aunt beg for her life, for the pain to end, and he didn’t even blink.”

“Your…aunt?” Cat breathed. “Astra is your aunt?”

Kara nodded, face crumpling as her tears broke through the last of her resistance.

Cat felt as though she should have known. Irrationally, she felt she was owed this information. The alien power struggle plaguing her city was actually an intergalactic family feud? Why hadn’t anyone bothered to tell her this?

In her next breath, though, she remembered putting off learning more about Kara’s family and home no fewer than three times in five days, thinking there would be time for that later. Of course, the way things seemed to work with Kara and her, time was a relative thing and subject to a host of interesting anomalies.

If she were being honest with herself, Cat knew Kara would have told her if she’d asked. She almost chuckled, thinking the young Kryptonian had at least one more deceitful bone in her body than either she or her mother had given her credit for. That knowledge was a comfort.

Alex sat stock still, watching Cat watch Kara. She wondered what Cat would do, how she would react to what, just on the surface, appeared to be an overwhelming amount of disturbing information.

So, Cat…you have a new girlfriend, who—it turns out—is an alien from a planet twenty-seven light years away. Well, she was. The planet blew up. Anyway, she started out as your assistant, but you made her into a superhero that defends National City from the other aliens that accidentally came with her when her pod came to Earth. The leaders of those other aliens—the ones blowing shit up and terrorizing your city every day? They’re your girlfriend’s aunt and uncle, two of her three last surviving family members. Oh, and now you and your son are telepathically connected to your girlfriend, your girlfriend’s sister works for a shadow government agency whose entire purpose is to capture aliens, and your girlfriend walks a very thin line between helping that agency and being locked up by it. Any questions?

Fuck, thought Alex. It’s like we’re on General Hospital—and not the good one, from back in the Eighties. The bad one when the aliens landed in Port Charles and random people started coming out as vampires.

Cat reached out to gather Kara into her arms, shushing her as the young woman dissolved into sobs, tucking her stubborn tow-head under her chin.
“It’s okay, my darling,” she whispered, stroking Kara’s hair. “So your aunt is an alien with anger management problems and a teensy fondness for using terrorism in pursuit of her goals.” She kissed the top of Kara’s head and chuckled darkly. “My mother is a verbally-abusive, name-dropping one-percenter with an acid tongue and the scales to match—though that Laura Mercier foundation she uses works miracles, apparently.” She shrugged indifferently. “Sounds like they’ll get along famously at Thanksgiving. As long as we keep them away from knives and other sharp implements, everything should be fine, right?”

Kara’s sobs stopped abruptly as she gaped up at Cat. The sobs turned to laughter when she looked into Cat’s teasing green eyes and she hiccupped once as she tightened her arms around the smaller woman, hiding her tear-stained face against her neck.

Cat looked up at Alex and raised one eyebrow in challenge, as cool and unflappable as ever.

The brunette snorted. _Jesus_, she thought, shaking her head. _Kara never had a chance_. She watched as Cat scooted her chair closer to Kara, still soothing her sister sweetly…although Alex detected a distinctly dangerous undercurrent humming just beneath the CEO’s calm veneer. _Hell, I’ve only known her for a few days and I’m a little bit in love with her_, she added.

Once Cat had Kara calmed down and comfortable, she cleared her throat and pinned her guests with a gaze that did not invite dissembling. “Since neither of you bothered to contradict Kara’s version of events, I assume they were accurate,” she said, her voice hard and cold, as if cut from a diamond.

“So we’re between a rock and a hard place, it would seem.” Cat threaded her fingers through Kara’s hair and looked down at her briefly, hating how much pressure she must be feeling, how much responsibility rested on those deceptively fragile shoulders. “Kara can’t protect Carter and me all the time, but she doesn’t trust your agency to do it in her place. Her aunt and uncle are likely to discover the recent changes in Kara’s life quickly, exposing my son and me to increased risk of kidnapping, torture, or more. Even if we do rely on the DEO’s assistance, there’s the possibility General Lane and his superiors will take all three of us into custody, accomplishing the very same thing we’re trying to avoid with Non and Astra. Does that about sum things up?”

Alex laughed and Hank’s eyebrows climbed the considerable real-estate present on his forehead.

“Yep. Completely,” said Alex, wishing she had _never_ questioned Cat’s involvement with Kara—or at least that she hadn’t been such an unmitigated jackass about it. Clearly, Cat was the best thing that had ever happened to her sister.

“Then the only logical recourse is to make us harder targets to acquire,” said Cat reasonably. “I have a fair amount of self-defense training—trust me, I’ve been a target in one way or another for longer than Kara’s been on this planet—but I could always benefit from additional instruction. I assume I’ll require a more specialized regimen focusing on an entirely different set of outcomes?” She smirked briefly, unwavering in her determination when Kara’s sister nodded in agreement. “I trust Alex to help there. In the meantime, Kara and I will discuss ways to broaden the safety net around Carter and we’ll vet them through the both of you.”

She gazed at each of the agents impassively, as if she was brokering the take-over of a failing media outlet rather than negotiating for her family’s protection. “Does that sound fair? We’ll keep the door open to renegotiating the terms of the agreement as circumstances change, of course, but I think this gives us a good place to start—without frightening my son unnecessarily or worrying Kara to the
point of tears. Agreed?”

Hank seemed to hesitate, but Alex nudged him and shook her head. “The faster you say yes, the faster we get to those pies,” she reminded him. She grinned then, the span of it crinkling the skin around her eyes. “She’s already won, Hank,” she said. “We have no leverage. None. And she’s a woman protecting her family.” She winked conspiratorially at Cat. “Non and Astra won’t know what hit them.”

The DEO director glowered for a few seconds longer, and then sighed, turning his large hands upward in surrender. “Agreed,” he said. “Alex is right. Astra and Non have no idea what’s coming for them.” He grinned and it was dark and gleefully evil. “I actually like the sound of that.”

Cat leveled a discerning gaze at both of them before relenting and letting a smile curve her lips. “Then shall we have dessert? Carter has school in the morning and it’s already getting late. If we don’t have it now, he’ll have to go to bed without.”

Alex stood. “Aunt Alex opposes that plan in its entirety,” she declared. “Hank and I will start serving. Why don’t you two go get Kara cleaned up and call Carter to the table? We’ll be ready by the time you get back.”

Cat stood and pulled Kara up with her, lacing their fingers together possessively. She gazed at her sister-in-law with gratitude glittering in her eyes, knowing Alex was giving her and Kara a chance to reconnect for a few moments’ time, letting them heal their bond and each other.

Thank you, Cat mouthed at Alex before turning and tugging Kara down the hall toward the bathroom.

The DEO agents watched them go, unsurprised when Kara swayed into Cat’s side and rested her head on the shorter woman’s shoulder as they walked.

When they disappeared around the corner, Hank turned to Alex and sighed again, a look of gentle consternation crowding his features.

“What is it?” asked Alex, concern flooding her eyes.

“They have the power to change this whole planet. You realize that, don’t you?” he asked. “Kara has the heart for it and Cat has the reach. Now that they’ve found each other like this, now that they’re family, no one will be immune. One way or the other.”

“Meaning?” Alex wasn’t sure what Hank was trying to say; only that he seemed incredibly serious about it.

“Meaning Non and Astra are just the beginning. Whatever happens over the next few months will affect everyone in ways we can’t possibly predict.” Determination, not anger, pulled his mouth into a frown. “We have to do whatever we can to protect them, Alex. No matter what.”

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Twenty minutes later, Kara picked at what was left of an entire chocolate pecan pie of her very own, listening as Carter grilled Hank about engineering, particularly the usage of robotics in the military. To her left, Alex thanked Cat for her personal elevator badge while Cat demurred, making it seem the act benefitted her more than anyone.

Alex had gotten two quarts of ice cream—one of Bourbon Vanilla with Toasted Coconut, which she felt went best with the pie, and one of Kara’s favorite, Snickerdoodle Swirl. Kara was already on
her second helping of the ice cream—in other words, the last of the container—and she smiled as she scooped another spoonful into her mouth, happily watching her family—her growing family—interact with each other so well. Content just to watch and listen as she ate, it wasn’t long before she felt the tension and worry drain from her body.

Even though nothing had been resolved—dangers and questions still loomed—the joy she felt listening to Cat laugh conspiratorially with Alex about her upcoming date with Neves or to Carter exclaiming “That’s so cool!” at Hank describing the complexities of the DEO’s tactical communications center was more than enough to wash the stress from her muscles and her mind, making lots and lots of room for the one thing she couldn’t get enough of—love.

Cat noticed Kara’s contentment and leaned into her, giving her a quick kiss on the cheek. “Should we have gotten you two pies, darling?” she asked, glancing down at the remnants of crust at the bottom of Kara’s pie plate.

Kara shook her head and her long hair bounced with the movement. “Nah,” she said. “One’s enough.” She grinned as if that wasn’t quite true and her nose scrunched up. “Maybe.” She chuckled and added, “I did finish all of my ice cream, so there’s that…."

“And you know where to go to get more,” said Alex, remembering one week during Kara’s first month of training as Supergirl where she went to the grocery store over a dozen times, often in the middle of the night. One of the early morning cashiers—a tall young man named Akim—had started to wonder what Kara was doing with all that food. Kara finally gushed something inane about a nebulous, unnamed boyfriend who was a Pi Delt at UCNC and how his frat was in the middle of rush week, so she’d volunteered for snack runs. If anything, the young man had seemed more alarmed by her explanation. “Remember Akim?” she asked.

Kara rolled her eyes and laughed at herself. “That poor guy!” she said, a faint blush rising in her cheeks.

When Cat looked at the sisters questioningly, Alex brought her up to speed and she covered her mouth to hide her knowing smirk. “You’re a terrible liar, darling,” she said, shaking her head. “Did it ever occur to you he might be a Pi Delt himself? Did this even happen in the fall, when Rush Week takes place?”

Alex snorted. “And there, my friends, is the difference between pro—” Alex raised her eyebrows at Cat. “—and amateur.” She frowned at Kara. “If I’m not mistaken, this took place in July. When classes weren’t even in session.”

“Yeah,” said Kara, shrugging self-consciously. “I don’t go to that grocery store anymore.”

Alex and Cat both chuckled but the topic of grocery stores reminded Alex of a challenge she was facing at work—a challenge that had been dropped in her lap by her sister, as a matter of fact, and perhaps it was time to share the wealth a little.

“Hey—speaking of grocery stores, Kara, I could use some help with your friend from Friday.”

Kara, who’d been lost in Cat’s smile, turned to her sister, confusion crashing across her features like a kitten falling into a fish tank. “My…friend?” Friday seemed like eons ago and anything not having a direct connection to Cat or Carter was, well, so far on the back burner as to be stowed in the depths of a walk-in freezer somewhere in Duluth.

“Yeah. You know, Sush’an? The Fort Rozz prisoner whose case you asked us to look into? The Mohlkanite miner who helped you save all our people during the earthquake in the warehouse...
district? *That thing that happened Friday?*” She waved at Kara’s blank stare. “Is this ringing any bells?”

Kara’s eyes suddenly widened and focused. “He has a name?”

“They, actually. *They* have a name.” Alex sighed. “Turns out Mohlkanites are non-gendered. They reproduce asexually via a process known as clonal fragmentation and prefer non-binary pronouns. Visually, they resemble our armadillo but they’re actually closer to our marine echinoderms, genetically-speaking. Except, of course, for their sentence and bipedal ambulation. And their teeth.” She pinned Kara with a long-suffering glare. “Would you like to know how I know all this?”

Kara shrugged. “Because you asked them?”

Alex laughed but it was a laugh devoid of mirth. “Ha ha. No.” Then she thought about it and amended her original statement. “Well, yes. But not directly, not at first. *First*, we asked about Friday. Who they were working with, if they knew where any of the other Fort Rozz prisoners were, why they were in the warehouse district in the first place—and I know what you told us, but we had to ask for ourselves. That’s how things work in the government.” She scowled at Hank who wasn’t paying attention and, therefore, didn’t see. “They sound like reasonable questions under the circumstances, right?”

Kara nodded slowly. “Absolutely,” she said, but she sounded less than confident about that assessment looking at Alex’s face.

“We thought so, too. And they answered the questions as we expected them to—which is to say, hardly at all. They weren’t working with anyone; no, they didn’t know where any of the other Fort Rozz prisoners were; they’d gone to the warehouse district because they’d sensed the earthquake and they needed to feed. Nothing ground-breaking there,” she said, winking at Cat. “Well, except for the earthquake.”

Cat narrowed her eyes at Alex. “You’re lucky you don’t work for me,” she said darkly. “Puns are a terminable offense at CatCo.”

“What isn’t?” asked Alex, smirking. Then she turned back to Kara. “So then, we asked about their case—you know, why they’d been imprisoned, the facts of the incident as they remembered them, what they thought had contributed to the alleged discrepancies in the official record…. Also reasonable, yes?”

“Yes?” said Kara, even less sure than she’d been before. Her vocal register was so high, she needed her cape to retrieve it at this point.

Alex shook her head. “No. Apparently not. Because almost immediately, Sush’an opened a—a—I don’t know—some sort of compartment in their abdomen, reached inside, and presented me with not one, not two, but *four* softball-sized fragmentation buds and said—and I quote—‘I wassss proteectinnng thhhee chiiiiildrennnn.’”

Kara’s hands shot to her mouth and her eyebrows climbed so high upward on her forehead, they practically disappeared. “What? There are…babies? Baby Mohlkanites?”

Cat, slightly distracted by Alex’s passable imitation of the Mohlkanite’s distinctive accent, corrected Kara. “Clones, darling—not babies. Hence, the term *clonal fragmentation.*”

Alex and Kara both stared at Cat for a long moment, but said nothing.
“But Alex—how?” asked Kara finally, turning back to her sister.

Alex raised a finger. “So, get this—Mohlkanites don’t usually reproduce during times of stress and the Mohlkanite Yrsssha—that’s what they call contingents of slave miners on Etellus Major—they experienced a lot of stress. The Mohlkanites worked daunting and exhausting shifts and pain was inflicted by the G’shiik—the foreman—as an incentive and punishment both. Being sent to Etellus Major to mine was usually a death sentence for Mohlkanites. But Sush’an’s Yrsssha bonded as a clan, supporting each other and protecting each other when they could.”

“So their stress levels naturally fell, apparently falling enough for one or more of them to start the reproductive cycle,” said Kara.

“Yes!” Alex leaned forward, grinning with the enthusiasm of a scientist. “Three of them, including Sush’an, created buds.” Her grin evaporated like rain hitting hot pavement, though, when she thought about the rest. “They made a plan—the Yrsssha. They were going to raise them in secret, feeding them as they could, stealing kinetic energy from the mining equipment in small bursts or from natural cave-ins or quakes in the mines, if they were lucky. Once the buds were fully grown, the Yrsssha were going to set them free in the mines. They would have been the only free Mohlkanites to have ever lived on Etellus Major. They were going to be the first of their kind.”

“What happened?” asked Kara quietly. She knew that look. Alex didn’t do sad so much as she did righteous indignation coupled with murderous rage.

“The same thing that always happens in these stories,” said Cat, her own tone one of resigned disgust. “Someone betrayed the Yrsssha. Someone told the foreman.”

Carter and Hank, drawn to the women’s conversation by their distress, looked at Cat, both of them wearing identical frowns.

Alex nodded. “Exactly. Whoever betrayed the Yrsssha knew there were buds but not how many or which of the Mohlkanites were carrying them.” She looked around the table, eyes haunted. “Mohlkanites are a peaceful, non-violent species. We verified that at the DEO when we asked some of the captured Fort Rozz prisoners. They all said the same thing: ‘They never kill.’” She looked at her hands and told the rest, her voice a desolate murmur. “The foreman threatened to kill one member of the Yrsssha per shift unless they turned over the buds. The Mohlkanites refused. So the foreman did what he said he would.”

Alex paused and fought the lump in her throat, trying not to look at Hank, knowing what this story must be doing to him, what memories it would dredge up. “The first one chosen had a bud and after they died, the rest of the Yrsssha opened their abdomen and placed their bud in another member. This went on for seven shifts—until Sush’an was the only one left. They had all four buds by that time and they didn’t want the Yrsssha’s dream to die, didn’t want the children of the bravest Mohlkanites they’d ever known to be cast away as garbage. So they killed the foreman.”

“They were arrested twelve shifts later, scavenging bursts of energy off a conveyor track,” said Hank, taking over the story so Alex could pull herself together. The others might not know how close she was to tears, but he did. “Rather than betray the existence of the buds, they pleaded no contest to all eight murders, earning a life sentence in Fort Rozz.” He reached across the table to put a hand on Alex’s forearm, catching her eye to let her know he was fine; she didn’t have to worry. When he looked back at the Grant family, they had matching looks of horror on their faces.

“We—” Alex stopped and cleared her throat. “We think the time in the Phantom Zone put the buds in stasis and, then, once arriving here, Sush’an was under too much stress hiding from humans and his fellow prisoners alike to restart the reproductive cycle. Until—” and she looked at Kara here, “—
they met you and surrendered to the DEO. Since then, their stress levels have fallen significantly and the buds are growing again.”

Kara looked around the table. “But that’s a good thing…. Right?”

Carter was the first to answer her. “If they all reach adulthood, there are going to be five sentient, bipedal echinoderms with really big teeth, all of which will be over ten feet tall.” Carter looked at Alex, highly concerned. “What are you going to do with them?”

Alex closed her eyes and dropped her head into her hand, massaging her forehead. “That’s one of the questions we haven’t answered yet,” she said. “And we’re not sure there are going to be five of them. That’s the problem we’re having now.”

Kara sat straight up in her chair, a grim expression overtaking her features. Supergirl had made her entrance.

“What problem, Alex?” she asked. “How can I help?”

“We’re, uh…we’re having trouble feeding them,” said Alex, embarrassed and frustrated. She wanted to be doing more, felt like she should be doing more. Somehow the survival of Sush’an and these buds had come to have significant meaning for Alex. “We’re having trouble generating enough kinetic energy for them. They require a sustained amount and, short of generating our own earthquakes, we’re not sure what to do. We thought maybe you could shake the buds a little here and there—”

Cat blanched and stared at Alex. “You want Kara to shake larval clone buds? Like some sort of geological wet nurse?”

Now it was Alex’s turn to be a little less than confident. “Yes?”

“Wait!” said Carter, holding up his hands as if he was Chris Pratt training the velociraptors in Jurassic World. “We don’t need Kara to shake them. I mean, that’ll work and she can do it if she wants,” he clarified, glancing at his newer mother. “It’s not like anyone can stop you,” he told her.

Kara grinned.

Carter grinned back before returning to Alex. “But all you really need is something that can sustain a lot of kinetic energy over time and that doesn’t take up too much room!” He looked up at the ceiling and began the calculations in his head. Then he ran to the kitchen to get the notepad his mother kept on the refrigerator and a pen from the junk drawer. He skidded to a halt next to Hank and started scribbling calculations, muttering to himself as he did so. “It would have to be something that rotated on a fixed axis because linear motion would take too much space…. Something large enough for Sush’an to get inside as it rotated…. Something with a high mass and reasonable volume…. There!”

He shoved the notepad across the table toward Alex.

“You need an extra-large cement mixer—with some power mods, of course,” he announced proudly, crossing his arms over his chest. “It has everything you need—sustained kinetic energy over time, stationary, a reasonable size…. All you’d have to do is increase the RPMs from fifteen to twenty-five or so and figure out how to make Sush’an comfortable inside as it rotated, so they don’t bounce around like a rock in a rock tumbler.” He looked at Hank knowingly. “That would be loud.”

“Yes,” agreed Hank, looking from Carter to Cat to Kara and back, clearly shocked by the boy’s advanced reasoning. “It would.” He raised an eyebrow at Kara as if to ask Is he always like this?
She shrugged imperceptibly. She knew he was smart, yes. She knew he was taking advanced courses in school and sitting in on interesting science lectures at UCNC. But she didn’t know if this—what he’d done here—was something within his normal range. She peered at him and lowered her lead-lined glasses a hair, looking to see if his brain showed any obvious signs of structural or cellular change.

What she saw startled her and she hastily shoved her glasses back up her nose.

She didn’t notice a pair of narrowed green eyes watching her every move.

Alex, still bent over the notepad, blindly reached for the pen. Kara handed it to her and everyone watched as she did a few more calculations. Then she slowly looked up, giving Carter the widest grin he’d ever seen from her.

“Kid, have I told you lately that you’re my favorite nephew?” she asked.

Carter rolled his eyes. “I’m your only nephew, dude,” he said. “Of course I’m your favorite.”

Alex shook her head, ignoring his flippant remark. “You did it! You solved our feeding problem, Carter.” She hauled herself up out of her chair—she’d had way too much pie and ice cream tonight—and rounded the table, wrapping the lanky pre-teen up in her long arms, hugging him tightly. “Thank you so much. Really. You probably saved their lives. All of them.”

Carter blushed scarlet and hugged Alex back gingerly. “It was just a little math,” he said, self-deprecatingly.

“Hey—math is a superpower!” said Kara defensively.

Alex finally released Carter and looked down at him, giving him a lopsided smile. “Now if only you could figure out what we’re going to do with five adult Mohlkanites—because I think that’s what we’re going to have in a year or so.”

“They’d make pretty good seismologists, wouldn’t they?” he asked, oblivious to Alex registering his question and then staring at him in shock. “I think I read somewhere where the GSN—the Global Seismographic Network—is monitored by volunteers.” He shrugged. “If they did that, they’d get all the food they needed for free—while reducing the intensity and damage of earthquakes all over the world.”

Alex and Hank shared a look, then Alex looked back to her nephew.

“Hey, Carter…would you like to, maybe, come down to the DEO sometime—”

“No,” said Cat and Kara at the same time, Kara with her arms crossed over her chest and glowering at her sister; Cat seething.

“But—” said Carter, turning beseeching eyes on his mothers.

“No!” they said again and their tone did not invite debate.

He looked sheepishly up at his aunt. “The mothers have spoken,” he said morosely.

“Yeah,” she said, ruffling his brown curls. “And they have good reasons for saying no…so don’t give them a hard time, okay? We can talk science anytime. Any. Time.” She smiled at him, the warmth in her eyes bright and genuine. “I mean it.”
“Okay,” he said, his own smile stealing back.

“It’s time for bed, Carter,” said Cat, her ire gone, replaced now by a soft, pleased smile. “Say goodbye to our guests and Kara and I will be in in a few minutes to say goodnight.”

Carter nodded and gave Alex another brief hug. “Bye, Aunt Alex,” he said. “Take pics of the cement mixer once you get it installed. I wanna see how big it is.”

“You got it,” she said.

Carter turned to look at Hank and said, “Goodbye, Director Henshaw. It was nice meeting you.”

“You, too, young man,” replied Hank, holding out one massive fist for Carter to fist bump. “Have fun at that robotics lecture Thursday.”

Carter grinned. “I will. Thanks.”

He darted around the table to give his mothers an awkward squeeze around their necks from between them, and then gave them each a quick kiss on the cheek. “Love you guys,” he whispered, and then he was gone, zooming out of the dining room and down the hall to get ready for bed.

Kara, grinning like she’d just discovered Christmas morning for the first time, watched him go, rubbing the spot on her cheek where he’d kissed her, dazed.

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Continued in Negotiability
Negotiability

Chapter Notes

abydosdork comes through again with a brilliant banner! Give her some love!

fictorium is still the beta of record on this work and she makes my writing better.

Also, all my love to my amazing wife, Lisaof9. She makes everything better. ;)

Kara gasped awake. The air was hot and thick and stank of ozone and old grease. Bursts of electricity crackled and snapped along frayed or sheared cabling, causing white-blue sparks, the only light. Metal groaned and creaked in the dark, a haunting song of impending doom.

Kara struggled to free herself, lungs choked by filthy air and her body wrapped in a dense cloak of pain, bone-deep and seemingly endless. Wreckage was all around her, pinning her down, holding her motionless. She didn’t know where she was or which way was up. What had happened? How had she gotten here?

“Help! Somebody help us!”

The voice was far away and instantly, heart-stoppingly recognizable. Kara engaged her x-ray vision and saw the elevator car far below her. The elevator car containing Cat and Carter.

“Cat?” she called, trying to wrench her body free from the crumpled metal and coiled cables. Every minuscule movement brought cascades of searing pain and the harder she fought, the more trapped she became. “Cat? Hold on!”

“Supergirl! Help us!”

Just then, a cable snapped with a massive crack and the elevator dropped away. Kara sobbed and reached for them—her family—but couldn’t move. She couldn’t break free of the wreckage, no
matter what she did, and she watched—helpless and despairing—as the elevator got smaller and smaller and their screams became fainter and fainter.

“NOOOOOOOO!” she howled and bolted upright, her arms outstretched.

Cat gasped awake. The force of Kara’s nightmare through the Daat Kyashar felt like a train hurtling through her brain, shockingly loud and completely beyond her control. She sat up in the darkness, pushing through her disorientation and Kara’s proximal fear in order to comfort the young woman, who was paralyzed beside her, still reaching for an elevator car that was never there. Down the hall, Cat could hear Carter’s sleepy, startled voice call, “Mom?”

“Kara, love, it’s okay,” said Cat, her voice gentle and calm despite the hammering of her heart. She didn’t think she had ever been so frightened in all of her life. She turned on her bedside lamp and noted the time; it was after two. “I’m here—”

“Mom?” called Carter again, sounding uncertain and worried. He was right outside the door.

Cat glanced quickly at Kara and herself, relieved to find them both at least partially clothed and somewhat decent. Kara had on her white tank top from Sunday and Cat wore a black silk camisole. She twitched the sheet so it covered what wasn’t and said, “Come in, Carter.” She continued to soothe Kara, rubbing small circles between her shoulder blades.

Kara’s arms lost their rigidity and finally dropped bonelessly into her lap. She whimpered, though, still unseeing, still ensnared by the heart-wrenching images. Carter came into his parents’ bedroom and stood nervously at the foot of the bed, hair sleep-mussed. A frown settled low over his eyes like a collapsed tent.

Cat reached out blindly with her left hand, never taking her eyes from Kara. She sighed, relieved and comforted both, when Carter rushed to take it, holding it tightly in his own. He radiated strength and a solid determination to help through their bond and both were a balm to her frayed nerves.

“Sweetheart, it’s me. It’s Cat, darling. It’s only a dream. Wake up now.” She stroked the side of Kara’s face first, and then her hair over and over, calling the young woman back from the darkness with her gentle touch and with her love. “I’m here. Carter’s here. We’re safe.”

Kara whimpered again and she crumpled forward, curling herself into a tight knot, shuddering with silent tears. “I’m sorry,” she whispered, voice muffled by the sheet and her knees. “I’m so sorry….

“Kara, it was a nightmare. You have nothing to apologize for.” Cat, still holding onto Carter’s hand as if it was a lifeline, leaned over to press a kiss to the side of Kara’s head. Shards of desperate images and remembered pain melted out of their bond and Cat’s heartbeat slowly stopped beating so insistently against her temples.

Kara looked up then, eyes wet with tears and bottom lip trembling. “I couldn’t save you,” she said, voice strangled by her grief.

Cat sighed and pursed her lips together, wondering how to say what she wanted to say, struggling uncharacteristically to find the right words. She pulled Carter to the edge of the bed and motioned for him to sit, watching with a small smile as he climbed up and sat next to her in practically the same position as Kara—hunched over himself, hugging his knees.

There was nothing deep nor mysterious about the nightmare and Cat knew exactly what had caused it—Alex’s grim reminder the night before that, despite her best intentions, Kara couldn’t be
everywhere at once. She couldn’t protect everyone she loved all the time, no matter how much she wished she could. One day, she might be forced to make an impossible decision. One day, she might run out of time.

Cat’s heart broke at the thought, knowing what something like that would do to Kara, how it could twist and pervert her spirit. She’d felt it before, briefly—the bleak internal landscape that had trapped Kara when she thought Sam Lane might gain unexpected access to them. Cat would do anything to keep Kara from sinking into that unspeakable desolation again—anything at all—but what? What magic words or deeds could she conjure to reassure Kara when they both knew there were no guarantees?

Carter looked at Kara crying softly, heartbroken and shivering, and then turned his eyes to his mother, seeing she desperately wanted to help but clearly didn’t know how. He squeezed his mother’s hand in a gesture of support, and then reached out with his free hand, tugging gently on the sheet over Kara’s knees.

When she looked at him, he said, quietly, “That’s not your job.”

“W-what?” asked Kara shakily, surprised, her voice hoarse with tears.

Carter let his hand fall away, but he kept his eyes on hers. They were clear and direct. “Saving us—that’s not your job. That’s not why you’re with us.” He took a deep breath and frowned, lips pressed into a grim line. “Mom didn’t wake up one morning and think ‘What this house really needs is a bodyguard!’” he said. “She and I took care of ourselves just fine without you—at least, the staying safe part.” He looked at Cat—who was looking back at him as if she had no idea who he was or where he’d come from—and smiled. “And we were okay together—Mom and I. We were our own team and, for a long time, that was enough.” He turned his soft smile toward Kara, and then looked shyly down at his hand, plucking at the rumpled bedclothes. “Until we met you.”

Kara looked wide-eyed at Cat, who shook her head, at a loss.

“Until you met me?” she asked, looking back at Carter, voice small.

Carter nodded eagerly. “When you showed up—when we got to know you—things just got better. All on their own. And suddenly, you were part of our team—even if Mom was a little slow figuring that part out,” he said, grinning cheekily at Cat.

Cat rolled her eyes. “Everyone’s a critic!” she said, mock-annoyed, bumping him with her shoulder.

Carter laughed, but then turned serious, his gaze thoughtful. “The thing is…you were part of our team a long time before we knew you were Supergirl. I mean, Mom didn’t fall in love with you because you can stop bullets,” he explained, glancing at his mother bashfully, knowing he was treading in very personal waters here. He looked back at Kara quickly. “And I thought you were, like, the greatest way before I knew you could fly….” He turned to Cat, looking for help untangling his words. He knew what he was trying to say but not how to say it. That was his mother’s superpower, after all.

Overcome, Cat pulled Carter into her arms and held him in a crushing hug, wondering what she had done to deserve a child like him, with a heart as big as the moon and a love like the ocean, quiet and deep. So different from his father’s stoic superiority, so different from her own selfish egocentrism.

When she eventually looked up, she reached out a hand for Kara’s and smiled when the young woman took it.
“I think what Carter’s trying to say, Kara, is your love makes us a family—not your powers. Your love is enough of a gift, is more than I dreamed possible.” Cat’s eyes shone in the dim bubble of golden light that encircled them from her bedside table. Holding onto them both—to the loves of her life—made the world feel different to Cat, clearer and more solid, and she knew the feeling for what it was: strength. “That’s what we want, what we need from you, darling. Just that.” She pulled Kara’s hand to her mouth and brushed her lips over her knuckles. “We’ll figure out the rest together.”

Carter grinned and pulled away from his mother, turning back to Kara. “Yes! ‘All you can do is your best,’” he said and his words sounded strangely stilted, as if he were mimicking a more authoritarian voice. “‘The rest will take care of itself.’”

He looked so serious and so grown up, Kara had to laugh, stunned. She scrubbed the tears from her eyes with the heel of her hand and shook her head. “Who are you and what have you done with Carter Grant?” she asked, nudging him with her foot.

“I’d like to know the same thing,” echoed Cat, eyebrows high on her forehead.

Carter scoffed, exasperated. “This is stuff I learned from you, Mom,” he said. “You know—‘Don’t compare yourself to other people; look at where you are now compared to where you were,’ or ‘You’re responsible for your own happiness; don’t rely on others for that,’ or ‘Don’t change yourself because you think that’s what someone else wants; if you aren’t enough as you are, you won’t be enough then, either,’” he recited, his impression of his mother’s aggravated voice nearly perfect. “Cra—um—stuff like that.”

“Crap, eh?” asked Kara, smiling now. “Sounds like pretty good advice to me,” she said, winking at him.

“Yeah,” agreed Carter, shrugging. Then he winked back and looked slyly at his mother. “Some of it even works!”

Cat rolled her eyes. “Har har. I’ll have to start paying attention to these little gems of wisdom I sprinkle about,” she said, waggling her fingers to emphasize the word sprinkle. “Who knew you were actually listening?” She laughed when he stuck his tongue out at her. “All right, you—back to bed. You still have school in the morning.” She ran a hand through his unruly hair and smiled softly at him. “Thank you for checking on us. I can take it from here.”

“Oh, no.” Carter looked at the clock on his mother’s bedside table and whined, “Two-thirty-three? Nightmares never come at a convenient time, do they?” He shook his head as he levered himself up out of his mother’s bed. A yawn caught him just as he stood and he tried to block the cavernous O of his mouth with a raised arm. He was only marginally successful. When it finally released him, he leaned over and gave Cat a tired peck on her cheek. “‘Night, Mom,” he said. He leaned across Cat and gave Kara a peck on her head. “G’night, Kar. Love you.”

“We love you, too, honey,” said Cat, smiling as she watched him shuffle out the door. He closed it softly behind himself, already half asleep. “Every day he seems more mature than the day before,” she said wistfully, still staring at the closed door. “He’s so naturally intelligent. Emotionally, too.” She clucked her tongue and looked at Kara. “I don’t know where he gets it from.”

Kara leaned into Cat and looped her long arms around the smaller woman, almost dwarfing her as she pulled her into a hug. She rested her chin on Cat’s shoulder. “He’s a great kid, Cat,” she said, voice thick with emotion. “And like he said, he learned it from you.”

The sentiment pleased Cat but she was too much of a realist to give it much credence. “The two of
“you are biased.” She placed her hands on Kara’s arms where they crossed over her chest and turned to look at her with a searching gaze. “How are you? Do you think you could go back to sleep?”

“Maybe.” Kara looked unsure of that statement. “I’m sorry I woke you. It can’t be fun to have someone else’s nightmares playing in your head….”

Cat reached up to cup Kara’s face in her hand. “‘Stronger Together’ isn’t some empty platitude, darling,” she whispered. “Not in this family.” With the gentlest urging, she turned Kara’s face towards her own and pressed a soft kiss to her lips. “Support, protection, love—these aren’t one-way streets. I’m here for you. If nothing else, the Daat Kyashar proves that much, doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Kara, agreeing instantly. “Yes, Cat. Of course.” Emotion, tender and earnest, filled her eyes. “It’s so much more than that and I know it. I do. I just—”

“You’re accustomed to doing the saving. You’re used to carrying that weight on your shoulders now, as if it’s sewn right into the fabric of your cape.” Cat’s hand dropped to her lap. Her heart followed, like a stone. “I did this to you,” she said, her voice hollow and stained with remorse.

Kara stiffened and a wave of incredulousness swamped their bond. “What? Cat, you didn’t do—”

“Do you remember the nightmare I had this weekend?” asked Cat, interrupting her.

Kara nodded slowly, not sure she was following. She remembered. She also remembered Cat hadn’t shared it with her. “Your heart was racing,” she whispered. “Your breathing was…off.” She swallowed, suddenly afraid she knew why Cat wouldn’t let her see the dream images. “Was it about me?” she asked.

Cat didn’t need the Daat Kyashar to hear the question Kara didn’t ask: *Was I the monster chasing you?*

She shook her head. “Yes, the dream was about you, but not in the way you think.” Cat sighed, part of her grateful for the chance to unburden herself about this all-too-frequent night visitor of hers and part of her wrecked with guilt. “It’s not new, nor is it particularly mysterious or insightful. As far as dreams go, it’s fairly straightforward. Some of the variables change depending on what’s worrying me most at the time. For instance, I was—”

Kara ducked her head and stopped Cat’s explanation with a soft kiss to the back of her head. *You’re stalling,* she sent. She tightened her arms around Cat’s slender form and closed her eyes, steeling herself for whatever Cat was about to say. *Just tell me.*

Caught, Cat had no choice but to stop evading the issue. “You sacrifice yourself,” she blurted, and then stopped abruptly, realizing she’d included no context. “In the dream,” she said, starting over, trying to explain. “You—Supergirl—she sacrifices herself to save someone. Who it is changes, of course, but I’m to blame. Always me—although who does the blaming changes, too.”

Cat closed her eyes, realizing too late she’d played right into the nightmare’s twisted talons. All the sick, gut-wrenching images she wished she could forget flickered against the darkness behind her eyelids, grasping at her. She pried her eyes open again to escape them, thankful she didn’t have to look at Kara while she confessed this particular sin. “The worst is when it’s you, broken and bloodied, shrieking that it’s my fault.”

“That *what* is your fault?” asked Kara. “Cat, you’ve never done—”

“I made her.”
Kara’s protests died before she could finish them.

“I told you the very first day, Kara,” said Cat dully. “I branded Supergirl. Like the summer’s hot, new action film or a two-door coupe by Hyundai.” She turned and looked over her shoulder, reaching up to touch her fingertips to Kara’s cheek, gazing at her as if seeing her for the first time, her eyes filled with wonder and light. After a moment, though, the light faded and her hand fell away. “I wanted a superhero, so I made one—out of a waterlogged girl clinging to an airplane’s wing. An airplane carrying her sister, mind you, but I didn’t care about that. I didn’t care about anything—not even the waterlogged girl. As long as I got my superhero, I didn’t care whose life it tore apart.” Cat looked away from Kara, eyes haunted. “I’ve put you in so much danger.”

Unseen, Kara shook her head. “You set me free,” she said quietly.

Stunned by those words, Cat pulled away from Kara’s embrace and turned in her arms to look at her directly. Her surprise showed in her eyes and Kara looked away, embarrassed.

“My foster parents were so lovely,” said Kara sincerely. “They opened their home and their hearts to me when I had nothing and I will always be grateful for what they did for me.” She looked back at Cat imploringly. “You have to understand that.”

Cat nodded, taking Kara’s words at face value—although her relationship with Alex corroborated the statements easily. “But…” she prompted.

“But…they were terrified of me—of what I could do.” Kara worried she wasn’t making herself clear. “Not like I would attack them,” she explained, “but more like….” She shrugged. “I didn’t know my own strength in the beginning or how to control my powers. I was young and afraid, alone on a planet I didn’t understand—and I could do things I couldn’t do on Krypton. Kal did his best to explain it all, but I was in shock, I think. I don’t remember a lot of what happened those first few months.” She looked at her hands, watching her own long fingers as they absently fiddled with the sheet, willing herself not to cry. “I just wanted my mother,” she said, her voice breaking on the words.

Cat gasped, made heartbroken by Kara’s words and the taste of her memories from that time, rancid with constant terror and bitter with leaden grief. She drew Kara into her arms, holding her tightly, sending a sea of comfort—all she could muster—through their bond. “Of course you did,” she said, pressing kisses to Kara’s temple. “Oh, darling, of course you did!”

Kara clung to Cat and wrapped herself in the solace she offered, a warm, soothing blanket. “Mistakes brought attention to the Danvers and to me. More than anything, I think they were afraid of me being taken away—of having to fight their government to save an alien. They had their own daughter. I was a danger to them all.” She pulled away and shook her head helplessly, clearly understanding the Danvers’ motivations but still hurt by them. “So they tried to hide me in plain sight. My glasses, for example, are lead-lined. At first, they were to help me adjust, because I saw everything those first few weeks—and I mean everything.” A look of disgust passed over her face briefly. “Everyone thinks x-ray vision is so cool until they find out exactly how much excrement they don’t have to see on a daily basis.”

“Please do not share that measurement,” said Cat, swallowing carefully. Suddenly her eyes weren’t the only green thing about her.

Kara chuckled. “Yeah. The first six months on this planet were a challenge—for a lot of reasons,” she said. “The thing is, I learned how to control my vision within those six months, but Eliza and Jeremiah both insisted I keep wearing the glasses.” She shook her head and a frown pulled her eyebrows down low over her eyes. “‘Special is dangerous, Kara,’ they would say. ‘We’re safest
when no one sees you.’ So I wore the glasses and the cardigans and kept a solidly respectable low-A average in school when I could have aced every single test without breaking a sweat.”

“You don’t sweat,” Cat noted ruefully, “so that’s not a fair metric by which to judge the difficulty of any action.” Her eyes turned a troubled shade of ivy-green, though; thinking of a young and brilliant Kara hamstrung by well-meaning but unimaginative caretakers, by surrogate parents worried more about the possibility of discovery than about the misuse and stagnation of a young woman’s mind. “School must have been dreadful for you, darling,” she said. The only comparison she could make for herself—being trapped in an endless loop of rubber-chicken awards dinners while engaging in small talk with entitled white men and their trophy wives—made her shudder.

“Since I didn’t have to study ninety-percent of what they were teaching, I spent the time catching up on modern history and literature, learning pop culture references, and practicing my socialization skills in a controlled environment.” She treated Cat to a lopsided smile and said, “In other words, I watched a lot of television, went to a lot of movies, and read a lot. Like, a lot a lot. Like, I stayed up all night the night Amazon released the first Kindle just so I would be sure to get one.”

Cat grinned. “Let me guess—your foster mother is still storing boxes of books in her garage, waiting for you to take them to your loft?”

When Kara nodded sheepishly, Cat continued. “Well, that’s one thing she’ll have in common with my mother. It’s not much to build a conversation on, but I’ve worked with less.”

Kara laughed and dropped a quick, lighthearted kiss on Cat’s nose. When she pulled back, Cat’s nearness and the weight of her in her arms, the wild, earthy green of her eyes and the mouthwatering scent of her—all those things coalesced low in Kara’s belly, flipping it upside down and setting her blood simmering in her veins.

“Do we have to go back to sleep right now?” Kara asked, staring with half-lidded eyes at Cat’s luscious mouth. She licked her bottom lip in anticipation of tasting those lips again.

“It’s negotiable,” said Cat, smirking knowingly. She saw Kara’s dilated eyes and her staccato heartbeat pulsing in the notch at the base of her throat. She felt the growing heat of Kara’s desire all along the places they touched, both physically and mentally. “Do you need to burn off some adrenaline, darling?” she asked innocently, tilting her head back and to the right in obvious invitation. She gasped when Kara darted forward, teeth and tongue already desperate against her skin. “Would flying around the block once or twice help?”

Kara growled and rolled with Cat, pinning her beneath her, knees to either side of Cat’s slender hips. She reared back and stripped off her tank top with a single, fluid movement, blindly tossing it behind her in her eagerness.

“There are other ways to burn off energy,” she said, her voice dark and deep and so hungry. She hitched the hem of Cat’s camisole up and slid one hand underneath it, thumb circling a taut nipple. With her other hand, she gently but insistently parted Cat’s long legs and settled herself between them. She raked her eyes down Cat’s flawless body, and then lowered her mouth until it was only millimeters from Cat’s lips. “Brace for impact,” she breathed, winking cheekily. A sexy grin flashed across her features before she kissed Cat, hard and deep, and her hands were suddenly everywhere—kneading and caressing, grasping and teasing—igniting a storm of sensation that sent chills sweeping across Cat’s creamy skin.

Kara’s kiss was a tempest of tongue and teeth and lust and Cat groaned into it, awash in the depth of
her desire. She hooked one long leg around Kara’s hip and pulled the young woman closer, grinding herself upward, hands greedy, clutching Kara’s strong shoulders through this welcome storm. She ached for more and threw her head back, crying out when Kara began to rock her hips deliciously. “Oh God, Kara,” she moaned. “Please…."

Kara looked up from Cat’s throat, upon which she’d been lavishing attention in the absence of Cat’s intoxicating mouth. Her eyes were very blue. “Please what, mon ange?” She lifted Cat gently and swept the silk camisole up and over her head, cinching the fabric taut just before it was completely off Cat’s body, lightly trapping her wrists and holding them against the upholstered headboard.

*Is this okay?* she sent, holding very still, prepared to release Cat if she expressed the slightest bit of hesitation.

Immensely pleased by this unexpected display of dominance by Kara, Cat’s pupils blew wide open and her nostrils flared. Protesting was the furthest thing from her mind.

*Oh, yes,* sent Cat, alongside a deeply anticipatory and hedonistic purr. *Very much so.*

Made brave by Cat’s permission, Kara continued to rock her hips between Cat’s gorgeous thighs and raised one eyebrow in challenge. “What is it you want, Cat?” she asked, voice velvety deep and teasing. “Do you want me kiss you again?” She leaned in to do just that, claiming Cat’s mouth in a kiss that seared like the sun but tasted like honey, amber sweet and pure. It left Cat breathless and wanting and she whimpered when Kara pulled away.

“Do you want me to mark you?” Kara asked, lowering her mouth to Cat’s left breast, circling her nipple just once with her talented tongue before moving to the gentle swell, suckling there with an earnest abandon that quickly purpled Cat’s ivory skin. Cat bit her lip and hissed. She reveled in the sting of pain stitched like a red thread into her pleasure, arching her back, drenched with need.

Kara shivered against Cat, buffeted by wave after wave of urgent longing crashing through their bond. She felt Cat’s thundering heartbeat everywhere and heard her wordless plea. Kara worried her bottom lip for half a second before leaning forward and lowering her mouth to Cat’s ear.

“Do you want me to fuck you?” she breathed, and Cat gasped, her eyes slamming shut as she came on the spot, shattered by those perfect words said by that perfect mouth.

Kara groaned, nearly swept away by a tsunami of sensation. Her hips slowed briefly as she tried to process the deluge and she quickly discovered the consequences of her lack of attention.

*Don’t you dare stop,* ordered Cat. Her tone held the ring of steel but her eyes were pleading. “I need to feel you inside me,” she said. “Please don’t stop….”

Kara had never been one to keep Cat Grant waiting and she nodded obediently before releasing Cat’s hands from their temporary imprisonment. She lifted herself slightly, her right hand finding its way between their overheated bodies.

*“Rao’s light,”* she whispered reverently as she slipped three fingers inside Cat, finding her flooded and fluttering and so ready. She braced herself using her left elbow and rocked her hips behind her hand, giving her thrusts that much more power. She never took her eyes from Cat’s.

Cat bit her bottom lip hard to keep from crying out and hooked her calves around Kara’s hips as if they’d been made to fit together in exactly that way—open, bare to one another’s need, so deeply connected. When Kara groaned again, lost in Cat, wanton and desperate—when she curled her fingers upward to find that tiny spot that unraveled her every time—Cat arched her back and twisted
her hands in wheat-gold hair, pulling Kara down into a blazing kiss meant to stifle her screams. She couldn’t be sure of her success.

Eventually, Cat returned to herself, blood pounding, breathless and weak. When she opened her eyes, she realized she and Kara were still entangled just as they had been, intimately entwined in a slow, sweet, golden river of contentment. Kara filled Cat completely—in every sense of the word.

*Maalkhati,* sent Kara, the name touched with wonder. She looked down at Cat, eyes wide, awestruck. *I can feel your heartbeat in my fingertips.*

Cat reached up and lazily drew her fingers down Kara’s cheek, a sleepy, sated smile on her lips. “What is it telling you?”

Kara opened herself to all the information the Daat Kyashar carried at that moment—to all the light and joy, to all the leaps of faith they’d made, to all the places she and Cat were now knotted together, seamlessly, as if they’d always been so. A bright, wide, ‘Sunny Danvers’ grin broke across her features.

*That you are the heart of the sun,* she sent, eyes filled with tenderness. *And I am home.*

**-----**

“Ohmygod, ohmygod, ohmygod, OH. MY. GOD!”

Cat, seated at her vanity, watched—bemused and smirking—as a half-naked Kara Danvers shot through her ensuite and into the walk-in closet, her hair up in a decidedly unkempt knot and a toothbrush jammed into her mouth.

“Is something wrong?” she asked serenely, returning to her morning routine.

“We are so late!” cried Kara, her voice muffled by the wall between them and the toothbrush both. “And I have nothing to wear!” Cat could hear hangers scraping along the chrome rod as the young woman searched desperately through what little clothing she had on hand.

“I am never late, Kara,” she said, dusting her cheeks with illuminating powder before choosing her lip color for the day. “Once—in 2002, I think—I was unavoidably delayed due to the incompetence of the National City Department of Transportation, but I have never been late.” She smiled knowingly before adding, “To my knowledge, neither have you. I know we were…energetic…this morning, my darling, but I didn’t think we’d exhausted *all* your strength.” She raised a single eyebrow. “Should we notify your sister?”

Kara poked her head around the closet door, her face the perfect picture of horror combined with confusion. “Notify Alex of *what*?” she asked, the toothbrush still jammed into her mouth. Because there was *no way* was she going to outline her latest sexual exploits to her sister.

Cat finished applying her Louboutin lipstick—which Kara immediately wished she could kiss right off those luscious lips—and looked pointedly at her lover’s reflection in the mirror. She said two words—“Super. Speed.”—before blotting her lipstick carefully, running her tongue suggestively just inside her top lip for Kara’s benefit.

Kara’s eyes went wide behind her glasses and she groaned, disappearing once again into the closet. She said something whiny and incredulous—it sounded like “Mother of pearl!” to Cat, which wouldn’t have surprised her in the slightest—and then zipped out of the ensuite altogether, an orange-tinted blur.
Cat laughed and shook her head, brushing on her mascara while she waited. Thirty-five seconds later, Kara stood in the doorway, completely dressed and ready for work, looking very sheepish.

“So that’s the first time that’s happened,” she said, scowling unhappy.

“That what’s happened, darling?” asked Cat absently. She dotted her boar’s bristle hairbrush with a few drops of Emerald Reign and lifted it, intending to brush her hair, only to find Kara standing next to her in the blink of an eye, staying her hand with gentle fingers wrapped around her wrist. Her scowl had evaporated and in its place was an expression both hopeful and uncertain.

“May I?” Kara asked, looking shyly into Cat’s eyes via the reflection in her vanity mirror. “I used to dream—I—I’ve always wanted to….”

Cat released the hairbrush into Kara’s hand, feeling like the world had dropped right out from underneath her. She was glad she was already seated because she was certain her legs would not support her right now.

“Please,” she said huskily. No one had ever asked to do this for her before and she was spellbound. Kara started at the back where Cat’s flaxen hair was thickest, and brushed with long, sure strokes. She trembled when the first swirl of perfumed air hit her nose and barely swallowed a moan, failing completely to catch the accompanying rush of raw desire that inundated their bond. She blushed scarlet and refused to look at Cat again, self-conscious about this particular fantasy of hers.

Knowing she was only seconds away from pushing Kara against the wall and hitching that ridiculous orange floral-print dress up over her unbearably delectable hips—work be damned—Cat cleared her throat and tried to stem the relentless tide of her yearning with mundane conversation.

“You were telling me this was the first time you’d forgotten…?” she prompted, her voice a little throatier than she wanted.

Kara’s eyes snapped up to meet hers in the mirror, framed by a curious frown. Clearly she had no idea what Cat was talking about. Until she did.

“Oh! Right.” She continued to brush Cat’s hair, now using the fingers of her free hand in tandem with the brush, tugging errant curls back into place and generally driving Cat utterly mad. “I was just saying it’s the first time I’d forgotten I had powers. With everything going on right now—and everything Alex said last night—all the questions that came up about the Daat Kyashar—and then the nightmare this morning—I—I got turned around, I guess.” She sighed. “I really thought I was going to be late to work,” she said. “On top of everything else, I have two meetings about my internship today.”

“Already?” asked Cat. Her eyes fluttered shut in the next moment, however, when she felt Kara’s fingertips combing lightly through the hair at the nape of her neck. She swallowed carefully. “With whom?”

Consternation washed over Kara’s features and she looked up again. “Anjana Makhri at ten,” she said softly, “and Dorothy Webb in HR at two.”

Cat caught the scent of Kara’s trepidation like a bloodhound. She didn’t even need the Daat Kyashar; it was clearly written in the arcing plunge of her delicate eyebrows.

“You’re nervous about one of these meetings,” she announced, narrowing her eyes briefly. “And since Dorothy threatened to involve CatCo legal the last time I sent an official termination for you to her department—in an impressively short email using one or two words of questionable relevance—I
have to assume your concern is regarding Anjana.” Her features softened and she smiled up at Kara’s reflection. “What’s worrying you, darling?”

Kara made a short sound of frustration, fiddling nervously with the bristles of Cat’s brush. “I haven’t really had the opportunity to work with Ms. Makhri yet—and I know next to nothing about broadcast news. She’s one of the Top Five Worldwide News Leaders and just a little bit intimidating and I’m—I’m—I have no idea what I’m going to say to her!”

Cat chuckled and looked over her shoulder, raising an eyebrow at Kara. She was about to make a snide comment—something about being glad Anjana was happily married—but the look in Kara’s eyes was slightly too unhinged for that, she thought, and she stopped herself. The last thing she wanted to do was upset her.

Cat decided upon another tack, instead: an offer of a little insider information. But first, a distraction was in order—something to take Kara’s mind off her nerves. She retrieved her hairbrush from Kara’s grasp and rose from her vanity, revealing the golden zipper of her Roland Mouret sheath dress, undone to the small of her back.

“Would you help me with my zipper?” she asked.

Kara nodded, caught somewhere between irritation at the interruption to their conversation and arousal at the sight of that gorgeous expanse of unblemished ivory skin. She placed one hand on Cat’s left hip and the other on the zipper pull before she stopped herself, a brilliant idea flashing through her mind’s eye.

First, hand me the perfume you used on your hairbrush, she sent. Cat watched Kara bite her lip in an attempt to keep a carnal grin under some semblance of control.

Intrigued, Cat handed her the crystal wand from the decanter.

“Thank you,” whispered Kara, taking it from her carefully, her mouth a breath away from Cat’s ear. In the next second, Cat felt the chill of the wand at the base of her spine before Kara slowly began to drag it upward, her touch light and sensuous, the zipper clicking closed behind it, inch by tortuous inch. By the time Kara reached the top of the dress, Cat’s knees had buckled and she leaned heavily against her vanity table.

Jesus fucking Christ, she swore. Every nerve-ending felt as if it couldn’t decide whether it was caught in an inferno or had been plunged into Glacier Lake. Cat had never felt as wanted, as desired, or as beautiful as she did in that moment and she wondered what she had ever done in her life to deserve the love of Kara Danvers.

“Is this payback for what I did to you Monday morning?” she teased weakly.

Kara, pleased with herself, gently handed the fragile crystal stopper back to Cat. “Consider it a down-payment on tonight,” she murmured huskily, dropping a kiss just under Cat’s ear. “If zipping you up is this much fun, unzipping you must be amazing.”

“Yes, well,” said Cat, uncharacteristically flustered. She pressed her hand to the base of her throat, still unsteady on her feet. “I look forward to collecting the remaining balance, then.” She reached down to slip her 4-inch Manolo Blahnik tie-dye pumps onto her feet and Kara wondered if the shoes had been dyed specifically to match the cerulean shade of the dress. “In the meantime,” she continued, reaching out for Kara’s hand as she found her footing, “what do you want to know about Anjana? We’ve worked together for ten years—I’m happy to share anything you think might be
Relieved, Kara opened her mouth, ready to launch into a series of questions Cat assumed she’d prepared in advance. In the next second, though, the young blonde frowned deeply and balked, sighing instead. She crossed her arms over her chest and turned, walking a few steps away. “I don’t know,” she said finally. “Maybe that’s not such a good idea.”

Startled by Kara’s hesitance, Cat also frowned. “Why ever not?” she asked.

“I don’t want to get ahead in CatCo because of insider information, Cat—even if it’s the best information ever—even if it comes from you.” She shook her head and turned back to Cat, her expression a mixture of determination and stubbornness. “No—especially if it comes from you. That’s like being a high-school bake-off champion who got lessons from Julia Child! It’s not fair to everyone else and—and—”

Kara stood tall and uncrossed her arms, holding them at her sides as if steeling herself for battle. “I want to be like you, Cat,” she said. “I want to build something on my own—even if it fails.” Her shoulders fell in the next breath, though, when her real worry bubbled unexpectedly to the surface. “Besides, what’s everyone going to say when they find out about us?” she asked. “They’ll say I cheated,” she said, answering her own question miserably. Crestfallen, she added, “They’ll say I slept my way up the ladder.”

Cat did her best to hide her knowing smile and, instead, raised an impertinent eyebrow. “Well, at least you started with the top rung,” she said airily.

Kara fisted her hands at her sides, appalled. “Cat!” she whined. “I’m being serious!”

Cat took a deep breath and coolly exhaled it, composing her emotional landscape so it aligned more with Kara’s needs. She pushed away a flash of impatience and a fair bit of didactic superiority in favor of understanding and support, nurturing both emotions as best she could. When she felt sufficiently prepared, she stepped forward and took both of Kara’s hands in her own, uncurling each of the young woman’s fists delicately, like sunlight bidding a spray of morning glories to open their tightly clenched petals. Glancing up, she found Kara staring at her feet, looking terribly unsure of herself.

“Look at me, Kara,” said Cat quietly.

When Kara’s anxious azure eyes lifted to meet hers, Cat let a fond smile curve the bow of her mouth.

“First, my darling, I did not build anything—not my career, not CatCo, not anything—alone. I had help every step of the way, from my seventh grade English teacher who suggested I would make a wonderful writer someday, if I was so inclined; to the acquaintance who let me know her aunt, Perry White’s Executive Assistant, had just retired, suggesting I apply for the open position; to the frightened young woman who called my desk at the Tribune one afternoon in 1994 to tell me she thought she’d been sexually assaulted while under anesthesia at a renowned cosmetic surgery clinic.” She tightened her hold on Kara’s hands. “Media is not made in a vacuum, Kara. That single telephone call led to a massive investigation and the eventual prosecution and indictment of over two dozen doctors and clinic employees, including the Medical Director.”

“And to your first Pulitzer,” said Kara, a little star-struck. She’d read the articles—hadn’t everyone? —but to hear the story mentioned by Cat herself, no matter how briefly, was inspiring.

“As proud as I am of that,” said Cat, demurring, “I’m prouder of what we did for Kelly Mathis and the other victims of that terrible place.”
“Is Kelly Mathis the woman who called you?” asked Kara. She hadn’t heard the name before, but Cat’s articles had all referred to the woman who had come forward as “Jenny Doe,” in order to protect her identity.

Cat nodded. “Kelly was twenty-six when she went into that clinic. All she wanted was a pair of size-C breasts to fill out a bikini top for once in her otherwise unremarkable life. She could afford it and had been self-conscious about her appearance since junior high school. She thought, ‘Why not?’”

Cat scowled and Kara felt the fury that swept through her, still fresh, still raw and immediate after all these years.

“Kelly Mathis came out of that clinic a rape survivor believed by no one,” continued Cat, her voice acidic with murderous hatred. “Her boyfriend, her parents, the police…. They all thought Kelly was being histrionic—that she’d had a nightmare while under the anesthetic and was blowing it out of proportion. ‘It’s a reputable clinic,’ they told her. ‘Nothing like that could ever happen there.’”

“No one in this world has ever created anything lasting or meaningful by themselves.” She held onto Kara’s hands just a little bit tighter. “I’d think someone whose family motto is ‘Stronger Together’ might understand that,” she teased, lips twitching with a barely-hidden smile.

“Your articles—the investigation afterward,” said Kara. “They gave Kelly and the other victims a voice. Vindication.”

Cat nodded sharply once. “And a sizeable payout by the institution responsible for the clinic’s oversight. Kelly put hers to excellent use, of course. She was the founding director of RISE—Rape and Incest Survivor Empowerment—and then on its board until she died of cervical cancer last year.”

Kara blinked. “You went to her funeral,” she said, the mystery of a cleared morning schedule one blustery Wednesday last December finally solved. Cat’s dress had been as black as her mood that day and Kara had been terribly worried about her. “I wondered who she was, but it wouldn’t have been right to ask. I thought she might have been a friend from school or something.” At Cat’s raised eyebrow, she added, “You were close in age.”

“Too close,” said Cat, looking away, depressed by the thought. “We lost her too soon.”

Kara nodded in commiseration, and then leaned forward, pressing a soft kiss to Cat’s cheek. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

“Me, too,” said Cat, sighing. Then she glanced back up at Kara, having swept her momentary sadness away like someone tidying a disordered room. “The point I was trying to make, darling—before we wandered away from it—is Kelly Mathis and her call to me that afternoon had as much to do with the creation of CatCo as I or anyone else did. No one in this world has ever created anything lasting or meaningful by themselves.” She held onto Kara’s hands just a little bit tighter. “I’d think someone whose family motto is ‘Stronger Together’ might understand that,” she teased, lips twitching with a barely-hidden smile.

“And when everyone finds out about us?” asked Kara uneasily. “What will they think?”

Cat shrugged indifferently. “Who cares?” Seeing Kara’s features darken with protest, Cat realized that wasn’t a helpful response. She tried again. “What’s the worst they can say? That we’re sleeping together and I gave you preferential treatment because of our relationship?”

Kara nodded glumly.

Cat smiled at her and shook her head tolerantly. “So…the truth, then.”

Kara stared incredulously at Cat. “What?”
Cat waved one hand dismissively. “Or one version of it, if you prefer,” she conceded. She took a step closer to Kara and drew her fingers down the blonde’s cheek. “We are sleeping together, Kara—however crass I might find that expression,” she whispered, leaning up to press a kiss to the corner of Kara’s mouth. “And the fact I’m desperately in love with you will play a part in how I treat you at work. However hard I try not to let it.”

Cat’s admission stole the breath from Kara’s lungs and it took her a minute to remember the point she was trying to make. She squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head, rejecting the tempting distraction.

“But Cat—”

Cat placed a single finger over Kara’s lips and the young woman’s eyes popped open. “It doesn’t change how talented you are, my darling, or your qualifications. You’re more than ready for this challenge—regardless of what we have together. In fact…” Cat looked up at Kara contritely. “I’ve known for a while I was going to have to let you go, sooner or later. You’ve outgrown your position. You have so much more to offer—to CatCo or to any other company. My selfishness has held you back.”

“No,” said Kara, jerking her chin to the side to free her mouth from Cat’s finger. “I love being your assistant. I love smoothing out all the rough edges of your day. Anything I can do to make your life easier—that’s not wasted time to me.” Cat heard the steel in Kara’s voice. She could almost see the crest of the House of El emblazoned on her chest as she spoke. “I’m meant to be by your side, Cat, and if I’ve outgrown the position I’m in, well, that part’s negotiable, right? The position can change just as much as I can.” Decision made, she sighed and let all the tension drain from her muscles, sinking into Cat’s warm embrace. “In the meantime, I’ll try not to let what other people might say bother me,” she said softly.

“Good,” said Cat, pleased. She reached up to give Kara another kiss. “Now then—will you accept my advice for your meeting with Anjana?”

Kara rolled her eyes but smiled, too. “Yes,” she said, tightening her arms around Cat, knowing she’d have to let her go soon so they could finish getting ready for work. “What should I do?”

Cat smirked and cast a critical gaze over Kara’s chosen outfit. “Well, the first thing you should do is change into something else—preferably in blue or green. Anjana hates the color orange.”

Kara leapt backwards out of Cat’s arms, horrified. “What?” she yelped. She looked down at herself and went as white as a sheet. “You couldn’t have mentioned this ten minutes ago??”

_and miss the look on your face just now?_ sent Cat. _Not on your life!_

_Aaaaugh!_ sent Kara. That and an irritated buzz of exasperation was the only response Cat received.

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In line at Noonan’s, Kara remembered it was Wednesday and, therefore, the day of Alex’s big date with Neves Montenegro, the assistant concierge at The Prague. With a wicked gleam in her eye, she snatched her phone out of her purse and sent her sister a cheeky text.

_Have u told Suse about ur big date yet? Is she teasing you unmercifully?_

She watched the blinking ellipsis appear almost immediately.
No. I told her I had a dentist appt. For exactly that reason.

Kara clapped one hand over her mouth to keep from laughing right out loud. She drifted forward absently as the line moved ahead.

Lame, Alex. Dentist? Really? Best u could do?

Apparently, came the one word reply. Kara could almost feel Alex’s disdain through the screen of her phone.

Well, where are u taking N? texted Kara. And remember, u need to avoid onions and garlic both or else no 😐.

What are you, 12? came Alex’s reply. Kissing is not on the menu for today’s lunch. Trust me.

Kara scowled at her phone. Never say never, she typed. What if N wants to kiss u? Then what, big shot? ;) Seeing she was nearing the front of the line and that her order was waiting for her, she texted, Gotta run, latte up. Call me later to let me know how it went! Luv u!

She clicked off her phone before Alex could reply and shoved it back into her purse, flashing a brilliant smile at Frankie, the barista behind the counter.

“Busy day already?” asked Frankie, nodding at Kara’s phone in her bag. She handed the blonde Cat’s usual as if they’d made the exchange a thousand times before. Which they probably had.

“Aren’t they all?” replied Kara, sighing. She turned to head back toward the entrance doors only to see Winn in line about ten people back. “Winn!” she said, startled. “What are you doing here?”

Winn had told her often enough he didn’t see the point in buying coffee from Noonan’s when CatCo provided decent enough coffee for free. He preferred to spend his money on more practical things—like science fiction collectibles or bandwidth for his alien encounters blog.

The IT Analyst gave Kara a tentative half-smile and held up a black and gold card Kara recognized as one of Noonan’s gift cards.

“I won the IT pool on who was going to bite it in the Game of Thrones finale.” He flicked the edge of the card against his pant leg and looked down. “Gift card from here was part of the pot.”

Kara narrowed her eyes at her friend but said nothing. His story was plausible enough, but also too convenient. Plus, he wasn’t looking at her. Something felt…off.

“You should try their cinnamon rolls,” she said, trying to muster her usual sunny disposition for him, but finding it difficult. Had he always acted like this—overly interested and aggressively hopeful in an unsettling way? Or was it getting worse since she’d rejected his advances? “They’re seriously the best.”

Winn’s eyes lit up at the recommendation. “Okay, I will. Thanks.” Kara nodded and started to walk away when Winn called out to her. “Hey, did you ever find out who those flowers were from? The ones from Monday?”

Not expecting the question, Kara turned back to look at Winn, her expression caught between a blindingly adorable smile and profound reluctance. “Winn—” she began, but the color drained from his face. Kara watched the realization hit his eyes and he knew, now—for better or worse.
Not only did she know who the flowers were from, she was head over heels in love with whoever had sent them.

“You know what—never mind,” said Winn hurriedly. “I don’t want to know.” He stepped out of the line and looked over his shoulder, clearly searching for a quick and painless exit. “I’m gonna—I’m gonna save this card for another day,” he said. He ducked his head and wouldn’t look at Kara again. “See you around.”

Kara watched him go, upset, wondering what she could do. Clearly, the problem needed to be addressed—sooner rather than later—but there were so many other things higher on her priority list at the moment. She wished she could discuss it with Alex or Cat, but she knew both of them were stretched just as thinly as she was and she didn’t want to burden them with something she ought to be able to handle herself.

She was Supergirl, after all. Surely, that counted for something, right?

Vowing to have a talk with Winn before the week was over, Kara glanced at the latte cooling rapidly in her hand and hurried out of Noonan’s with a frown stamped solidly onto her features.

*Reasonable,* she thought, careful to keep the word and the wish inside her own head. *Everyone just needs to be reasonable for a few more days. Then we can breathe again.*

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Kara’s meeting with Anjana Makhri went well. So well, in fact, she hummed all the way back from the Thai restaurant with Cat’s lettuce wraps, her happiness spilling over into their connection unnoticed until she tasted Cat’s answering grin reflected back, bright and tart both, like a spritz of lemon.

*I’m having a hard time sounding angry on this conference call with Rome, my darling,* sent Cat. *What with ‘Sunny’ Danvers humming—what is that? ‘Rainbow Connection’? Honestly, Kara—directly into my head.*

Kara knew Cat was more bemused than frustrated, but she dampened the flow of traffic from her side of the Daat Kyashar anyway, embarrassed. She hadn’t quite gotten a handle on quieting the loudest of her emotions yet and they often barreled through their bond before she could catch them. She’d have to work on that.

*Sorry!* she sent. *I have your lunch if you’re ready. I’ll try to keep it down….*

Cat sighed aggrievedly and rolled her eyes and Kara worried for a moment her annoyance was directed at her until she felt a sort of…hook?…at the end of it, indicating it was meant for someone outside their connection. That was new.

_Giani isn’t interested in what I have to say, anyway,* sent Cat, the sourness of her scowl puckering Kara’s lips, too. _He won’t be as dismissive when he sees me in person,* she noted darkly. _How do you feel about spending Christmas in Italy?_

Kara gulped, taken aback. *Me?* she asked, shocked.

Now Cat’s irritation was directed at her.

*Yes, you. Carter will be with his father this year and I can postpone my visit to Greece until early next year—they’re holding their own for the moment and no one can say Vasilyos isn’t giving it everything he has.* Cat tempered her irritation with a healthy dose of romance wrapped in old-
fashioned tradition. If you are operating under the assumption I will be spending our first Christmas together halfway across the world from you, Kara Ellen Danvers, you are sorely mistaken. You will join me in Italy or my trip there will be short, sharp, and deadly.

A soft, sweet, sensuous emotion threaded through Cat’s steely conviction, eroding it until nothing remained but her smile.

Either way, she sent, I’ll wake up in your arms on Christmas morning.

Kara almost stumbled as she entered the elevator on the ground floor of CatCo, pleased by Cat’s certitude. I’ll spend Christmas with you anywhere on this planet, Cat, she sent, her tone colored with more than a little lasciviousness. As long as I get to unwrap my present first.

The tell-tale flickering of the next images Cat saw indicated they were from Kara’s imagination rather than her memory. The fact they showed Cat on her knees over Kara while the young woman untied the satin ribbons holding a slip of scarlet silk to Cat’s hips nearly made her groan right out loud.

Kara snickered when she heard Cat snap at Giani and his team before slamming the phone down. She was still five floors away when Cat stalked to the threshold of her office and yelled, “Kiera! You have one minute to deliver my lunch or your appalling taste in cardigans will be the first thing they notice about you in the unemployment line tomorrow! Balcony! STAT!”

It was all for show, of course. Bellowing blindly into the bullpen had the same cathartic effect on Cat as cardio workouts had on others—with the added benefit of keeping their relationship off everyone’s radar. Who in their right mind would think the two of them were anything other than what they appeared to be, what with Cat shouting at her hapless assistant every half hour or so?

Before she stalked back across her office toward the balcony door, Cat noticed Winn rise hesitantly from his chair, pale and uncertain, as if he was wondering how he could run interference for Kara or at least buy her some more time. The gesture impressed her. Only a true friend would throw himself atop that particular grenade. The rest of her worker bees, she noticed, had scattered like ball bearings spilled on a hardwood floor.

Kara came around the corner from the elevator bank, shoulders hunched and head down, trying hard to hide the grin threatening to burst across her features. Winn saw her just as he was deciding whether or not to use his Super Special Beacon Watch to summon her.

He shooed her across the bullpen like he was herding a chicken into its coop. “You’ve got less than a minute!” he hissed. “Go! Go!”

Kara juggled the to-go boxes and bags expertly while depositing her purse on her desk. “I know, I know!” She hurried through Cat’s office door and onto the balcony as if chased by demons. Winn watched until he couldn’t see her anymore and then sighed audibly when there was no further explosion from Cat. He dropped into his chair as if he had just run up ten flights of stairs.

Kara kept up her nervous pace until she reached the point where no one from the bullpen could see her and then relaxed, finally freeing the grin she’d been hiding. Cat sat in repose in one of the club chairs, a gentle smirk quirking her lips.

“Your lunch, Madame,” Kara quipped, arranging Cat’s place by rote, opening containers as she set them down. Cat’s lettuce wraps and grilled salmon were on real china and Kara handed over a set of spotless silverware with a practiced hand, waiting until Cat took them before flipping the cloth napkin neatly across her lap. As she leaned forward, Cat surprised her with a quick kiss to the
cheek.

“Someone’s in a good mood,” Cat noted, pleased as a wash of pink crossed Kara’s cheeks in reaction to her show of affection. She thought she would never tire of Kara’s blush. “I take it your meeting with Anjana went well after all?”

Kara took a place on the couch across from Cat and opened her own bagged lunch—two overstuffed pastrami sandwiches from an amazing Jewish deli around the corner. She nodded enthusiastically.

“She’s amazing, Cat!” she said, taking a huge bite from her sandwich. She waited until she had swallowed—and Cat thought she should be grateful for that—before continuing. “She said my lack of broadcasting experience was less of a handicap than I thought and promised me I would learn everything I needed to know about the logistics side of things in just a couple of weeks of shadowing. She’s going to pair me up with her best producer.”

Cat nodded and delicately lifted a morsel of salmon to her lips. “Eric Chu,” she said, before taking the bite. She chewed thoughtfully for a moment. “Surely, she’s going to have you learn other aspects of the process, too….”

Kara nodded again and forced herself to swallow another mouthful of her sandwich. “She has a whole plan—including time in the editing booth, some behind-the-scenes stuff with the breaking news spots, and she even had me spending a few days with the research team, but—”

“But you don’t need that, owing to your unique educational background,” finished Cat, smirking knowingly. “How did you get out of it?”

Kara shrugged. “I told her I’d been doing research with that team for a while now—mostly for you and CATCO Magazine—and asked if she would mind me shadowing her for that time, instead—so I could get a feel for the pressures—and politics—division chiefs face.”

Cat grinned wickedly and sent a tendril of sensual carnality through their bond, completely turned on by Kara’s deft handling of the situation. Skill was an aphrodisiac to Cat Grant and she was self-aware enough to know it—and to reward it, when appropriate.

“What did she say?” she asked airily, curious as to how Anjana had responded to the request. She, herself, just wanted to kiss her fiancée silly and she made that clear through their connection.

Kara blushed as Cat’s decadent daydream brushed across her awareness and—although she knew better—she sent an answering ribbon of desire back, careful to keep it understated, just in case.

“She said she thought I would have had my fill of that, learning from the best—meaning you. I told her I believed the pressures on you, as CatCo’s CEO and guiding force, were different than the pressures on a division chief, who had people both up and down the chain relying on her.” Kara smiled, pleased with herself. “That impressed her, I think.”

Cat blinked and all her flirtatious teasing simply disappeared from the Daat Kyashar, obliterated by her surprise. “It impresses me,” she said, putting her fork down on her plate. After a moment’s consideration, she added, “Perhaps we’re moving too slowly with this plan of yours, darling. Should we consider omitting the internship and proposing the reclassification to HR immediately?” Her distress shone clearly in her eyes. “I don’t want you to repeat your high school experiences here at CatCo, Kara. I don’t want to make the same mistakes your foster parents made.”

Kara carefully put her sandwich down on the bag she’d spread out and was using as a makeshift placemat. She didn’t know what to say about Cat’s proposal—other than it was a terrible idea. Her
first instinct was to gloss over that fact—or even to flee outright. She could fly, after all. It wouldn’t take much just to hop up to the roof and take the stairs back down to her desk.

Because one thing was very clear to Kara. Nobody told Cat Grant she’d had a terrible idea.

Except, possibly, Kara was about to. Just as soon as she had a moment to explain why it was so terrible—complete with supporting documentation and, perhaps, a note from the Supreme Court.

“I can see from your frown you don’t agree,” said Cat, pursing her lips. Defensiveness, of course, was her first reaction. She was human, after all. She breathed through it, though, and let her curiosity take the lead. First, she didn’t want to fight. Kara was humming silly songs and agreeing to Christmas in Tuscany and riding high after a successful meeting under challenging circumstances. Picking a fight with her right now would be a criminal act. Second, it was Kara’s life, her career, her plan. Cat’s role here was as Kara’s safe harbor—not as the captain of her ship. It might not be a part that felt entirely natural to Cat, but she was determined not to fail. It was too important.

“I—I think we should stick with the original timeline, Cat,” said Kara hesitantly. “It’s not that I don’t understand what you’re saying—or what you’re offering—because I do. I know you’re coming from a place of wanting what’s best for me—and maybe it is what’s best for me; who knows?” She gave Cat a weak smile, hoping to diffuse the anger she thought would be coming shortly. “But it’s not best for all of us—and that’s more important right now.”

“How so?” asked Cat, her voice surprisingly reasonable. “How does keeping you from reaching your full potential as quickly as possible benefit me? Or CatCo, for that matter?” She folded her hands in her lap and raised a single eyebrow, interested to hear Kara’s response.

“Because I’m not you, Cat,” said Kara, sighing. “Because—as far as most of the people in this building are concerned—I have no real training or skill. Because Alex is right—sooner or later, people are going to figure out what’s going on between us. Like you said this morning, we are sleeping together and that does make a difference, no matter how much we try not to let it.”

Kara took a deep breath and ran her hands down her skirt, smoothing out what few wrinkles were there.

“If we were to do as you suggest—skip the internship, go to HR now—a lot of people would resent that, would resent me. They’d think the worst of both of us and that would be a disaster.” Determination set her jaw and she curled her hands into fists in her lap. “The internship requires the input of other department heads and division chiefs. It provides a framework for keeping things transparent and it will give me a chance to prove myself, which will give me legitimacy in the eyes of anyone watching. Which, in turn, will protect you and the legacy you’ll leave to Carter.” She leveled her most stern glare at Cat. “You’ve already survived one takeover attempt this year. It would be ridiculously stupid of us to give the board ammunition for round two.”

When Cat only stared at her, unspeaking, Kara uncurled her hands, releasing the tension she felt before it could sully their connection. “The whole point of this plan is to make me more of a help to you—to create a position that allows me to be of real value to you and to CatCo,” she said. “How can I do that if we both lose our jobs?”

Cat tried to keep her face blank and impassive, but how could she when Kara Danvers, assistant extraordinaire, loving partner, and the sweetest mother to their son, kept surprising her at every single turn? Just when she thought she’d gotten a fix on Kara and her ‘Sunny’ Danvers personality, the girl would do or say something completely unexpected—like sharing her utterly shrewd and politic understanding of actions undertaken for the benefit of the whole. Like reminding Cat of what was truly at stake—now and in the future.
Without a word, Cat stood and picked up her lunch, coming around the table to settle next to Kara on the couch. When she had everything in place—including the cloth napkin, draped again across her knees—she gazed up at Kara, letting the smile she’d been denying free rein of her features. Before Kara could smile back at her, Cat leaned forward, cupped Kara’s face in her hands, and captured her mouth in an unquestionably thorough and altogether heavenly kiss.

When she pulled away, she brushed her thumb along Kara’s cheekbone, and then returned to her lunch.

“Finish your sandwiches, darling,” said the CEO absently, taking another bite of her salmon. “We both have meetings at two and I need to look at the binder you gave me before I go into mine.” She rolled her eyes before picking up one of the lettuce wraps. “God knows I don’t want to face Jonathan and his team without at least a cursory glance at your color-coded and annotated quarterly finance report.”

Kara stared at Cat, trying—and failing—to figure out what she should respond to first. There were so many things to choose from. Considering her lips were still tingling, she figured she would start there.

“You just—”

"Kissed you at work?" sent Cat. "I did. I can’t promise it won’t happen again, either. Think of it as an exercise meant to keep you on those inexplicably perfect Kryptonian toes."

Cat wagged her eyebrows suggestively and carefully bit into her lettuce wrap, leaning forward a little to avoid getting soy sauce on her dress.

“I thought we weren’t—”

Kara stared at Cat, trying—and failing—to figure out what she should respond to first. There were so many things to choose from. Considering her lips were still tingling, she figured she would start there.

“You just—”

"Every deal is negotiable, Kara,” said Cat, interrupting her, casting a heated gaze the blonde’s way. “I was an idiot to think I could keep my hands to myself for ten hours a day; you’re much too irresistible for that.” She delicately polished off one lettuce wrap and reached for another, treating Kara to a bright grin. “The occasional rendezvous out here should be safe enough, I think.”

“O-okay,” said Kara uneasily as she watched Cat enjoying her lunch. “You’re not mad, then?” she asked, cheeks ruddy with another blush as she imagined exactly what kinds of trouble they could get into on the balcony, fueled by sunshine and long periods of necessary restraint. “Because I thought you were going to be mad. Mad is what you usually get when someone disagrees with you. And, unless I’m mistaken, I just disagreed with you. Like, a lot.”

Cat took a sip of her iced green tea and then waved her hand, dismissing Kara’s concern. “The difference is you were right. It does me absolutely no good getting upset with someone when they are not only correct in their thinking but are also protecting decades of my personal and professional effort.” She leaned in to nuzzle Kara’s neck and nipped her softly beneath her ear. “Besides, that’s what partnership is all about, darling,” she murmured, lost in Kara’s scent and the softness of her skin.

“Driving me crazy on your balcony at lunch?” Kara breathed unsteadily.

"Compromise," corrected Cat, smirking as she returned to her salmon. "Driving you to distraction is just a perk," she added.

“For whom?” grumbled Kara, both relieved to have some distance between them again and frustrated by it. She wondered if there would ever come a day when Cat’s touch didn’t threaten to
send her directly to the moon. Then again, looking at the woman—at her perfect posture, her regal elegance, and those entirely too-kissable lips—she hoped not.

“Both of us,” said Cat matter-of-factly. She caught Kara staring at her mouth and added, “That is, if I do it right.”

Then she winked at her and Kara groaned.

Cat only laughed.

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Alex approached the building underneath the brightly lit sign with a somewhat jaundiced eye. She’d let Neves pick the location for their lunch date and had never heard of The Boardwalk before. Given its name and address, she assumed it was some sort of cute bistro with an ocean view. It never occurred to her to Yelp it or even to look at the menu online.

Hence, her surprise now.

*That’s…a lot of neon,* she thought as she walked onto the covered patio. The restaurant looked nothing like a cute ocean-front bistro, but it did resemble a carousel. Rather alarmingly. She reached for the door and took her sunglasses off at the same time, blinking as she stepped inside. It didn’t take her long to find Neves once her sight adjusted to the lower light levels.

Neves Montenegro, assistant concierge at Cat Grant’s building, sat alone at one of the wood-veneer tables in a lurid orange molded-plastic chair. She stood as Alex entered, and her hair, usually tightly braided at work, fell unbound around her shoulders in long, ink-black waves. She grinned and it lit up the entire room.

Alex smiled back at the woman reflexively and then closed her eyes, shaking her head just once.

*So much for your reputation as the aloof butch,* she said, scowling internally.

“Hey,” she said, going with the smile. It was too late to take it back, anyway. She reached out to shake her hand, and was surprised when Neves pulled her in to press a soft kiss to her cheek. Alex caught the scent of grapefruit on Neves’ skin and something warm and enticing underneath it. Bergamot, maybe? With a hint of ginger. It was…breathtaking.

“Hey, yourself,” said Neves as she pulled back, her voice a little higher than Alex remembered it. She let go of Alex and jammed both hands into the back pockets of her black jeans, blushing crazy red as she looked around the restaurant. “I know this probably wasn’t what you were expecting….”

Alex could tell Neves was self-conscious and she urgently wanted to put her at ease.

“No, it’s great,” she said, looking around at the over-bright oranges and yellows and the plastic décor. The 50s music blaring from a bejeweled jukebox in the corner made her grin with nostalgia. “It reminds me of the boardwalk where I grew up. A bunch of us surf rats used to track sand and seaweed into places just like this most summers, surviving on curly fries dipped in frozen custard. If it weren’t for ketchup, we’d have all ended up with scurvy.” She took off her motorcycle jacket and draped it over the back of a chair. “You come here a lot?” she asked. She eyed the line forming at the counter and suggested they join it with a nod of her head.

Neves took off her burgundy bomber jacket with the embroidered skulls and slung it over the back of the chair opposite Alex’s, following her to the front of the restaurant.
“Some,” she said and her voice had settled back into its normal range. She shrugged and then looked at Alex with eyes like late November leaves, an evocative and altogether heated smile staining her lips tinted dusky rose. “I mostly chose it so you would know I’m a hearty eater.”

A rush of tingles raced up Alex’s body from her toes at the implication clearly and deliberately woven into those words. A blush she knew she couldn’t hide followed fast on its heels. In fact, it was a goddamned miracle she was able to stay standing and she felt the tips of her ears begin to burn.

*Oh, no…* she thought, panicking as her body let her know—in no uncertain terms—how pleased it was by Neves’ comment. *I’m in so much trouble here.*

Alex cleared her throat and glanced up at the menu posted over the cash registers, glad of the distraction. She needed half a second to catch her breath.

“Good to know,” she said finally, hoping the words sounded a little more solid than she felt at the moment. The clunk of her boots on the linoleum floor as the two of them edged forward in line seemed too loud, somehow.

Neves, laughing, bumped her hip against Alex’s. “I just wanted to get the awkward part out of the way—to let you know I’m into this—into you,” she said lowly, so only Alex could hear. “If it’s too much, let me know and I’ll tone it down.” She chuckled ruefully. “I’ve been told before I’m too direct for some people. You wouldn’t be the first.”

Alex’s eyebrows climbed high on her forehead. What had she said to Cat the other night? She preferred the direct approach? It looked like she was going to get the chance to see if she’d really meant it.

“No, no,” she said, searching for a tone of voice that would convey both confidence and appreciation. “You’re good.” She cut her eyes at Neves and found herself grinning again, surprised to see it reflected in those lovely coffee-colored eyes. “I’ll…um…catch up,” she said, laughing at herself.

They ordered their food at one end of the counter and Alex picked it up at the other, their sandwiches wrapped in shiny foil and boxed up in flimsy cardboard already stained with the grease from two orders of fries—one curly and one slathered in an unnaturally yellow cheese sauce. The fresh-faced teenager behind the counter handed it all to Alex on a lime green plastic tray with a too-bubbly “Have a nice day!” She somehow managed to thank the girl without rolling her eyes.

Impressed by Alex’s restraint, Neves snatched her drink off the tray as they headed back to their table.

“So where’d you grow up?” she asked, backing off on her intensity levels a little. After all, she didn’t want to spook the poor woman. Especially when she had such beautiful hazel eyes.

When Alex looked at her blankly, she said, “You said this place reminded you of the boardwalk where you grew up…?”

“Right,” said Alex, wanting to slap her own forehead. “Yeah, sorry.” She put their tray down and waited for Neves to sit before she took her own seat, trying to regain some of her equilibrium through the time-honored art of chivalry. “Midvale,” she said. “Not far from the beach. My mom still lives there.”

Neves picked up on what Alex didn’t say immediately. Mom, but not Dad. She thought about asking about after him, but decided to leave it for now. The answer would contain some form of
heartache or trauma or both—no matter what the reason—and lunch at this candy-colored restaurant wasn’t the right place for that. Better to keep things light...for now. Maybe—if things went as well as she hoped—they’d eventually get to that place where secret-telling was more important than secret-keeping.

“You still surf?” she asked instead, interested in the answer. Alex kept in shape somehow, that much was obvious. Surfing wasn’t Neves’ thing but she’d be happy to watch.

She imagined Alex walking out of the ocean in the white heat of an August morning, clad only in the briefest black bikini, salt-water beading on her bronzed skin—and amended that thought to Very happy.

Disappointingly, Alex shook her head. “Odd hours. Hard for me to find the time.” She unwrapped one of the sandwiches. “Plus, I’m not sixteen anymore. I’d look ridiculous out there now.”

Neves snagged a cheese fry and unwrapped her own sandwich. “Not from where I’m standing,” she said softly, looking up at Alex through a fringe of long, dark lashes.

Alex nearly forgot how to breathe and took a sip of her too-sweet orangeade to cover.

“What about you?” she asked finally, hazel eyes flicking up and down what she could see of Neves’ lithe form. “What do you do to keep in that kind of shape?”

Neves winked at Alex. “Now you’re catching up,” she said appreciatively. She gave her a slow, sexy smile. “Good.” She took a breath and switched gears a little, saying, “In answer to your question: running, mostly.” She bit into her roast beef-extra horseradish with gusto, adding, “Some weights, too. It’s a modified regimen from the one I used in Kandahar.”

Neves wasn’t the only observant person in the room. Modified could mean a lot of things, but the addition of Kandahar narrowed that list significantly. Alex toyed with the possibility of asking about Neves’ service, but she knew the direct approach—no matter how successfully employed thus far—might not work as well for that particular topic. Alex had no desire to go traipsing through an emotional mine field—not with orangeade the only available liquid courage. She was having enough trouble just keeping up with the flirting.

Looking at Neves, Alex wondered if she’d always been this forthright, wondered what she had seen in Kandahar and how those things had changed her, wondered what she’d been like before all that. She surprised herself, wanting to know so much about this woman.

Alex wasn’t used to this. They were only on their first date—not even fifteen minutes into it—and she was already planning future conversations. That was a good sign, wasn’t it?

Alex had so many secrets of her own to keep that she usually preferred not to dwell on what depths others might be protecting. She liked to keep things light and uncomplicated and resented it when her partners eventually wanted something deeper, feeling almost betrayed by that, in a way. Pressured, with expectations heaped on her shoulders like stones. She’d had no one to turn to for such a long time—lying to her mother and to Kara both about the nature of her work, believing Hank to be someone other than who he was….

But things had changed a lot this past year and Alex was in a good place right now. With everything out in the open, Kara and Hank were showing themselves to be steadfast and unshakable in their support of her—and now she had Cat and Carter, too. Even her mother seemed to be coming around a little. What was that saying? Many hands make light work.
Maybe, thought Alex, Neves could become part of Alex’s support group, too. Maybe she would find a way to let Neves in.

Maybe she would enjoy trying, either way.

“How long have you worked at Cat’s building?” she asked finally, deciding to save secrets and depths for another day.

“How about six months,” said Neves. “I love it—for now. It pays really well and it’s easy work. The residents are all like Miss Grant—wealthy, particular, but nice enough, for the most part.” She smiled conspiratorially. “I mean, it’s not like they have keggers and spend every weekend puking in the elevators, right? This is not that crowd.” The kind of crowd it was? Well, that was something she was still working on.

Alex laughed. “I guess not,” she said, shaking loose a hilarious image of Cat stumbling into her private elevator and vomiting delicately into a tiny Prada bag after a night on the town. She was very glad her sister’s fiancé couldn’t read her mind. Turning the spotlight back onto Neves, she asked, “So you didn’t do this sort of thing before you joined up?”

Neves, sipping on her orangeade, nearly choked. “Concierge work at high-end condominiums?” she asked, incredulously. “Hardly!” She shrugged and went back to munching on cheese fries. “I got my MBA at UCNC just like my parents wanted—and then promptly ran away to join the Army. The thought of spending the rest of my life in some gray cubicle, answering phones and shuffling paperwork for someone making four thousand times what I made—” She grimaced and it was the first time Alex had seen a negative emotion pass through Neves’ eyes. “Well, let’s just say that was never my dream.”

“What is your dream? If you don’t mind me asking….,” said Alex, taking a thoughtful bite of her sandwich.

Neves grinned at her. “That’s the million dollar question, isn’t it?” she asked. “I’m thirty and I have no idea what I want to do with my life.” She sighed dramatically but Alex could tell it was for show. It didn’t seem the type of thing Neves would worry about. “I’ll let you know when I figure it out. In the meantime, I have a nice paying job with benefits and I like the people I work with.” Her grin transformed into something a little less wide, a little more sensual. “Occasionally, I meet an interesting person or two along the way,” she added, winking at Alex. “All in all, not a bad way to pass the time.”

Alex agreed. At least, Neves seemed to be negotiating the uncertainty in her life better than Alex ever had. If nothing else, maybe she would pick up a few pointers on that front. She took another bite of her sandwich and used the natural lull in conversation to observe Neves, admiring not only her natural beauty but her presence, as well, feeling the woman was—what was that phrase her mother always used?—‘comfortable in her own skin.’ That was something Alex was still working on, but she had been getting better lately—especially now all those lingering doubts about how she’d gotten her position at the DEO had been resolved.

Thankfully, Neves had taken the guesswork out of how she felt, letting Alex know she was interested. And Alex was definitely attracted to Neves—but a small, relatively new part of her wanted something more than just a couple of nights of fun. She was tired of “the friendly fuck” lifestyle. It was hard to hold the person in her bed at arm’s length all the time and she was almost thirty. A fact her mother had no problem reminding her of on a near weekly basis.

Alex was self-aware enough to realize maybe she was ready for something deeper and more meaningful. Maybe it was time for a real relationship—with all the craziness and discovery and
work that entailed. Like Kara had with Cat.

Except without the all-access pass to my fucked up brain, she thought, smirking. No one needs that.

But Alex knew she wasn’t going to find out whether or not she was ready for a relationship if she never made a move. And the ball, so to speak, was definitely in her court. She took a deep breath and screwed her courage to the sticking place just as Neves looked up at her again, with those tarnished-penny eyes and that sensuous, knowing smile.

“I may not get to surf as much as I used to,” said Alex, untangling a curly fry from its mates and popping half into her mouth, “but I’ve been known to make time for something else that’s…um…good for the cardio-vascular system….”

“And what’s that, Agent Danvers?” asked Neves softly, reaching across the table to run her index finger lightly across the back of Alex’s hand.

Alex shivered with the touch. “I was going to say ‘dancing’ but….” But now she was imagining a few other things also known for increasing the heart rate. She shifted in the hard chair and wished she’d listened to Kara’s warning about strong flavor profiles and how they could ruin certain…activities.

Neves’ eyes sparkled as she stole one of Alex’s curly fries.

“How about we start there and see where things go?”

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At two-o’clock on the dot, Kara Danvers walked off the elevator on the fourteenth floor…into a standing ovation.

Twenty HR personnel members—including Raj of the grumpy mornings and Dorothy Webb, the department’s director—were clustered around a small table in the lobby area upon which sat a chocolate-frosted sheet cake and two pitchers of lemonade. A bouquet of colorful Mylar balloons sporting phrases like “Good job!” and “Congratulations!” hovered overhead, tethered to the edge of the table by long, yellow ribbons.

Blushing to beat the band, Kara took a hesitant step toward the gathering, only to have the grinning throng break into a warbling, off-key version of “For she’s a jolly good fellow!” The song didn’t help matters for Kara and she turned redder with every step she took. Realizing her confusion and embarrassment would be a huge distraction to Cat in the quarterly finance meeting upstairs, she threw a barrier—or four—across their connection.

Dorothy handed Kara a plate containing a fairly large piece of cake as the singers wound down. The blonde’s eyes danced as she took it, and then she frowned when she registered the words glaring at her from the center of the cake. The number 100 was piped in four-inch yellow buttercream characters above the word CONGRATULATIONS!

“I know it might seem like I’ve worked here for a hundred years in comparison to some of Miss Grant’s other assistants, Dorothy,” she said, “but you know I haven’t, right?”

Dorothy and one of her Associate Directors—Salva Jimenez—continued to hand out slices of cake to the rest of the party-goers.

“Oh, that number doesn’t represent your years of service, Kara,” she said cheerfully, her stylish silver curls bobbing with the tolerant shake of her head she aimed Kara’s way.
Kara sighed, relieved, and shoveled a bite of cake into her mouth.

Dorothy went on. “That’s how many days it’s been since Miss Grant last tried to fire you!”

Kara’s bite of cake made a sudden and unfortunate reappearance.

“W-what?” Kara sputtered. Someone—Raj, maybe—handed her a paper cup filled with lemonade and she drank it down, trying to quiet her coughs and gasps. “You count the days?”

Her shock pushed right up against the barriers she’d thrown up across the Daat Kyashar and Kara did everything in her power not to let it bleed through. Whether or not Cat would find the image of her entire Administrative Personnel Department counting the days between termination attempts amusing in general—and that was a debate all its own—Kara knew for a fact Cat wouldn’t find it the least bit comical while she was stuck upstairs in a windowless conference room discussing CatCo’s financial solvency with her CFO and his team.

Dorothy nodded. “You bet we do,” she said, determination and a little something else—fiery rebellion?—coloring her gaze. “We’re not stupid down here in Personnel, you know.”

Kara shook her head. “No, of course you aren’t,” she agreed.

“When you survived your third termination,” said Dorothy, chin lifting with pride, “we saw the writing on the wall.”

Kara offered up her best version of the stoic, serious nod she often used to convey understanding in situations where she had not a clue what was going on.

“Of course you did,” she said. “And…um…what writing was that, exactly?” She slowly slipped her plate with its mostly uneaten piece of cake back onto the table, not trusting herself with it now. At this rate, she was going to be lucky not to be wearing it.

Dorothy looked surprised by having to spell it out. “Why, how important you were becoming to Miss Grant, of course!” The older woman took Kara’s hand lightly in her own and looked at her with such intensity and earnestness, Kara became alarmed. “No one—and I mean no one—has lasted as long as you have in that position. Not even a third as long. Kara, what you’ve achieved here isn’t just amazing; it’s unique.” When Kara continued to stare at her uncomprehendingly, Dorothy tut-tutted, exasperated. “You don’t even know what I’m talking about, do you?”

Kara shook her head and her ponytail swished behind her. “Not…so much,” she admitted reluctantly. “I mean, I mostly just fetch coffee and lunches and make sure not to overbook her calendar.” Kara suddenly became aware of several pairs of round, unbelieving eyes staring at her from behind paper cups or over plates of cake. “It’s…um…not that complicated,” she added.

Laughter broke out around the table and Dorothy’s egg-blue eyes sparkled over a wide grin.

“Oh, you sweet summer child,” she crooned. “If that were true, then you wouldn’t be the first of her assistants to be able to count her service in years rather than in weeks.”

Kara’s eyes widened and she slid her glasses nervously back into place. “The first?” She’d heard all the scuttlebutt, of course—the rumors and whispered stories about assistants going out for lunch and never coming back or assistants packing up their apartments in the middle of the night and fleeing to other states. Kara hadn’t paid it much attention. Lots of people said lots of horrible things about Cat as a boss and most of those things seemed more legend than fact—at least, in her experience. “The first ever?”
Dorothy smirked. “One nearly made it six months. What was his name?” She tapped the side of her nose and then looked up at Kara. “This would have been, oh, six—no, seven years ago—when Carter was just a shock of sticky-up hair with a backpack almost as big as he was.” She gestured for Kara to follow her to her office, continuing the story as they went. “He was the cutest little thing back then—all big eyes and big smiles. Just starting school, I think—or maybe in the first grade. His nanny would bring him by after school most days—so he’d see his mother at least once before he went to bed.”

Kara frowned and Dorothy saw it. “Oh, it was *terrible* back then,” she said, agreeing with Kara’s obvious concern. “More for Miss Grant than for Carter, of course. All three of Carter’s nannies have been very sweet, nurturing women and he never lacked for caring—his mother made certain of that. But Miss Grant was working fifteen-, sometimes twenty-hours a day in those days—and her assistant—what was his name? Jeff? Jerry?”

She shook her head and opened her office’s door, motioning for Kara to enter. “Something with a ‘J’, anyway,” she said, shrugging. “It’s hard to remember when there’ve been so many. In any case, whatever his name was, he was a hustler, that’s for sure. He wasn’t perfect but he was eager. We had such high hopes for him.” She shook her head and grimaced with regret.

“What happened to him?” asked Kara, taking a seat in one of the guest chairs parked in front of Dorothy’s desk. She saw a teal personnel folder, a blank legal pad, and several sets of forms, all marked with colored sticky flags, neatly arranged on Dorothy’s workspace.

The director took her seat and folded her hands on her desk in front of her. “It was close to Thanksgiving and Carter had made one of those turkey pictures—you know, the ones where you outline your hand for the body and make construction paper feathers for the tail?”

Kara nodded although she’d never actually made one herself. She’d arrived on the planet much too late for schooling that included that sort of arts and crafts.

“Anyway, Julia was his nanny then. She’d brought Carter to CatCo to see his mother, just like she had all year. If Miss Grant was in a meeting, Julia usually would take Carter to the breakroom for a snack until she was available. But that day, Carter was excited, and he got ahead of her—far enough that she was still coming around the corner when it happened.”

Something in the way Dorothy said the words “when it happened” gave Kara goose bumps and she decided she didn’t like the sound of this story one bit. Every muscle in her body tensed and she ground her teeth to keep from growling.

“When what happened?” she asked, measuring her words carefully and looking, perhaps, a little more intense than Dorothy had ever seen her.

“I didn’t see it, of course, but what I heard was Carter was racing across the bullpen toward his mother’s office, his Superman backpack bouncing on his back, holding his turkey picture in front of him, all smiles. Miss Grant was in a meeting—I think it was with Christiane Amanpour—and whatshisname—Joey? Jack?—was at his desk—your desk—outside Miss Grant’s office. He saw Carter running for the office door and he—well, he wasn’t thinking clearly, that much is obvious—but he grabbed Carter’s arm just as the sweet little thing reached out for the door handle and pulled him backward to keep him from going in. Knocked Carter right off his feet.”

Cold hatred flashed over Kara’s entire body and she just barely kept it from barreling through the blocks she’d put up between Cat and herself in the Daat Kyashar.

“Did he hurt Carter, Dorothy?” she asked, her voice dangerously low and dark. Because if he had,
there was no place on Earth he would be able to hide from her.

Dorothy, shocked by Kara’s sudden bristling anger, hurried to reassure her. “Oh God, no! If he had, Miss Grant wouldn’t have fired him; she would have killed him!” She reached out to pat Kara’s right hand where it was balled into a fist at the front edge of her desk. “I’m sure he frightened Carter, but no, he didn’t hurt him, Kara. I promise.”

Assuaged, Kara set about releasing the tension and murderous intent stored in her muscles. Dorothy gazed at her warily and Kara realized she must have looked a little crazy for a moment there, thinking some man—Cat’s assistant, no less—had hurt tiny Carter while trying to keep him from Cat. Needing a moment to regroup and unwilling to interrupt Cat’s meeting upstairs, Kara chose instead to open the taps on her connection with Carter, knowing it was close to the end of his school day and he’d be in science class, his favorite subject. She needed to know he was okay and knew, if nothing else, she would at least be able to feel his heartbeat.

She felt it instantly, steady and sure underneath her own and Cat’s, and the relief that washed through her felt like a cold drink on a hot day, refreshing and direly needed. She sighed and looked up at Dorothy with a sheepish smile.

“That must have been a…challenging day…for all of you,” she said, indicating the department with a nod of her head.

“Try year,” said Dorothy ruefully, raising one eyebrow. “After that incident, it took all of us working around the clock for three months just to get someone in that role who lasted for more than two hours. I want to say her name was Emily or Emmaline or something like that, but who knows? She only lasted a month. Still, she bought us some time.” After a moment, the older woman sighed, sounding utterly bereft. “Honestly, Kara—I don’t know what we’re going to do without you.”

Kara stared at the HR director with a look of pure confusion. “Without me?” she asked. “Am I going somewhere?”

Now it was Dorothy’s turn to look confused. “Aren’t you?” When Kara only shrugged at her, she continued. “Well, then, what are these MOUs legal sent down?” She picked up a sheaf of the color-flagged paperwork and shook it. “They outline an unpaid editorial internship for you over the next twelve to eighteen months, followed by a reclassification of your position. We assumed Miss Grant meant this as a promotion—that you’d be moving on to another department or heading up a new office or something.”

A slow, genuinely happy grin spread across Kara’s face like sunlight overtaking a shadow.

“Dorothy,” she said. “I think I’m about to make your year.”

Carter Grant stood with his project partner, Zoe Kalla, on the roof of the Lower School’s building overlooking the faculty parking lot near the track. His teacher, Mr. McNair, stood with another group of students about fifteen feet away, helping them with last minute issues they were having with their egg drop inventions. Carter’s group—kids from the first half of the alphabet—had gone two weeks ago and he and Zoe had passed with flying colors. They were talking about Carter’s trip to Wyoming and all the cool things he’d done.

Two other boys from the first half of the alphabet—Aiden Lieserowitz and Matt Michaels—were near the edge of the roof, sneaking looks at Matt’s cell phone, which he wasn’t supposed to have. The boys had been best friends since kindergarten, having sat next to each other throughout the
years, and were known to be boisterous and to have a questionable relationship with rules and regulations.

“Stop!” said Matt in an exaggerated stage whisper, turning away from Aiden, his phone clutched close to his body. “It’s my turn.” He looked up at Mr. McNair to make sure he was still faced away from him and added, “It’s my phone!”

“Man, don’t be a GD a-hole! You wouldn’t have known it was up here if hadn’t shown you. Let me try again. I know I can catch it!” Aiden reached for the phone but Matt shied away again, shooting his friend a warning glare.

Carter rolled his eyes. He liked playing Pokémon Go just as much as the next person but he knew if his mom ever found out he’d used his phone without permission during the school day, he’d be grounded for the rest of his life—Snorlax or no. He knew which Pokémon was on the roof because he’d already caught one—six weeks ago, on an afternoon when Kara had unexpectedly picked him up from school. Before everything changed and she was just his mom’s cool assistant who was also possibly Supergirl.

He smiled and thought about dinner, knowing it was family dinner night and Kara was going to be there again, like she had been all week, and he kept waiting to wake up because everything that had happened since Sunday felt simultaneously like the best dream ever and totally surreal. Kara was still his mom’s cool assistant, but she had also admitted to being Supergirl the same day she’d become his other mom, and he couldn’t wait to see her again.

Grinning now, he thought of the chocolate chip cookies he was planning to bake as a surprise for Kara when Aiden, sulking because Matt still had the phone, made a grab for the device. Matt, engrossed in what he was doing, didn’t even look up.

“Aiden, stop!” he hissed, bumping his friend with his hip. “I mean it!”

The brief scuffle moved them another few feet away from Carter and Zoe but, Carter noticed, it had moved them closer to the roof’s edge, which they were faced away from. The roof was only twenty feet up—that’s why Mr. McNair had picked this particular building for the egg drop project in the first place—but watching the two boys jostling each other that close to the low retaining wall at the edge of the roof made Carter nervous.

“Come on, guys,” he said, glancing over his shoulder, hoping Mr. McNair would turn around, see what they were up to, and confiscate the phone. “Quit horsing around.”

Both Aiden and Matt looked up, clearly surprised to hear from Carter Grant. Matt—annoyed by the interruption—grumbled something under his breath and returned to his Snorlax-catching mission while Aiden—already sullen—snapped, “Shut your pie-hole, Prince of Zero! Mind your own business!”

Carter rolled his eyes again, but didn’t let Aiden’s retort stop him. “I’m serious! You guys are too close to the edge.”

And there were the magic words that got Mr. McNair to look up from what he was doing. “What’s going on?” he asked, looking back and forth between the four students.

Matt froze like a jack rabbit in the middle of a field, hoping Mr. McNair wouldn’t see the phone. Zoe took a breath, intending to explain the situation to the teacher. Aiden, noticing Matt’s distraction, made a last ditch attempt to get the phone from him and Carter, his eyes still on Aiden, felt his stomach drop, knowing exactly what was going to happen.
Dorothy Webb dabbed at her eyes with the Kleenex Kara had handed her, apologizing to the young woman.

“I’m not usually so emotional,” she said, laughing self-consciously. “Miss Grant has rules about this sort of thing, as you well know.”

Kara smirked, all too familiar with the NO CRYING AT WORK rule.

“But I’m just so relieved,” continued the personnel director. “You have no idea what we’ve been going through since Monday afternoon when legal delivered these MOUs, Kara. I called an emergency meeting of my leadership team ten minutes after reading them—it was that serious.” She glanced at her closed office door, whispering, “Salva has already begun an undercover search, looking through resumes submitted to our Careers at CatCo website over the last month to see if there was anyone remotely suitable to interview.”

Kara nodded sympathetically and smiled. “She should probably keep doing that,” she suggested. “I’ll vet them, of course, but Cat—I mean, Miss Grant—thinks we’ll eventually have to give away some of my less essential duties so I can focus on my new responsibilities. We were thinking someone a little more junior in title? Like an AAIII?” Kara leaned forward earnestly, adding, “Someone with the potential to grow into a more complex position.”

Dorothy laughed out loud and blew her nose. “So…another you, then? Because employees like you just plummet out of the sky like meteors, do they?”

Kara did a sharp double-take at Dorothy’s words and she was about to ask what the older woman meant by them when she felt Carter’s heart suddenly speed up followed by a tell-tale stomach drop. Her smile evaporated and she steadied herself on the edge of Dorothy’s desk, knowing something was wrong but not what, blind to all but the anxiety washing through her connection with Carter.

Dorothy noticed Kara’s distress immediately. “Kara, dear? Are you all right?”

Aiden reached over Matt’s shoulder to grab for the phone one last time, and three things happened all at once: Mr. McNair took a step toward the boys with one hand outstretched, sudden fear widening his eyes; Matt—startled by Aiden’s move—body-checked his friend; and Aiden—lighter than Matt—staggered hard. The heels of Aiden’s Chucks hit the bottom of the retaining wall and he lost his balance, flinging his arms wide as he fell backwards over the side. His blue eyes, round with terror, were the last thing Carter saw before he shot forward.

Instead of answering the personnel director, Kara shot out of her chair and went as white as a sheet. Her blue eyes, normally as bright as the sky, were as pale as milk.

Dorothy, alarmed, stood up, as well. “Kara? What’s wrong?”

Carter got to the wall before anyone else could move and he reached out without thinking, grasping Aiden by his flannel shirt, hands fisted in the soft fabric. Knowing only that he had to save him, Carter braced his knees against the inside of the retaining wall and heaved, twisting his body to the right with a roar that sounded wrenched from his toes.
Aiden’s momentum shifted as Carter swung him in an arc back over the wall and the blond boy hit the roof with a thud, the wind knocked out of him.

Carter had less than half a second to breathe a sigh of relief before he realized his terrible, terrible mistake.

As he, himself, toppled over the edge of the building and saw the asphalt of the parking lot rushing up to meet him, he had time for one thought, nearly drowned out by Zoe’s high-pitched shriek behind him.

*Oh, shit!*

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Dizziness, terror, shock, and pain flooded Kara’s connection to Carter just as Cat’s realization of what was happening and her resultant panic slammed into her brain and she dropped like a rock to the floor.

Dorothy cried out and hurried out from behind her desk.

“Kara!”

*Kara?* Cat’s heartbeat was erratic, her pulse thready. Kara tasted her wife’s bile on the back of her own tongue. *Carter—*

*I know,* she sent, rising from the floor in one fluid movement, hands curling into fists. *I’m on my way, Cat. Tell them I’m coming.*

Dorothy, in the midst of reaching down to help Kara up, took a step back from the young woman, recognition in her eyes.

“She sent, rising from the floor in one fluid movement, hands curling into fists. *I’m on my way, Cat. Tell them I’m coming.*

，“Use my balcony,” she said, gesturing to the door behind Kara that led to a much smaller but no less well-appointed version of Cat’s outdoor refuge. “No one will see you.”

Shocked, Kara snapped her head to look at Dorothy, questions in her eyes.

“Go,” said Dorothy, gesturing with one hand in a way that clearly mimicked flight. When Kara still failed to move, rooted to the spot by one too many surprises, Dorothy gave her a sad little shake of the head. “Honestly, who else could you possibly be?” In the next breath, she began shooing Kara toward the door. “Now, go! Save the day!”

Not able to wait one more second with Carter’s pain and Cat’s panic screaming through her body, Kara nodded once and pulled open the balcony door, almost ripping it from its hinges.

Dorothy waited until she saw the streak of red and blue she knew would be coming next and whispered, “Your secret’s safe with me…Supergirl.”

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Continued in *Negligence*
Lots of notes this time around:

1. I know I've slowed down. I caught up to myself, you see. When I started posting, I already had 7 chapters completed. I thought by giving myself two weeks between postings, I would keep myself from catching up to myself. Not so. Probably because chapter 9 comes in at over 25k words. Please know I am still writing and I will continue this story. Posting times will now be between 6 and 8 weeks, though. I apologize.

2. There are some canon characters included in the chapter but used in a non-canonical way. Remember that my AU shears off from canon after Bizarro, and that should help.

3. I wrote certain aspects of Kara's understanding of her sexuality before I saw any reference to Alex's S2 episodes. Any similarities are purely coincidental and follow my original mention of it in chapter 2, Negotiation.

4. LOTS of Original Characters (CatCo employees) in this chapter. I can't help myself. I'm addicted now. I love these people. To help you all visualize them, I have cast the roles from actual actors.

   Eric Chu = Tzi Ma
   Dorothy Webb = Lois Smith
   Alice Kens = Sara Rue
   Anjana Makhri = Archie Punjabi
   Alan McLaughlin = Ben Kinglsey
   Judy Simon = Sheila McCarthy

Uncast roles exist. Feel free to suggest someone for those if the mood strikes.

5. And last, but not least, thank you, as always, to Abydosdork for the wonderful and heart-wrenching banner and to fictorium for her amazing editing skills. I appreciate you both so much.
At two o’clock on the dot, Cat Grant made her entrance into the windowless boardroom on the thirty-third floor beloved by her CFO, Jonathan Marshall. Cat might be queen of CatCo Plaza, but Finance was its own fiefdom and Jonathan loved to hold court in this particular room. With its mahogany furniture and charcoal-gray accent colors, it was an unimaginative ode to power and money and Cat imagined it smelled faintly of testosterone, making her nose wrinkle delicately with disdain.

A wall of windows would have done much to improve the space but Jonathan insisted they would be more trouble than they were worth. Cat knew the decision had more to do with his love of PowerPoint presentations than any sensitivity to aesthetic or décor, and she barely kept her smirk in check when she saw the A/V remote at Jonathan’s right hand, ready to be employed. Clearly, a PowerPoint was in her immediate future.

Cat carried only her iPhone and Kara’s meticulously-prepared binder and when she entered, the men in the room stood.

“Cat—good to see you,” said Jonathan, his voice booming in the enclosed space.

“Good afternoon, Jonathan,” she said, nodding to him. A sweep of her end of the table showed Cat she had ice water, a pristine legal pad, and two new pens—her favorite brand—at her seat. That, she knew, was Kara’s doing—though done deftly through Alice Kens, Jonathan’s long-time assistant. Alice, she noted, was also standing, and Cat sought her out, giving her a nod and a small smile in acknowledgement of her attention to detail. The startled but brilliant answering grin she received from the redhead made her regret having never taken the time to acknowledge her before.

She turned her attention to the rest of the group and greeted them by name, looking at each of them as she did so. “Wei, Miriam, Kurt—a pleasure to see you, as always. Shall we begin?”

She took her seat and the others did as well—except for Alice, who leaned over Jonathan’s shoulder to open his binder for him before taking a seat on the periphery of the room. One of Cat’s eyebrows rose in response. Perhaps Alice would be a suitable candidate for the position she and Kara hoped to create after Kara completed her internship. She thought about conferring with Kara on the subject immediately, but a quick inspection of their connection showed the young woman had blocked traffic from her side.
Disappointed but cognizant of the possible reasons for the barrier, Cat made a note of the idea on her legal pad instead. Alice was a higher classification than they had originally considered for the as-yet imaginary position, but her skill was undeniable. And the woman might flourish with a change of scenery.

*Or some windows,* Cat thought sourly.

Cat’s opinions of Jonathan aside, he was extremely effective at his job, and she listened attentively as he gave a brief yet thorough overview of where CatCo stood financially. None of it was a surprise, of course; Kara’s binder contained exhaustive detail and, all in all, her brand was doing well. Cat’s diversification into multimedia and social media venues over a decade ago was certainly paying off and the regular appearance of Supergirl on its front page kept the Tribune from collapsing under the weight of its dinosaur status. Even still, she knew she would eventually have to rethink the decision to keep the failing paper—knowing she’d done so only for Kara’s sake and not because of any sentimentality about it being the first of her acquisitions. Although—she mused—perhaps that had been sentimentality of a different kind.

When Jonathan finished his overview, he gave a sharp nod to Kurt and Cat returned her attention to the room, sensing something off the agenda was about to be brought up. Kurt led into the main point gently enough but when he began detailing the world-wide economic fallout expected in the wake of Brexit and made reference to something he called “the previous Hellenic collapse,” Cat knew he was going after her Greek office in Theorias, a neglected neighborhood in Athens that overlooked the Temple of Athena. Cat had hand-picked the site based entirely on that one point.

“If I may interrupt?” she asked, narrowing her eyes slightly—not at Kurt, whom she suspected had been coerced into this confrontation, but at Jonathan. When Kurt trailed off, glancing at Jonathan as if seeking guidance, she knew she’d guessed correctly. “I’m giving Vasylios through Easter. I’m delaying my visit there until the first of May and I’ll make my decision then. End of discussion.”

Kurt raised both eyebrows in defeat, but he knew better than to argue. Wei seemed to approve of the plan—if Cat interpreted the deferential incline of her head correctly. She was a woman of few words but those she used often cut right to the heart of a matter. Miriam frowned slightly but also said nothing. She usually appreciated spirited debate and always disapproved of unilateral decisions; Cat had expected her to comment. Alice admirably kept her features impassive, though a minuscule widening of her eyes told Cat much.

Only Jonathan smirked.

“Cat, that’s not a sound decision. Theorias is hemorrhaging green—”

“Is it?” asked Cat mildly. She opened her binder to the section flagged in purple—Kara always coded possible ambushes and/or surprises in purple for some reason—and read from a teal Post-it note placed strategically under Jonathan’s downward-trending chart from last quarter. “Data from this quarter—though scant—show a slowing of losses there, which is exactly what we expected.”

Jonathan opened his mouth to argue but Cat forestalled him with a raised hand. “It could be artificial; I know. A dozen variables might be responsible, including our country’s contentious election. I want to see if the slowing continues.”

Jonathan snorted. “Why? Greece is done, Cat. Over. Whatever’s left there will be carved up by the EU, parcelled out to the highest bidders, and peeled apart until there’s nothing left but fishermen and thieves. Why should we keep Vasylios plugging away at it for one more quarter, let alone two? It doesn’t make any sense!”

Cat raised both eyebrows but didn’t respond to Jonathan directly. She looked, instead, at the rest of
his team. “Does anyone have anything to add? I want to be certain to address all your concerns.”

Again, Kurt proved her suspicions by remaining steadfastly silent. Wei shook her head sharply and Alice sat with her pen perched over her minutes, waiting for a response, a rapt hen in a burgundy skirt suit.

It was Miriam who finally spoke.

“Even with improvement, the bottom line is still projected to be a loss. A little, a lot—I’m not certain what difference it makes. Isn’t it more prudent to stem the tide sooner rather than later?”

“It may be more prudent fiscally, certainly,” agreed Cat. “But what about the human cost?”

Wei’s eyes sparkled but, again, she said nothing. Cat knew her seeming lack of participation in the discussion was deceptive; Wei Ma always waited for the perfect moment to contribute to any conversation.

Jonathan, on the other hand, laughed openly.

“The human cost? What are you—” He frowned and leaned forward, radiating ersatz paternal concern. “Cat, this isn’t like you. Does this have something to do with that ridiculous announcement you made at your Monday Strategy Meeting? Something about an internship for your prepubescent assistant?” He turned to look at Alice over his shoulder. “What’s her name? Carla?”

A seething rage rose in Cat’s veins like magma hissing beneath the Earth’s crust, but she kept it in check. For now.

“It’s Kara,” said Cat firmly. “And you’ve mistaken this meeting for an episode of Intervention, Jonathan. How I came to this decision is not at issue here.” She looked at Miriam and gave her a serpentine smile. “Miriam was right: the financial cost of the losses in Greece is negligible—whatever the final number turns out to be.”

Cat turned back to Jonathan. “CatCo can and will absorb it without a single tremor to its foundation. In the meantime, by proceeding cautiously and with loyalty to our partners, we earn respect and hopefully loyalty in return.”

Jonathan scoffed, but Cat persisted. “Can we afford to have our partners in the European Union turn against us? During my conference call with Rome this morning, Giani was openly defiant.” She smirked. “Granted, that’s not too far removed from his usual behavior, however, it’s earned him a one-on-one with me in December, before his complaints can turn too many heads. My time is better spent soothing a potential outbreak of rebellion than in watching a wound showing signs of healing.”

Jonathan’s eyes flashed. “Are you—”

He was going to ask Are you serious? but even he knew not to be that reckless with Cat Grant. She was always serious…and usually as ruthless and as cutthroat as he was about these sorts of things. Lately, he’d been noticing a change in his fearless leader—a dulling of her finely-honed business acumen he had attributed to her age. Now he wondered if there wasn’t a less obvious reason. A reason named Supergirl.

He narrowed his eyes at Cat, considering her carefully. “A little truth, justice, and the American way, eh, Cat?” he asked finally. He leaned back in his chair, cocksure and condescending—a dangerous combination. “I guess if the Queen of All Media was going to chase a little skirt, that’d be the one, right?”
The question detonated in the conference room like a bomb.

Kurt physically leaned away from Jonathan, not wanting to be caught in the crossfire, and Miriam looked at her boss sharply, clearly outraged he’d ask so ridiculous a question in a professional setting.

Wei broke her silence finally and hissed at him, exclaiming “Liúmáng!” Cat recognized the curse. Roughly translated, it meant something along the lines of pervert, but it was exclusively used to admonish men who were being inappropriate with women. Cat appreciated the word’s precision.

Alice’s hand shot to her mouth in a move not unlike something Kara would do, head swiveling back and forth between her boss and her boss’s boss, horrified.

Slowly, every eye in the room turned to Cat, awaiting an explosion that never came.

Instead, Cat looked pointedly at Alice and said, her voice even and unruffled, “Please be sure to include Jonathan’s questions in the minutes. Word for word.”

Alice nodded hesitantly and lowered her pen to her pad just as Cat turned her gaze on Jonathan.

“I want to be sure Ms. Lane in our legal department has accurate information.”

Jonathan, realizing the magnitude of his mistake, raised his hands in a gesture of surrender. “Cat, I didn’t mean—”

Cat’s flashing eyes cut Jonathan’s attempt to backpedal off at the knees.

“You meant every word,” she said narrowly. “You may not have meant to say them aloud.”

She stared her CFO down, daring him to dig the hole deeper. Jonathan glowered at her from across the table, but wisely said nothing more.

Cat had heard worse, of course. She hadn’t risen to power in a male-dominated field unscathed by the inappropriate behavior of “the boys of the backroom.” The difference now was that she didn’t have to put up with it, or them. She held all the cards and putting her Blahnik-clad foot down in defense of Supergirl’s honor? Well, she didn’t see a downside to that.

Gloating, she was just about to adjourn the meeting early when she felt a flash of dread rip through her, followed by her heartbeat tripling in time. She braced herself on the edge of the conference room table and swallowed thickly, staring at nothing, trying to make sense of the feeling.

Then her stomach dropped while her anxiety and her body temperature rose, seemingly in tandem. She didn’t know what to do. She’d never felt anything like it and she wondered what was happening. Was she having a heart attack?

Half a second later, she shot out of her chair so abruptly, Jonathan jumped at the movement even though he was twenty feet across the room. A sick feeling came over Cat and it took a moment for her to realize it wasn’t her own. As she stood there, pale and trembling, the source of her distress became clear—Carter was in danger. She lurched for her phone and knocked over the water glass at her seat instead, clearly rattled.

Alice stood, driven by genuine concern for the woman, while everyone else in the room seemed rooted to their chairs.

White with anguish, Cat—now in possession of her phone—muttered a hoarse “Excuse me,” and
turned and bolted for the conference room door. Dizziness swamped her as she staggered into the hallway and she felt what remained of her lunch hurtling upward, seemingly from her toes.

Alice ran after the CEO, snagging a silver wastebasket on the way out of the room. She reached Cat just in time.

When Cat finished vomiting, she sagged against the wall, holding herself upright but just barely.

*Kara?* she sent, panicked, relieved to find the barriers across their bond gone. She didn’t think she had the wherewithal to break through them and—until this very moment—she hadn’t realized something like that might be possible. *Carter—*

Supergirl’s strength and determination flowed through the Daat Kyashar, buoying Cat and mitigating the terror that seemed to have claimed her every bone and organ.

*I know*, sent Kara. *I’m on my way, Cat. Tell them I’m coming.*

Cat moaned with relief and Alice Kens, tentatively patting Cat’s back in what she hoped was a comforting way, mistook the sound for pain.

“Let’s get you somewhere private, Miss Grant,” she said softly, glancing back toward the conference room door, hoping the useless executives were all still sitting in their chairs, blinking at each other like owls, baffled by what had just happened. It would give her some desperately needed time.

She continued to hold the wastebasket at the ready and gently supported CatCo’s reigning queen with her left arm, guiding her forward until they reached an intersection. Alice led Cat to the left, through two unmarked doorways, and down another short hallway until they reached what was, apparently, a little used but well-appointed lounge. They met no one along the way.

“It’s a lactation room,” Alice explained as she helped Cat into an overstuffed chair. She placed the wastebasket nearby and returned to the door, locking it from the inside. “We don’t have anyone pumping this month, so you won’t be disturbed.”

The sitting room had been designed for comfort and utility both and contained a rocking chair, the chair Cat now occupied, a fully-equipped workstation, a Bluetooth speaker, and a full-sized refrigerator. Alice hurried to the refrigerator and opened it, retrieving a bottle of water which she handed to Cat without comment. Then she picked up the little wastebasket and carried it through another door, which she shut quietly behind her.

After a moment, Cat heard a toilet flush and the sound of running water. She took several sips from the bottle Alice had given her, relieved she could hold them down, then pressed it first to her temple, and then to the back of her neck. She clutched her phone, knuckles white with dread as she waited for the call she knew would come. Like a tongue probing a sore tooth, she returned again and again to her connection with Carter, feeling his pain and shock and trying, with limited success, to send him comfort while also keeping her panic from him.

One question played in a loop in her mind: *What happened to my son?*

*I’m here, Cat, but I can’t go in until they call you,* sent Kara, and Cat could feel her restless pacing and the fierce, frustrated need to act coiled in her every muscle. *Are you safe?*

Cat tasted Kara’s desperation, vinegary and acrid. Her need to be in two places at once was overwhelming and she could be neither, trapped hellishly between them, relying upon the Daat Kyashar to bridge the gaps between her and those she loved.
I'm fine, Cat sent in return, just as desperate, just as fierce. Stay there. Find our son, Kara. He’s all that matters. Protect him. Please….

She closed her eyes against the prickling of tears she felt and re-doubled her efforts to send love and reassurance to Carter, relieved she could still feel his heartbeat inside her, light and fast, but strong. Whatever else had happened, he was alive, and she held onto that with all her might.

I will, Maalkhati, sent Kara and she said the words as if they were a sacred vow. As long as blood or breath remain.

Alice returned from the restroom and placed the freshly-cleaned wastebasket near Cat again, just in case.

“Is there anyone I can call for you, Miss Grant?” she asked softly, eyes filled with compassion and sympathy even though she’d just washed the remnants of Cat’s lunch out of a trash can. It was almost more kindness than Cat could bear. “Should I call Kara or—”

Cat shook her head. “She’s not available,” she said, her voice still hoarse. “Will you call my car service? Do you have—”

Alice nodded. “Kara’s very thorough,” she said, heading to the workstation. She booted up the computer and logged into her account. “She emailed it to me this morning.” Her fingers flew over the keyboard and she scrolled downward in her email inbox for a few seconds until she found the message she was looking for. “I’ll call immediately,” she said, snatching up the receiver from the phone on the desk.

Cat was just about to thank her when her iPhone began to buzz in her hand. She answered on the second ring, knowing it had to be Carter’s school.

“Cat Grant,” she said, hoping she sounded professional and functional rather than how she felt, which was anything but.

“Miss Grant, this is Judy Simon from Carter’s school. We met at the open house at the beginning of the school year.”

Cat nodded, tensing automatically. Judy Simon, PhD, was Carter’s new principal. She’d started at the school just this year. “I remember,” she said, and her mind supplied an image of a tall, thin woman with short, ash-blonde hair and warm, fawn-colored eyes. “What can I do for you?” It was infuriating, this game—pretending not to know something was desperately wrong with Carter when all she could feel was her baby’s pain and confusion.

Dr. Simon hesitated and Cat scowled. “Miss Grant, there’s been an accident and Carter has been injured—”

“What?” Cat stood. “What kind of accident? Is he all right?”

Alice looked up from her own call, alarmed.

“He’s conscious and talking,” said the principal calmly. “So far, we suspect a broken arm. We’ll know more when the ambulance arri—”

“Ambulance?” Cat felt her knees buckle and she dropped back into the chair, unable to stop the tears she’d been fighting. They slipped down her cheeks unchecked. “Why does he need an ambulance? What happened?” she demanded, a mother’s panic driving her voice higher than usual.
“Miss Grant, Carter…fell. He was in science class and another boy got too close to the edge of the Lower School’s roof, where they were completing their egg-drop projects. The boy tripped and began to fall over the side of the building when Carter grabbed him and pulled him to safety. He…” Cat heard the deep breath indicating the principal’s hesitate and regret. “Miss Grant, Carter fell off the roof while saving the other boy.”

First, Cat froze, paralyzed by shock. Then cold terror washed over her and she shook as if she would fall apart.

“My son fell off the roof of a building?” she breathed, unable to fathom such a thing.

Alice—just finishing her call—could only gasp at Cat’s words, but they jolted Kara into action.

Cat, tell them I’m here. Tell them you sent me. I’ll find him. I’ll take care of him. I promise you.

Kara wasn’t about to wait one more second to find their son and Cat, feeling dazed and powerless, loved her for it—with every fiber of her being.

“Miss Grant—” began Dr. Simon, but Cat cut her off, hearing the faint sound of sirens in the background of the call, hearing their haunting wail increase in volume as they sped closer to the school.

“Is that the ambulance?” she asked. She gripped the phone with two hands, still shaking. Alice stood silently nearby, aching with the need to help.

“Yes, but—”

“Who’s with Carter now?”

“Mr. McNair, his science teacher, and our school nurse—”

Cat steamrolled over the principal as she spoke, wanting to be done with this conversation so she could be in the town car already. “My assistant—Kara Danvers—she should be there any minute. I sent her to pick up Carter today. She’ll stay with Carter in the ambulance and I’ll meet them at the hospital—”

“Miss Grant, I—I don’t know if that will be possible. She’s not on the medical permissions list—”

Cat Grant suffered the slings and arrows of incompetence at CatCo on a daily basis without flinching but when someone’s incompetence threatened to keep Kara from their son, she had zero tolerance for it. She stood.

“Dr. Simon, I will not repeat myself. Either Kara is in that ambulance with my son or tomorrow I send my entire legal department to your door with a negligence lawsuit so brutal, your children’s children will curse the day you ever took this job.” She stalked over to the door to the lactation lounge, unlocked it, and jerked it open, realizing as she walked into the hallway she had no idea where she was going.

Alice Kens was way ahead of her. She slipped in front of Cat and hurried forward in the correct direction, glancing over her shoulder to make sure the CEO was following. She was.

“Of course, Miss Grant, but I have a responsibility to the school—”

Cat closed her eyes briefly and took a deep breath, trying to rein in her emotional response. Carter’s heartbeat, steady and strong, still beat beneath her own and, soon, Kara would be with him. She
needed to relax and take control of the situation. To start acting instead of reacting.

“Make a notation on the form that—due to an emergency situation—you acquired verbal consent from me via telephone to allow my domestic partner, Kara Danvers, parental rights over Carter’s care in my absence,” instructed Cat, smirking slightly when those words caused Alice to inhale sharply. To her credit, the executive assistant kept her pace without a single additional indication that she’d heard Cat’s admission. “Tomorrow, after Carter has received medical care and I am certain he is safe and comfortable, I will come to the school personally and sign whatever forms you wish. Will that suffice?”

Judy Simon sighed, relaxing a little herself. “It will, Miss Grant,” she said. A sudden flurry of activity and several voices erupted behind the principal and she added, “Miss Danvers is here, Miss Grant. Do you want to speak to her?”

Cat felt more tears well in her eyes at the news and she shook her head, dashing them away. “Take her to Carter, please. He needs her more than I do right now.”

“Of course,” said the principal and Cat heard her brief, muffled conversation with Kara. “I’ll escort Miss Danvers personally, and then I’ll meet you both at Sterling Memorial.”

“Thank you,” said Cat and she disconnected the call, surprised to find herself outside the main elevators on the thirty-third floor. One of the cars opened seconds later and Alice held the door for her as she entered, following after her with business-like efficiency and pressing the button for the fortieth floor.

“Your car and driver are downstairs, Miss Grant,” she said, “but I knew you’d want your bag and your wallet—for the hospital. You’ll have a lot of forms to fill out and they’ll need to see your ID before they let you into the emergency room because Carter’s a minor.” Nervous, she stared straight ahead, not daring to look at Cat as she said the rest. “Of course, I won’t say a word about anything that’s happened—not at the meeting with Mr. Marshall or afterward—except—”

Here, she glanced over at Cat, eyes round and apprehensive, but also pleased. “Can I just say how happy I am for you and Kara, Miss Grant?” She clutched at the gold herringbone chain at her neck, hurrying to add, “I won’t tell another living soul—your secret’s safe with me—but I—I—I think you make a lovely couple. And I hope Carter is okay. I really do.”

Alice blushed and Cat only had time to shake her head at the woman’s continued kindness before the elevator opened with a harsh ding and the redhead darted through the door, holding it for the CEO as she rushed out. Forgetting everything but her need to see Carter whole and safe, Cat strode across the bullpen and into her office, retrieving her blue Fendi handbag and her sunglasses. She made a quick stop at Kara’s desk, as well, knowing she had nothing with her at the school. She saw Kara’s leather saddle-bag purse jammed into a half-open file cabinet drawer and she went around Kara’s desk to get it, slipping her tablet and notepad inside and making sure her cell phone was there, too. Neither one of them, she knew, would be returning to their desks tonight.

Winn, working on a server capacity issue from his desk, watched Cat’s movements with a curious frown. As she stalked away with Kara’s bag slung securely over her shoulder, a rusty set of gears in the back of his mind ground to life and slowly began to turn.

Instead of following Cat, Alice headed to Cat’s personal elevator and pressed the call button, a woman on a mission. When it arrived, she held the door open for Cat again and followed her into the car, surprising the CEO.

“With all due respect, Miss Grant,” said Alice, forestalling the expected protest, “Kara would never
forgive me if I didn’t see you to your town car personally. So that’s what I intend to do—even if it gets me fired.” She stared straight ahead again, not trusting herself to look at the Queen of All Media. She was terrified of what she might see in those shrewd, discerning eyes. Instead, she lifted her chin, a defiant frown sharpening her normally soft features.

Cat laid her hand gently on Alice’s forearm and the executive assistant looked down at it in shock. Everyone in CatCo knew Cat Grant did not do personal space.

“Alice, you have remained kind, accommodating, and professional through difficult circumstances,” said Cat softly but sincerely. “Having you accompany me to my car is, frankly, a relief.” She smiled again and Alice tentatively returned it. “Besides,” added the CEO, retrieving her hand and rolling her eyes, “Kara would never forgive me if I terminated one of CatCo’s best and brightest over a two-minute elevator ride. Consider yourself safe.”

Alice sighed, relieved. “Thank you, Miss Grant,” she said.

“No,” replied Cat, genuinely appreciative. “Thank you. For everything you’ve done today.”

Alice nodded timidly in acknowledgement and did her best to hide her grin.

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Kara followed the school’s principal to Carter, her face closed and ominous, like a thunderhead on the horizon. She wanted to run ahead, to find him herself, but she was here as Kara Danvers, Cat Grant’s assistant and “domestic partner,” not as Supergirl, and she was well aware—even in the midst of all this worry and chaos—how these different parts she played affected the people around her. Blending the two too much or too often would put both identities at risk.

As they hurried toward Carter’s location, Kara noticed the school’s corridors were unusually silent and empty. The effect on her mood was off-putting and foreboding.

“We have the school on lockdown until the ambulance leaves,” said Dr. Simon, seemingly reading the reason for Kara’s uneasiness as if it were printed on her skin. “It arrived just before you did….”

They reached a double-door at the end of the wide corridor and the principal hurried her pace, pushing through one side of it, leading them outside into the late afternoon sunshine.

“He’ll be just around this corner, Miss Danvers,” she said and Kara felt the truth of that statement, knowing she was getting closer to Carter with every step she took. She practically vibrated with the need to see him—to hold him in her arms and make sure he was okay—and every second that kept her from him made her want to scream or incinerate things with her heat-vision. Lots of things. Lots and lots.

They turned the corner and Kara saw the EMTs lifting Carter onto a gurney. He was immobilized on a spine board and his left arm was splinted to his torso. He grimaced with obvious pain when they set him down and braced himself for more as they began securing him for transport. Kara was relieved to see he did not have an IV. That meant the EMTs didn’t suspect anything more serious than broken bones—like a brain hemorrhage or internal bleeding.

“Carter,” she breathed, pushing through a small crowd of onlookers.

Carter heard Kara but was unable to turn toward her. Instead, he reached out to her as much as he was able with his uninjured arm.
“Mom,” he said, his voice strong and insistent despite his pallor. He wanted so much to reassure Kara that he’d forgotten he’d never called her that before. “Mom, I’m okay. I’m okay. Really!”

Kara reached him in an instant, clasping his hand in both of hers, smiling down at him on the gurney as tears dripped down her face and off her nose. His pain and shock barreled into her as soon as they touched and she instinctively drew it into herself, trading it for love and warmth and comfort, all she had.

Carter’s face, pinched and miserable, relaxed instantly.

“I’m here,” Kara said, overwhelmed. The panic and desperation of the last thirty minutes finally began to bleed out of her, replaced by relief and a joy so magnificent, she felt like singing. “I’m here,” she repeated.

“I knew you’d come,” he said and his eyes fluttered momentarily with exhaustion. All the excitement had clearly tired him out and, now that Kara was there, the adrenaline still coursing through his veins began to fade.

Kara lowered her glasses while the EMTs were busy elsewhere and gave Carter a quick onceover with her x-ray vision. The only injury she saw was a broken arm—serious but not life-threatening.

Cat, she sent, elated, Cat, he’s fine! His left arm is broken above the wrist but that’s all. He’s fine. I promise.

In the town car, speeding toward the hospital, Cat covered her mouth with one hand and sobbed. She felt what Kara was doing for Carter—how she was substituting love and gentleness for his anxiety and suffering, patiently erasing the jangling, grinding discomfort from his body as if it had never existed—and she cried harder. All mothers wished they could take away their child’s pain and Kara had made it possible, had given them this unimaginable gift, this unheard of ability.

Cat Grant had never felt as safe or as loved as she did with Kara Danvers and she didn’t believe she would ever find words perfect enough to let the young woman know how she felt, even if she spent the rest of her life searching for them.

I love you, Kara, she sent, giving her emotions a freer rein than usual, her defenses down. Thank you so much.

Kara, unable to respond, shook her head, tears still streaming down her face. Carter looked up at her, worried.

“Please don’t cry,” he pleaded. “I’m really okay.”

Kara leaned over and kissed Carter’s forehead at the edge of the strap that held him to the spine board.

“I know,” she whispered, her voice strangled by happy tears. “We know,” she added and Carter knew she meant his mom was listening. Kara squeezed his uninjured hand as the EMTs finished securing him for the short trip to the hospital.

“We’re ready to go, ma’am,” said the younger EMT, a strawberry blond with a patchy beard and compassionate eyes.

Kara nodded and let go of Carter’s hand while they loaded him into the back of the ambulance. The young man climbed up after him and turned around, offering Kara a hand up.
Kara took his hand and let him “help” her into the vehicle. He motioned for Kara to sit next to Carter on the narrow bench alongside him before pounding the spot over the window leading to the cab in front.

“No sirens today, buddy,” he said to Carter sadly, grabbing a clipboard off the wall before taking his own seat. The ambulance slowly made its way out of the school’s parking lot and headed toward Sterling Memorial. “Looks like you busted up your arm pretty good but we only use the sirens when someone’s in real distress and, luckily, that isn’t you.”

Carter tried to look at the EMT but, with his head restricted like it was, he didn’t have a great angle.

“That’s okay,” he said to the ceiling of the ambulance. “I think I’ve had enough excitement for today.”

The EMT grinned. “I heard you took a header off a two-story building after pulling another kid to safety,” he said, raising both eyebrows, impressed. “You trying to get Supergirl’s attention or something? You after her job?”

Carter scoffed. “No way!” he said, outraged by the suggestion. “No one can ever take Supergirl’s place!” He winked at Kara, making her laugh.

The EMT laughed, too. “Well, you should probably stay off of roofs for a while, then. Don’t want her getting the wrong idea….”

“Dude, you don’t know my other mother very well, do you? I’ll be forty before I’m allowed in a building with more than one floor again.” Carter scowled, obviously expecting the worst. “She might not even let me up on curbs for a while.” He sighed. “I’m in so much trouble.”

“Nah,” replied the EMT, knowingly. “Trust me, buddy, all your moms care about is that you’re gonna be okay—which you are. Well, that—and they aren’t gonna want you falling off any more roofs.” He looked at Kara and raised both eyebrows at her. “Right, Mom?” he asked.

Kara nodded at the man and then looked at Carter, eyes clear and serious. “You didn’t do anything wrong, Carter,” she said. “Your mom is going to hug you so hard when she sees you—I promise. We’re both so relieved it’s just a broken arm.”

“See?” The young man smiled at his patient. “What’d I tell you? Moms are all the same.”

He went back to his paperwork and left Kara and Carter to themselves. Kara sat as close as she could to Carter’s side and stroked his forehead soothingly, smiling down at him, relieved beyond her ability to express that he was okay—alive and relatively whole.

“What’d I tell you?” Carter asked softly, nervous. “Called you ‘Mom’, I mean? I know no one’s supposed to know yet and I—”

Kara melted, her eyes bright with emotion. “It’s okay,” she assured him. “It’s very okay.”

“Then…can I keep doing it? Because I don’t care who knows.”

Kara nodded. “If your mom says it’s okay—”

If? Cat’s incredulousness and irritation were loud and clear through the Daat Kyashar. Don’t be ridiculous, Kara. Honestly. Why would I— When have I ever— If? Really?

Kara ignored Cat’s sputtering outrage and continued, “—and if it’s just at home or in private for now
—until your mom and I get some things settled at work—then yes.” She gave Carter a watery smile and her voice broke. “I would be honored if you called me ‘Mom.’” She leaned over and hugged Carter as best she could, pressing her cheek to his forehead and closing her eyes.

Carter might not know how deeply moved and honored Kara truly was, but Cat certainly did, and she began to cry again in the back of the town car.

Between Carter doing a half-gainer off the roof of his school and this little emotional display, I’m going to look like a post-confessional Tammy Faye Bakker by the time I arrive at the hospital, complained Cat sourly, but Kara knew the bitterness for what it was—a way to deflect deep emotion.

Instead of confronting her about it, Kara asked Tammy Faye who? She didn’t understand the reference.

Cat chuckled. Another gift of the dismal and soulless Eighties, she explained. Do yourself a favor and don’t bother to look her up. She ended her life an icon revered by many a gay man, but the scandal that made her a household name will only sully your opinion of humanity as a whole.

Kara chuckled, not certain that was possible.

For humanity’s sake, I hope that’s true, replied Cat. All the same, perhaps we shouldn’t borrow trouble, hmm?

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Impatiently attaching her visitor badge so it was visible, Cat hurried through the main doors of the Emergency Department, startled when she immediately heard her name spoken, both aloud and in her head.

“Cat!” Maalkhati….

Her eyes snapped up, searching, and found Kara’s in a heartbeat. In the next breath, she dropped both of their bags and flung herself into Kara’s waiting arms, holding onto the young woman with what remained of her strength.

“Kara,” she whispered, only just realizing—that it was gone—that she’d been suffering from separation sickness all this time, too. She clung to Kara for another breath, sending a flash flood of love through their connection, and then pulled back, eyes filling with worry. “Where’s Carter?”

“In a room around the corner,” said Kara, reaching down to snag both of the abandoned bags. As she rose, she took Cat’s hand and tugged her down the hospital corridor. “They cleared him for spine and neck injuries but they want to take him right to x-ray for his arm,” she said, trying not to roll her eyes too hard. Just because she already knew what they would find didn’t mean she could tell anyone. She was having a difficult time being patient, though. “I asked them to wait. I knew you’d want to see him first and he wants to see you, too.”

“Mom!”

Cat spun and saw Carter sitting up in his hospital bed. She let go of Kara’s hand and ran to her son, gathering her precious boy awkwardly into her arms, banging her hip into the safety rail separating them. She ignored the flicker of pain and focused only on Carter, kissing his head and forehead, and fussing over him in a way no one who knew the Queen of All Media would have believed had they seen it. Finally, she pulled back to look into his eyes, running her hands through his hair and over his shoulders as if trying to prove to herself he really was okay.
“Are you all right?” she asked, eyes frantic as she looked him over, patting him down, searching for additional injuries. Before Carter could answer her, she answered herself, saying, “You’re all right. Thank God. You’re all right.” She saw the temporary sling holding his broken arm to his torso and it ignited an unexpected explosion of anger. “Carter Jefferson Grant, what were you thinking?” she snapped and both his and Kara’s faces crumpled. “Do you know how lucky you are you only broke your arm? You could have been seriously injured!” she cried. “You could have been killed—”

Kara put her hand on Cat’s shoulder and whispered, “Cat.”

Just that, just her name. One softly spoken word between her and the terror fueling her out-of-control temper. Cat stopped and closed her eyes, reaching up to grasp Kara’s hand, running her thumb lightly over the backs of her fingers.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, fighting a rising tide of tears. She opened shining eyes and leaned forward, kissing Carter’s forehead again. “Oh, Carter, I’m sorry!” She pressed her cheek to his temple for a moment and caught her breath. She pulled back again and cupped his face in her hands, looking directly into his worried brown eyes. “I was terrified and I suppose anger is easier to express than fear.” Her voice broke and the tears she fought threatened to spill down her cheeks in waves she thought might never stop. “I don’t know what I’d do if I lost you,” she said. “I love you so much.”

Carter Grant knew his mother loved him. It had been the one constant in his life—the steadfast support and tenderhearted care of Catherine Jane Grant, the human soul protected by the Queen of All Media persona she wore like battle-armor. He’d seen her love expressed in so many different ways over the years and he’d never questioned it. His mother loved him. He loved her. Period, end of story.

Now—bound as they were by the Daat Kyashar—he didn’t just know his mother loved him; he felt it. It was always there. Like the gentle hum of the engine on a long car trip or the reassuring constancy of his own heartbeat, Cat’s love for him was a reverberation he felt in every cell, singular and sweet, and he understood her fear and the anger it inspired so much better than he would have before.

“I’m sorry, Mom,” he said sincerely, searching for forgiveness in the troubled jade of his mother’s eyes. “I’m sorry I worried you.” He gave her a tentative smile. “I love you, too. I really do.”

Cat smiled back at her son and the radiance of it took Kara’s breath away. Before she could say a word, however, a short, curvy woman in raspberry-colored scrubs and a tall, lanky, black man walked a wheelchair into the room.

“I see our missing mother has arrived,” said the woman cheerfully. “Welcome, Mom. As you can see, Carter is doing terrific for someone who fell off a building.”

If the nurse recognized Cat—and who in National City wouldn’t?—she didn’t give any indication of it.

“I’m Claudia, Carter’s nurse. This is Desmond,” she said, introducing the man with the wheelchair. “He’s going to take Carter and a guest over to x-ray so we can see what we’re dealing with. You two can flip for it or arm wrestle or whatever you do to settle these sorts of questions.” She winked and Carter laughed at the absurd image of Cat Grant arm wrestling anyone, let alone Supergirl. “In the meantime, I’m going to get some balls rolling on this end so we can get you out of here in a reasonable amount of time. Does that sound like a plan?”

You go, sent Kara. I’ve already “been to x-ray” with him. She rolled her eyes a little and Cat stifled
her grim amusement.

“I’ll go,” Cat announced and her iPhone began to buzz insistently. Cat looked at the display and frowned. She handed the offending thing to Kara and looked at her imploringly. “Darling, would you mind rescheduling my appointments—today’s and tomorrow’s? I’m due at the station any minute to tape that piece on—”

Kara, round-eyed, suddenly remembered what time it was and what day. She looked at Cat’s phone and saw Eric Chu’s name. Cat was, in fact, fifteen minutes late for makeup. She was due to tape a three-minute interview about irregularities in several local Republican campaigns with Sara Ransdell, Channel 10’s election analyst. It was supposed to run as part of the six o’clock broadcast. After that, she was scheduled to tape an appearance on The Rachel Maddow Show via remote uplink.

“Go,” said Kara, waving Cat away, already transitioning into work mode. “I’ll take care of it.” She answered Cat’s phone while reaching for her own phone and her tablet at the same time. She commandeered the powder-blue guest chair in the corner of Carter’s room and began apologizing to the agitated producer, trying to keep her voice low so she wouldn’t disturb Carter’s nurse as she went about her business.

Knowing everything was in the best hands, Cat focused on getting Carter the care he needed.

That was all that mattered now.

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They left the hospital two and a half hours later, after a brief consultation with the pediatric orthopedic surgeon (which Kara was convinced was just a bit of celebrity rubbernecking on the part of the doctor). Carter had acquired a fiberglass cast (he picked one in Supergirl blue) and a prescription for Motrin. They also had an effusive in-person apology from Dr. Simon, who’d met them at the ER as promised, armed with a sheaf of paperwork for Cat to review. Chief among the pages was the school’s insurance information (because of course the school would be covering all of Carter’s medical costs), with her personal vow that such a horrific accident would never happen again.

Kara, agitated by one too many contentious telephone calls in pursuit of clearing Cat’s schedule for the next thirty-six hours, locked onto Dr. Simon’s vow like a heat-seeking missile, asking exactly how she was planning to keep such a thing from happening again.

The principal paled under Kara’s intense gaze. “Excuse me?”

“You said it wouldn’t happen again.” Kara’s voice turned cold and dark, like iron, and she lowered it a notch or two to keep Carter from hearing her. “You’re making a promise to keep other people’s children safe but it was our son that fell, our son that almost died.” She glowered at the tall woman, hands reflexively curling into fists at her side. “I want to know what you’re going to do about it.”

Cat stepped closer to Kara and took her hand, lacing their fingers together. While she loved Kara and her galaxy-wide protective streak equally, she didn’t want Carter’s principal jumping to any caped conclusions, no matter how accurate they were.

“Everything in my power, Miss Danvers,” said Dr. Simon sincerely. “In fact, I would welcome your input. Would you be willing to meet with our faculty and staff to discuss options? At your convenience, of course. I don’t want to take you away from Carter or Miss Grant when they need you.”
Kara hesitated. She hadn’t considered she might be asked to offer input. In fact, it seemed there were a lot of things she hadn’t considered regarding becoming Carter’s second mother, not the least of which was being known as such by people outside their family. She glanced at Cat, unsure of what to do, or how comfortable Cat would be with her stepping into a more publicly-active role in Carter’s care.

Cat felt Kara’s uncertainty and tightened her hold on Kara’s hand. “You know how difficult my schedule is better than I do, darling,” she said softly. “And it would put my mind at ease knowing one of us was a part of the discussion…..”

We were never going to be able to keep this—us—under wraps for long, were we? sent Kara sheepishly. Alex’s prediction last night of a media blitz within a week seemed overly generous all of a sudden, especially after schools and hospitals and medical permissions forms.

Cat’s gaze turned wistful and loving. It doesn’t appear so, no, she sent, smiling gently.

And you’re okay with this—with Carter’s teachers and friends and the PTA knowing? With me making decisions and answering questions and being—

Carter’s other mother? Cat wanted to laugh at the wave of mild shock that buzzed through their connection, but instead, she sent a wash of conviction to reassure Kara. There’s no one I trust more, she sent and Kara felt the truth of that statement as if it were etched into her bones. Her slow, answering smile warmed Cat like the sun.

Kara turned to look at the principal. “Yes, of course, Dr. Simon. Email the dates when you know them and I’ll make every effort to be there.”

In the town car, Carter sat between his mothers, tucked under Cat’s arm like a chick under a hen’s wing. He fell fast asleep before they’d even traveled a block.

“So much for family dinner night,” said Cat quietly as Carter snored lightly against her. “He was so excited, too, darling. I was going to make pasta again and he was going to bake three dozen chocolate chip cookies for you.”

“Awww,” whispered Kara, overcome by the sweetness of the now-unfeasible plan. She ran her fingers through Carter’s hair, careful not to wake him. “I’ll order out for all of us—something easy to eat with one hand…..”

Cat smirked. There’s pepperoni pizza in my future again, isn’t there? she asked as Kara reached for her tablet. Just then, both of their phones began to ring at the same time.

“It’s Anjana,” said Cat, bewildered, looking at the display on the screen. She couldn’t imagine why the broadcast division’s chief would be calling her so late on a Wednesday—unless she wanted to follow up with Cat about her canceled elections piece.

“Anjana,” said Cat, after swiping the answer bar on her phone. “I apologize for canceling on Sara with such short notice but—”

“Cat,” interrupted the division chief. “This isn’t about that. Sara’s fine.” She paused before adding, “I don’t think you are, though. Twitter and Facebook are blowing up right now with a story about Carter saving some kid’s life?”

Cat frowned. “He did, but surely the school didn’t—”
Kara looked at her phone and was even more confused. “Winn?” she asked, answering on the third ring.

“Kara—what’s going on?” asked Winn, sounding as anxious and flustered as Kara had ever heard him. “Alice Kens just stationed two security guards outside the elevators up here and she’s giving orders for at least six others to be stationed in the lobby. Your phone and Miss Grant’s phone are both ringing off the hook—and have been all afternoon—and I’ve seen at least two division chiefs, the editor of the Tribune, and the President of the Board in the last hour.” He lowered his voice. “Is it another takeover?”

Kara turned wide eyes toward Cat. “What? No! Not that I know of.” She opened her tablet and jabbed at the icon for her work email account, urging it to load faster. “Alice Kens? From Finance? Are you sure? I don’t know why—”

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At Kara’s mention of the CFO’s assistant, Cat looked up from her own call and sent Kara a series of over-bright images through the Daat Kyashar, bringing her up to speed in the fastest way she knew how. They featured Alice Kens coming to Cat’s rescue a number of times that afternoon and ended with Alice’s good wishes for the two of them as a couple.

“How do I just say how happy I am for you and Kara, Miss Grant?” Alice asked in the memory, clutching at her necklace, a look of earnest sincerity on her face. “I won’t tell another living soul—your secret’s safe with me—but I—I—I think you make a lovely couple. And I hope Carter is okay. I really do.”

Cat hoped Kara’s call wasn’t water cooler gossip about their relationship. Alice had said she wouldn’t tell anyone, but people had been known to lie about that sort of thing before.

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“Oh,” said Kara, now understanding, blinking as Cat’s memories faded out of her mind’s eye. Her heart couldn’t decide between beating like the rotor of a helicopter and not beating at all. “Oh my God.” Her inbox sprang open in front of her and Kara saw it contained just over two hundred new messages, most of them sent within the last forty minutes, and fully ninety percent of them meant for Cat. She’d only been copied because she was Cat’s assistant. Kara read them as quickly as she could, her eyes growing wider with each one. “Oh my God,” she repeated.

“What?” snapped Winn, still waiting on the line. “What is it? Is it a super friends thing? Is it a takeover? What...is...it...?” His voice faded out as something caught his attention on his end of the world. “Uh, Kara? Where are you?”

“Why?” She’d almost blurted I’m in the town car with Cat! but caught herself at the last possible second, the words still tingling on her lips. “Because I think you need to turn on the news—and not ours. Channel 3’s. Like, now.”

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“There’s nothing official from us or from the school as far as we can tell, but it’s a school, Cat,” said Anjana, and Cat pulled her attention from Kara and returned it to the division chief. “If Carter’s is anything like Ramya’s, everyone has a phone. I’ve seen five-year-olds with them. It’s ridiculous these days.” Anjana paused and changed directions in the conversation, choosing her words carefully. “My friend—you know the one—who works for Snapper?”
Cat remembered that Anjana had a mole at Channel 3, owned and operated by Snapper Carr, a journalist-cum-station owner who Cat liked to call “the tyrant in a teapot.” Anjana’s friend sometimes shared little tidbits about Channel 3’s upcoming feature stories with Cat’s division chief. Apparently, they’d worked together at the BBC when Anjana was first making a name for herself.

“I remember,” said Cat, frowning, worried by her inclusion in the conversation.

“She says there’s talk of cell footage at her office.” Anjana let that sink in for a moment. “What are we going to see, Cat? Because this is their lead story at six and we have nothing to contradict it and no way to stop them.”

Cat paled. “Cell footage?” Could there be footage of her son falling off a building? Would someone have been as callous and uncaring as to film her son falling potentially to his death rather than helping him? “I don’t know—I—Carter’s principal didn’t mention anything about any—”

Anjana stopped Cat again, this time with a sudden expletive. “Shite! I’m so sorry, Cat—I didn’t even ask if Carter is okay. Is he all right? Was he—?”

Cat shook her head sharply, her flaxen curls jerking slightly as she did. “A broken arm. He’s fine. Exhausted, but fine.” As grateful as she was for Anjana’s concern, there were more immediate issues to be dealt with now. Like what Channel 3 was going to show on screens all over National City in just about—she checked her watch—two minutes. “I have no idea what it could be, Anjana. I would tell you if I did. Whatever it is, we have to respond—tonight. We’ll break in during the sports segment; that will give me time to get home. I won’t leave Carter, but can you send a camera crew—”

“Already done. I sent Eric, Simone, and one cameraman, Lionel, to your penthouse thirty minutes ago. They’re waiting in the parking lot with ten other mobile teams—so they say.” She snorted. “You’re a hot commodity, Cat. I hope there’s a back way into that condo of yours.”

Cat narrowed her eyes. “There is,” she said darkly. She toggled the mic to the front of the town car and snapped, “Underground entrance, Anthony.”

“Yes, Miss Grant,” came the immediate reply and Cat registered the route change as the car made an unexpected left turn shortly afterward.

Back with Anjana, Cat rattled off a quick and dirty plan for how they were going to get out in front of whatever Channel 3 had. “I’ll have our camera crew escorted upstairs when I get home. Depending on what Snapper has, I will either tape a response alone or I’ll do one with Carter. If he’s up for it.” She glanced at her son, smirking when she realized he was no longer asleep and was, in fact, listening to both of his mothers unnoticed. She’d trained him well, it seemed. “I’ll discuss it with him. In the meantime, I’ll get you the name and telephone number of the other family—the boy Carter saved. But only if they’re willing to speak to the press, Anjana. I won’t force them.”

“Understood,” said the division chief and Cat could tell she wasn’t necessarily happy about that last part. As a mother, she understood Cat’s reasoning, but as a broadcast news leader, she didn’t have to like it. “It’s starting now,” she said impassively. “Do you have it up?”

“I’m watching it in the town car,” Cat said vaguely, letting Anjana interpret that how she may. The fact she was about to watch it over Kara’s shoulder on Kara’s tablet was a revelation for another day.

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Kara zipped over to another screen on her iPad and stabbed a different icon, waiting—annoyed and impatient—through a fourteen-second ad for Cialis before their rival’s 6 O’Clock News stream loaded. When it did, it caught one of their field reporters right in the middle of her BREAKING NEWS report.

“—there, across this field, Broughton Friend’s School, the private school where Carter Grant, son of Cat Grant of CatCo Worldwide Media, allegedly saved the life of a classmate today. Eyewitness reports indicate a boy tripped while on the roof of a two-story school building and was pulled to safety by twelve-year-old Carter Grant, who then, apparently, fell off the roof himself. We cannot corroborate the story at this time, John—neither the school nor CatCo have given an official statement and attempts to reach Cat Grant for comment have failed so far—but we were able to acquire some cell phone footage taken by our eyewitness. Do you have that, John? Can you show it?"

“We can, Siobhan,” said John back in the studio. He pressed his hand over his right ear, listening to a member of his crew off-screen. “I believe we…. Uh, here—here it comes now.”

The image switched from Channel 3’s studio to a grainy cell phone video taken from ground level outside the Lower School’s building near the faculty parking lot. The owner of the cell phone was roughly twenty-five feet away from the ambulance and was standing behind a group of taller people who obscured the phone’s field of vision. A lucky break in the crowd allowed him or her to get a clear shot of the EMTs transferring Carter to the spine board and then up onto the gurney.

Kara covered her mouth with her hand, knowing what was coming next.

“You see here, John, first responders—I believe from county Emergency Services—assessing a young man for injuries. They’re seen putting him on what is called a spine board to immobilize him in the event of a serious spine or neck injury, and then they’re lifting him onto the ambulance’s gurney for transport to the hospital. At this distance, we cannot positively identify the young man, however, in just a second here—I think there’s a—there!”

Kara watched herself enter the frame behind Judy Simon and then watched as she hurried around the principal to get to Carter just as Carter reached out to her, crying, “Mom!”

The field reporter broke in again. “As you can see, a woman arrives on the scene and is taken to the young man’s side. He can be heard referring to her as ‘Mom,’ however, the woman is clearly not Cat Grant.” Kara had no trouble hearing the reason the reporter was so sure of that fact; the words *Cat Grant wouldn’t be caught dead in that outfit* were unmistakable in the tone she’d used to say the word *clearly*.

The footage stopped just as it was showing the EMT giving Kara a hand up into the back of the ambulance and the view switched back to the studio.

“Any idea who the woman is, Siobhan?” asked John.

The view switched again—this time to a split screen, showing Siobhan Smythe back at the scene on one side and John Romero, Channel 3’s primetime anchor, in the studio on the other. Kara held her breath.

“Not at this time, John. Hopefully, we’ll hear something official from either the school or from CatCo soon and that will help identify her. Until then, we have teams attempting to learn more.”

Kara Xed out of Channel 3’s streaming app and let out a brief but heartfelt sigh of relief. The footage had caught her mostly from the back and side and had never given a full, clear view of her
face. She knew she was fairly invisible as Kara Danvers, Cat Grant’s unremarkable assistant, and she figured only a few people would recognize her from the clip. Cat and she just might be able to get out of this in one piece…if they spun it right.

Kara jumped when she heard someone gently clear their throat in her ear.

In all the excitement, she’d forgotten she was still on the phone with Winn.

“So…the flowers on Monday were from Miss Grant,” he said quietly and Kara closed her eyes.

She and Cat had so many things to worry about right now—big things—potentially catastrophic things. There was nothing like footage on the 6 O’Clock News to force the realization they’d been juggling live grenades for the past five days and one of them had just blown up in their faces. She’d be getting a call from her sister soon, she knew—not to mention whatever was going to happen at CatCo. Kara didn’t have time to prop up Winn’s fragile ego at the moment, but it didn’t look like she was being given a choice in the matter.

“I was going to tell you—” she began.

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Cat watched in silence, acutely aware of Kara’s distress throughout the report—as if she had some idea of what it would contain. Kara actually stiffened when the cell footage began to roll and Cat honestly could not tell if she was breathing. Her heart clutched, though, when she saw Kara enter the frame of the shaky video and she gasped, throat closing with emotion, when she heard Carter’s tinny recorded voice call out “Mom!” as he reached for her. The footage ended abruptly seconds later.

Eighteen different reactions pinged in eighteen different directions inside Anjana Makhri’s brain and the two women sat in silence for a long moment while she contemplated what she wanted to say.

“That explains the internship,” is what she finally decided upon.

“Yes,” said Cat, reading fear and self-recrimination in Kara’s movements and in the slump of her shoulders as she curled around her phone, seemingly locked in a tense and emotional conversation with Winn. “It does.”

Anjana sighed. “The footage makes tonight easier for us—neither Kara nor Carter is ever positively identified. We can claim you haven’t seen it—you were on the way home from the hospital, still shaken up. Then we do two minutes on a vague version of what happened—preferably with Carter, if he’s up for it. We won’t name the other boy until we get a yes or no on their plan—I notice he’s nowhere at the moment, not even on social media—and we won’t identify Kara. We’ll focus on how proud you are of Carter, how frightened you were for him when you heard about the accident, etcetera.”

Cat took a deep breath. “Thank you, Anjana. That sounds perfect.”

“Believe me when I say this—it’s the least I can do. I’m not going to lie to you—we may have lucked out, but you didn’t. That footage is the opening credits of a brand new shit show, Cat, and you’re the star. I heard about Dirk Armstrong’s takeover attempt earlier this year and how you caught him in his own net. Take my advice and get out in front of this before you’re in the same boat. The MOUs, the internship—great idea, if you’d had the time. You’re out of time now.” She paused, hating what she had to say next, but knowing she was right. “She has to go, Cat.”

“Careful, Anjana,” said Cat, scowling. “That’s a lot of water metaphors. You might get in over
“Cat—”

“I’ll give up CatCo before I’ll give up Kara,” Cat snapped, not interested in any life advice just now. “I’ll give up everything I own—”

“Kara, stop,” said Winn and he sighed. “Look, you don’t owe me an explanation. I get why you couldn’t talk about it—I mean, this is big, right? Carter’s calling you ‘Mom’ and everything, so this definitely isn’t just some weird fling. I know what it could do—the mess it’s going to make for both of you—and I don’t blame you for wanting to keep it quiet.” He paused and Kara found herself holding her breath again. “I just wish you could have been honest with me when I guessed you might be gay....”

“I didn’t know then!” Kara blurted, both stunned and relieved by Winn’s acceptance of her relationship with Cat. “I hadn’t—we weren’t—” She took a deep breath and tried to slow down so she could get a full, coherent sentence to come out of her mouth. “I didn’t realize I was, then. And when I figured it out, finally, I couldn’t tell you because I was afraid you’d think I was lying to let you down easier. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. Just don’t—don’t sell yourself short like that again, okay? I’m a big boy—though I haven’t been acting like it lately and I’m sorry about that. But I know a little about what it’s like to think you have to hide something about yourself so people won’t leave you. I’m not leaving, okay? I’ve got your back, Kara. Whatever happens.”

Tears welled in Kara’s eyes. “Thank you, Winn. You don’t know how much that means to me.”

“And after seeing Channel 3’s report on at least eight of Miss Grant’s screens, it looks like what happens next is a shit storm the size of Montana, so you might want to—I don’t know—hide or something.”

Kara rolled her eyes at Winn’s terminology but his assessment, she knew, wasn’t that far off. “Yeah,” she said morosely. “Alex is going to kill me.”

Winn snorted. “If Eliza doesn’t beat her to it,” he said.

Kara started, not having thought of her foster mother—not even once. Her foster mother, the inimitable Eliza Danvers, who was probably watching the news right now as she threw together a light salad or a sandwich in the farmhouse’s kitchen, a lonely dinner for one. Her foster mother, who was one year older than Cat Grant and twice as opinionated.

“I’m so dead,” she breathed, going white with terror.

Winn, she noted, did not disagree.

“Whoa!” said Anjana and Cat imagined one elegant hand, raised as if to ward off attack. “I wasn’t asking you to abdicate your throne! I meant Kara can no longer be your assistant; that’s all.” Anjana chuckled. “Jesus, Cat, no need to go all Eddie the Eighth on us.”

“Oh.” Cat blinked and the unexpected change in tenor of their conversation blended with the stress and chaos and uncertainty of the entire afternoon, creating levity where there had been none, like a
chemical reaction. “Oh,” she said again, but it was followed by a brief snort and then an honest-to-God giggle. Carter and Kara were both now staring at her, wide-eyed, and the giggle turned into a full-throated laugh, head thrown back and eyes closed in blissful release. She lifted her phone back into place when she finished.

“Well,” she said diffidently, cheeks pink with embarrassment. “I guess I needed that.”

“I’d say so,” agreed Anjana. After a moment, she asked, “Serious, then, is it?”

Cat turned to gaze at Kara and her entire face lit up just looking at her. “Very,” she confirmed.

She wanted to kiss Kara and to hold her, wanted—so much!—to wipe the stain of worry from her eyes, knowing Kara was blaming herself for what had happened, for everything that had happened. Unable to do what she wanted, Cat did the only thing she knew had a snowball’s chance of reassuring Kara: she sent a slow, sweet river of tenderness through their connection, watching as a faint smile smoothed out the troubled frown carved into the young woman’s features.

“Then allow me to offer you my congratulations, Cat. It’s about damned time you found a love like that. Amazing, isn’t it?”

Cat could hear Anjana’s smile through the phone. She knew the division chief balanced her home and work lives precisely, like Anubis weighing souls on the scales. She also knew the woman would walk away from her award-winning international career and never look back if her family needed her.

“It is,” she replied and she managed to find and squeeze Kara’s hand.

“Then hold onto it, whatever it takes. In the meantime, I’m on your side—yours and Kara’s both—if sides are needed. I know Alan was looking for you this afternoon,” she said ominously.

Alan McLaughlin, President of CatCo’s Board of Directors, was usually pro-Cat but Cat knew that wouldn’t count for much under present circumstances.

She smirked, not sure she cared—at least not at the moment. “I probably have a dozen voicemails from him alone,” she noted.

“Then I’ll let you go delete them,” joked Anjana. “Eric will run the segment through me and I’ll edit it personally. After that part’s over, try to get some rest. Don’t let the vultures pick apart what’s left of your night, okay? It’s never worth it.”

“I won’t,” said Cat. “Thank you, Anjana—for everything.”


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Alex Danvers, alone in her lab at the DEO, was having a hard time concentrating on her work. All she could think about was the soft, brief kiss Neves Montenegro had bestowed upon her in The Boardwalk’s parking lot after their lunch date.

“Thanks for lunch,” said Neves, looking up at Alex pensively. After a moment’s hesitation, she darted forward and pressed a soft kiss to Alex’s lips, shocking the DEO agent right down to her boots. Neves grinned when she pulled back, her eyes alight with pleasure when she opened them. “Can’t wait ’til Friday,” she added and Alex shivered. A night of dancing with Neves sounded like heaven but Alex couldn’t help but think there was a promise of more in that seconds-long kiss. “See
“Yeah,” said Alex, waving unseen, struck dumb as she watched Neves walk away in those amazing jeans, feeling like a moron. “See you.”

Alex was so busy berating herself for her less-than-Shakespearean response, she didn’t even look at her phone’s display when it started buzzing on the counter next to her.

“Danvers,” she said, answering with a shorter tone than she’d intended. Whoever had called would just have to get over it.

“Alexandra Diane Danvers, why didn’t you tell me I had a grandson?”

For ten heart-stopping seconds, Alex thought she’d gotten pregnant, had had a baby, and then had misplaced a baby—all while forgetting to tell her mother. When reality shouldered its way into her blindly-panicked brain a second later, she glared angrily at her phone.

“What are you talking about, Mom?” she growled. A call from Eliza was exactly what Alex didn’t need right now. So much for the relaxing evening second-guessing everything I said at lunch I had planned, she thought.

“I’m talking about the young man calling Kara ‘Mom’ on the local news—well, on Channel 3 anyway. None of the other news reports seem to know anything about it—”

“Charlie, what the fuck now?” Alex looked at her phone as if it had bitten her.

“Language!” snapped Eliza disapprovingly. “And who’s Charlie?”

Catching up to what her mother had said, Alex bolted out of the lab, heading straight for Hank’s office. If you’re reading my mind right now, she thought, Channel 3 apparently ran a report having something to do with Carter and Kara.

“It’s just an expression,” she explained, her tone clipped and tight. “Tell me what you saw.”

“There was a Breaking News report and one of the field reporters on Channel 3—the snide one who always looks as if she’s smelled something offensive?—Siobhan…something—she said there’d been a report of a boy falling off the roof of a school building while saving the life of another boy. She said it was Carter—”

Alex’s vision went white and her knees buckled.

“Are you sure, Mom?” she asked, stricken. “Are you sure she said ‘Carter’?”

“‘Carter Grant, son of Cat Grant of CatCo Worldwide Media’—to be exact.”

Alex blinked back tears. She staggered to the wall in the hallway and slid down it, not understanding how her heart hadn’t already exploded in her chest. She heard blood rushing in her ears and not much else. Hank came around the corner and dashed to her side just as she lost what little patience she had.

“Did they say if he was okay?” she cried, exasperated. “Mom, did they anything about injuries or —”

“They said they couldn’t confirm any injuries but they showed a cell phone video of a young man being lifted into the back of an ambulance. Then Kara ran into the frame and the boy called out
‘Mom!’” Eliza scoffed. “At first, I didn’t believe it—they didn’t show her face—but she was wearing that light blue dress with that narrow navy blue belt I picked out for her—”

“Mom, I’ve got to go—”

“But—”

“I’ll call you back. I’ll explain everything. But right now I’ve got to find out if Carter is okay, okay? Just give me five minutes, Mom. Please.”

“Of course, honey,” said Eliza and if she was mildly concerned before, now she was positively alarmed. Alex sounded...haunted. “Do what you need to do. I’ll wait for your call.”

Alex nodded sharply and hung up with her mother. She hit speed-dial for her sister so forcefully she was surprised the phone’s screen didn’t crack. Hank crouched next to her to lend support.

Kara answered and launched immediately into an apology.

“Alex, I’m sorry. I know I messed up—”

Alex barreled right over her. “Is he okay?” she asked, panicked.

“Wh-what?”

“Is Carter okay?” asked Alex through gritted teeth, trying not to yell.

“Oh! Yes! I—he—it’s just a broken arm. He’s fine, Alex.”

Alex sighed and closed her eyes, feeling the tightness in her chest loosen for the first time since Eliza had called. Hank put his hand on her shoulder and she leaned into the touch.

“Good,” she said quietly, her voice hoarse. “Good,” she repeated, using the word to ground herself.

Kara paused, realizing she’d screwed up all right—just not in the way she’d thought. “I—Alex, I should have called you. I’m sorry you had to see that—”

Alex waved her hand dismissively. “I didn’t see it. Not yet, anyway.” She took perverse pleasure in saying her next words, knowing Kara would soon have some explaining to do—to someone else, for a change. “Mom called.”

The anxiety-ridden silence that answered Alex was awfully loud.

“I’m supposed to call her back after I finish talking to you,” she continued, chuckling ruefully. “I’d expect a call from her shortly.”

“I’m in so much trouble, aren’t I?” Kara’s voice waivered ever-so-slightly with the question.

“She discovered she has a grandson while watching the 6 O’Clock news, Kara. What do you think?”

Kara whimpered and Alex took pity on her beleaguered sister.

“Listen,” she said, “I’ll take care of Mom, okay? I can’t keep her from calling you but I can bring her up to speed a little bit. Would that help?”

“Yes. Alex—I—that would be great. Thank you.” Kara knew what Alex was offering—the hit she
was willing to take for her—and she was grateful. “You’re the best,” she said sincerely, sighing with relief.

A grimace followed Alex’s brief smile at Kara’s words. “Mom said Carter called you ‘Mom’…. Is that causing you and Cat problems at work?”

Kara hesitated. “I—I think it will,” she said quietly. “We—we’re still—we don’t know yet. They’re in the living room taping an official statement about the accident right now. Channel 10’s going to break in and show it during the sports segment—”

“How did Siobhan whatshername even get that footage, Kara?” asked Alex, interrupting her, a frown pulling her eyebrows into a deep V over her hazel eyes. “Where did it come from—do you know?”

“No—I—” Kara ran through what she’d seen on her tablet’s screen and tried to match it to what she remembered about entering that parking lot, pushing the gut-wrenching memory of seeing Carter on a gurney aside for the moment, and focusing instead on things she hadn’t cared about at the time—like the crowd separating her from her son.

“There was—that’s weird. Dr. Simon said the school was on lockdown but there were kids in the parking lot with the rest of the—well, I thought they were teachers, I guess—the adults milling around?” She noted each of the children as she remembered them. “There was Carter’s science project partner, Zoe…and a blond boy trying to see around the adults…and a boy with brown hair who—” Kara paused again and then gasped. “I think he had a phone, Alex!”

Alex blinked, surprised. “So Channel 3’s ‘eyewitness’ was a kid with a cell phone? That doesn’t sound very ethical. Cat’s not going to be happy about that….”

“No,” said Kara, and Alex could hear her sister’s displeasure clearly. “She isn’t.”

“I’ll let you break the good news to the Queen of All Media, then,” said Alex sarcastically, wishing she could be a fly on the wall for that conversation. After a second, she changed topics, a grin tugging at her mouth. “So…Carter saved a kid from falling off a roof, huh?”

“Yes, he did,” said Kara, and Alex heard the pride in her voice. “Our badass family just keeps getting bigger and better, doesn’t it?” she replied and she could practically feel Kara’s grin through the phone line. “Listen, tell him…tell him I’m proud of him, okay? And that I’ll come by to sign his cast sometime tomorrow.” Alex ran her hand through her hair, thinking of Cat and Kara both, of what they’d been through, of how terrifying it must have been. “Tell Cat I’m glad he’s okay. She must have been beside herself. You both must’ve been.”

“We were. It—it was a nightmare, Alex.” Kara’s brief buoyancy faded and her mood sank. She sounded hollow and drained.

“Sounds like more’s on the way,” said Alex, empathizing with her sister. “I’m sorry.”

“Thanks,” said Kara, and Alex could hear the worry in her voice.

“I’ve gotta call Mom back—she’s probably freaking out—but call if you need anything, okay? I’m here for you. For all three of you. Whatever you need.”

“I will,” said Kara. Then, remembering the importance of the day for Alex, she added, “Hey wait—how did your lunch date go?”
Alex couldn’t stop her smile despite her feeling that Kara had bigger things to worry about right now. “Good,” she said. “It was…really good.” She felt a blush tingle across her cheeks and her stomach fluttered as she remembered the kiss yet again.

“Yeah?” asked Kara hopefully, a little of her usually ebullient mood returning.

“Yeah. We’re going out again Friday night…unless you need—”

“Nope.” Kara cut Alex off abruptly. “No way. We’ll be fine. You go have fun. Promise me.”

Alex rolled her eyes but did as Kara asked. “I promise,” she said, grinning like a fool.

“Good,” said Kara. “Someone in the city has to have a good weekend, right?”

“Right,” agreed Alex, happy to be that person for once. And—if she was lucky—it would be better than just ‘good.’

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“That’s a wrap,” said Eric Chu and Cat closed her eyes for a second longer than she normally would, grateful this part of their ordeal was over, at least. Carter was being a good little soldier—no doubt reacting to the uncertainty and tension in his mothers—but Cat could tell he was getting impatient and irritable, a sign he’d had enough. When she put her arm around him, she could feel the throbbing discomfort creeping back into his wiry frame, and she leaned in close to his ear, telling him to go find Kara, that she would be able to help with the pain.

“Are you sure, Mom?” he asked, clearly worried and wanting to be there to help, if needed. “What if—”

“We’ve done what we can. We’ll take the rest as it comes.” She kissed his temple and whispered, “Go to your mother. She’s worried sick about you.”

It wasn’t a lie. Kara, hiding out in the master suite to give the CatCo film crew plausible deniability where she and Cat’s relationship was concerned, haunted their connection, her presence advancing then retreating, over and over, almost as if she were pacing. Cat soothed her as much as she could.

Carter nodded, the shadow of a smile dusting his lips. He said goodnight to the film crew and then trudged down the hallway toward the bedrooms, clearly fatigued. Cat watched him go, pride and love showing in her features.

“He’s a very brave young man,” said Simone, also watching Carter go. Simone Achiri was one of Channel 10’s field reporters, the one usually tapped for the uplifting stories—the human interest ones featuring ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Cat liked the sense of compassion and solidarity Simone brought to them and, based on Simone’s individual ratings and the volume of fan mail she received, Cat wasn’t alone in that.

“He is,” said Cat wistfully. When Carter finally turned the corner and couldn’t be seen anymore, she turned back to the reporter. “Thank you for everything you’ve done tonight—”

Simone waved Cat off, treating her to one of her brilliant smiles, warm and understanding. “It’s my pleasure, Miss Grant, though we should be thanking Carter. One family’s son is alive tonight because of what your son did. That is no small matter.”

Cat blinked, stunned for a moment by Simone’s assessment. She hadn’t thought of what Carter had done in quite those terms before and it put some perspective on…well, on everything. Whatever
chaos Channel 3’s report might wreak in their lives, Carter and Aiden were alive and safe in their parents’ arms, the thinnest of margins separating that outcome from a dark alternative. How could she feel anything but overjoyed?

Before she could thank Simone again, Eric left the cameraman where he was packing up his equipment and strode toward the two women, still on the phone. He hung up as he reached them and gave them a stern nod.

“Anjana has the footage. She says it looks good. They’ll break in just after the pro-football scores to run the Special Report.”

Cat rose. “I appreciate your hard work tonight—and your accommodation of the unusual circumstances.” She looked around Eric to include Lionel. “All of you.” She walked over to the phone by the elevator. “I’ll call someone up to escort you downstairs. I’m sure you want to get home to your families.”

Cat’s phone began to buzz in her hand the minute Christopher arrived. She waved at her crew one last time and scowled down at her phone, assuming it was Alan McLaughlin again. He’d left a number of messages already—three or four rather than the imagined dozen, but still enough to let Cat know he was taking the footage seriously.

Instead, the name on her phone’s display read WickedWitchOfTheEast.

Cat thought about letting it go to voicemail but a gentle nudge from Kara through their connection convinced her otherwise.

“Mother,” she said curtly, answering with a vicious swipe of her finger, annoyed that Kara had successfully guilted her into talking to the woman. “I don’t have time—”

“Cat, thank God. Is Carter all right? Some idiot reporter on the television said he fell off a roof at school. Surely, my grandson did not fall off a roof, Cat. You would have called me. Or Kara would have.” When Cat didn’t answer immediately, Katherine continued. “Catherine Jane Grant, is my grandson all right?”

Cat walked into the living room and sank back onto the couch from which she and Carter had just issued the official statement about his accident, feeling genuinely and horribly guilty.

“He has a broken arm,” she said quietly. She heard her mother’s gasp and braced herself for a brittle, icy rebuke, knowing she hadn’t given a single thought to calling Katherine during their ordeal—something she found herself regretting deeply now. Their deplorable relationship aside, Katherine was still her mother, was still Carter’s grandmother, and as such, she merited basic human decency. Like receiving a telephone call about her grandson’s heroic plummet off a building instead of seeing it on the evening news half the world away.

“Mother, I should have called. I’m sorry. You shouldn’t have had to find out from a news broadcast.” Cat sat perched on the edge of the sofa, spine impossibly straight, and waited for the biting, sarcastic criticism Katherine was known for and which—in this one instance—Cat felt she deserved.

It never came.

Instead, there was a long silence, followed by a somewhat withering sigh.

“Well, I certainly shouldn’t have had to hear it from that horrible little shrew from Channel 3 Snapper thinks is so brilliant. Remind me to give him a piece of my mind at his regatta in Oyster
Bay later this month.”

Cat rolled her eyes. “I’m writing it down now,” she lied, a hint of her own sarcasm bleeding into her tone despite her best efforts. Of course, her mother socialized with her business rivals. Why was she surprised?

Still, as far as commentary went, Katherine’s condemnation had been downright mild, and Cat couldn’t quite believe it. It was beyond unusual; it was unprecedented.

Cat’s pie-in-the-sky hope the change represented the extension of some sort of bizarre olive branch was borne out by Katherine’s next question, as unexpected and as discombobulating as a surprise birthday party on the right day but in the wrong month.

“How is Kara holding up?”

“What makes you think I know?” asked Cat haughtily, defensive because she’d been caught off guard.

Katherine chuckled wryly. “Correct me if I’m wrong, darling, but Carter did call Kara ‘Mom’ on national television tonight, didn’t he? That would indicate you and she have come—” Katherine paused just long enough to color that word with a second meaning. “—to some arrangement regarding your mutually unexpressed longing.” The barest hint of disapproval flavored her next words. “And rather quickly, too, it would seem. What is it, dear? You wanted to put your new filly through her paces before you forgot how to get back in the saddle?”

Cat’s cheeks flashed hot and pink.

Did she just—? sent Kara, her own blush telegraphing perfectly through the Daat Kyashar, along with her shock.

She did, confirmed Cat. I warned you about this. You didn’t believe me.

“Shes fine,” Cat said to Katherine, hitting the word fine a little forcefully. She deliberately ignored her mother’s off-color insinuations, unwilling to engage Katherine on that particular battlefield. There were some lines Cat simply would not cross—especially when the “filly” in question was listening in. “She’s taking care of Carter at the moment. I was about to make a light supper for us.”

“I won’t keep you, then.” Katherine paused for a moment, then added, “Your relationship with that girl is going to cause problems, Cat.”

Anger was chief amongst Cat’s reactions to her mother’s observation, leveled so matter-of-factly. “I can handle it, Mother,” she snarled, irritated that she’d ever thought their relationship could be healed. Clearly, she’d been mistaken—lulled into a false sense of hope by—

“Don’t be ridiculous! Of course you can handle it,” Katherine said and Cat went wide-eyed with astonishment. “You’re strong; you can handle anything. Honestly, I sometimes wonder if you’re not as bulletproof as that clumsy menace with a cape you let fly around your city.”

“Excuse me?” said Cat, baffled and off kilter. She was finding it hard to keep up with the conversation, as off the rails as it had become. She stole a glance at the phone’s display again, just to reassure herself.

“It’s Kara I’m worried about,” continued her mother, ignoring her discomfiture. “A woman in her position—wearing her heart on her sleeve like she does? Promise me you’ll do what you can to shield her from the worst of it. They’ll fall on her like wolves, Cat.” She sighed.
Katherine Talbot Grant, the judgmental, acid-tongued widow of Jefferson Buchanan Grant, actually sighed, and Cat reeled.

“I know,” said Cat, not knowing what else to say. Her mother was right; Kara’s reputation and her professional future were more at risk because of this whole fiasco than were Cat’s. That knowledge sliced into the CEO like shards of glass wedged underneath her skin.

“I was right, wasn’t I? She’s fallen in love with you?”

Cat swallowed thickly, tears winding around her throat like a vine, strangling her. She nodded. “Yes,” she said hoarsely.

“And obviously you feel the same if Carter is referring to her as ‘Mom,’” said Katherine. She paused briefly and Cat felt her mother’s hesitation, knowing the why of it. This—this mother-daughter dance of shared vulnerability—was unchartered territory for the both of them. Cat’s heart raced, fueled by equal parts hope and dread.

“If any two people can survive what’s coming, it’s the two of you, but....” Katherine sighed again. “Don’t let them ruin her for it, Cat. Don’t let them destroy her because she chose you.”

“I won’t,” she whispered, dumbfounded by the simple fact of this conversation and the long-overdue thaw it represented between her mother and herself. Cat wasn’t stupid; she knew the cause of it. One incredible woman, who had turned Cat’s whole life inside out. One woman who—at that very moment—was absorbing the pain from her son’s broken arm, filling the vacuum it left with a brilliant, luminous concoction of love and devotion that seemed to accompany her wherever she went.

‘Sunny’ Danvers strikes again, sent Cat, alongside a glowing bubble of gratitude and tenderness. Kara, trying so hard not to interrupt Cat’s conversation with Katherine, could no longer hold back her joy at the prospect of a reconciliation between mother and daughter and it spilled into the Daat Kyashar, sweet and bright and sparkling, like champagne.

Cat pressed her hand over her mouth to keep her smile at bay.

“I should go,” said Katherine, sighing again, and Cat couldn’t tell if it was a sigh of regret or of resignation. “It’s late there. Please thank Kara for the flowers she sent on Monday and tell Carter I’ll be sending something to keep the boredom away. Broken arms are especially unpleasant for boys his age.”

Cat blinked. “I will,” she said, surprised to hear Kara had sent her mother flowers. She intended to ask her all about them at her first opportunity. “Thank you—thank you for calling, Mother.”

“Well, someone had to,” said Katherine, snickering lightly. “Goodnight, Cat. And give that filly of yours a night off, won’t you? We wouldn’t want you to break a hip,” she quipped. “I imagine you’ve had enough of hospitals for one day.” On that note, she disconnected the call.

Cat laughed—one perfect bark of unrestrained delight—and then stood and headed for the kitchen, shaking her head.

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Kara hung up with Alex and took another look at her work inbox, frowning as she continued to sort Cat’s emails into three categories: Answer Tonight; Can Wait; and Delete. The number being placed in the Answer Tonight folder was growing, along with Kara’s anxiety, and she tried not to think about what was coming, about the repercussions she and Cat were about to face.
Kara didn’t care what happened to her. She’d survived so much already and workplace drama—even the possibility of being fired—couldn’t compare to losing her home and family. As long as she had Cat and Carter, Alex and Eliza, her friends and extended family, that was all she needed.

But Cat had spent decades building the CatCo brand and now she stood to lose it all, just because the woman she loved also happened to be her assistant.

Kara scowled angrily, knowing if Cat were male, her peers wouldn’t bat an eye at something like this. Instead, they’d look at Kara—young, blonde, and pretty—and chuck the CEO on the arm, congratulating him for his taste and his luck. They’d snicker knowingly when the engagement was announced and then would tease him unmercifully after the wedding, claiming he was “whipped” or that she had him “wrapped around her little finger.”

Because Cat was a woman—because they both were women—the reality of their situation was vastly different. No congratulations for Cat, a brilliant middle-aged woman at the top of her field who just happened to fall in love with her assistant. Instead, snide emails subtly (and some not-so-subtly) questioning her judgment and worse flooded her inbox. Meetings were being requested left and right and no fewer than five members of the board had sent notes flagged URGENT.

Kara’s heart sank further and further with each email she read.

She checked her connection to Cat again and again, needing the contact (as brief as it was), soothed by Cat’s attention and assurances about Carter’s well-being, no matter how tangential and distracted. Eventually, she felt relief flood their bond as Cat and Carter finished filming their Special Report segment. Her own relief mirrored it.

She focused on Carter then, noticing his pain had returned and his distress was inching up into the worrisome range. She shut down her tablet and put it away, knowing Carter would be coming soon, that Cat had sent him to her for help. She met him at the door of their bedroom with a hug, pulling him into her arms, drawing his pain and fatigue into herself and replacing it with strength and a measure of comfort, warm and gentle.

“Hey, buddy,” she whispered, kissing the top of his head. She closed her eyes for a moment, thinking he wouldn’t always be shorter than she was, that he’d one day be too tall for her to do that. A soft, pleased smile tugged at her lips.

“Hey, Kara,” he whispered back, sighing as he felt the pain and irritability melt out of his body, grateful for the reassurance and encouragement she was sending through their connection.

“All done filming?” asked Kara, loath to let him go. His presence was helping quiet her rattled nerves as much as she was helping him.

“Yeah. Mr. Chu said they’ll run it after the football scores.” Feeling a little better, Carter gently extracted himself from Kara’s arms. “I’m really tired. I guess I should go change for bed,” he said, but Kara could feel the reluctance underneath his words.

“You could come back here when you’re done,” she offered, checking on Cat briefly, finding her fielding a phone call from Katherine. Knowing she’d be getting her own call from a neglected mother shortly, Kara encouraged Cat to answer it rather than letting it go to voicemail. “Your mom was going to make dinner when she finished with the film crew. You could hang out with me while we wait. Unless she needs my help, that is.”

Carter looked at Kara, torn. “Are you sure?” he asked. “I know you probably have a lot of work because of….” He looked down at his feet, filled with shame, feeling responsible for what his
mothers were now facing at CatCo—all because of one tiny three-letter word.

Kara saw Carter’s self-recrimination and embarrassment immediately and she reached out, grasping his upper arm and shaking him gently to get his attention.

“Hey, hey,” she said, frowning. “Carter, you did nothing wrong, okay?” She pulled him back into her arms. “I love that you called me ‘Mom’ today. It’s better than being called ‘Supergirl’ and—if you want to—you can call me that whenever you want. I promise you I will never get tired of hearing it.”

Carter looked up at Kara, frowning himself. “But people at CatCo are mad at Mom now—because of what I said! I heard her in the car—she said she would give up CatCo before she gave you up and I never meant to get you and Mom in trouble—”

“You didn’t, Carter,” said Kara insistently. She shook her head and chucked him under the chin. “You didn’t.” She gazed at him and saw the flicker of hope in his eyes, then saw it die a second later, snuffed out by doubt and that all-too-human tendency for second-guessing one’s self—a challenge even Kara faced sometimes.

Like now, for instance.

After weighing the options, Kara made her decision and zipped down the hall to Carter’s room using her super-speed, returning half a second later with a t-shirt and a pair flannel drawstring pants, which she handed to Carter with an encouraging smile.

“Change in your mom’s bathroom,” she said. “Then we’ll talk.”

He nodded and Kara could see the hope flare back to life in his eyes. “Okay,” he said.

She nodded and watched as he disappeared into the master bath. Then she turned and set about organizing the pillows of the bed into a comfortable arrangement for conversation, knowing Carter was exhausted and would need additional treatment via the Daat Kyashar to help with the stress and continuing pain. Kara didn’t want him out of her sight—not for the foreseeable future, anyway—and she knew this was the best option: having him comfortable and safe in the master bedroom rather than suffering alone down the hall.

As she was retrieving the bottle of Motrin the hospital had sent home with them from the dresser, Kara felt a flash of indignation zing along her connection to Cat and she turned her attention there for a moment, grimacing slightly, afraid the conversation between mother and daughter had taken a turn for the worse. Instead, she heard something else entirely, something suggestive and decidedly… risqué.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, darling,” said Katherine, “but Carter did call Kara ‘Mom’ on national television tonight, didn’t he? That would indicate you and she have come—”

Katherine paused there and Kara knew instantly the pause was intentional, meant to highlight the word’s other, indecent meaning. She felt a blush begin to sweep across her chest and upward, racing toward her cheeks like a freight train.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, darling,” said Katherine, “but Carter did call Kara ‘Mom’ on national television tonight, didn’t he? That would indicate you and she have come—”

Katherine paused there and Kara knew instantly the pause was intentional, meant to highlight the word’s other, indecent meaning. She felt a blush begin to sweep across her chest and upward, racing toward her cheeks like a freight train.

“To some arrangement regarding your mutually unexpressed longing,” continued Katherine, her tone acerbic and disapproving. “And rather quickly, too, it would seem. What is it, dear? You wanted to put your new filly through her paces before you forgot how to get back in the saddle?”

Kara froze, stunned, torn between what felt like a case of terminal embarrassment worse than what she had suffered with Kal and wanting to see the look on Cat’s face at that exact moment. The heat
of her own blush prickled and burned but Cat’s….

Cat’s mortification seared through their connection like a river of molten steel.

Kara’s incredulity rolled through the Daat Kyashar unchecked.

_Did she just_—?

_She did,_ sent Cat, her annoyance both palpable and sour to the taste, like the lime wedge at the end of a tequila shot. _I warned you about this. You didn’t believe me._

Kara dropped onto the edge of their bed, eyes wide, and shook her head, conceding she had never once imagined any such thing, now having trouble thinking of anything else. She was still sitting there when Carter came back into the room.

“Kara?” he asked and Kara jumped.

“Carter!” she said, standing. “I’m sorry. I—” She saw the medicine bottle in her hand and lifted it, offering it to him. “Do you want a Motrin? I found them on the dresser….”

Carter shook his head. “I’ll have one with dinner,” he said. “Otherwise they make me sick.”

Kara frowned and stowed the bottle on her bedside table for later, wondering if there was some way they could avoid having to give him the medication at all.

“Is it okay if we talk in here?” she asked, motioning to the conversation nest she’d made at the head of the bed.

Carter nodded enthusiastically. “Mom and I used talk like this a lot when I was younger,” he said, skootching himself to the center of the bed carefully, keeping his injured arm raised so he wouldn’t bump it. He took time to settle in against the pillows then looked up at Kara, smiling. “Is this okay?”

Kara slipped onto the bed and sat cross-legged across from him. “That works,” she said. Looking at his arm in its blue fiberglass cast, she asked, “May I?”

He held it out to her and she let the full weight of his arm rest in her hands, one cradling his cast-clad wrist and one cradling his elbow, bare to the touch. She pictured the breaks in his bones as she had seen them in the school’s parking lot and lowered her head, directing her x-ray vision over the top of her lead-lined glasses, comparing what she remembered to how the breaks looked now, after being set. She used her connection to Carter through the Daat Kyashar to surround the damage she saw with a more intense dosage of cool, calming comfort. Able to concentrate more than she had the other times she had attempted this with him, Kara saw the need for sustained contact and a way to pull the inflammation and pain into herself over time, allowing for deeper healing. She told Carter about it.

“You could just rest against me, I think,” she said, explaining how the process would work—or at least, how she was seeing it in her mind. “It seems to require continuous physical contact. If I do it right, it means you might not need the Motrin at all but…it would mean you’d have to sleep in here with us tonight. It that okay with you?”

“It’s okay with me if it’s okay with you and Mom,” he said with practiced nonchalance, and Kara pretended not to see his relief.

“Good.” Kara released his arm and stood, looking at the entrance to the ensuite. “I’ll just go change
—” She zipped away in a light blue blur and returned a second later, wearing the nerdiest pair of pajamas Carter thought he had ever seen on anyone over eight years old. They were white but dotted with tiny pink and orange tulips. A narrow strip of ruffled lace peeked out around the collar and the cuffs of the sleeves. And were those…snaps?

“What, they didn’t have pajamas with footies in your size?” he asked, laughing.

Kara laughed with him, blushing. “Shut up,” she said, rolling her eyes. She slipped under the covers on her side of the bed and settled against the pillows behind her, looking at Carter inquisitively when she was finished. “I think—if you just leaned here….”

Carter rolled his eyes and scooted closer to Kara, fitting himself under her arm like he had with Cat in the town car and resting his head on her shoulder. “How’s this?” he asked, turning slightly so his broken arm wasn’t trapped between them.

“Good,” Kara said again, but now her face was the picture of concentration as she re-entered the Daat Kyashar more fully, opening herself to her connection with Carter, feeling the depth and breadth of the damage to his arm and the stress his body was under. “What I’m going to do is kind of like a transfusion,” she began, grimacing slightly as she drew away the angry traffic traveling through his nerve pathways. “Except, instead of giving you blood, I’m disrupting pain signals and preventing your body’s normal inflammatory response.”

Carter sighed with relief almost immediately and Kara felt the tension leave his muscles.

“Better?” she asked.

“Yeah.” Carter closed his eyes and sank further into Kara’s side, more relaxed and comfortable than he’d felt all day. “Why does it feel cool?” he asked, after a moment.

“I’m activating some of the cold receptors in the muscles around the broken bones,” she explained. “Cold retards inflammation and human bodies have been shown to heal faster in cooler temperatures. It thought it would help.” And, unlike using her freeze-breath, this method wouldn’t cause tissue damage or hypothermia.

“It is helping,” said Carter, mumbling as he relaxed further. “Mom’s happy,” he added absently, drifting in a sea of sleepiness.

Kara, who’d been keeping tabs on Cat’s conversation with Katherine through their connection, gaped down at Carter, smiling softly at him.

“You can feel that?” she asked wonderingly.

“Yeah, just a little.” He took a deep breath but didn’t open his eyes. “It’s…like a ghost. In the background.”

What Carter felt as a ghost, Kara felt as if she were living it and Cat wasn’t just happy; she was downright hopeful, with a knot of tears burning in her throat as she contemplated the real possibility of reconciliation with her mother. Kara didn’t know if she wanted to laugh or to cry.

‘Sunny’ Danvers strikes again, sent Cat and with it, a ribbon of love that felt like it could wrap the whole world up in a bow.

Kara gave her joy free rein and let it bound through their connection like a spirited filly, thinking, If the shoe fits….
Returning her attention to Carter, she rested her cheek on the top of his head. “Then you know she’s all right. Nothing that happened today—nothing that will happen tomorrow or the day after or the day after that—none of it matters because she still has you. She may be the Queen of All Media to the rest of the world, Carter, but you’re her world. And being your mom is the best thing she’ll ever do.”

Kara pressed a kiss to the back of Carter’s head and whispered, “So no more worrying, okay?”

Carter didn’t answer immediately, but then he shifted, huddling closer to her, and sighed, mumbling, “Kay, Mom.” He dropped off into a deep sleep with his next breath and Kara closed her eyes with him, drowsing in the space between two heartbeats, his mother’s and his, happy they were all home, safe and sound and together.

Not two minutes later, Kara’s phone buzzed on her bedside table and she reached behind her to snatch it up before it woke Carter, knowing who it was—who it had to be.

“Eliza,” Kara began, but her foster mother interrupted her.

“I want to meet my grandson,” she announced, somehow sounding both cheerful and impatient at the same time.

Kara looked at her phone’s display, just to be sure, and then brought the device back to her ear. “Um…what?”

“My grandson, Kara. The young man calling you ‘Mom’ on the 6 O’Clock Evening News. Carter Grant, son of Cat Grant, who—the last time I checked—is that boss of yours you never stop talking about.” Eliza paused and Kara could almost see the mile-wide grin on her foster mother’s face. “Your sister was very upset to hear I’ve known about your crush on Cat for years.”

Kara felt dizzy and breathless and wondered if she was having a stroke—except that would be ridiculous because she was Kryptonian and Kryptonians didn’t have strokes. At least, not on Earth, they didn’t.

“My— You— What?”

“Oh, honey—did you think you were being subtle?” Eliza’s laughter through the telephone was accompanied by equally indulgent laughter from Cat through the Daat Kyashar, both women enjoying a moment of merriment at Kara’s expense.

I was, wasn’t I? Being subtle? You didn’t know, Cat…did you?

The thought of Cat knowing… All that time….

I found it immensely endearing, darling, replied Cat, unable to lie. I was flattered. I still am.

Another blush blazed across Kara’s cheeks. She wished the floor would open up and swallow her whole.

“Now, about Carter,” continued Eliza, moving on to the more important topic—as far as she was concerned. “First, tell me about his injuries. Alex said he had a broken arm?”

Kara pushed away her embarrassment as much as she could and looked down at her son as he slept soundly against her, her heart aching. “His left radius and ulna both, just above the wrist. The doctor at the ED thought it was probably from trying to brace himself in the fall.”
She squirmed as she imagined what the impact of his body against the paved parking lot might have felt like to him, biting back a yelp of surprise and terror both when she accidentally fell into Carter’s memory of it, in all its devastating glory. She scrambled out of it in her next breath, desperate to keep it from Cat, astonished that she’d managed to access it in the first place.

“Kara?” Eliza asked haltingly. “Honey, are you all right?”


“Pain? Are your powers—”

“No, Eliza,” said Kara, rushing to reassure her foster mother. “It’s...um...it’s not...mine. Not originally, anyway. The pain, I mean.” She rolled her eyes, knowing she wasn’t making the slightest bit of sense. “It’s...it’s Carter’s. I’m just...holding it for him? Sort of? Until it goes away.”

Kara bit her lip, knowing she must sound crazy or worse to Eliza, a biomedical engineer with three advanced degrees, but her foster mother gasped, asking, “Kara, are you saying you’re able to take Carter’s physical pain away from him? Through a haptically-reinforced biofeedback connection?”

Kara’s eyes widened. “Yes,” she breathed, not believing what she was hearing. That, in fact, was exactly what she was saying.

“Then it happened?” Kara heard the elation in Eliza’s voice. “Jeremiah always hoped.... Oh, honey, does this mean you’ve bonded with Cat via the Daat Kyashar?”

Kara blinked.

Something in the kitchen shattered as it hit the floor.

“Sent Cat, all of her attention now on Kara, narrow and sharp.

Kara repeated the question to Eliza.

Eliza ignored her, carrying on as if she hadn’t heard, as if it was perfectly normal to know the words Daat Kyashar and what they meant.

“Jeremiah never stopped believing it was possible,” she said. “I had my doubts but he thought the genetic similarities between humans and Kryptonians were enough—that the events you’d survived might have pushed your hind brain into ‘fight or flight’ mode, spurring your immune system to kick in, allowing the Daat Kyashar to manifest when you—”

“Please don’t say it,” Kara begged, terrified her foster mother was about to launch into a dissertation on her sexual responses and their role in cementing the connection between herself and Cat. She wondered if it was possible to achieve a permanent state of blushing. If so, she was well on her way there.

Unseen, Eliza smirked. “I was going to say ‘when you fell in love.’” She paused for a moment, then added, “Kara, there’s nothing for you to be ashamed of. You know that, don’t you? Or...is it that Cat is listening in and you thought I was going to give you another time-honored lecture on the value of regular orgasms and the miracle of oxytocin?”

Kara groaned and Eliza laughed. “Relax, honey,” she said, trying to soothe her flustered Kryptonian daughter. “I’ll be good. But tell me...am I right? About the Daat Kyashar?”
“How do you even know those words? I only learned them on Saturday when we called Kal in a panic—”

“How do you even know those words? I only learned them on Saturday when we called Kal in a panic—”

“How do you even know those words? I only learned them on Saturday when we called Kal in a panic—”

“When Kara replied in the affirmative, Eliza went on. “So you’re still in the naissance phase—experiencing heightened emotional and physical responses as your brains rewire themselves to accommodate the connection? Suffering withdrawal when separated over long distances?”

“You knew?” Kara didn’t know whether to be incensed or overjoyed and she initiated some deep breathing exercises to calm herself down before she disturbed Carter. “All this time, you knew this was possible—that I could bond this way with a human—and you didn’t tell me? You didn’t warn me?”

“Warn you?” asked Eliza, taken aback, and Kara’s eyes filled with tears, her insecurities around the concept of consent crackling to life again, like flames bursting forth from faintly glowing embers. She instinctively curled into Carter, feeling the ache of Cat’s disappointment and concern through their connection.

Kara, darling—

Cat intended, once again, to reassure the sensitive young woman but she was interrupted by Eliza Danvers’ stern, no-nonsense voice.

“Kara Ellen Danvers, I am appalled,” she began and Kara shrank into herself, knowing what was coming next. “I don’t know what disappoints me more,” continued Eliza. “Do you truly believe Cat Grant, the Queen of All Media, would let you do what you’re doing for Carter right now if she had the slightest doubt about how she felt about you? Do you trust her so little?”

Kara blinked and sat up a little, shocked by Eliza’s words. They weren’t what she had been expecting—not by a long-shot.

Eliza went on, regret bleeding into her voice. “Or…is it yourself you doubt? Oh Kara…. Eliza sighed and Kara scrubbed at her cheeks, trying to keep her tears at bay. “Sweethart, I know you’ve always worried about controlling your powers and I know why that is. We’ll talk about it—sooner rather than later; I promise. But the Daat Kyashar didn’t happen out of the blue nor did it happen overnight.” Eliza paused, letting that sink in for a moment, and then said, “Tell me how you feel about Cat.”

It was as if Eliza’s request was the catalyst to a complex chemical and emotional reaction Kara couldn’t hope to describe, culminating in the creation of the Universe itself. Tears spilled down her cheeks and she tightened her arm around Carter. There was so much to say and no words with which to say it. The insufficiencies in every language she knew paralyzed her. Kara thought she would need two extra dimensions—at least—and maybe the mastery of time itself just to begin a general outline of how she felt.

She shook her head, and finally said the first thing that came into her mind.

“How you felt about Jeremiah,” she whispered. “She fills the whole world with light, Eliza.” The beatific smile on her lips faltered and faded a moment later. “It would be so dark without her.”

“Then trust that, Kara,” said Eliza, voice thick with emotion, “and remember, the Daat Kyashar lay dormant in your DNA all these years, waiting until conditions were perfect. It wasn’t the catalyst for your love; it manifested in reaction to it.”
A tendril of warmth and light wound through the Daat Kyashar at Eliza’s words and encircled Kara as if Cat had taken her into her arms and was holding her.

_I told you so_, she sent, a gentle smirk accompanying the thought.

Kara laughed through her tears, almost missing her foster mother’s next words.

“Which doesn’t mean it won’t be the catalyst for some significant changes—for all three of you, but most immediately for Carter since his brain hasn’t reached adult maturity.” Eliza made a frustrated sound and Kara’s attention snapped back to her foster mother.

“What?” she asked. “What is it?”

“I’m flying to Star City tomorrow morning. I’m the keynote at UCSC’s symposium on emerging research trends in biomedical engineering.”

“Eliza—that’s amazing—” began Kara.

“No, it’s inconvenient. I’d rather be meeting my grandson and Cat. I’d rather be with you all in National City, seeing if Jeremiah’s assumptions about the Daat Kyashar were correct. He had so many ideas, Kara—about how it would function here—how it might work with humans—”

Kara nodded enthusiastically. “Alex would love to hear those! Kal gave us a few files from Kalex and told us what he knew but we’ve mostly been figuring it out as we go along. The experience has been…” Kara thought of everything that had changed and how quickly it had done so, thought of all the discoveries they had made and were still making, of the emotional upheaval (both good and not so good), of all the lessons they’d learned. Finding a single word to summarize the experience was proving difficult.

“…challenging,” she said finally, deciding that one would have to do.

_Have her change her return flight from the conference_, sent Cat. _Invite her to stay with us this weekend. Carter would love it and we would benefit from another perspective on all this._

_Are you sure?_ asked Kara, knowing how private Cat was and how stressful it might be for her to meet yet another one of Kara’s family members, especially in conjunction with what was going on now at CatCo and with Carter’s recent and very public heroic act.

Cat sent a flash of warmth with her agreement. _Why not?_ she sent, rolling her eyes. _Besides, if we play our cards right, we could solve all the remaining logistical issues surrounding our relationship in one final push this weekend, leaving us free as birds for the rest of the year_, she added sarcastically. _How will we fill the time?_

Kara grinned and answered—not with words, but with images. Soft, sweet, sensual images. Cat’s resultant anticipatory purr vibrated throughout her whole body.

Eliza scoffed. ‘_Challenging,’_” she repeated. ‘_I’m sure that’s an understatement._”

“Come here when you’re done with your conference,” blurted Kara, overcome by a surge of familial longing. Cat had once encouraged her to look for the ‘anger behind the anger,’ but Kara realized emotions never appeared alone. Sometimes sadness tagged along with love and tenderness; sometimes satisfaction stood shoulder to shoulder with anger and righteousness.

Right now, it seemed uncertainty and insecurity needed the comfort of togetherness. “Change your flight back and stay with us. Please.”
“Oh, honey, are you sure? Alex said you and Cat were dealing with something big at work and I don’t want to be a burden....”

Kara grinned. “You won’t be,” she promised. “Besides, we’re getting used to the chaos. It’ll be fine.”

“Sounds like famous last words to me,” groused Eliza, “but if you say so. I’ll change my flight and come in late Saturday morning. I’ll get a cab—”

Kara shook her head. “No, you won’t. I’ll send a car. Look for your name at baggage claim.”

“Kara, that’s not necessary—”

“If he’s up to it, I’ll bring Carter. Meaning you’ll get to meet him right away.” Kara’s sing-song tone marked the offer for what it was: unapologetic emotional manipulation.

“At baggage claim, you said?” asked Eliza and Kara laughed.

Grandmothers were all the same.

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Cat swept up the remaining shards from the dropped Pilsner glass and deposited them in the compacter just as her phone began to buzz again. It was Alan, of course—no doubt feeling neglected. She took a second longer in deciding to answer than she would have normally, thinking she would take this call and it would be the last of the evening.

She had a starving wife to feed and an injured son to comfort.

Everyone else could go straight to Hell.

“Alan,” she said, answering with a sigh. She forced a measure of cordiality into her tone and put up a temporary barrier in the Daat Kyashar to keep Kara from overhearing what was likely to be a contentious conversation.

“Cat,” he replied. His usually mellifluous voice remained so and he seemed unruffled, even after what must have been a trying afternoon filled with myriad questions, some of which he likely couldn’t answer. “I apologize for the repeated calls, but it was imperative I speak with you tonight. I hope you understand.”

Cat did understand—that was the worst of it. Even now, in the aftermath of her son falling off a building, Cat found herself inextricably tethered to CatCo and its needs, a single mother with two children, one needier and more time-consuming than the other.

“Of course,” she said. “Someone has to allay the Board’s fears. I assume you’d like to meet?”

“Yes, that’s the plan...but first, how is Carter? I saw the Special Report, of course, but I understand he fell two stories. Frankly, I’m amazed a broken arm is the extent of his injuries.”

Cat’s eyebrows lifted in rueful accord. “You’re not alone in that. The pediatric orthopedic surgeon at Sterling didn’t quite use the word ‘miracle’ but it was on the tip of her tongue.” She began transferring sandwiches from the cutting board to a platter, piling them up. It was a mountain of nourishment more appropriate for a rugby team than for just the three of them, but so went the care and feeding of a superhero. “I assume that’s not the word on the tip of your tongue, Alan,” Cat continued, without ire. “All things considered.”
Alan chuckled warmly. “All things considered, the word on the tip of my tongue is ‘congratulations.’ How long have I known you? Fifteen years now?”

“Closer to seventeen,” said Cat, slightly taken aback by his seeming support. “But who’s counting?”

“Has it been that long?” he asked, scoffing gently. “All right—seventeen, then. I remember your wedding, Cat…and I remember when your marriage ended. I remember thinking it would be decades before you trusted someone like that again—that whoever was brave enough to try would have to be remarkable and someone completely unexpected.” Alan paused, and then added, “By all accounts, Kara Danvers is a remarkable young woman.”

“She is,” agreed Cat, daring Alan to challenge that assessment. “And—I assure you—completely unexpected,” she added quietly.

“Also the consensus, yes.” Alan paused again and Cat heard him shift in his chair, the frame squeaking softly in the silence. “The Board has concerns—valid ones and some that are not so valid, I’m afraid. I assured them I would meet with you—”

Cat rinsed a bag of pink Holiday grapes under the spray nozzle in the deep farmhouse sink, and then put them into a bowl.

“Not tonight—”

“Of course not. No one wants to take you away from Carter tonight. But it needs to be soon. Can you make yourself available tomorrow?”

“Yes,” said Cat, pulling another large bowl down from a cabinet. “We can.”

Here, Alan faltered. “We?”

A frown flashed unseen across Cat’s features. “I won’t have decisions about Kara’s professional future made without her input, Alan. We don’t get to sit in boardrooms beyond her reach and decide what to do with her as if she’s an underperforming stock or an advertising campaign that missed its mark. The Board has concerns—fine. They can address them with both of us together or not at all. A courier can deliver my letter of resignation within the hour.”

Cat filled the empty bowl with potato chips and pretzels, waiting for his response, her insides quivering with something akin to nervousness. She knew she was out on a limb here and she didn’t want to lose CatCo. She had unrealized plans and unfulfilled dreams by the score and they were so tied up in her brand she wouldn’t know where to begin without it.

However—that being said—Cat also knew she would walk away from CatCo and all it meant in one heartbeat if it ever became an anchor around her neck or around the necks of those she loved. The people who wielded the most power in a deal were those who could afford to walk away from it—and Cat was prepared to do so, was prepared to give up control of her company and all its holdings, over this one point.

Because if the Board didn’t respect Kara enough to invite her to the table now, they never would, and where would CatCo be then? If that was the kind of business the Board wanted, well, they could have it—sooner rather than later and without the benefit of her name or backing.

“You wouldn’t,” said Alan, finally finding his voice, scoffing at Cat’s ultimatum. “You’d be ruined.”

“Try me,” snapped Cat. “You don’t think I’d rise from the ashes…and look incredible doing it? I’m
only fifty; no one’s looking to put me on a shelf just yet. Hell, I’ve hardly begun scratching the
surface of what CatCo can mean and you know it.” Cat put one hand on her hip and began to pace
in a tight circle. “You made quite a few assumptions in those five words, Alan—the first being that
you know anything about me—about what I would or wouldn’t do.” Her eyes flashed. “Test me
and, I promise you, you will fail.”

“All right,” said Alan, acquiescing. He was astute enough to recognize a losing battle when he saw
one—and it was one CatCo couldn’t afford to lose. “We’ll meet with both of you—at your
convenience, of course. Let me know when you might be able to get away.”

Cat gave a sharp nod, pleased by the decision. “I’ll call you in the morning.”

“In the meantime,” he added, and now Cat could hear his smile, “promise me MaryAnn and I will
receive an invitation to the wedding. We wouldn’t miss it.”

Cat pursed her lips in a thin line, biting back her initial surprised reaction. “I haven’t proposed,” she
insisted, shocked by yet another of Alan’s assumptions—this one hitting a little too close to home.

Alan laughed. “Pardon my language, Cat, but what the Hell are you waiting for? Take it from an
old man who lucked out the first time he walked down the aisle—she doesn’t care half so much what
you’re willing to walk away from as long as you’re walking towards her.” He paused to let that sink
in. “And those of us who care about you would dearly love to be there when you do.”

An image of Kara walking down the aisle toward her in something flowing and delicate, her blue
eyes filled with love and sunshine, took root in Cat’s imagination and she cleared her throat,
powerful emotion rising in her, tears brimming in her eyes.

“I’ll make a note of that,” she said, intending to sound sharp and acerbic, but only managing a mildly
annoyed tone. “Good night, Alan,” she added, and she hung up on him before he could say
anything else.

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It was late—almost seven-thirty. Cat turned off her phone, tossed it onto the kitchen counter, and
went in search of Kara and Carter to call them to the table for their impromptu and informal dinner.
Her first stop—Carter’s room—yielded nothing. It was dark and decidedly empty.

As she drew nearer to the master suite, she could hear the faint sounds of Kara humming…
something. A swath of soft golden light spilled into the darkened hallway from the bedroom’s open
door and Cat walked toward it, Kara’s humming finally coalescing into an actual tune, one Cat
recognized: “Yellow” by Coldplay, of all things.

As she reached the doorway, the sight she saw stopped her in her tracks, stealing the air from her
lungs, making her gasp softly. For there, resting against a mountain of pillows, sat Kara with Carter
sleeping peacefully, his face pressed against her shoulder, his muffled snores sounding more like the
buzz of a handful of excitable bees than anything else. Kara had her arm around Carter, holding him
close, fingers combing lazily through his unkempt curls. Her cheek rested on the top of his head and
her eyes were closed as she hummed to him, a sweet and lilting lullaby. Only the half-smile tugging
at the corner of her mouth let Cat know Kara was aware of her presence.

Wave after wave of emotion crashed through Cat and she stood there tremulously, on the edge of
sobs again, heart impossibly full and despairing at the same time, grateful beyond words for this
woman and her love, for the tender care she bestowed upon their son, for the promises she made
with her eyes…and yet wishing—perhaps selfishly—they’d had the whole of Carter’s life together,
that instead of this one image of Kara holding their son now burned into her memory, she had years and years of them, each more heartbreakingly beautiful than the last.…

Kara, privy to Cat’s internal musing, reached out to her, smiling softly.

“Come here,” she whispered and Cat hurried across the room, not having to be told twice. She kicked off her shoes and leaned across the bed, grasping Kara’s hand and letting herself be pulled into her family’s quiet circle of love. Once beside Carter, she pressed kisses to his temple until he squirmed away from her in his sleep, embarrassed by her effusive attention, still a pre-teen boy, even when unconscious. Then she reached across Carter and pressed her lips to Kara’s, kissing her desperately at first, and then adoringly, wanting to fully express everything she was feeling, needing this to be the way.

There were no words. None in any of the four languages she spoke fluently nor in the five additional languages she knew well enough to feel confident when traveling to those countries. As a writer, Cat regarded the concept of inexpressibility as both a personal challenge and a rarity. Language was an altogether useful and flexible tool and it seldom failed her—except in these moments with Kara, when emotion ran high, overwhelming her ability to process it.

With the Daat Kyashar, Cat didn’t need words—and that was both freeing and terrifying when they were the bricks laid ever-so-precisely in the foundation of her existence. When she pulled away from their kiss, she found herself cupping Kara’s cheek in her hand.

“I’ve needed to do that for hours,” she confessed in a whisper, feeling something settle inside her as they touched, as if the world had righted itself, putting everything back into balance.

“Me, too,” admitted Kara, sighing with relief.

“Dinner’s ready,” said Cat. “I know you must be starving.”

Kara’s stomach confirmed Cat’s assumption by growling at the mention of food, but Kara shook her head.

“I don’t want to wake Carter just yet,” she said. “The—what I’m doing—it’s pretty intense right now. I want him to sleep—in case there’s any discomfort.”

“Can I help?” asked Cat, resting her hand on Carter’s arm just above where his cast ended. She felt heat and quite a bit of activity surrounding his injury, much of it she didn’t understand.

“I don’t know. Maybe? I finally had a chance to really look at the damage earlier—without, you know, people around—and the Daat Kyashar—it seemed to suggest a way for me to help—for me to interrupt the pain signals and to lessen his inflammatory response—but….” Kara made a tiny, frustrated sound and looked at Cat with wary, uncertain blue eyes. “I’m just making this up as I go along, Cat. Eliza and Alex are right—even if we had a full-fledged manual on the Daat Kyashar from Krypton, it wouldn’t apply to us—not really. Too many of the variables are different.” She frowned and looked down at the bed. “I wish Jeremiah were still here. I wish he and Eliza had told me about the Daat Kyashar earlier. I’m so unprepared! There are so many questions—so many things I don’t know—”

“Hey, hey—Kara, look at me,” said Cat, waiting until Kara looked up before she continued. “We’ll figure it out. I trust you and I trust this—” She gestured in a way that encompassed the three of them. “Your DNA may have started this, but we’re going to finish it—all of us. Together.” She reached up and caught Kara’s chin in her fingertips, eyes softening as her intensity faded a bit. “Like we were clearly always meant to be.”
Cat’s words and her conviction steeled Kara’s spine and she gave a short, sharp nod of her head. “Okay.”

Cat leaned forward and pressed a kiss to Kara’s temple. “Let me go change into something more comfortable and you can show me what you’re doing for him.” She dropped a kiss onto the back of Carter’s head and slid off the bed. “I want to help if I can. You shouldn’t have to do this alone.”

Kara watched Cat hurry into her walk-in, groaning quietly when she saw the magnificent gold zipper slithering down Cat’s back. It appeared she wasn’t going to be the one to unzip that pretty dress after all, and she ached with the momentary regret, reminding herself there’d be plenty of opportunities for her to unzip Cat in the future—provided they managed to get through the next few days relatively unscathed.

Carter whimpered in his sleep and Kara refocused her attention on what she was doing for him, letting her other worries go for the moment.

*One bridge at a time*, she counseled herself, quoting Cat.

“You know, that’s some of the best advice I ever received,” said Cat, returning from the walk-in wearing what appeared to be a pair of yoga pants and one of Kara’s discarded tee-shirts she’d pulled out of the laundry basket. It was much too large for her, but she didn’t care. It felt like Kara’s arms were around her and she needed the comfort of that—had needed it all day. “‘One bridge at a time,’” she explained when Kara looked up at her, confused.

Cat lifted the comforter and slid beneath it, scooting forward until she reached Carter’s side. She faced Kara and her son and tucked herself into a casual knot next to them, leaning against the mountain of pillows, propping her head on her left hand and looking deeply into Kara’s eyes.

“I was in college. I’d overloaded my schedule that semester—Spring of my sophomore year—because I’d heard a rumor that one of the advanced journalism courses was having Seymour Hersh come in as a guest lecturer for a month—four classes with the Pulitzer-award-winning journalist who’d broken My Lai.” Cat shook her head. “I petitioned my advisor and the chair of the department to let me take the course a full year earlier than I normally would have just so I could be at those lectures. Of course, they agreed—which left me with fifteen credit hours that semester instead of the twelve I was used to.”

Cat smirked, rolling her eyes at herself. “It all caught up to me at mid-terms and I called my father on the telephone in tears one night, sitting in the middle of my bed, paralyzed because I had an article and two papers due—not to mention the mid-terms I was studying for. I didn’t know where to start and, instead, was questioning everything—from my decision to be a journalist all the way to the happenstance of my birth.” Cat laughed at the memory, horrified that she’d ever been so young. “He listened to me blubber for exactly five minutes before interrupting me, letting me know in no uncertain terms that my problem was a) one of my own making and b) boiled down to my inability to prioritize properly.”

Cat screwed her face up into a crude approximation of what she thought Jefferson must have looked like in his study, scowling into the telephone, uncomfortable with the emotional outburst and sternly exasperated with his headstrong, mercurial daughter.

“‘Your problem, Cat, is you think you can do everything all at once and have it come out right in the end,’” she quoted, deepening her voice comically. “‘This new fad for multi-tasking is all well and good—in moderation—but quality requires attention and the real world demands precision. Figure out what moves you the furthest toward your goals and put that at the top of the list. Then the next and the next and so on, until the way forward is clear. Remember—you can only cross one bridge at
Kara thought about the many bridges ahead of them, some of them stacked one atop the other, fighting for their attention, jostling for position in a world turned upside down by a pocket watch, a kiss, and a single word uttered in the midst of crisis—the “Mom” heard round the world. Yet, however many crises vied for their attention, Jefferson Buchanan Grant had been right: they could only cross one bridge at a time. The most important bridge of them all—the clear and deserving focus of their attention right now—was the young man nestled between them.

Cat reached out and rested her hand on Kara’s arm.

Show me, she sent. Let me help you. You’ve done so much already.

Kara nodded and closed her eyes, inviting Cat deeper into their connection. Using a combination of imagery, sensation, and thought, she showed Cat what she was doing for Carter, showed her how to disrupt pain signals before they became pain and how to combat his body’s inflammatory response enough to decrease tissue damage and the stress the injury was causing.

Cat was either a quick study or her genetic link to Carter made everything about this newfound skill that much easier for her. Whatever the reason, she had the basics down within moments and had quickly moved on to suggesting improvements, including one that would lessen the length of time they would need to be in physical contact with Carter—not that Kara minded it. In fact, holding him—and Cat now, too—well, the contact was soothing to the insecure little girl inside her, the one that needed the refuge of family and familiarity, especially when everything else around them was so tumultuous right now.

Cat, for her part, was fascinated, awed, and humbled by the Daat Kyashar and what it allowed her to do, allowed her to see. Every loving mother on the planet at some point wished they could take away a child’s pain. Cat’s heart broke thinking of women huddled over bedsides all over the world, begging God for what was now second nature to her, a gift from another planet, long dead. That the gift also provided expanded understanding of her son, of his complexity and the miracle of his human body, well, the curious little girl inside of her never turned down an opportunity to learn and Cat moved beyond the immediacy of Carter’s injury to take in the whole of him, brilliant and beautiful and hers.

She was drawn to his maturing brain and the activity there, remembering Eliza’s words on the telephone, and she saw the new pathways built by the Daat Kyashar. If the human brain’s normal electrical activity could be described as faintly blue, the pathways created by the Daat Kyashar and the information carried on them pulsed in shades of honey-gold. They radiated from an area close to the amygdala, deep within the brain—a pea-sized glowing sun in a hazy electric blue sky.

“Is this what you saw last night?” asked Cat, pointing it out to Kara. “After Carter solved the Mohikanite’s kinetic energy problem?”

Kara gaped at Cat. The moment Cat was referencing seemed so long ago, she hardly remembered it. “You were watching?”

Cat chuckled. “Of course I was. It’s not as if you had a privacy barrier up. And your thoughts about Carter at that moment were particularly…focused,” she said.

Kara nodded, conceding the point. “Yes, I saw the new pathways…but that’s not what, um, caught my attention. What surprised me was this—”

Kara showed Cat flickering images of what appeared to be a microscopic view of Carter’s brain.
magnified significantly, specifically the synaptic connections throughout his gray matter.

“I’ve seen a lot of human brains, Cat,” she explained. “The research that’s coming to light in neuroscience right now—about how the human brain doesn’t mature fully until sometime in a person’s 20s? That’s true, but something else the researchers are noticing is that peak gray matter production happens later than they originally thought. Instead of plateauing in childhood, the human brain actually produces gray matter well into adolescence. The capacity for learning during this time of a human’s life is extraordinary—even under normal circumstances.”

“And in not-so-normal circumstances?” asked Cat slowly, wondering where this conversation was headed.

“Super-extraordinary?” ventured Kara, her voice high and uncertain.

“Elaborate,” snapped Cat, not in the mood for Kara’s hesitance at the moment.

Kara nodded, putting aside her own worries in order to allay Cat’s. “Not only is Carter’s gray matter production at the 99th percentile for human males his age—which may be related to the Daat Kyashar or may just be a product of his excellent genetics—I don’t know—but his myelin production is increasing at a rate I’ve never seen before. It’s basically streamlining his entire brain.”

“Meaning he has an agile intellect and his brain’s processing efficiency has changed, allowing for faster, more reliable nerve conduction,” said Cat.

“Yes,” said Kara. “Essentially, his brain is becoming more…” She hesitated again, looking at Cat with worried eyes. She said the last word in a whisper. “Kryptonian.”

“Hank said he thought our brains might mimic Kryptonian brains—”

“Except this isn’t mimicry, Cat. This is full-scale reorganization.” She frowned and looked down at Cat’s hand where it still rested on her arm. “Maybe Jeremiah was right—maybe humans and Kryptonians are genetically related enough that the Daat Kyashar is building new, more efficient brains from the raw material of the old. Maybe it won’t stop there. Maybe all those crazy things we worried about last night aren’t so crazy after all. I mean—you and I are sitting here with Carter between us, healing his broken arm. We’re doing the same thing for him that my body does on its own when I’m injured. The only difference is the speed. We’re slower.”

Cat heard and felt the undercurrent of concern in Kara’s musings. “Meanwhile, you’re still wallowing in the proverbial mud, thinking you’ve somehow forced something untenable on Carter and me, while patently ignoring how this solves several other problems brought to light recently—specifically, his and my safety and how we can maintain it.” Cat reached up and tilted Kara’s chin so she could look into those deep blue eyes directly. “On balance, having brains that are more Kryptonian than they were before is more useful than not—and the whole process has been easier than, say, converting to Judaism, which I understand can sometimes take years.”

*Although the two seem to be equally pro-orgasm, if I understand The Joy of Judaism correctly, she sent.*

Kara groaned and pulled her chin out of Cat’s hand, cheeks blazing a delightful cherry-blossom pink.

Cat laughed, apologizing as she did so, and then she turned serious once again.

“I won’t tell you I haven’t been afraid at certain points during all of this, my darling,” she said
slowly. “I’ve never felt as exposed or as vulnerable in a relationship before and—initially—Carter’s involvement worried me. The speed with which our lives have changed has been dizzying at times. The whole experience has been…alien to me.”

Kara opened her mouth to speak but Cat placed her index finger across her lips, forestalling her.

“Even so, I know what the Daat Kyashar is, what it has given me, and what it might mean for our future.” Cat gazed at Kara with solemn green eyes. “Know this,” she said, and her voice held a ring of steel. “I will fight tooth and nail to keep it and you, Kara Zor-El. Until my last breath, if need be. Do you understand?”

Kara nodded, head bobbing, letting Cat’s words flow through her unsteady heart like liquid gold, letting them mend the cracks there. It felt like kintsukuroi—the Japanese art of repairing brokenness with beauty. She sighed as the words settled softly, shoring her up, and the tension she was holding in her muscles slowly melted away.

*I understand, Maalkhati,* she sent, her tone formal and heartfelt. *We will not need to cross this bridge again.*

Cat shook her head lightly. “I’m happy to cross it as many times as we need to until you believe me. I’m old enough to know doubt—especially in ourselves—can rear its ugly head when we least expect it.” She reached up and let her fingertips flutter over Kara’s cheek. “And, as unreal as this sounds, we are less than a week into your first serious romantic relationship, Kara. Navigating insecurity, negotiating boundaries—it’s all devastatingly normal. Most people just get more than three days to do it in.”

Kara laughed in spite of herself. “You’re right, Cat,” she said, shaking her head. “Of course.”

“And don’t you forget it,” replied Cat, injecting some of her Queen of All Media haughtiness into her tone. “In the meantime, we have one or two more pressing items on our agenda right now.”

“Yeah,” agreed Kara, sighing.

“You and I have been asked to ‘make ourselves available’ for the Board tomorrow. I’m thinking we’ll do it right before lunch—and we’ll bring Carter. I’ll have him look all pale and wan; it’ll keep their nonsense to a minimum.” Cat glanced at Kara warningly. “And before you start imagining the worst, Kara Danvers, I’m prepared to fight anyone who even thinks firing you would be our best option for damage control. I’ll stab them in the throat with a letter opener. Your employment at CatCo is not in danger. I promise.”

Kara looked at Cat, goggle-eyed with alarm. “Okay, I was thinking getting fired by the Board was the worst until you said that. That is definitely worse. Please don’t do that.”

“If everyone behaves, I won’t have to,” said Cat airily, dismissing her concern. “Now, other than the specter of imminent unemployment, what has your lead-lined glasses all fogged up with worry? I saw you in the town car talking to your little IT Hobbit, Winn—has he finally figured out how out of his league you are?”

Kara rolled her eyes. “No. I mean—yes, but you don’t have to make it sound so—” She made a face pitched somewhere between a grimace and the piteousness of a kicked puppy. “I mean, he has been acting weird but now that he knows, he’s very supportive! He just wanted to know why—why I didn’t admit it when he guessed I was gay. Months ago.”

Intrigued but hesitant to show it, Cat raised her eyebrows. “What did you tell him?”
“That I didn’t know—because we—you and I—weren’t together back then.” Kara shrugged and looked down at Carter, happy he was still blissfully asleep (even if it was through Kryptonian means) because talking through this particular issue with Cat was hard enough. Adding Carter to the mix would be nightmarish for Kara. “It never really occurred to me that I was, you know? I mean, once I got over the flattery, the few times I ever tried anything—a handful of dates in college—I just didn’t see the point, really. Then later—with James and Adam—it felt…forced.”

“So, is that how you identify now? As gay?”

Kara shrugged again. “In purely human terms, I guess I would be considered gay.”

“And in Kryptonian terms?” asked Cat. “You would be considered….?”

“Yours,” said Kara simply. She watched as Cat’s momentary shock at the single word dissolved into a sweet, pleased smile. “I told you before, Cat… There will never be anyone else for me. On Krypton, that’s all that mattered.”

Cat didn’t respond, only reached out and found Kara’s hand, lacing their fingers together possessively. Eventually, she cleared her throat and found her voice, asking, “If it isn’t Winn, then what is bothering you?”

Kara hesitated only a moment before crumpling. “Dorothy knows,” she confessed, looking both stressed and guilty.

Cat waited for Kara to continue and, when she didn’t, she said, “Darling, after tonight, I think most of National City knows. Telephone calls we’ve each received would indicate the news has, perhaps, spread even further afield. It wouldn’t surprise me in the least if Lois sends me a congratulatory flower arrangement in the shape of a U-Haul.” She rolled her eyes at the thought. “We already know the Board knows; what difference does it make if Dorothy Webb does?”

Kara shook her head. “No—not about us,” she said, tightening her hold on Cat’s hand. “About… me.” She grimaced and whispered. “The other me.”

Cat started, her eyes widening. “What makes you think that?”

“I was in her office when I felt Carter fall—and then your panic hit and I—I fell to the floor. She took one look at me and said ‘Use my balcony.’”

Kara expected Cat to be exasperated. Instead, Cat chuckled warmly.

“Oh, Dorothy,” she said fondly. Noticing Kara’s dismay, she added, “Did I ever tell you I stole her from Perry White?”

Flummoxed by the change in topic, Kara shook her head.

“She was a low-level personnel manager at the Daily Planet when I worked there, but she was on her way up the ladder. Everyone knew her, respected her. When I bought the Tribune, she was the first person I thought of to head my HR department, but I never thought she’d leave Perry. It just so happens she was passed over for a promotion to HR Director the week before I called her.” Cat grinned evilly. “Let’s say she was…eager for a change of scenery. It doesn’t surprise me in the slightest she was able to put two and two together about you, darling. She’s one of the best judges of character I’ve ever met.”

Kara frowned. “But—”
“But what? Are you worried she’ll do a write-up in the Staff Newsletter? Announce it at the Family Picnic in July?” Cat scoffed lightly. “She’s as loyal as she is sharp, Kara, and—for whatever reason—she’s extremely loyal to you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mentioned it this morning, didn’t I? The letter she sent to me the last time I tried to fire you through official channels?” Cat glanced around the bedroom, looking thoughtfully at dresser and bedside table drawers. “I have it around here somewhere, I’m sure. I always meant to have the last sentence embroidered on a throw pillow by one of those crafty little DIY elves that keep Etsy and Pinterest in the black, but I was afraid she would see it and get the wrong idea.”

Kara tried to imagine an embroidered throw pillow on one of Cat’s couches and failed.

“What did it say?” she asked.

“Like I said this morning, it was a short email sent in response to my attempt to fire you over the daisy daydream—”

“Termination number nine,” supplied Kara helpfully, a smile tugging at her lips.

“Hmm,” agreed Cat, ruefully. “It was very well-written. So much so, I memorized it.” Cat cleared her throat as if preparing to orate before a crowd. “It said, and I quote, ‘Request denied. If you ever send me another unfounded termination for this girl, I will involve the legal department on her behalf. I’m begging you; pull yourself together and stop with these flimsy attempts to blame your own personal failings on a young woman who has done nothing to deserve this treatment. I mean, Jesus fuck, Cat. Enough. With all due respect, Dorothy Webb, Director, Department of Administrative Personnel.’” Cat raised one eyebrow and smiled sardonically as Kara took in the content of the letter. “You have nothing to worry about from Dorothy Webb, Kara. Trust me.”

“Maybe not,” said Kara, a slow, brilliant grin stealing across her features. “But now I know what to get you for Christmas.”

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Continued in *Nexus*
You will all notice a shoutout to my beautiful and amazing wife in this chapter, but I'd also like to thank her here as she has been so helpful and patient with me during discussions of plot points for this chapter and future ones. I could not have written this without her help. Also, she is the best wife ever.

Thank you, also, to Fictorium for her fantastic editing of this chapter. It has made it that much stronger, and I am grateful.

Thank you to Abydosdork for the fantastic banner! Once again, her work is more than I could have ever imagined. She takes the most vague comments and makes them works of art.

We have some OCs in this chapter again, some already familiar, and some new. Those that have been cast are below:

Eric Chu = Tzi Ma
Alice Kens = Sarah Rue
Dorothy Webb = Lois Smith
Alan McLaughlin = Ben Kingsley
Diane Magnus = CCH Pounder
Dick Corkle = Harry Davenport (I know he is long dead [1949] but he was persistent about being included.)
Barbara Schaeffer = Ana Gasteyer

Of course, all canon characters are portrayed by their actual actors. :)

“C-Cat,” Kara stuttered softly. The cedar slats of the sauna wall pressed sharply into her shoulders
and she adjusted her footing, wondering how long she would be able to keep upright like this, with one foot balanced precariously on the slotted bench beneath her and the other thrown over Cat’s shoulder. She tried again to get Cat’s attention. “C-Cat…. We—oh, Rao—we can’t…”

Cat snaked one arm around Kara’s left hip and splayed her hand wide in the hollow at the small of the young woman’s back. She used the other to brace herself against the wall, giving her delicious leverage as she continued with her singularly pleasurable task.

_Not now, darling_, she admonished huskily, her voice in Kara’s head rich and dark and hot, like the most decadent chocolate ganache. _I’m busy_, she added, delving more deeply into her work.

Kara groaned and threw her head back, not caring if she made a dent in the planks. She’d fix them. She’d stay up all night and fix them herself, if she had to; she didn’t care. She took a deep, shuddering breath and tried one last time to make an appeal for restraint. “We’re—_ahh_—we could be late, Cat. The Board won’t be—_Oh! Oh, yes_—won’t be h-happy.”

Cat pulled away from Kara with a soft but audible _pop_. “The Board can go fuck itself,” she said, clearly annoyed. “They don’t own me. If I want to show up fifteen minutes late to a ridiculous and unnecessary meeting with the taste of the woman I love still on my tongue, then that’s what I’m going to do.” Cat looked up at Kara, jade eyes softening. “I’ve needed to touch you like this for _hours_, Kara,” she admitted, “and you could use the distraction, too. Your anxiety blared at me through the Daat Kyashar like the hideous shriek of an alarm clock the second your eyes opened this morning.”

Kara knew Cat was right. Right about all of it, of course. Especially the part where Kara’d woken up with a million butterfly fish swimming around in her belly—all because she was going before CatCo’s Board of Directors as something more than just Cat’s assistant, as more than a useful pair of hands. Based on some of the emails she’d read last night, she wasn’t expecting a friendly chat.

She looked down at Cat, eyes crinkling, a healthy measure of lasciviousness present in the curve of her lips as she grinned. “I guess a few extra minutes won’t matter,” she agreed, running her hand through Cat’s hair until her fingers curled around the back of Cat’s head, tugging her back into place. “Back to work,” she breathed, tilting her hips forward and pulling Cat closer with the gentle flex of her calf muscle. “Chop chop.”

Cat smirked. Kara’s leanings toward sexually dominant behavior showed themselves so very rarely. Cat understood why that would be, especially knowing how seriously Kara took the concept of consent, but that didn’t mean Cat had any success hiding how much those moments turned her on. “Yes, Miss Danvers,” she purred, eagerly obeying the command.

“_Ungh_,” moaned Kara, melting into Cat’s touch. Her eyes fluttered closed and she pressed Cat even more tightly to her, aching and desperate now that she’d given in to Cat’s effective seduction. Her head rolled from side to side and her right hand drifted up over her belly, fingertips lightly skimming her skin until they reached her breast. She tugged at her nipple and moaned again at the added sensation.

Completely caught up in the moment and without meaning to at all, she sent, _One day, it’ll be ‘Mrs. Grant’_.

Stunned, Cat pulled away from Kara again, eyes wide. A shimmering tenderness quickened her heart and she marveled up at Kara.

Kara—frustrated by the interruption—looked down, frowning. She quickly traded her frown for confusion when she saw the look of wonder on Cat’s face.
“What? What is it?” she asked.

“You’d really take my name?” asked Cat, her voice soft and uncertain.

Kara’s eyes widened for a half a second until she remembered that yes, Cat could actually read her mind and that no, she—meaning Kara—hadn’t gotten any better curtailing the unintended sharing of her thoughts. Especially when she was distracted or otherwise occupied.

Realizing Cat expected an answer, Kara nodded firmly. “Yes. Maybe you think that’s not very feminist of me or that it’s old-fashioned, but your name is your brand, Cat. I never want there to be any confusion about who I am or where I belong.” She smiled and ran her fingers down Cat’s cheek. “Besides,” she added, smirking, “the change to my initials will provide endless hours of entertainment for Alex.” Kara rolled her eyes, remembering. “16-year-old Alex got so much mileage out of KED—imagine what 30-year-old Alex will do with KEG.”

Cat filed that information away for another day. More important to her right now was the fact of Kara’s devotion and how it obliterated her insecurities, no matter how minuscule. Kara had a way of taking something complex, confusing, and difficult to manage—Cat’s self-doubt, for example—and transforming it, like sunshine burning away fog.

“I love you, Kara,” said Cat, voice catching on the words, overwhelmed by the depth of her emotion.

Kara bit her lip. Show me how much, she sent, along with a series of flickering images instructing Cat how she should touch Kara and where.

Cat snickered. “You’re getting bolder,” she noted as she leaned into Kara, following one of the examples given and nibbling her way up the young woman’s inner thigh. “I like that,” she breathed and she resumed her morning feast with gusto, humming into Kara, the sound vibrating against Kara’s clit so deliciously, the young woman almost lost her footing.

Kara threw her head back against the wall again and ignored the tiny crack she heard. She knew it wasn’t her head. “Oh, Rao…. Don’t stop….”

Don’t worry, darling, sent Cat. Only one thing could stop me now—

A muddled blast of hurt and anger slammed into the Daat Kyashar at that precise moment, followed by Carter’s voice calling through the penthouse.

“Mom?” he shouted, and both women heard the irritation and exasperation in his voice. “Mom, Dad wants to talk to you! Where are you?”

Cat opened eyes made pale with rage. Of course her worthless ex-husband would choose this moment to vent his spleen about the news clip and of course he would start with Carter, lobbing a grenade of petulant indignation directly into his son’s psyche just because he could, just because Carter couldn’t fight back.

I’ll kill him with my bare hands, she thought, stepping away from Kara reluctantly and curling the hands in question into two tight fists.

Seconds ago, Kara had been shivering with need, on the edge of coming, awash in the fervor and focus of Cat’s mouth and her attentions. Now she shook with fury, the thought of Cat’s ex hurting their sensitive and empathetic son—especially over Kara’s relationship with Cat—making her Kryptonian blood boil.

I’ll help, she vowed darkly.
An hour later, Cat rode her private elevator the entire forty floors to the executive suite in triumph. She wore her oversized Givenchy sunglasses and an Elie Tahari sleeveless sheath dress in a color she called “Don’t Fuck With Me Red.” Her black patent leather Prada pumps—so sharp they looked like they could cut the unwary—and a jet black Ferragamo handbag hanging from the crook of her right arm completed her power ensemble. She stared at the seam separating the doors to her elevator, grinning like her Cheshire namesake, and congratulated herself on her near surgical evisceration of whatsisname, her narcissistic ex-husband.

Cat had listened to exactly seventeen seconds of his vitriol before deducing he was more concerned about some perceived attempt at humiliation than his own son’s health. In fact, the way he’d sputtered his denials when she’d confronted him about it made her think he hadn’t given a single thought to Carter’s wellbeing; his only concern was his own reputation.

“Think of how it looks for me, Kit,” he’d whined, using the diminutive of her name she hated most.

“Enlighten me,” she’d purred, her voice as slick as black ice on a dark, winding road. “What bothers you most? That Kara’s a woman? That she’s half my age? That your son calls her ‘Mom’? Or is it that you know she wouldn’t look at you twice, even in your prime?”

The seething silence that had answered her gave Cat all the information she needed and she used the opportunity to strike like a cobra, going for the kill.

“While you’re pondering an answer to any or all of my questions, consider this: we want Carter with us at Christmas.”

Whatsisname hesitated. “This Christmas or all of them?”

“All of them. And before you regale me with a third-rate volley of stammering outrage, remember where you were on the day our son was born and how I left that out of the divorce papers at your request. Because of how it would look for you if our son someday found the case file online.” She’d leaned back in her desk chair in her home office, the taste of victory already on her tongue. It wasn’t as satisfying as the taste of Kara would have been, but it would do in a pinch. “Ask yourself if you’re ready to have that talk with Carter yet, because he’ll want to hear it from you. If I’ve taught him nothing else of value, at least he knows how to vet a source.”

Her ex’s capitulation had been definitive and immediate and Cat had notified her divorce lawyer only moments afterward, wanting the ink on the changes in the custody agreement to be dry before her ex could think of a way to weasel out of them.

All in all, not a bad start to the morning, all things considered.

Kara, on the other hand, was feeling anything but triumphant. Cat’s ex’s interruption to their morning had left Kara more keyed up than relaxed and she tugged at her skirt, smoothing away imaginary wrinkles for the hundredth time. She’d ended up with the orange floral-print dress she’d discarded yesterday, snagging a white cardigan just before they left the penthouse. She wouldn’t have worn a cardigan with this dress usually, but she felt over-exposed somehow. Unprotected. On display.

She plucked nervously at a pill on her sleeve and tried not to bite her lip.

Kara knew the Board hadn’t invited her to this meeting willingly. Cat had made it an ultimatum, no doubt, and her heart was in the right place, of course, but that didn’t change the fact that Kara
Danvers, Executive Assistant, had no business in that boardroom. At least, according to the people used to being in it. To them, she was just part of the set dressing around their Very Important Work™.

Cat had elevated Kara’s status unexpectedly and without consultation, like an Edwardian Duke eloping with a chambermaid, and the Board, she knew, would strongly resist the incursion of a commoner into their midst. Unless Kara could prove to them she was a worthy investment, they would roll right over her, razing everything Cat had worked for to the ground, collateral damage in a war against change.

The few precautionary phone calls Kara had been able to make this morning while Cat showered didn’t seem as helpful now as they did then—even though one of them had confirmed her suspicion that Siobhan Smythe had, in fact, bullied a child into turning over that cell phone footage without his parents’ consent. Somehow, with the specter of the board meeting looming over her, that knowledge didn’t seem as explosive or as relevant as it once had.

As they climbed ever closer to her perceived doom, Kara remembered her nightmare of two nights ago with a start. She couldn’t help wondering if the elevator that had stolen away her family was, in fact, this elevator, wondering if the dream was in any way prophetic. She lowered her glasses to check the cables and mechanics behind the steel car’s walls only to feel Cat’s hand slide into hers, warm and strong and fierce.

It was a nightmare, sent Cat, her voice soft in Kara’s head. Cat held onto the confidence her interaction with her ex had inspired, but let the schadenfreude and self-righteousness fall away, focusing on Kara instead, wanting to soothe her nerves. Nothing more.

Kara nodded and hoped that was true. Still, she made a mental note to check all the elevators in the building anyway.

If this meeting doesn’t go well, she thought, I could become part of the elevator maintenance crew, I guess. They’ve always been very nice to me.

Cat smirked. They’ll make you wear coveralls over your cardigans, she noted, making a show of leaning around Carter to look Kara up and down. Which isn’t necessarily a bad thing, now that I think about it, she added roguishly.

Ha ha, sent Kara, chuckling in spite of herself. The faint shadow of her own smirk tugged at the corner of her mouth, but only for a moment.

Carter stood between his mothers, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, trying not to pull at his collar with his good hand. He wore the outfit he usually wore for picture day at school, even though they’d discovered at the last minute he’d outgrown the shirt. The sleeves were too short but Kara fixed that problem by rolling them up to his elbows.

“No one will ever know,” she said, reassuring Cat and her persnickety nature. “Besides, I’d have to roll up one side for the cast, anyway. Both looks more consistent.”

Cat relented, unable to argue Kara’s logic, and Carter clung to the one bit of comfort this outfit now afforded. The tie, tied for him by his fastidious and perfectionist mother, felt like a leash around his neck, tight with responsibility and expectation. He knew he shouldn’t have come, that the Board was going to be upset, but he also knew the reasons why Cat had insisted upon it.

One, she still wasn’t over yesterday, no matter what she said, and she wanted to keep him close. Two, he was a prop. A useful and effective prop, but a prop, nonetheless.
That fact didn’t bother him, really. If there was anything he could do to make this easier on his mothers, well, he was all for doing it—up to and including wearing the ridiculously pointless sling the doctors had sent home with him from the hospital. He’d survived falling off a roof; he thought a CatCo Board meeting was probably less dangerous. *Probably.*

No, the thing that bothered him was he could feel Kara’s worry. Juxtaposed against the glare of his mother’s confidence, Kara’s uneasiness seemed dark and foreboding.

Carter wanted the meeting to be over with already. He wanted to get to the part where his moms fixed things instead of being stuck in this icky part, waiting to find out how broken they were.

He sighed and Kara reached out, absently squeezing his shoulder. When the elevator finally stopped, his stomach churned with anxiety, a mix of his own and Kara’s, both.

The doors slid open to reveal Lucy Lane, dressed to kill in an ink-black Escada sheath dress and matching Louboutin patent leather pumps, and Alice Kens, looking especially professional in a conservative emerald skirt suit that complemented her hair. Alice carried a coffee caddy with three drinks from Noonan’s. Lucy sipped from a fourth.

“Alice?” asked Cat when she saw her, both eyebrows raised in obvious surprise. While the redhead’s assistance had been invaluable to her yesterday, Cat hadn’t expected it to continue today.

Alice rushed to pacify Cat as soon as she saw her brief surprise beginning to fade into pique.

“Ms. Webb temporarily reassigned me to you yesterday, Miss Grant,” she said, blushing scarlet under Cat’s scrutiny.

“And who’s assisting Jonathan?” asked Cat, wondering if this was the best course of action under the circumstances. As relieved as she was to have Alice’s organizational skills in her arsenal at the moment, she wondered how Finance was faring without her.

“Veronica Lewin from Temp Services,” said Alice. “She covered for me back in March when I was out for my sister’s wedding. Mr. Marshall requested her personally; she’s very good.” She paused for the briefest of moments before handing off the largest of the three cups still in the caddy, taking the lack of further protest from Cat as—well—not so much as endorsement, but as acceptance of the situation. “Your latte, Miss Grant. Non-fat, no foam, extra hot.”

Cat, pensive, took it from her without comment.

The CFO’s assistant then turned to Kara and handed her the next cup. “Spiced pumpkin latte, extra foam, with a dash of cinnamon for you, Miss Danvers,” she said, rattling off the order as if she’d been providing it for years. Alice had to force herself to look up at Kara, nervous about how Kara would feel about what was essentially a usurpation of her duties. She finally managed it, though, giving the blonde a deferential nod.

Kara just stared at her, eyes wide and disbelieving. She took the cup hesitantly, not certain she should. Assistants didn’t bring *other assistants* coffee. There was some sort of unwritten rule about that, wasn’t there? A firmly understood protocol meant to keep the administrative pool from devolving into the 20*th* century equivalent of a gladiator’s ring?

“Thank you,” she muttered, not sure what else to say.

Alice turned to Carter last, handing him the smallest cup, a sweet smile—the first she’d allowed herself all morning—transforming her features. “And for our hero of the day, a Snickerdoodle
steamer, no whipped cream.”

Carter looked at his mother, who nodded her permission, and he took the cup. “Thank you, Miss —?” He panicked, realizing he didn’t know the nice woman’s last name.

Alice chuckled. “Call me Alice,” she told him.

“You can do that? It’s my favorite Noonan’s drink.” He smiled at her quizzically. “How did you know?”

She winked at him. “A little bird told me,” she said, glancing at Kara. The ‘little bird’ in question—Kara’s extensive document outlining the support of Cat Grant, entitled simply Care and Feeding—was kept on the CatCo shared drive. Alice had practically burst into tears of gratitude when she’d found it.

“Now that the introductions are over,” said Cat pointedly, smirking slightly as she cast her gaze at the assembled group, “and I have my latte, Smarter Lane, you can tell me why you’re here.” She gazed at Lucy expectantly. “I anticipated an escort, of course, but isn’t it a little early in the game for non-disclosure forms?”

Lucy’s eyes flicked to Kara’s, unsure of how much she should say given this brief hesitation alone was enough to raise red flags for the preternaturally observant Cat Grant.

“I called her,” said Kara softly, deciding honesty was the best policy—especially with Cat. “While you were in the shower.”

“And I’m glad she did, Cat,” said Lucy, clearly unfazed by the intimacy of Kara’s statement. “You could use someone on your side—”

“You’re part of CatCo Legal, Lucy; you’re already on a side—”

Lucy shook her head. “CatCo Legal’s loyalty is to CatCo, yes. My loyalty is to you. And those are not mutually exclusive viewpoints.” She glanced at Kara, relieved to see the beginnings of a smile in her previously worried eyes. “No one wins here until we make that absolutely clear; CatCo is nothing without her Queen.”

Whether or not she would ever show it, Cat was touched deeply by the sentiment behind Lucy’s statement. “I assume you have a plan of some sort?” she asked, her tone wry. Only Kara knew Cat’s true feelings.

“You’re soaking in it,” said Lucy, grinning wickedly. “Or the first part of it at least. Alice gave the Board a false arrival time for you so you and I would have a few minutes to talk—”

“You have maybe forty minutes left,” interrupted Alice, checking the time on her tablet. “Plus or minus the Calm.”

“The…Calm?” asked Cat, momentarily distracted. A sudden wave of embarrassment through their connection made her turn toward Kara, eyebrows raised.

“Um,” said Kara, “the Calm states everyone should be in place, ready to receive—um—you at least three minutes before your planned arrival.”

Cat arched her eyebrow. “So now I’m a storm, am I?” she asked, glowering.

To Kara, Cat sent, Ready to receive me? She’d taken the word receive, wrapped it in sexual
innuendo, and then tossed it back to Kara through the Daat Kyashar, where it exploded like a glitter bomb, showering Kara in a wave of tingles. Kara blushed.

Lucy cleared her throat, pulling Cat’s attention back to her. “Forty minutes isn’t nearly enough time,” she admitted, “but it’s a start. I’ve glanced at the past twenty years of CEO agreements, the Memorandums of Understanding you’ve put in place with the Board, and other guiding documents, Cat—there’s nothing prohibiting you specifically from having a personal relationship with an employee. Even the Conduct Unbecoming clause doesn’t cover it—”

Cat waved her hand in a dismissive little flutter and headed toward her office, the rest of the group falling in behind her like a well-trained military regiment. “They removed it,” she said, nodding in the general direction of the boardroom. “Obviously their imaginations stretched only so far. They couldn’t fathom a world where a woman executive might fall blissfully in love with another woman—let alone her assistant.”

Four faces wore identical grins behind her. Cat affected the air of one who did not notice such things and kept her smirk to herself.

“It’s the HR policy on fraternization we have to overcome,” continued Lucy, following Cat into her office. Kara and Carter also followed while Alice sheared away to hold down the fort from Kara’s desk. “You started the process with Kara’s internship and the plans for her reclassification, but that’s not going to be enough now.”

Cat threw her bag and sunglasses on one of the long couches and headed to her bar, serving up two tumblers of M&Ms—one for herself and one for Kara. “What do you suggest?” she asked, handing Kara’s to her and thunking her own on her desk, untouched, as she opened her laptop.

Lucy glanced at Kara and Carter, unsure of how open to be on the topic, but wisely took Cat’s annoyed frown as permission to speak freely.

“Well…what did you have planned for Kara after the internship? The MOUs mention a reclassification, but don’t define it.”

Cat and Kara grimaced at the same time.

“We hadn’t gotten that far, to be honest,” said Cat. “I know I want her here with me, helping me run CatCo like she does now—but with more input and direction, and less…” Cat scowled, thinking of all the pointless goose chases she’d sent Kara on over the years, of all the mindless tasks she’d given her, just to put some distance between them. “I thought the internship would show us the most effective role for Kara and her strengths.”

“Is there even a position like that in the classification structure?” asked Lucy, concerned. “Did you check?”

Cat snatched her M&Ms off her desk and popped one into her mouth, chewing irritably. “It’s been a busy week, Lucy. You’ll forgive me if I haven’t had the time to go searching for a new title for Kara.” She paused to take a calming breath, and exhaled her frustration. “We thought we had a year. We’ve had other priorities to attend to.”

Lucy blinked. “Week?” She looked at Kara, who sheepishly looked away. Then she rounded on Cat, outraged. “You’ve been together a week?”

Kara’s pink cheeks clashed with the orange of her dress as she shook her head. “It’ll be a week tomorrow,” she said, shrugging apologetically. Cat rolled her eyes at the correction.
“It’ll be a week tomorrow?” Lucy staggered to the edge of Cat’s desk and leaned heavily against it, wondering what the hell they were all doing here if Cat and Kara had barely been together long enough to outlive a pint of raspberries. Then something occurred to her. “Wait—” she said, holding up one hand, brows diving into a frown over darkening eyes. “Is this some sort of weird Kryptonian thing?”

And—just like that—the shoe of shock was on the other foot.

Cat blanched and Carter giggled. Kara gaped at Lucy as if she’d grown another head. “You know?” she squeaked, forgetting herself. The whites of her eyes showed all the way around her sky-blue irises.

Lucy crossed her arms over her chest and shook her head, turning her back on both women, disgusted. “Lois and I might not be close,” she said, whipping around to face Kara again, “but she’s been with your cousin for how many years now, Kara? Trust me; your name’s come up once or twice.”

“Oh,” said Kara. “Yeah, I guess so.” She should have known.

“That Kara’s Sup—” began Cat.

“No! That you’ve only been together a week! That’s the part with the potential for the most damage. The Board finding out Kara is who she is might actually work in our favor.” Lucy sighed and tried to regain control of her anger. “Who?”

“Alex,” blurted Kara. “And her boss, Hank. Oh, and Susan—one of her fellow agents. She overheard me talking to Alex.”

“Carter, of course,” added Cat, “and my mother in Metropolis.”

“Eliza,” said Kara, thinking hard. “And Kal probably guessed after we called him Saturday.”

“Which means Lois knows,” said Lucy darkly. “I’m sorry to say this Kara—I mean, he’s your cousin and all—but Clark is shit at lying.”

“It runs in the family, I assure you,” said Cat dryly.

“Hey!” protested Kara, who received a single raised eyebrow and the ghost of fingertips skimming across her cheek in response to her outburst.

“You two need to focus,” said Lucy sharply. “Anyone else? Think. Does anyone else know how short a time it’s been?”

Kara and Cat ran through the six days in their heads and finally decided, no, there wasn’t anyone else. There were others who knew they were together, but no one who could definitively point to a day when it had begun. After a brief consultation through their bond, they turned to Lucy and shook their heads.

“Good,” said the beleaguered lawyer, sighing with relief. “I can assume your sister and her colleagues aren’t going to cross paths with anyone on the Board anytime soon, but Cat, your mother is a problem. As are Kara’s foster mother and my sister.” She checked her watch, annoyed by how
late it was. They only had a few minutes left and no real plan to speak of.

“Okay—new party line,” she said, pinning both women with a look that said ‘I’m giving the orders now.’ “You’ve been dating for six months. Pick a date and a reason things changed between you. Memorize it and share it with our problem children at your first opportunity. I’ll handle Lois and Clark, so don’t bother calling them. In the meantime, we have to figure out a way to change this from an inquiry into a job interview—fast.”

“A job interview?” asked Kara, going white. “Lucy, what are you talking about?”

“The only way the Board will ever be satisfied with Cat’s plans for you is if she’s no longer the person you report to. The appearance of impropriety doesn’t work the same for women as it does for men. Think Meg Ryan versus Russell Crowe. Her career ended up in the toilet because she cheated on her husband, but Russell Crowe was suddenly on everyone’s short list because he was the rogue who had tarnished Little Miss Angel’s halo.”

Cat scowled. “As much as I hate to admit it, Kara, Lucy’s analogy is disappointingly accurate. That man was insufferably smug and unapologetic and had casting directors lined up around the block, promising him he’d be the next Brando. Young Brando, of course; not Island of Moreau Brando. Meanwhile, agents crossed the street rather than be seen near Meg. After the dust settled, she couldn’t have gotten work in a Peoria community theater without paying them.”

Lucy nodded. “So the goal is to get you in another command structure—one that doesn’t scream Sexual Harassment Lawsuit from the rafters. The problem is there isn’t anyone else who can supervise you if you’re doing the kind of work Cat wants you to be doing. Unless you’re planning to make this easy on all of us by quitting. Are you?”

“No,” said Cat acidly, answering for Kara. “She isn’t.”

“Didn’t think so,” replied Lucy grimly. “In which case, the only option—other than Kara joining another department somewhere in an entry-level position and working her way up the ladder—is for her to report to the Board the way you do, Cat. Ergo, this disaster is now a job interview instead of a court-martial.” She crossed over to Kara and began to herd her in Cat’s general direction. “Cat, take her and clean her up. The dress can stay; the cardigan can’t. Fix her hair and her makeup. Put some jewelry on her. We’re looking for a little gravitas—nothing fancy.”

Cat knew exactly what to do. “We’ll need transparency,” she said over her shoulder as she gathered Carter into their little group and nudged them both toward her private ensuite. “Literally and figuratively. Tell Alice to let the Board know I’ve arrived and that I’ve decided I want the meeting moved to my office. Have her tell them I have Carter with me. Alan will understand.”

“Good plan,” said Lucy, grinning now. “Kara, let Cat and I do the talking in the beginning. We’ll take as much of the heat off of you as we can. If someone asks you a question, keep your answer short and sweet, and when you see your moment to shine—and there will be one—take it. Don’t hesitate, don’t overthink. Just run with it.” Lucy offered the young woman what she hoped was a reassuring smile. “I’ll take care of the rest.”

Kara offered Lucy a weak smile in return.

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Alan McLaughlin had to give Cat credit—she certainly knew who she was dealing with and how to frame her message. As he and his fellow board members approached Cat’s office from the elevator bank, her well-documented skills in showmanship became even clearer.
Alice Kens stood at the door like a palace guard, cutting a sharper figure than usual in a tailored skirt suit and a precise chignon, her features impassive and inscrutable. Beyond her, through the massive glass walls that served as a symbolic reminder of CatCo’s promise of transparency to the world, Alan saw Lucy Lane and he smirked inwardly. He had expected the impressive and brilliant attorney to choose Cat’s side in all of this, but hadn’t expected her to be so blatant about it. She’d surprised him and the fact pleased him greatly, though he couldn’t have said why.

Beyond Lucy, though, was Cat’s pièce de résistance: a tableau of power as artfully and as allegorically arranged as da Vinci’s *Last Supper*.

Cat stood behind her desk, leaning slightly forward over it, braced by her elegant, long-fingered hands. A wide, easy smile graced her features and she looked as relaxed and as confident as Alan had ever seen her. Cat’s son and Kara Danvers, the unwitting architects of this whole difficulty, flanked her. Kara stood at Cat’s right hand and Carter, with his broken arm and sling, stood at her left.

Kara’s smile was passable but not as practiced or as believable as was Cat’s. Her posture was perfect, however, and Alan noted she looked different from the last time he’d seen her—less girlish, more sophisticated. He wondered if it was just a paint job or if there was substance underneath. That, he knew, was the million dollar question.

Carter didn’t even try for artifice. His grim determination to see his mother protected radiated from him in waves and was, perhaps, the most intimidating part of the whole scene. Alan was suitably impressed—though the feeling didn’t surprise him. He was Cat’s son, after all.

“Oh,” said Diane Magnus, Vice President of the Board. She stood just behind Alan’s right shoulder, her exclamation soft and laden with rueful understanding.

“You see it, too, then?” he asked easily, almost smiling. He would never say it here, but he loved when Cat owned her power. They were in for a show no matter what happened—and Cat’s shows were always worth the price of admission.

“That we’re screwed?” asked Diane, eyebrows raised. She snorted. “Yes.” She found her gaze caught by Cat’s and the CEO inclined her head in acknowledgement. “Nothing fazes that woman, does it?”

“She cut her teeth in Grozny, Diane,” said Alan. “She spent three miserable days holed up in a bombed-out hotel as the city around her was practically razed to the ground. You’re mistaken if you think Cat Grant has ever shaken in her shoes because of the likes of us.”

“I thought—” Diane frowned. “Dirk, as awful as he was, did find something we weren’t expecting.”

Alan nodded. “And Cat was never worried about herself during all that. Her only concern was protecting her son. Or sons, truth be told. She would have walked away without complaint if we’d asked her to.” His gaze flickered to Diane for a moment. “She threatened resignation last night when I balked at including Kara Danvers in our meeting today. Keep that in mind.”

Diane laughed, the sound low and rich. “Oh, yeah. We’re getting screwed all right.” She squared her shoulders and took a deep breath. “Question is whether or not we’re going to enjoy it when it happens.”

Alan chuckled. “I wonder if she’ll let Carter stay,” he said, more interested in the answer than he was letting on. “It’d be a hell of a learning experience for him.” When Diane looked unconvinced, he
added, “One day Carter Grant will be leading CatCo Worldwide into the future. Don’t forget that, Diane—because, rest assured, Cat hasn’t.”

“Shit,” she said, and Alan agreed with her succinct assessment.

“Mr. McLaughlin,” greeted Alice as they approached. She pulled open the door and nodded affably at them both. “Ms. Magnus. Miss Grant is ready for you.”

Alan and Diane entered first, followed by the other seven members of the Board, Dorothy Webb, and—last but not least—Alice Kens herself, who hurried around the crowd to retrieve a tray from the bar.

“I hope you don’t mind the change of venue too much, Alan,” said Cat, by way of greeting, rising as the group entered.

“Not at all, Cat,” he assured her. He took a place opposite Lucy Lane and motioned for Diane to sit next to CatCo’s legal counsel. “It’s certainly more comfortable in here than that stodgy old boardroom.” He turned his gaze to Kara, scrutinizing her as the group behind him jostled for their seats. “Kara, allow me to welcome you to your first—but hopefully not your last—board meeting. The Board and I look forward to working with you in your new role—whatever that turns out to be.”

Well, that answered that.

Kara had been expecting a test of some sort but Alan’s bluntness in reference to the uncertainty of her future made her insides shake. She did her level best not to show it, though, relying on a little of Supergirl’s confidence to steel her backbone. Cat had prepped her during their little costume change and she already knew—from vast personal experience—how important first impressions were.

“Thank you, Alan,” she replied, her gaze on the Board President direct and unwavering. The name Alan felt awkward and wrong in her mouth, and she was happy she didn’t bobble it. She kept herself from fiddling with her glasses by gripping the edge of Cat’s desk until it creaked and tried, instead, to affect an air of casual interest. “I look forward to working with you, too. I know I will appreciate any guidance the Board can give us.”

Alan nodded at the young woman and held her gaze for a second longer than he should have, wondering if she would look away. She didn’t. Impressed, he turned to Cat and Carter and his tone became friendlier and less formal.

“If it isn’t the man of the hour,” he said warmly. “May I be the first to congratulate you on a job well done, Carter? Or—if not the first—one of what I assume will be many?”

“It doesn’t take talent to fall off a roof,” said Carter darkly. “Anyone can do it.”

Alan laughed but not unkindly. He empathized with the boy, understanding all too well what was fueling his displeasure. If the situations had been reversed, he knew he’d be inclined to flex his muscles, too. “You’re right, of course,” he agreed. “But taking a risk like that in service of another shows heart. Courage. Concern for your fellow man.” Alan smiled. “I remember you were a fan of Superman when you were younger. Taking his lead, are you?”

Carter shook his head. “Superman’s okay, I guess,” he replied, shrugging indifferently. “Around here, though, Supergirl has him beat. She’s National City’s hero. I’ll take her lead any day.” Carter stood up straight and puffed out his chest, thinking this colleague of his mother’s might try to argue the point. Instead, Alan raised both eyebrows.

“I stand corrected,” he said, glancing at Cat. “Like mother, like son, it would appear.”
“We both know quality when we see it,” said Cat, her smile a tad smug. She flicked her eyes at Kara just in time to see the brief flash of pink that crossed her cheeks.

Alan, too, turned to look at Kara Danvers. She was the unknown quantity in all of this, the wrinkle in the fabric no one had been expecting. At first glance, she seemed…average. Young, certainly. Pretty, too—in a wholesome, girl-next-door way. However, as she looked back at him, blue eyes piercing and attentive, he caught a glimpse of something bright and deep and certain. Something extraordinary and startling.

“We can be assured Kara knows quality when she sees it, too, can’t we?” he asked, and his meaning was not lost on anyone present. He turned his gaze back to Cat as he took his seat. The rest of the Board followed half a second behind him. “Will Carter be joining us today?” he asked, careful to school his tone to one of mild curiosity.

Cat shook her head, her eyes tracking Alice as she put the coffee and tea service on the long table between the two sofas. The younger woman was finding it easier to maneuver with the tray now that Cat’s guests had settled.

“Carter will stay with Alice while we meet,” she said, putting her arm around her son’s shoulders and guiding him out from behind the desk. Kara mirrored their path from her side, coming to a stop next to one of Cat’s charcoal nailhead guest chairs, which had been turned around to face the assemblage. “I’m sure you can forgive a frightened mother’s need to keep an injured child within line of sight. Especially under the circumstances.”

“Of course,” said Alan, hiding his relief. “I hope you’re back in fighting form soon, young man,” he said to Carter as Alice came to his side. “I promise not to keep your mother long.”

“Mothers,” Carter corrected, glancing at Kara who couldn’t have stopped her smile if she’d tried. “And I appreciate that, sir. It’s been an eventful couple of days.”

Alan caught Diane’s eye and they shared a knowing look. “I’m sure it has,” he agreed.

Cat leaned down and pressed her lips to Carter’s forehead. “Go with Alice now, sweetheart,” she said, wiping away a garnet ghost of her kiss with her thumb. “We’ll be out in a little while.”

“Okay,” said Carter, smiling wanly. “Love you,” he added, before turning to follow Alice.

“We love you, too, darling,” said Cat, smiling as she watched him go. When the door finally shut behind him, Cat strode to the chair next to Kara’s and they took their seats in perfect unison, Kara’s posture ramrod straight while Cat reclined and idly traced the line of the double-strand gold choker around her neck.

“Shall we begin?” she asked, treating the group to one of her practiced smiles.

Alan returned Cat’s smile but she noted it didn’t quite reach his eyes. “As I said to Carter, I expect our meeting today to be brief—no more than an hour—and civil. The Board has certain concerns now that your personal relationship with one another has come to light.” He indicated both women with a nod of his head. “This is your opportunity to address them. To that end, I’ve asked Dorothy Webb to join us.”

“I find it interesting you’ve invited the Director of Administrative Personnel to this meeting when Cat’s relationship with Kara doesn’t violate a single term of her contract—not even the Conduct Unbecoming clause—” began Lucy.

Another board member, a scowling man named Richard Corkle, scoffed, interrupting her. “Well,
who in their right mind expected her to engage in such an unseemly affair?"

“So much for civility,” said Lucy, glaring at him. She followed that look with a meaningful one directed at Alan, who frowned deeply.

“I did say civil, Dick, and I meant it,” he said sharply. “There’s no indication of anything unseemly here and I’m disappointed by your assertion otherwise. Our purpose in this meeting is to address any negative press from the report on Channel 3, and to protect CatCo from potential future litigation. Not to debate your antiquated ideas on morality.” Turning to Lucy, he added, “Dorothy is here to speak toward HR policy and—to a lesser extent—as an advocate for Kara. She’s already confirmed to me privately that no complaints have been brought to her, formally or informally, regarding Cat and Kara’s relationship.”

“In fact, no one seems to have known a thing about it,” said Dorothy, glancing at Kara and offering her an encouraging smile. “After the report aired last night—and at the behest of Mr. McLaughlin—I made some inquiries of employees who’ve worked closely with one or both of them over the last year. The consensus was that Cat and Kara make a fantastic professional team. Nothing more was suspected—certainly nothing inappropriate or untoward.”

Kara returned Dorothy’s smile gratefully.

A woman with a pinched face and a severe hairstyle sneered and Kara’s smile faded. “All that proves is that they’re good at hiding things.”

“That’s not fair, Barbara,” said Diane, frowning, concerned. “I don’t see any indication of intent to mislead or misdirect, here. As I understand it, Kara was about to embark upon an internship—overseen by a number of division chiefs and department heads—that would have mitigated some of our pressing concerns about oversight, transparency, and favoritism.” The Vice President turned to address Dorothy. “I assume any plans to promote Kara after the internship would have included your department, wouldn’t they have, Dorothy?”

The silver-haired director nodded. “That was my understanding from the MOUs sent to me by the legal department yesterday. If Kara completed the internship successfully, we were to reclassify her based upon CatCo’s business needs, her interests, and with the input of those chiefs and directors with whom she had worked.”

“So it’s a question of who knew what and when,” countered Barbara, her sneer intensifying. “Sounds like we’ve uncovered some collusion with Legal—”

Lucy held her hand up, shocked. “Wait a minute—are you upset because you didn’t know at all or because you didn’t know first? If I understand Dorothy correctly, none of us knew Cat and Kara had anything other than a highly successful professional relationship until that news report aired yesterday evening. I know I certainly didn’t.”

“Then why are you here, taking her side?” asked Dick. “This whole thing stinks to high heaven, if you ask me,” he added, disgusted.

“No one has,” said Cat archly. “Lucy is here as CatCo’s advocate. That’s what I pay her for, after all. Unless you think I should step down? Is that what you’re after, Dick—a second bite at Dirk Armstrong’s apple?” She tsk-tsked. “Isn’t it telling how many of you walking embodiments of white male privilege want to take over the empire that I built? And all of you have phallic little four-letter names beginning with ‘D’.” Cat narrowed her eyes. “Hmm.”

Kara tried not to gape at Cat but a bubble of surprised laughter she couldn’t stop burbled through the
“Cat isn’t stepping down,” said Lucy firmly. “CatCo is and has always been the product of Cat Grant’s incomparable vision. Separating one from the other would be disastrous and, frankly, I don’t see the need. The last I checked, there is absolutely nothing in Cat’s contract that requires her to discuss the particulars of her love life with anyone in this room. Cat’s personal life is just that—personal.”

“Not when it has the potential to destroy CatCo’s brand,” countered Dick. “That nervy little minx at Channel 3 has us over a barrel! The city doesn’t care about the boy’s act of heroism! All they’re talking about is that woman,” he said, pointing at Kara, whose whole body went on instant alert. Her heart thundered in her chest and she struggled to keep her fight or flight instinct from showing in her features.

“Even if they don’t know her name or who she is, they know she’s a woman—and easily half Cat’s age,” continued Dick. “When they find out she’s not only an employee, but Cat’s administrative assistant, we’ll be laughingstocks from here to Kathmandu.”

Cat’s eyes flashed and she snapped upright, leaning forward to address Dick directly. “Your affair with not one but two of your assistants didn’t seem to affect the daily lives of the people of Kathmandu,” she said acidly.

Dick took Cat’s comment completely in stride. “Those affairs weren’t national news, Cat, and I’m not the face of CatCo Worldwide Media. You have no idea what’s going to happen, do you?” He gaped at her as if she were an idiot child. “Since Channel 3 aired that piece last night, the worst of the worst—the sleaze that trades in gossip and speculation—have been swarming over your life with a fine-toothed comb, looking for the pins with which to prick your bubble of success. They’re not looking to make this the love story of the century, with features in the Style section about whose gown you might wear to your summer wedding or splashy honeymoon destination spec pieces; they’re looking to bury you with this! You’ve given them pure prurient gold, Cat—a May/December lesbian affair cut right out of the worst pulp fiction the Fifties had to offer—and they’re building a coffin for you out of it.”

As Dick spoke, Kara’s panic increased. Everything the cantankerous board member said seemed to be as effective as a Kryptonite dagger straight to Kara’s heart and she felt like she couldn’t breathe. Her blood pounded in her ears and she struggled to maintain her external stoicism. It was crumbling and crumbling fast—so she did the only thing she knew would help: she thought What would Cat do?

That single question stopped the chaos within Kara and she closed her eyes for one second, forcing herself to take a deep, calming breath. She sank fully into her connection with Cat, drawing from the well of Cat’s strength, poise, and skill, buffeted by myriad troubling thoughts, weathering them until her Kryptonian brain kicked in. Faster than any human, Kara sorted through all the relevant data and found a faint nexus of possibility that would not only stop Dick’s worst case scenario in its tracks, but would likely fuel talk around industry watercoolers for months to come—in CatCo’s favor, no less. When Kara opened her eyes again, the shadow of a smile ghosted across her lips.

“That’s not the story they’ll be running with,” said Kara pleasantly, and Cat looked at her sharply, noting her serenity. Kara’s nerves no longer quaked through their bond; instead, she seemed to be drawing confidence from Cat herself, pulling it inside her, like sunlight, and reflecting it outward with the same intensity and precision as her heat-vision.

“Of course it is!” shouted Dick, rounding on Kara. “What are you talking about? You don’t know
the first thing—"

Kara ignored his outburst and turned, instead, to the Director of Administrative Personnel. "Dorothy, I have a hunch," she said. "Would you call Salva and ask her how many times Siobhan Smythe has applied for a position here at CatCo—or at any of our subsidiaries?"

Dorothy’s surprise gave way to a beaming smile. "It would be my pleasure," she said, and she retrieved her cell phone, rising from her seat and stepping away from the group so as not to interrupt them with the call.

"Just what do you think you’re playing at here, young lady?" snapped Dick.

"If I’m wrong, I’ll pack up my desk today," said Kara. "But if I’m right, Snapper Carr will fire Siobhan Smythe and he’ll issue a personal apology to Cat on air this afternoon," she continued, her voice even and unhurried. Somehow, she endured the laughter that rang out around the room without flinching. Even Alan seemed bemused by the certitude of her wildly optimistic statement.

Diane Magnus, however, found Kara’s assertion intriguing.

"Why?" she asked simply, and the other board members quieted, shocked anyone was taking the girl seriously.

Kara treated Diane to a serpentine grin so out of character for the young assistant that the Vice President blanched and leaned away from her. "Because the story they broadcast last night isn’t the real story," said Kara. "Why would Siobhan Smythe follow a handful of Twitter breadcrumbs to Carter’s school? No one else did. The other stations called here or to the school, looking for corroboration before they made a move. Not Siobhan; she and her crew went directly there. Why? Because she wanted to celebrate an ‘act of heroism’, as you put it, Dick?" she asked, glancing at the glowering board member.

When no one had an answer for her, Kara answered the question herself. "No. I think she went to Carter’s school yesterday because she saw an opportunity to embarrass a professional rival. A rival she blames for her struggling career."

"What?" Barbara’s look of astonishment matched the ones on several other board members’ faces. "What are you talking about?"

Dorothy glanced at Kara just then and caught her eye. When she was sure she had Kara’s attention, she tucked her cell phone awkwardly between her ear and shoulder and held up six fingers. Kara nodded, pleased.

"The real story is that Siobhan Smythe is a bitter six-time applicant to CatCo, who I’m betting never made it past the first interview." She looked at Dick directly. "You want to talk morality? What kind of moral judgement allows a mediocre second-string field reporter to use footage acquired from a minor, without his parents’ consent, in a national Breaking News broadcast?"

"Wait—you think she did this or you know she did?" asked Diane, intent on the distinction. It could make all the difference.

"I know she did," said Kara. "I was there; I remember a boy with a cell phone in the crowd around the ambulance when I arrived. He’s the only person who was filming. I confirmed it with his family—the Michaels’—this morning."

"That doesn’t matter!" protested Dick. "Snapper Carr won’t care. He’s protected the Smythe girl before—from far worse things, I assure you."
“He won’t protect her this time,” said Kara, and the shadow of a smile tugging at her lips blossomed into something of a victorious grin—not unlike the one Cat had worn that morning.

“Why not?” asked Diane.

“Because if Snapper refuses to fire her, CatCo will sue KRO3 into bankruptcy,” deadpanned Kara. “He’ll be eager to agree to our terms because he gave the green light on Siobhan’s footage last night. Footage that identified Carter Grant by name and with a full, unobstructed view of his face—also without parental consent, I might add.”

Lucy stared at Kara for five full seconds before bursting into peals of raucous laughter. “Oh, my God, Kara! It’s brilliant!” She shot an appreciative glance Cat’s way, adding, “She learned this from you, didn’t she?”

Cat beamed at Kara. “God, I hope so,” she said. “I’d like to be able to take credit for something today.”

“Learned what?” barked Dick Corkle, face red with rage. “Because I haven’t heard one thing that changes my mind about this whole fiasco!”

“Then you haven’t been listening, Dick,” said Alan, shaking his head. Turning to Kara, he added, “I apologize for ever doubting you.”

“Oh, for God’s sake, Alan—”

Alan finally snapped and turned on Dick with the full force of his exasperation. “If you’d put a cork in it long enough to let a word of what Kara’s saying sink in—”

Lucy interrupted before things got out of hand between the men. “Let me break it down for you, Dick,” she said sweetly, hitting the k-sound at the end of his name with a definitive pop. “CatCo Legal is going to call Snapper Carr in an hour to offer him an ultimatum—either he kills the story, fires Siobhan, and issues a personal apology to Cat on air today or CatCo Worldwide—in conjunction with the Michaels family—will sue KRO3 and Snapper Carr, personally, for failing to protect the interests of one minor—this Michaels kid—and the identity of another during a live broadcast, specifically Carter Grant, son of Cat Grant, CatCo’s owner.”

She snickered when Dick began to pale around the edges, like faded parchment paper. “And before you ask, Barbara,” Lucy added, anticipating the argument of the other skeptic in the room, “I’m sure the Michaels family will happily join our cause once they discover how big a house I’m planning to drop on KRO3. Trust me when I tell you, they will not want to be on the wrong side of this deal—and you’d better hope Snapper takes the deal, Dick,” she continued, turning back to the now thoughtful man, “because if he doesn’t and we end up in court, I promise you, CatCo will win.”

“You say that as if I should be unhappy about that outcome,” said Dick warily, not sure he was following Lucy’s train of thought.

“Because she knows what I’ll do when I win,” said Cat silkily, a slithering smile of her own aimed at the curmudgeonly board member. “She knows I’ll gut KRO3 like one of the fishes I don’t particularly care for and I’ll do one of two things with it, depending on what the Board decides here. Either CatCo will absorb the station, giving us double the prime-time exposure, or I’ll give it to Kara as a gift—and I’ll let you worry about how well she’ll run it in competition with us.” She flashed Kara an entirely different kind of smile—one made out of starlight and steel. “I’ll be too busy cheering her on to care.”
Silence overtook Cat’s office like a wave of humidity, sticky and oppressive, as the Board considered their options. Diane eventually took the lead, knowing there was really only one.

“I move to allow CatCo Legal to go ahead with the plan Lucy Lane just outlined so…vividly,” she said, shuddering a little at the thought of Kara Danvers opening her own media outlet just down the street.

“Seconded,” said several overlapping voices. Apparently Diane wasn’t the only one worried about that possibility.

“All those in favor?” asked Alan gravely.

Hands went up all around the room—some more quickly than others. Even Dorothy raised her hand, knowing full well she had no vote in the matter. That pesky little detail wasn’t going to keep her from lending her support to Kara, though. Not for one second.

“All opposed?” asked Alan, knowing there would be no hands. Dick Corkle was cantankerous and conservative and problematic in all the ways anyone would expect of him, but he wasn’t stupid. He’d been in the business for nearly fifty years; he knew a win when he saw one.

“I think we can safely say the Board is in full support of your plan, Lucy,” said Alan, turning his gaze on the attorney, feeling slightly wrung out but confident, nonetheless. “That just leaves the question of Kara Danvers. Clearly, we can’t afford to lose her,” he noted, and several board members grunted their agreement. “Just as importantly, though, she can’t remain in the command structure as she is—reporting to you, I mean, Cat. That opens CatCo to a host of problems I’m sure none of us wants to tangle with.”

“What do you suggest, Alan?” asked Cat. “All roads do lead to Rome,” she noted, turning her hands to the sky in an elegant shrug.

“Not all of them,” said Dick, “but I dare say you were counting on one of us to make that observation. Looking to add another chief, are you?” He shook his head, feeling annoyed and manipulated. “Out with it, then. What flavor horse pill are you asking us to swallow?”

“Chief Brand Officer,” blurted Kara, answering before anyone else could take a breath—if they even had anything to offer, that is. This wasn’t something she and Cat had had time to discuss, after all. She was flying blind here.

All eyes turned to her practically in unison and Kara swallowed, summoning her strength—coupled with a bit of Cat’s—once again. “First, no one knows Cat’s vision and brand better than I do. I spend more hours a day with her than any person on this planet and I’ve been doing it for over two years now.” The look of determination on Kara’s face was as earnest as it was fierce. “I’m the world’s leading expert on Cat Grant.”

Mmm, you are getting bolder, aren’t you? sent Cat, purring through their connection, the words sharp and tight with arousal. I expect you to share some of this expertise with me later, darling. The flavor of Cat’s thoughts left no doubt as to the exact nature of her request. I believe we have some unfinished business from this morning to address, as well, she added brazenly, sending the whisper of a kiss to that sweet, soft spot between Kara’s thighs.

Kara’s eyes widened and she forced herself not to look at Cat or react in any way—even though heat raced through her, leaving her aching in ways that were quite distracting.

Cat chortled with glee through the Daat Kyashar. Oh, you were right, darling, she sent. This does
“Second,” continued Kara, the word heavy and hard-ended in her mouth, “Chief Brand Officer sounds made up—as if Cat created it just to keep me close. All those assumptions you wanted to hide from ten minutes ago? This will confirm them for our competitors and they’ll make the same mistake everyone does with me—they’ll underestimate me.”

She cast her gaze around the room, effectively accusing them all of the same error, and ended with a pointed look at Cat, eyes filled with admonishment and lust in equal measure.

Eyebrows shot up all over the room, with the notable exceptions of Cat and Dorothy. Cat smirked and Dorothy beamed.

“No one will believe it!” groused Dick. “An Executive Assistant of your age becoming CBO? It’s unprecedented! It might throw off our competitors like you say, young lady, but it could do some real damage within the company, too. What do you say to that?”

Kara leveled very blue, very serious eyes on the man. “I say my name is Kara,” she said, her mouth set in a grim line. “If you want the rest of CatCo to take me seriously, then it has to start with you—with everyone in this room. This plan only works if you trust me to do my job; if you accept me as an equal.” A hint of royal Kryptonian haughtiness crept into her tone. “Call me ‘Kara’ or nothing at all. I’m no one’s ‘young lady.’”

Dick harrumphed, taken aback. When he caught sight of Alan’s warning look, he had the good sense to look abashed. “Point taken, Kara,” he said. “Though that doesn’t answer—”

“As to your question, we don’t have to publicize the change right away. Cat announced my internship Monday. We can let it go on as planned, though now under the Board’s supervision and with different objectives.” She cast a look around the room, pinning each board member with her singularly pointed gaze. “All I’m asking for is time—time to learn from all of you, to prove myself to you. In the meantime, we’ll bring Alice Kens on board as Cat’s new Junior Executive Assistant. I’ll train her and when you feel I’m ready for the change in my title, she’ll be ready for the change in hers.”

“By that time,” added Cat, in a voice like whiskey laced with honey, “I’ll be the luckiest woman alive and no one will bat an eye at the change in Kara’s title. They’ll be too busy trying to keep up with us to care.” Her eyes shimmered with emotion and Kara glanced at her, blushing sweetly, heart hammering in her chest at the reminder of their sometime-future wedding and all it would entail. Her head swam and a single thought flitted through their connection with all the finesse of a newly-hatched butterfly.

Is this really happening?

Cat almost laughed out loud. Hadn’t that question—or one very like it—been the start of all this?

It is, my darling, she answered. For better or for worse.

For better, sent Kara insistently. Everything’s always better with you.

Cat cleared her throat and turned deliberately away from Kara, urgently in need of a moment to breathe. She was seriously contemplating leaning across the short space that separated them to kiss Kara senseless in front of everyone present! That simply would not do.

“Are we agreed?” she asked, an urgency in her tone that wasn’t there before. “Or is there someone in this room still confused about in whose extremely capable hands I’ve placed the future of CatCo
“Worldwide Media?”

Lucy cast a hard, dark look around the room, practically ordering the others present to keep their mouths shut. “I think we’re all on the same page,” she said slowly, hawk-like eyes looking for any hint of dissent. Surprisingly, she found none. “I’ll have new MOUs drawn up for Kara by the end of the day,” she added, turning back to Cat. “They’ll be on your desk ready for review in the morning. We can handle the rest later.”

“Then I move to adjourn,” said Cat, a hint of weariness coloring her tone. “I’d like to take my son home so he can rest.”

“Seconded and carried,” said Alan, dispensing with the vote in the interest of time. “Kara, I want to personally thank you—not only for the solutions you provided to several complex and sensitive issues, but also for teaching this old dog a new trick. I’ll be the first to admit I underestimated you. You’ve taught me to be a little more careful when judging others and I’m grateful for the lesson.”

He looked at Cat, contrite. “I hope you’ll remind me of this if I ever make the mistake of doubting your judgement again.”

Cat’s lips twisted into a wry grin. “Count on it.” She looked at the rest of the Board and nodded at them. “Thank you for your time today. I appreciate the trust you’ve given both of us. You won’t be disappointed.”

“We know where to find you if we are,” said Dick Corkle, the hint of a challenging grin tugging at his mustachioed upper lip.

Everyone in the room chuckled, including Cat. “Yes, I suppose you do,” she agreed. She caught Lucy’s eye as the attorney began to rise and added, “Lucy, you and Dorothy stay behind a moment. I have something to discuss with both of you. Otherwise, we’re adjourned.”

Outside in the bullpen, Alice saw the dismissed board members rise from their seats and she jumped up, hurrying around Kara’s desk to open the door for them. They left in groups of two and three and paid Alice little attention other than to nod at her on their way out of Cat’s office. Dick Corkle and Barbara Schaeffer, the two skeptics, left together but paused at the doorway when Alice wished them a good rest of their day.

“Tell me, young la—er, Alice, isn’t it?” said Dick, not waiting for her answer. “Are we going to have to reinvent the wheel again just to accommodate another of Cat Grant’s protégés? Do you have ideas above your station, too?”

Flummoxed for half a second, Alice finally sputtered, “No more than any other redheaded Scot who can trace her people back to the Stuart line, sir.”

Barbara snickered and Dick looked at Alice, aghast.

“Well, you asked,” said Barbara as she nudged Dick away. He grumbled all the way to the elevator.

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Cat said her goodbyes to Alan and Diane, and then turned to watch Kara accept an enthusiastic hug from Lucy Lane.

“Oh, my God, Kara! Did you see their faces?” Lucy laughed—mostly out of sheer relief—and pulled back from Kara, grinning to beat the band. “I thought Dick Corkle was going to have a coronary right there, on the spot. When I said ‘look for your moment,’ I honestly had no idea what to expect. I certainly wasn’t picturing that—that—whatever that was. I said shine and you beamed.”
Dorothy agreed. “They didn’t know what hit them, Kara. The last time I saw something like that, Melanie Griffith was charming the pants off Harrison Ford!”

“Oh,” said Kara a little breathlessly, and all the adrenaline she’d wallowed in her gut suddenly broke free, swamping her. “The end of ‘Working Girl’ always makes me cry.” She gave Dorothy a tremulous smile, and then turned to Cat, blue eyes swimming with tears.

Cat knew her cue when she saw it. “Me, too,” she confessed softly, crossing to where Kara stood and gathering the young woman into her arms, wrapping her up in warmth and pride and love. “You were astonishing, darling,” she whispered, just a breath in Kara’s ear, for her alone. “As always.”

Kara closed her eyes and melted into Cat’s embrace, holding on until the adrenaline washed through her and she stopped shaking. She forced herself to take a single deep breath and opened her eyes on the exhale, her smile and her resolve stronger, her tears gone. “Thank you, Cat,” she said quietly, pulling away from the comfort and reassurance reluctantly, missing Cat’s warmth and the proof that all of this was real. Kara wished they were home already. She wished she could kiss Cat. She wished…a lot of things.

“You know,” said Lucy, teasing, watching as Kara scrambled to hide the lust in her eyes, “we don’t have to be here if you two want to…you know…be alone….”

Cat rolled her eyes but couldn’t quite keep her smile at bay.

“Watch it, Smarter Lane, or I’ll demote you,” said Cat warningly, though her tone had no bite. “‘Smartass Lane’ doesn’t quite have the same ring to it.”

“I’ve been called worse,” noted Lucy. “By you, as a matter of fact.” She thought for a moment and added, indignantly, “At my own sister’s wedding! I distinctly remember you calling me ‘Loser Lane’ when I tripped during the bouquet toss and lost to Connie Chung!”

Cat raised a single eyebrow. “One—I was on my third martini and—two—Connie only joined your pack of leggy, underfed bridesmaids fighting over second-hand roses as a joke. And you still lost to her.”

“Wait—” said Kara, eyes wide, staring at Cat. “You were at Clark and Lois’ wedding?”

“Not the actual ceremony, of course,” said Cat, shrugging, “but I did make it to the first half of the reception.”

Lucy snorted. “The dinner half—and only because you paid for it.” When she caught sight of Cat’s affronted glare, she gulped. “Which I wasn’t supposed to know, apparently,” she amended.

Cat held the icy look for a moment and then let it melt, waving it away absently, like a buzzing gnat. “I saw great things in Emma’s future,” she said airily, as if that alone explained springing for her best frenemy’s wedding reception. “She’s Executive Chef at Aquavit now, so apparently I was right.”

Kara rolled her eyes. “What is it with you and chefs?” she asked, laughing. “Not that I’m complaining. Now I wish I’d gotten there earlier. When I finally made it, all they had left to give me was a wilted salad and some cake.” She frowned comically. “Not enough cake, but then, when is there ever enough cake?”

Cat blinked. “You were there?”

Kara nodded. “Barely. My connecting flight was delayed in Denver and I got to the reception an
hour before it was over. Clark said it was okay, but I could tell he was hurt. I rushed through that last exam so I could make my flight,” she whined. “The snow in Denver wasn’t my fault.”

“Doing the math, Cat?” Lucy winked at the still-baffled CEO. “Where you could have met her five years ago, when she was still in college, instead of when she interviewed here?” She patted Cat’s forearm empathetically. “Don’t worry—we all missed our chance to meet Kara that night. I was too busy making a fool of myself with James.” She blushed, remembering how shamelessly she had flirted with him, intent on blunting the sting of her sister’s nuptials with the best looking guy in the room. It hadn’t hurt that he was Lois’ photographer, either.

“Mmm,” said Cat, non-committal. She was too busy wondering how her life might have changed had she met Kara Danvers, college co-ed, what felt like it would have been three years too early. How much time had separated them that night, she wondered? An hour? Two, at the most? Was that all the time that stood between her and this life she had now? It didn’t bear thinking about and she was saved from dwelling on the possibilities when she caught a flash of purposeful movement out of the corner of her eye. “Speaking of James,” she said, a single nod of her head indicating his arrival at Winn’s desk.

Everyone turned to look, but only Lucy—oblivious—smiled. Dorothy didn’t give the photographer much attention, but Kara seemed displeased.

“I’m going to…uh…I’m going to go check on Carter,” she said, veiling her thoughts from Cat as she headed out to the bullpen.

Since Cat desperately wanted to talk to both Lucy and Dorothy without Kara present—and had been wondering how to arrange that without arousing Kara’s suspicions—she let her go, relieved by the distraction, whatever it was. When the door to her office had swung securely shut behind Kara, and Cat’s own privacy barriers were firmly in place, she turned to the two women she’d asked to stay behind.

Dorothy opened her mouth to speak but Cat put up one hand to stay her. “We’ll talk about the logistics of Kara’s internship and whatever problems you expect to encounter when reassigning Alice in a moment, Dorothy,” she said, eyes still tracking Kara’s movements outside the office. “But right now, I need to know how many employees know.” She finally pulled her attention back into the room and pinned both Dorothy and Lucy with a piercing look. “I know both of you do.”

Dorothy glanced at Lucy and sighed. “Any number I give you will be a guess, at best,” she counseled Cat. “We try to shield her—we do—but it’s difficult. I mean, does the word *secret* even exist in her language?”

Cat smirked and Lucy snorted.

“It may be the concept is too close to lying,” said Lucy. “She’s terrible at that, too.”

“Your best guess, then,” said Cat, leading them back to the subject at hand. “It’s important or I wouldn’t ask. Ignorance is truly bliss in this case.”

Dorothy nodded. “I can’t help you with the upper management numbers—we don’t have a way to track that, really—but we think, at any given time, about thirty-five percent of the administrative personnel and the housekeeping personnel know.” She quirked her eyebrows and looked up. “Add security to that number, too,” she added, shrugging when she looked back at Cat. “She forgets about the cameras all the time. Especially in the elevators. Coop curses a blue streak on those days.”

Leonard “Coop” Cooper was CatCo’s head of security—an ex-marine with a chiseled jaw and a
block of granite on his shoulder the size of Wyoming. His honorable discharge, secondary to the loss of one of his legs to an IED, was still a point of contention with him. To date, the only person who had ever gotten Coop to smile while on duty was Kara Danvers. Most of Cat’s other employees were terrified of him, and gave him the widest berth possible.

As comical as the situation seemed to be—having a superhero with a tentative grasp of the words *alter ego* on payroll was ridiculous, after all—it also had the potential to be devastating. Just one person speaking out of turn could put Kara and/or Carter in danger—unintentionally, certainly, but intent was the least of Cat’s worries at the moment. Her family’s safety came first.

“Is there anything we can do?” she asked helplessly, her mask of unflappable confidence slipping ever so slightly.

“About what?” asked Lucy, confused. Then—with a zap—she caught up. “Oh my God,” she breathed. “If everyone knows about you and Kara now…and thirty-five percent of CatCo knows about Kara and…” She trailed off, not wanting to say the words aloud. “Oh my God,” she said again.

“You see my dilemma,” said Cat wryly.

Lucy’s brain started spinning a mile a minute. “If we do anything blanket now—like that non-disclosure form you were talking about earlier?—we’ll just confirm Kara’s identity to the ones who don’t already know,” she said, “which will increase the possibility of exposure.”

“We do nothing,” said Dorothy firmly, weathering the exasperated and, frankly, unhinged looks being cast her direction. “You have demonstrated immense trust in your employees over the years, Cat. You’ve shown them incredible loyalty and they—surprise, surprise!—return it. Obviously, no one has said anything incriminating so far. Has even one attack on Supergirl been attributed to a breach of confidence by a CatCo employee?” She held up her own hand to stay Cat when she moved to speak. “And Leslie Willis doesn’t count.”

Cat snapped her mouth shut.

“There is no one in this building who is as loved as Kara Danvers,” continued Dorothy. “Not even you can compare. You’re an ideal, Cat—they put you on a pedestal and worship you from afar. But Kara? Kara talks to them, she remembers things about them and their families, she makes them feel special. She’s right there on the front lines with them and no one’s immune to her charm. Especially when she waltzes into the building like sunshine personified most days.” Dorothy shook her head. “Last night’s revelation doesn’t pose the risk you think it does. It just gives the ones who know an added reason to protect Kara—because now they know they’ll be protecting you and Carter, too.”

Lucy smiled softly. “Dorothy has a point, Cat. The risk remains the same—or maybe it’s a little smaller now—if we do nothing. Winn monitors all outgoing communications anyway—if the Super Friends really are doing their job, that is…” She rolled her eyes tolerantly and shrugged. “Maybe we should see if they have any openings?”

Cat rolled her eyes, too. “I’m practically their silent partner as it is,” she grumbled, though it was good-natured. “That empty office they hide out in two floors down—the one they’ve made into their little lair? Why do you think it’s still unoccupied after a year?” She crossed to the bar and refilled her tumbler of M&Ms. “It’s not the grunge appeal of unfinished drywall, I assure you.”

“Subterfuge really isn’t a strong point for any of them, is it?” asked Lucy, already knowing the answer.
“Let’s just say my twelve-year-old is a more accomplished liar than the three of them put together,” said Cat dryly.

Lucy laughed and Dorothy gestured to the couches. “If we’ve succeeded in assuaging your fears of an imminent attack, Cat,” she said, “might I ask that we address some of the more mundane issues facing us—specifically Alice Kens? I’d like to get started on her reclassification paperwork this afternoon and I need your input.”

“And we need to talk about Kara’s reclassification, too,” said Lucy, retaking her seat. “I can get the MOUs redrawn for her internship with the Board without your input, but I’ll need to know a few things before I can start a contract for Chief Brand Officer—like what one does.”

Cat glanced at Kara through the office windows and nodded once, knowing it was something more than maternal concern that had drawn Kara to Carter’s side. The murkiness of the Daat Kyashar at the moment kept Cat from knowing specifically what the issue was—although it didn’t take a rocket scientist to determine it had something to do with James Olsen. The photographer’s body language practically screamed “UNRESOLVED TENSION” and Cat knew Kara must have heard whatever it was he’d said to Winn when he’d walked up.

Part of Cat wanted to march out into the bullpen and get to the bottom of whatever it was herself. Her patience with these little bursts of resistance they kept encountering—expected or not—was wearing thin, and she knew the finely-honed edge of her personality could cut through all this emotional red tape quickly and with resounding finality.

Another part of Cat recognized interfering would be the worst thing she could do. The bulldozer method might be her preferred way to deal with obstacles, but she knew it wasn’t Kara’s way. And whatever had brought James Olsen upstairs certainly wasn’t Cat’s responsibility. She would have to trust Kara to take care of it. Luckily, trusting Kara was turning out to be the easiest thing Cat had ever done.

“Thirty minutes,” said Cat, returning her gaze within her office walls, leveling it first at Dorothy and then at Lucy. “You have thirty minutes,” she said, repeating herself as she resettled herself back into her chair. “Then I’m taking Kara and Carter home. I know I’ve said it before, but it really has been a busy week.”

“Did they tell the Board the truth, then, or are they still trying to sell it?” asked James, walking up to Winn’s desk, grinning widely. “What—did Cat lose a bet with Lois or something?”

Winn’s head snapped to look at Kara so quickly, he heard his neck crack in protest. “What are you doing?” he whispered, eyes swiveling between Kara—now on the move—and James, standing there as if he was in on some big joke. “You know she can hear us!”

James’ booming laughter rolled through the bullpen, catching the attention of several people, Carter included. Clearly, James didn’t care if Kara could hear them or not. “Come on, man,” he said, rolling his eyes. “You didn’t fall for it, did you? There is no way this isn’t some kind of publicity stunt or something. Trust me, Winn, Cat and Kara are not an ‘item’.” He bookended the word item with air quotes and Winn winced, knowing how much Kara would hate that. “I can’t believe you fell for it!” continued James, shaking his head in disbelief.

Winn looked over his shoulder just as Kara exited Cat’s office. “Um, James?” he said from between gritted teeth. “It’s not a stunt. They’re really together and maybe you shouldn’t be talking like that
when Kara is *right over there*—"

He looked up and Kara wasn’t right over there anymore; she was next to his desk, and—wow—had she used super-speed? Because that was fast and maybe they should be more careful about that during work hours—

“Winn, can I ask you a favor?” asked Kara, ignoring James for the moment. “Carter was supposed to go to a robotics lecture at UCNC tonight—can you find out if there’s going to be a live feed of it? I don’t want him to miss it if he doesn’t have to. He’s been looking forward to it since he got home from Wyoming.”

“Sure, Kara,” said Winn, relieved she wasn’t angry. He rose hesitantly out of his chair and pointed in Carter’s general direction. “I’ll just go over there and see if he and I can find it on the university’s website. Should I?” Seeing that Kara had pretty much already forgotten he existed—wow, was he glad she wasn’t looking at *him* like that—he answered his own question. “Yeah, I’ll just….” His voice trailed off as he scurried away.

“James,” said Kara, her voice measured and even and nothing like James had ever heard before. “May I speak to you privately on the balcony, please?”

James’ smile faltered, melting into a frown of confusion. “Uh, yeah. Yeah, sure,” he said and he followed Kara onto the employee lunch balcony with its garish yellow chairs and spotless white lunch tables, thankfully unoccupied at this time of the morning.

When they were alone, Kara rounded on James, ready to snap at him…until she remembered he had no idea what was going on—not really—and as hurtful as his questions had been, they hadn’t actually been directed at her. Winn had tried to tell him the truth. James’ inability to hear it wasn’t anyone’s fault.

She finally looked up at James, and the anger stamped into her features dissolved like mist, turning, instead, into uncertainty tinged with sorrow.

“Hey, Kara—whatever it is, you can tell me;” said James and Kara knew he meant it, that—underneath all the confusion and the hurt—he really did care about her. And some of this *was* her fault, after all. She’d been so desperate to put some distance between herself and her crush on Cat, she’d forced a crush on James. On James, her *friend*, who had put his job and his life on the line for her numerous times. On James, who already *had* a girlfriend. What Kara had done hadn’t been fair—not to him, not to Lucy, not to Cat, and not to herself.

“I—Winn—he was telling you the truth,” she blurted, and then she stopped and shook her head. She needed to take responsibility for her own actions. “Cat and I are together—a couple. I should have told you—before the report at least, but before that, too—when it first happened.” Her face crumpled and she turned away from him. “It’s been really—” she began, thinking about the chaos of the week and all the confusion, of all the bridges she and Cat had had to cross. Then she sighed and shook her head again. “No. That’s just an excuse for not trusting you. You’re my *friend*, James. Like Winn. And I convinced myself I couldn’t tell either one of you. Winn, because I didn’t want to hurt him even more than I was already, and you because…..”

Kara took a deep breath and turned back to James, eyes filled with contrition. “Because I didn’t want to admit what I’d done…or why I’d done it.”

“The crush,” said James, knowing immediately what Kara was talking about. “It wasn’t real.” It wasn’t a question—his voice was curiously flat when he said it—but Kara sensed the disappointment underneath the words.
“No, it wasn’t,” she admitted softly. “I needed a place to put my feelings for Cat—somewhere safe—somewhere harmless. I thought there would never be any way for she and I—that it was just my own stupid dream—and you were with Lucy! She’d followed you across the country. I thought—I thought that meant—” The look in James’ eyes confirmed Kara’s growing realization. “—but I was wrong, wasn’t I? You thought—oh, James!” Kara covered her mouth with her hands, just now seeing the full picture of what she’d done. “I’m so sorry….”

James stood very still and looked at her for so long that Kara felt a lump rise in her throat. He reached out and grasped her shoulder, fingers curling around her and squeezing so gently—as if he was worried he could hurt her with just a single touch. After a moment, though, he let his hand drop and turned to walk away. He leaned against the balcony railing and gazed out over the city, shining in the late-morning sun.

“He asked me why,” he began and Kara knew instantly who James meant. “When I told him I was coming out here, when I told him I’d gotten this job. He asked me point blank and I…” James glanced at Kara, shame and regret in his eyes. “I lied,” he admitted, resigned to the truth now that he was finally telling it. “I looked him right in the eyes and I lied to him.”

James paused and Kara watched the muscles of his jaw twitch. He was fighting to do something but Kara didn’t know if it was to keep the words from spilling out or if it was to pry them from his mouth. Knowing she couldn’t help him, she kept quiet and waited.

“You know, I got so good at telling that lie, I almost believed it myself,” said James and his smile, hiding the shadow of the gallows, was one Kara knew all too well. “Fresh start, better opportunity, yadda yadda yadda….” He raised his eyebrows at Kara. “Sounds good, doesn’t it?” When Kara nodded, he scoffed. “Yeah, everyone thought so. Even Lucy let me go without a fight and, for a couple of days at least, I really thought something had changed—that I’d changed.”

He looked out over National City again, glinting in shades of chrome and gold and blue—so different from the brooding skyline of Metropolis, steeped in memories and shadows. Not so different after all, he’d found, and the thought almost made him laugh.

“I should have known I’d end up being third wheel again,” he said softly, and the bleakness of his voice made Kara gasp. She pulled him around to look at her, shaking her head the whole time.

“But you’re not, James! You’re not!” Her blue eyes pleaded with him from behind her lead-lined glasses, knowing she was right but not knowing if she was right enough, not knowing if it would make any difference. “Lucy loves you—anyone can see that. She left Metropolis—her family—her job—and she came here for you. She knows who I am, James, and she pretends not to care when you’re helping me instead of spending your time with her, but you and I both know where you should be.”

“Kara, I…” James sighed and looked at his feet. “I don’t know.”

“Probably because you’ve never just been with her, alone—without one of us taking up all your time.” Kara smiled at him encouragingly and touched his arm. “I think you owe it to yourself and to Lucy to find out, though, don’t you?”

“You’re right,” said James. He took a deep breath and turned to look inside the building, searching for Lucy now, wondering how to make this up to her, or if it was even possible. Kara was more right than she knew; James had traded the distractions of one cape for another and his relationship with Lucy—already tenuous—had suffered accordingly. Now he wondered if he’d ever been truly present for her, or if he’d been using his Kryptonian friends as a convenient excuse to avoid commitment with someone who had been putting all the effort into their relationship.
“Just start over,” said Kara, sensing his hesitance and the reasons for it. “Start tonight. Take her somewhere she actually wants to go, for a change.”

James nodded. “Guess we can’t have Game Night at Cat’s place, huh?” he asked, smiling sideways at Kara, taking the opportunity to tease her a little now that he knew Winn had been telling the truth.

She grinned back. “Never say never,” she said, shrugging to show she, at least, was open to the idea. “But not for a while,” she added, cutting her eyes away from his shyly, thinking about how much she wanted—no, needed—Cat all to herself for right now.

James laughed when she blushed. Then, suddenly curious, he asked, “Are you happy, Kara?”

“Yes,” said Kara, but James didn’t need to hear the word to know the answer to his question; it rose in her eyes like the sun.

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Their busy week followed them home—as Cat suspected it would.

Riding high from what amounted to not one, but two victories, Cat wanted to stop and have lunch somewhere quiet and relaxing where they could eat together as a family, effectively tearing away the last of the public veils surrounding their relationship.

Kara shook her head at the suggestion. “Paparazzi,” she said softly, retrieving her iPad from her bag to look up delivery options.

The word infuriated Cat.

“Mm,” she said, the sound short and sharp, and she looked out the window of the town car, trying to hide her scowl. She knew it was only for a few more days—a week at the most—but Cat desperately wanted to move beyond all this subterfuge and misdirection. She was accustomed to living her life as a statement. One couldn’t be the Queen of All Media and an avowed trendsetter without a certain amount of openness and freedom of expression.

Having to wait—even briefly—before acknowledging Kara and their relationship publicly felt disingenuous, somehow. Stiff and unnatural. Restrictive.

Cat Grant didn’t like other people telling her what to do or how to act, even when it was in her own best interest. She understood Kara’s reasoning for their continued radio silence on the topic but it chafed, reminding her of her mother’s eternal exhortations to be more this, less that during her childhood. She resented having to kowtow to other people’s expectations of her. It was not the Cat Grant way.

If it helps, ventured Kara, by way of their connection so as not to disturb Carter, who was happily poking away at his phone, keeping it—us—quiet for a few more days will help on another front—one that’s had to take a back seat to board meetings and imminent professional ruin.

The sarcastic flavor of Kara’s last three words came through their bond tart and sweet—like candied lemon rind—and Cat wondered at the taste for a moment, fascinated by the Daat Kyashar’s tendency to use every sense possible in the act of communication. Putting aside her scientific curiosity for the moment, Cat searched the swirl of Kara’s disorganized thoughts for what she was referring to, finding an anxious, roiling bubble of fear attached to an image of a couple Cat both did and did not recognize.

The dissonance pulled her lips into a tight, grim line and she sent back, Your aunt and uncle?
Kara nodded. *We haven’t had time to talk about Carter’s safety, let alone yours. As successful as you might have been protecting yourself and Carter against human threats, Astra and Non and the others that follow them—they aren’t human. You haven’t even started training with Alex yet—and—and—*

Kara swallowed her growing panic and reached across the leather seat, taking Cat’s hand and twining their fingers together, needing a dose of Cat’s pragmatism to ground her. She closed her eyes for a moment and waited for the fear to pass, reminding herself they were safe—for now—and nearly home.

*Being out of the spotlight for a few more days gives us a little time to see where we stand, she sent,* opening her eyes finally. *To make some preparations, no matter how small.*

Cat did not miss the pleading in Kara’s eyes nor the emotional landscape behind her words—like standing alone on a high, cold mountaintop where the air was thin and difficult to breathe. And giving the added time underground a higher purpose did take some of the sting from it.

*You’re right, of course, darling,* she sent, squeezing Kara’s hand and gazing at her, resignation and understanding both painted in jade green. *What should we do first?*

Phrasing the question that way—as a task they were undertaking together, for the benefit of their family—magically unlocked the invisible cuffs of *should* around Cat’s wrists and she felt them fall away. Having to keep things under wraps for a few days longer no longer rankled and she welcomed the chance to work with Kara on something that had nothing to do with CatCo, for once.

*I have a few ideas about that,* said Kara excitedly and she flipped the iPad’s screen to a horizontal orientation, calling forth some documents Cat knew had been meticulously prepared just for this occasion. She smirked and leaned closer, kissing Kara’s cheek before bending her head over the files, the two of them looking more like a pair of girls huddled over a shared issue of *Teen Vogue* than the powerful businesswomen they were.

*Tell me,* said Cat fondly, and she rested her head on Kara’s shoulder.

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They had a late lunch on the rooftop terrace, the afternoon sunlight recharging all three of them—though in decidedly different ways. Kara had ordered delivery from a little Korean barbecue place, remembering it was a favorite of both Grants, and the food was as plentiful as it was good.

Cat had trouble letting go of CatCo and her work responsibilities at the beginning, unaccustomed to taking a break in the middle of the week like this, no matter how warranted. When she saw the flash of disappointment that crossed Kara’s face after she picked up her phone for the second time, she decided to turn the blasted thing off, relieved—albeit secretly—for the brief reprieve. The smile she received as reward for the action told her she’d made the right choice.

Carter asked how the board meeting had gone and Cat relished telling an abbreviated version of Kara’s political coup, much to Kara’s blushing dismay. As quickly as she could, Kara turned the conversation to Carter’s arm and how it was feeling, desperate for the spotlight to be focused elsewhere. Carter, also uncomfortable under scrutiny, deftly turned the conversation to Eliza, wanting to know more about his newest grandmother. Pleased by the topic, Kara launched into what amounted to a recounting of Eliza’s impressive CV, with some homey family stories mixed in.

All in all, it was one of the best lunches Cat had ever had.
When they finished eating and were clearing away the mess, Cat reluctantly turned her phone back on, only to see a text from Lucy confirming Snapper Carr’s agreement to the terms of the proposed deal. Well, most of them, anyway.

**Snapper agreed to everything except firing Siobhan. Says he wants to talk to you first. Apology will lead at 6 and 11. Call if you want the run down.**

Cat tapped out a quick reply. **Am I missing something here? Siobhan Smythe is not an anchor or even his best in the field. Why is he balking on this?**

The fluttering ellipsis of Lucy’s reply appeared immediately, to Cat’s immense satisfaction.

**He wouldn’t say; just repeated that he wanted to talk to you first. He said he’d call you directly. In the meantime, there are several emails you should take a look at if you have the chance.**

I’ll look at them shortly, typed Cat absently, still pondering Snapper’s unexpected reticence. **Thank you.**

“Problem?” asked Kara, catching sight of Cat’s pensiveness. She stacked dirty plates and flatware on a tray, then moved to box up the few leftovers they had.

“Possibly,” answered Cat, but—seeing Carter’s sudden worried look—she decided to keep her concerns to herself for the moment. She smiled instead. “Nothing that can’t wait,” she added, taking the leftovers from Kara and nodding toward the stairwell. “Carter, will you get the doors for us? After we get this put away, I want to take a look at your arm, all right?”

“Sure, Mom,” he said, rushing ahead, causing both women to shout in unison, “Don’t run!” He slowed down obediently, but not without rolling his eyes at them over his shoulder. “Sheesh, guys!” he complained, trying hard to hide a cheeky grin as he reached the first door. “It’s like you think I’m gonna fall off the roof or something!”

Cat gasped and Kara laughed.

“That is not funny, young man,” said Cat icily, glaring at her son as she walked through the door. “Come on!” he protested. “You gotta admit it’s kinda funny. Right?” He looked at Kara. “Back me up on this, Mom.”

“Oh, no,” said Kara, eyebrows high over her eyes in a disbelieving arch as she shook her head. If her hands weren’t full, she would have thrown them up in mock surrender, too. “Leave me out of this one, buddy,” she said, adding a quiet, “I’m the mom that can fly, remember?” as she passed him.

“But that’s why it’s funny!” insisted Carter, letting the door swing shut behind him with a loud bang. He weaved between his mothers carefully, trying to make his way to the interior door before Cat reached it, her head held high with imperious disdain.

“Two words,” she said, pinning him with a look that promised punishment if he didn’t drop the joke and fast. “Too. Soon.” She marched across the foyer and into the kitchen, her face thunderous. She all but slammed the leftover containers onto the granite countertop and jerked the refrigerator door open with far too much force.

Carter was about to protest again when he saw Kara’s wide eyes and the sharp, urgent shake of her head. He wisely changed his tune.
“I’m sorry, Mom,” he said, sincerely even though he did still think it was funny. “I didn’t mean to upset you.” He leaned against the far end of the counter and scuffed the toe of his shoe against the baseboard, his eyes big and filled with sorrow.

Cat narrowed her eyes at him. “Stealing a page from the Sunny Danvers playbook, are you?” she asked, and Kara squeaked in outrage, looking back and forth between the two of them as if she’d never seen either of them before.

“What—I didn’t—the Sunny Danvers what now?” she sputtered.

Mother and son looked at each other, and then broke into laughter.

“You’re too easy, Mom,” said Carter, grinning at Kara.

“Yes,” agreed Cat, one eyebrow arched high on her forehead. She leaned her hip against the island, crossed her arms over her chest, and raked her eyes down Kara’s lithe form—unseen by Carter, of course. “You are.” Her tone was perfectly innocent, but Kara reddened under her lingering gaze.

Cat laughed again and shook her head. “Come on,” she said, draping her arm around Carter’s shoulders. “Let’s go take a look at that arm of yours. Then I really am going to have to get some work done today if we’re going to give Alice Kens the good news tomorrow.” She flashed a brief, excited smile at Kara, who returned it.

“Yeah,” said Carter, sighing. “I should log on at school, too. I probably have some homework from yesterday and I don’t want to fall behind. Especially since Winn found that live stream of the lecture I was going to go to tonight.” He looked up at Kara and smiled. “That was really cool of him,” he said. “You have the best friends.”


Speaking of your friends.... sent Cat, and though her thought trailed away, a brief flash of her memory of James walking up to Winn’s desk at the end of the board meeting played in a silent loop over their connection.

Kara looked up and gave Cat a minuscule shake of her head. Later? she asked. When I have time to explain everything?

Cat kept the icy stab of her sharp green jealousy from crossing the Daat Kyashar and nodded, breathing through her displeasure and the defensive instinct to shut down. Just as she felt she had moved through it, Kara reached out and took her hand, lacing their fingers together with such gentle ease, Cat’s eyes snapped up, thinking Kara must have heard her negative thoughts and was trying to comfort her. Instead, all she saw in Kara’s eyes was contentment. Love. Joy.

“After we look at Carter’s arm,” said Kara, “I’ll start some laundry and then come help you with work.” Her mouth twisted into a rueful grimace. “I’m running out of clothes to wear—unless you like bicycle shorts and paint-stained tee-shirts.” Kara hesitated and Cat felt her uncertainty like static through their bond. “I guess I should pick up some more stuff from my loft,” she said softly, but the words felt hollow to Cat. There but not—like the waver of shimmering heat on a desert horizon.

Cat squeezed Kara’s hand reassuringly. “Yes, you should,” she agreed, her voice resolute and approving. She kept her opinion about the bicycle shorts to herself, knowing it would make Kara blush again. “The sooner, the better,” she added. She led Kara and Carter both through the house, heading for Carter’s room where they would examine his arm before settling him in for homework.
“And maybe, while Eliza is visiting this weekend, we can have a family meeting with her and Alex. We’ll talk over living arrangements and some of the other logistical issues surrounding our new family.” She beamed at Kara over Carter’s head. “How does that sound?”

Kara exhaled her relief. “Perfect,” she said, blue eyes dancing. Then, needing Carter to weigh in, she looked down at him. “How does that sound to you, buddy?” she asked, genuinely interested.

Carter rolled his eyes. “You guys maybe don’t want to know what I think,” he said, his tone cutting. “’Cuz—if it were up to me—Kara would’ve moved in last Sunday.” He shrugged. “But, hey, if you guys want to take it slow…."

Kara’s mouth fell open in abject shock and Cat laughed. She took inordinate pleasure in ticking off sarcasm on the mental tally she kept of traits Carter had inherited from her.

She was so proud.

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While Carter did homework and Cat reviewed numerous MOUs, contracts, and other documents being produced by her legal department at an alarming rate, Kara spent the afternoon doing laundry, answering emails, sending flowers to all the assistants that had helped her reschedule Cat’s appointments yesterday, and arranging for a second desk to be placed directly across from her own in the bullpen outside Cat’s office.

She had just sent Winn an email asking for his help setting up Alice’s IT and telecommunications needs when Cat’s telephone rang on her desk. Kara hopped up from the couch where she’d been working to answer it before Cat could.

“Cat Grant’s office,” she said. “How can I help you?”

“Hi, Kara,” said Neves and Kara could hear her wide smile through the telephone line. “There’s a delivery for Carter and I thought I’d bring it up. It’s an overnight package from Metropolis. Is that okay?”

Kara grinned, pleased. Katherine had promised to send something to ease Carter’s boredom and she obviously wanted to make certain it arrived post-haste. Kara knew whatever it was, Carter would love it—more for what it meant for Cat and Katherine than for whatever it actually was.

“Sure!” she said. “I’ll meet you at the elevator.” She looked at the time and noticed it was getting late; they’d have to start thinking about dinner soon. “Hold on a sec,” she said and she covered the mouthpiece of the phone with her hand. “Hey, beautiful?” she asked, addressing Cat. “Have you decided on the salmon for dinner tonight or do you want to order in again?”

Cat’s fingers froze over her keyboard and she looked up at Kara, blinking slowly at her, completely silent. Distracted by her own set of precise calculations regarding their provisions and how best to divide them, Kara mistook Cat’s shock for indecision.

“It’s just that I’d like to send dinner down to Neves and Christopher again. I know we have enough salmon for five—that thing is huge—but if we order out instead, I want to be sure to include them.”

“The salmon,” Cat said finally. It was Kara’s casual term of endearment and not the question that had her discombobulated. She cleared her throat and elaborated on her plan, putting aside her surprise for the moment. “I was going to grill it on the terrace and put you in charge of the Brussels sprouts and the salad.”
“Then it’s okay if I offer?” asked Kara, still oblivious to Cat’s disbelief.

“Of course,” said Cat and she shook herself out of her stupor long enough to give Kara a soft smile.

Kara smiled back and turned away, returning to her phone call. “Neves, we’re having grilled salmon, pan-roasted Brussels sprouts with olive oil, bacon, and garlic, and salad for dinner tonight. Will you come up to get plates for you and Christopher when it’s ready?”

“That’s an affirmative,” said Neves using her best military voice, teasing Kara. “Thanks!” she added, her voice going back to its normal cheerfulness. “It sounds terrific.”

“Great!” said Kara. “See you at the elevator in two.” She hung up the phone and leaned down to plant a kiss on Cat’s cheek. “Be right back,” she told her. “Your mom’s present for Carter arrived and Neves is bringing it up.” Kara gifted Cat with one last happy grin, and then flounced out of the office, practically humming as she went.

Cat stared after Kara in wonder, trying to remember how long it had been since someone had called her beautiful like that—with such affectionate absentmindedness. The word had rolled off Kara’s tongue as if she’d been saying it for years, and even though Kara had called Cat mon ange and Malkhaati before, this was different somehow. Mon ange was a bedroom endearment, reserved for their most intimate moments, a pet name between lovers, and Malkhaati was formal and sacred, regal and imbued with solemnity and weight. It was ceremonial in nature and Kara spoke it only through the Daat Kyashar, which kept it where it belonged—steeped in Kara’s Kryptonian culture and upbringing.

But—like darling and love—beautiful was a workaday endearment, safe for all ears and all occasions, something Kara could feel comfortable saying in front of Katherine or the Board with little reaction and no protest. Cat had no idea why it brought tears to her eyes, but it did.

She dashed them away self-consciously and shook her head at herself. “I am so screwed,” she said softly, chuckling at how little that observation worried her. Then she shut down her laptop and went to join her family.

Katherine’s gift turned out to be a first edition Lord of the Rings trilogy set, wrapped in stately rust and black gift paper with a card attached, which Carter read aloud.

Carter,

While I am proud of you for saving that other boy, I would appreciate it if you would be more careful in the future. My heart can’t take surprises like it used to and your mothers have enough to worry about without you adding to their concerns.

As to the gift, I’m certain you’ve seen the films by now. What twelve-year-old boy hasn’t? The books are more tedious and problematic than the films, largely due to their blatant racism and Tolkein’s barely-disguised homoerotic tendencies. They are, however, from my personal collection and should reside with someone likely to appreciate them far more than I do. Enjoy them.

I close with the wish that you will heal quickly. Please give my regards to your mothers.

Sincerely yours,
When he finished reading the card, Carter deliberately did not look at either of his mothers lest he burst into a fit of giggles.

Cat, stunned for the second time in ten minutes, turned her wide green eyes toward Kara, who looked back with blue eyes filled with an earnestness only she could manage in the face of something so remarkably unsettling.

“She’s trying so hard,” Kara said, a worried frown rippling the spot between her eyes.

Cat prudently stifled her entirely inappropriate laughter with an index finger pressed savagely across her lips.

Carter shrugged. “Grandmother’s right, you know,” he said, coming to Katherine’s defense the only way he knew how. “In *The Hobbit*, a Halfling named Smeagol becomes obsessed with a gold ring and the obsession eventually turns him into a gray-skinned, half-dead creature called Gollum.” He looked up from the books in his lap, brown eyes sad and serious. “It isn’t exactly subtle—the anti-Semitism, I mean.”

At that, Cat grinned, puffed up by pride in her son and his contemplative media consumption. “You don’t have to read them, of course, but I would like you to send your grandmother a thank you note tomorrow, all right?”

Carter grinned. “Oh, I’ve already read them. Twice. But I’ll send Grandmother a thank you note. I promise.” He carefully opened the first book and looked at the title page, running his fingers over the imprint date of 1954. “It’s a really nice gift,” he said. “I mean, they’re from her personal collection of first editions, Mom. She never even takes those out of the special case in the library—not even to look at herself!”

Carter was right, of course, and Cat thought about what Kara had said, how Katherine was ‘trying so hard.’ Cat realized Kara was right, too. The last lines of her mother’s note to Carter—however inexpertly expressed—amounted to a get well wish and a request that he pass on her regards to Kara and herself, both sentiments unheard of from Katherine.

Cat wondered what else they could expect from her…and how soon. All things considered, Cat thought she could use a little forewarning on that front, if only to prepare herself. She allowed herself a moment of reflection longer, and then leaned down to kiss the top of Carter’s head. “How’s the homework coming along?” she asked. “If we start dinner now, can we eat before your lecture?”

Carter looked at his alarm clock. “It doesn’t begin until seven,” he said. “If you’re planning dinner for five-thirty, we should have enough time for dinner and dishes before it starts.” Talk of homework and the university lecture reminded Carter he wanted to ask his mother a question, but the uncertainty of her answer made him a little nervous.

“Hey, Mom?” he asked, picking at a frayed spot on his jeans. Both Cat and Kara looked at him expectantly and he recovered immediately. “I mean, uh, hey, Moms? If my arm keeps getting better like it is, can I go to school tomorrow?”

Cat crossed her arms and considered the request, torn. On the one hand, she loved the fact that her precious son liked going to school so much that he was willing to go back only one day after having broken his arm. Carter took his education seriously and Cat encouraged that viewpoint as much as
she was able. Hence, her readily-given permission for the elective courses he participated in at UCNC and the online studies he completed on Coursera and at MIT. On the other hand, she never wanted him to set foot on Broughton’s grounds again and, while she knew the feeling was completely irrational, it was also strong. The very idea of Carter going back there filled Cat with revulsion, nauseating her, and she felt her jaw clench with extreme aversion. Carter might not need the extra day to recover, but it appeared Cat did.

“Kara?” she asked, punting for the moment while she searched for a way to make the irrational rational.

Kara’s immediate reaction was that this was not her place and she should keep her mouth firmly shut. But she noticed a buzzing, shivering current of apprehension running through the Daat Kyashar and she knew it came from Cat. A glance at the cause of it widened her eyes for a moment, and Kara realized Cat’s request for her opinion wasn’t just for show—it was a desperate plea for help.

Kara sidled next to her and draped her arm loosely around Cat’s waist, noticing a slight tremor in Cat as she did so.

“How about we decide in the morning?” Kara asked reasonably. “We can take a look at Carter’s arm when we get up for work and figure it out then. We’ve had a long day and I think we could use a break from big decisions tonight, okay?”

Carter nodded, disappointed but understanding. “Okay,” he said. Besides, she hadn’t said no outright, so that was a good thing.

Kara smiled at him gratefully, then leaned into Cat, tightening her hold around her. “Okay, Cat?” she asked, nuzzling Cat’s cheek while sending all the calm, soothing support she could muster through their bond, hoping to ease Cat’s agitation.

Cat swayed closer to Kara, thankful for Kara’s strength and logic. She nodded. “Okay,” she whispered, and she took a deep breath, releasing some of her worry on the exhale. She opened her eyes and looked up into Kara’s. “Thank you, darling,” she said, and she meant it wholeheartedly. Cat knew of Kara’s skills as a peacemaker—she’d brokered a thousand such compromises for Cat professionally over the years—but having those skills as a resource to call upon personally allowed Cat to slacken her iron grip on the world, lessening her need for constant control.

Kara kissed Cat’s cheek in acknowledgement of the sentiment, and then turned to Carter. “You might want to finish up your homework before the lecture,” she suggested. “My guess is you’ve been putting off reading your next chapter of World History.” When Carter’s eyes snapped up to meet hers in shock, she chuckled knowingly. “Do that and we’ll call you when dinner’s ready, okay?”

Caught, Carter nodded. “Yes, ma’am,” he mumbled, realizing that there were, indeed, some ways having two mothers could be seen as a negative.

Kara ruffled his hair, and then took Cat’s hand. “Let’s go get dinner started,” she said, tugging Cat from the room. “I don’t know about you, but I’m starving!”

Cat smirked as she let herself be pulled from the room. “Well, it is a day that ends in Y,” she said.

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Of course, the best laid plans…. 
Neves came to retrieve hers and Christopher’s plates right on schedule, and she endured some good-natured teasing about her date with Alex from both Cat and Kara for her trouble.

Kara was pouring the wine for their dinner when Cat remembered Snapper Carr’s apology was going to lead Channel 3’s six o’clock news broadcast. She asked Kara to set her tablet up on the dining room table so they could watch there, instead of moving to the media room.

Snapper’s dour face and succinct, emotionless explanation of the circumstances necessitating his unusual appearance on screen gave way to what appeared to be a sincere and contrite apology directed not only to Cat and Carter, but also to the Michaels family, for what he termed “an inexcusable breach of ethics.” He made reference to an “internal investigation” that was ongoing and ended with Cat’s favorite quote from Joseph Pulitzer, which he likened to his own point of view regarding the role of journalism in the world: “I am deeply interested in the progress and elevation of journalism, having spent my life in that profession, regarding it as a noble profession and one of unequaled importance for its influence upon the minds and morals of the people.”

All in all, Cat was quite impressed.

Three minutes later, her cell phone rang. It was Snapper, of course.

Rather than put him off, Cat opted to take the call in her office, where she wouldn’t interrupt Carter’s and Kara’s dinner.

Kara realized something must be up if Snapper was calling Cat after the broadcast, and she remembered the text Cat had received after lunch, thinking it must be connected. She offered to help carry Cat’s dinner into her office, but Cat declined, returning Kara’s supportive smile and expertly juggling her phone, her dinner plate, and her glass of wine as she headed down the hall.

“Lucy Lane tells me you’re balking at firing Siobhan,” she said into the phone, one eyebrow arched high on her forehead. “Care to explain, Snapper, or is this just an example of your masochism coming to the forefront again?”

Snapper laughed but it held no mirth. “You really want me to fire her, Cat?” he asked, his impatience with the whole fiasco making his words more clipped than usual. “Fine. She’s not even my third-best field reporter. I have no problem firing her if it makes this lawsuit Lo’s sister seems intent on hanging me with go away. I’m just saying it’s going to make things worse for you, not better. I don’t know what you did to Siobhan, but damned if she doesn’t want you to fall out of the sky like Icarus. On fire, preferably. It’s all she talks about.”

Cat put her phone on her desk and switched it to speaker, gaping down at it in shock as she took her seat. “I’ve never even met the ‘nervy little minx’—as Dick Corkle calls her,” she said, affecting an air of patent disbelief. “Trust me, I have no idea why she wants my head on a pike. Yours, I could understand,” she added, smiling. “How long has she worked for you now?”

“Well, I think you’re funny, but you’re not.”

“Three years with you and I’d want more than just your head on a pike,” said Cat breezily, picking at Snapper’s ego and her dinner with equal interest. “I’d send pieces of you to the four corners of my kingdom as an example. Of what, I can’t be certain.” She hummed as she took a sip of her wine. “It wouldn’t matter to you anyway.”

“Listen to me or don’t, Cat; I honestly don’t care. But when Siobhan eventually snaps and pulls a butcher knife on you, don’t say I didn’t warn you.”
The absurdity and melodrama of Snapper’s warning almost made Cat laugh. “Are you saying your soon-to-be-ex field reporter is an axe murderer, Snapper?” she asked.

“I’m saying she’s psycho, Cat. With a capital P. Think creepy taxidermists and shower curtains. Hell, I wouldn’t be surprised to find out her mother is an actual skeleton in a wig.” Snapper sighed and the sound of it rumbled down the phone line like distant thunder. “I’ll fire Siobhan. I’ve been looking for a reason for months, to be honest. This isn’t a problem for me, but it might be for you. Consider yourself warned. Call it my civic duty.”

Cat saluted the man with a jaunty little wave that he didn’t see. “Aye, aye, Captain,” she said, chuckling. “You should think about calling your yacht that—My Civic Duty—instead of whatever it’s called now.”

“It’s called A Good Start, after that old joke—What do you call a bus full of journalists falling off a cliff?” He chortled at his macabre little joke. “And I see you’ve spoken to your mother recently,” he added. “She tell you about the regatta?”

“She did,” said Cat, smiling. “She told me she was planning to give you a piece of her mind about Siobhan there.”

Snapper laughed. “Woulnd’t be the first time,” he admitted. “Your mother is an opinionated woman. Witty, too. She’s one of my most popular guests at this shindig. God only knows why she keeps showing up. She’s already out of our league—it’ll be even worse when the new book comes out.”

Cat stilled, caught off guard. Her mother was releasing a new book? Since when? “She thinks highly of you, Snapper,” she said, dissembling to cover her surprise. Her mother had been a bestselling author once upon a time, but had given it up to turn editor, running the Crown imprint with an iron fist. Why hadn’t she mentioned a book when she’d visited? Or any time since, for that matter?

“That’s a lie, but thank you for saying it,” said Snapper ruefully. “Listen, I’ve got to go. I want to get my ducks in a row before I call Siobhan into my office tomorrow. Do you think I have time to get a Kevlar vest this late?” he asked, and Cat could tell he was only half-joking.

“If you think you might need her, I’ve been known to have a little pull with Supergirl,” she offered. “Bulletproof superheroes are better than clunky Kevlar.” Her lips twisted into a wry grin. “Those vests aren’t very slimming.”

“Oh, sure—bring that up, thanks.” Cat imagined Snapper shaking his head at her. “And I’ll pass on Supergirl, if it’s all the same to you. Siobhan hates one person on this planet more than she hates you—and that’s Supergirl. Fuck if I can figure out why—I don’t think they’ve actually met.” He paused and Cat imagined him shrugging. “Maybe it’s just garden-variety insecurity,” he said. “But between you and me? I think the little bitch has something my father used to call AAS—Acute Asshole Syndrome.”

Cat nearly choked on another sip of wine. “It’s going around, I hear,” she said lightly, trying to inject a little levity back into the conversation, especially now that it was coming to a close. CatCo had been hard on Snapper today, but he’d come through with flying colors. There was no reason to kick the man when he was down.

“Ha ha,” said Snapper. “I’ll send you an email when the deed is done. After that, keep your head down for two or three days and the droolers will have latched onto something else. Maybe you’ll luck out and Adele will elope over the weekend.”
Cat chuckled. “That would be lucky,” she said. “We might get a happy song out of her for once.”

Snapper snorted. “If wishes were horses, yeah? Anyway, tell the sister she can relax. After Siobhan is gone, I’ll have fulfilled all of her demands, and if there’s one person I don’t need chewing my ass, it’s Lois Lane’s baby sister. Lo is tough, but Lu’s a pit bull. She’s got a lot of her dad in her—just don’t tell her I said that.”

“I won’t,” promised Cat, snickering. “You’re probably fond of mundane things—like breathing.”

“Mm, yes,” agreed Snapper. “Night, Cat. Might want to have a refresher course with that kid of yours about sensitive information and people with cell phones, but let him know I think he’s got guts and then some. I don’t know many people—adults even—who would have done what he did.”

Cat smiled, genuinely pleased by the compliment. “I’ll tell him. Good night, Snapper. And thank you for your apology. The Pulitzer quote was a nice touch.”

“You liked that, did you?” he asked, not at all surprised. “Talk to your girlfriend, then. She sent it in an email to me this morning, titled ‘This might help.’”

Snapper slammed his end of the line down hard enough to make Cat jump, but she recovered quickly and shook her head indulgently.

Darling? she sent to Kara through the Daat Kyashar. Just how many people did you talk to this morning while I was in the shower, hmm?

A startled gulp was all she got in return.

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At seven, Cat met Kara in the small living room off the foyer holding a glass of warm milk laced with cinnamon syrup, which she handed to Kara with distaste.

“I wish alcohol did something for you, darling,” she said, swirling the scotch in her tumbler before taking a sip. “It would be better than warm milk to take the edge off of a day like today.”

Kara took a long pull of the milk and shook her head at the same time. “This is perfect, Cat,” she said when she finally came up for air. “Really.” She collapsed onto the couch and slumped over her knees, huffing out her exhaustion.

Cat noticed Kara had taken the time to change, opting for the comfort of a pair of yoga pants and one of the tee-shirts she’d mentioned earlier—one thankfully without stains.

“You didn’t get enough sunshine—yesterday or today,” said Cat, running her fingers lightly through Kara’s long curls. “We’ll work from the balcony tomorrow afternoon,” she promised. “That will help.”

Kara leaned into Cat’s touch and closed her eyes. “It will,” she agreed. “Thanks.”
They sat there for a moment—Cat absently stroking Kara’s hair and Kara relaxing more with each pass of Cat’s fingers. Kara reveled in the silence and in their brief respite from so many crises. She needed both.

“Did you get Carter’s lecture set up okay?” asked Cat, the quiet nibbling at the edges of her comfort zone finally.

Kara started, adrift in the comfort of Cat’s touch, but she caught up to the question in a flash. “Oh, yeah. It was fine. I was mostly there to drop off the snacks,” she said, giving Cat a lopsided grin. “He didn’t need me.”

“But he’s busy now?” asked Cat, her tone light and innocent. “With his headphones on?” Her caress moved from Kara’s hair to the rise of Kara’s collarbone, where her touch was the faintest dusting of fingertips against skin. “Until the lecture ends at nine?”

“Y-yes,” breathed Kara. The bottom dropped out of her stomach and her heartbeat—once sleepy—now thrummed inside her, an engine roaring to life.

“Mm,” said Cat noncommittally. She downed the last of her scotch then leaned forward with exaggerated care, setting her tumbler safely on the coffee table next to Kara’s glass. She moved closer to Kara when she returned to the young woman’s side, her breath hot against Kara’s cheek. “Then we have some time to kill,” she noted, her voice slow, and low, and silken. She trailed her fingers down Kara’s bare arm. “What should we do with it, do you think?”

Kara did not require a second invitation.

She turned her head and captured Cat’s lips in a heated, desperate kiss, groaning as desire raced through the Daat Kyashar, a river of fire licking at every nerve ending all at once. As their kiss deepened, Kara turned toward Cat and cupped Cat’s face in strong hands, shuddering with need.

This, she sent. Oh, Cat, this.

Cat smiled into their kiss and placed her palms flat against Kara’s broad, strong shoulders, pushing her back into the couch.

Kara’s eyes were as dark as bruises and despondent at the separation, but Cat ran her thumb over Kara’s bottom lip and mirrored the move by licking her own, jade eyes sparkling, the depths of her need clear in them.

“I have an idea,” she whispered, and she pushed Kara further backward until she was sitting upright, flush against the cream-colored pillows behind her. When Cat was satisfied with Kara’s position, she stood and made a show of hitching up the already-short hem of her fire-engine-red dress, revealing the sinfully delicious lace edge of a pair of black silk thigh-highs.

Kara didn’t—no—couldn’t breathe.

Had Cat worn these all day? Had she been sitting less than ten inches away, wearing black silk thigh-highs, throughout the entire board meeting? The thought hit Kara like a Kryptonite grenade and she was absolutely certain her brain had melted.

With a singularly graceful series of movements, Cat shifted her weight and straddled Kara’s thighs, leaning forward to brace herself on either side of Kara’s head with hands that twitched with the need to touch. She slowly lowered herself so she could rest her weight on Kara’s legs more completely, the hem of her red dress riding higher on her thighs with every centimeter of descent, revealing a swath of creamy bare skin above the silk stockings.
“I did have these on in the board meeting,” confessed Cat huskily, answering Kara’s unspoken questions. “These…” She rolled her hips forward just before she transferred her weight fully to Kara’s lap. “…and nothing else,” she whispered, knowing Kara was just now discovering that devilishly decadent fact.

“Fuck,” groaned Kara, reaching up to pull Cat down into her, patience evaporating in the heat of her want. She wrapped her arms around Cat, one hand splayed between Cat’s sharp shoulder blades and one buried in her honey-gold hair. She claimed Cat’s mouth in a deep, wet, desperate kiss and rolled her hips upward at the same time, trying to provide some measure of friction between Cat’s gorgeous thighs.

An image—bright and white hot and jolting—passed through Kara’s brain and into Cat’s via their bond, and Cat pulled her mouth away from Kara’s to gasp out loud at the content of the fantasy. Just the thought of Kara in a strap-on….

“Jesus,” Cat swore, breasts heaving. She pressed her forehead to Kara’s and tried to keep herself from climaxing right on the spot. “We are definitely going to try that,” she vowed breathlessly. “The sooner, the better.”

Kara nodded and tried to kiss Cat again, reaching for her. “Please,” she begged, and Cat wasn’t sure what Kara was begging for until she felt Kara’s hands on her waist, pulling her downward to meet hips already pushing upward.

Cat knew they were heading for a hot and messy quickie on the couch and—while tempting—that wasn’t exactly what she wanted. They hadn’t been intimate since Wednesday morning, after Kara’s nightmare, and the longer the deprivation continued, the more Cat wanted it to be slow and sweet and deep when they finally did make love again. She craved more than just a physical release. She hungered for emotional intimacy, too.

Cat pulled Kara’s hands from her waist and brought them to her mouth, kissing the inside of each of Kara’s wrists softly, the edge of her teeth scraping ever-so-lightly along the sensitive skin there.

“Slow, darling,” she said, breathing the words into Kara’s palm. “Take your time,” she directed, and she placed Kara’s hands high on her sides, guiding them downward, covering them as Kara caressed her, hands gliding over her dress until they reached bare skin. “Make me shiver,” she whispered, eyes burning with desire. She leaned forward until her mouth was a breath away from Kara’s ear. “Make me scream.”

“Oh, yes,” whimpered Kara and she kissed Cat as if it was their first time all over again, brushing her lips against Cat’s full ones, teasing them open, nipping, tasting the love Cat offered, breath stolen from her lungs and stars bursting behind her eyes. When she pulled away, she found her trembling hands high on Cat’s bare thighs, her thumbs teasing the edge of Cat’s dress.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were wearing these?” Kara asked, gently plucking one of the garter straps.

Cat realized the question was a way for Kara to slow herself down. She could feel the tension in Kara’s muscles beneath her and the tension of her desire through their connection, like mirrored coiled springs. Kara wanted to push the hem of Cat’s dress higher, wanted to take Cat, then and there, wanted to watch as Cat fucked herself on Kara’s long fingers. She held herself back, though, also wanting Cat to have what she needed, first and always.

Cat threw her head back and groaned, knowing what kind of strength Kara needed to hold that line. She curled forward and kissed Kara sweetly, nipping at her lips, tugging at the kiss-swollen bottom
one for a second before releasing it.

“I had my reasons,” Cat said, her voice deep and sultry.

“Business reasons?” asked a third and entirely unexpected voice.

Cat’s and Kara’s heads both snapped up to look at the intruder standing over Kara at the back of the couch. Kara’s eyes were round with shock and Cat’s narrowed in rage.

It was Alex. She had one hand over her eyes. The other held an apple, which she munched on loudly.

“I’m not looking,” she promised, though Cat could see one interested brown eye peeking through the tiniest of slits between her fingers. “But I thought I should let you know I was here since neither of you heard the elevator.”

“Alex!” squeaked Kara, and she snatched her hands away from Cat’s thighs as if they burned—and not in the good way. “You were supposed to call!” she accused, her shock transforming into frustrated anger.

“I’ve been calling for twenty minutes,” said Alex between bites of her apparently delicious snack. “Looks like the elevator isn’t the only thing you didn’t hear.”

“Isn’t there an attractive concierge you could be necking with in the stairwell, Agent Danvers?” asked Cat, her voice dark and dangerous. “Do you have to be here right this instant?” If she’d thought the deprivation she’d been experiencing was bad before, this—this sororally-generated coitus interruptus—was oh-so-much worse. She wished she’d settled for the quickie now. At least one part of her would have had what it wanted.

“Her shift ended at seven,” said Alex, grinning. “I just missed her and, believe me, no one is sorrier about that than me.” She widened the slit through which she was surreptitiously surveying the situation and winked at the Queen of All Media. “Nice dress, by the way,” she added.

Kara growled. “Let me up, Cat,” she said through gritted teeth. “I need to murder my sister.”

“Hey!” protested Alex, dropping the hand covering her eyes so she could plant it on her hip in outrage. “Is that any way to treat the aunt that came over to sign her hero nephew’s cast?” she asked. “It’s not my fault you two can’t stay away from each other for a full five minutes at a time!” She pointed to a pink box on the credenza in the foyer. “Besides, I brought cupcakes. The super-fancy special ones that you guys like so much. And let me tell you, they weren’t cheap!”

Kara, distracted, glanced at the box in the foyer. “Cupcakes?” she asked.

Cat sighed and began to back awkwardly off Kara’s lap, knowing defeat when she saw it.

“Yeah,” said Alex, laughing. “So button up, Buttercup, and get Carter.” She frowned, suddenly confused. “Where is he anyway? You guys didn’t knock him out with Benadryl or something, did you? Cuz that would be—”

“No!” said Kara, leaning forward to steady Cat as she found her footing. “He’s in his room, watching a live-feed of the robotics lecture he was supposed to attend tonight. Winn called in a favor and—”

“—and you guys took advantage of a little ‘alone time,’” said Alex, bookending the words alone time with her patented air quotes. “Gotcha. Very efficient.” She laughed at the look on Cat’s face,
and then shrugged. “Sorry I interrupted,” she said, but she didn’t actually look sorry at all.

“As personally inconvenient I find your visit to be, Alex—” began Cat, her tone one that Kara knew all too well. It was tight with control and sharp with rebuke. “—some good may come from it. I’m going to change clothes—”

The sound of disappointment Kara made at that announcement came very close to a whimper. Cat ignored it and Alex sniggered.

“—and when I return,” continued Cat, her tone indicating she would not brook any further shenanigans, “I would very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss my self-defense training with you. Since your prediction of an imminent media blitz surrounding Kara’s and my relationship proved insightful, I find myself at a disadvantage. Kara and I agree my training should start as soon as possible.”

“That’s…” Alex frowned, turning serious for the first time since she arrived. She dropped her apple core into Cat’s empty scotch glass on the coffee table, ignoring Cat’s raised eyebrow at the move. “That’s a really good idea, actually,” continued Alex. “We could get started tonight, if you want. I really did come to see Carter, but I don’t want to interrupt his lecture.” She looked at her feet in a way that immediately reminded Cat of Kara. “I know you won’t believe me, but I’m sorry for interrupting you guys. Next time—if I can’t get through to either of you by cell—I’ll call from the lobby, okay?”

So that’s where you picked that up from, Cat noted through the Daat Kyashar, watching Alex apologize. I didn’t think it was a Kryptonian habit, but I couldn’t be sure.

Yeah, that’s definitely a tried and true Danvers sisters original, replied Kara. We, uh…. Once Alex and I figured each other out, we were a handful.

Cat looked back at Kara, leering gently at the blonde’s ample breasts, remembering the shape and weight of them in her hands, how it felt to kiss them and the sounds Kara made when she did.

Or, in your case, more than a handful, sent Cat, the words laced with heat and want. Kara blushed and crossed her arms over her chest to hide her tightening nipples.

Cat chuckled warmly, and then turned back to Alex. “Acceptable,” she said, agreeing with Alex’s plan, and the frostiness of her voice had melted somewhat. “Besides, if the mere fact of me straddling your sister’s hips in a red dress and silk thigh highs and nothing else renders her unable to hear ringing telephones and elevators, our security needs are more dire than I originally thought.” Cat winked at Alex’s slack jaw and reddening cheeks, proud of her little turn of the knife. “Be right back,” she said, waggling her fingers cheerfully. “Kara will show you the space we’re thinking of repurposing for our training.”

Alex watched her go, still a little flummoxed, and then turned to Kara—only to find her sister standing over the open bakery box in the foyer, shoving a whole cupcake into her mouth, frosting and all. As Kara chewed, she began to unwrap a second one, preparing it, too, for a ghastly fate.

“Whoa, Kar, slow down!” said Alex, eyes bulging out of her head. “What if you choke? I don’t know if I can do the Heimlich on you!”

Kara swallowed the unwieldy wad of cupcake and glared at Alex. “I can do it on myself,” she snapped, and then groaned in disgust when Alex sniggered at her again. “You owe me, Alex. Big time!” Kara slapped the second cupcake’s wrapper onto the credenza, but seemed to lose steam where the actual cupcake was concerned, nibbling at the raspberry buttercream frosting instead of
“I said I was sorry,” said Alex, tentatively reaching out to put her hand on Kara’s shoulder. She sighed with relief when Kara didn’t immediately shrug her off.

“I know,” said Kara, frowning and shaking her head. “And normally it wouldn’t matter, but we haven’t—haven’t—in over forty hours and that might not seem like a long time to you, but right now? To us? To us, it feels like an eternity and we’re both a little…a little on edge.”

Doctor Alex clued in where Sister Alex had not and she gasped. “Oh my God,” she whispered. “The naissance phase! Kara, I totally forgot.” She leaned down and tried to catch Kara’s gaze. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know it was affecting you so much.” She squeezed Kara’s shoulder supportively. “Are your powers compromised?” she asked, fully into provider mode now. “Are you in pain?”

“No,” said Kara, refusing to look at her sister. Her cheeks darkened with a deep blush and Alex realized how hard it must be to talk about one’s sexual health with one’s sister who also doubled as one’s doctor. “It’s not like that. There’s just this…this urgency. The Daat Kyashar is still growing, still learning, and it learns best when we’re focused only on each other—no distractions.” She frowned and tried to find the right words to describe what she felt. “If anything, it’s like an emptiness, a—a hunger. And not just a—not a sexual one, Alex. The connection, the emotional intimacy, the bond—they’re more important than the sex.” She smiled shyly. “Though that part is, um, really good, too,” she whispered.

Alex tucked a lock of Kara’s long hair behind her ear. “I’m glad,” she whispered, smiling softly at her little sister. “About all of it, Kara.” She leaned in to press a kiss to the side of Kara’s head. “You deserve to be happy. It’s all I ever wanted for you.” She sighed and it was a self-deprecating sound. “I just wish I could help with the Daat Kyashar. I wish I knew more—”

Kara’s head snapped up. “Oh my God, Alex—I forgot to tell you! With everything that’s been going on—I—I got distracted. Again. I’m so sorry!” She dropped the uneaten cupcake on its wrapper and put her hands on Alex’s shoulders. “Eliza’s coming to National City Saturday,” she said urgently. “She knew about the Daat Kyashar before I told her what was going on. She said Jeremiah had been studying it—that he had ideas or—or theories about how it might work here, on Earth—about how it would work if I fell in love with a human.” Kara gulped a little nervously. Twice in two days she’d forgotten to tell Alex something really important and she felt terrible. “I should have called you, Alex. I’m sorry.”

Alex stepped out from under Kara’s grip and backed away from her. She crossed her arms over her chest, her eyebrows high above her bark-brown eyes, her features curiously blank.

“Mom’s coming to National City,” she recounted, voice flat. “With Dad’s research on something we didn’t even know about until this week.” Alex shook her head and grimaced, lips pulling into a thin, tight line. “Swooping in out of nowhere to save the day. Again.”

“No,” said Kara and her voice was as stern as it was certain. “She’s not saving the day. There’s no ‘day’ to save—and, besides, you and Cat and Hank and I, we’ve been doing okay on our own. All Eliza is bringing to the table is her love and Jeremiah’s notes.” She gave Alex an awkward sideways-hug and rested her head on her sister’s shoulder. “It’s not a competition, Alex. I can’t afford it to be a competition. I need everyone’s help.”

Alex didn’t react at first and Kara still felt the tension in her sister’s lanky frame. Finally, some of that tension seemed to dissipate.
“When is she coming?” Alex asked, resigned.

“Late Saturday morning.” Kara smiled encouragingly. “If Carter’s up to it, he and I are going to pick her up at the airport. She’s staying with us.”

Alex nearly choked. “Mom’s staying here? With you and your girlfriend who is only a year younger than she is?” A wide, devious grin broke across her features. “And you thought my shovel talk was bad,” she said, shaking her head. Alex continued before Kara could respond, saying, “Come on and show me this space you want to use for Cat’s training. I know she said she has basic self-defense already on board, but Mom fights dirty. I want to show Cat some quick counter techniques so she’ll be better prepared.”

Kara gaped at her sister, mouth opening and closing like a goldfish dying on the kitchen floor. “Eliza wouldn’t—would she?”

Alex only laughed and shook her head, walking away from Kara with her hands raised, as if to say ‘You invited her; not me.’

Kara followed nervously after her, voice high and squeaky. “She wouldn’t. Alex? Alex, don’t walk away from me….”

-----

Thursday night ended with a bruised hand and a black eye.

Either Alex had gotten too close to Cat while positioning her for the right cross or Cat had been a little overzealous in throwing it. Neither of them would say and Kara was left holding two bags of frozen peas and the shattered remains of yet another deferred romantic interlude with her fiancée.

She was not pleased.

She shuffled Alex out of the penthouse with one of the bags of frozen peas and a sharp reprimand. “You’re lucky it wasn’t the other way around, Alex.”

“Boy, am I,” agreed Alex. She’d take a black eye any day over being the one who’d given Cat one. That would have been a fucking nightmare. “I’ll call tomorrow to check up on her,” she added, wincing in empathy.

Once Alex was gone, Kara clucked over Cat’s injury as if the CEO had been wounded in a pitched battle fighting for her life. Gently, she placed the second bag of peas over three angry blue and swollen knuckles.

“Let me go find an ACE bandage,” Kara begged, her frown and worry growing every time she looked at it. The edges of the bruises were already turning a virulent plumy purple, and Kara’s distress climbed a notch or two higher at the sight—from mother hen to I’ve-seen-too-many-episodes-of-Grey’s-Anatomy. “Maybe Carter will let you borrow his sling tomorrow.”

Cat sneered. “There will be no ACE bandages and no slings,” she declared, her decision final. “First, I will not be trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey, and second, if the paparazzi got a shot of that, they’d say the honeymoon was over and you and I would be the stars of the latest celebrity break up gossip to hit the National Enquirer.”

Kara’s guilt and anxiety skyrocketed at those words and Cat sighed, realizing she was making things worse instead of better.
“All I really need, darling, is a couple of Tylenol, another scotch, and to sleep in your arms,” she said, trailing the fingers of her uninjured hand down Kara’s arm. “Can that be arranged?”

Kara nodded morosely. “Of course,” she said, but it sounded more like Kara was heading to her own execution rather than providing Cat a little tender loving care. “Can I at least make sure the bones aren’t broken?” she asked.

Cat presented the hand for examination without protest. “I don’t believe they are,” she said, “but if I’m wrong, I promise to let you take me to the hospital if you promise to let me devise an appropriate lie about how this might have happened.” She cast a baleful gaze at Kara. “I do not want to risk being the lead story in another news cycle so soon.”

Kara nodded, agreeing wholeheartedly. She lowered her glasses enough to look over the tops of them with her x-ray vision and a smile bloomed across her lips almost immediately.

“Bruised, not broken,” she declared, relieved. “Go say goodnight to Carter and I’ll meet you in the bedroom with your Tylenol and your scotch.”

Cat leaned across the space that separated them and kissed Kara teasingly. “We can pick up where we left off earlier,” she husked, looking up at Kara with hooded eyes.

“Oh, no we can’t,” snapped Kara, incredulous Cat would suggest such a thing. She frowned. “You’re in pain, Cat. I can feel it, remember? I won’t be able to think of anything else.” When Cat pouted, Kara sighed. “Maybe—if you feel better in the morning and we get up early enough—we can reconsider. Okay?”

Cat rolled her eyes, but relented. “Far be it from me to argue with Supergirl,” she said. “As long as you don’t mind me doing my best impression of a barnacle with you tonight, I’ll find a way to endure.” Her gaze softened and she reached up to caress Kara’s cheek with her uninjured hand, adding, “I need you, my darling. I need your touch—in whatever way you’re willing to give it. If we have to wait a little longer to make love, then so be it.”

Kara felt the tension in her muscles leave her in a wave and she leaned forward to kiss the corner of Cat’s mouth. “I love you, Cat,” she murmured, her words heartfelt and pure. She was so grateful… for this woman’s presence in her life and her unending patience and understanding, yes, but mostly for her trust. Kara knew how much of a risk it had been for Cat to give in to her feelings and how alarming it must have been to find herself bonded to Kara via an ancient Kryptonian immune response as a result. Cat’s trust was a gift Kara treasured, a gift she’d never expected to receive.

Cat cupped Kara’s cheek in her palm, her eyes sparkling. “I love you, too,” she whispered. “I hope you know how much.”

Kara grinned and the instantaneous change in her features reminded Cat why she had earned the nickname ‘Sunny’ Danvers.

“I do, Cat,” Kara said with her trademark earnestness. “I promise, I do.”

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Friday morning—whether due to fatigue or something altogether different—both Cat and Kara woke later than they had planned. They weren’t late by any stretch of the imagination, but they no longer had time to engage in a much-needed sensual catch-up session, which both women had been looking forward to with something akin to ravenousness.

What they did have, however, was a cold, dripping bag of mushy peas and a fully healed right hand.
“Okay, that officially sucks,” said Alex when Kara called in a panic to report the incident. “I look like I went a round with Rhonda Rousey and Cat’s all better? How does that work exactly? And how is it fair?”

“I don’t know!” hissed Kara. “I mean, we’ve been able to do a little bit of healing with Carter’s arm, but that was us working together, consciously initiating and encouraging the healing process.” She looked at Cat, who was staring down at her unblemished right hand with the evilest of grins, clearly pleased and/or planning something. The second possibility alone made Kara more nervous. “But Cat’s hand is completely healed, Alex. You can’t tell there was ever anything wrong with it. And we didn’t do anything to it; I swear.” Her disbelief gave way to her uncertainty and she pleaded with her sister. “What do we do, Alex?”

“Nothing?” Alex wasn’t sure what Kara was asking her. “I mean, this is a good thi—” She stopped in mid-thought, however, when the implications of a self-healing human suddenly caught up with her as-yet uncaffeinated brain. “Holy shit,” she said.

“See?! This is what I’m talking about—”

Kara was quickly becoming unhinged and Alex decided to take the reins of this runaway panicwagon before Kara crashed it into a proverbial building.

“Kara, listen to me,” she ordered, voice ringing with a little steel of her own.

When Kara obediently fell silent, Alex reached up to pinch the bridge of her nose…and remembered too late why that might be a bad idea.

“Ow!” she muttered under her breath. Before Kara could ask what had happened, she barreled over her. “I’m fine. Never mind. First things first, Kara—have you checked Carter’s arm yet this morning?” Alex had a pretty good idea where this was heading, but since she hadn’t specifically trained as a family physician, she was hesitant to admit her suspicion aloud.

“No. We were going to because he wants to go back to school today, but—”

A brief sotto voce conversation happened outside of Alex’s hearing, and then Kara returned to the phone.

“Hold on,” she said, and a second later Alex heard an outraged Carter Grant grousing about his unexpected visitor.

“Mom, jeez! You scared the—”

“Do not finish that sentence, young man,” came Cat’s expected admonishment, but she sounded far away.

“Well? Kara?” Alex waited while another sotto voce conversation took place, this one sounding a trifle more urgent. “Kara, are you still there?” she asked.

“Yeah, um, Alex?” Kara sounded as hesitant as she’d ever heard her. “It, um, it looks like Carter won’t need that cast much longer,” she whispered. Alex imagined Kara in the hallway outside Carter’s room, trying unsuccessfully to engage in subterfuge. “Like, it could probably come off tomorrow,” she continued, and Alex closed her eyes.

And there it was: the other shoe dropping. An anticlimactic experience if there ever was one.

Alex briefly wondered how she was going to open a medical practice inside the DEO without their
knowledge, but wisely decided to leave that bit of creative logistics for another day.

“Listen, Kara, we’re going to figure this out. I promise.” She sighed, thinking that was a pretty tall order to be asking for, even with the help of a superhero. “I know you don’t want the DEO involved, but we might not have that luxury anymore. Do you understand?”

“But—”

“Kara, how could we even begin to explain any of this to Carter’s pediatrician? Or to Cat’s internist?” asked Alex, wanting Kara to look at this reasonably. “Cat went to bed last night with an injury that should have taken weeks to heal properly. Instead, it’s gone this morning—poof!—like magic.” She rubbed her forehead as myriad possibilities and unintended consequences crowded into her brain, all shouting for their chance to be heard. “And what if this is just the start, Kara? What if more is coming—more we can’t hide as easily? Like flight or heat-vision or your super-strength?”

“But, Alex—”

“Look, Kara, I know you’re afraid for them. I am, too. Hell, I’m afraid for all three of you.” Alex refrained from telling Kara exactly how afraid she was. Some things were better left unsaid. “But if either of them gets hurt—seriously hurt, where they need immediate medical attention—our options are limited.”

Kara didn’t respond for nearly a full minute, but, in the end, she had to agree. Cat’s and Carter’s continued wellbeing was more important than some unknowable future. “I know, Alex,” she said, trying hard to keep her fear from running wild, to temper it with reason. “Thank you for helping us.”

Alex shook her head and smirked. “I’m your sister, Nerd. Of course I’m helping. That’s what I do.” She paused for a moment, and then added, softly, “Let’s talk to Mom about it tomorrow. Maybe she’ll have some ideas, too.”

Kara’s eyes welled up with tears, but she smiled through them. “You’re the best, Alex!” she said. “I really mean it.”

“Yeah, yeah. Remember that when you’re losing to me in poker,” she said, chuckling. A quick look at her alarm clock, though, made her groan in defeat. “Listen, if I don’t get up now, I’m gonna be late—and you know how Hank feels about that.”

Kara wiped her eyes, then giggled. “You need to bring him Chocos when you’re late. He doesn’t care as much then.”

“Yeah, I’ll pass, thanks,” said Alex wryly. “Carter can go to school if he wants, but he has to keep that cast on, Kara. Even after tomorrow. It’s going to be uncomfortable and itchy for a while, but better that than another Breaking News segment, right?”

Kara nodded. “I’ll tell him.”

“And I’ll tell Neves a perp clocked me when I wasn’t looking—unless you think Cat wants a little street cred for beating up an FBI agent?” She winced and Kara heard it. “I’m not sure makeup’s going to cover this shiner Cat gave me. At least, not enough that Neves won’t notice tonight.”

Kara’s hand shot to her mouth. “Oh, no! I forgot about your date!”

“With any luck, so has Neves,” joked Alex darkly.

“Don’t say that—Alex, I feel terrible!”
“Why?” asked Alex. “You didn’t do it.” She laughed suddenly and added, “What’s that meme online? ‘She’s beauty, she’s grace, she’ll punch you in the face?’ Cat’s got that one nailed.”

“Alex—”

“Go to work. I’ll let you know how it goes, okay? And tell Cat she owes me. I don’t know what yet, but I’ll think of something.”

Kara shook her head tolerantly. “A—she heard that, and B—she’s got a few ideas of her own what you might like,” she said. Her voice turned a little more serious and she added, “She says she’s sorry, Alex. She means it.”

“She shouldn’t be,” said Alex. “It was a hell of a right cross!”

When she hung up with Alex, Kara heard Cat negotiating with Carter about school and about his cast.

Carter readily agreed to the prospect of going back to school, but balked at a full four weeks in the cast—especially since it seemed he was healing faster than normal. Way faster.

“We’ll arrange a compromise while you’re at home, but you have to have it on in public, Carter. Things are different now—you’re different and—”

Cat stopped mid-sentence, horrified. She’d been about to say “and anything different is dangerous!”—just like the Danvers had done with Kara all those years ago. How easy it would have been to say those words. How easy to fall into that trap of fear and shame when her child’s life was at stake. She understood, now, why the Danvers had opted for suppression rather than celebration of Kara’s uniqueness. It must have seemed like the only way.

Cat pursed her lips, disappointed in herself, and started again, determined not to repeat their mistakes.

“You and I are changing physically and mentally,” she explained to Carter, her voice softer now, and calmer. “We need a chance, as a family, to absorb the full extent of those changes and how best to accommodate them. We need time so we can learn how to protect ourselves and each other.” She seated herself on the edge of Carter’s bed and reached out to tug at one of his brown curls. “That’s what the Daat Kyashar is at its heart, darling: protection.”

Carter sighed. “I know,” he grumbled. “It’s just that I don’t think there’s anything wrong with how we’re changing or who we are and—”

“There isn’t,” countered Cat emphatically. “There is not one thing wrong with you, or me, or Kara—not one! That’s not what this is about, Carter, and you know better than to suggest something like that.” She put her hands on Carter’s shoulders, eyes pleading with him to understand. “What I’m asking for is a pause, time for us to adjust, to act instead of react. Once we know what we’re facing and how it will affect us, we can reassess where we stand.” She cupped Carter’s cheek in her hand and looked him in the eyes, her gaze solemn. “I promise you, I will never ask you to hide who you are or what you can do for any other reason than our family’s safety. All right?”

Carter nodded. “All right, Mom,” he said, looking back at his mother with serious brown eyes. “I’ll wear the cast however long you want me to. I’m sorry for—”

Cat leaned in and hugged Carter, stopping his apology with a kiss pressed to the side of his head. “You have nothing to be sorry for, darling,” she told him. “Now, get dressed and I’ll see what we can figure out for your breakfast, okay?”
“Okay, Mom,” said Carter, pulling back to smile at Cat. “Love you.”

“Love you more,” she said, smiling at him. In the hallway, Cat almost ran headlong into one Kara Danvers or—more specifically—her lips. When Kara finally pulled away from a sound and thorough kiss, Cat whispered, “What was that for?”

“For what you told Carter,” said Kara, blue eyes shiny with emotion. “For explaining the dangers to him in a way he could understand. For reassuring him there was nothing wrong with what he and his body could do.”

Cat gave Kara a watery little indulgent smile. “There is nothing wrong with him,” she said softly. “He’s astonishing—just like his mother.” She reached up to catch one of Kara’s tears before it fell and rubbed the moisture between her fingertips, realizing just how long-lasting the effects of a few misspoken words could be. “Oh, darling, do you ever wonder how different your life would be if you still had your parents? If Krypton hadn’t died or if they’d somehow been able to come with you?”

Cat’s question—so far out of left field—caused Kara to gasp, at first, but she thought deeply about her answer before she gave it. “I…I used to, a lot, my first years here. Things didn’t work right. I didn’t fit in. Everything was hard for the longest time. But eventually those dreams faded…or…or maybe I let them go. If I hadn’t, I would have been trapped between the past and my future, unable to move in either direction.” She looked up and smiled. “I’m glad I did, Cat. The present—our present—is more wonderful than anything I ever could have imagined.”

Cat stretched up on her tip-toes to bestow a tender kiss on Kara’s cheek, and then pulled back, rolling her eyes. “Come on, sweet talker,” she groused playfully, stepping away from Kara as she deflected some of the deeper emotion she was feeling. “We should get ready for work. Remember, it’s a whole new world for us at CatCo. Everyone knows our secret now—and not everyone will be pleased.” She smirked and curled the fingers of her right hand into a fist. “At least I can throw a mean right cross if I need to,” she noted, admiring her unblemished knuckles.

At that, Kara rolled her eyes. “Since when has the Queen of All Media ever needed anything other than a sharp comment to take down her adversaries?” she asked. “Well, as long as Supergirl wasn’t too far away,” she added, winking.

“And if I said you were too far away now?” asked Cat suggestively.

Kara stepped back into Cat’s personal space and wrapped the smaller woman up in her arms. “I can fix that,” she said, and she leaned down to kiss Cat, blue eyes sparkling.

A second later, Carter burst into the hallway and immediately recoiled.

“Could you two stop making out in the hallway for, like, three minutes?” he asked, exasperated. He squeezed past his mothers on the way to his bathroom. “Some of us are trying to get ready for school.”

Cat and Kara separated, watched as Carter slammed his bathroom door, and then burst into helpless giggles.

“That’s our cue, darling,” said Cat, tugging Kara down the hall toward their room. She was still smiling.

“I’ll say,” said Kara. As they passed the shut door, she added—in a comically loud voice—“I’d hate for Carter to catch our cooties!”
Without missing a beat, Carter shouted back, “Cooties are so last week, Mom! If I have to catch something, I’m hoping for either flight or heat-vision next.”

Kara’s mouth hung open practically the entire way to work.

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Dorothy Webb spotted Alice Kens in the lobby of CatCo Plaza at seven-thirty on the dot and called out to the young woman as she passed the hot pink cougar statue on the way to the elevator bank.

“Yes, Ms. Webb?” asked Alice, her features crinkled by mild worry. “Is something wrong?”

“Not a thing, Alice,” said Dorothy, smiling as she took Alice’s arm and walked with her to the elevators. “I just wanted to catch you on your way up to Ms. Grant’s office. It’s all terribly embarrassing, really, but in all the kerfuffle these past few days, I forgot to have you sign some paperwork showing you’d agreed to your temporary reassignment…and that you understand the pay increase is also temporary. It’s upstairs in my office—if you don’t mind a bit of a detour before you get started today?”

This was a bald-faced lie and if Alice had been looking into Dorothy’s eyes when she’d said it, she would have been able to tell that immediately. Because the concept was plausible, though, and Alice was looking ahead of her, watching Veronica Lewin slip hurriedly into a nearly full car before its doors closed, she only nodded affably.

“Yes,” she said, and her frown deepened just a little. “Oh, of course, Ms. Webb, but I hope you know it wasn’t about the money. I’m happy to waive any increase if it makes it easier for you—”

Dorothy smiled and patted Alice’s arm. “Don’t be ridiculous. You’ve more than earned it and Ms. Grant set the policy for a reason,” she said. “It will only take a few minutes and I called Kara to let her know where you’d be.”

Alice breathed a sigh of relief. “Then I’m still assigned to Ms. Grant? Even though Kara is back?” Seeing Veronica had made her wonder, but she supposed the temp could have been assigned to another department already.

Dorothy nodded and made a show of glaring at the elevator bank, impatiently checking her watch. “For the time being,” she said, lying again. “Ms. Grant wants you to bring Kara up to speed on what happened while she was gone.” A quiet ding announced the arrival of another car and Dorothy gestured for Alice to enter it ahead of her. “Shall we?”

Alice smiled as she went in and happily pressed the button for the fourteenth floor.

Thirty minutes later, the two of them exited an elevator on the fortieth floor, Dorothy accompanying Alice under the guise of needing to speak to Cat about another issue. As they walked across the bullpen, the personnel director noticed Winn Schott and a gaggle of young women trying to act casual around a new desk across from Kara’s while attempting to keep it partially hidden from view. They were doing a terrible job of it and Dorothy was frankly surprised by Alice’s obliviousness.

When they neared Cat’s office, Kara leapt up from her desk and rushed forward, a to-go cup from Noonan’s in her hand.

“Alice,” she said, her voice and smile both as bright as the sun. She handed the startled admin the Noonan’s cup, explaining, “I wanted to return the favor from yesterday. It’s a soy peppermint mocha, no whip. Frankie said it was your go-to.”
“It is,” said Alice, trying not to sound surprised. “Thank you, Kara. You didn’t have to, though.”

“I wanted to,” Kara assured her. “And Miss Grant would like a moment to thank you for everything you did—if that’s okay?”

“Oh, she doesn’t have to thank me, Kara,” said Alice fretfully. “I was just doing my job—”

“She knows,” interrupted Kara. “She might want to talk a little about that, too,” she added, opening the door to Cat’s domain, waiting for the two women to enter.

“About what?” asked Alice, eyes narrowing. “Does this have anything to do with that new desk across from you?”

Dorothy smirked. “So you did see it,” she said, pleased to know she hadn’t underestimated Alice’s powers of observation.

Alice shrugged. “Well…it didn’t exactly require x-ray vision,” she said cheekily, glancing at Cat who was trying to hide her pleased smile. “And maybe next time, get Jimmy Olsen to chat up three admins and a program manager as a distraction. Winn looked like he was about to pass out.”

Cat cast a pointed look at Kara who huffed her exasperation in a brief, sharp exhale. “Okay, okay—you were right,” she said, and everyone chuckled.

When the moment of levity faded, Cat invited Dorothy and Alice to sit in her guest chairs with a sweep of her arm. Once they were settled, she took her own seat and Kara perched on Cat’s desk at her right hand.

“Before we begin, Alice,” said Cat, “I want to take the opportunity to thank you for everything you’ve done for me and for CatCo these past two days. You were thrust into a difficult situation with little in the way of resources or time to prepare and you performed well above and beyond any expectations we may have had of you. Employees like you represent the excellence of CatCo Worldwide Media and it is my responsibility and my pleasure to recognize that excellence.” She picked up an envelope on the desk in front of her and handed it to Alice, who took it gingerly. “You’ve more than earned this bonus, Alice, and I hope you accept it in the spirit in which it is given—unreservedly.”

If the look of surprise and delight in her eyes was any indication, it may have been the first time in Alice’s entire professional career she had received such high praise and recognition for her work.

“Thank you, Ms. Grant,” she said sincerely. “It’s been my pleasure to assist both you and Kara these past few days and the knowledge that my work helped either of you at all is more than enough recognition for me.” She glanced at the envelope with a flick of curious green eyes, burning to know what was in it, but she put her curiosity aside for the moment, genuinely touched by the acknowledgement of her efforts. “That being said, my mother taught me it is as important to accept praise as it is to accept criticism, and I am grateful. Thank you.”

Cat raised one eyebrow and flicked her green eyes toward Kara, sending, You could use a little help with the former, my darling.

Kara’s cheeks pinked in response to the gentle admonishment.

“Your mother taught you a valuable lesson,” Cat observed, returning her gaze to Alice. “I would love the opportunity to meet her one day.”

Alice grinned. “Ms. Grant, that would be a dream come true for her,” she said. “She’s admired you
and your work for years.”

“All the better, then,” said Cat, smiling graciously. “Now, on to the real reason for all this inexpertly executed subterfuge…. As you may have guessed, the change in my personal relationship with Kara necessitates a change in our professional one. Currently, she reports to me and that presents a potential for legal difficulties the Board of Directors considers onerous.” She smirked briefly and nodded once, conceding their point. “They’re not wrong,” she said grudgingly, “but any alteration to Kara’s position creates certain problems for me I’ve had the luxury of avoiding for the last two years—namely having to find a new assistant.”

“That’s where you would come in, Alice,” said Kara, picking up the explanation from Cat smoothly, as if they’d rehearsed it that way. “My internship is going ahead as planned, and Cat and I always intended for me to train my replacement—preferably from within the company, if possible. We didn’t exactly know who that would be, but when you came to Cat’s rescue during the finance meeting—and then took over security and logistics while we were at the hospital with Carter—well, you certainly got our attention.”

“Is that something that would interest you, Alice?” asked Cat. “My work is more creative and broad-ranging than the work in Finance, but what it lacks in the realm of math, it more than makes up for just in the presence of sunshine alone,” she said, gesturing to the wall of windows to her right. “Although I can also guarantee a more interesting complement of guests and the occasional charity ball or correspondent’s dinner.”

Alice looked back and forth between Cat and Kara with round eyes. “If you’re asking me would I be interested in becoming your Executive Assistant, Ms. Grant, the answer is emphatically yes,” she said, nodding vigorously to emphasize that sentiment.

“Actually,” said Dorothy, eager for Alice to understand the full scope of what she was agreeing to, “once your training is complete and Kara’s internship is over, you’ll be assisting both Cat and Kara. There might be a need for a junior assistant at some future date, as well, but you would be the senior. And you would have a say in who would report to you.” She smiled at Alice’s widening grin. “In the meantime, you’ll be junior to Kara for the duration of her internship—say, six to nine months. How does that sound?”

“It sounds like I went to sleep last night on a regular Thursday and woke up on Christmas morning,” she whispered, and Kara grinned. “Will I need to prepare for an interview or—”

Cat shook her head. “I think your work over the last two days has shown me what you’re capable of and what your potential is better than any fifteen minute sit-down with canned questions.” She paused and added, “If your comment about x-ray vision earlier was meant to confirm your understanding of Kara’s unique circumstances…."

Alice blushed and looked at her hands in her lap. “It was,” she confessed, glancing apologetically at Kara. “I’m sorry—it’s just that the glasses really don’t help, like, at all. And then there’s that scar…."

Kara had the good sense to look abashed as she pressed her finger over the tiny divot between her eyebrows. “It happened before I, um, emigrated,” she said, shrugging. “We can’t exactly fix it now.”

“Hmm,” said Cat pensively, thinking that might not be entirely accurate. “In any case,” she continued, returning to the task at hand, “the only other question I have for you, Alice, is what kind of plan you have for your career—and how can I help make it a reality?”
Alice took a deep breath and nodded once, bringing her thoughts into order before answering. “I don’t think I’d be wrong in saying that no one at CatCo ever expected the position of your Executive Assistant to open this soon, Ms. Grant. You and Kara make such a good team and the upper level admins had all pretty much given up on ever making it to your office,” she said haltingly, wondering if she was saying too much. When she only received knowing smiles from all assembled, she went on. “But if you’re asking me what I want to do, I’ll tell you it’s exactly what you’ve offered me, nothing more.”

Cat gave Alice a quizzical look. “No burning desire to be, say, a field reporter or to head your own department someday?” she asked mildly.

Alice shook her head. “No,” she said and the finality in her tone was palpable. “I like being behind the scenes. I like making other people’s lives easier, taking care of the day-to-day worries so they can shine. When the spotlight is on them, I’m happy knowing I helped them look their best under the lights. It’s all I’ve ever wanted to do.” She smiled and her eyes crinkled at the corners with it. “I come from a long line of Scots who distinguished themselves in service to the English gentry. My mother thinks I’ve inherited that spirit—perhaps more than she would have liked.”

“Far be it from me to discourage that spirit,” said Cat, smiling openly. “Especially when it benefits me as much as it apparently does you.” She turned her hands upward in an elegant shrug. “If we’re all agreed, I’ll let you return to Dorothy’s office to negotiate the terms and to sign the necessary paperwork. After that, please take the rest of the day off—paid, of course. You’ll report to Kara on Monday morning.”

Alice and Dorothy rose from their chairs, followed by Cat and Kara both.

“Thank you, Ms. Grant,” said Alice sincerely. “And Kara,” she added, turning to the blonde. “I appreciate your trust in me. I promise you won’t be disappointed.”

“I’m confident that’s a promise you’ll have no problem keeping,” said Cat warmly. She gestured at the forgotten envelope in front of Alice with the lift of an eyebrow. Alice seized it from the desk and immediately blushed.

“Have a great weekend!” said Kara, waving. “See you Monday—and don’t worry about bringing coffee for Miss Grant just yet. We’ll work that into your training.” She winked and Alice just laughed.

Cat and Kara watched the two women go, and then Cat sighed, sad to see what was likely to be the most pleasant part of her day end.

“What’s next on the agenda, darling?” she asked, taking her seat again. She opened her laptop with a flick of her hand.

Kara snatched her tablet from the corner of the desk and activated it, turning to Cat’s comprehensive and angry-looking calendar. “Nothing good,” she said, grimacing. She glanced up at Cat hesitantly. “You have a call with the mayor in—” Her eyes flicked to the time in the lower corner of the device. “—six minutes, a meeting with Lucy after that, and then a call with Alan—to ‘check in’ on the progress of my internship MOUs.” She rolled her eyes, and added, “And Giani wants five minutes if you can spare it. He’s not happy about the December visit.”

Cat snorted. “In other news, water is wet,” she said sarcastically. “Put the mayor through immediately, of course. I’m sure he needs reassurance my little scandal isn’t going to bleed all over his reelection campaign.” She reached for her reading glasses and chewed on the end of an arm thoughtfully. “Have something sent up for Lucy’s meeting—you know her tastes. She doesn’t eat
enough and I’m starving.”

She sighed and slipped her glasses on, looking up at Kara in resignation. “As for Alan, he’s fishing, but I’ll take his call. He’ll be happy your replacement is an in-house transfer and it might be enough of a chew toy to keep him busy through the weekend.” She scowled, though, when she remembered Giani. “You have my permission to tell Giani to go straight to Hell—using, of course, your own Sunny Danvers translation of those words. I don’t have time to listen to him mansplain why my recently rescheduled visit to Italy is a bad idea. Frankly, I’d rather have an un-anaesthetized root canal on a Russian oil tanker in the middle of the Indian Ocean. It would be less painful.”

“For whom?” Kara wondered, but she made a note of Cat’s decision nonetheless. When she was done, she finished the outline of Cat’s day. “I’m thinking today might be a good day for a cheeseburger salad,” she said wryly and Cat nodded eagerly to that. “Then two hours to go over the next CatCo Magazine feature layouts—from the balcony, as requested.” She logged out of the calendar and closed her tablet. “After that, you’re due in makeup to prep for the rescheduled live uplink with Rachel Maddow.” Kara blushed hotly and Cat raised an eyebrow expectantly at her. “She’s asked to speak to you off the record for a few minutes before the official interview,” Kara explained. “I think she wants to know about us,” she added, smiling shyly.

“Pfft,” said Cat, dismissing the thought with a wave of her hand and a roll of her eyes. “What she wants is an exclusive. Don’t let Rachel fool you with her do-gooder lesbian earnestness, darling. Once she’s gotten her teeth into a story, she’s twice as ruthless as Lois. She’ll leave marks if you’re not careful.”

That was an interesting turn of phrase to Kara and she leaned down close to Cat’s ear, whispering, “The real question is—will you?” Behind the question she sent several flickering images, each more risqué than the last. All of them featured Cat using her mouth to its best advantage—at least where pleasing Kara was concerned—and Kara’s enthusiastic and breathless encouragement of her efforts.

Before Cat could respond in any way, her telephone rang and Kara answered it as if nothing had happened. “Cat Grant’s office,” she announced. “This is Kara. How can I help you?”

Cat seethed as Kara nodded helpfully to the unseeing caller.

“Absolutely, Mr. Mayor,” she said. “May I have you hold for a moment?” When he agreed, Kara pressed the red hold button and held the receiver out to Cat. “The mayor for you,” she said sweetly.

Cat took the phone from Kara’s hand, glowering at her with dark eyes.

*You think you’re funny, but you’re not,* she sent, the words dripping with frustration and need in equal measure.

Kara hugged her tablet to her chest, grinned cheekily, and flounced out of the office.

Cat watched her go, and then rearranged her features into something resembling a smile, hoping she could pull off a light, interested tone of voice instead of a steadfastly murderous one.

“Eric,” she said as she released the hold button. “How can I help National City’s mayor today?”

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Alex sat at the bar in the quieter lounge section of Pearl, nursing a Strongbow Honey cider, and shifting uneasily on the uncomfortably small barstool. Whatever hesitation she’d had about her black eye—and she’d been right on that point; makeup had only covered so much—it had been laid to rest
with the third gifted drink she’d had to refuse.

The bartender, a Goth-y nose-ringed twenty-something with heavy eye-makeup and long hair dyed in shades of green and blue, snickered and took it away.

“They’re lining up for you tonight,” she noted, nodding at a bevy singles haunting the space between the bar itself and the tables in the shadows. “It’s that killer dress. And the shiner doesn’t hurt. You look hot and dangerous. Girls love that.” She picked up an empty bottle from two seats down, and wiped the space beneath it with a rag. “What’s the matter—not interested?”

“I’m waiting for someone,” said Alex, hoping beyond hope that someone was actually planning to show up. She so did not want to get stood up, especially not here. She wasn’t exactly a regular anymore—those days were long over, thankfully—but there were a few people who still remembered her drunken dance-craze days and she’d had enough of their pity years ago.

“Alex!”

Alex turned to her left just in time to catch a glimpse of red before her arms were full of a warm, wonderful, deliciously fragrant Neves Montenegro—who was kissing her thoroughly and decidedly, as if Alex had just returned from war. A chorus of disappointed groans went up around the lounge and the crowd thinned out a little as hopefuls drifted away in search of other possibilities.

When Neves pulled back, she looked at Alex’s lips with wide bark-brown eyes and slowly wiped away a smudge of her lipstick with her thumb.

“I’m sorry I’m late,” she said quietly.

“I’m not!” blurted Alex, still stunned, her whole body popping like a Fourth of July sparkler. Realizing how that might sound, Alex closed her eyes and sighed. “I mean, not if that’s the way you’re going to apologize,” she clarified.

Neves chuckled. “Every time,” she promised. “And I’m late a lot. Just ask my boss.”

Neves chuckled. “Every time,” she promised. “And I’m late a lot. Just ask my boss.”

Alex opened her eyes and Neves’ nearness and her intensity caught her in mid-smile. “You look incredible,” she breathed and Neves blushed even though she knew Alex had no idea what she was even wearing. Alex hadn’t stopped staring into her eyes long enough yet to even notice how short her dress’s ruffle hem skirt was or how long her legs looked in her matching black cherry 4” T-strap heels.

“So do you,” she answered, and she literally did not care what Alex was wearing. It was enough that she was here. Everything else was icing. However, a shadow around the inside of Alex’s right eye caught the dim light just right and made her frown. “Hey,” said Neves, reaching up to cup Alex’s cheek in her palm. “What happened to you?”

Alex looked away, embarrassed. “Got too close while training someone on a right cross,” she admitted self-consciously, carefully leaving Cat out of the picture.

Laughter bubbled up from Neves’ belly and lit up her eyes and Alex both smiled and grimaced at the same time.

“Oh, no!” said Neves, covering her mouth with her hand.

Alex shook her head. “I should have told you the story I made up—the one where I fend off three drugged up perps and end up with a shiner and a break in a five-year-old trafficking case,” she said morosely.
Still laughing, Neves nodded. “Yeah, you should have,” she agreed. When Alex pulled back a little, hurt, she caught Alex’s chin in her fingertips. “If you’d have told me that story, I would’ve taken you home with me on the spot.”

Alex looked up, eyes suddenly bright and very interested. “Yeah?” she asked, a smile tugging at the corner of her mouth.

“Yeah,” said Neves, looping her arms around Alex’s neck and leaning into her, her breath hot on Alex’s cheek. “But now I’m gonna make you work for it,” she said, grinning when Alex groaned and rolled her eyes. “Come on, Agent Danvers,” she said, tugging Alex off the stool. “Dance with me.”

Neves’ fingers laced with hers as the shorter woman dragged her toward the interior of the club, and Alex felt her heart thunder in time with the bass beat of the pounding dance music.

*I am in so much fucking trouble,* she thought, eyes round and worried.

But when Neves turned around and pressed into her on the dancefloor, black cherry curves grinding into her to the beat of music so loud Alex couldn’t even hear her own blood rushing in her ears, she gave up thinking altogether, put her hands on Neves’ hips, and surrendered to the night.

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Barely ten minutes into a documentary about electric trains, train safety, and the future of public transportation, Carter Grant yawned and then sighed.

“Would it be okay if we recorded this?” he asked his mothers, nodding toward the television. “I had a long day and I’m kinda beat. I think I’m just gonna go to bed.”

Cat frowned and reached for Carter’s arm. “Do you feel all right, sweetheart?” she asked, scanning him for pain and illness even as he nodded. She pressed the back of her hand to his forehead to see if he had a temperature and Kara looked up from her book, concerned.

“Mom, I’m fine,” he said, ducking away from his mother’s fussing. “It’s just that everyone wanted to know what happened. I had to tell the story, like, a thousand times. You know what’s funny, though?” he asked. “The girls mostly talked about how brave I was or wanted to know how much it hurt or if I was scared. The guys wanted to know how it felt to fall off a building or what it was like to ride in the ambulance—stuff like that.” He rolled his eyes, his opinion on the guys’ questions clear. “Only Zoe asked me whether or not I liked my new mom. Weird, huh?”

Carter shrugged, completely oblivious to the knowing look that passed between his mothers, and then got up, leaning down to kiss his mother’s cheek. “G’nite, Mom,” he said. “Love you. Thanks for letting me go back to school today—even if it was a pain.”

Cat smiled ruefully. “You don’t know how hard that was for me,” she admitted, ruffling his unkempt curls. “Good night, darling. Sleep well.”

Carter turned to Kara and gave her a kiss, too. “G’nite, New Mom,” he said and he grinned sideways at her, clearly teasing her. “Love you, too.” Then a stray thought zinged through his brain, making him frown. “Hey, what time do you want me to be ready tomorrow so we can go pick up Gramma Eliza at the airport?”

Kara melted visibly, caught off guard by Carter’s name for her foster mother. “You want to go?” she asked. “Really?”
Carter rolled his eyes at her tolerantly. “You keep giving me new family members who are, like, famous scientists and stuff,” he said. “Course I wanna go.”

“Oh, you poor unfortunate soul,” droned Cat, voice dripping with ersatz sympathy. “Living your whole life with a Pulitzer-Prize-winning investigative journalist and media mogul. How horrible for you.”

Carter smirked at Cat. “Mom, stop,” he said. “You know what I mean.”

Cat chuckled and nodded. “Yes, I do,” she said warmly, thrilled right down to the iron in her blood that Carter was getting the kind of family she always wanted for him, but never thought was possible. An engaged, protective second parent who loved him with a fierceness and generosity of spirit Cat adored. An indulgent and interested aunt (maybe two, if things with Neves went as well as she hoped) who would be there for him no matter what. A milk-and-cookies grandmother with three advanced degrees in biomedical engineering who—sight unseen and on a moment’s notice—had rearranged her busy life just to meet him. Even Cat’s own mother—aloof and prickly Katherine Talbot Grant—was making an unsolicited effort to be more present for Carter and Cat both. The CEO smiled softly and shook her head at Kara, realizing the young woman had changed their lives in ways that went far deeper than the Daat Kyashar.

“Her plane lands at one-twenty,” said Kara. “We could go right after lunch.”

“Sounds good,” said Carter, giving her the thumbs up. He yawned again, then waved sleepily. “See you in the morning.”

Kara watched him as he trudged off down the hallway, while Cat uncurled herself from the couch and picked up his empty milk glass and the dessert plate containing the remnants of his cupcake. She carried them to the kitchen to put them into the dishwasher. Kara waited until she finally heard Carter’s bedroom door click shut, and then she used her super-speed, startling Cat as she appeared next to the poor woman in a flash.

Cat pressed a hand to her throat, heart pounding with shock.

“Kara, what on Earth—” she began, only to have her indignation cut off as Kara swept her up in strong arms and kissed her protests away. The kiss began as a way for Kara to hush Cat but it quickly grew beyond that intention, a wind-whipped campfire catching crisp Fall leaves alight until the entire forest was ablaze.

“Kara,” breathed Cat as she wrenched her mouth away. She threw her head back, groaning as the young woman bit and kissed her way down Cat’s neck. “Oh, God, yes,” she said, knowing now what Kara was doing and why.

“Bed.” Kara managed the single word while stumbling into the kitchen island. The resultant crack did not register. “Bed,” she said again, kissing every part of Cat she could reach with a desperation that was quickly driving her to her knees. “Now.”

The Daat Kyashar magnified their need for each other until the depths of it rang through their connection like the joyous peals of cathedral bells. By the time they reached their bedroom, Cat’s hands were shaking and the buttons of Kara’s shirt seemed smaller and more complex than was absolutely necessary. In a fit of pique, she grabbed the plackets and tore the shirt apart, sending the hated buttons pinging throughout the room.

Kara groaned and staggered with her to the dresser, sweeping away the empty vase, two books, and a soapstone statue of a gazelle with one arm and setting Cat upright on the edge of it with the other.
She looked up into Cat’s eyes with such naked longing, it took Cat’s breath away.

“I need you, Cat,” she said, voice shaking. She hitched the hem of Cat’s dress up and stepped between her knees, snaking long arms around her waist and then upward, searching for the hidden zipper pull at the back. Cat put her hands on Kara’s shoulders and locked her ankles around Kara’s hips, claiming Kara’s mouth in a deep, wet kiss.

Kara found the zipper and yanked at it, pivoting with Cat in her arms. By the time she’d taken the four steps needed to reach the foot of their bed, she had the zipper pulled all the way down. She lowered Cat to the floor, her hands trembling as they parted the fabric of the dress and she tugged it forward firmly, pulling it from Cat’s shoulders. It fell to the floor with a sigh.

Kara stared at Cat hungrily for three seconds before surging forward to unclasp the lacy rose-colored Simone Perele bra Cat wore. With the lightest of touches, she swept the bra’s straps outward and down Cat’s arms, watching it, too, fall away.

Cat shivered under Kara’s intense gaze. She wanted Kara’s mouth on her, wanted the heat of Kara’s tongue on her skin, wanted to feel Kara’s lips pulling her sensitive nipples into hardened peaks. She reached up and took Kara’s glasses away, dropping them to the floor amidst a growing pile of discarded clothing. She slid her fingers into Kara’s long hair and bunched it in her hands, pulling Kara toward her.

“Please, Kara,” she whispered, feeling Kara’s breath on her skin. “I need you, too….”

Kara whimpered and pressed open-mouthed kisses across Cat’s delicate collarbones until she finally couldn’t resist any longer, and she kissed her way downward, capturing a nipple as it tightened against her tongue.

Cat gasped. Kara’s touch seared and her tongue danced. Cat curled her head forward and kissed Kara’s head roughly until Kara flattened her tongue and flicked the tip of it along the underside of Cat’s nipple. Then Cat threw her head back and groaned deeply, feeling that touch like a lightning strike right to her core.

“I’m so wet, darling,” she sent, and Kara moaned against her skin. “I want you so much, have wanted you so much.” Cat pulled Kara up into another deep, sensuous kiss. “I can’t believe I ever thought I could live without your love.”

“You will never have to,” vowed Kara, heart pounding. She sounded breathless, even through the Daat Kyashar. Her hands glided down Cat’s back and she slipped her fingertips beneath the waistband of Cat’s tanga briefs, inching them downward over Cat’s hips….

Which, of course, was the exact moment her phone began to ring.

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As Arianna Grande’s “Into You” began to transition into “This is What You Came For,” Alex became painfully aware that she was no longer twenty-two years old. She held up her hands to indicate she needed a time-out and Neves nodded eagerly, also appearing winded and over-heated. Neves grabbed Alex’s hand and led her off the dancefloor, expertly weaving her way through the other couples as they headed back to the lounge. Once there, she found them an empty table in the back corner and playfully shoved Alex into one of the chairs.

“I’ll be right back, okay?” she said, leaning down to ghost her lips over Alex’s twice before pulling back and winking. “Promise you won’t go anywhere.”
Alex raised her hands in surrender and Neves laughed before disappearing into the crowd. The truth was, Alex couldn’t have moved if she’d wanted to. Just the touch of Neves’ lips had rendered her knees completely useless and she was certain she would fall right on her face if she tried to stand just now.

Since she had a few minutes to herself while she eagerly waited for Neves’ return, Alex used it for more than just catching her breath. It wasn’t always easy for her to sort through her feelings. She’d become adept at hiding them—especially from herself. She’d occasionally tried to drown them at the bottom of a bottle, too, though that tendency had begun to fade this year, once she’d stopped keeping so many secrets, once she’d started letting people in.

The question was—could she let Neves in, too?

Oh, how she wanted to. Alex hadn’t felt this way about anyone in a long time and she wanted everything that came with those feelings, everything Neves might be willing to offer her.

On the other hand, things were going pretty well for Alex just now and she wondered if they would continue to do so if she added Neves to the mix. Wasn’t it asking too much? People like her weren’t made for happiness—or so she thought. Would Neves tip the scales somehow and plunge Alex back into the hard, cold pit of detachment she’d perfected after her father had died?

She didn’t have time to begin to answer those questions, though, because Neves returned to the table with four ice-cold bottles of water.

“I made Nik—that’s the bartender—let me pick these out of the case myself,” said Neves, thumping the bottles on the tabletop. She pushed her chair around to Alex’s side of the table and hopped up into it, leaning into Alex so they touched from shoulder to hip. “None of them have been opened, but you can check behind me if you want. I won’t be offended.”

Alex blinked at Neves in shock. “You think I’m worried about you slipping me something?” she asked. It was literally the last thing that would have crossed her mind. She was only thinking about it now because Neves had said something.

A flash of annoyance crossed Neves’ features. “Date rape is a genderless crime,” she said sternly. “You of all people should know that, Agent Danvers.” Neves said the last part lowly so only the two of them could hear. Just as suddenly as it had appeared, though, her annoyance faded. “But no, I don’t think you were thinking that about me,” she said, nudging Alex playfully. She looked up at the FBI agent through long eyelashes. “At least, I hope not.”

“I wasn’t,” said Alex, Neves’ nearness and that come hither look suddenly taking her breath away. She reached for one of the waters, cracked it open, and gulped half of it in three long swallows, wondering when it had gotten so hot in the bar. She pressed the bottle to the side of her face and to her neck, grateful for the chill of it. When she finally glanced back at Neves, she found the woman still looking at her with big black eyes.

“Aren’t you thirsty?” asked Alex, nodding to the remaining bottles of water.

“Oh, yeah,” said Neves, her voice husky and deep. “But not for water,” she added, reaching up to kiss Alex. She cupped Alex’s face in her palm and skinned her tongue across Alex’s top lip, groaning when Alex opened to her and their kiss deepened.

When they parted, Neves looked up at Alex with unreadable dark eyes.

“I want to take you home with me,” she said, and Alex shivered with anticipation at the words, her
stomach flipping like a tiny, energetic gymnast. “But there’s something I have to tell you first,” Neves added, hesitating, and suddenly Alex wasn’t sure what to think or what to say.

“Okay,” Alex said hoarsely, wondering if this was the place where they would fall apart. Everything felt too close all of a sudden, and also too far away. She forced her next words from a rapidly-closing throat. “What is—”

Before she could finish her question, the ceiling over the bar exploded in a shower of sparks and flying debris as a section of it disappeared upward, seemingly ripped right out of the building. Screams erupted around them and panicked women started running…some for the bathrooms, some for the doors.

Except for Alex.

And for Neves.

Both women stood in the classic boxer’s stance, weapons raised. Alex’s gun had been holstered high on the outside of her thigh—something she’d been second-guessing since Neves’ first kiss of the evening. It wasn’t often someone was shot with their own gun while making out with their date, but Alex knew if it was going to happen to anyone, it would be her.

She glanced over at Neves and wondered where in the Hell Neves had holstered her gun. And where she’d been hiding the shield hanging around her neck on a long chain, for that matter.

Another impact site started not far from the first one and another wave of screams and panic sluiced through the crumbling club. Alex activated her earpiece and snapped a report to Susan Vasquez, who, she knew, was on duty tonight.

“Vasquez, send a team to me now. We have an attack of unknown origin happening at 21st and Cypress—”

“Wait—you’re at Pearl?” asked Susan, plainly shocked. “Are you on a date?”

Alex ignored the question. “Something is ripping a hole in the ceiling of this club and I need tactical support and a full containment team on site, STAT. There might be injured, but I want you to hold medical until my say so. I don’t want this to be a massacre. We have no idea what’s coming through this ceiling.”

“Right. Sorry, right. On it. Delta team will be in the air in three and Hank and Alpha team are on their way via ground transportation.” She paused as she listened to someone else’s report on her headset. “Delta team says their ETA is eight minutes. Should I call in the big guns?”

“The big guns” was their code for Supergirl and Alex scowled, wishing she could keep Kara out of whatever this was. She also knew that probably wasn’t going to be possible.

“Affirmative,” she said, sighing. Just then, the entire club was plunged into darkness as the electrical grid for the block overloaded and blew. Emergency lights flickered on a few seconds later, but showed little. “Tell her to hurry,” she barked. Things were definitely going from bad to worse.

Alex glanced to her right and saw the faintest outline of Neves’ features in the dim, flickering light. The woman’s eyes were alert and trained on the initial impact site, waiting calmly for whatever was coming next. Except for the moans of the injured and the creak of the broken building, though, everything was relatively silent.

“Is this what you were going to tell me?” asked Alex, nodding to Neves’ gun, her voice tight. “So
Neves nodded slowly. “Science Division,” she said, and she saw that Alex recognized the words—knew them for what they meant. The arrival of Fort Rozz thirteen years ago had caught National City flatfooted and unprepared for the paranormal and extranormal events that followed. The NCPD had compensated by forming the Science Division. Its mission was to investigate any and all criminal activity featuring paranormal or extranormal elements.

“And your name?” asked Alex, glowering at the smoldering remnants of the bar. Had anything they’d shared been real?

“Detective Maggie Sawyer,” said Maggie, voice even and strong.

This is not how she planned to have this conversation with Alex, not the way she wanted to reveal herself. For one thing, she had never once thought they’d be doing this with weapons raised. The fact they weren’t raising them at each other was of little comfort.

Maggie frowned and pressed her lips together, knowing this wasn’t the time or place for explanations. But she also knew she couldn’t let another minute pass with Alex thinking she was just part of the mission.

“Other than my name and my occupational history, everything else I told you was the truth, Alex,” she said. “You’re not part of my mission.” She tore her gaze away from the gaping hole over the bar and looked at Alex with pleading eyes. “Please believe me,” she said, and there was an edge of desperation to the words.

Alex, hurt and feeling betrayed, didn’t respond.

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On the second ring, Kara pulled away from their kiss with an audible pop.

“No no no no no,” she said, begging as she moved to her bedside table, snatching her phone from where it was charging. “This isn’t fair,” she whined, and half of her wanted to crush the phone into dust just to make it shut up, consequences be damned. She might have done it, too, if she hadn’t seen the name on the display. The name alone changed her unfathomable frustration into thready fear and she swiped the answer bar.

“Susan? What is it?” Kara knew Susan Vasquez wouldn’t have called her unless she’d been ordered to do so…or unless something terrible had happened. “Is it Alex?”

The panic in Kara’s voice evaporated all of Cat’s annoyance at this third unforgivable interruption to her intimate plans in the last thirty-six hours. “Alex?” she whispered. Wasn’t the DEO agent supposed to have the night off? Wasn’t she on a date with Neves?

“We need you at 21st and Cypress,” said Susan, her voice clipped and serious. “An attacker of unknown origin is apparently ripping holes into the ceiling of a dance club there. Alex was on-site before the attack began.”

Kara heard what Susan couldn’t say on the unsecured line—that Alex wasn’t on duty, that she was alone and waiting for back-up, that she was probably standing there, in the middle of destruction raining down on her from above, with nothing to protect her but her standard-issue weapon and that royal blue halter-top dress that Kara knew Neves would love.

“I’m on my way. Tell her to hold on, Susan. Tell her not to do anything stupid.”
“Will do,” said Susan. “Command out.”

Kara turned toward Cat, intending to explain, but Cat flew into Kara’s arms, shaking her head. “Go take care of your sister,” she whispered, kissing Kara quickly. “Come home when you can. I’ll be waiting.”

Kara nodded and used her super-speed to change into her suit. She hesitated at the balcony off their bedroom and looked back at Cat sadly, watching as she clutched a robe around herself.

“I love you,” said Kara before turning to let the hungry night sky swallow her whole.

I love you, too, sent Cat, and then she reached for her own phone, pressing a speed-dial name. “Eric,” she said when her best producer answered. “Get a helicopter in the air—21st and Cypress. Assume Supergirl will be on-site. Tell our pilot to stay out of the perimeter, though. There’s some sort of attack going on at a club there—unknown origins—and the government is responding. I don’t want our team caught in the cross-fire.”

Eric acknowledged the order and disconnected the call. He never belabored a point, which was something Cat respected about him. If he needed further direction, he’d contact her. She tossed her phone onto the bed and grabbed the remote for the TV in the sitting area. She turned the TV on and tuned it to Channel 10, muting the sound of whatever banal sitcom was playing at the moment. She knew it wouldn’t be on for long.

In the meantime, she tidied up the bedroom, returning the items Kara had swept to the floor in her passion to the dresser and retrieving her own discarded clothing. She folded Kara’s glasses neatly, placed them on her bedside table, and gave them a small, worried pat.

Then, she waited.

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Kara made it to Pearl in two minutes and immediately saw the cause of the attack. Two of Non and Astra’s loyalists—Kryptonian prisoners who had once found themselves at the mercy of Kara’s mother—were terrorizing the club and its patrons, like little boys pulling the wings from flies or burning ants with a magnifying glass. They ripped chunks of the roof from the building with their bare hands and used their heat-vision to carve their mark into the surrounding area, egging each other on with laughter and roars of brute strength, but—and this was the weird part—they didn’t seem to be targeting any of the people.

Dozens of women fled the club on foot, pouring out of every egress, perfectly exposed and vulnerable, but the men ignored them, except to frighten a group here or there by buzzing them with a fly-by or chasing them with their heat-vision. When the DEO Black Hawk appeared on the horizon, the Kryptonians abandoned the fleeing women and focused on it instead, hurling debris at it or taunting it with daring aerial acrobatics.

Again, though, the confrontation didn’t seem serious. The Black Hawk easily dodged the flying debris as it screamed across the sky, and snipers shot Kryptonite darts at the pair, which they, in turn, dodged or batted away. The DEO flight team tried to engage the Kryptonians in order to draw them away from the innocents below, which was standard operating procedure, but the Kryptonians didn’t seem too interested in what they were dishing out. Instead, they searched the skies, seemingly looking for something better to play with.

The arrival of Hank and his team in the SUVs didn’t impede the Kryptonians in any significant way. In fact, it wasn’t until the two of them noticed Kara that their entire demeanor changed. They struck
at her immediately and with deadly accuracy, one of them firing on her with his heat-vision while the other attempted to take her out of the sky with an expertly wielded steel girder. They ignored the DEO as much as they could, engaging them only when their attacks came close to disabling one of them.

And just like that, Kara understood the nexus of this attack was her. She was their target. The whole thing had been engineered to ensure her involvement, to lure her into the melee—and it had worked like a charm. An attack on innocents, including her off-duty sister? Few, if any, casualties, despite a vulnerable population? Toying with the DEO but not attacking them directly? There were no coincidences here.

Kara thought of Cat’s disappointment and worry and she thought of Alex’s and Neves’ interrupted date and she narrowed her eyes, blood boiling to know that these criminals—possibly the same criminals that had tried to take Alex’s plane out of the sky—had once again used the people Kara loved as a weapon against her. She fought like a lioness, venting her rage in a roar and holding her own against the Kryptonians with tenacity and grit until one of them hit her in the back with an abandoned DEO SUV.

Blinding pain paralyzed her and she crashed through two nearby buildings before her momentum stopped and she dropped to the ground in a heap. After catching her breath, she rolled over onto her stomach, assessing herself for any major injuries. Finding none, she pushed herself into a crouch, and then took to the sky again, needing to be back in the fight, the pain fading a little as she tried to mitigate some of her fatigue.

The Black Hawk and Hank’s ground team had one of the Kryptonians cornered in a dead-end alley way. He was pinned against a building, gasping, obviously weakened from several Kryptonite darts she could see sticking into his body.

Kara searched the skies around the area, looking for the other Kryptonian, knowing he would strike soon to save his compatriot. She would be there when he did.

Except that he didn’t.

When she finally spotted him, he was over a mile away, hovering over a darkened warehouse, watching to see what happened with his partner. When it became clear the DEO would capture him, the lone survivor turned and shot off into the night, abandoning him. Kara had never seen anything like it.

She frowned, but turned her attention to the DEO forces, seeing Alex and Neves among them, surprised to see Neves armed and shooting at the disabled Kryptonian with the rest of the team.

Kara activated her earpiece.

“Susan, patch me through to Hank and Alex only. It’s time we finished this.”

“Understood,” said Vasquez, and Kara could hear the satisfaction in her voice. “You are go for Director Henshaw and Agent Danvers, Supergirl.”

“Hank, he’s done. Your team can stop firing on him. I’ll bring him down to you. Be ready with the cuffs when I get there.”

“Thank you, Supergirl. We’ll be waiting.” The gunfire faded but the Black Hawk held its place, keeping the vanquished Kryptonian in its sights.

Kara headed in their direction. “Alex, are you all right? I’m so sor—”
Alex cut her off. “We’re uninjured, Supergirl,” she said, and Kara’s eyes went wide. Something was definitely wrong. Was Alex mad? Did she think this was her fault?

“But—”

“The cuffs are ready for the prisoner,” Alex said curtly. “We’re waiting for you, Supergirl.”

Kara sighed. Just how many different ways was she going to fuck up tonight, anyway?

She flew over to the injured Kryptonian and assessed his medical state, knowing it was only the Kryptonite darts that kept him from escaping. He was clearly in pain, though, and breathing hard.

“What’s your name?” she asked him, grimacing in empathy with his discomfort.

“Jod-Ur,” he told her, glowering at her. “Innocent victim of judicial overreach perpetrated by—”

“By my mother, Alura In-Ze,” Kara finished for him. “Yeah, I’ve heard that one before, actually. You’re being taken into custody by the DEO today. You’ll find human justice to be a little more… primitive… than that on Krypton. My mother’s methods might take on a different light here.” She grabbed him by the arms and flew him down to where Hank and Alex were waiting.

Hank snapped the Kryptonite cuffs on him as they landed and Jod-Ur nearly fell to his knees, grunting with the sting of added weakness.

“Full containment, Fields,” Hank told Alpha team’s lead. “And I want him in the cuffs while he’s receiving medical treatment. This is Non’s man. Don’t trust him for a second.”

“Understood,” said Fields, and she motioned for her squad to take Jod-Ur into custody. Kara watched until she felt sure the Kryptonian was no longer a threat, and then turned to her sister and Neves, startled when she saw the badge hanging around Neves’ neck and the uneasy looks both women were giving each other.

Oh, something was wrong, all right. And—for once—it wasn’t Kara’s fault. She would have sighed with relief except she felt awful just looking at the two of them, awkwardly trying to avoid each other’s gazes, knowing people were staring. There was a story there and Kara burned to know what it was, but she knew she couldn’t ask—not now. She was Supergirl here, not Alex’s sister. The story would have to wait.

“Agent Danvers,” she said, “I thought you’d like to know the other Kryptonian attacker fled northwest after your team cornered Jod-Ur. Also, I believe this attack was designed to—”

“—to lure you into the fight. Yeah, I figured that out when they started playing with us like they were cats and we were mice.” Alex frowned. “What was their goal, Supergirl? Was it a test of some sort?” She looked at Kara and concern flooded her eyes. “If they were looking to capture you, there sure weren’t enough of them. They must have wanted you out here for another reason.”

Kara gasped, thinking about Cat and Carter at home, unprotected. A glance along her connection with them told her they were safe, but she also realized—in her distracted state and in her hurry to come to Alex’s rescue—she had completely forgotten to put barriers up across the Daat Kyashar to protect Cat from experiencing the fight alongside her. Kara looked at Alex, ashen, tears welling in her eyes.

“If you’ll excuse m-me, Agent Danvers, I have to—”

Alex grabbed Kara’s wrist, stopping her. “Are they in danger?” she asked, not caring right now
about anything but what Kara needed, what Cat and Carter needed.

Kara shook her head, but her eyes told Alex there was trouble of some sort, even if the answer to her question was no.

“Go,” she said, releasing her sister. “Call me later. We’re good.”

“Thank you,” said Kara, and she took a running leap into the night sky.

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Kara landed on the balcony outside of their bedroom at the penthouse, fists clenched at her side and taps thrown wide on her connection with Carter. She sighed, utterly relieved to feel him peacefully asleep and warm in his bed, unruffled by what she’d just been through. She would have left him then, content to know he was safe, except for an unusual void she sensed along their bond.

A deeper look into the Daat Kyashar showed the void for what it was—a barrier, wide and black and impenetrable, like a wall of lead twelve-feet thick, across the threads of Carter’s connection to his mothers. Kara shook her head and stared at it, confused.

Where had it come from? She knew she hadn’t put it there, so that could only mean….

“Cat,” she breathed.

Cat had put the barrier up and in doing so, she’d left herself completely open to Kara for the entirety of the fight, using what little protection she’d had to shield their son, leaving their own connection unblocked, a conduit for everything Kara had suffered.

“No no no,” cried Kara, and she used her x-ray vision to find Cat, knowing she was nearby but not knowing where, panic overriding her reason.

Eventually, Kara swung her vision in a wide arc near their master bath, catching sight of a huddled mass concealed in Cat’s walk-in closet. Kara slowly pushed the door to it open, a shaft of warm, auric light cutting into the darkness within like a blade.

“Cat?” asked Kara, her voice barely above a whisper.

Kara’s eyes quickly adjusted to the low light and she gasped when she saw Cat. Catherine Jane Grant, the all-powerful Queen of All Media, CEO of CatCo Worldwide Media and global media mogul, had pressed herself into a tight, shivering ball in the farthest, darkest corner of her closet. Her face was a gray rictus of agony and she clutched something that looked suspiciously like Kara’s yellow cardigan to her chest in despair.

“Cat,” breathed Kara, taking the five steps needed to reach her in the blink of an eye. She crouched in front of her and reached out, intending to cup Cat’s face in her palm, but Cat shied away from her.

“Don’t touch me,” Cat snapped, her voice biting and hoarse with tears that even now coursed down her cheeks, though she felt like she should be wrung dry of them. Hadn’t she cried them all by now? “Don’t you dare.”

Tears rushed into Kara’s eyes, her heart breaking to see the woman she loved more than life itself in so much pain.

“Cat,” she pleaded, still reaching out to her, desperate to touch her. “Please let me help you.”
Cat lifted her eyes to meet Kara’s for the first time since she’d opened the door and Kara inhaled sharply, shocked by how bleak and empty they were.

“Let you help me?” asked Cat, outraged and incredulous. “When you can barely keep yourself alive from minute to minute with these—these monsters hunting you?” A fresh wave of tears crested over her lashes and ran down her face in hot, angry rills. “They hit you with a car! You crashed through two buildings before you fell out of the sky and I felt every second of it. Every second! Do you know why this stuns me, Kara? Do you?”

Crying, Kara could only shake her head, her hand finally falling back to her side, empty and useless.

“Because I didn’t know you could feel pain!” cried Cat, and she gripped the cardigan in white-knuckled fists. “You’re my bulletproof angel—my superhero—my indestructible faith in this broken, brutal world and I knew—I knew there were times you were vulnerable, times when you could break like the rest of us.” Cat glared at Kara, eyes flashing as the storm of her rage and her fear broke against the crumbling walls of her fortress. “But I didn’t know this! I didn’t know every fight—every risk you take—every moment you put yourself between us and these slavering brutes hell-bent on destroying us all brought you this agony!” Cat raised the cardigan and shook it at Kara as if it was proof of something terrible. “How am I supposed to watch you step into the sky like a goddess knowing this?” she cried. “How can I ever let you be the hero you never asked to be again?”

Kara’s restraint finally broke on that last desperate question and she surged forward, pulling Cat to her chest and curling herself around Cat’s shivering frame, letting Cat vent her terror in silent sobs against her shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” whispered Kara, voice thick with tears. “I’m sorry, Cat—I’m so sorry.” She rocked Cat in her arms and pressed kisses to the side of her head, searching frantically for the words that would make this right. “This is my fault—I did this to you. I forgot to put the barriers up—and even when I remember them, I get distracted or overwhelmed and my control slips.” Kara clenched her eyes shut against the guilt she felt, wondering hysterically if it would be easier for Cat, better for Cat, if she just erased the whole thing—the whole night—out of Cat’s memory.

Kara knew the act would sever their bond, but in this moment of wild grief and frenzied despair, she wondered if that wasn’t a decent price to pay to stop Cat’s heart from breaking every time Kara had to put herself in harm’s way.

She held her breath, knowing how easy it would be…

…but she didn’t.

Whether it was weakness or strength beyond her wildest dreams, Kara didn’t know, but she couldn’t bring herself to do it. Instead, she poured love and comfort and tenderness into their connection—a river of light—and rocked Cat sweetly, endlessly in her arms.

“I’ll get better, Cat,” she promised. “I’ll practice. It isn’t fair to leave you at home with the threat of this hanging like the sword of Damocles over your head every time I’m called to fight.” She lifted Cat’s head from her shoulder and looked into Cat’s eyes, using her thumbs to wipe away tears that still fell. “But you need to know I don’t feel that pain the same way you do. My nervous system processes it differently, allows me to withstand so much more than you can. My agony—the thing that drives me to my knees—is seeing you like this and knowing I caused it.”
Maalkhati, forgive me, sent Kara, a hollow, wailing, indigo sadness coloring her voice in the Daat Kyashar. My weakness has made you suffer.

Cat looked up into Kara’s eyes, the faintest light of hope in them.

“You don’t feel it the way I do?” she asked, her voice small and uncertain. “Truly?”

Kara shook her head. “I don’t,” she whispered, cupping Cat’s face in her hand. “I don’t, Cat.”

Cat reached up and covered Kara’s hand with her own, curling her fingers around it, turning her face into it to press kisses into Kara’s palm.

“You came home to me,” Cat whispered, and the lingering rigidity of her fear finally let her go, melting out of her body. She sagged against Kara, exhausted.

“God and Rao willing, I always will,” replied Kara solemnly. She kissed Cat’s temple and picked her up in strong arms, carrying her tenderly to their bed. After she settled her, Kara brought a warm washcloth from the master bath and gently washed away the remnants of tears on Cat’s cheeks.

Cat roused briefly and looked up at Kara with sleepy green eyes. “We’ll talk tomorrow, all right?” she asked. “I’m not done being mad at you yet.”

“Of course,” agreed Kara, the tiniest knowing smile tugging at the corner of her mouth. “Sleep now, mon ange.” She leaned down and brushed her lips over Cat’s fleetingly. “I love you,” she said.

“I love you, Kara,” murmured Cat. “Always.”

Kara watched as Cat drifted away into sleep, wanting nothing more than to strip out of her filthy suit and crawl into bed next to her. But she still had work to do and miles to go before she slept.

She stole down the hall to Carter’s room and slipped inside, resting her hand over his cast to check the progress of his healing. She smiled, grateful to see remodeling of the bone was almost complete, but more so that Carter was no longer experiencing pain. She leaned down to kiss his forehead—and almost yelped when his eyes popped open.

“Mom?” he asked, voice gravelly from interrupted sleep. “Is everything okay?”

Kara considered lying for half a second, and then shook her head, slumping on the edge of Carter’s bed. “It will be,” she said, sighing as she ruffled his curls. “Your mom’s asleep and I have to go out for a while. Official business.” She looked down at her suit, eyes clouding briefly. When she looked back up at Carter, she said, “I’ll try to be back before it’s time to go to the airport, but if I can’t, I’ll call Alex and she’ll take you, okay?”

“Sure,” said Carter, but a frown settled low over his eyes. There was something in Kara’s voice, something sad and resigned. It bothered him. “Where are you going?”

Kara looked at him, shadowy blue eyes filled with sorrow. “I hurt your mom tonight, Carter. I forgot to put blocks up in the Daat Kyashar when I was fighting two Fort Rozz prisoners and she felt all of my pain, all my fear, my anger.” She took a shuddering breath and blinked back the tears flooding her eyes. “That’s not fair to her or to you, buddy, and I owe it to both of you to learn how to be better at this. So I’m going away to practice putting up the blocks and holding them, to practice protecting you both.”

“But you’re coming back, right?” Carter sat up a little in the bed, worried. “You’re not leaving us?”
Kara blinked at Carter, stunned by the question, and then she swept him into a tight hug, hearing his heartbeat, so fast and fearful.

“I could never leave you—either of you,” she whispered, mouth pressed against the side of his head. “I’ll be back,” she promised him. She pulled back and looked him straight in the eyes, hands firm on his shoulders, voice strong and sure. “I will.”

“Okay,” he said, smiling with relief. He looked up at her with soft brown eyes. “I love you, Mom.”

Kara smiled back at him, then let him go, rising from the bed.

“I love you, too, Carter.” She opened his bedroom door and the glare of the hall light instantly plunged her into shadow. Her cape swung behind her and she straightened her shoulders, determined to make everything right again, no matter what it took. “See you tomorrow,” she said. And then she was gone.

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Tel-Van met Non at their pre-arranged rendezvous point only to find his general seething with rage.

“Jod-Ur?” Non asked, his Patrician nostrils flaring with disdain as if he already knew the answer.

“Captured, my General,” said Tel-Van. “One of the humans had projectiles dipped in nelamine powder, I believe. Where they found it, I have no idea.”

Nelamine powder, made from the dried sap of the nela vine from a tiny, backwater planet called Shelsin III, was an inhaled paralytic—much less dangerous to Kryptonians here, under the light of a yellow sun, than it had been in the ruddy light of Rao. Inhaling nelamine on Krypton usually meant a long, desperate road to death. The dried sap reconstituted when it came into contact with mucous membranes, slowly filling the lungs of its victim. On Earth, it mimicked a human respiratory illness, weakening its victim for a time, but not causing permanent damage.

Non sneered. “There are four Shelsour prisoners still unaccounted for after all these years. Perhaps one of them is bargaining for whatever meager existence he’s been able to scratch out with the secrets of his planet. He’ll be found and dealt with; I promise you.” Non looked Tel-Van up and down, as if he was ahead of the Shelsour traitor in line for execution. “What I really want to know is why I’ve left a rare and valuable living weapon in an empty home.”

Tel-Van glanced at the building that housed Kara Zor-El’s loft apartment and paled. “What?” he asked, clearly shocked.

Non surged toward Tel-Van, and shouted, “I’ve left the last surviving Black Mercy pod in an apartment my wife’s niece hasn’t entered in a week!” His hands shot out and gripped Tel-Van by the throat. “Did you even check that she was here before you attacked that human vermin she considers to be her sister?” he asked, his voice calmer now that he was squeezing the life out of this disappointment to the Kryptonian race. “Did it even occur to you to look into one of these massive windows before you put our plan into motion?”

Tel-Van clawed at Non’s hands, desperate for breath, eyes bulging as his general’s grip tightened.

“The Black Mercy is a difficult, delicate creature, Tel-Van,” Non went on. “I’m sure I remember telling you that. I’m absolutely certain I explained to you and to Jod-Ur how small a window of opportunity we had, how precise the timing had to be.” He squeezed harder, barely registering Tel-Van’s thrashing and gurgles. “And now the creature will die unfed, Tel-Van! Because of your
incompetence!"

Tel-Van pounded on Non’s hands and arms, trying to break his general’s hold—to no avail. He knew he was going to die tonight. He knew it right to the marrow of his bones. Even so, a single spark of Rao’s vitality and strength flared to life in these last desperate moments and he pointed at a flash of red that had caught his eye some distance away.

He didn’t know what it was. It could have been anything—the blinking light on an airplane’s wing, a radio tower, a flag catching the moonlight just right. He pointed at it, though, and the act saved his life.

Non looked over his shoulder in the direction of Tel-Van’s gesture one second and released Tel-Van the next.

“Shut up,” hissed the general, grabbing the gasping Kryptonian by the scruff of his neck and flying away with him. Once they were a safe distance from the loft, Non stopped and held Tel-Van still, forcing his gaze back to where he’d pointed. “We wouldn’t want Supergirl to hear you now, would we?”

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Kara popped the sticky latch on the window-casing closest to her loft dining room and floated through the open window, landing lightly on the floor inside. It hadn’t even been a week since the last time she’d been here, and yet she felt vaguely creepy wandering around in her apartment in the dark, a stranger in her own home.

She ran a finger along the front edge of her stove and laughed when it came away dusty. How quickly everything here had become unnecessary to her. How quickly it had all become a ruin from another lifetime, her belongings reduced to artifacts from a dream. Looking around, there were only a few things Kara even thought she would take with her when she and Cat finally realized how silly it was to keep this place.

Her art supplies and the canvases she had painted over the years. Photographs. Some gifts given to her by Alex and Eliza and others. Her clothes. The tiny box shoved into the back of her sock drawer that held the few things she’d kept from her time as Cat’s assistant—like the teal Post-it Note with those four fateful words of praise.

Little else mattered to Kara now. She had the memories of Thanksgivings around her dining room table and Game Nights on her couch. The way the lamp light had shone in her living room as she’d stood, dripping wet and shoveling food into her mouth, watching herself save a plane full of people over and over on the news. The way the sunlight blazing through her floor-to-ceiling windows had turned cold and gray when she’d found out Alex had been spying on her.

Memories were precious; things were things, and the value of her relationship with Cat and with Carter far outweighed a loft full of second-hand furniture, even with its history. She smiled, thinking how easy it was going to be to leave it all behind.

But….  

Kara sighed.

But that wasn’t why she was here.

She was here to keep her promise to Cat—to practice placing and holding blocks in the Daat Kyashar.
The memory of Cat’s ashen face and empty eyes in the back of that closet, the memory of her agonizing tears—both turned Kara’s stomach and she never wanted to be the cause of anything remotely like that again. If it meant Kara stayed here for a little while, where everything was strange and cold and surreal, then that was what she would do. She could bear anything if it meant being a better partner to Cat, a better mother to Carter.

“No time like the present,” she muttered, guilt eating at her with razor-sharp teeth. She remembered the size and strength of the barrier Cat had used to protect Carter and she tried to recreate it, finding it surprisingly easy to do. She remembered she had made one like it once, but that had been an accident, a reaction to fear and revulsion so deep she had somehow managed to wall herself off from Cat without being fully aware of the act.

Consciously making a barrier like that was only part of the problem, though; keeping it in place no matter what—that was the other part, the part Kara failed to do more often than not.

Motivated, now, and wanting all of this to be over so she could return to her family, Kara headed toward the couch, planning to make herself at least mildly comfortable while she devised some sort of training strategy. She turned on the lamp standing behind the glass-topped side table and, as she moved around it, she saw a decorative bowl on her small coffee table where one hadn’t been before. Some sort of decaying, gelatinous plant matter sat in the center of it, making Kara’s nose crinkle with disgust.

Hesitantly, she reached out to touch some of the clear, sticky goo that covered what appeared to be the inside of a giant burst pod. As she pulled the substance toward her to look at it more closely, she saw movement in her peripheral vision and she glanced up at it.

The coiling strike of something large and green was the last thing Kara saw.

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The sudden loss of Kara’s presence in her mind jolted Cat from her already-troubled sleep. Before she fully understood what she was doing, she reached across the bed, expecting to feel strong arms enfold her, expecting to be pulled into tender warmth and soft kisses. Her eyes opened when her hands found only empty sheets.

A quick glance along their connection led to the discovery of a massive block in the Daat Kyashar, one not unlike the barrier Cat had used earlier with Carter, and Cat realized what it meant—that Kara was up practicing instead of in bed where she should be, believing her promise to be more important than sleep.

“Oh, Kara,” said Cat, shaking her head sadly. She slipped out of bed and traded the short, barely-there silk robe she wore for a thicker cotton one, feeling chilled. The faint sounds of a spoon clinking against the side of a mug made her smile and she headed toward the kitchen, expecting to find Kara staring into space over a mug of hot cocoa, a determined look stamped into her features, crinkling the spot between her eyebrows.

Instead of Kara, though, Cat found Carter—and in almost the same pose: staring out the windows to the balcony, stirring a mug of hot cocoa, a frown making him look older than his twelve years.

“Carter, sweetheart?” she asked. “Is everything all right?”

Carter was so lost in thought, he jumped when he heard his name. “Mom,” he said, turning to look at her with sad brown eyes. He sounded strangely relieved. “Kara said you were asleep. I’m sorry if I woke you.”
The hair rose on the back of Cat’s neck. She’d never known her son to avoid answering a question like he just had—without hesitation or pretense. It was a mark of maturity Cat didn’t think she approved of in someone so young and it proved her instincts right: something was wrong. Drastically wrong.

“Carter, where is—” began Cat, but she never finished her question. A strangled cry cut her off and her eyes widened with terror for a split second before they rolled back into her head.

“Mom!”

Carter shouted as his mother fell, and he hurried around the counter, throwing himself to the floor at her side. He reached out and grasped her shoulders, oddly aware of how narrow and fragile they felt in his hands before he shook her, trying to wake her.

“Mom, wake up!” he begged and he shook her harder, the movement causing her head to loll toward him. He saw the crimson scrawl on Cat’s face before it fully registered, but then he was scrambling to get up, to get to the nearest phone, knowing he had to call 911.

He stumbled as he tried to rise, his legs not wanting to work right, feet slipping against the tile floor. He felt like he was going to cry.

“Mom, it’s going to be okay! I’m going to get help,” he said, reaching for one of the bar stools and pulling himself upright with its help. When he finally gained his feet, he saw a splash of scarlet on the café au lait leather seat of the stool and he reached up to touch his own face with trembling fingers.

They came away red with blood.

“Mom,” he cried, his voice small and terrified, and even he didn’t know which Mom he meant.

Then the darkness took him, too.

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continued in Nightmare
First, hello! I told you I’d be back!

Second, someone I trust very much (catherinegrant) stated chapters that were 40k words long can be overwhelming to read and she encouraged me to break up the longer chapters to make them a little easier to digest. Therefore, I am splitting Chapter 11, Nightmare, into several parts.

Third, someone (my fabulous beta, fictorium) also suggested I do a little catch-up for everyone, so please read below.

PREVIOUSLY ON One Bridge at a Time

In the aftermath of Siobhan Smythe's report, the CatCo Board of Directors requests Cat and Kara attend an emergency meeting. With a little help from Lucy Lane and Dorothy Webb, Kara turns the inquiry into a job interview and proves her value to the Board, landing herself the position of Chief Brand Officer (after an appropriate internship, of course).

James finds out that Kara and Cat are a couple and the information is a surprise. He blames the instability of his on again/off again relationship with Lucy on his fixation on caped superheroes, and wonders if he's able to make it up to her.

Katherine Grant continues to thaw, sending a set of first edition Lord of the Rings books to Carter as a gift, while Snapper Carr agrees to fire Siobhan and to apologize to Cat on air in hopes of avoiding several lawsuits as a result of Siobhan's shitty ethics.

Alex Danvers interrupts a little Cat/Kara canoodling only to find out her mother is coming to town--with information on the Daat Kyashar. Later, she's training Cat in a little advanced self-defense when Cat lands a lucky right-cross, giving Alex a shiner and herself a bruised hand. In the morning, Cat's hand has healed completely, unnerving Kara, who agrees--albeit hesitantly--that the changes to Cat and Carter necessitate further cooperation with the DEO.

Alice Kens gets a bonus check and a promotion, and Alex gets to go on her date with Neves, shiner and all. It's going well when several unknown aliens attack the dance club, requiring the DEO to bring in "the big guns," i.e. Kara, interrupting yet another romantic interlude between Cat and Kara.

Alex discovers Neves isn't who she said she was, and is, instead, an undercover NCPD detective named Maggie Sawyer. Meanwhile, Kara puts two and two together and realizes the attack on the club was a means to lure her into the open. She thinks the targets are Cat and Carter, only to find them safe at home. Cat, however, utilized all her Daat Kyashar abilities to protect Carter from experiencing Kara's battle with the aliens, leaving herself open to Kara's pain and horror.

Realizing she's to blame for Cat's pain, Kara thinks about severing the bond between them for a split second, but she can't bring herself to do it. Instead, she decides to improve her skills in holding blocks in the Daat Kyashar and she heads back to her loft.
for the first time in a week, hoping she can practice there undisturbed.

Non reveals to a fellow Kryptonian the real reason he lured Kara from home: so he could plant the last remaining Black Mercy pod in her apartment. He discovers too late that she hasn't been to the loft in a week. But then, a bit of luck...

See the beginning of the chapter for the last two scenes from Chapter 10: Nexus, followed by Chapter 11: Nightmare (part 1).

**From Chapter 10: Nexus:**

Kara popped the sticky latch on the window-casing closest to her loft dining room and floated through the open window, landing lightly on the floor inside. It hadn’t even been a week since the last time she’d been here, and yet she felt vaguely creepy wandering around in her apartment in the dark, a stranger in her own home.

She ran a finger along the front edge of her stove and laughed when it came away dusty. How quickly everything here had become unnecessary to her. How quickly it had all become a ruin from another lifetime, her belongings reduced to artifacts from a dream. Looking around, there were only a few things Kara even thought she would take with her when she and Cat finally realized how silly it was to keep this place.

Her art supplies and the canvases she had painted over the years. Photographs. Some gifts given to her by Alex and Eliza and others. Her clothes. The tiny box shoved into the back of her sock drawer that held the few things she’d kept from her time as Cat’s assistant—like the teal Post-it Note with those four fateful words of praise.

Little else mattered to Kara now. She had the memories of Thanksgivings around her dining room table and Game Nights on her couch. The way the lamp light had shone in her living room as she’d stood, dripping wet and shoveling food into her mouth, watching herself save a plane full of people over and over on the news. The way the sunlight blazing through her floor-to-ceiling windows had turned cold and gray when she’d found out Alex had been spying on her.

Memories were precious; things were things, and the value of her relationship with Cat and with Carter far outweighed a loft full of second-hand furniture, even with its history. She smiled, thinking how easy it was going to be to leave it all behind.

But….

Kara sighed.

But that wasn’t why she was here.

She was here to keep her promise to Cat—to practice placing and holding blocks in the Daat Kyashar.

The memory of Cat’s ashen face and empty eyes in the back of that closet, the memory of her agonizing tears—both turned Kara’s stomach and she never wanted to be the cause of anything remotely like that again. If it meant Kara stayed here for a little while, where everything was strange and cold and surreal, then that was what she would do. She could bear anything if it meant being a better partner to Cat, a better mother to Carter.
“No time like the present,” she muttered, guilt eating at her with razor-sharp teeth. She remembered the size and strength of the barrier Cat had used to protect Carter and she tried to recreate it, finding it surprisingly easy to do. She remembered she had made one like it once, but that had been an accident, a reaction to fear and revulsion so deep she had somehow managed to wall herself off from Cat without being fully aware of the act.

Consciously making a barrier like that was only part of the problem, though; keeping it in place no matter what—that was the other part, the part Kara failed to do more often than not.

Motivated, now, and wanting all of this to be over so she could return to her family, Kara headed toward the couch, planning to make herself at least mildly comfortable while she devised some sort of training strategy. She turned on the lamp standing behind the glass-topped side table and, as she moved around it, she saw a decorative bowl on her small coffee table where one hadn’t been before. Some sort of decaying, gelatinous plant matter sat in the center of it, making Kara’s nose crinkle with disgust.

Hesitantly, she reached out to touch some of the clear, sticky goo that covered what appeared to be the inside of a giant burst pod. As she pulled the substance toward her to look at it more closely, she saw movement in her peripheral vision and she glanced up at it.

The coiling strike of something large and green was the last thing Kara saw.

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The sudden loss of Kara’s presence in her mind jolted Cat from her already-troubled sleep. Before she fully understood what she was doing, she reached across the bed, expecting to feel strong arms enfold her, expecting to be pulled into tender warmth and soft kisses. Her eyes opened when her hands found only empty sheets.

A quick glance along their connection led to the discovery of a massive block in the Daat Kyashar, one not unlike the barrier Cat had used earlier with Carter, and Cat realized what it meant—that Kara was up practicing instead of in bed where she should be, believing her promise to be more important than sleep.

“Oh, Kara,” said Cat, shaking her head sadly. She slipped out of bed and traded the short, barely-there silk robe she wore for a thicker cotton one, feeling chilled. The faint sounds of a spoon clinking against the side of a mug made her smile and she headed toward the kitchen, expecting to find Kara staring into space over a mug of hot cocoa, a determined look stamped into her features, crinkling the spot between her eyebrows.

Instead of Kara, though, Cat found Carter—and in almost the same pose: staring out the windows to the balcony, stirring a mug of hot cocoa, a frown making him look older than his twelve years.

“Carter, sweetheart?” she asked. “Is everything all right?”

Carter was so lost in thought, he jumped when he heard his name. “Mom,” he said, turning to look at her with sad brown eyes. He sounded strangely relieved. “Kara said you were asleep. I’m sorry if I woke you.”

The hair rose on the back of Cat’s neck. She’d never known her son to avoid answering a question like he just had—without hesitation or pretense. It was a mark of maturity Cat didn’t think she approved of in someone so young and it proved her instincts right: something was wrong. Drastically wrong.
“Carter, where is—” began Cat, but she never finished her question. A strangled cry cut her off and her eyes widened with terror for a split second before they rolled back into her head.

“Mom!”

Carter shouted as his mother fell, and he hurried around the counter, throwing himself to the floor at her side. He reached out and grasped her shoulders, oddly aware of how narrow and fragile they felt in his hands before he shook her, trying to wake her.

“Mom, wake up!” he begged and he shook her harder, the movement causing her head to loll toward him. He saw the crimson scrawl on Cat’s face before it fully registered, but then he was scrambling to get up, to get to the nearest phone, knowing he had to call 911.

He stumbled as he tried to rise, his legs not wanting to work right, feet slipping against the tile floor. He felt like he was going to cry.

“Mom, it’s going to be okay! I’m going to get help,” he said, reaching for one of the bar stools and pulling himself upright with its help. When he finally gained his feet, he saw a splash of scarlet on the café au lait leather seat of the stool and he reached up to touch his own face with trembling fingers.

They came away red with blood.

“Mom,” he cried, his voice small and terrified, and even he didn’t know which Mom he meant.

Then the darkness took him, too.

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Chapter 11: Nightmare (part 1)

Hank Henshaw looked from Alex to Maggie and back again, his gaze dark and closed.

“Needless to say, Detective Sawyer, our jurisdiction outweighs yours,” he said, voice tight. “It would be better for you if you were to forget you were a part of this. There will be no corroboration from the DEO on what you saw here tonight.”

Maggie crossed her arms and shook her head. She barely kept herself from rolling her eyes. Why were men all the same? Even the good guys reached for intimidation first.

“It’s not my first rodeo, sir,” she told him. Her smile was easy but didn’t reach her eyes. “It’s not even my first time being booted by the DEO, though it’s nice to finally have a name to go with the face,” she said. “I wasn’t on duty tonight. I’ll tell my boss the west-side women’s bathroom had a hell of a dismal view. Will that work?”

Hank nodded. “Yes.” He looked at Alex, and she saw the bemused interest behind his stoic, hard-nosed front. “Agent Danvers?” he asked, leaving the question hanging.

Alex put a hand up. “I need a minute,” she told him. He held her gaze for a moment, but then he nodded again, and walked away without comment.

Alex watched him go, then turned to Maggie, frowning. She felt completely exposed, standing in the parking lot of what used to be her favorite dance club, still dressed in the halter dress with the flirty skirt and her chunky heels. She wished she was in her tactical uniform; she’d feel less vulnerable. She crossed her arms over her chest, mirroring Maggie, and jerked her chin in a direction
away from the DEO clean-up operations.

“Can we talk?” she asked quietly.

Maggie smiled hopefully. “I’d like that,” she said, and she let Alex lead them away into the shadows. Alex was silent for so long, though, she wondered if talk had a different definition for her than for the rest of the world.

“You said I wasn’t part of your mission,” said Alex finally, stopping near the still-smoldering wreck of one of the DEO’s SUVs. “Is Cat?” she asked, her voice strangled. “Because if there’s something — if she’s hurting Kara or — or could—”

Maggie gripped Alex’s forearm. “Oh, God, no! No, Alex.” She squeezed tightly. “Cat’s not my target. Not at all. She’s really particular about who works in her son’s building, though. I had to interview with her to get the concierge job. She doesn’t know I’m undercover.” Maggie shrugged. “As far as I can tell, she just likes me.”

Alex glanced at Maggie sharply. “You had to interview with Cat?” she asked, confused. “She vets the staff where she lives?” While not entirely outside the realm of possibility for the fastidious Queen of All Media, Alex thought that seemed a tad excessive.

Maggie blinked back, equally confused. “You don’t know?”

“Know what?” Alex didn’t like surprises and this felt suspiciously like one — though maybe a less upsetting one than finding out your date was an undercover cop.

“The Prague — it’s owned by Carter Grant — or rather, he’ll be the owner of record when he turns twenty-one. That’s why Cat’s so particular about who works there.” Maggie shook her head. “Our forensics document specialist is a goddamn miracle worker as far as I’m concerned. We had a hell of a time fabricating a paper trail that could stand up to her background check.”

“Jesus.” Alex thought about the income a place like The Prague would generate in a year, figuring Cat was shrewd enough to run it all back into the trust. She didn’t need money, after all. And with Carter just about to turn thirteen, there were years of income left to capture… Alex whistled low.

Maggie chuckled. “Yeah,” she said, agreeing with Alex.

“But if it’s not Cat, then who are you after?” asked Alex.

Maggie grimaced. “His name’s Grover Keene, on the fourth floor. We think he’s connected with the disappearances of seven women, maybe in connection with Maxwell Lord, but we can’t prove it. Hence, me hanging out downstairs, eating Cat’s food for the last six months.” The detective scowled, hating how little progress she’d made. She was used to closing cases, not wasting time eating rich people’s carbonara and steak. “My boss is getting antsy,” she admitted. “If I don’t come up with something soon, I think he’s gonna pull the plug.”

Alex searched Maggie’s eyes for a long moment, then she let go the breath she was holding. “Thank God,” she whispered. “I didn’t know what I was going to tell Kara.”

Maggie almost laughed right out loud. “Um, I’d think Kara would be the first to know if Cat was hiding something,” she said. “She hasn’t left Cat’s side in a week, as far as I can tell. Which kinda tells me there’s something more going on than just your standard employer/employee relationship. I mean, I hope there is, because if there isn’t? Your sister probably shouldn’t look at her boss that way.”
Alex rolled her eyes. “I know what you mean. I walked in on them last night and there’s not enough vodka in the whole world to burn that out of my memory, thanks.”

Maggie looked at Alex blankly, lifting her hand to scratch a spot next to her eye. “So, is that really how you got your black eye?” she asked, trying to stifle a giggle. “You walked in on your sister and her boss…uh…” Maggie gestured vaguely but Alex understood all too well what she was trying so hard not to say. “…and Cat socked you a good one?”

“No!” protested Alex, giving Maggie a playful shove. “I told you what happened — I was teaching Cat to throw a right cross and I got too close.” She narrowed her eyes at Maggie. “Besides, how do you know it wasn’t Kara who hit me? She was the one who was livid.”

“Because getting socked by Supergirl would put you somewhere between the harbor and next week, that’s why.” Maggie started to roll her eyes, but she caught Alex’s look of shock before she could. “What?” she asked. “I mean, you guys don’t really think those glasses help, do you?” Alex’s shock melted into sheepish embarrassment and Maggie laughed. “You do! Oh, that’s just sad.”

“I’ll let you take that up with my boss,” said Alex, shrugging. “You know — tall, dark, and stoic back there? He’ll love any suggestions you have. I promise.”

Maggie shook her head, eyes crinkling with a smile. “Yeah, I’ll pass, thanks.” She watched Alex after their moment of levity faded, watched as she eventually became uncomfortable and awkwardly looked away.

“Alex, is this—” Maggie gestured at the shield hanging on the chain around her neck. “—is this something we can get past?” She looked at her feet for a moment, mortified by how vulnerable she felt, then lifted her eyes again, determination straightening her spine. “If it isn’t, I’ll understand. I mean, I won’t be happy about it, but I’ll understand.” Her dark eyes shone in the half-light. “But if there’s any way for me to make this up to you, please—”

Alex darted forward and kissed Maggie soundly. She reached up to cup Maggie’s heart-shaped face in her hands and pressed her backward against the hulk of the ruined SUV. For once she didn’t care who was watching. When she finally pulled away, she opened serious hazel eyes.

“It’s not like I was a hundred percent honest with you,” she said softly, gliding her thumb gently across Maggie’s cheek. “And it might take me awhile to stop thinking of you as Neves,” she added. “If you can live with that, then…”

*Then I can get past anything if it means getting to feel the way I do now,* she thought.

Maggie nodded and shivered with relief. “I can,” she said. “Alex, I can,” she promised, and she reached up to kiss Alex again, winding her arms around Alex’s neck and pulling her as close as she could. When she pulled away, she added a heartfelt, “Thank you.”

Alex’s phone ringing cut off her response.

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Carter Grant tumbled end over end inside a tornado of images he had absolutely no hope of understanding. He was dizzy and nauseated and he wished he could get his footing! If he could just stop turning — even for a second — but he couldn’t seem to control anything about his environment and the images whirled past, unstoppable. He caught a glimpse here and there but nothing that made any sense.

A long strip of scorched grass outside an unfamiliar farmhouse…
Four people — three adults and a little girl — huddling together by the smoking wreckage of something silver, shielding their eyes from the sun, looking up at two figures in shadow…

A woman staring down at a crumpled cooking pot in surprise…

The little girl at school, hunching behind glasses she didn’t need, using a language she didn’t quite understand…

Eventually, Carter realized the little girl was Kara and he watched as she grew and changed at the speed of light, flashes of the same five people standing by her over and over and over again. Two of the three women were twins. The men could have been brothers but weren’t. A yellow sun hung in a clear blue sky.

Fragments of voices whooshed through his brain, too, and the words were distorted and difficult to make out. The name Kent. The word powers. Kara laughing.

Carter eventually caught up in time and the tornado of images spit him out, wobbly and queasy, onto a bedroom floor, dawn breaking milky blue through an open window. A breeze caught a faded mobile of a strange solar system in its wake, turning the red sun and the orange, brown, and purple planets in unfamiliar orbits. The quiet scrape of an old ceiling fan made him look up and he saw a thousand glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling.

The air smelled of green grass and dung and apple blossoms. The room needed a coat of paint.

The bed, hardly bigger than a cot, was a lump of old-timey quilts and crisp white sheets that writhed in the half-light.

A voice made a sound halfway between a yelp and a sigh.

Another voice, one he recognized instantly, hushed the owner of the first.

“Shhhh!” said Kara, whispering harshly. “Martha will hear us!”

The first voice chuckled low, a sound that was sultry and something Carter definitely did not want to hear. Because he recognized the first voice now. He recognized it so well, he just barely kept himself from stuffing his fingers into his ears.

“It’s our wedding day, Kara,” said the owner of the first voice. “What does she think we’re doing up here — braiding each other’s hair?”

“Cat!” scolded Kara, her tone scandalized, and Carter saw movement under the covers.

“Mom!” he cried, wanting to catch their attention before he saw or heard too much, not understanding how he’d gotten here or where here was exactly, but knowing he wasn’t supposed to be seeing this. He was in the wrong place and definitely in the wrong time. As soon as he spoke, however, the tornado unexpectedly churned back to life around him and it tore him from the room, whipping him away in the blink of an eye.

A tousled blonde head erupted from beneath the covers, shrewd jade eyes searching the room.

“Carter?” asked Cat Grant, and then she frowned at herself, confused.

Another blonde head, this one with longer hair, also popped out from under the covers. “Who?” she asked, looking at Cat strangely. “Who’s Carter?”
“I… I don’t know,” admitted Cat, looking even more confused and, now, a little upset. “Didn’t you hear that? Someone calling out ‘Mom!’?”

“No,” said Kara slowly, shaking her head. She reached out to run a hand through Cat’s hair. “Cat, are you alright?”

“Yes!” said Cat, annoyed now. “No!” she added a second later, bewildered and unreasonable. She sat up, drawing her knees to her chest protectively. “I don’t know,” she said finally, sighing aggrievedly. “I thought I heard someone — a boy — say ‘Mom,’” she said. “It sounded so real.”

“Then it was,” said Kara, as if the matter was settled. Kara’s earnest features and her solid determination to be supportive melted Cat’s prickly irritation.

“You didn’t hear it,” she accused, smirking.

“It’s enough that you did,” said Kara. “If you say you heard a boy call out ‘Mom,’ then who am I to say you didn’t? I was…otherwise occupied,” she said. “You know,” she added, sidling closer to her fiancée and digging her fingers into Cat’s side. “Down there.”

Cat darted away from Kara’s maddening fingers and rolled her eyes. “For God’s sake, Kara, it’s 1996! We’re getting married today, or as married as the state of Kansas will allow, which is to say not at all. In any case, we’re pledging our lives to one another today in a ceremony officiated by your aunt, and with our family and friends sitting in little white chairs under a canopy in the yard. Why is it so difficult for you to say the word cunnilingus?” She leaned close to Kara’s ear and whispered, “Say it with me, darling — cun-i-ling-gus….”

Kara put her hands over her ears. “Stop!” she cried, laughing and blushing at the same time. “Cat, don’t! You know how I feel about that word. Besides,” she said, looking sideways at Cat, “we were talking about a boy calling out ‘Mom.’” She paused to take a breath, her blue eyes darkening as she turned thoughtful. “I mean, is that something you want?” she asked quietly.

Cat looked at Kara, startled. “What?” she asked hoarsely. Was Kara asking what Cat thought she was?

“We never really talked about it,” said Kara, shrugging. “Kids, I mean. You just bought your first station and we’ll be crazy busy for a long time, but if that’s something you want, I want them, too, okay?” Kara reached out and stroked Cat’s arm. “I don’t want you to think you have to give up any of your dreams. I can make them all come true. I promise.”

Cat lifted her hand and cupped Kara’s cheek in her palm, her jade eyes going smokey and dark with deep emotion. “Oh, Kara,” she whispered, and she leaned forward until their foreheads met. “How did I get so lucky?” She looked up, eyes filled with insecurity, old and worn, like a comfortable sweater. “You could have had anyone in the world,” she said. “Half of the Daily Planet would dive off Perry’s penthouse balcony if you asked them to, but you picked me. For reasons I’ve never understood.”

Kara tolerantly rolled her eyes. This wasn’t a new conversation for either of them. In fact, it was a familiar bridge, crossed again and again in the years they’d been together, as many times as Cat needed.

“That night — the night you talked Kelly Mathis off that ledge and convinced her you could help — remember that?”

Cat nodded, the memory flooding her mind like a dam breaking.
They’d been holed up in Cat’s six-story walk-up, the little one in downtown Metropolis, on West 116th, that Cat’s mother, the bestselling author, paid the rent for when Cat’s bank account ran thin. Just the two of them, typing and re-typing Cat’s notes for the biggest story of her career on a beat-up Brother electric, picking at cold Chinese food and watching MTV, waiting for the Cure’s new video to play — Friday, I’m in Love.

Kelly called sometime after nine, crying, nearly hysterical, changing her mind for the fourth time — or was it the fifth? How could she go ahead with this story? No one believed her about the rape. Her boyfriend was threatening to leave her if she kept on with it. Even her mother had begun to doubt.

Cat talked Kelly through it all over again and Kara held her hand the entire time, if not literally, then figuratively, watching with round eyes as Cat paced the living room, dragging the putty-colored phone with its long, curly cord, behind her, back and forth. Sometime after midnight, Kelly relented, pledging her trust in Cat again, pledging her faith in the power of the press to right wrongs no one even knew existed. After hanging up with the girl, Cat sank down onto her futon next to Kara, put her hands over her face, and cried.

Kara lent Cat what comfort she could by rubbing gentle circles in the center of her back. “I’m here, Cat,” she whispered.

Cat turned at the sound of Kara’s voice and pressed her mouth to Kara’s in a wild, desperate kiss neither of them were expecting, clutching at Kara’s cardigan, pulling her closer than either of them thought possible. She parted Kara’s cherry-glossed lips with a groan, her heart a drum, electrified and terrified all at once.

Kara kissed Cat back, brushing away Cat’s tears, murmuring, “Yes, Cat, yes.”

They made love pressed into the fold of that futon, not even opening it flat, undressing each other amidst take out boxes and cheap wooden chopsticks, MTV’s blue light flickering in the background. They knocked the putty-colored phone off its cradle sometime during the morning and neither one of them heard the relentless beep-beep-beep of its protests.

After one of their kisses finally melted into soft touches and softer breaths, Cat’s eyes slammed open, filled with fear. Kara cupped her face in her hands and asked, “What? Cat? What’s wrong?”

“Did I — oh, God, Kara, did I…” She swallowed hard. “Did I force you?” she asked in a small voice. Cat tried to pull away, but Kara held her in strong arms, grinning at her like she was some kind of idiot.

“Force me?” she scoffed, incredulous. “No matter how ferocious you may be when you go after a story, Cat Grant, you’re not strong enough to force me to a damned thing; I promise. Remember that secret you wheedled out of me after I saved Lois from that helicopter?” Her grin was lopsided and cocky, but faded slowly when she realized Cat was serious. She turned them, then, tucking Cat beneath her, kissing her tenderly, everywhere — on her forehead, her eyelids, her cheeks and lips.

“I’ve wanted you for so long, Cat,” she said when she finally pulled away. “I never thought you’d ever notice me like that.” She looked down at the two of them entwined together, covered by a thin sheet and nothing more. “Like this.”

“Like love,” Cat whispered, reaching up to kiss Kara again and again.

“Friday, I’m in Love ,” Cat said when the memory receded. They never had seen the video that night.
Kara smiled, her eyes dancing, and she nodded. “I knew long before that night, Catherine Jane Grant, that there would never be anyone else for me, not in this Universe or any other. You know that’s how I feel.” She leaned in and kissed Cat’s cheek. “Why don’t you believe it?”

“Because you shouldn’t!” Cat pounded at Kara’s collarbones with tiny, ineffective fists. There was no ire in her attack, just exasperation. “I’m ruthless and selfish and single-minded. I’m terrible at remembering anniversaries and birthdays. I work through dinner three nights in a row and expect you to work through dinner the fourth without complaint. I never think to send you flowers until way too late and you never look at me with anything but love in your eyes! It’s ridiculous, Kara! You deserve someone so much better than me.”

Kara shook her head. “There is no one better than you,” she said, leaning in to plant a kiss on Cat’s cheek. The certainty in her voice took Cat’s breath away, like it always did. “Now, you have exactly—” Kara looked at her alarm clock on her childhood desk. “—three minutes to get these cold feet out of your system. After that, I’m going to make love to you in the bed where I grew up, dreaming of you under those stars.” She pointed at the field of glowing plastic on her ceiling. “Then you’re mine. Forever and ever. And remember, I don’t make the rules—”

“—you just enforce them,” said Cat wearily, knowing this particular refrain by heart. “Yeah, yeah, I remember.” She rolled her eyes and flounced herself backward against the goose down pillows, crossing her arms in mock annoyance and staring at the ceiling, huffing a lock of hair out of her own eyes. After a minute, she looked sideways at Kara, a smile she couldn’t contain tugging hard at her mouth. “We’re getting married today, Kara Ellen Kent,” she said, and she practically giggled as she reached out to take Kara’s hand in her own.

“Yes, we are,” said Kara, and she squeezed Cat’s hand in hers, kicking her feet under the covers with unabashed joy. “And — if you ask me — not a minute too soon.”

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Non strode into the Kryptonians’ hidden command center, victory radiating from him like the light of this planet’s sun. Astra’s nostrils flared in recognition of the pride and confidence he couldn’t hide, knowing how it added to his power and his charisma, knowing how much more a leader it made him, especially here, on Earth, where men battled each other for supremacy while women contented themselves with scraps. Astra envied Non’s ease of movement on this planet, envied his command and how he wielded it, knowing the Kryptonians who followed them both saw him as their de facto leader despite her higher caste and her royal lineage.

“Where have you been?” she asked angrily. “The solar flares have increased in intensity. The next phase of Myriad awaits.”

Non took his place at the command computer and reviewed the data regarding the solar flares.

“I’ve been securing the future of our plan,” he said, sneering. “Myriad is nothing if your niece is allowed to interfere. I’ve taken care of the problem.”

Astra hesitated, her heart fluttering in her chest. “What have you done?” she demanded, coming around the console to face him directly. “I made a deal, Non. She was not to be harmed—”

“And she hasn’t been — no thanks to you, of course.” He snorted at her, his disdain clear. “Tell me, was it truly weakness on your part or your great house’s sniveling sentimentality that kept you from killing her? Remember, you have no family here, Astra. Not anymore. All that is left is Myriad and our eventual victory over these human vermin.”
Astra’s eyes flashed. “My devotion to our plan cannot be questioned,” she told him. “I am as committed to Myriad and to saving this planet as I was to saving Krypton. You know this to be true.”

Non raised a single eyebrow. “And yet, you made a deal to leave your niece unharmed. You can see why I might have concerns about your loyalty, surely?” He shrugged off the glare Astra shot him and went back to his data. “Kara Zor-El has not been harmed. Let us say instead she is at peace.”

“At peace?” Astra wondered what Non could mean by that until she remembered the pod stored in the confines of Fort Rozz. “The Black Mercy?” she asked. “You released it? It has ensnared her?”

“It has — and at great expense to us. Jod-Ur has been captured by the humans and I nearly killed Tel-Van myself for his incompetence, but Kara is securely imprisoned by the Black Mercy, living out her heart’s desire. She will be at peace for as long as it takes the creature to drain her life force.”

“Her heart’s desire?” repeated Astra. Years ago, she would have thought that would have been Kara returning to Krypton to see the parents that had so callously sent her away, bound to that infant cousin of hers as protector. She had no idea what Kara desired now that she was an adult.

“Girls?” called Martha Kent from the foot of the stairs. “Girls? Are you up yet? Breakfast is on the table and we’ve got to get started with the decorations soon if we’re going to be ready when the guests start arriving!”

Astra swooped in and put her arm around the older woman’s waist, pulling her away from the stairs. “Hush now, Martha Kent,” she said low, casting a wicked, knowing glance up the stairs. “Leave my Little One alone. Some Bonding Day traditions are meant to be private, after all.” She laughed at Martha’s scandalized look and pulled her out the front door of the farmhouse, onto the porch. “Come, you and Alura will start with the chairs while Jonathan and Zor-El raise the canopy. I’ll continue with the flower arrangements. I promise you, we will finish in time.”

Kara, grateful, listened with half an ear as her aunt guided Martha further away from the house. “Look at me, Cat,” she whispered, stroking Cat’s hair. Cat forced her unfocused eyes to turn toward Kara but they closed again when she arched her back, groaning as Kara’s fingers found a new depth.

“I’m here,” said Kara breathlessly, her thrusts gentle yet so deep, her heart thrumming in her chest so loudly she thought the whole world would be able to hear. Rays of early morning sunlight streamed into the cool gray-blue of their room and Kara thought she had never seen anything as lovely as Cat Grant, touched by gold, head thrown back in ecstasy, her bottom lip caught in teeth very white in the half-light.

“I’m right here,” said Kara again and she groaned when she felt Cat tighten around her fingers. “I love you. I love you so much,” she whispered and she pressed kisses wherever her mouth could reach — Cat’s cheek, her collarbone, the pebbled peak of one small breast, the perfect mouthful.

“Kara?”

Cat’s voice was small and high. She could feel everything with such clarity, such immediacy. Her blood pounded in her veins like molten gold and every stroke of Kara’s fingers brought her closer and closer to that pinnacle, where the air was thin and cold and bright. She struggled to open her eyes, dark with lust, and cried out when she felt Kara’s tongue tease her nipple again.
“Kara?” she asked again, but it was a nonsense question, not meant to be answered. She arched her back and rolled her hips upward to meet Kara’s thrusts, feeling that telltale flutter begin, knowing it wouldn’t be long now before she came, with Kara’s name on her lips and Kara’s fingers deep inside her.

“Please,” she begged. “Oh God, please….”

Cat had never loved anyone like she loved Kara Kent and it terrified her. Her parents’ marriage — as long as it was — was fraught with strife and Cat wanted something different, something with more partnership, less competition. She thought she’d found that something in Kara’s lovely, strong arms and in those eyes, as blue as the sea, but would it last? Could it last?

It may be 1996, but the concept of a lesbian power couple had only recently broken into mainstream media. It would be hard for them to make it in the male-dominated field they’d both chosen, but harder still for them to do it together, a couple in a world that might never look at them with any measure of legitimacy.

Still….

Cat looked up into Kara’s eyes and she watched them fill to brimming with tears of joy as they made love, on this, their wedding day of sorts, and she knew they would be okay as long as they had each other.

“I love you, Kara,” she said, her voice breaking on the words. She felt Kara’s thrusts become longer and deeper and she rocked her hips to meet them. “Oh, I love you,” she sighed, letting herself go, letting the iron grip of her control slip away for these few blissful moments, enough to let all of Kara’s light inside.

“Come, Cat,” said Kara and she darted forward to press a hot, breathless kiss to the corner of Cat’s mouth. “Please, come for me.”

And Cat did, pulling Kara down into a deep, wet, gorgeous kiss, hoping it would keep her cries from being too loud. Neighbors were few and far between out here in Smallville, but Kara’s parents and aunt had the same powers Kara did and super-hearing was not something easily ignored.

As she slowly came back to herself, panting, still pulsing around Kara’s fingers, she looked up into Kara’s loving eyes.

“Maalkhati,” said Kara, her voice touched by wonder, “I can feel your heartbeat in my fingertips….”

Cat frowned at the unfamiliar word. “Maalkhati?” she asked, reaching up to draw her fingertips down Kara’s cheek. “What does that mean?”

Kara looked down at Cat and for a dizzying, completely discombobulating moment, it wasn’t Cat — or rather it was Cat, but older, looking up at her, sleepy and sated, asking, “And what is it telling you?”

The images in Kara’s head dissolved into fog and she returned to the here and now. “What?” she asked, not knowing which question she should answer.

“That word — maalkhati — what does it mean?” Cat propped herself up on one elbow, her smile open and interested, happy to learn another tidbit of Kryptonian, no matter how small. When she saw a frown beginning between Kara’s eyes, one of her own darkened her features. “Is something wrong?”
“It means *my queen*,” said Kara, eyes clouding. “And for some reason, I’m sad you don’t know that.”

“I know it now,” said Cat, trying to reassure Kara. It was a beautiful word and, true to Kara’s excessively romantic nature, too dear, too grand. Cat was barely the queen of WRAF Channel 9 Metropolis, let alone anything else.

Kara looked up and saw Cat’s worry, and she rushed to set her at ease. “No, I know, Cat. I’m sorry. I just had a…a weird moment. It’s nothing. I’m sorry.”

Cat rolled her eyes. “Stop apologizing and come here,” she ordered, pulling Kara to her, and kissing her soundly. “It’s my turn to make *you* come,” she whispered, rolling Kara beneath her and kissing her way down that amazingly taut and beautiful body. “You know I don’t like to be kept waiting.”

Kara put the strange waking-dream out of her head and arched up to meet Cat’s mouth, biting her bottom lip in anticipation.

“Oh, yes,” she murmured, eyes fluttering closed as Cat’s mouth closed around a hardening nipple. “Yes, please…”

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Carter Grant woke up on his back, looking up at the ceiling of his kitchen, breathing hard. He sat up slowly and cradled his spinning head in his hands, feeling sick. He forced himself to breathe through his nose, hoping that would keep him from puking everywhere. After two breaths, his head snapped up, memories pouring into his head like ice water, including one of blood on his mother’s face.

“Mom!” Carter turned and found Cat right where he’d left her, still unconscious, still unmoving. He hurried to Cat’s side on wobbly legs, shaking her. “Mom, wake up! Wake up!” he begged, but she didn’t respond. He leaned down and pressed his ear to her chest, relieved to hear a steady heartbeat. The nosebleed worried him, though, and he remembered that the same had happened to him, too. He reached up to wipe his face with his tee-shirt; it came away stained with half-congealed blood. He’d been unconscious for a while, then.

Carter’s first instinct was to call 911, but he remembered Cat’s talk with him just that morning, about being careful in public while they adjusted to how they were all changing. Instead, he ran to Cat’s bedroom and found her cell phone, dialing Kara’s number.

Kara would know what to do.

But the call kept going to voicemail, frustrating Carter. Why wasn’t she answering?

Logically, he knew there were a thousand reasons why she couldn’t or wouldn’t answer, but he didn’t care about them right now. He just wanted his mom.

He ran back to the kitchen with the phone and knelt next to his mother on the floor, stroking her hair, not wanting to be too far away in case she woke up and needed him.

“What should I do, Mom?” he asked Cat. “Who should I call?”

He didn’t expect an answer, of course, but an image of a smirking Alex Danvers popped into his head just then and he grinned, relieved, opening his mother’s contact list and scrolling through it until he found the right name. He pressed the number triumphantly and waited for his aunt to answer.
Alex looked at her phone’s display and saw Cat’s name, frowning as she swiped the answer bar.

“Cat? Everything okay?”

“Aunt Alex?” Carter’s voice sounded small and uncertain.

“Carter?” Alex looked at Maggie, her anxiety skyrocketing. An unexpected call from Cat at this time of night was one thing, but one from Carter was downright chilling. “Carter, what’s wrong? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, I think. But Mom fell down in the middle of talking to me and she won’t wake up. There’s blood coming from her nose — mine, too — and I think I passed out for a while. I tried calling Kara but she’s not answering her phone. Is she with you?”

Alex tried to make sense of what Carter was saying. Cat was unresponsive? Carter had passed out? What was he talking about?! “No, she’s not,” she said slowly. “Is your mother breathing? Have you called 911?”

“She’s breathing. I didn’t call 911 because of what happened this morning with her hand and my arm. She said we had to wait to find out what was going on, that we couldn’t do normal things anymore until we knew.” Carter was working himself up into a panic. “Was that right, Aunt Alex? Should I call them now?”

“No. You did the right thing, Carter,” said Alex. She turned and pinned Maggie with a desperate look. “I’m sending Neves to you, okay? Stay with your mom and watch her breathing. Neves will be there as soon as she can.”

“Okay,” said Carter and he sounded a little calmer now that someone else was taking charge. “What about Kara? She left earlier in her suit. She said she had to practice putting blocks in the Daat Kyashar, to keep Mom and me safe. Where would she go, Aunt Alex? Why isn’t she answering her phone? Why didn’t she come when Mom fell?”

“Listen, let me worry about Kara, okay?” said Alex sternly. “You just take care of your mom and wait for Neves. Understood?”

Alex heard Carter snuffle, but his voice was strong and sure when he answered. “Understood,” he said, and she sighed with relief. “We’re in the kitchen. Tell Neves to hurry.”

Alex pulled Maggie to her and pressed a kiss to the corner of her mouth. “Go,” she whispered. “He says they’re in the kitchen. Stay with them; see if you can help. I’ve got to find Kara.”

Maggie nodded and whipped her shield over her head, stowing it back in her little black bag. “I’ll call you when I get there,” she said, and she took off across the parking lot toward her car.

Alex returned to her call with Carter. “She’s on her way,” she told him, running her hand through her hair. “Carter, we’re going to figure this out, okay? You and me. I’m going to stay on the line with you until Neves gets there, but I have to mute my end so I can talk to some people here, all right? Just hold on and if anything changes or you think you’re in danger, let me know.”

“Okay. Thanks, Aunt Alex,” he said, and Alex closed her eyes for a second, relieved her nephew was a smart and capable twelve-year-old and not a toddler. She keyed the mute command, then toggled her earpiece on and barked an order into it, hoping Susan was still at her post.
“Vasquez, status report on Supergirl’s earpiece. We’ve got a report she’s not answering her cell phone.”

“On it, ma’am,” came the instantaneous reply. “I’m getting good ping back but no response to communication attempts. It’s operational but may be toggled off.”

Alex scowled and headed toward where she’d last seen Hank. They needed to find Kara and fast. It wasn’t like her to ignore calls. It also wasn’t like her to be away from Cat and Carter, especially when there was trouble. “Get me a twenty on that earpiece, Vasquez. We need to find her, STAT.”

“Triangulating now,” said Susan, having anticipated the order. “I show location to be… It’s the loft, ma’am. She’s at home.”

Alex saw Hank in the distance and flagged him down, skeptical of Susan’s report. The loft apartment hadn’t been Kara’s home for a week now. What would she be doing there?

“Hank and I are on the way,” she told Susan. “Have medivac meet us there and have Medical go to Level One alert. Prepare for multiple incoming.”

“Multiple?” asked Vasquez. “I thought the injuries at the club were minor—”

“This is a separate incident, Vasquez,” Alex told her logistics analyst. “Need to know only, and that list is currently very short. Make sure Solis is on-site and Morgan, too. Have them standing by.”

“Affirmative, Agent Danvers,” said Susan, snapping to attention. “Need to know only. Medical is at Level One Alert. Solis on-site and Morgan on the way. Awaiting further orders.”

“Thank you,” said Alex and she sighed, letting go a little of the tension in her shoulders as she did so. Hank caught up to her at a jog.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Supergirl is not answering communications attempts and Cat is unconscious, bleeding from the nose,” said Alex tightly, her jaw creaking as she thought of Carter, worried and alone. “Carter had an episode, too, it sounds like, but he’s conscious and holding on the line,” she added, nodding at the cell phone she still held to her ear. “I’ve put Medical on Level One alert. Something’s wrong. Very wrong.”

“Where’s Kara?” asked Hank, falling in beside Alex as she headed toward one of the SUVs.

“Vasquez triangulated her earpiece. It shows she’s at the loft. Medivac is meeting us there.”

“Medivac?” asked Hank, surprised.

“I’ve got a bad feeling about this. You drive,” she ordered, and she swung herself into the passenger seat of the SUV.

“On it,” said Hank as he started the car. He peeled out of the parking lot, squealing tires as he did so.

“Carter?” Alex asked, unmuting her phone. “You hanging in there, buddy?”

“Yeah,” he said. “Mom’s breathing is still good and I tried to clean her up a little. She’d hate it if someone saw blood on her face like that.”

“Good,” said Alex, nodding in approval. “Neves should be there soon. Listen for the elevator. In the meantime, I want you to help your mom some more, okay? Have you ever heard of a person
“The ambulance guy who worked on me was worried about that, but he said my pulse was good.”

Alex grabbed the oh-shit bar over the passenger-side window as Hank took a turn a little hard.
“Your mom might go into shock, too, so I want you to do a few things for me, okay? Things that will help.”

“Tell me,” said Carter, and Alex could hear his determination. She gave him a quick set of instructions about raising Cat’s legs and keeping her warm, all of which he carried out with the eagerness of a recruit on his first day. “Done,” he reported when he returned to the phone.

“Good,” said Alex. “Now tell me about your mom’s breathing. Is it shallow? Fast? Irregular?”

“No. It’s normal, like she’s asleep.”

Alex breathed her own sigh of relief. “Good. That’s good, Carter. Neves should be there any minute. You just stay on the phone with me, okay? You did great, kid.”

“Thanks, dude,” he said, the familiarity of their little inside joke buoying him a little. “Hey,” he added a second later, “the elevator just cranked up.”

“Okay, give the phone to Neves when she gets there, okay? I want her to check your mom out a little more for me.”

Another minute or so passed, and Alex heard a muffled conversation before Maggie came on the line. “Alex, I’m here. What do you need?”

“Assess them both, starting with Cat. Get as many of their vitals as you can and see if you can rouse Cat at all. If not, let me know. I’ll send you a medivac team, too.”

“Okay,” said Maggie, and Alex heard the sound of purposeful movement and something clicking. “Cat’s vitals are within normal limits, though her breathing’s a little slow for my liking. Her pupils are equal and reactive, and there’s no sign of injury — no lump on her head or bruising that I can see.” Another brief pause and Maggie came back, her voice quiet and obviously concerned. “No response to sternal rub, Alex. She’s out.”

“Shit, that’s what I was afraid of.” Alex rubbed her face hard, then looked outside the SUV. She recognized the neighborhood, finally. They were only a few minutes from the loft. “And Carter?” she asked.

Maggie did a quick and dirty assessment of Carter’s vitals. “He’s fine, Alex. Scared, but fine.”

“Thank you,” said Alex. “We’re pulling up to Kara’s place. I have to hang up now. I’ll call you back in a minute, okay?”

“Okay,” said Maggie. “Be careful,” she added, her voice soft. “I’m officially petitioning for a rain check on this interrupted date, Agent Danvers, so no heroics. Understood?”

Alex smiled weakly and tried to hide her blush. “Understood.”

Alex and Hank leapt out of the SUV and rushed into Kara’s building, sharing a look at the foot of the stairs before running up them to Kara’s floor, guns raised. When they reached her apartment door, Hank asked, “Do you have a key?”
“Yeah,” said Alex, and she kicked the door open with one solid hit. Hank raised both eyebrows.

They moved through the darkened dining room toward a light in the living room, searching every shadow for a threat. Alex nodded to the open window and Hank turned to look at it, seeing nothing moving there. When they reached the couch, the two of them split up to go around it, and Alex saw Kara first, lying flat on her back on the floor with some sort of dark green, pulsating plant wrapped around her torso. Bizarre puck-shaped flowers with undulating purple spikes covered her chest.

“Oh my God, what is that?” asked Alex, dropping to Kara’s side, looking for a way to pull the thing off her sister.

“Don’t touch it,” snapped Hank, scanning the room. He saw the bowl and the dying pod on the table nearby. “It looks like it came from there,” he said, nodding at the drying brown hulk.

Alex had seen enough. “Vasquez,” she barked, toggling her earpiece on. “Reroute medivac team from Kara’s loft to Cat and Carter’s penthouse on North Palm — they’re on the fifth floor of The Prague. Neves Montenegro will let them in. I want Cat and Carter taken to Medical at the DEO. Neves, too. My authorization. Understood?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Vasquez. “Medivac rerouted per your instructions.”

“Good. Now, I need a full containment unit with outbreak suits here at the loft. We’ve got an unknown parasite on the ground — Supergirl is down — and I want air support now, do you understand?”

“Ma’am, yes, ma’am. Delta unit will be in the air in three — full containment protocol.” She risked a question. “What’s going on, ma’am?”

Alex scowled. “I wish I knew,” she said.

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Alex and Hank rolled into DEO Medical with Kara in a containment unit and found themselves walking straight into all Hell breaking loose.

Solis and two nurses were transferring Cat Grant from a gurney to an examination table while Morgan and another nurse were trying to pull Carter away from her, explaining that he couldn’t be here, that he had to go to another room.

Carter, lanky and wild, fought the two men off while Maggie argued with Morgan and Vasquez tried to run interference.

“I’m not leaving my mother!” shouted Carter, shoving Morgan hard enough to send him stumbling. “Get off of me!”

Morgan, six-one and weighing in at just under two hundred pounds, shook the feeling back into his arm and glared at Carter. A twelve-year-old shouldn’t have been able to move him like that. He was getting ready to regroup when Alex intervened.

“Hands off, Morgan,” she barked, pointing at the doctor to stay him. “The kid’s with me.”

“But—” Morgan was a by-the-booker who didn’t like chaos. Alex liked his focus and his methodology, but found him a little too rigid for her tastes.

“Did I stutter?” she asked. “Take over for Solis. Cat’s your patient now. I want two lines,
telemetry, and vitals on her, STAT. Also, EEG. I need to know what her brain activity’s doing.” Alex pinned Solis with a hard glare. “You’re with me,” she told the woman. “I want a work up on whatever the Hell this thing on Kara is. See if you can get DNA or something from it, run it through the usual databases. Find out how it’s holding onto her and if we can get it off without hurting her.” When everyone just stood there, staring at her dumbly, Alex clapped her hands to get their attention. “Come on, people, move! Clock’s ticking and I want answers.”

The room exploded into organized chaos and Maggie came to Alex’s side.

“Go change clothes, babe,” she said, leaning in so only Alex would hear her. “You’ll feel better and they’ll stop staring at your legs,” she added, snickering. She’d caught at least three people giving Alex sideways looks already, including Vasquez.

“They can suck it up,” said Alex, glowering at her colleagues as they worked. She watched as Solis and her team swarmed over the thing attached to Kara. “Besides, I can’t leave her. She needs me.”

Maggie squeezed Alex’s arm. “I’ll stay right here. I’ll watch over all three of them, I promise. Nothing will happen in the next five minutes and you know you’ll feel better in your uniform or whatever it is you wear.” She leaned closer and pressed her cheek to Alex’s jawline, feeling the taller woman’s teeth grinding beneath her skin. “Go,” she whispered. “They’ll be fine until you get back.”

Alex nodded and headed out the door, stopping to have a word with Hank before she left. When she returned dressed in her tactical gear, she felt one hundred percent better and she made a mental note to thank Maggie properly when this was all over.

“Report!” she snapped when she walked in and Solis jumped.

“No known match to the creature’s DNA in any database on Earth,” she began. “It appears to be strictly plant-based — I couldn’t find any evidence of a circulatory system, a nervous system, or a gastrointestinal tract of any kind. It’s attached to Supergirl’s torso with over one hundred pounds of pressure and manipulation of its limbs causes the creature to constrict itself tighter around her.” Solis gestured to the monitors keeping track of Kara’s vitals. “As you can see, if we leave the creature alone, Supergirl’s vitals and brain activity remain within normal range.”

“But she won’t wake up,” said Alex and Solis shook her head.

“The creature has attached itself to Supergirl’s thoracic nerve pairs, tapping directly into her central nervous system. It’s possible it feeds on nerve impulses and the brain’s electrical activity, but we’re not certain how or toward what end.” Solis looked at Kara’s EEG. “She appears to be in a dream state.”

Alex crossed her arms over her chest and stared down at her sister, listening to the soft beeps and whirs of the monitors around her.

“So we just leave it there, feeding off her, and hope it will what? Get full and wander off?” She shook her head. “That’s not an option. What if it’s introducing some sort of pathogen to her system? What if it doesn’t come off until it’s drained her dry?” She looked up sharply. “Tell me about Cat,” she said, glancing at the CEO on her gurney.

“Ms. Grant seems to be in the same physical state as Supergirl — all vitals and brain activity within normal range, unresponsive to stimulation or rousing. We’ve tried nail bed pressure, sternal rub, and smelling salts — nothing.” Morgan shook his head, annoyed. It didn’t make any sense. There was no physical reason for Cat to be unconscious. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d say the creature had
attacked her, too. But how would something like that be possible? Weren’t they in different locations?”

“Wait,” said Maggie, looking at Carter suspiciously. “Didn’t Carter say he passed out?”

Alex felt like kicking herself.

“Carter, can you take us through what happened — everything you can remember? Start from you and your mom talking in the kitchen.”

Carter gulped and nodded, uncomfortable now that he was the center of attention. “I was up because, um, Supergirl had just left. I made some cocoa and Mom came into the kitchen. I told her I was sorry for waking her and it seemed like she was gonna ask me a question when she sorta… yelped…instead.” He shrugged, not knowing how else to describe it. “I looked up just in time to see her fall.”

“What did you do then?” asked Alex.

“I ran around the counter and shook her, trying to wake her up. She didn’t answer, but her head turned toward me and that’s when I saw the blood.” His face crumpled and he fought back tears. “I knew I had to get help and I tried to get up, but my legs weren’t working right. I used one of the bar stools to pull myself up, but there was blood on the seat.” He shook his head, not understanding any of what had happened. “That’s the last thing I remember until I woke up on the kitchen floor and called you, Aunt Alex.”

“’Aunt Alex?’” said Morgan, recoiling at Carter’s unexpected familiarity with his superior.

Alex reached up and grabbed the bridge of her nose, only remembering afterward why that wasn’t the greatest idea she’d ever had. She knew this might happen. Hell, half of them had probably seen the news story from Wednesday and had made their own assumptions already. *In for a penny,* she thought.

“All right,” she said, looking up with murder in her eyes. “What I’m about to tell you is need to know only and you all have just been put on the list. Before I begin, I’m going to be very clear: *none* of this gets written up in any way whatsoever; understood? Not in Supergirl’s medical records, not in personnel files, nothing. Got it?”

There were a few nods around the room and Alex waited to continue until she’d seen everyone’s eyes. If there were problems later, she wanted to know who she’d be coming for.

“Okay,” she said, taking a deep breath. She shared a look with Hank, hoping he understood why she had to do this now and why she hated that she did. He gave her a quick nod and she looked up at the assembled team. “Supergirl and Cat Grant are…” Alex stopped and started again. “They’ve…” She rubbed her forehead. Why was this so hard?

Ultimately, she decided to make the announcement as if she were ripping off a Band-Aid.

“Supergirl and Cat Grant are romantically involved and have bonded via a haptically-reinforced biofeedback connection that is, as far as we can tell, a latent Kryptonian immune response. The bond extends to Carter, too, but we don’t know exactly how it works. So far, it facilitates telepathic communication between Cat and Supergirl, it provides telepathic status reports on Carter’s wellbeing, and it provides limited healing support to both Cat and Carter.” She looked around the room. “Any questions?”

Hank closed his eyes. Maggie hid her smile behind her hand and Carter looked at Alex as if she’d
grown another head. Vasquez looked vaguely smug, while the rest of the team just blinked dumbly at their superior officer, wondering if, perhaps, she’d had too much to drink at the club.

Eventually, one of Solis’ nurses, a young black woman named Turner, raised her hand.

“Uh, yeah?” asked Alex, the formality of the gesture making her uncomfortable.

“If the connection is an immune response, which suggests a protective element, and it’s haptically-reinforced, well…” The nurse nodded at both patients. “Shouldn’t they be touching?”

To her credit, Solis didn’t even wait for the order; she just started pushing Kara’s containment unit toward Cat. Carter and the other nurses met her halfway. They rearranged tangles of tubes, electrodes, and other lines as they moved.

Carter looked up at Alex and she nodded her permission at him, unable to speak, a lump stuck in her throat. He lifted his mother’s left hand and gently dropped it into the cradle of Kara’s upturned right hand, holding his breath.

They waited, Alex whispering “Come on, Kara, wake up!” under her breath.

Nothing happened.

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continued in *Nightmare (part 2)*
Nightmare (part 2)

Chapter Notes

To those of you requesting the full chapter, I hate to disappoint, but it's not complete. I do, however, have part 2 ready for you. Please enjoy.

Also, a couple of casting notes:

For Dr. Solis: Sonia Braga
For Dr. Morgan: Colin Farrell (clean-shaven)
For Turner: Yaya DaCosta
For Jefferson Buchanan Grant: Raymond Burr (bearded)

Nightmare (part 2)

Kara walked along the edge of the picnic table that held the fruits of her aunt’s exhaustive labors, letting her fingertips touch sprays of apple blossoms, creamy rose petals, and the palest pink peonies. There were twelve milk jugs of flowers to line the aisle, two milking buckets to flank the altar, and Astra, hunched over the end of the table, was currently working on the bouquets. Deft fingers wound ivory ribbons around the stems for each woman to hold.

A soft gasp from across the table made Kara look up. Cat, clutching her all-important first cup of coffee in both hands, gaped, marveling at the splendor of Astra’s work.

“Astra,” she breathed. “These are so beautiful!”

“Aren’t they?” asked Kara, her grin wide and wonderful. “Aunt Astra, you’re amazing.”

As pleased as she was by the compliments, Astra still clucked sadly at her work. “The flora of this planet is so limiting!” she complained. “Imagine, Little One, how much more beautiful these arrangements would be with a pink plume flower from Kandor rising from the center or how much more satisfying your bouquets would be with even a single singing blossom amongst these quiet blooms.”

Kara came to Astra’s side and looped an arm around her waist. “What’s past is past, Aunt Astra,” she whispered, leaning into her. “How many times did you and Mother soothe my nightmares of Krypton’s destruction with those words? You have done so much for Cat and me — more than we deserve. Kryptonian flowers can’t make what you’ve done any more special to us.”

“She’s right,” said Cat, rushing to reassure Astra. “We’re both so lucky to have you here. That’s gift enough.”

Astra made a show of sighing aggrievedly, then reached out to draw Cat to her side, too. “If it is enough for you, I will try to let it be enough for me.” She saw a leftover peony blossom next to her scissors and scooped it up in gentle hands, offering it to Cat. “I have done some research on the meanings of the flowers of this planet,” she said. “I chose this one because it represents a happy marriage, which is my wish for you.”
Cat put her coffee down on the table and took the fragile bloom from Astra. Then she turned toward Kara to show it to her.

As Kara cupped Cat’s hands in her own, a wave of unexpected dizziness overwhelmed her. Her knees buckled and her eyes fluttered and rolled back into her head. For the briefest of seconds, she smelled antiseptic and heard a strangely familiar voice say “Come on, Kara, wake up!”

“Kara!” cried Cat, snatching her hands out of Kara’s and dropping the peony in her fear. Kara snapped back into the world at the sound of her name, blinking sunlight out of her eyes and feeling very confused. Wherever she’d just been, it was dark there, and cold — as if it were deep underground.

“I’m okay,” she said unsteadily.

“Little One, have you eaten yet?” asked Astra, tightening her hold around Kara’s waist. “You must keep your strength up,” she admonished lightly. “I have heard brides on this planet sometimes faint during their wedding ceremonies because their emotions are so strong and their bodies are so weak.” She winked at Kara’s scandalized look.

Cat smirked. “More often than not, it’s because they’ve starved themselves to fit into their gowns,” she said, glad she wasn’t going to be one of those brides. She’d found a strapless bone-white Prada tennis dress from last year’s Spring Collection in one of those little shops in Metropolis that sold out-of-date fashions for pennies on the dollar. It was the perfect wedding dress for this maddeningly unofficial ceremony — not too fussy or too dressy, and it fit her like a glove.

Cat turned back to Kara, though, and her smirk faded to be replaced by genuine concern. “Are you alright?” she asked, running her fingertips across Kara’s cheek. “Really?”

Kara grabbed Cat’s hand and kissed her palm. “I’m fine,” she assured her. “Aunt Astra’s right. I was so excited to see the flowers, I didn’t even stop to grab a piece of toast on my way out here.” She carefully didn’t tell Cat about the voice she’d heard.

Cat rolled her eyes. “Come on, then,” she said, tugging Kara away from the picnic table and toward the house. “Martha made a feast for you,” she said. “The least you can do is actually eat some of it.”

“Do you think there might be some coffee for a couple of tired Metropolitans who just got off the red-eye?” asked a booming voice and Cat whirled, her face lighting up.

“Daddy!” she cried, and she let go of Kara’s hand to launch herself into her father’s arms.

Jefferson Grant caught his daughter and lifted her off the ground, eyes closing as he took in the scent of her, fresh and clean, like cotton and sunshine.

“There’s my Mustard Seed,” he said, using the nickname he’d given her when she was born, his arms tight around her. “I’m so sorry we couldn’t get out here sooner, Cat,” he said, pulling back to look at her, contrite and apologetic. “I had to be in court yesterday and it went longer than I—”

“Don’t apologize, Daddy,” admonished Cat. She shook her head at her father, looking up at him adoringly. “We’re just so happy you could come.” She shaded her eyes and looked behind her father to where her mother, the inimitable Katherine Talbot Grant, stood, with her slight look of disdain and her weak smile. “Both of you.” Cat disentangled herself from her father’s easy affection and strode over to offer her mother a peck on the cheek. “Thank you.”

Katherine sniffed and looked around the yard, eyes lighting disdainfully on the rented chairs and canopy, the flower arrangements in milk jugs, and other accoutrements of the day.
“Heaven forfend the press say I couldn’t be bothered to attend my only child’s wedding — er — commitment ceremony. Whatever.” She waved her hand dismissively. “Now, where’s my darling daughter-in-law?” Katherine saw Kara hanging back, watching them with a huge smile, and she hurried over to her, arms wide for Kara where they hadn’t been for Cat.

Kara gave her soon-to-be mother-in-law a warm hug. “I’m so glad you and Mr. Grant could come,” she said sincerely, but she looked at Jefferson with a somewhat jaundiced eye, feeling very shy of him for some reason, almost as if they’d never met before. Which was ridiculous! Of course she’d met him before. Many times!

She remembered being introduced to Cat’s parents at some Daily Planet function, where the hors d’oeuvres had been terrible but the drinks had been plentiful. She remembered how nervous she’d been to meet Cat’s bestselling author mother and her district attorney father. She remembered how at ease Jefferson had made her feel and how surprised she’d been that he’d read her latest article — something saccharine about a homeless man who’d found homes for fourteen abandoned dogs, diligently saving them, if not himself, from the streets of Metropolis.

She remembered the tense dinner she and Cat had hosted a little over a year later, after they’d become lovers and had moved in together in a little four-story walk-up in Hell’s Kitchen. They’d come out to Cat’s parents over a bottle of good wine, Cat’s meticulously-made mushroom risotto, and sea scallops Kara had braised with a flash of her heat-vision, wanting to be honest about their relationship, come what may.

She remembered how strangely pleased Katherine was about the whole thing, going on about Cat’s “lesbian affair” and how it made her more interesting, more fascinating, and worthier of certain national attention. Jefferson had asked practical questions focusing on the daunting obstacles they would face as a same-sex couple in an unwelcoming world, and Kara remembered how — once his concerns had been addressed — he’d asked what he considered the most important question of all: “Are you both happy?”

She remembered Christmas just eight months ago in Cat’s parents’ cabin in upstate New York and how Jefferson had stood, counting down the seconds on his ever-present pocket watch, a family heirloom, to the precise moment Cat could light the tree on Christmas Eve. The act had imbued an otherwise mundane moment with such meaning and gravitas, tears had filled Kara’s eyes.

That was the night she’d proposed.

The two of them had stayed up late to wrap last-minute gifts under twinkling lights and Kara had fumbled her way through a halting proposal, getting down on one knee amidst the wrapping paper and bows to slip a tiny diamond ring on Cat’s finger. She remembered looking up at Cat, her heart in her throat, terrified Cat would say no. When the answer was a resounding yes whispered between fervent kisses, Kara had burst into happy sobs, waking Jefferson down the hall. He’d been the first person to congratulate them.

Why, then, this strange, lingering feeling of something off? It didn’t make any sense.

Jefferson shook his head at Kara. “How many times am I going to have to ask you to call me ‘Jefferson’ before you capitulate, young lady?” he asked, rich laughter lacing the question. “You’re marrying my little girl today. I’d think we could move beyond the formalities now.”

Kara’s family and the Kents made their appearance just then, and the entire gaggle of them launched into a happy cacophony of hugs and welcomes followed by a slow progression through the back door toward the kitchen and the feast Martha had made. Kara hung back and watched, trying to shake off the lingering feeling of wrongness, desperate not to ruin this day.
Cat came to her side and slipped her hand into Kara’s.

“Are you having cold feet now?” she asked, eyes muddy with worry. “Or are you sick? You never get sick, but if you’re sick, we can postpone the ceremony—”

Kara pulled Cat into her arms and shushed her with a gentle kiss. “I’m fine,” she said, looking at Cat with clear blue eyes. “I’ll have a plate of eggs and toast and I’ll be as right as rain. Nothing is going to keep me from marrying the love of my life today. Nothing.” She leaned in for another kiss, this one a little less gentle, a little more demanding. “I promise you.”

The worry faded from Cat’s eyes and she smiled. “Come on, sweet talker,” she said, tugging Kara toward the porch door. “Let’s get some food into you before you really do pass out.”

Kara laughed and shook her head, but she let Cat pull her along, thinking she would go anywhere in the world as long as Cat was leading the way.

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Alex braced herself on the edge of the UV table. “There was no change at all? Nothing?”

Solis pored over the EEG tracing and pointed to a series of angry-looking spikes that had happened seconds after Carter had put his mother’s hand in Kara’s.

“Only this,” she said, lifting it for Alex to see. “It indicates a period of near-wakefulness during REM sleep. It was brief — a second or two — then she returned to the REM wave.”

Alex looked over at Morgan. “Was there a corresponding jump in Cat’s tracing?” she asked.

“No,” he said. He dropped Cat’s tracings back into their collection box and ran his hand through his hair. “Shouldn’t there have been?” he asked, trying to work through what he knew. “If this bond is haptically-reinforced, a change in one EEG due to physical contact should be mirrored in the other, right?”

“It’s not that simple,” cautioned Solis, senior to Morgan and a trained neurologist. “Supergirl’s Kryptonian physiology plays a part, as does the fact this connection originated in her cellular structure. It could be that the bond exists in a hub - satellite formation, similar to a computer server bank and its networked computer stations.

“There’s likely a proliferation phase and Ms. Grant hasn’t yet achieved status as a secondary hub. For example, the limited healing component mentioned earlier? As Carter matures and as Ms. Grant’s physiology adjusts, I believe those limitations will disappear and they will develop the same ability to self-repair Supergirl has now.” Solis turned to Alex and looked at her expectantly. “Am I right, Dr. Danvers?”

“Doctor Danvers?” said Maggie, turning wide copper eyes on Alex.

Alex sheepishly held a hand up to Maggie to stay that question for a moment, and started instead with Solis’.

“Cat — that is, Ms. Grant — has already begun that transition,” she admitted quietly. “And she and Supergirl together have been able to affect Carter’s healing. The cast he’s wearing now is for show.”

Morgan whistled low. “That injury only happened on Wednesday, didn’t it? And it’s fully healed?”

Alex nodded.
“That makes sense if the bond is an immune response,” said Turner. “Its primary goal would be protection of all members of the group.” She frowned briefly. “We don’t know what’s coming next, though, do we?” she asked.

Alex shared a look with Hank, and then shook her head. “No, we don’t. In the meantime, I want to know what the risks are of simply prying this thing off Supergirl.” Alex turned to Solis. “You said it was attached with over a hundred pounds of pressure. Do we have something that can exert more than that? Something that could potentially pull it off?”

“Possibly,” said Solis. “We could rig one of the patient movers with a claw and attempt to remove the creature by force that way. It’ll constrict itself around Supergirl more tightly — we’ve seen that already when we attempted to manipulate its limbs — but perhaps we can mitigate that reaction, too.”

“Good. Work on that. Put the damned thing to sleep, if you have to.” Alex crossed her arms over her chest, looking around the room expectantly. “Other risks?” she asked.

“There could be a neurological response,” admitted Solis. “The creature has attached itself to Supergirl’s central nervous system. We don’t know what effects removing it by force will have on her.”

“Not to mention, we have no idea how any of this will affect Ms. Grant,” added Morgan.

Alex grimaced. The risks were terrible but part of her still hoped there would be an easy way out of all this. Did everything have to be so goddamned complex all the time?

“I still want to try it. Be ready for a first attempt in—” She looked at her watch. “—fifteen minutes.”

“Nunh unh,” whispered Maggie, tugging Alex to the side and keeping her voice low so the others wouldn’t hear her. Something told her undermining Alex’s authority in front of her subordinates would not be a point in her favor. “Give them an hour. They need the time to do this right and you need a break.”

“I’ll get some coffee,” said Alex darkly. She glared at her people, willing them to work faster. “I’m fine.”

“No, you’re not,” insisted Maggie. “You’ve been up for almost twenty-four hours and you’ve had a hell of a night. Compromise. Give them forty-five minutes; tell them to call you when they’re ready. In the meantime, you and I are going to go find a bunk in a corner somewhere.” She smirked at Alex’s look of unadulterated shock. “To sleep,” she clarified, blushing hotly. “You’re in no shape for anything else.”

Alex didn’t want to take a break. She wanted to bark out orders and make people jump and she wanted Kara’s eyes to open right this second. She knew she could stand there and make at least some of that happen, but Maggie was right. There were ways to handle this ordeal that wouldn’t use up everyone within a half mile radius of her.

“Listen up!” she barked, and her crew stopped in mid-movement. “New plan: first removal attempt in one hour. Use the extra time to get some food or coffee or a little shut-eye — whatever you need to be at your best. In the meantime, call me if there’s any change. Remember, this is need to know only. No chatter outside this room, understood?”

Her team relaxed visibly, answering with a chorus of relieved grunts and nods. Even Carter,
hunched on a stool next to Cat’s gurney, breathed a sigh of relief.

Alex quietly asked Maggie for a minute and went to Carter’s side, draping an arm around his narrow shoulders.

“Hey, buddy,” she said. “Maybe you should get some sleep, too. I’ll have them move a gurney in here, next to your mom. It’ll be loud and busy, but you’ll be right here—”

“I wanna wait until you try to pull that thing off Kara,” said Carter. “After that, then yeah, someplace to stretch out would be nice.” He looked up at Alex with murky brown eyes. “It’s not gonna work, is it?” he asked quietly.

Alex closed her eyes for a moment, hating to be the one to burst Carter’s bubble of hope. The likelihood yanking this thing off Kara was going to do anything but make everything a thousand times worse was slim, at best, and she knew Kara wouldn’t want Alex to lie to him.

“Probably not,” she admitted, running her fingers through his curls. “But that doesn’t mean we’re out of options. We will figure this out; I know we will. Right now, our job is to keep both your moms healthy and strong until we do, okay?”

“Okay,” said Carter and he swiped at his eyes to hide his tears. A second later, he unexpectedly wrapped his arms around Alex and pressed his face into her middle. “Thanks for answering the phone tonight, Aunt Alex,” he whispered. “Thanks for always being there for us. I know you didn’t want to in the beginning, but—”

Alex hugged Carter with such fierceness, she was afraid she might break a few of his ribs. She rested her cheek on the top of his head and blinked her own tears away.

“Listen to me,” she told Carter, her voice hoarse. “Not one second of that was about you or your mom. I was afraid Kara wouldn’t need me anymore and I lashed out. It was wrong and unfair and I’m so glad you accepted my apology, because you’re stuck with me now, kid.” Alex pulled away and looked into Carter’s eyes. “Whether you like it or not.” She smiled at him, then, and brushed his bangs out of his eyes. “Got it?” she asked. “Do you need to jot that down somewhere or are we clear?”

Carter chuckled. “I got it, Aunt Alex,” he said, rolling his eyes. Then, shyly, he added, “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome,” she said. She nodded over at Maggie. “Uh…Neves has convinced me I need a nap so I’m going to go lie down for a few minutes. I’ll have my phone with me and if you need anything — and I mean anything — and I mean anything, Carter — I want you to call me, okay? You still have your mom’s cell phone?”

Carter jerked his chin toward where it sat next to Cat’s hip. “Yeah, I have it; don’t worry. Go get some rest, Aunt Alex.”

Maggie came up and laced her fingers with Alex’s, a soft smile playing across her lips. Alex smiled at her tiredly, and then turned back to Carter.

“I will if you will,” she said. “Deal?”

Carter nodded. “Deal,” he said, and he waved at the two women as they walked away.

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Alex keyed the door to the officer’s bunk, then stood back, allowing Maggie to enter first. There
were three cots in this small, out of the way room, all thankfully empty. Alex followed Maggie in and unbuckled her holster, stowing it on the small desk across from the first cot. She stripped out of her black pullover next and tossed it on the back of the desk’s chair.

Maggie’s eyes widened at the vision that was Alex Danvers, standing before her in nothing but a charcoal tank top and a pair of hip-hugging black cargo pants. With the inevitable combat boots rounding out the whole ensemble, Maggie didn’t think she’d ever seen anyone as drop-dead gorgeous as Alex. Gorgeous and exhausted.

Alex collapsed onto the edge of the cot and cradled her head in her hands. She probably could have slept just like that if it weren’t for Maggie kneeling behind her, encouraging her to lie down.

“Come on, boss,” whispered Maggie into Alex’s ear. She found it surprisingly easy to tip Alex over so her head hit the pillow. “Let’s get you tucked in. You need some shut-eye.”

Alex noticed how Maggie didn’t insist she take her boots off. Putting them back on, tying them back up — that would be a total time-suck in an emergency and Maggie obviously understood that. Then, Maggie peeled back the covers and draped only a corner of the blanket over Alex’s shoulder, leaving her legs unhindered.

“You’ve done this before,” said Alex, yawning as she tugged the blanket closer.

“Well, my story about flying helicopters in Kandahar might have been a cover, but I did run away to join the army when I was sixteen. Made it halfway through bootcamp before they figured it out and booted me.” She snickered. “I was there just long enough to learn how to make a bed and how to sleep in one fully dressed.”

Alex glanced over her shoulder. “That sounds like some story,” she said carefully. She’d heard something a little dark underneath the lightheartedness of Maggie’s tone and it made her wonder. “I’ll tell it to you another day,” said Maggie quietly, and Alex nodded.

Maggie sat at the head of the cot behind Alex and tucked her knees up under her, letting her heels hang off the edge. She reached down and stroked Alex’s hair. “Speaking of stories, is the one where you’re a doctor and a DEO agent up for grabs or do you wanna pass on that one for now?”

Alex chuckled. “Nothing earth shattering there,” she said, shrugging. “I failed out of med school in my second year. I was in the middle of making a huge mess of my life when Hank — you remember Hank? Tall, dark, and stoic? — offered me a different path, namely I join the DEO, they make a doctor out of me. And some other things, too.” She thought about how long that decision had haunted her. “It was a better deal than I was going to get anywhere else, so I said yes.”

Maggie heard the tension in Alex’s voice and moved her hand to the base of Alex’s skull to massage it away. “That sounds more like an offer you couldn’t refuse,” she whispered, wondering if Alex would tell her the rest.

“He made it because of Kara,” said Alex. Her voice was so soft Maggie had to lean forward to hear her clearly. “Superman brought her to us one Sunday the summer I turned sixteen. My parents must have known he was coming because I wanted to go to the beach that day and they said no, that I had to stay close to the house.

“I remember staring up at him. He was huge! And with the suit and his cape whipping in the wind… My eyes must have been as big as plates.” Alex shook her head, caught in a memory so vivid Maggie didn’t even think she saw the bunk room around her anymore. “Then Mom and Dad
were on the porch, too, and that’s when I noticed her.” She smiled sadly. “A little blonde thing with the biggest blue eyes, hiding under Superman’s cape, clinging to him like she’d float away if she wasn’t holding onto something. Which might have been the case, actually…

“After that, there was a lot of talking and — maybe — some yelling on my part. Superman explained who she was — that she was a member of his family who’d been sent to take care of him — I wasn’t following most of it.” Alex paused and tears sprang to her eyes. “All I knew was they were saying she was my sister now, that she was going to live with us, and I lost it.

“I resented her so much, Maggie,” cried Alex. She clenched her eyes shut, remembering how desperately Kara wanted to fit in and how badly she’d failed at it, embarrassing Alex over and over again, in front of her friends, her teachers… Then there were Alex’s parents, suddenly spending all their time with Kara, giving her all their attention, all their love, while Alex was relegated to the status of an unpaid babysitter.

“I was terrible to her. I was so mean when all she wanted—” Alex’s voice broke then and Maggie surged forward, wrapping her arms around Alex from behind, holding her tightly. Alex clutched at her, hoping Maggie wouldn’t judge, wouldn’t hate her.

“All Kara wanted was a family,” Alex croaked, “and that’s what she is to me, Maggie. She’s my sister and she needs me and nothing I’m doing is working and—”

Maggie turned Alex around to face her and rocked her, shushing her with soft sounds and softer kisses, pressing them to her temple and to her cheeks.

“No, honey,” she whispered. “You’re doing everything you can and Kara knows that. She knows you’re never going to give up, that you won’t stop until you find a way to cut that thing off of her, to bring her back. She knows, Alex. I promise you, she knows.”

“Yeah?” asked Alex, sniffling. She glanced up at Maggie, surprised to see her gaze so open, so accepting.

“Yeah,” said Maggie, smiling softly. She cupped Alex’s face in her hands and wiped away what she suspected were long-overdue tears. “No matter what happened when you were kids, she knows who has her back now, and that’s the woman who put her whole life on hold just to take care of her.”

Alex stared at Maggie for exactly one second before surging forward and capturing her lips in a different kind of kiss. It went beyond hungry, becoming ravenous in the blink of an eye, and Maggie, caught by surprise, made a sound like a whimper before she let her eyes fall closed and kissed Alex back.

Alex leaned into her, deepening the kiss further, and she pressed forward, rearranging the two of them in the narrow cot, turning to put Maggie beneath her. The realization of what was happening only barreled into Maggie's awareness when Alex moved her thigh between Maggie’s legs, exerting a delicious and distracting pressure for which, frankly, neither of them was ready.

“Wait,” Maggie breathed, pulling away from their kiss, but Alex, concentrating on Maggie’s neck now and kissing her way down it, didn’t hear her.

Maggie put her hands flat on Alex’s shoulders and pushed — not hard, but with enough force to get her attention. “Alex,” she said, looking worriedly into Alex’s dilated eyes. Maggie paused until the focus came back into them a little before she whispered, “We should wait.”
Alex flinched away from Maggie as if struck.

“Oh, my God,” said Alex. She practically fell out of the cot in her hurry to put some distance between them. “Oh, my God,” she repeated. “Maggie, I’m sorry — I didn’t mean—”

Maggie saw exactly where Alex’s hyper-responsible brain was going and she reached out to stop that train of thought before it plummeted off a cliff, grabbing Alex’s tank top and pulling the woman back into her arms.

“You didn’t, Alex,” promised Maggie, running her hands through Alex’s hair and gazing confidently into her eyes. “I was going to take you home with me tonight, remember? I want this. I want you, Alex Danvers — so much.” She leaned forward and pressed her forehead to Alex’s, holding onto her, refusing to let her run. “But Kara needs you more than I do right now. Your focus should be on being there for her, on figuring out how to save her and Cat.”

Maggie pulled away a fraction of an inch and ran her thumb along Alex’s cheekbone. “I can wait,” she promised.

Alex sagged against Maggie and the two of them collapsed, exhausted, onto the uncomfortable cot.

“Why are you so good to me?” asked Alex quietly. “You don’t even know me. This was only our second date and we didn’t even get to finish it…” She shook her head and Maggie felt it against her shoulder. “You should be at home in your own bed. It’s probably nicer than a cot in the middle of nowhere.”

Maggie sighed. “You’re right,” she said. “I could be at home in my own bed, worrying about you and your sister, about Cat and Carter, too. I could toss and turn there and never get a wink of sleep. And maybe you don’t need me here,” she added, shrugging, “because you’re strong enough to handle this by yourself. I’m sure it’s not the first time Kara’s been in trouble and I doubt it’ll be the last.” They both chuckled at that.

“But maybe, Alex,” said Maggie finally, tilting Alex’s chin upward and looking deeply into darkening hazel eyes, “maybe I need to be here for me, because I’d rather stand by you and face whatever happens with you, than lie alone in my bed and let you think you have to face it alone.”

Maggie kissed Alex — just a simple press of lips, meant to reassure — and then gently tucked her head under her chin. “Now,” she said, voice firm. “Get some sleep.”

Alex tensed for half a second before closing her eyes and tightening her arms around Maggie. She sighed and let the tension she was holding drift away on the exhale. She knew she could spend the next forty-five minutes running around in circles in her brain. She’d done it often enough in her life, with nothing to show for it but sleep deprivation and some seriously pestilent moods.

Or she could just enjoy the warmth of Maggie’s arms around her while she slept.

That sounded like the better option, so Alex took it.

She was out within seconds.

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Cat glanced at herself in the vanity’s mirror and tried to quell her nerves. It was ridiculous! She didn’t get nervous. She was used to walking into any room, into any situation, and owning it, but this…
This was different.

Kara Kent had proposed eight months ago under the twinkling lights of the Christmas tree at her parents’ Brant Lake house, and Cat had never quite recovered. Beyond saying yes and agreeing to hold the ceremony at Kara’s childhood home in Smallville, Cat hadn’t ever successfully imagined the day. Her stomach would twist up in knots or she’d blush like an idiot every time she attempted it. She finally abandoned the activity altogether. She had a reputation to protect, after all.

Now here she sat, at Kara’s mother’s vanity, in a Prada tennis dress from last year’s Spring collection, her hair brushed, curled, and sprayed within an inch of its life. Her makeup was all but done, and she stared at herself in the mirror, wondering how she was ever going to walk down that aisle.

The truth — the plain, unvarnished truth — was that Cat didn’t deserve Kara.

Kara was sweet and loving and kind — kinder than she had to be, kinder than should be possible after losing one’s whole planet and culture and way of life. Kara was supportive and unselfish, compassionate and thoughtful, and she was present in ways Cat had never experienced in a lover before. Meaning she was Cat’s polar opposite.

“Who am I?” Cat asked her reflection dejectedly. “Just an ex-gossip columnist with a Pulitzer they gave to me by mistake and a tiny television station in Metropolis I bought instead of earned.”

“My Kara tells a very different story,” said a voice behind her, and Cat looked up into Kara’s mother’s eyes, her heart pounding. “Forgive me startling you, Catherine,” Alura apologized, “but Astra sent me with this.” She lifted a comb decorated with peonies for Cat to see. “For your hair.”

“What about Kara’s hair?” It was all Cat could manage under the circumstances. Alura’s sudden appearance had frightened Cat half to death. Her heart hammered in her chest.

“Martha and Astra have that well in hand. I’m only in the way.” Alura warily took a step or two closer, aware of Cat’s continued unease. “May I help you with yours?”

Cat finally managed to swallow, and nodded hesitantly. She wondered if she should risk another Xanax or if the agitation would pass once she caught her breath. She’d had one pill this morning already, though it didn’t seem to be helping much. Another might be too much to risk.

Alura smiled and strode to Cat in that wholly alien way she had, taking every step as if she were a general leading troops into battle. Astra walked that way, too, and it had always struck Cat as an ostentatious show of confidence, unnecessary and overdone.

“Tell me, why do you believe you won your prestigious award in error?” asked Alura. “Kara speaks of your accomplishments as if you would know the touch of Rao’s favor though you lived at the bottom of the sea.”

It took a moment for Cat to puzzle through Alura’s metaphor, but when she did, she chuckled sadly. “I guess I don’t think I deserve it. My mother thinks journalism is a waste of talent and she hated when I was a gossip columnist. She said I was ‘one step above paparazzi slime’ — and not a very big one.”

Alura raised a perfect eyebrow but did not comment. Instead, she deftly used the hair comb to sweep a lock of Cat’s hair behind her right ear and secured the result with the generous usage of several bobby pins and another spritz or two of Aquanet.

“And your father?” she asked finally, looking into Cat’s eyes via the mirror’s reflection. “Does he
feel the same?”

Cat shook her head, amazed by how little her hair moved in response. “No. I’m not a failure to him, at least.”

“And yet, you believe your mother’s opinions over his. Over Kara’s, too, apparently. Why?” Alura’s tone was more curious than accusatory, which was the only reason Cat answered.

“Mothers — daughters.” Cat waved her hand dismissively in exactly the same way Katherine Grant often did. “Hard.”

Alura laughed, but not unkindly. “How succinctly expressed, Catherine,” she said. Then she crouched down next to Cat’s chair so that she could look the young woman in the eye. “Before we left Krypton, before all we knew was destruction, I used to imagine what path Kara might take. She is the descendent of queens, after all, and she so loved to read. She would read anything you put in front of her.” Alura’s eyes crinkled with a self-conscious smile, one of a handful Cat had ever seen from her. “I selfishly thought she might discover a calling to the law, as I had. I imagined us together, weighing the truth side by side, formidable but fair.”

Cat tried to imagine Kara as a prosecutor and failed, utterly and completely. “But…” she said, not intending to question Alura’s hopes, exactly, but knowing without a doubt Kara wasn’t suited for that kind of work.

Alura placed her hand on Cat’s knee to forestall her.

“I know,” she assured her. “Even when she was little, Kara was drawn to the arts. She sculpted, and painted, and wrote, sometimes all day and night. We would have to call her three and four times for meals.” Alura smiled up at Cat. “It pleases me to know you see that in her, too, Catherine. You’re good for Kara.”

Cat looked away sadly. “She deserves better,” she said softly. *What am I doing?* she wondered again, watching her hands as she twisted a leftover bobby pin into a mangled mess. *What you are doing is ruining Kara’s life*, she told herself. *You have to call this off…*

Alura shook her head. “When Kara called to tell me she had fallen in love, I was as giddy as she was,” she admitted, smiling softly. “When I met you for the first time, I knew my Little One had chosen well.”

“Alura, I—” Cat began, intending to argue that point. Cat was good at arguing and this topic was a favorite of hers to wrestle with.

“No, Catherine,” said Alura sharply, eyes flashing. A shadow, like a cloud blocking the sun, darkened the room, calling attention to the sudden shift in her mood. She rose slowly and loomed over Cat, her height and presence forbidding. “You must not do this. You must stay. Marry Kara. There is no other choice.”

“No choice?” echoed Cat weakly, confused and frightened. What was Alura talking about?

Before she could even begin to make sense of what was happening, Cat felt her breath ripped from her lungs. Alura took a step toward her and the room shuddered, trembling as if they were experiencing some sort of earthquake — but there weren’t earthquakes in Kansas, were there?

Cat held onto the fragile chair she sat in, white-knuckled, gasping for air as the world came apart at the seams. Alura took another earth shattering step toward Cat and another, unfazed by the chaos around her.
“You are my Kara’s heart’s desire,” she hissed, features narrow and sharp. “I will not let you go so easily.”

Petrified, Cat tried to push away from Alura but her heel got caught in the floorboards and she tipped her chair backward instead, feeling the world spin as she started to fall.

Alura reached out in the blink of an eye and stopped Cat’s chair, freezing it in place. Instead of righting it, though, she kept Cat unbalanced on the chair’s back legs and slithered into her personal space. Darkness swallowed the sunlight outside and lightning flashed behind Alura’s head.

Cat opened her mouth to call for help, but movement in the mirror caught her eye — movement so grotesque, so alien it made her shudder with horror. The peonies on the comb had turned into dark green flowers with purple spikes, undulating unnaturally, as if wailing. If she could have moved her arms, she would have ripped them from her hair.

Repulsed, she turned away — only to see Alura’s long brunette locks had also changed, becoming writhing tentacles that rose menacingly around her head. They were a gruesome living crown reminiscent of Medusa, and Cat felt turned to stone. Somehow she knew she was going to be swallowed whole, that those tentacles would wrap her up and absorb her until there was nothing left.

She needed Kara.

Desperately, Cat squeezed her eyes shut and took the deepest breath she ever had. Then she opened her mouth to scre—

“What the Hell?” asked Alura, her voice deeply concerned. Cat’s eyes snapped open to see Kara’s mother looking down at her with worry clearly etched into her features. Her long hair had returned to its usual state of inhuman perfection and sunlight wreathed her in a happy shroud of gold. She held onto Cat’s chair with one hand and gently pulled her forward, righting her with a quiet thump against the floorboards.

It was as if the last five minutes had never happened.

“What the Hell?” repeated Alura. “Are you alright?”

“Catherine?” asked Alura, her voice deeply concerned. Cat’s eyes snapped open to see Kara’s mother looking down at her with worry clearly etched into her features. Her long hair had returned to its usual state of inhuman perfection and sunlight wreathed her in a happy shroud of gold. She held onto Cat’s chair with one hand and gently pulled her forward, righting her with a quiet thump against the floorboards.

“I’m fine,” she said, smiling to reassure Alura, though she thought the odds of that smile actually reaching her eyes was practically nil. “I’m — I’m a little nervous and the chair tipping over startled me.”

Alura smiled knowingly and released Cat’s chair. “Have you taken too much of the medication meant to assist with your anxiety?” she asked. “Or not enough?”

Cat chuckled in spite of herself. “I was wondering that myself,” she admitted ruefully. She looked up at Alura and forced herself to relax, thinking whatever had just happened had been a product of her own overactive imagination. What else could it have been?

“Hmm,” said Alura, looking thoughtful. “Why don’t you finish with your adornments while I go find something to settle your nerves? I know how much you like Jonathan’s private reserve bourbon. I’m sure he can be persuaded to part with a glass.”
Cat sighed with relief at the suggestion, certain her smile reached her eyes this time.

“That sounds wonderful, Alura. Thank you.”

Alura nodded and excused herself, leaving Cat right where she’d started — seated at Alura’s vanity with fear in her grey-green eyes.

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Pulling the creature off Kara did not work.

Not only did the attempt cause the creature to tighten its hold on Kara, it damn near killed Cat in the bargain, sending her into seizures as her organ systems began to fail one by one. The harder Solis’ jury-rigged claw apparatus pulled, the more unstable Cat became until Alex urgently called a halt to the whole operation. The last thing on Earth she wanted to do was to kill Cat in front of Carter. Or kill Cat at all.

Morgan’s team immediately began to stabilize their patient. Only when the Queen of All Media was back to baseline and resting comfortably did the personnel in the medical bay collectively relax, breathing a sigh of relief.

“We’re definitely not trying that again,” said Alex from where she stood, her arms around Carter. He clung to her, exhausted and frightened, and she kicked herself for not insisting he get some sleep, an oversight she planned to rectify at her earliest opportunity. “Other than confirming Cat and Kara are connected, what did we learn?” she asked, hoping her team had at least gotten some useful information out of the whole ordeal.

“No known sedative has an effect on the creature,” said Solis. “We’ve tried a dozen of them — in massive doses — to no avail.”

“When threatened, the creature went after Cat even though it’s attached to Supergirl,” noted Turner, a single eyebrow raised over her left eye. “It either knows how strong Supergirl is or how important Cat is to her. Or both.”

“They’re in a state of prolonged REM sleep,” said Morgan slowly, taking Turner’s observation further. He glanced at Cat’s EEG. “The creature is plugged into Supergirl’s central nervous system, but if Supergirl can communicate telepathically with Cat through their connection, and vice versa, what if they’re not just dreaming randomly?” he asked. “What if they’re having the same dream?”

Alex swore under her breath. She hadn’t considered that. “I need to know what this thing is and how it works,” she spat, staring blankly at the creature, wondering who she could go to, who would know. Suddenly, she straightened and grabbed her phone from a cart nearby. She snapped a picture of Kara and her parasite, then looked over at Turner. “Can you find Carter a place to stretch out?” she asked. “Make sure he stays near his moms — the closer, the better. I’m not taking any chances with any of them. I want him within hand’s reach.”

Turner nodded. “Yes, ma’am. I’ll arrange it.”

Grateful, Alex nodded back, and then turned her attention to Susan. “Vasquez, since the detective here is insisting on staying for the long haul,” she began, glancing at Maggie where she stood on the periphery, still in her oh-so-tempting dress and those ridiculous heels, “can you find her something more comfortable to wear? Her shoes are making me nervous.”

Both Susan and Maggie smirked at Alex.
“Will do, ma’am,” said Vasquez, looking Maggie up and down appreciatively. “I think we can find something suitable.”

Alex bristled and narrowed her eyes at Susan, a hint of green in her gaze before Susan winked at her, letting her know she was being teased. Shaking her head and blushing, Alex turned to Maggie.

“You should get some rest, too,” she said. “I’ll have someone get you a temporary badge for the officer’s bunk or something. You’ll be okay. Just don’t go poking around. Hank gets jumpy.”


Alex shook her head. “Not this time,” she said sternly. No way was she going to put Maggie at risk. Not like this.

“Why? Where are you going?”

“To talk to Kara’s aunt,” replied Alex, and she turned and stalked out the medical bay door.

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Hank met Alex at the motor pool.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he asked sharply, glowering at Alex.

Alex shouldered past him and opened the door to the nearest SUV. “Unless I’ve gotten a hell of a lot better at shielding my thoughts from you, you know exactly what I’m doing. I’m saving Kara.”

Hank slammed the door shut. “Not like this. Astra’s too dangerous, too unpredictable—”

“You think I don’t know that?” said Alex, crossing her arms over her chest. “I know what she’s capable of, but she didn’t kill Kara when she had the chance. I have to believe there’s some part of her that still loves Kara, that’s still the beloved aunt she had on Krypton.”

“Kara was part of the trap that put Astra on Fort Rozz to begin with—”

“She was a child, Hank! That was Alura’s plan, not Kara’s.”

Hank crossed his arms over his barrel chest. “And when Astra discovers she’s been tricked again? What happens then?”

Alex gave him a half shrug. “I’ll have to talk faster than she can move, I guess,” she said.

Hank threw his hands in the air. “That’s—”

“That’s the deal we made, remember? We protect them ‘no matter what.’” Alex advanced on Hank and he took a step backward even though he towered over her. “Do you think I give a fuck what Astra thinks or what she might do to me? Do you think I care about anything but Kara right now?”

When he didn’t answer, she looked away from him and lowered her voice. “I don’t know if you noticed or not, but I fucked up a lot of things for her this week. This can’t be one of them. I won’t let it be.”

Hank bristled, glaring at Alex for a long moment. Then he deflated, nodding at her in reluctant agreement.

“I’ll come with you.”
Alex shook her head. “No. You have to stay here with Cat and Kara. You’re my backup, in case this goes south or I’m not as fast as I think I am.” She reached out to squeeze his forearm. “If I’m not back in two hours, get my mom from the airport and start over. Figure out how to get that fucker off of her. Save them. It’ll be up to you.”

Hank frowned and rubbed the back of his neck with a giant hand. He was silent so long, Alex thought he was going to refuse her.

“Fine,” he said finally, sighing. Then he looked at her sideways. “You know they’re up to something. Non and Astra. Something big.”

Alex nodded. “I know.” She fought to suppress a smirk when Hank looked at her expectantly. “I’ll be careful. I promise.”

“Be more than careful,” he groused, watching her get into the SUV. “Come back.”

Alex saluted instead of answering him. She didn’t trust her voice.

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Astra couldn’t sleep. The thought of the Black Mercy ravaging Kara’s central nervous system wouldn’t let her go. She wondered what her niece might venerate now that she’d been fully assimilated into this planet’s lamentable culture, but gave it up after several tries, unable to fathom what might bring Kara joy now that she was an adult. Instead, Astra turned the question on herself as an exercise, to see if she could easily declare her own heart’s desire.

It proved harder than she’d imagined. Her automatic response was to say “I want to save this planet from destruction,” but even as the words left her mouth, she knew they weren’t true.

She didn’t care about Earth, had never cared about it. It was a hostile world, filled with small minds and smaller ambitions. That it found itself with the same problem as Krypton — natural resources dwindling, ecology on the verge of collapse — proved only that chaos reigned in all the Universes, as unaffected by reason and action as the weather.

So many on Krypton had blamed that planet’s fate on its population’s pursuit of knowledge, on it’s abdication of its soul for the cultivation of its mind. Some even wondered if the loss of the planet was an acceptable sacrifice in the face of their scientific and cultural gains. What arrogance! What hubris!

No such lofty ideals and polite discourse here, though. These humans were hardly above their knuckle-dragging phase, barely advanced enough to manage a brief trip to their own moon, consumed by war and violence and hedonism — and they, too, were content to watch as the natural world dissolved around them, eaten away by poisons, choked by refuse. Whole swaths of this planet’s population actively denied the evidence before their very eyes rather than lift a single appendage in support of solutions so desperately needed. Earth would suffer the same fate as Krypton. It was only a matter of time.

But no, saving Earth was not Astra’s heart’s desire.

Neither was Non, though that wasn’t a revelation so much as hard fact.

Perhaps once he was, when he was still Non Ran, the fiery orator and general from the Military Guild, who’d followed his tirades before the Council with decisive and dramatic action. First, he’d renounced his House when they would not support his bid to take control of the Council; later, he’d formed ÆTH JAGHA, his so-called separatist movement.
In those early days, Astra had found Non’s passion electrifying. He was not content to sit and debate like the rest of the Council. Instead, he chastised the Council for their complacency while all around them perished. He vilified them for their complicity in the planet’s ruination. He reviled them for their inertia in the face of the planet’s anguish. He demanded they stand up for progress!

As expected, the Council declined, encouraging restraint and further debate. Non naturally took the responsibility for the progress he desired onto his own shoulders. He was, in Astra’s eyes, nothing short of visionary, a hero of the people, whether they recognized him as such or not.

When Astra had taken Non as her lover, her sister, Alura, already deeply entrenched in politics and the collective delusions of grandeur held by the House of El, into which she’d married, had warned Astra her choice would have long-ranging consequences.

“Disassociate yourself from him and all who would follow him, Astra,” she’d begged. “There will be no glory in his cause. Prosecution is the least of it. The Council is already discussing Severing. You will find no protection in our House or in that of my husband.”

The threat of Severing, a type of lobotomy reserved for the most damaged, most dangerous minds, had enraged Astra and, instead of breaking ties with Non, she’d married him. It had seemed so necessary then, so noble, so natural. Their beliefs had become a cause; now the cause would become their fate. Together, whatever the outcome.

Only now, exiled upon another dying planet, did Astra realize how little meaning their lives held. Their cause, failed on Krypton and resurrected to give purpose to their existence on Earth, meant unending struggle in a war already lost. Non’s newest plan, she knew, was too grand in scope for one man to manage, and it would break him in the end. Still, he would cling to this war until his dying breath, fool that he was.

Astra left her cot and opened her small clothing cupboard, not bothering with the light. She rooted through the single drawer until her fingers closed around the thing she was looking for: a bit of metal, long since cold, a reminder of betrayal, a souvenir of love. A love that was dead now, she was sure. With ashes where her heart should be, Astra wondered what might be left for her here, now that she knew no choice, large or small, mattered in the grand scheme of things.

The choice she’d made for herself alone — saving Kara — hadn’t made an iota of difference. Or maybe it was too little, too late. Maybe she should have chosen family over cause so much sooner than this...

Astra looked at the beacon in her hand sadly.

“I’m sorry, Kara,” she whispered to it, fingertips drifting across it’s round face in a farewell caress.

Which was when the thing lit up.

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Continued in Nightmare (part 3)
Alex sat cross-legged on Kara’s dining room table with her kryptonite handgun by her right knee and a small box in front of her. It hadn’t taken long for her to find it; Kara’d been hiding it in the same place since she was thirteen. Back of the sock drawer, all the way to the right-hand side.

In the beginning, it had held all the wonders of a child. Bits of sea glass and sand dollars, rusty pop-tops and speckled eggshells left rotting in the sand. Crackling autumn leaves from the white oak outside her window and tufts of fluff from the neighbor’s golden lab, Murphy. Candy wrappers in all the colors of the rainbow and swatches of bubble-wrap, half-popped. Alex had always known when a night was particularly hard for Kara by the faint pop-pop-pop of bubble-wrap across the hall.

A child from a dead planet saw these things not as garbage, but as treasure to be hoarded, and Kara stored them lovingly alongside the few things she’d been able to rescue from Krypton, priceless keepsakes, every one. Alex used to sneak looks inside the box as often as she could, just to see what forgotten fragments of the world had caught Kara’s eye. It was always interesting to see Earth through an alien lens.

Now, though, Alex needed one of Krypton’s treasures.

She lifted the lid of the box reverently. The act felt strange and intrusive, like going through one of her fellow agents’ footlockers after they’d been killed in action.

*You can’t think that way,* she chastised herself, squeezing her eyes shut. *She’s alive. You’re going to figure this out. Focus.*

It had been years since Alex had last thought to look inside the box and, steeling herself for whatever she would find, she opened her eyes. The first item, right on top, was a CatCo Post-it note with four words on it: “Good work. Thank you.”

Alex snorted, positive the handwriting was Cat’s. “Jeez, Kara, you really had it bad, didn’t you?” she whispered, taking the note out of the box and setting it aside. The answer to that question lay right underneath it: a hexagonal pasture tile from Settlers of Catan with a little cut-out of a cartoon sheep taped to it, no doubt a gift from Carter. Alex rolled her eyes, but she couldn’t help but grin, too.

The rest of the box was more of the same — a tiny Supergirl figurine, most likely from Winn; a note from Lucy inviting Kara to lunch with her and James; a rose-gold ballpoint pen; a photographer’s loupe, probably stolen off James’ desk; a Choco’s wrapper; a strip of snapshots she and Kara had taken in a novelty booth at the fair a couple of years ago; a faded Polaroid of Jeremiah and Eliza and herself as a baby at Christmastime...

Mementos from the family Kara had cobbled together, person by person, over the last thirteen years.

As heartwarming as the contents were, the small velvet pouch containing Kara’s last remaining possessions from Krypton was what Alex was after today. She dumped it out in her hand and gazed at what was left of Kara’s life before Earth: a teardrop pendant on a chain given to Kara by her mother, and a round metallic device Kara called a ‘spy beacon.’
During a stupid game of Truth or Dare they’d had one hot and boring night the summer before Alex left for college, sixteen-year-old Kara had chosen Truth for her next turn, and Alex had asked her if she’d ever betrayed anyone. Alex still mocked Kara’s goody-two-shoes nature every chance she got — even more so back then — so she’d expected an emphatic “No!” as her answer.

Kara’s quiet “Yes” had shocked the Hell out of her. Hesitantly, Kara had told Alex everything about the ‘spy beacon’ — how it had been a way to communicate secretly with her aunt, whom she loved fiercely; how it had been used to betray that aunt when she had broken Krypton’s laws; how Kara had activated the beacon herself at her mother’s behest, and the look of hurt in her aunt’s eyes when she was arrested…

Alex had never forgotten the story. She was betting Astra hadn’t either.

She pressed the carved face of the beacon, half expecting nothing to happen. She jumped when the white light began to blink, steady and strong.

Alex put the beacon in front of her, placed her hand lightly on her gun, and waited.

She didn’t have to wait long.

Astra arrived less than three minutes later, blowing in like a storm through the windows Alex had left open for her.

“Little One?” she asked, breathless until she saw Alex sitting on the table, one hand raised, the other resting on some sort of weapon.

“I don’t want to fight,” said Alex, staring Astra down, her body wound tight like a spring. “I brought you here because I need your help.”

Astra’s eyes flashed. “Where’s Kara?” she demanded. “How could you know about these?” She raised the mate to the beacon sitting on the table. Their lights blinked in unison.

Alex reached down and pushed the strip of photo booth pictures toward Astra, who cautiously lifted it for a closer look. Confusion rumpled her forehead, but the ghost of a smile passed over her face.

“I knew there was more to you and my niece,” she said.

“She’s my sister,” said Alex, gesturing to other photographs of she and Kara together around the room.

Astra chuckled and shook her head. “Sister,” she repeated, and there were so many shades of meaning in that single utterance, Alex shivered. “If you are Kara’s sister and I am her aunt, what does that make us?”

Alex pulled her phone out of her jacket pocket and stood, abandoning her weapon where it lay on the table. “That’s up to you, Astra,” she said, accessing her phone’s photostream. She chose the most recent picture and held it up for the Kryptonian to see. “Tell me what this thing is. Tell me how to get it off of Kara without killing her. Prove to me you’re still the aunt who loved her on Krypton. Then we’ll talk.”

Astra took a few steps closer, frowning. “May I?” she asked, and Alex handed her the phone. Astra gazed down at her niece, pale and unconscious, knowing she was getting weaker and weaker every moment, knowing her time was running out. Knowing another choice had to be made.

“It’s a telepathic parasite known as the Black Mercy,” she said finally, looking up at Alex urgently.
“Telepathic?” asked Alex. “That explains why it’s affecting Cat, then. Does it have them in a true coma, or is it some sort of dream state—”

“Them?” Astra glanced back down at the phone. “Who is Cat? Are you saying it has attacked more than one person?”

Alex closed her eyes and turned, taking a few steps away from Astra.

_Stupid, Alex_, she said, chiding herself. _Either you explain it to her — and make Cat an even bigger target than she already is — or you explain nothing and compromise whatever trust you’ve built here. Good going._

A single sigh later, she turned back around. “Kara and her employer, Cat Grant, became — uh — romantically involved recently,” she said, watching Astra closely to gauge her reaction to the news. “They’ve bonded telepathically via something called—”

“The Daat Kyashar?” breathed Astra, eyes wide. “But that should not be possible—”

“You know about it?” asked Alex, but Astra ignored her.

“—unless the myths are true—”

“Myths? What myths?” Alex frowned, fearing she’d lost her place in the conversation, and with it, her control. “About the Daat Kyashar?”

Astra looked at Alex quizzically. “No. Although not seen for many years in our population, the Daat Kyashar is a documented part of our people’s evolution. Several of my own ancestors are known to have bonded this way. But such a thing should not be possible with a non-Kryptonian — unless the myth of The Thousand is more than just a children’s story.”

“Explain,” said Alex, her voice low and measured.

“My culture has a long history of exiling those it considers undesirable. Many millennia ago, shortly after our people developed the technology for rudimentary deep space travel, Krypton’s first act was to exile a thousand political prisoners. Legend says they were sent to an uninhabited planet to live out their lives in whatever way they could…”

Alex began to pick up the threads of the plot. “…except the planet wasn’t uninhabited; not really.”

Astra shook her head. “I never believed the story myself. I thought it a vain, egocentric fantasy. But if Kara has truly bonded with this human, perhaps I was wrong.”

Alex ran a hand through her hair and grimaced. “Oh, they have. They’re still in the naissance phase, but she and Cat communicate telepathically, and there’s the little matter of an injury or two healing more quickly than they should have.” She left Carter’s name out of the retelling, not wanting to compromise him, too. “When this thing — the Black Mercy or whatever — attacked Kara, Cat was miles away. As far as we can tell, they lost consciousness at the same time. Their brain waves suggest they’re in some sort of dream state.”

“The Black Mercy has them trapped in life-like hallucinations,” said Astra. “A perfect fantasy life created from memories, emotions, and dreams — one that grows more and more real with each passing moment.”

“How do I wake them out of it?”
“They must reject the fantasy themselves,” said Astra, her preternaturally direct tone of voice beginning to set Alex’s teeth on edge.

“How?” she snapped. “If they don’t know it isn’t real, how can they reject it? That thing nearly killed Cat when we tried to pry it off Kara, and I don’t know of any other way to get through to them short of elective craniotomies!”

“I can help you, but you must trust me. It will be difficult. These creatures were bred on my planet as a compassionate means of execution. They are not easily overcome.”

Alex glowered at the Kryptonian. “The last time I trusted you, six soldiers died. You’ve tried to kill Kara before. Why should I trust you now?”

Astra smirked at her. “Because you have no choice?” she asked darkly. Seeing Alex’s eyes narrow dangerously prompted the general to be a little more honest, a little less confrontational. “Kara saved me from a death without honor. As a fellow soldier, I expect you know the meaning of that. It’s…” She looked away for a moment, and Alex thought she saw something, some spark of tenderness cross Astra’s face. “It’s time I repaid the debt,” she finished, resolute once more.

“Come with me to the DEO,” Alex blurted. She didn’t know which of them was more surprised by the outburst, Astra or herself. “Kara wants her aunt back. She’s never given up on you and I know she never will.” Alex gave the general a half-shrug. “I may not understand it, but I trust my sister’s judgment. If she’s ready to give you another chance, then so am I.”

Oh, the sadness that broke open in Astra’s heart at those words. Sweet and stinging, it swelled inside her like a long-forgotten song. She shook her head and blinked away the tears she could not allow to fall.

“No. I cannot — and you overstep your authority with your unit to offer it, Agent Danvers. They will imprison me or worse, no matter what you might say. You know this to be true.” She turned to gaze out the windows, a soft look of disappointment clouding her eyes. “Come, let me tell you what you need to know. I’ve been gone too long already, and Kara and her mate are running out of time.”

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“Kara?” called Jefferson Grant, and Kara’s head snapped up at the sound. She stopped her pacing and looked toward the open doorway at the front of the half-filled hay barn she’d chosen as her refuge. Jefferson’s barrel-chested silhouette cast a long shadow across the floor as he passed in front of the sun.

Kara gulped when the sunshine retreated, and she forced herself to stay where she was, her heart lodged in her throat, a tornado of emotion. This was getting ridiculous! Every time she crossed paths with Cat’s father, she felt uneasy, almost panicked, and she had no idea why! She’d scanned him — twice — and found nothing out of the ordinary. It didn’t make any sense.

Of course you haven’t found anything, Kara Ellen Kent, she chided herself. There’s nothing to find! It’s Cat’s father, for Rao’s sake. The same as he’s always been. Now get a hold of yourself right this instant and let him know you’re okay.

“In here, Mr. Gra — er — Jefferson!” When he stuck his head in the doorway, she offered him a weak smile.

“There you are, young lady,” he said, taking the two steps to the dirt floor, all smiles. “We thought we’d lost you! This is the fourth building I’ve checked and I have to say, this hay dust is wreaking
havoc with my citified sinuses.” When Kara didn’t laugh, he looked at her sharply. “You do know what time it is, don’t you?” He fished his pocket watch from its silk-lined home and toggled the cover open, glancing down at the face of it, one eyebrow raised. “The march is set to start in ten minutes. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you were suffering from a case of cold feet.”

That brought Kara up short, and she shook her head emphatically, the curled ponytail she wore bouncing and swinging with the movement.

“Absolutely not,” she said, her features set in a look of fierce determination behind her square-rimmed glasses. “Your daughter is everything to me. There is no one else in this world or any other who could ever compare. Nothing will keep me from marrying Cat today — not even you—” Kara gasped and clapped both hands over her mouth, eyes wide with shock. She definitely hadn’t meant to say that last bit out loud.

“Me?” asked Jefferson, clearly surprised. “Kara, have I given you the impression that I am anything but thrilled for you and for my little Mustard Seed? If I have, please let me be the first to apologize —”

“No,” said Kara, putting both hands up, palms out. She sighed, frustrated and angry with herself. Why was she doing this? It was supposed to be the happiest day of her life. Why couldn’t she behave like a normal human being for one freaking day?

“You haven’t done anything. In fact, you’ve been nothing but wonderful, just like always.” She looked up at him and nibbled her lip for a moment. “That’s the problem, really — well, no, not really — but sort of? I — I’m — it doesn’t feel —” She stopped herself from saying more and turned away from Jefferson’s encouraging features with a huff, crossing her arms over her chest. “Ugh. I’m sorry. I’m not making any sense.”

Jefferson clucked knowingly and came around to look at Kara again, head ducked to catch her eye, hands clasped behind his back. “Let me guess,” he said gently, his own eyes filled with bemusement. “It doesn’t feel real. The whole day feels like one big ecstatic dream, and you think you’re going to wake up to find none of it was true, and that’s going to hurt. So much, you don’t think you could survive it.” He rocked himself up on his tiptoes and tugged absently at his salt and pepper beard, looking very much like the district attorney he was. “Am I close?”

For a moment, Kara stood frozen, wondering how he could have known all of that. Then tears flooded her eyes and she deflated, all the tension leaving her in one tremulous exhale. “You’ve pretty much nailed it,” she said sheepishly, and she went back to twisting the handkerchief Martha had given her to keep her hands busy. “That obvious, huh?” she asked.

Jefferson chuckled. “You forget, my dear, I’ve been around for a long time. I’ve seen a thing or two in my lifetime, and let me assure you, everything you are experiencing is devastatingly normal.” He turned and found a hay bale of the right height, sinking onto it with a grunt. “The stories I could tell you of my own wedding day would curl your hair,” he said, eyebrows raised high on his forehead. “And all that on top of the worst hangover I’ve ever had. Nineteen sixty-three was the year I gave up tequila for a reason.”

Kara did laugh at that.

“If I recall correctly,” continued Jefferson, hamming it up for her, “I spent the entire ceremony alternating between shades of pea-soup-green and chalk white. Katherine was not pleased.”

“No, I guess not,” Kara agreed.

Jefferson cast her a conspiratorial smile, then slapped his knees. “Well,” he said, pushing himself off the hay bale and opening his watch again. “Shall we rejoin the wedding party? Too much longer,
and I’m afraid they’ll send out the National Guard.”

Kara nodded, and Jefferson offered her his arm, which she took. As they walked, a question rose up inside her from out of the blue and she gestured to his watch pocket, unable to keep herself from asking it.

“Jefferson, Cat once told me your pocket watch was handed down from parent to child when the child achieved their first significant success…”

“True,” said Jefferson as he helped Kara up the two steps and into the sunlight.

“Then why didn’t you give it to Cat when she won her Pulitzer last year?”

Jefferson frowned for a moment, then glanced at Kara sheepishly. “I’m afraid you’ve caught me out, Kara, my dear,” he said, patting her hand. “Today’s the last day I’ll ever wear this watch. It’s to be Cat’s wedding gift from me — for finding her heart’s desire, and holding onto it — well, you — with both hands.” When Kara looked up at him, disbelieving, he added, “We expected the Pulitzer. She’s so driven, so focused on her career, it had to happen sooner or later. But settling down? Listening to her heart?” He shook his head ever so slightly. “I confess, I thought she’d never be able to hear it over the relentlessness of her ambition.”

“Her ‘heart’s desire’?” grimaced Kara. That sounded… ridiculous. Why would anyone in their right mind ever measure Cat Grant’s value or success by whom she chose to marry? Cat’s ‘relentless ambition’ had taken her from gossip columnist to Pulitzer-Prize-winning journalist in just under four years. The clout of that had gone a long way toward making up what she lacked in capital for the purchase of WRAF just last month.

How in all the galaxies would it make any difference at all who Cat married?

“Would you like to see the inscription?” asked Jefferson, smiling brightly.

Kara swallowed and shrugged, coming to a stop when Jefferson did. She could hear the guests shifting in their rented chairs around the corner from where she and Jefferson stood, their soft conversations and the flap of their programs as they fanned themselves providing a steady background hum. The normalcy of it all comforted her.

Jefferson produced the precious watch again, and toggled the cover open once more, showing Kara a line of script that followed the curve of the bezel around the crystal.

To My Mustard Seed: Follow your heart, and the mind will chase after it. All my love, J.B. Grant

Kara recoiled from the watch the instant she read the words. The trees and the house and the bright blue sky all swam in her vision, and the sun beat down on her, a thousand degrees hotter and whiter than it should have been. For one terrifying second, she thought she was going to be sick.

Then an urgent voice cried “Kara?” and everything suddenly snapped back into place, leaving her breathless and a little dizzy.

“That’s beautiful, Mr. Grant,” she said, hoping to Rao he wouldn’t see the revulsion in her eyes. Then she heard her mother calling. “I have to go,” she said, hurrying away.

Soon she’d be married to Cat and she could put all of this uneasiness behind her.

It was all she wanted.
“Goddammit!”

Alex slammed her fists on the edge of Kara’s sunbed and cursed again. “It’s not working!” she growled, pushing at the jury-rigged tech crowding around her sister, disgusted by its lack of cooperation. “We can’t get in.”

“There was a spike—” began Morgan, holding up Kara’s EEG readouts.

“But not enough of one,” said Alex darkly. “I need a doorway, not a crack, and I don’t know how to do that with the technology we have available! It will take days to turn this junk into something useful. That’s time they don’t have.” She looked up and caught Hank’s gaze, her eyes filling with tears. “We need a miracle. Now.”

The door to the isolation room slid open behind her.

“One miracle coming up, ma’am,” said Vasquez, strutting in. She jerked her chin toward the woman shrugging into a lab coat behind her and grinned.

“Alex!” said Eliza, hurrying around her escort to pull her oldest daughter into her arms. “Why didn’t you call me? Sweetheart, you know I would drop anything to help you girls—”

“Mom?” Alex couldn’t believe it. Her mother — the biomedical engineer whose work centered around the research applications of artificial intelligence — was here. It wasn’t a dream. The Universe had heard her anguish and had dropped the one person who might be able to help right in her lap. How was that even possible? “What are you doing here?”

“Director Henshaw called me.” Eliza glanced at the imposing man over Alex’s shoulder and lowered her voice. “I don’t know if he expected me to offer assistance or not, but that’s what I’m here to do. Tell me what you need.”

Alex brought her mother up to speed as quickly as she could, explaining what Astra had told her, and what the equipment cluttering up Kara’s sunbed was supposed to do. She raked her hand through her hair and gestured to the miniature screen and its tangle of wires and leads. “Carter helped me build that but it doesn’t seem to be wor—”

“Carter? He’s here?” asked Eliza, looking around the room, her eyes wide and her smile wider. When she didn’t see the pre-teen boy, she looked back at her daughter. “Where is he, Alex? Where’s my grandson?”

“Eating, I hope,” said Alex, frowning. “I sent him to the mess with Maggie—”

“Maggie?” asked Eliza, not recognizing the name. “Who’s Maggie?”

“That’s… uh… that’s more complicated,” said Alex, in a hurry to change the subject. “Look, Mom, Cat and Kara are running out of time. If I don’t figure out how to communicate with Kara’s subconscious soon, they’re going to die, trapped in whatever Disney-Cinderella-happily-ever-after bullshit dream is playing in their heads.” She gripped her mother’s upper arms tightly, barely keeping herself from shaking her. “I need your help. Kara needs your help.”

Eliza snapped to attention, going from doting grandmother to hardass lab director in a blink of an eye. “Of course, Alex. I’m sorry. Show me what you have, what you and Carter built. Let’s take it step by step.”
Alex took a deep breath and nodded, showing her mother what Carter and she had cobbled together. “Only one attempt, the last one, got any reaction at all — a single spike of consciousness — but it wasn’t enough. I didn’t see or hear anything.”

Eliza crossed her arms over her chest and paced the length of Kara’s sunbed, her gaze turned inward, her lips pursed. She glanced at her youngest daughter as she passed, noting how pale she was. The slow but measurable decline in Kara’s vital signs worried her. When she reached the head of the bed for the second time, she stopped to stroke Kara’s hair and forehead, watching Kara’s eyes dart back and forth under closed eyelids.

Then Eliza strode to Cat’s side, seeing the same pallor, the same inexorable decline of her vitals, the same REM of an active dream state. She clasped Cat’s hand gently before looking up at her eldest daughter.

“It won’t work, Alex — not the way you have it set up now.” She let Cat go, and returned to Alex’s side, gesturing to the view screen. “You’re trying to make the equivalent of a cell phone call into your sister’s brain when what you need is an immersive experience, like virtual reality—”

Alex’s face lit up. “We have VR tech, the best available.” She nodded to Morgan, who hurried out of the room. “We can reconfigure this so it lets my consciousness merge with Kara’s—” she began, but her excitement faded when she saw Eliza shake her head.

“Don’t forget the reality part of the equation,” her mother cautioned. “Merging your consciousness with Kara’s won’t work unless you know where you’re going.” Eliza gripped Alex’s wrist. “You can’t go in there blind, sweetheart. You need a destination and none of us knows where she is.”

“Um…” came a voice from the doorway. Eliza and Alex turned to see Carter standing just inside the room, holding two donuts, one in each hand. The bubble-gum pink frosting and rainbow sprinkles clashed with his blue cast.

Maggie stood behind Carter, eyes pinwheeling back and forth between Alex and the woman she didn’t know. She put her hands on Carter’s shoulders and took a deliberate step closer to him. Alex’s heart swelled watching her.

“Um, I might,” mumbled Carter. “Know where they are, that is. Maybe.”

“What?” asked Alex, but Eliza quieted her with a hand on her arm.

“Carter?” she asked. When he nodded, she smiled. “I’m Eliza. Are those for Kara?” She gestured at the donuts he held with a tilt of her head.

“Smell is a powerful stimulant,” said Carter, slouching into himself and looking at his feet. “And olfactory memories are some of the deepest memories we have. Donuts are Kara’s favorite. I thought they might help bring her and Mom home.”

“That’s brilliant, sweetheart,” Eliza said, catching his eye and grinning at him. “Let’s put them over here, right on her bed.”

Carter, standing a little taller than he had been just a moment ago, stepped forward and allowed Eliza to shepherd him to the head of Kara’s bed. Eliza moved Kara’s hair, and he put the donuts as close to her nose as he dared.

“That’s perfect,” said Eliza when he looked up. She took a deep breath, knowing Alex and the others were waiting impatiently for his explanation about where Kara and Cat might be, but this was her grandson, and she was meeting him for the very first time. An interrogation was not how she
wanted to begin their relationship.

“May I hug you, Carter?” she asked.

Carter stiffened for just a second, but then he lifted his shoulder in a half shrug, and Eliza melted, blinking tears out of her eyes as she enfolded him in her arms. After a second, Carter relaxed, and he looped his own arms loosely around Eliza’s waist.

Eliza buried her nose in Carter’s hair and kissed his head before releasing him. “It’s so good to finally meet you,” she whispered. “Now, tell us why you think you know where your mothers are.”

Carter grimaced and looked at Alex. “So, remember when I told you I’d passed out after my mom did, and that’s the last thing I remembered until I woke up?”

“I do,” said Alex, crossing her arms over her chest and glaring back at him.

Carter gulped. “That wasn’t entirely true,” he admitted. “I thought it was a dream or something,” he said. “Not real. Or not something really happening. I mean, it didn’t make any sense—”

Eliza put her hand on his narrow shoulder and squeezed. “Why don’t you let us be the judge of that, sweetheart? Tell us what you saw.”

“All of it? Even if it’s... private?” asked Carter, his voice high and breathy. His cheeks went pink, too, and Alex tried and failed to hide her smirk.

“Lemme guess,” she said, eyes knowing. “You saw your moms having a little alone time?” She put her patented air quotes around the last two words.

“Just for a second!” protested Carter. “Not even a whole one! As soon as I realized what was happening, the tornado started back up and I—”

Alex and Maggie both chuckled, but Eliza stopped them dead with a single look, seeing Carter’s cheeks blaze brighter.

“Girls,” she admonished. “Carter may have the information we need to save our patients. Let him tell us what he saw without editorial comment, if you please.” That brought the women up short, and they struggled to wrangle their expressions to something neutral. When she was satisfied, Eliza turned back to Carter. “Go on,” she encouraged him. “Start from the beginning. The smallest thing might be important.”

Carter nodded, and he told them about the torrent of fractured images he’d seen — the scorched grass, the farmhouse, the pieced-together family, the name they all went by: Kent. Then he told them of being dumped out onto the floor of a room inside the farmhouse, and the conversation he overheard between two lovers beneath a tangle of quilts.

“I didn’t hear much,” he said, “but I heard enough to know it was the morning of their wedding.”

The room went dead silent and every face wore the same expression of horror.

“She’s with her parents and Astra,” Eliza breathed, looking up at Alex, her face pained. “They’re all living with the Kents, which means—”

“Which means she never met us,” said Alex tightly. “She took Kal’s place. It’s his timeline or a version of it. Kara Kent and Cat Grant instead of Clark and Lois. Getting married.” She swore.
“Why is that bad?” asked Maggie. “You have what you needed — a destination. You can connect now—”

Alex shook her head. “She won’t recognize me,” she said. “In that reality, she doesn’t know me, has never even heard of me! How am I supposed to convince her what she’s seeing isn’t real? Especially when she’s marrying the love of her life!”

“No,” countered Maggie. “I don’t believe that. Whether you’re part of that dreamworld or not, Alex, Kara knows you. She trusts you and she needs you. You’ll be able to get through to her. I know it.” She looked at Eliza. “Don’t you agree, Dr. Danvers?”

“You’re forgetting something. All of you,” said Hank. Until now, he’d been content to let the experts work their magic. When those experts looked up at him blankly, he scowled. “Cat’s in there, too. Her subconscious is driving this imaginary dreamworld as much as Kara’s is, and I’ve had the privilege of experiencing its power first hand. Convincing one mind — a Kryptonian mind — to reject the fantasy will be hard enough. Convincing two may be impossible.”

“Let me go, too!”

Every head in the room whipped around to look at Carter, and all of them seemed ready to shake their heads no at once.

“It makes sense,” he said, hurrying to overcome their resistance to the idea. “I’m linked to both of them through the Daat Kyashar, which may be a serious advantage, and if anyone can get through to Cat Grant, it’s me. It was just us for the longest time, and there are only two heartbeats she knows better than her own.” He puffed himself up, a determined frown etching itself into his features. “One of them’s mine.”

After a long moment of consideration, Alex sighed. “He’s right. It does make sense.”

Hank bristled. “I don’t like it.”

Eliza scoffed. “No one likes it,” she said, “but it may be the only chance we have. We have to consider it, at least. What choice do we have?”

The silence that followed answered her question succinctly.

“How’s going to kill us all,” said Alex flatly.

Maggie winced. “At least she’ll be alive. That’s the point, right?”

“Don’t count your chickens just yet, Detective Sawyer,” growled Hank. “We don’t know this plan will work.”

Alex rounded on him. “But we have to try!” she cried. “You said we protect them ‘no matter what.’ This option falls into that category, whether we want it to or not.” She scrubbed at her forehead, fighting the exhaustion nibbling at the edges of her consciousness. “The choices won’t all be easy ones. That’s not how life works.” She took a deep breath, then looked up at her mother. “Let’s do it. As soon as Morgan gets back—”

“We’re here!” said Morgan breathlessly as he pushed an overloaded cart through the door. Turner followed him in. “We’re here. Sorry. I ran into Turner in the hall, and she thought there might be some useful tech in the stuff we seized from Maxwell Lord when we took him into custody.” He gestured at two banker’s boxes holding rows of red-topped chain of evidence bags. They were lined up smartly, like little soldiers. “She was right.”
“Wait — you guys have Max Lord?” asked Maggie, shocked. Alex shot her a look but ignored the question.

“Good thinking, Turner,” she said to the nurse. “I’m assigning you two to my mother. Solis, too. Vasquez, go wake the good doctor, would you? I know she’s only had a couple of hours of sleep, but it’ll have to do.”

“On my way, ma’am,” said Vasquez, already jogging out the door.

“When Solis gets here, the four of you will work on the VR setup,” continued Alex. “We’ll need two independent connections. I want Carter to be able to bail out the second he’s in danger. He can’t be tied to me. Understood?”

Morgan nodded sharply. “Understood,” he said. He started unboxing the tech on the cart, answering Eliza’s rapid-fire questions as best as he could.

Alex looked at Carter grimly. “Did you eat?” she asked him.

“Two cheeseburgers and some onion rings,” he answered. “Gatorade to drink, for hydration.”

“And how much sleep have you had in the last twenty-four hours?”

“About forty-five minutes or so. But I don’t feel tired, Aunt Alex! I don’t.” He looked around furtively and lowered his voice. “It might be because… you know…”

“Yeah,” said Alex. “I know.” She pinned him with a hard glare. “If I let you do this, if I let you go with me to break the spell this bastard has your mothers under, you have to promise me you will do exactly what I say when I say it.” She pointed at him. “Without question. No ifs, ands, or buts. Clear?”

Carter gulped again. “Clear, Aunt Alex,” he said, and his voice sounded stronger than he expected it to. “No ifs, ands, or buts.”

“Good,” she grumbled, and the tension in her body seemed to recede a little. She pulled Carter into her arms and hugged him tightly. “If anything ever happened to you…” She clutched him a little tighter for just a second, then released him, ducking down to look him in the eye. “I wasn’t kidding back there. Your mom is going to kill me when she finds out about this.” She chuckled weakly. “Both of them, knowing my luck. So I’m ordering you to be careful, okay?”

“Ma’am, yes, ma’am,” said Carter, throwing a sharp salute.

Alex grinned at him tiredly, then looked around the room, seeing the gurney he’d slept on earlier pushed against the wall, out of the way. “Look,” she said, nodding to it, “I don’t care if you sleep, but I want you to rest at least. It will be a while until we get the interface working. Meditate, play Tetris on your mom’s phone, sleep if you can — whatever you need to do to prepare. Okay? I’ll come get you when we’re ready.”

“Sure,” said Carter, acquiescing instantly. Then he looked down at his feet, adding quietly, “Thanks for letting me go with you, Aunt Alex.”

“Kid, there is no one I would rather have at my side,” she said, lifting his chin to look at him again. “Go. We’ll be ready sooner than you think.”

Carter grinned at her and made his way to the gurney in the corner. When she was satisfied he was comfortable, Alex turned to Maggie, jerking her chin toward the door. “Can I see you outside for a
Maggie followed her through the automatic door and down the hall, arms crossed over her chest. The navy blue scrubs she was wearing were more comfortable than her dress had been, but she wished she had some jeans or her leather jacket. Something with a little more substance. “What is it?” she asked. Alex’s face was a storm of doubt and darkness.

“I know my boss, okay?” said Alex, eyes darting over her shoulder to make sure they weren’t being watched. “If he thinks we’re in trouble while we’re plugged into that thing, he’s gonna pull us out, whether we’ve saved Cat and Kara or not—”

“Alex—”

Alex stepped closer to Maggie. “That’s fine for Carter; let Hank pull him out at the first sign of trouble. But not me, okay? Don’t give up on me, even if it looks bad. Hold him off as long as you can — until the very last second, Maggie. Promise me.”

Maggie searched Alex’s eyes. She knew what Alex was trying to say — that she had to run this race to the very end and her boss might not understand where the line was. He might jump the gun and pull her out too soon. The fact Alex trusted her with that line — one that could easily mean the difference between life and death — both terrified Maggie and filled her to brimming with hope.

She darted forward and cupped Alex’s face in her hands, kissing her deeply, desperately, until she saw starbursts behind her eyes. When she finally pulled away, she pressed her forehead against Alex’s and tried to catch her breath. “The very last second,” she whispered. “I promise.”

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Three hours later, exhausted but hopeful, Eliza looked down at her eldest daughter where she lay on the gurney they’d placed next to Kara. She held a VR headset in her hands. Solis and Turner stood with Carter where he lay next to Cat. Solis held a matching headset.

“Once we engage the power source, the connection will be instantaneous,” said Eliza, addressing both Carter and Alex. “You’ll experience some dizziness and blurred vision while your brains adjust, but as soon as they do, you’ll be able to see and interact with your environment in real time.”

Alex looked up at her mother, one eyebrow cocked high on her forehead. “Is this gonna work?”

Eliza glanced at Carter, stiff and uncertain, but stoic as Solis and Turner fitted the headset over his eyes and ears. “I hope so,” she said quietly as she did the same for Alex. “I’m entrusting what’s left of my family to it.”

Alex took a deep breath at that and reached for Maggie’s hand just as the goggles made everything go dark.

“I’m here,” said the detective, jockeying for position between Eliza and the tech set up, grasping Alex’s hand tightly. Looking at Eliza sheepishly, she added, “I’m sorry, Dr. Danvers—”

Eliza shook her head and smiled. “Don’t be. Hold onto her.” To Alex, she said, “Ready, sweetheart?”

Alex turned her head toward where Carter lay. “Ready, kid?” she called.

Unseen, Carter gave her an awkward thumbs up. “Ready, dude,” he replied gamely.
Alex nodded once, then set her mouth in a grim line. “Do it,” she said.

Eliza leaned over and kissed Alex’s cheek. “Sweet dreams, honey,” she whispered. Then she looked up at Solis and nodded. They pressed both power buttons simultaneously and the headsets hummed to life.

White light burned into the back of Alex’s brain and she heard a high-pitched whine that blotted out every other sound, growing in volume until she thought her skull would crack. Then light and sound both disappeared with a zap, and Alex gasped, sitting up in a panic. She regretted the move immediately. The world spun around her in a sickening angle and her insides sloshed. She leaned forward and swallowed the bile at the back of her throat, cradling her head in her hands until the dizziness began to fade. Only then did she feel capable of assessing her status.

The first thing she saw when she opened her eyes was Carter flat on his back in the grass next to her. “Carter!” she whispered, crawling to him. His eyes fluttered open when she reached him, and she helped him to sit up. “Slowly, kiddo,” she cautioned. “Mom wasn’t kidding about the dizziness.”

Carter groaned and rolled onto his side. He tucked himself into the fetal position and panted like a puppy until his nausea passed. When he felt better, he pushed himself upright. “Now I know how Harry felt the first time he apparated,” he whispered shakily, still a little pale. “Where are we?”

Alex shrugged as she looked around. Prairie stretched away from them like an endless grassy sea, and to their right was a series of outbuildings, all whitewashed and blazing in the sun. Chickens scratched in the dirt of a gravel drive, and rose bushes in full bloom lined a white picket fence. A flagpole glinted in the sunlight and the Stars and Stripes snapped in the breeze.

Just then, music struck up behind them, and they both turned to find themselves staring up at a massive farmhouse with a wrap-around deck. Stunned by the sight, it took Alex’s brain a few seconds to catch up to what she was hearing, but when it did, she began to shake her head. “Oh no. No, no, no,” she said, scrambling to her feet. When she knew she wasn’t going to keel over again, she reached down to haul Carter up with her.

“What is it, Aunt Alex?” he asked. Then he, too, heard the music. “Here Comes the Bride,” being played expertly by a string quartet. “Oh shit,” he said, looking at Alex with wide, horrified eyes.

Because they hadn’t just shown up on his mothers’ wedding day.

They’d shown up at the wedding.

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Continued in Nightmare (part 4)

Chapter End Notes

There is dialogue in this segment that is taken directly from the episode "For the Girl who has Everything."
Unfortunately, the story credit for this particular episode goes to Andrew "I'm a RAPEY MONSTER" Kreisberg.

So, there's his fucking credit. He can choke on it.

Ted Sullivan and Derek Simon wrote the teleplay.

Caitlin Parrish was the executive story editor.
It all came to a head for Cat when she and her father reached the steps at the edge of the porch. Her heart thundered. She couldn’t catch her breath and she shook all over.

“Daddy, stop,” she whispered, fingers squeezing his forearm. She swallowed hard to push back her nausea and stared straight ahead, unblinking. She knew Kara was already standing at the altar — knew Kara’s parents had walked her there, seemingly thrilled to give their daughter away to this haphazard, ill-conceived partnership. Cat wondered why she was the only one who could see what a terrible idea this whole thing was, for Kara especially. Complementary personalities and phenomenal sex could only take them so far, right? There had to be more to a successful marriage than just a good start, and Cat didn’t think she had more than that in her.

“Kitty?” asked Jefferson, stopping alongside his daughter. “Are you alright?” When he felt Cat trembling, he chuckled softly and patted her hand on his arm. “Nerves, eh?” He shook his head. “Like father, like daughter,” he mused. “Why don’t we take it one step at a time? I promise you, everything’s going to be fine. When you see Kara standing at that altar, it will all make sense. Trust me.”

Cat nodded, though she didn’t believe a word her father said. She’d been a daddy’s girl all her life, indulged and encouraged by a man who’d never had a single unbiased thought about her. Her father was comforting her, nothing more. Except that he was right.

Every step Cat took felt like she was clawing her way through muck and mire until she reached the head of the aisle, looking up when she heard a delighted gasp.

Kara, grinning like the lovestruck fool she was, stood at the altar in a vintage lemon-yellow dress with a full, pleated skirt and matching Mary Janes. She was as bright and as beautiful as a ray of sunshine and seeing her, Cat’s whole world righted itself in an instant.

The string quartet must have played “Here Comes the Bride” and her father must have escorted her down the aisle, just as planned, but all Cat saw were Kara’s sky-blue eyes and Kara’s widening smile. All Cat heard was her blood rushing in her ears. All Cat knew was that she was getting closer and closer to her dream. Just like her father had promised, everything suddenly made perfect sense.

When Jefferson handed her off to Kara, Cat, dazed, barely managed to give him a simple kiss on the cheek, hardly acknowledging him at all.

“Cat?” asked Kara, reaching up to cup Cat’s cheek in her hand. “What is it?”

At first, Cat was only able to manage a single shake of her head. Then she hiccuped back a sob, and whispered, “I get to love you. Me. Selfish, opinionated, stubborn me.” She shook her head again and caught a tear on the crook of her index finger before it could ruin her makeup. “I prayed for this, but I don’t think I ever believed those prayers would come true.”

“Oh, Cat…” whispered Kara, and she leaned forward to kiss the woman she loved.
Astra, forgotten on the altar above them, quickly put a stop to that. She cleared her throat sharply and narrowed her eyes. “I know you’re eager to kiss your lovely Cat, Little One, but we haven’t reached that part of the ceremony yet,” she teased. “You must hold your horses — or whatever other load-bearing livestock is appropriate. I confess I don’t understand many of the sayings of Kansas.”

The guests all chuckled while Kara blushed apple-red. Cat took Kara’s hand and smiled at her shyly, her own cheeks pinker than they had been.

“Let us begin,” continued Astra, “so these blushing brides aren’t kept waiting any longer than necessary.”

“Aunt Astra!” protested Kara, turning even redder.

Astra laughed, and then reached out to touch Kara’s head like she might have when Kara was a child. She blinked back tears, then looked out at the assemblage.

“We are gathered here today to celebrate the joining of these two hearts, to bear witness to the beauty of their love, and to lift them into the light of these words, which unite them today, and for all time, in partnership, companionship, and as each other’s deepest love and support.

“If there is anyone present who can show just cause why this couple should not be joined in this way, speak now.” Astra swept her gaze over the guests, then added a menacing, “If you dare.”

More chuckles answered her, but no one spoke.

Nodding once, Astra looked down at the tiny book in her hands and opened her mouth to continue when a voice rang out from the end of the aisle.

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“Kara! Wait!”

Alex and Carter skidded to a stop at the end of the aisle as two dozen heads spun around to look at them, radiating various levels of shock and outrage. Noticing they were hopelessly outnumbered, Alex put her hand out, scooting Carter behind her — and smirked when she saw Kara do the same with Cat.

Hadn’t she and Kara already danced this dance once before? Looking more closely, though, Alex thought something was different about this Cat. She was younger than Alex had been expecting, and a quick, startled glance at the wedding party’s clothing and hairstyles confirmed her suspicions.

If Kara had taken Kal’s place in every way, including when he’d arrived on Earth, then Kara and Cat would look closer in age, would have met at a very different time in their lives. The Cat Grant of Kal’s timeline worked at the Daily Planet in Metropolis. This wasn’t the present.

“Who are you?” asked Kara, eyebrows knotted in a frown. Her hand, fingers splayed, lay flattened against Cat’s belly, and Kara’s parents silently flanked the women, standing to either side of them like pillars of stone.

Alex clenched her jaw and scanned the crowd, tracking everyone’s movements. She wished she had a weapon — and sucked in a breath when her favorite kryptonite handgun appeared holstered on her hip.

“Okay,” she muttered to herself. “I wasn’t expecting that.”
The appearance of the weapon caused a ripple of apprehension in the guests around her, and one man sitting in the front row rose out of his seat, a frown etched deeply into his bearded features.

“Answer me,” ordered Kara, her voice low and measured. “Who are you?”

Alex raised both hands in front of her. “Kara, it’s me,” she said, taking a step toward her. “It’s Alex. Your sister.”

Kara shook her head once. “I have no sister,” she said, but her eyes flicked to her mother standing at her side, and Alex saw confusion flash across Kara’s face.

“You don’t, not here, but you’re not from here, Kara. You’re suffering the effects of a creature called the Black Mercy—”

“The Black Mercy?” said Astra from her place at the altar. “Impossible! They were destroyed with Krypton.”

“In our world, one survived. It attacked Kara in her apartment last night, creating this illusion to incapacitate her.” She nodded toward where Cat stood behind Kara. “Cat’s affected, too. Because of the Daat Kyashar.”

Astra’s eyes went wide and Kara looked askance at Alex’s unfamiliar words, but it was Alura who acted, stepping forward, bristling. “Lies!” she spat. “It’s all lies.” She turned to Kara. “I don’t know who or what this creature is, but what she says cannot be true. The Daat Kyashar is ancient. It hasn’t been seen on Krypton in generations.” She glanced at Cat and sneered. “Even if it had, the bond would not be possible with a human.”

The way she said the word human temporarily took the focus off the interlopers.

“Hey!” said Cat, pushing her way around Kara to confront Alura. “What’s wrong with being human?”

Apparently recognizing what that look on Cat’s face meant, Carter reached out to stop her.

“Mom, don’t!” he cried, and those words brought everything to a screeching standstill, with all eyes now on him. “Shit,” he muttered, looking from face to flabbergasted face. “Not again.”

“‘Mom?’” Cat repeated, looking at the boy with wide, disbelieving eyes. A thousand different emotions tumbled across her face. The boy’s name — and she was sure it was his — swelled inside her like a storm surge, solid and unstoppable.

“Carter?”

Those two simple syllables shattered the world around Cat. In the same instant the illusion of her youth cracked and fell away, her father surged forward, his face splitting, mouth gaping around a shrieked word.

“NO!”

Before anyone could move, Jefferson’s hand shot out toward the boy and kept going, long beyond where it should have stopped. His arm stretched and elongated, transforming, turning rope-like and dark green, like a vine.

The sight paralyzed everyone except for Kara. In the blink of an eye, she was between them, intercepting the grotesque thing before it reached Carter. As she grappled with it, Carter ducked
around Kara, yelling for Cat.

Cat rushed toward him. She dropped her bouquet and it fell to the ground, changing from innocent roses and peonies to puck-shaped green monstrosities with angry purple spikes rising from their dark centers. The flowers in the milking buckets on the altar and in the jugs lining the aisle all mutated, too, undulating and hissing menacingly.

Panicked wedding guests fled, darting away in every direction, screaming and upending chairs as they went. Ominous clouds rolled in to blot out the sun and a cold wind whipped up around them, adding to the chaos.

Before Cat and Carter could reach each other, two more tentacles shot out. One wound around Cat’s throat, and one wound around Carter’s chest, yanking them further apart.

“Carter!” Alex shouted, and she ran toward him, unholstering her gun as she went. “Hold still!”

Carter obeyed and stopped struggling. He fell backward, dead-weight, and Alex drew a bead on the tentacle holding him, firing a single shot. The green bolt struck true, severing the appendage, and the man in the front row snatched it back. His squeals of pain and outrage were deafening.

Ignoring him, Alex covered the remaining distance between her and Carter in a daring slide across the grass. She tossed her gun aside and gripped the piece of tentacle still wrapped around his chest, but the thing seemed to have a life of its own. It constricted tighter, squeezing the air out of Carter’s lungs, and the cut-end rose up, turning toward Alex.

Its flesh blistered, then blossomed into a horrific flower, each petal lined with gleaming crimson thorns. The whole thing reared back like a snake and struck at Alex, petals snapping closed like the jaws of a beast.

It caught her on its first try.

---

Eliza Danvers never stopped moving. She began her rounds with Carter, focusing primarily on his EEG readings and his temperature. She was worried about brain damage with him, and also temperature regulation. Carter had zero insulation on his wiry frame and Eliza had blankets at the ready, should they be needed. She lifted his hand in hers and pressed it to her cheek. So far, Carter’s vitals were holding steady, trooper that he was.

Cat, though… Eliza focused her attention on Cat’s blood pressure and respiration, mindful the CEO would likely decompensate far more quickly than Kara would though her vitals were falling at roughly the same rate. Turner, at Eliza’s behest, had fluids, oxygen, and pressors on hand, and was ready to sweep into action at the first sign of any rapid decline, but that didn’t ease Eliza’s worry much.

She checked Cat’s pupillary response, then let her fingertips drift across Cat’s forehead in a sad caress. All Eliza knew of Cat Grant was what she had seen on TV, or what she’d gleaned from the anecdotes a besotted Kara had told her over the years. Eliza desperately wanted to get to know the real Cat — the one who had raised such an intelligent and kind son, the one who had stolen her younger daughter’s heart. She prayed she’d get that chance.

Kara’s respirations had fallen enough that Eliza had put her on oxygen already. Just a mask to supplement her superhero daughter’s increased needs, but it was a stark reminder of what was at stake. The sunbed was doing its part to replenish what the Black Mercy drained away, but those
losses would eventually overwhelm what the UV light was able to provide. Once they reached that point, Eliza knew there wouldn’t be much anyone could do except to keep Kara comfortable until the end came.

That thought made Eliza’s heart clench. People who didn’t know better often assumed Kara’s superpowers meant she was invulnerable. Only a few people knew how fragile she really was, and most of them were in this room. There were a hundred different things that could compromise Supergirl, and Eliza lived in fear someone would discover one of them and use it to bring Kara down. But this… She hadn’t counted on something like this. It wasn’t fair.

She leaned down and kissed Kara’s forehead, whispering, “Don’t you dare give up, Kara. We need you.”

When she reached Alex’s bed, Eliza stopped first to squeeze Maggie’s hand, lending the young detective a little support and encouragement. She still didn’t know exactly what was going on between Maggie and her oldest daughter, but it didn’t seem all that mysterious. Maggie held onto Alex’s hand like it was a lifeline. In fact, she hadn’t left Alex’s side since the moment the VR headset had been activated. Clearly, she was here to stay no matter what. Eliza approved of that wholeheartedly.

Especially since Eliza worried about Alex more than the others. Her sarcastic, headstrong daughter was the one most likely to charge at the deadliest thing in the room. She would be first in the fray and the last to leave it, making sure everyone else was out of danger before thinking of her own safety. She would never give up. Not on Kara. Not on Cat. Not on anyone.

Alex, with no superpowers to speak of save the hugeness of her heart, was Eliza’s hero and Eliza had put her right in the middle of a battlefield — one no one else could reach.

Failing Alex now was Eliza’s worst nightmare.

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Hank watched Eliza make her rounds and finally met her at Alex’s bed on her third pass.

“Is this working, Dr. Danvers?” he asked, without preamble.

Eliza looked up from Alex’s EEG readings and scowled.

“I hope so,” she said, flipping the pin-feed readout to the next page. She went back to reviewing it without another word.

Hank glowered at her. Alex’s safety was his responsibility, his highest priority. He disliked consigning her fate to unvetted science and wishful thinking.

“Is hope enough?” he grumbled.

Eliza pitched Alex’s EEG report back into its box and marched up to the man, standing toe to toe with him.

“Director Henshaw, as you well know, the four people lying here in this room are all that remains of my family,” she ground out. “Hope has to be enough because it’s all I have. Between tech cobbled together out of other people’s experiments and a military medical lab that appears to be powered mostly by stale testosterone, I’m working miracles here, and I know it. If you don’t, you haven’t been paying attention.”
Morgan gaped at Eliza from his spot next to Carter, while Maggie and Turner grinned.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me,” Eliza continued, her voice saccharine sweet, “I have actual work to do.” She turned and walked away, glancing over her shoulder as she went. “You can go back to holding up that wall or whatever it is you’ve been doing.”

Before Hank could respond, Maggie cried out from her place at Alex’s bedside. Alex had begun to convulse, and Maggie was trying to hold her down. “Dr. Danvers!”

Eliza flew to Alex’s side just as several alarms began beeping on various monitors. The room exploded into movement around her. “Report!” she yelled.

“Carter’s heart rate is up — 120 and climbing. Respirations have increased, too, but they seem to be labored,” said Morgan. His eyes flicked over Cat’s readings next. “Same for Ms. Grant!”

“And Kara?” asked Eliza. She glanced at Alex’s readings before heaving herself over Alex’s legs, trying to keep her eldest from hurting herself.

“Also same,” said Solis. “Only Agent Danvers is experiencing seizures.”

Eliza swore. “They’ve made contact. The Black Mercy is fighting back—”

“It’s killing her!” said Hank, taking a step forward. “Pull her out. Now!”

Eliza ignored him and began giving orders of her own. “Keep your eyes on the Grants’ O₂ sats and ph levels,” she called. “Be ready with masks if they show signs of hyperventilation.” She caught Maggie’s eye. “You with me, Detective?”

“Whatsoever you need,” said Maggie.

“Hold her — keep her from injuring herself if you can.” She looked at Hank. “Director, you hold Alex’s legs.”

Hank shook his head vigorously as he took another step forward. “I told you to pull her out,” he barked, reaching for the headset on Alex’s head. “It’s over—”

Maggie intercepted Hank’s hands. “I can’t let you do that,” she said. Alex writhed on the gurney below her, but Maggie kept her eyes trained on Hank, stepping between him and the woman she was certain she was falling in love with. “I know you’re worried about Alex, sir, but I’m begging you to give her more time.”

“Her safety is my responsibility.” Hank jerked his hands out of Maggie’s grip.

“Yours?” scoffed Eliza, still struggling to hold Alex still. “Like you kept her father safe?”

Vasquez winced, but Hank ignored Eliza. “This is on my head and if I say we’re putting an end to this, then that’s what we’re doing.”

“She asked me to stop you!”

Hank frowned. “What?”

Maggie took a step toward him. “She knew this might happen, that you might pull her out the minute it looked bad for her. You have to understand! She came to me because she wants to save Kara.”

“You don’t think I want that? They’re family to me, both of them, but—”
“If you pull Alex out of there before she has a chance to save her sister, she will never look at you the same way. You know that.”

Hank’s jaws ground together. “That’s a risk I’m willing to take,” he said, and he shoved Maggie aside, flinching when he felt his sidearm slip out of the holster on his hip. He whirled around to reach for it — and found himself staring down its barrel.

“Are you willing to take this one?” asked Eliza, clicking the safety off the pistol and widening her stance. “Because I’m betting you have an idea who taught me to shoot, and why, and I’m not letting you take one step closer to my daughter.” She glared at him with her darkening blue eyes. “Not. One. More.”

---

“Aunt Alex!” croaked Carter, redoubling his struggle to help free his aunt from the tentacle now latched onto her shoulder. He tried prying one of the fanged petals away from her body, but it wouldn’t budge.

“Let go!” she ordered, hissing as teeth sank further into the meat and bone of her. Carter did as she said, and Alex flailed for her gun in the grass, searching blindly for its comforting weight. When she found it, she gripped the tentacle tightly with one hand and pulled the trigger twice with the other. At point blank range, the bolts caused significantly more damage and the petals shriveled and turned black, falling away.

Alex dropped her gun again and reached for the rest of the tentacle cinching tighter around Carter’s chest. She ignored her torn uniform and the blood running down her arm, and grappled with the thing, grunting as she tried to pull it off him.

Helpless, his own efforts failing miserably, Carter finally had an idea.

“Aunt Alex, dig in!” he cried, pointing at the grass beneath her feet. “Don’t let go!”

Unsure what her nephew had in mind but trusting him, Alex did as he commanded, digging the heel of one boot into the dirt beneath her feet. She braced herself.

Carter watched until she was settled, then rolled away from her as hard as he could, using his momentum to unwind the remainder of the tentacle and flee its grip.

As soon as Carter was free, Alex tossed the grasping, snapping appendage into a patch of open grass and fired on it three times. It stopped moving and shrank, black with char.

Carter gave a short cheer. Then movement caught his eye.

“Mom!” he shouted, and he took off running for Cat.

Swearing, Alex took off after him.

---

Cat clawed at the tentacle around her throat, desperate to breathe, fighting it as it pulled her off balance. Bursts of white light obscured her vision and her lungs burned.

She didn’t understand what was happening or where she was, exactly. Hadn’t she been in her kitchen, talking to Carter—
Carter, she thought, looking around wildly. Memories that weren’t quite her own came flooding back to her — the boy’s voice she’d heard that morning, the split second of terror she’d felt hearing the urgency in his tone and how the moment had ended so quickly, leaving her bewildered and unsettled. She’d felt out of sync after that, and realized now she’d never quite recovered, had never quite synced back up.

*Because it wasn’t real,* she thought. *Which means…*

This life… Kara… Their wedding…

Her father.

None of it was real.

Cat looked at Jefferson Buchanan Grant, at his face distorted by alien rage, at his arms that terminated in long, green vines, and opened her mouth to scream in terror and in grief, but…

No sound came.

*It would be so easy to let go,* Cat thought. To drift away into the nothingness swallowing her up. She kept clawing at the tentacle around her throat but her fingers found no purchase, no gap to exploit, no weakness to turn to her advantage. An inferno raged in her lungs, and red-speckled blackness crowded her sight.

Hearing as sharp as ever, though, she heard Carter cry out for her. She turned toward the sound and saw her son, her beautiful boy, running toward her.

Carter, she sighed in her mind, wondering how she ever could have forgotten him. Then a color — a glimpse of yellow through encroaching clouds — brought another memory. Her heart, her love, her rock, standing at an altar in a dress made of sunshine.

With the last of her strength, she mouthed a single word.

“Kara…”

---

“Cat!” screamed Kara, and she let the tentacle she was fighting go, running toward the woman she loved. The wind howled around her, and an unholy screech filled the air. Kara turned her head to see Alura rise up behind her, growing and changing before her eyes. Her mother twisted and thrashed, flesh splitting, turning inside out. Tentacles burst forth from the writhing mess, and a gaping maw lined with razor-sharp teeth roared.

“We will not let you go!”

The Jefferson Grant body and the Zor-El body collapsed into themselves, coiling and squirming and contorting until they, too, erupted into terrifying masses of tentacles and teeth, their screeching, discordant voices joining Alura’s in a nightmare chorus.

“You belong to us! We will never let you go!”

“No! Mother!” Kara cried. “Father!” She stopped, torn for a moment between what had become of her parents and what was happening to Cat.

Seeing the love of her life beginning to flag in her fight, Kara made the only choice she could: she
continued toward Cat, toward her future, and turned her back on all the rest. A twisting creeper caught Kara’s ankle, knocking her off balance for half a second until she ripped herself free. She shook the remnants off and continued onward. Then more tentacles came, and more, and more after that. She would free herself from one and three would take its place.

Kara growled and pushed herself harder, clawing her way forward step by step. She saw Cat start to weaken, saw her going limp, and she screamed in frustrated rage. The tentacles never let up, coming faster and faster and from all directions until they finally overwhelmed her, stringing her up like a fly caught in a web.

“No!” she wailed. “Caaaaaaaaat!”

---

A split second of stunned silence paralyzed the lab around Eliza Danvers until Vasquez shattered it by drawing her own weapon, grimly aiming it at the scientist. Maggie pulled hers a half-second later, training it on the DEO agent.

Hank put his hands up slowly. “Everyone calm down,” he said.

“Do I look unhinged to you, Director Henshaw?” asked Eliza.

Hank’s hands curled into fists. “Dammit, Alex is dying!” he yelled. “Let me save her!”

“Like you saved my husband all those years ago?” Eliza’s voice was quiet but hard. “You failed Jeremiah in that godforsaken hellhole, and I’m damn sure not going to let you make the same mistake now.”

Hank shook his head. “That was different — I was — this isn’t—” He relaxed his shoulders and scrubbed the back of his neck with one hand, dropping the other to his side. “I’m not who you think I am, Eliza,” he said quietly. “I’m not the same man.” He meant that literally, of course. He wasn’t the Hank Henshaw who had betrayed Jeremiah Danvers in that jungle, but Eliza didn’t know that and it certainly wasn’t the right time to explain it to her.

“Maybe not,” conceded Eliza, and she reined in her intensity a notch or two. “But I can’t let you risk everything we’ve done, everything we’re trying to do, because you’re afraid.”

“I’m not afraid,” said Hank, bristling. The knowing looks cast his direction told him how weak the lie was. He slumped against a nearby cart. “She’s more than just another agent to me,” he admitted quietly. “They both are.”

“That may be true, sir,” said Maggie, risking a glance in his direction, “but Dr. Danvers is their mother. In every way that matters, she outranks you.”

“Give Alex more time,” pleaded Eliza. “That’s all we’re asking.”

Hank looked up at her, pain in his eyes. “And if her time runs out?”

Eliza relaxed her stance and stood up straight. She re-engaged the safety on the Director’s weapon and turned it around to hand it back to him. “I trust Alex with my life,” she said. “I know you do, too. But do you trust her with her own?”

Hank cut his eyes at Vasquez, who stood down. He reholstered his pistol and smirked as Maggie did the same, flicking up the hem of her top to reveal a clamshell holster nestled in the small of her back. He’d wondered where she’d managed to hide a weapon under borrowed scrubs. “ Doesn’t look like I
have much of a choice,” he noted.

Vasquez snickered. “That’s the first smart thing you’ve said all day,” she said, and then she gulped. “Um, sir,” she added, coming to parade attention.

“As you were,” said Hank, raising one eyebrow at her and shaking his head.

---

Carter skidded to a stop in front of his mother and grabbed the tentacle around her neck, pulling with all his might. Her eyes were closed, her arms hung limply at her sides, and Carter couldn’t tell whether or not she was even breathing. He was terrified he’d gotten there too late.

“Mom!” he yelled. “Mom, hold on!”

He frantically took stock of the situation, then, using both hands and all the strength he had, he grabbed the tentacle where it curled around his mother’s throat and twisted it, grunting with the effort. Buoyed by the give he felt, Carter clenched his teeth and dug in, growling and straining, face contorted with desperation until he finally tore the thing in half. A screech of outrage emanated from one of the writhing masses across the yard, and the broken appendage slithered away. Carter stared at the gore on his hands, shocked at what he’d done, but he recovered quickly and set about unwinding the shorter piece from around his mother’s neck.

“Mom, wake up!” he begged. His struggle with the flailing end of the tentacle brought back his panic. “I can’t do this alone! Help me!”

Cat’s eyes fluttered twice then opened, but barely.

Carter counted it as a victory anyway and pumped his fist in the air. “That’s it, Mom, stay with—”

Another tentacle, much bigger than the last, wrapped itself around Carter’s chest, cutting off his words of encouragement and ripping him away from Cat. She reached out to him weakly, anguish filling what he could see of her eyes. Then she looked behind him and her anguish became abject terror.

Carter wrenched his head around and felt his heart stop in his chest. Kara, fighting, clawing her way toward them step by step, was losing. The creatures attacking her were like a Hydra, replacing each tentacle she ripped away with five new ones. They coiled around her and lifted her into the air. Eventually, they overwhelmed her and when Kara realized she was trapped, she cried out for Cat.

“Mom, it’s not real,” Carter said, turning back to look at his mother. “I know it looks real, but the Black Mercy plugged itself into Kara’s brain and took it over somehow. Because of the Daat Kyashar, it spread to you, too. It’s using your dreams and memories to create this place, but none of it is real, do you understand? You can reject it!” The tentacle around his chest cinched tight and he felt like his ribs might crack. “You can take us home,” he gasped, stretching his fingers toward her, trying to touch her. “It can’t hurt us if you don’t believe it’s real.”

*Home?* thought Cat, and an image of her office at CatCo rose in her mind, with its collection of flickering television sets and its glass walls and its serene grandeur. With its gold-toned accents and its opulent bar and its—

She blinked.

—and its Kara, standing there with a hand on Carter’s shoulder, wearing one of her inevitable cardigans, blushing pink and fiddling with those goddamned useless glasses. Her grin was all
‘Sunny’ Danvers and she reached out her hand.

_Home_ , Cat sighed, and the word felt as solid as a brick in a world made of distorted reflections. She reached for Kara’s hand and the cacophony around her faded into a blinding white silence.

A moment later she inhaled sharply on her gurney and her eyes shot open. She was moving before she even realized where she was and she sat bolt upright, a frown crashing down over her eyes.

Morgan yelped and flinched away from her, startled, and Eliza and Maggie, keeping a close eye on Alex, turned to see what was going on.

“Carter?” Cat paid no attention to anything else around her, intent on only one goal. “Carter?” she repeated, sounding a little more desperate until her eyes lit upon him in the bed next to her.

Carter impatiently shoved the headset off his head, ignoring it when it clattered to the floor. “Mom!” He pulled himself upright and found himself engulfed by one of his mother’s crushing hugs. “Mom, I’m okay!” He threw his arms around her and hugged her back, trying not to hurt her with his stupid cast. “I’m okay,” he repeated, and he patted her back awkwardly.

Cat clung to her son and breathed him in, felt him concrete and safe in her arms. When the shock and confusion of her transition into consciousness began to fade, the Daat Kyashar flickered back into existence in her mind, slowly at first, and then hungrily. She wanted to laugh, delighted by the reassuring tattoo of Carter’s heartbeat beating beneath her own again. It confirmed for her where she was in the world, and where he was, and she would have cried with relief except for the shadow.

Dark and impenetrable, an immense gloom loomed in Cat’s mind, and she recognized it for what it was immediately. The Daat Kyashar had only been able to repair her connection to her son. The one between herself and Kara was still inert, bleak and somber, and the edges of it were stitched with dread.

Disquieting images boiled up from the bottom of Cat’s brain and danced across the darkness. An interrupted wedding on the Kansas prairie. Families reunited only to be torn apart. Memories becoming monsters.

Kara’s screams.

Cat’s head whipped around and she barely registered the unfamiliar room around her.

“Kara,” she breathed, and she gingerly lowered herself to the floor, ignoring the shock of the cold linoleum against her bare feet.

Carter scrambled off his gurney and hurried to his mother’s side to steady her. She clutched his hand and took a step toward Kara where she lay on what appeared to be a technologically-advanced tanning bed. Cat tried to absorb the scene before her, tried to make sense of the puzzle and all its disjointed pieces, but nothing mattered more than Kara, prone and unconscious, wearing an oxygen mask and plugged into so many machines. Cat forced herself to look at the hideous creature attached to her from shoulders to knees even though her eyes wanted to slide past its unnatural gruesomeness.

“Kara,” she said again, and she surged forward, taking Kara’s hand in her own. Immediately, a slurry of jumbled emotions and images sluiced into Cat’s mind and she gasped, frozen to the spot until they subsided and she was able to tear her gaze away from them.

She looked around for someone she recognized, for _anyone _with authority, and was relieved when she saw Director Henshaw.
“Send me back,” she ordered. Hank's wasn't the only startled face in the room.

“What?” cried Morgan, but Hank lifted a hand to quell the doctor’s alarm.

“Miss Grant—” he began, but she cut him off, her voice unyielding.

“It’s not a request, Director Henshaw. You know who I am and what I can do. And before you lie about what is and is not under your control, I know you sent Carter after me.” Cat cast an imperious gaze around the room. “I’m sure these helpful men and women in lab coats aren’t here just to fluff pillows,” she said. “Send me back.”

“I can’t do that, Miss Grant,” said Hank. “I’m risking enough as it is.” He nodded at Alex where she lay on her gurney, body still twitching as she fought the monsters in Kara’s head. “Also, the last time we met, Kara was pretty clear on the consequences I would face if I were ever to put you or Carter in danger. Your request falls into that category.”

“Please,” Cat begged, her bravado falling away. “Please, you don’t understand. I have to go back. I have to let Kara know we’re okay, that there’s a way out and Carter and I found it. Right now all she knows is that we’re out of her reach, that she can’t save us. Believing that might kill her.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Eliza.

Cat turned toward the woman and forced herself not to react. Of course, she recognized Kara’s foster mother — she’d been following the woman’s career ever since discovering her existence — but this was not at all how she had imagined meeting her. Nor was it the time to make proper introductions.

“That thing,” she spat, indicating the Black Mercy, “spun a pretty little web of lies from our dreams and our memories, allowing the parents we lost to live again, gifting us time together we never had. Now that it's in danger of losing us, it's using our nightmares to lash out, to wound as it kills. Kara’s nightmares are about being unable to save the people she loves. If she believes she’s lost Carter and me, she’ll think she’s failed us.”

“Which is your nightmare,” said Eliza shrewdly.

Cat hesitated briefly, then nodded, tears filling her eyes. “You see why I can’t let that happen,” she whispered. “You have to send me back. Please...”

Eliza flew across the space between them, surprising Cat with a fierce embrace. Cat narrowly kept herself from pushing the woman away from her, but the instant she relaxed and allowed herself to accept the comfort Eliza was offering, Eliza whispered back, “What I see is why Kara loves you.” When she pulled away, she squeezed Cat’s shoulder. “But I agree with Director Henshaw; we can’t risk putting you in danger again.”

Eliza gazed at her oldest daughter, still shuddering on her gurney though the worst of the convulsions had finally subsided. “Alex will find a way to reach Kara,” she said softly, covering Alex’s hand with her own. “She won’t let us down.”

The utter conviction of Eliza’s words had the unique effect of jolting Cat out of the terror that had seized her heart. Eliza’s faith in Alex reminded Cat of the depth of her trust in Kara and all the unexpected joys that had come with it. She looked around the room, truly seeing it and the people in it for the first time. She didn’t recognize most of them but the few she did — Director Henshaw, Neves, that intense little butch agent that seemed to follow Alex around like a shadow — well, their presence in the midst of this crisis wasn’t at all surprising to her. Cat wondered if there wasn’t something even larger at play now that the Daat Kyashar had resurfaced in a living Kryptonian. If so,
she had a feeling she knew what to call it.

Surrendering the last of her worry, Cat took Eliza’s free hand in her own and gave it a squeeze. Eliza looked up at her, dismayed.

“El Mayara,” said Cat, by way of explanation.

Eliza swallowed the lump in her throat and nodded, squeezing Cat back. Before she could say anything in reply, though, Carter stepped forward and took his mother’s free hand in his own. He nodded at Cat then turned to find another hand to hold.

“El Mayara,” he said to Vasquez, reaching for her, and she flashed a grin at him before turning to find another empty hand.

Before long, the whole room was linked like a daisy chain around the Danvers sisters. Even Hank, stoic that he was, couldn’t refuse the offer of Maggie’s hand when she turned toward him, stumbling over the unfamiliar words.

“It means ‘Stronger Together,’” he translated for her. “It’s the motto of the House of El — Kara’s family on Krypton.”

“Looks like it works pretty well for her family here, too,” Maggie noted, looking around the room at all the hopeful, determined faces.

Alex had just about made it to Carter’s side when she saw both he and Cat fade out of the clearing.

“’Atta boy,” she muttered, grinning, but the desperate wail that erupted behind her wiped that grin off her face.

“NOOOOOO!” screamed Kara, and Alex turned to find her sister strung up between the three tentacled creatures, a prize they weren’t likely to give up easily. Kara stared at the spot where Cat and Carter had been, arms outstretched, her face a rictus of despair.

Alex instantly changed course and raised her weapon, firing in rapid succession, hoping to free Kara. The kryptonite bolts only seemed to piss off the monsters and a multitude of tentacles zinged across the yard to replace the ones Alex had severed.

“Kara!” she yelled, firing again. “This isn’t real! None of this is real!”

Kara took a shuddering breath and looked at Alex, haunted.

“They weren’t real!” she asked brokenly. “Cat and Carter—”

“—are safe, Kara. They’re safe and, trust me, they’re very real. They’re back at the med bay, and Cat’s probably reading Hank the riot act right now. This place,” she said, jerking her chin at the clearing, “these people and the monsters they’ve become — this isn’t real—”

“LIES! WE ARE ALL THAT’S LEFT TO YOU NOW! YOUR MATE IS DEAD, HER CHILD IS DEAD. WE ARE ALL THAT REMAIN!” The chorus of demonic voices rose to deafening levels, forcing Alex to cover her ears, but she couldn’t let Kara believe what they were saying.

“NO!” she screamed. “Kara, look at me! I’m your sister and I know what you’ve been through, how much you’ve lost, all the sacrifices you’ve made to be Supergirl, to be Kara Danvers on a planet that
is not your home. I know it’s been hard and lonely for you here, and I know how much you love Cat and Carter, and how much they love you back!” Tentacles shot out from the coiling masses, trying to stop her, trying to silence her, but Alex fought back.

“I know you would die to protect them, but I also know your secret — a secret you’ve never told anyone else. Do you remember? That night on the terrace, when you thought Sam Lane might somehow get his filthy hands on them?” Alex roared as more tentacles tried to rip her away from Kara. “I know you would kill for them, Kara!” she shouted. “That’s why I would never lie to you about them. They’re real and they’re safe and they’re waiting for you back home. And deep down, Kara, deep down you know that’s true!”

As the tentacles began to overwhelm Alex, she abandoned her gun and her fight altogether and thrust out her hands toward Kara instead, trying to reach her little sister, to touch her even though she was so far away.

“I can’t promise you they’ll always be there, but I promise I’ll never lie about where or how they are. Not to you. Not ever. Because you’re my sister and I love you. All I want — all I have ever wanted — is for you to be happy.”

“It isn’t real,” said Kara, looking around the ruined meadow with tears running down her face. When she found Alex’s eyes again, her gaze held the truth the creatures were so desperate to keep from her. “You came for me.”

“I always will,” promised Alex.

“Alex—” Kara stretched her fingers toward her sister, but couldn’t quite reach her.

“I got you!” said Alex, reaching back. “I got you!”

A buzzing white light enveloped them both.

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Alex came to in blackness and in silence and it took her a second to realize why she couldn’t see or hear anything. Panting, she shoved her headset off and bolted upright, turning to see Kara just where she’d left her, on the sunbed with the Black Mercy still attached. Cat and Carter, wide-eyed and pale, stood next to her mother, all three of them waiting for what Alex would say.

Unable to face them in her defeat, Alex turned toward Hank. “You pulled me out?” she asked shakily. Then she lowered herself off her gurney, taking a menacing step toward him. “How could you?”

When Hank didn’t answer her quickly enough, Alex turned to Maggie, accusations in her eyes. “I told you to stop him!” she cried, curling her hands into fists. “She was about to choose us! I told you to stop him! Why didn’t you stop him?”

“I did!” said Maggie, rushing forward to catch Alex as she sank to her knees. “Honey, I did. He didn’t touch you.”

“Then why did I come back?” she asked, and her voice was as plaintive and as heartbroken as a child’s.

“Because you did it, sweetheart!” said Eliza from Kara’s bedside. Everyone turned to look at her and she pointed to the Black Mercy, more specifically to its extremities which had begun to darken and shrink. “You did it! You convinced her.” They all watched as the creature shriveled up and
disengaged from Kara’s torso, slithering off of her and the bed like a beetle scuttling away into the
dark. It headed for the shadowy corner of the room, but only made it about two feet before it turned
bone white and died, seizing up, a dried-out husk.

Kara woke up a second later, sitting up. Pale and shell-shocked, she pulled her oxygen mask away
from her face, her eyes focused somewhere in the middle-distance. Clearly, her attention was on
something harrowing no one else could see.

“Kara, honey? Are you okay?” asked Eliza softly, but Kara didn’t respond.

She stared at nothing for a long time, gulping in long, shuddering breaths, tears welling in her eyes.
Then, as if struck by a bolt of lightning, she sat ramrod straight and scrambled off the bed, her head
snapping around to find herself held in Cat’s unwavering gaze.

“Malkhaati,” she breathed, and she nearly collapsed under the weight of her relief. Cat caught Kara
and pulled her into her arms, pressing kisses to Kara’s temple. Trembling, Kara reached out for
Carter, too, and she held onto her wife and son as if her life depended upon it, as if she alone could
keep them from harm.

Cat nuzzled Kara’s cheek and whispered reassurances to her, whispered words of love and gratitude
and home. Kara cupped Cat’s cheek in the palm of her hand and lifted her eyes to gaze at her, an
indigo flame burning in them with a thousand things unsaid.

“I know,” whispered Cat, and she pulled Kara’s hand from her face, kissing it reverently. “I know,
darling.”

Kara nodded, then looked down at Carter.

“Mom,” he said, and it was all the comfort he had to give. Kara ruffled his brown curls
affectionately, then looped her arm around his shoulders and hugged him to her body, savoring the
scent of him, sweet and earnest and real.

“Carter,” she whispered tearfully, and somehow that one word contained all of Kara’s love for her
son, all her relief in finding him safe, and all her pride in his strength.

Finally reassured Cat and Carter were alive and whole, Kara turned around to face her sister,
knowing Alex would tell her the truth, no matter what.

“Who did this to us?” she ground out, jaw set as if in stone. Even with Cat curled into her side and
Carter nestled against the other, Kara looked ready to level the entire base — with her bare hands, if
needed.

“Non,” said Alex tightly, taking a step toward her sister. “It was Non.”

Kara shared an unreadable look with Cat and then turned back to Alex to ask one last question, each
word hitting like a blow.

“Where is he?”

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Continued in Nemesis

Chapter End Notes
There is dialogue in this segment that is taken directly from the episode "For the Girl who has Everything."

Unfortunately, the story credit for this particular episode goes to Andrew "I'm a RAPEY MONSTER" Kreisberg.

So, there's his fucking credit. He can choke on it.

Ted Sullivan and Derek Simon wrote the teleplay.

Caitlin Parrish was the executive story editor.
Chapter Summary

Beginning right after Kara wakes up from the Black Mercy at the end of Nightmare, our family finds themselves at odds over what to do next, while Cat realizes something about Kara and makes a plan to help.

Chapter Notes

I know it has been too long a time, but I am writing. I promise I haven't forgotten this story and I am writing as often as I can.

Thank you for your patience.

“Enough!” barked Eliza. For the last hour she’d watched two opposing factions fight a war of words in the med bay. Alex, Maggie, and a glowering Kara supported the attack Non now option, while Hank and Cat opposed it, citing the need for additional information before any plan could be formulated, let alone executed.

Vasquez, by virtue of her rank, and Carter, as a minor, had no say in the matter and both recognized that fact... though Carter, exhausted and overstimulated, wasn’t coping with it as well as his DEO counterpart. He stood slumped against his newly-minted grandmother’s side as if he would collapse at any moment.

Eliza tightened her arm around his shoulders and frowned. “Enough,” she repeated, though this time she just sounded tired. “No one’s going anywhere, so you three?” She pointed at the group containing her daughters and looked each of them in the eye. “Cool your jets. You may have been medically cleared, but there is this little thing we humans need called sleep. And that applies to you, too, Kara.” Eliza narrowed her eyes at Alex specifically, then played her ace in the hole, squeezing Carter’s shoulder.

“No fair, Mom,” whined Alex, but she knew a lost battle when she saw one. She shot a questioning look at Kara who ground her teeth but capitulated. Eliza relaxed a notch, and relinquished Carter into Cat’s arms when the worried mother hurried across the room toward them.

“A little down time never hurt anyone,” she said, his brown eyes filling with tears as if they’d rehearsed it.

“Please, Aunt Alex,” he said, looking up at her, his brown eyes filling with tears as if they’d rehearsed it.

“No fair, Mom,” whined Alex, but she knew a lost battle when she saw one. She shot a questioning look at Kara who ground her teeth but capitulated. Eliza relaxed a notch, and relinquished Carter into Cat’s arms when the worried mother hurried across the room toward them.

“A little down time never hurt anyone,” she said, and if it sounded haughty to the others, that was their problem. “This will give me the opportunity to run some basic tests on Carter and Miss Grant. To strike while the iron is hot, as they say.”

Cat pursed her lips even as she held Carter to her, rubbing his back as if he was a much younger child. “Unless they belong to the pantheon of Jane Austen’s tedious fictional men, they say no such thing,” she announced. “And I insist you call me Cat, Eliza. If only to avoid the absurdity of me having to call you ‘Mrs. Danvers’ like some pimpled suitor standing awkwardly in your foyer on
prom night.”

Maggie tried unsuccessfully to hide a smirk behind her hand, and Vasquez concentrated intently on a speck high on the med bay wall lest she make a wholly unprofessional sound.

“Fair enough, Cat,” Eliza amended, flashing her a sideways grin. “Now that we’re on a first name basis, would you be willing to let me take a few samples? From you and Carter both? I’d like the opportunity to confirm my late husband’s hypotheses about the Daat Kyashar, and I know Kara was eager to learn more about it.”

Cat glanced at Kara, who was scowling like an unlikely cross between a Sherman tank and the Grumpy Cat meme. The only thing the young hero seemed eager to do was to strip her uncle’s flesh from his bones, preferably with a grapefruit spoon. She and Kara’s tender reunion earlier had quickly given way to something almost cold, made worse by the continued darkness plaguing their connection.

Cat wasn’t surprised. She couldn’t imagine what Kara had been through inside that creature’s hellish fantasyland and the Daat Kyashar’s stubborn refusal to reignite between them kept her from being able to share in Kara’s pain. She longed to reach out through their connection, to lend support, to soothe grief… whatever Kara needed. Cat only realized how essential that particularly private mode of communication had become now that it was gone.

With no acknowledgement of Eliza’s statement forthcoming, Cat transitioned seamlessly into gracious host mode. She realized she didn’t have much of a leg to stand on since her influence held little sway with the DEO, but she yanked the tie of her robe a little tighter and pressed forward. “All three of us are eager to learn more about it,” she assured Eliza, resting one hand on Carter’s shoulder. Then her eyes flicked toward Hank Henshaw, and her smile disappeared. “I’ll allow you to take samples from both of us, but only after Carter gets a hot meal and some sleep and only if those samples are destroyed after the tests you wish to run are complete. In addition, there can be no record of the results kept in the DEO servers. Agreed?”

“You know what, why don’t we all take a break?” asked Alex, not wanting to start yet another debate about the fucking DEO servers. “We’ll decide what to do and how to do it later, but Mom’s right — we could all use some sleep. I, for one, am planning to take the equivalent of five hot showers. Food also sounds good. And beer. Lots of beer. So why don’t we all take a rain check on the lab work tonight—”

“Uh, ma’am?” said Vasquez. “It’s 1333 on Sunday. FYI.”

Alex stared hard at Susan and tried to absorb what she was saying. It was Sunday? Sunday afternoon? Hadn’t she just been on a date? On Friday? “Okay,” she said slowly. “Whatever. The point is, I’ve got to get Ma — er — Neves home—”

“We know, y’know,” said Carter, rolling his sleepy brown eyes.

Derailed again, Alex glanced sharply at him. “You know what?” she asked.

“That her name’s Maggie,” said Carter, pointing at the woman in question. “Maggie Sawyer. She’s an undercover detective with the NCPD. We’ve known since before she started working for us, so you don’t have to keep calling her Neves. Not unless you really want to.”

Alex stared at Carter, then turned to look at Cat, eyes round and unblinking.

Cat’s immediate reaction was to snort, which she disguised by clearing her throat. “Her background
check threw up too many red flags. She was either undercover or in witness protection.” Cat looked at Maggie, turning her hands upward in a helpless shrug. “I took a chance and called the Commissioner. He confirmed your mission and told me not to worry, that you were the best they had.”

“Alex, sweetheart—” began Eliza, taking a single step toward her beleaguered daughter, but Alex held up her hand.

“Just — everyone get in the car,” she said, sighing. “Vasquez, get some scrubs for Kara and Cat, okay? But after that, take everyone to the motor pool and put them into one of the SUVs. I’ll meet you there in five.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Vasquez, and she herded the rest of Alex’s family out of the med bay toward the locker rooms. When they were safely out of earshot, Maggie burst into giggles.

“So much for our forensic document specialist,” she said, staring after the Grants, as surprised as she was grateful. She covered her mouth to stifle her laughter and shook her head. “DeShawn is going to be so pissed when he finds out. He really thought he’d nailed those papers. Crowed about it for months.”

Alex didn’t respond.

Maggie reached out and took one of Alex’s hands, pulling her closer. “Honey? Are you okay?”

Alex ran her free hand through her hair. “I — it’s a lot to take in, you know? I mean, I spent a couple of hours fighting tentacle monsters in Kansas in the mid-90s earlier and somehow it doesn’t make it sound any weirder when you add the part where I was a guest in my sister’s brain at the time! Pearl seems like it was a hundred years ago, and that ended with refugee Kryptonian forces punching holes in the roof and your little revelation. Now we find out that Cat and Carter both knew — have always known?” She shook her head. “I’m having a hard time keeping up.”

“Hey, hey,” said Maggie, brushing her fingertips lightly across Alex’s cheek. “It’s okay to need a few minutes to catch your breath, you know? You don’t have to be in charge of everything all the time. I promise.” The rigidity in Alex’s muscles didn’t lessen one iota. Deciding distraction might be a more successful tactic than truth, Maggie sidled closer to Alex and reached up to nuzzle her cheek. “If you’re interested,” she whispered, “I have a perfectly good shower at my place.”

Alex let her eyes flutter shut. “Yeah?” she breathed, and Maggie smiled, pressing a soft kiss to her jawline.

“Yeah,” she said, and she put her hands on Alex’s hips, swaying with her until she felt some of her tension recede. “Splurged on it when I bought the place. It’s huge. All decked out in marble and rainfall showerheads — all that crap.” She waited for Alex’s eyes to open and winked at her when they did. “And it just so happens I’m available if you need help scrubbing those…” Maggie slipped her hands under Alex’s top and kneaded the knotted muscles in her back for a moment before tracing her ribcage with blunt fingernails. “...hard to reach places.”

Alex shivered, but hummed as if considering the offer. “Got any beer?” she asked.

“Everything from Guinness to Wookey Jack,” said Maggie. “I could probably come up with a couple of Coronas and a lime, too — if you wanna be a jackass about it.” She slid her hands into Alex’s back pockets and gave her a playful squeeze.
“Anything to eat?” asked Alex breathily, her voice somewhere up in the rafters.

Maggie snickered wickedly. “Plenty,” she said huskily, brushing her lips across Alex’s again and again until the DEO agent whimpered and tried to deepen the kiss. Maggie pulled away slightly, denying her. “Afterward, we can order a pizza or two, if you like,” she added.

Alex groaned and kissed Maggie soundly.

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The kitchen of the penthouse looked as if a precise but devastating tornado had hit it, with blankets, medical debris, and at least one sofa cushion strewn about the floor. Cat drifted toward one of the leather stools at the island, drawn there by a garish black stain on the seat. As she drew closer, she realized it was dried blood. She pressed her fingers next to the stain, trying to remember if that was where she’d been standing when she’d lost consciousness, but Carter, rallying abruptly, rushed toward her, grabbing a towel from beside the sink on the way.

“I’m sorry, Mom,” he said. “I should have cleaned this up. Everything happened so fast when the med evac arrived and—”

“Is it yours?” Cat breathed, recognizing the faint buzz of guilt underneath his hurried apology. He nodded hesitantly and gasped when she pulled him into her arms. Ever since he’d fallen off that roof, her hugs had become more frantic somehow. Carter wished she would worry less.

“We think the Black Mercy took him, too, briefly,” supplied Eliza. “It’s how we knew where you both were — where to send him and Alex when we had the virtual reality technology working. He was in the farmhouse and overheard you and Kara talking.”

Cat nodded. “I remember,” she said quietly. “I heard him call out for me. Just once.” She looked at Kara and could see that she remembered, too. Sadness rose up inside Cat, clawing at her throat as she heard again Kara’s promise to make all her dreams come true, a ghost from a past that never existed. She pushed it away.

“Why didn’t it keep him?” asked Kara. Her tone was flat and emotionless, but Eliza was relieved she was engaging with them even this much.

“He arrived in the dreamstate after both of you had — maybe the Black Mercy couldn’t reconcile his presence with the fantasy world it had already created and let him go. Maybe the Daat Kyashar acted in his defense, realizing the Black Mercy’s hold on him was weaker than on you two.” She shrugged apologetically. “We don’t know. Either way, we were lucky. Without Carter, we never could have saved you.”

Kara’s eyes met Cat’s for just a second before she turned away again, but in that brief moment, Cat saw a flash of pride in them, an infinitesimal reminder of Kara’s usual sunny demeanor. It made her feel less alone.

Determined to put this whole ordeal behind them as soon as possible, Cat clutched Carter to her for another moment then finally released him. “We’ll clean this up later,” she said, indicating the disaster that was her kitchen. “And we’ll order in tonight. In the meantime, I suggest we all take a nap. Kara, will you show Eliza to the guest bedroom while I see to Carter?”

Kara nodded, silent again, and picked up her mother’s suitcase, turning to head toward the guest suite. Cat smiled at her softly, unseen.

“Thank you for welcoming me into your home, Cat,” said Eliza. She glanced after Kara and returned
worried eyes to the CEO. “I wish....” she began, but whatever she was going to say trailed away on a sigh.

“I know,” said Cat. “Me too.” She nodded once at Kara’s foster mother, then put an arm around Carter’s narrow shoulders and led him away.

Eliza watched them go, then wandered down the hall Kara had used. She found her youngest daughter standing outside an open doorway and gasped when she looked inside. Sunlight poured into the room through an entire wall of floor-to-ceiling windows and the view, inside and out, was stunning.

“This is beautiful, Kara,” said Eliza, but her smile faded when she saw Kara’s eyes. She recognized the look in them immediately though it had been a long time since she’d last seen them this way. Slate gray and empty of everything but a frightening coldness, they stared at nothing, refusing to acknowledge anything or anyone in the room.

“Kara,” she began, and she placed a hand on Kara’s arm only to have it shaken off. Sighing, Eliza sank down onto the edge of the bed. “Cat shared with me her connection to Carter through the Daat Kyashar reawakened moments after she regained consciousness. Has yours with Cat come back yet?”

Kara crossed her arms over the shapeless blue scrubs Susan had given her and shook her head. A beat later, she said, “It’s not important.”

“Not important?” echoed Eliza. “Kara, the two of you have just survived something invasive and traumatic, not to mention completely alien. The Daat Kyashar’s primary function is to provide a means of protection and healing for your family. What could be more important than its return?”

Kara stalked away from Eliza and looked out the window on National City for a long time. She dropped her hands to her sides, clenching and unclenching them over and over. “My parents were there,” she said finally. “And Astra. All four of us in the pod meant for Kal El. I grew up with them — in Kansas with the Kents, who took us in and loved us as their own. One big happy family.”

Eliza’s heart ached for Kara, for the life she’d had ripped away from her on Krypton and for the lives she’d been forced to endure here on Earth, both of them, as Kara Kent and as Kara Danvers.

“When the time came,” Kara continued, “I moved to the big city.” She snorted and repeated the words big city. “I took Kal’s job with Lois Lane, saved her from that crashing helicopter just like he did here, except it didn’t quite work out the same this time.” A shadow of a smile touched Kara’s lips. “I met Cat Grant instead. Celebrity gossip columnist Cat Grant, long before her reign as Queen of All Media...”

Kara’s silence this time was longer and colder and she lifted her hands, flattening her palms against the window. Eliza heard the glass creak under her fingertips, watched her smile fade.

“He took them away from me,” Kara whispered. “My parents, my aunt, Cat’s father, Cat...” She turned to face her foster mother and it took every ounce of Eliza’s remaining strength not to flinch at the darkness in Kara’s eyes.

“Non took them away from me and he will pay.”

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Cat rapped her knuckles against Carter’s cast as she tucked him into his bed and she tsked, a weary frown rumpling her forehead.
“I know we said you needed to keep wearing this, sweetheart, but if it’s in the way—”

“It’s not,” said Carter, hurrying to reassure her. “I mean, it’s annoying sometimes, but I don’t mind it so much anymore. Not since… Well, you know.”

He looked down at his blankets and frowned, picking at a worn spot on the comforter. Cat sat down on the edge of his bed and reached out, tousling his curls.

“I’m so proud of you, Carter,” she whispered. “And so grateful to you.” When Carter looked up, surprised by her choice of words, she added, “You saved us. That’s supposed to be our job, you know. A mother’s prerogative.” She cupped his chin for a moment and sighed. “I’m sorry you got caught up in all of this. I’m sorry we’ve asked so much of you.”

Carter shook his head and the motion jerked his chin from her hand. “I’m not,” he said. “Grandma Eliza said she and Aunt Alex wouldn’t have been able to find you without me — and I got you to listen to me in there. To reject that place and its lies. I’m not a little kid anymore, Mom. If I can help when we’re in trouble, then why shouldn’t I?” He paused, then gave his mother a knowing side-eyed grin. “So now I know what it feels like to be attacked by Ursula the Sea Witch,” he said, shrugging. “Seems like a fair trade to me.”

Cat blinked once, then chuckled weakly. “There were far too many tentacles in that meadow.”

“Ya think?” retorted Carter, rolling his eyes. After a moment their brief levity faded and a pall fell over the room. “Are you and Kara okay, Mom?” he asked. He already knew the answer but he wanted his mother to confirm it. A journalist’s habit.

Cat looked at him for a long time before replying.

“No, we aren’t,” she said matter-of-factly. “The Black Mercy’s fantasies were more than lies, Carter; they were weapons designed to inflict pain — on Kara especially. She lost her parents again, after they’d been saved from Krypton’s end, after living a whole life with them.” She looked off into the distance. “She must be so hurt, so angry. I know I would be.”

“You don’t know?” asked Carter, shocked. “I mean, the Daat Kyashar isn’t— ?”

Cat looked at Carter sadly. “We haven’t re-established our connection yet, no.” She shook her head, at a loss. “My connection to you returned almost as soon as I saw you. I don’t know why she and I haven’t…” She let the sentence drift away, unfinished. Cat was frustrated and tired and the tears she’d been fighting since she’d woken up on that gurney welled in her eyes.

Carter grabbed her hand. “It’ll come back, Mom. I promise it will.”

“How can you know that?” she whispered, holding onto him tightly, needing the support more than she could say.

“Dr. Solis at the DEO said the bond works like a computer network because it came from Kara. She’s, like, the server farm. See?”

Too exhausted and shaken to follow his logic, Cat frowned. “I’m sorry, sweetheart, I don’t.”

“If the Daat Kyashar is really like a computer program and you and I are still running it, that means the hub — Kara — still has to be running it, too, even if she can’t access it for some reason. If it was gone, like gone-gone, wiped from the system, our connection wouldn’t work,” he said, pointing back and forth between Cat and himself. “Since it is working—”
“Then the whole thing must be working,” finished Cat. “There’s just a disconnect on her end somewhere.”

“Yeah,” said Carter. “Like a hacked system running a shadow operating system alongside the native one. It’s all there, running just fine in the background, but you can’t get to it. When you shut down the shadow OS, though, the real one boots back up, no problems.”

_Shadow_ certainly was the right word for it, Cat mused, probing the looming darkness in her head once again. But a smile — one that felt like her first real one in days — smoothed the lines of worry around her eyes and mouth.

“How do I have a sneaking suspicion you and Eliza are going to get along like a house on fire?” she asked, narrowing her eyes at him.

Carter blushed and scrunch his face up in a sheepish grin. “She’s really cool and super smart, Mom,” he said. “And she asked if she could hug me before she did. She just …gets it.”

Cat raised both eyebrows at that admission, abruptly realizing why it wasn’t at all surprising Eliza would know how to handle a socially-awkward teen with sensory and stimulation issues. It was certainly something they had in common and Cat wanted to kick herself for not thinking of it sooner.

“High praise from you,” she said to Carter, squeezing his hand again.

Carter shrugged. “She’s a good person,” he said. “I can tell.”

“She is,” agreed Cat.

Carter flopped backwards into his nest of pillows. “What do you think the tests she wants to run on us will tell us?” He looked up at his mother, more alert than she thought he should be after their ordeal. “_Are_ we changing into Kryptonians, Mom? Will we have powers like Kara?”

Though desperately tired — even an hour of real sleep would be rejuvenating at this point — Cat gave Carter’s questions serious consideration. First, because they were serious questions and deserved her attention, and second, because she’d only recently woken up from a lifetime lived without him. Cat could still feel the ragged edges of the hollow she’d carried in her chest all that time, an emptiness she’d had no name for until Carter had called out for her in the meadow. She wasn’t ready to let him go quite yet.

“I don’t know what the tests will tell Eliza,” she said finally. “Or whether we’ll have powers like Kara or not.” She touched her fingertips to Carter’s chin and smiled. “But I do know we’ve been changing, you and I, since the moment we first met her. Like you said in the car last week after we picked you up at the airport — she made everything better, long before we knew about the Daat Kyashar.”

“Gramma Eliza said something like that on the phone after my accident — that the bond happened because of how we felt about each other, not the other way around. The Daat Kyashar protects us and helps us look after each other.” A jaw-cracking yawn interrupted his thought. “Nothing more.”

Cat remembered Eliza’s words that night and how relieved she’d been to have someone with scientific authority confirm what she already knew — that the Daat Kyashar was just the icing on an exquisite and long-overdue cake. That Carter seemed to remember her words, too, was surprising.

_Hadn’t he been asleep at the time?_ she wondered. Cat yawned, too, and covered her mouth with the back of her hand.
“Something’s telling me the Daat Kyashar wants us all to get a little shut-eye, hmm?”

Carter slid beneath his covers. “Yeah,” he agreed. “It’s amazing how exhausting hand-to-tentacle combat can be. It looked so much easier in The Little Mermaid.”

Cat chuckled and kissed his forehead. “Sweet dreams, Carter,” she said, then she rose and crossed to the door, turning back to make sure he was settled. She watched him for a minute longer than was necessary and was about to steal away when Carter called her back.

“Hey, Mom?”

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“I know you said we were going to order dinner later, but can I put in my vote now?”

Thinking he was going to ask for pizza yet again, Cat crossed her arms and said, “Go ahead.”

His vote was short and to the point. “Anything but sushi.”

Cat agreed with that wholeheartedly.

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Scrubbed clean so even her freckles gleamed, Alex sat propped up in Maggie’s bed and plowed through her seventh piece of pizza — or was it her eighth? She had on a black tank top and nothing else, and she was having trouble keeping her eyes off of Maggie, who wore only a strategically-draped burgundy top sheet.

“How can you still be eating?” asked Maggie, exasperated but laughing. “It’s a good thing Rizzo’s had that two for one deal or I’d have been stuck with PB&J.”

Alex popped the last bite of the slice in her mouth and chewed smugly, washing it down with the last of her third Wookey Jack. “Funny,” she said when she finally came up for air. “You weren’t asking that question before the pizza got here.”

“Oh, I was,” said Maggie, flouncing backward on the bed, landing somewhat spread-eagled. “It just came out sounding like ‘Oh God, yes!’” She turned to look at Alex and winked. “Maybe it got lost in translation?”

Alex wiped her face with a paper napkin, then tossed it onto her empty plate, turning to prop herself on one elbow. “From English to English?” she asked, winking back.

“Yeah, well,” said Maggie, gesturing vaguely with one hand. “You got my point.”

Alex laughed and Maggie watched her, struck by how relaxed and comfortable and right the DEO agent looked in her bed, barely-dressed and freshly-fucked. A wave of tingles swept up Maggie’s body from her toes and pooled in her eyes, making them sparkle like sunshine on water. Her smile went from cheeky to something altogether more sweet and soft. Something she desperately didn’t want to think about at the moment.

“C’mere,” she said instead, grabbing Alex’s tank top in her fist and pulling the woman toward her. When she could reach her comfortably, she kissed her, reveling in the taste of beer and pepperoni on Alex’s breath.

When they parted, Alex glanced at the clock on Maggie’s nightstand. It was almost nine. “Give me a
couple of minutes to get dressed, then I’ll help clean up, okay?” She scooched backward and was about to get up when Maggie stopped her, grabbing her wrist.

“Uh, just where do you think you’re going, Cowboy?” she asked. Her tone was still light, but there was a definite hint of challenge riding underneath it. “You’ve had three beers tonight. I can still taste them on your breath. You’re not going anywhere.”

Alex looked away. “Maggie,” she said softly. They both ignored the whine that stretched the last syllable of the name a little long. “I can’t stay.”

Maggie caught a whiff of Alex’s anxiety buzzing in the air between them and sat up, tucking the sheet around herself tightly. Whether the act was borne of modesty or vulnerability, she didn’t know.

“You can’t leave, Alex. What if you get into an accident?” A frown turned her usual smile into a fallen soufflé. “I don’t know if you noticed or not, but we spent the last forty-eight hours in an underground bunker in the desert saving your sister and your sister’s girlfriend from their own personal Giger nightmare.” She shook her head slowly from side to side. “I’m not letting you throw all of that away just because you’re scared, okay?” Maggie squeezed Alex’s wrist to get her attention. When Alex looked up at her, she said, “I’m scared, too.”

“You are?” asked Alex. “Of what?”

Maggie snorted. “It’s not your famous sister, or your work, or even meeting your mom on what was technically our second date,” she said, anticipating some of Alex’s protests. “It isn’t even that look you’re giving me right now, where you think you’re broken in some way and maybe all of this—” She gestured to the room around her. “—is too good to be true. Maybe it is, Alex, but that’s not what scares the hell out of me. Not by a long shot.”

Maggie laughed, but it was self-deprecating. “What scares the hell out of me is how drawn to you I was from the very first time I saw you. Maybe you couldn’t tell — God, I hope you couldn’t — but I was a basketcase from the moment we walked into the weapons locker that night. Later, when you asked me out—”

“ You asked me out, if memory serves,” groused Alex, cheeks pinking as she looked away.

“Only because if I’d left it up to you, you’d still be talking around it,” said Maggie, giggling. Sobering a second later, she added, “The point is I knew I wanted you from the moment I saw you. Then the more I got to know you, the more terrified I got, because it wasn’t just chemical, Alex. That mask of bravado you wear slipped at that stupid candy-colored restaurant I dragged you to and I was screwed because the person beneath the mask was way more attractive to me than she should have been, than I wanted her to be. I’ve been a wreck ever since…”

Maggie released Alex’s wrist but took her hand instead, staring at their entwined fingers. “Fairy tales are bullshit,” she said softly. “But I’ve seen some crazy things since I joined the Science Division. Hell, I’ve seen some crazy things in just the last two days and — and this feels different to me.” She looked up into Alex’s darkening eyes. “You feel different. And if it feels different to you, too, then please… stay.”

Alex stared at Maggie with unreadable eyes, then sighed, and leaned forward, pressing her forehead to Maggie’s.

“Okay,” she said.

For the first time in her life, Alex didn’t offer an apology or an explanation or even an excuse. She
couldn’t have come up with one if she’d wanted to — because this wasn’t about owing Maggie for what she’d done for her in that bunker or for what she’d just said. No, the simple truth was Alex wanted to stay. She wanted to stay more than she wanted to run. Tonight, that was all that mattered.

Smiling, she slid back into place next to Maggie and twitched the sheet over her legs, considering the matter decided.

“‘Cowboy’, huh?” she echoed, chuckling. “I hate to burst your bubble, but the closest I’ve ever come to riding a horse is the Harley Superlow we have in the motor pool.”

Maggie groaned softly. The thought of Alex straddling a motorcycle did something to her. Something that made her ache. Something that made her throb.

“Close enough,” she breathed, pulling Alex in for another scorching kiss. When they broke apart, Maggie looked up at Alex with hooded eyes. “That makes two things you know how to ride, then, doesn’t it?”

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It took Cat three tries to wake Kara on Monday morning.

They’d had a difficult night. Kara’s sullenness and disengagement had resulted in a painfully stilted dinner and Cat’s one attempt to talk to Kara later, in the privacy and relative familiarity of their bedroom, had gone… badly. Kara had ended up curled on her side as far away as she could get from Cat. Cat had stared at the ceiling in silent agony until succumbing — albeit unwillingly — to her exhaustion. Her sleep could not have been considered restorative by any stretch of the imagination.

Now, sitting on the edge of their bed in an Escada dress as black as her mood, she brushed Kara’s hair back from her face and sighed.

“Kara, darling, I’m leaving for work now,” she said, slipping into a pair of ink black Blahniks she knew would strike fear into the hearts of many as soon as they heard them clicking across the marble floors. All the better to keep everyone away , she thought.

Kara struggled to pull herself into consciousness, eyes fluttering, her features momentarily free of the frown that had been her constant companion since she’d awoken in the DEO’s medbay. Absently, Cat counted the seconds until it returned, mouth twisting when she barely made it to the number two.

“What time is it?” asked Kara, brows crumpling over darkening eyes. She uncurled from the tight ball she’d slept in all night and pushed herself into a half-sitting position. “Why didn’t you wake me up? Cat, what’s going on?”

“I’m going to work,” repeated Cat evenly, rising from the bed. “As for waking you, I tried — several times. Clearly, you’re in no condition—”

“No,” said Kara sharply, shoving the sheet down her legs. “No, Cat. You can’t go without me. Give me one minute and I’ll—”

“Kara, don’t come in today. I’ll tell everyone you’re sick. You can stay home and rest—”

“Sick?!” Kara scoffed. “I never get sick, remember? You said it’s the best thing about me!”

Cat winced at the memory of saying those words, at the memory of being a woman who could say them even when she didn’t mean them. “Kara, please—” she began, but Kara barreled over her protest.
“What kind of rest do you think I’ll get, Cat? With you at CatCo and me here, worrying about what else Non has in store for us?” Then another thought occurred to her, another explanation for this forced separation. “Or don’t you feel it? Is that it, Cat? The world has gone back to normal, so you will, too — screw whatever anyone else feels? Time to move on, to keep up appearances, no matter who else is hurting?”

Wounded by her words, Cat turned away from Kara, face ashen and closed. She stood stiff and severe in her all-black ensemble, back straight and unyielding, haloed by the milky sunlight of an October dawn.

As frustrated as she was, Kara couldn’t help but see the pain etched into the set of Cat’s shoulders, the exhaustion revealed by the tilt of her head. It was then Kara realized Cat was dressed for mourning.

“Cat—” she began, but Cat raised an elegant hand to quiet her.

“I’m keeping Carter home today,” she said softly, retrieving her clutch from the edge of the dresser. “I thought you could stay with him, that you two could take care of each other while I handled a few things at the office.”

“Cat, wait!” Kara flashed across the bedroom and caught Cat’s hand, stopping her before she could leave. Cat looked up, hazel eyes clear but wary. “I — Cat, I’m—”

Floundering, wondering how she could explain everything that was in her head without the Daat Kyashar, wondering how she could make sense of all the hurt and confusion when she barely understood it herself, Kara’s eyes welled with tears. “I’ll stay with him,” she choked out. “I didn’t realize—” she began, but even she heard how weak the excuse sounded. She was Carter’s mother, too. He had to come first. “I’m sorry,” Kara blurted. “Cat, I’m so sorry—”

Without thinking, Cat pressed herself into Kara’s arms and kissed her. Kara froze, blindsided, but then she kissed Cat back. It was short and sweet and sad all at once, but at least it was something.

“Apology accepted,” whispered Cat, brushing a wine-colored stain from Kara’s lips with her thumb. “We’ll talk tonight.” She stepped out of Kara’s embrace and smoothed the front of her dress, hesitating when she turned to leave. “For the record, keeping up appearances is a necessary evil in our line of work. It doesn’t mean I’ve moved on, though. Far from it.”

She took Kara’s hand again. “Whatever else happens, Kara, a part of me will always remember what we had in that terrible place — and what we lost. Please don’t doubt that.” Cat’s grip tightened for a moment, and then she released Kara, a weary smile making a brief appearance before she left.

“I won’t,” replied Kara, but it was too soft for Cat to hear.

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Maggie’s eyes popped open like they did every morning: on a sharp gasp of surprise. Usually she’d be scrambling to turn off her alarm, terrified out of sleep by whatever song was her favorite that month. It was an effective way to wake up but she hadn’t set an alarm last night. So what had woken her?

She flipped over in a panic only to find her bed empty. “Damn,” she sighed, her face crumpling.

“G’morning, Detective Van Winkle,” said a voice behind her and Maggie turned to see Alex holding two steaming mugs. She had on one of Maggie’s t-shirts — which barely covered her — and was smiling easily. “Coffee?” She held out one of the mugs.
Maggie rushed to take it. “Please,” she said, closing her eyes as she took the first much-needed sip. After she swallowed, she opened her eyes just as the bed next to her dipped. Maggie turned to watch Alex settle in and take her own sip of coffee.

“I want to say something,” she said slowly. The pressure of the words behind her teeth was almost unbearable. “But I don’t want you to take it the wrong way or—”

Alex cut her off. “I know what you’re going to say,” she said.

“You do?”

Alex nodded. “I don’t want to be that person anymore,” she said softly, staring into her cup. “The one who leaves in the middle of the night without a word. The one so afraid of failing, she never starts at all.” She looked up at Maggie with a sheepish half-smile. “You said last night that if it felt different to me, too, I should stay and I did. Because it does feel different.” She laughed hollowly and shook her head. “I halfway think it’s somehow Kara’s fault — as stupid as that sounds.”

Maggie grinned. “Hey, I am absolutely fine laying the blame on your superhero sister if that makes it easier,” she teased. “Whatever gets you through the day.” Then she took Alex’s free hand and squeezed it. “I’m just glad you’re here,” she said.

“Me too,” said Alex.

Maggie took another sip of her coffee, then chuckled. “We can say it’s a side effect of Kara’s bond with Cat and Carter. From being too close, you know? Like a contact high.”

Alex snatched her hand away and rolled her eyes. “Gross!” After a second, she added, “And yet…” When Maggie looked at her askance, she shrugged. “Who knows, right? It’s not as if we have a guidebook or anything even resembling concrete data on what they’re dealing with. I’ll ask my mom when I see her later. Maybe she’ll know.”

“That’ll be an interesting conversation,” said Maggie, laughing. A ping on her phone made her pick it up and she grimaced when she saw the reminder, tossing the phone on the bed.

“What?”

Maggie nodded. “In a way. To keep my boss off my back this weekend, I told him I was hunting down a lead on Grover Keene — something that would connect him to Max Lord. I’m supposed to be in his office at ten to let him know what I found and I have nothing.”

“What if…” Alex stopped and frowned, clearly warring with herself. “I can’t let you talk to Lord — that would open up a whole can of compromising worms — but I can let you look through the evidence we collected from his labs and offices. You’ve already seen some of it. We used tech we found in his labs to complete the VR headsets Carter and I used.”

“And if I find a link? I mean, no offense, Alex, but I don’t think your boss is just going to let me walk out of your secret underground bunker with evidence your secret government agency collected.”

“No, you’re right. He won’t. Unless…” Alex looked at Maggie directly. “Unless you had something to trade.”

Maggie went very still. “Like what?” she asked, voice measured.

Alex sighed and put her coffee cup on the bedside table. When she turned back, she squared her
shoulders. “We know about your non-standard ammunition, Maggie,” she said simply.

“Shit!” Maggie stiffened and scowled, then deflated, propping herself up on her knees. “How?”

“Solis’ team found a bullet lodged in the suit of that Kryptonian fugitive we captured at Pearl. When they dug it out, they saw it had traces of an unknown substance on it — something that’s still unknown two days and a lot of tests later.”

“And I’m the only other person who fired on him. Dammit.” Maggie closed her eyes for a moment, then looked at Alex. “No one’s ever noticed before,” she said.

“I’m guessing that’s because the Science Division doesn’t do a lot of joint operations — especially ones with agencies who also deal with extraterrestrial threats.”

Maggie chuckled. “‘Joint operation’ is stretching it, don’t you think? When we started our date that night, I thought you were FBI and you thought I was ex-military security for The Prague.”

Alex conceded that point. “Fair enough.”

“Look, Alex, you know how thin the margin is between a good CI relationship and a bad one, right? We need them more than they need us and if it gets out that I’m trading information with the DEO, I could have doors close on me that I can’t afford to lose. Lives would be at stake, not just cases.”

Maggie’s eyes pleaded with Alex. “You get that, right?”

Alex held up both her hands. “Whoa! I’m not asking you to compromise your network, Maggie. The fact you even have one is amazing — and frankly something the DEO should have thought about a long time ago.” She relaxed a notch and dragged her fingers through her still-tousled hair. “Let’s start with something small. Something no one else would have to know about.”

“Like?”

“What are you painting your ammo with?”

Maggie shook her head. “I can’t… I’m sorry, Alex. If I told you, a very specific life would be in danger. I won’t risk that.”

Alex frowned. “Ookay,” she said, drawing out the word in a way that made it seem like it really wasn’t. “What about intel — something we could corroborate independently? Something on Lord, maybe — or anything about strikes against National City targets?”

“I don’t—” began Maggie, but she stopped in the middle of her thought, eyes darting back and forth, something Alex said pulling on a thread in her memory. “There is something. Maybe.” She cocked her head to the side and looked at Alex. “It didn’t make sense to us, but maybe it will to you.”

“Shoot,” said Alex, sitting up.

“You remember a couple of weeks ago? When the Kryptonians struck Lord Technologies and Supergirl and your team ran them off?”

“Yeah,” said Alex, nodding. “We were lucky. We got Max and his headquarters. Non got nothing.”

“Well… that’s not the word on the street,” said Maggie. “The word is Non’s mission was a success — he got exactly what he wanted and more.”

“What?” Alex stood and began pacing beside Maggie’s bed. She crossed her arms over her chest,
making the tee she wore ride up distractingly. Maggie tried not to stare. “That’s crazy! Non’s strike team didn’t get anything! Lord himself did the inventory.”

“I know that and you know that, but my little corner of National City says otherwise. Like I said,” said Maggie, shrugging apologetically. “Doesn’t make sense.”

“Maybe not to us, but it might to Lord. I’ll ask him.” Alex flashed Maggie a grin. “In the meantime, finish your coffee. You’ve bought yourself a limited-access pass to the DEO’s evidence lockup.”

“Now?!”

“Do you want to show up to your boss’ office empty-handed?” Alex countered. “Non didn’t need Maxwell Lord’s help with the Black Mercy, so whatever he’s up to, we’re already two weeks behind. I’m not looking forward to telling Kara something like that without at least trying to catch up — are you?”

Maggie blanched. “I see your point,” she said, reaching for her mug. She gulped the rest of her coffee down and slammed the mug back on her bedside table. “Race you to the shower!”

“Why?” called Alex after her. “We’re just going to share it.” She grinned to herself and added, “Again.”

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Just as Cat had hoped, the sharp clack of her heels on the imported marble of the fortieth floor sent her cherished minions scurrying out of the line of fire toward the dark corners of the bullpen. All of them except Alice Kens who rushed onto the proverbial battlefield armed only with a tall Noonan’s cup and a worried frown. The sight of the cup — the contents of which were no doubt degrees colder than she preferred — filled Cat with a curious mixture of gratitude and nausea. She took a furtive breath and attributed the nausea to the fact it was Alice handing her the much needed caffeine and not Kara.

“Miss Grant,” said Alice hurriedly. “Is everything alright? When Kara didn’t arrive at her usual time —”

“No, it’s not,” said Cat, interrupting her brand-new junior assistant with more harshness than she’d intended. She winced and took the coffee, brushing past Alice as she entered her office. Once inside, a staggering sense of… of culmination dizzied her and she nearly stumbled. She caught herself on the back of the nearest couch and swallowed hard, fighting a second wave of nausea. A ghostly image of Kara stood before her in a tan cardigan — the same ghost that had brought her out of the Black Mercy’s terrible nightmare. She pushed the vision away.

Worried her queasiness meant something was wrong with Carter, Cat sent desperate feelers along their connection, relieved when she found him content and untroubled.

Alice, who’d followed Cat into her office, darted to her side but didn’t dare touch her. Instead, she clenched her hands into fists. It was such a Kara thing to do, Cat smiled faintly.

“You’re ill,” Alice whispered, horrified. “What can I do?”

“Clear my schedule,” Cat said, steeling herself for the short walk to her desk. If she could just sit down…

Alice whipped out her tablet and accessed Cat’s calendar. She made a few adjustments, then looked up. “Done,” she said. “Except for a meeting with Miss Lane that she herself scheduled. It’s marked
urgent. Do you want me to call—"

Cat waved dismissively as she reached her chair and she sank into it with a sigh. “No,” she said. “I’ll see Lucy. I have some questions for her anyway, and she’s not the type to mark something urgent if it isn’t. When is she coming?”

“Twenty minutes. Her note said she needed to see you first thing this morning.”

Cat took a sip of the too-cold coffee and grimaced, pushing it away. “Fine,” she said curtly, wondering what had Lucy in a lather. She was normally such an unflappable girl. “In the meantime, can you—”

Alice bustled away the offending coffee. “I know just the thing, Miss Grant,” she said, and she hurried out of the office. A few moments later, she returned with a tray and set it on the corner of Cat’s desk. She dropped two paper-thin slivers of fresh lemon into the bottom of a china teacup, then poured piping-hot liquid over them. The spicy scent of ginger and fresh lemon wafted over Cat like a comforting cloud.

“Oh!” she said, closing her eyes and breathing in deeply. “That smells wonderful.” After a moment, Cat opened her eyes and lifted the offered cup to her lips. The heat of that first sip bloomed in her empty stomach like a warm blanket. “Exactly what I needed, Alice. Thank you.”

Alice nodded. “I brought some toast, too. In case you felt up to eating.” She placed a delicate plate with two slices of perfectly toasted 9-grain bread, a jar of orange marmalade, and the tiniest spoon imaginable next to Cat, along with a linen napkin.

Cat opened her mouth to say something but instead caught sight of Lucy outside, heading across the bullpen like a storm in an Armani suit. The woman’s frown did not bode well.

“Miss Lane appears to be running ahead of schedule,” noted Cat, nodding toward the glass walls of her office. Alice met Lucy at the door and invited her inside. Cat took another steadying sip of tea, then spread a jewel-like dollop of marmalade on a toast point as she watched Lucy cross the room.

“Tea?” she asked when Lucy stopped in front of her desk. Of course Alice had provided a second cup.

Lucy scowled. “What? No!” Apparently thinking better of such a vehement response to the offer, she softened, but only just. “I mean, uh, no thank you, Cat.”

Cat cast her best legal mind a pointed look. “Sit,” she said. When Lucy made to refuse even that, she repeated the order, this time letting a little steel bleed into her tone. Lucy glared at her but sat, so razor sharp on the edge of the guest chair she looked like a blade stabbed into the cushion.

“Whatever it is must be urgent since you bypassed not one but both of my assistants to schedule this meeting,” said Cat, raising an eyebrow. “What can I do for you, Smarter Lane?” She tore the corner from her toast and popped it into her mouth, only barely keeping herself from groaning out loud with pleasure. The marmalade was glorious.

“You can tell me why James is moving to Midway City,” said Lucy, dark eyes flashing.

Cat put her toast down with deliberate care. “This is news to me, I assure you,” she said evenly. “I haven’t seen James since last week, after the board meeting. He hasn’t tendered his resignation. Not to me, at least, and I’m the one who brought him onboard. Perry made a personal appeal.”

Lucy rolled her eyes. “You might want to check your email,” she said. “James has never been
comfortable disappointing people face to face.”

Cat opened her laptop and tapped a few keys to bring up her inbox. Sure enough, there was an email from James Olsen dated Saturday evening, marked with a red exclamation point. Cat had missed it, having been in a telepathically-induced coma at the time.

“Mm,” was all she said, and Lucy snorted.

“Told you.” It only took a moment, but Lucy’s rigidity cracked and she began to deflate into the chair like a balloon with a slow leak. “To be honest, I’m not surprised. Not really. It’s just—” She gripped the armrests tightly and stared out Cat’s balcony windows at the clear, bright sky.

“Lucy?” prompted Cat when the younger woman failed to continue her thought.

“Why now?” asked Lucy. “Things seemed to be getting better between us. We even went on a date on Friday night, just us for once, with wine and—” Lucy stopped herself from saying any more and apologized to Cat. “You don’t need to hear this.”

Cat took another sip of her tea and wished she’d had the forethought to put something with a little kick in it. The extra fortitude would have been welcome.

“I have a hypothesis regarding James’ badly timed departure, but you aren’t going to like it,” she said succinctly.

Lucy smiled unexpectedly and Cat relaxed. “I’m not surprised,” said the attorney. “Not that you have one or that I won’t like it.” She folded her hands in her lap and braced herself, resigned. “Go ahead.”

“It could be that James has an unhealthy obsession with… capes.” At first Lucy didn’t seem to comprehend Cat’s meaning, but then she frowned and sat forward. “I admit it’s not something most people would notice and if ever pressed on the topic, I will deny it, but why else would he have left Metropolis when he did? His career was one Pulitzer away from a book deal and six tedious months on the talk show circuit.”

“You’re saying…” began Lucy, but she trailed off, seemingly unwilling to put breath to the words.

“I’m saying — whether unconsciously or not — James left a lost cause for a maybe.”

Lucy began to shake her head in earnest. “But he didn’t know Clark was—”

“Didn’t he?” countered Cat. “He’s an intelligent professional with, if I recall correctly, five functioning senses. He worked with Clark and Lois for years.” She shook her head. “He knew. Look how quickly he became de facto leader of Kara’s little Scooby Gang.”

Lucy narrowed her eyes. “Which means I was…” She paused. “Filler,” she said finally, her tone leaden.

Cat scowled. “I won’t fight for him to stay. His primary objection to employment here seems to be my personal relationship with Kara. Worse, his treatment of you has been unforgivable. If he’s found a new cape to obsess over, he’s welcome to make a fool of himself again as long as he does it when he’s no longer affiliated with my brand.”

Lucy’s eyes snapped up to meet Cat’s.

“What I want to know is whether you’ll follow him,” Cat continued. “I won’t stop you, of course. You’re a grown woman and a Lane. I could sooner stop a freight train with my bare hands, but—”
Lucy shook her head. “I’m not going anywhere. Even if he’d asked, I would have turned him down. That part of my life is over. My home is here.”

Cat smiled, relaxing for the first time in what seemed like days. “Thank you,” she said, and the words were heartfelt.

“I have no idea what you’re thanking me for, but you’re welcome,” said Lucy. “Now tell me what’s going on with you. Something’s up. I can tell.”

Sighing, Cat poured Lucy her own cup of tea, then spent the better part of a half hour catching her up.

“So,” began Lucy when Cat finished her story about the Black Mercy, “You’re telling me I didn’t so much miss out on the excitement of my sister’s life as much as I dodged a bullet. If this is what passes as a ‘normal’ weekend for you, what has she been dealing with all these years?”

Cat’s face fell. “So you don’t know whether or not Kal has ever been treated for depression?”

Lucy shook her head. “That’s not something Lois would share with me. In fact, she’d actively keep anything remotely like that from me. She’d see it as a sign of weakness.”

“Yes,” said Cat, somehow managing to keep herself from rolling her eyes at the suggestion. “Because a secret research organization rumored to be connected to Superman is going to tell me anything. Even if I do drop Supergirl’s name, they’ll just think I’m after a story.”

Lucy looked bored. “Too bad you don’t know a reasonably high-up agent in a different secret organization,” she said. “One who might be ever so slightly invested in Supergirl’s health and
wellbeing? Who would have a legitimate reason to compare notes?”

Cat narrowed her eyes. “Get out of my office,” she snapped. “And send Alice in on your way out. It appears I’ll be changing my lunch plans.”

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Kara woke up later that morning and stared at the bedroom ceiling.

She heard Carter say something like “That’s so cool!” in another room but she just lay there, unable to muster the slightest interest in the details of his conversation. She felt weighed down by an oppressive blanket of nothingness. It paralyzed her. Every breath felt like a Herculean task. The smallest movement of her muscles shot bolts of agony into her brain. She never wanted to move again.

Even dissolving — floating away on the breeze with no memory and no heart — sounded like too much effort. So she stared.

Memories bubbled up into the void. Memories of sunlight and apple blossoms in a meadow carved into the endless Kansas prairie. Of feasts and families and a white canopy snapping in the early summer breeze. Of a conversation in a half-empty hay barn with a man Kara had never met, the words on his pocket watch so different from the ones she’d seen before. Of a life hauntingly idyllic and patently false.

“I should have known,” she whispered.

“Should have known what?” came the unexpected reply from the doorway. “Kara?”

Kara swivelled her eyeballs just enough to see Eliza and Carter standing awkwardly in the hall, then she looked back at the ceiling. “Nothing,” she said.

“Okay,” said Eliza with a defeated sigh, and Kara was distantly surprised by how easily her foster mother had given up. “I have to go out for a little while. Will you be alright here while I’m gone?”

Kara didn’t answer, so Carter answered for her. “We’ve got this, Gramma Eliza,” he said, his tone confident.

“Are you sure?” asked Eliza. She didn’t sound half as confident as Carter did. In fact, she sounded downright uncertain. “I could—”

“I’m sure,” said Carter. “It’s okay.”

Eliza smiled at the boy and leaned closer to him, whispering, “Call if you need anything. I’ll come straight back.”

Carter smirked at Eliza and leaned forward conspiratorially. “She can hear you, you know,” he deadpanned. When Eliza blanched and glanced at Kara, Carter rolled his eyes. Just a little. “Go,” he said gently. “We’ll be fine. Promise.”

Eliza chuckled. “Twelve going on forty,” she accused, shaking her head at him. Carter crossed his arms. “Okay, okay, I’m going,” she said, raising her hands as she retreated to the hall.

Carter waited until he heard the elevator crank up before moving to join Kara. He ambled around the bed and leaned against it by Kara’s knees, gazing out the windows at the late morning sky. Kara tensed, waiting for him to speak. When he didn’t, she relaxed.
Two minutes later, when Kara had finally returned her full attention to the ceiling, Carter spoke.

“It looked like it would have been pretty,” he said.

Kara froze.

Carter wasn’t talking about the view.

“What did?” she asked.

“Young wedding in the Black Mercy dream,” said Carter, shrugging. “It looked like it would have been pretty — before Ursula the Sea Witch and her tentacled marauders crashed it, I mean.” He turned to look at her then, his brown eyes as innocent and as unassuming as she’d ever seen them. “Those things were a little on the nose, even for a telepathic alien plant, don’t you think?”

The unexpected question paralyzed Kara for a moment. Emotions warred inside her until, stunningly, by the thinnest of margins, laughter won. She tried to hold it back but it glorped out of her like Jello slurping out of a gelatin mold. Kara shook with it, clutching at her sides until despair finally overtook her, shattering her momentary joy with one long, breathless sob. She pulled herself into the fetal position, vision blurred by hot tears, her chest hollow and aching.

Carter settled himself onto the bed beside her and waited.

Eventually, Kara’s sobs faded into soft, exhausted whimpers. Carter stroked her arm.

“Does crying help you like it helps us?” he asked quietly.

Kara nodded, then pushed herself upright, sniffling. “How did you know?” she asked hoarsely.

“Kryptonians and humans look so much alike I thought—”

“No,” said Kara, interrupting. “How did you know how to do that — to break through the deadness like that?” She looked over at Carter. “I couldn’t feel anything and then I felt everything.” She shook her head. “No one’s ever been able to do that for me before.”

“It’s a trick,” he said. “When it feels like you’re at the bottom of an iceberg, all frozen and alone, the easiest way to break out of that is to force yourself to feel something familiar.” He shrugged again. “With me, it’s curiosity or a puzzle to solve. With Mom it’s frustration, but she hasn’t needed that kind of push in a while.” He looked at Kara sheepishly. “I just figured laughter would work for you because you’re usually so happy.”

Kara chuckled weakly. “‘Usually’ being the operative word there.” She grimaced when she heard her gravelly voice and she swung her head around, searching the room for something. Carter guessed what she needed and bolted from the bed, snatching a designer box of Kleenex from the dresser.

“Here,” he said, pushing the box into Kara’s hands. “Be right back,” he added and he darted into the master bath. Kara thought she heard water running but she couldn’t be sure over the sound of blowing her own nose. When Carter returned, though, he handed Kara a cool, damp washcloth.

Kara took it gratefully and sighed into it when she pressed it to her puffy eyes. “Thank you, Carter,” she murmured.

“I turns out I may have learned more than just catchy mottos from my mom,” he said.

Kara pulled the washcloth away. “Like?”
“Like cool washcloths feel good after crying. And… and it’s okay to ask for help when you need it.” Carter hurried to explain when tears welled in Kara’s eyes again. “Asking for help doesn’t make you weak, Mom, and it doesn’t make you a burden. Family sticks together and sometimes loving someone means being strong so they can fall apart for a little while.” A faint smile tugged at his mouth. “That’s okay, because we always put each other back together.”

Instead of smiling back at him, Kara looked down at the washcloth she twisted in her hands. “Always?” she whispered. She felt so far away from Cat, so far away from everything except the cold core of her rage. Non had taken away everything she cherished and had perverted the rest into a meaningless farce. The ersatz what-might-have-been memories of that Black Mercy dream gouged holes in Kara’s soul. All that time with Cat, building a life together year by year, with family and a shared history, only to have it ripped away…

It was agony.

Carter put his hands on Kara’s shoulders. “Always,” he said, and the word was more vow than promise.

“Come here,” Kara whispered, and she pulled Carter into her arms, hugging him tightly. She still felt buried deep beneath the Arctic ice, but there was some space now — an inch or two that hadn’t been there before, which might just let her catch her breath. “I love you, Carter,” she told him, and her voice wasn’t so flat anymore.

Carter hugged her back tightly. “I love you, too, Mom,” he said. When he pulled back, he asked, “Wanna go watch some GBBO and eat popcorn until we explode? I mean, that’s what we’re supposed to do when Mom keeps us home sick, right?”

“Well, I don’t know about the exploding part,” said Kara, eyeing him dubiously, “but yeah. That sounds great. Meet you there?”

“Sure! I’ll queue it up. Netflix just added a new season.” Carter darted out the door and down the hall before Kara could promise to help with the popcorn. She pressed the washcloth to her face again, then reached for her phone.

She typed the word Your into the text window, then backspaced it out.

Our son is amazing , she sent to Cat. And so are you. This is just what I needed. Thank you.

The little flickering ellipsis appeared a second later. Kara, grateful though she was, wished she didn’t need the cell phone at all, but her connection to Cat was dark and had been since she’d woken up at the DEO. Every time she’d tried to probe the block hanging between them, her heart would begin to race and she’d pull back, afraid.

I’ve been known to have good ideas on occasion , came Cat’s reply, and Kara could almost hear her arid tone. I have a lunch meeting soon, but I’ll call afterward. Okay, darling?

A smile tugged at Kara’s lips. Carter was right, she thought. A little familiarity went a long way.

Talk to you then, she sent, impulsively following it with a heart emoji.

When Cat sent back the words Love you, too, Kara felt the ragged edges of her soul slowly begin to knit themselves back together.
(continued in part 2)
Cat went back to work after the brief texts from Kara but her smile lingered. More than anything else, the emoji at the end of their exchange reassured Cat. Although she herself eschewed the usage of the modern pictogram in her communications, Kara was fond of them and she included them in her texts often. Seeing one now gave Cat hope a thaw was on the way.

Cat’s smile faltered when she re-read the last sentence in the email she was composing. James’ few lines of apology and his anemic explanation regarding the whys and wherefores of his wholly unexpected resignation grated on her. Even a phone call would have been more appropriate. Cat wondered if he had the slightest inkling as to why he was leaving. It didn’t appear so.

Still, if it was an email James wanted, then an email he would get. Cat considered every word with a jeweler’s precision, wanting to craft a reply that was both surgically devastating and casually dismissive. She wondered if he would bother to tell Kara goodbye — and if so, how he would go about it. Voicemail? Text? Post-it note?

The thought of James treating Kara with such disdain burned away what was left of Cat’s smile, leaving a look Alice already knew well as one she wished she didn’t have to disturb.

“Miss Grant?” she asked, taking a tentative step inside the room. “Ms. Danvers is here to see you.”

Cat frowned but did not look up. “I believe Alex would rather you addressed her as ‘Agent’.”

“It’s not Alex, Miss Grant,” said Alice. “Your guest introduced herself as Eliza Danvers.”

Cat’s head snapped up. Sure enough, Kara’s foster mother stood outside her office, casually inspecting the plastic yellow daisies on Kara’s desk as if stopping by Cat’s office in the middle of the day was routine for her.

“In that case, the appropriate title would be Doctor.” Cat stood and came around her desk. “Please show her in and, Alice, will you set a third place for lunch? Eliza’s timing is, as always, impeccable.”

Alice nodded smartly and turned back to the doorway. If she was at all confused, she hid it well. She shepherded Eliza inside Cat’s sanctuary, then scurried to set a third place setting on the long coffee table before returning to her desk.

“Eliza?” asked Cat. When she’d left the penthouse this morning, Eliza had been regaling Carter with stories of lab experiments gone hilariously wrong. “Is everything all right?”

Eliza grasped Cat’s hand and leaned in to kiss her on the cheek. “Cat, please forgive me interrupting your workday unannounced. Everything is…” Eliza grimaced. “Well, it’s stable. For the moment, at least. Carter swore he had everything well in hand or else I wouldn’t have come.”

Cat gestured to the small conversation nook by the balcony doors, following Eliza there with a smirk. “Carter seems to be the rock of the family at the moment. I’d be concerned by the transformation if I didn’t suspect what was at the root of it.” She waited for Eliza to sit, then took a seat herself. “Kara texted me a few minutes ago to thank me for keeping her home with him. She said it was just what she needed.”

Eliza’s deep exhale ended with a weary chuckle. “Good. That’s a step in the right direction at least. When I left her, she was staring at your bedroom ceiling. I think she said two words to me. Texting is practically a miracle.”
“Then this is something Kara has experienced often?”

Eliza’s smile faded.

“Often enough. Especially in the early days, when she was still an open wound. She was overwhelmed by grief, by her new powers, by everything. Sometimes she’d hide in her room for days, not speaking, not eating. It didn’t help that we had no idea what we were doing.”

“What do you mean?” asked Cat, and her tone turned a little chillier.

“My husband and I meant well, we did,” said Eliza, “but we hadn’t thought our plan through. Not even a little. Not even at all.” She made a frustrated, self-deprecating sound. “Jeremiah and I saw a child who needed our help and we jumped. We thought wanting to help would be enough, but it wasn’t. Everything happened so fast…”

She looked away. “We failed Kara and we failed Alex, too,” she said finally. “We didn’t even explain what was happening until it was already done — a fait accompli.” Eliza held Cat’s gaze, her eyes shading into a stormy, subdued blue. “One minute, Alex was an only child with Jeremiah wrapped around her little finger and the next, she was the older sister to a traumatized alien dropped into our lives by Superman himself.”

“An older sister tasked with guiding a traumatized alien child in the customs and mores of her new planet.” Cat frowned. “No wonder Thanksgivings are so difficult for you three.”

Eliza nodded. “Don’t forget that Alex simultaneously blamed me for disrupting her entire life and for being the parent who survived.” Sadness rose in her eyes. “A daddy’s girl who’s lost her father too soon is almost unreachable, Cat. Lost in ways I couldn’t begin to understand or to soothe. Does that make sense?”

Cat swallowed the lump in her throat. “More than you know,” she said hoarsely, not trusting herself to explain.

Eliza’s face fell. “Not you too?” she asked, reaching for one of Cat’s hands and squeezing. Then something clicked and she made a connection she hadn’t before. “Oh my god, Cat. He was there — in the Black Mercy dream. Kara mentioned him, but I didn’t put the pieces together—”

Cat pulled her hand away, firmly but not sharply.

“It’s not a part of my life I share widely,” she said, dismissing Eliza’s concern. “Kara only knew because, well…”

“Because she’s Kara,” finished Eliza. “Even as a child, she was always so thoughtful. As I said, we were woefully unprepared for the type of care she would need, for the commitment required and the sheer intensity of it all. Kara struggled every single day yet there would be wildflowers in my teacup at the breakfast table just when I needed them most. Somehow she always knew.”

Cat pursed her lips. “Thoughtfulness can be a weapon, too,” she said pointedly.

Eliza frowned. “A weapon?”

“Or a preemptive defensive strike, if you prefer. A means to an end — in Kara’s case, keeping herself from being sent away, something that had happened too often already. Being thoughtful, making herself useful… she believes those things are the price she must pay for being allowed to stay, to belong.”
“No,” said Eliza, shaking her head. “That’s not…” Her denial trailed away as memories rose in her mind’s eye. Little things Kara had done throughout the years looked suddenly different in this new light.

Spending her allowance not on makeup or clothes like other girls her age, but rather on an old, rusted push-mower which she cleaned up herself and used to mow the lawn with clockwork precision for years. Letting Alex coerce her into night flying. Even the wildflowers in Eliza’s teacup.

A tiny shift in intent and those sweet, thoughtful acts went from an expression of love to a plea for it. From “I do this because I love you” to “I do this so you will love me.” The horror of it — of a child believing her usefulness alone could buy the security and love she needed — made Eliza sick.

“Oh, Cat,” she whispered. “What have I done?”

Cat shook her head. “You’re not the only one, Eliza. It began with Kara’s parents, no matter how noble their motives. And then Kal, whatever his reasons may have been, placed Kara with your family, perpetuating a pattern. I’m guilty of it, too — though it’s a mistake I’ll never make again.”

“She did everything we asked her to do, became exactly what we asked her to become. She didn’t want to be sent away again,” said Eliza, stricken. “And we didn’t realize.”

“I think Alex has figured it out on some level,” said Cat. “She’s fiercely loyal to Kara despite the resentment she must have felt, must still feel. So much so, she was able to reach her in the dreamstate when no one else could.” A smile touched her lips. “No matter how angry Alex gets with her, it doesn’t interfere with that loyalty. In fact, when Alex became aware of my relationship with Kara, she blamed me for it. She accused me of being a cougar taking advantage of her little sister.”

“She did not!” Eliza covered her mouth to stop her laughter but failed. “I don’t believe you!”

“Feel free to verify my claim with the source,” said Cat warmly, nodding toward the bullpen. Alice had just spotted Alex exiting the elevator and was on her way to greet her. “I invited Alex to lunch so we could discuss Kara’s mental health history. I realize now I should have asked you both.”

“Cat,” greeted Alex absently, staring warily at her mother as Alice showed her into the office. “Mom? What are you doing here?”

Eliza leaned in to kiss Alex’s cheek. “Well, I originally intended to quiz Cat on the Daat Kyashar, to see if there was something there that might help Kara. Instead, Cat and I may have stumbled into another reason for her… disengagement.”

“Depression, Mom,” corrected Alex, rolling her eyes. “It’s called depression. Possibly combined with PTSD. We’re all adults here. We should call it what it is.”

“I agree,” said Cat, gesturing for her guests to sit at the long table, smirking briefly when Eliza stared at the third place setting. “That’s why I asked Alex here, to talk about Kara’s depression and how it’s been treated in the past.”

Alex and Eliza shared an unreadable look, but neither spoke.

Cat looked back and forth between the women, first with shock, then with growing anger.

“She has been treated in the past,” said Cat, her certainty of that fact fading with each passing second. “Hasn’t she?”

Eliza opened her mouth to speak, but Alex interrupted her.
“How would we have done that, Cat?” she asked. “What medications could we have given her? Better yet, can you imagine the nightmare that would have resulted if we’d sent her to a CBT practitioner? Or a Freudian?” Alex scowled, insulted. “They would have locked her up.”

“The DEO didn’t have a qualified psychotherapist in their ranks? Someone who could have kept her treatment classified, who would have understood the issues at hand?”

Eliza shook her head. “We were trying to keep Kara out of their hands back then! We knew what they wanted her for, what they would have done to her.” She glowered and Cat sat back, shocked by the difference it made to Eliza’s features. “Jeremiah traded his freedom for Kara’s the night they came for her, after she’d taken Alex night flying one too many times. It cost him his life.”

Leaving that minefield of emotion alone for the moment, Cat turned to Alex, eyes grim. “And now she’s too afraid of Sam Lane and his goons to trust the DEO with anything he might be able to use to his advantage.”

Alex nodded. “Kara’s right to be concerned; Lane’s a monster. He’d lock her up if given half a chance — and that would be the least of your worries.” She sighed. “If you’re looking for therapy options outside what the three of us can provide, there aren’t many that wouldn’t involve the DEO in some way. And I don’t think Kara will stand for that.”

“What about Kal — or that ridiculously named research lab that assists him?” Disgust wrinkled Cat’s nose. “You know, creating acronyms requires a certain amount of finesse which none of you seem to possess. Honestly, it’s as if you think just any word will do.”

“What — S.T.A.R. Labs?” Alex scrubbed her face for a second. “I suppose I could poke around, ask a few questions. I have a contact there that might have an idea or two. But don’t go getting your hopes up — either of you.” She pointed at both women sternly. “The odds of finding a trained psychiatrist with sufficient clearance or experience is practically nil. In the meantime, we’ve got more pressing issues on the table.”

“What could be more pressing than your sister’s health?” asked Eliza.

“Good news or bad news first?”


Alex smirked. “The good news is Maggie may have found a connection between Grover Keene, Cat’s downstairs neighbor, and Max Lord. There were invoices in Max’s system from a company known as Kilglass LLC, the US subsidiary of an Irish corporation known as Ulster Technologies. Lord paid the company for components that were used in the transformation of Jane Doe, that Supergirl doppelganger from a couple of months ago? The funny thing is Maggie remembers seeing the word Kilglass somewhere in Keene’s file, but she can’t remember where. Her forensic accounting team is digging around to see if they can tie the company to Keene somehow.”

“If that’s the good news, what’s the bad?” asked Cat. She’d known the target of Maggie’s hunt for six months now but not that the NCPD was trying to tie him to Max Lord. Cat had lost what little respect she’d had for that man as soon as he’d come out as a vocal opponent of Supergirl. When his opposition led him to attack her superhero, Cat’s disapproval had turned to loathing. Nothing involving Max Lord had the right to be considered “good news.”

“What ever Non is up to, it’s bigger than the attempt on Kara’s life,” said Alex. “Maggie’s informants told her that Non considers his hit on Max’s base a success, even though we — Supergirl and the DEO — routed the strike team before they could take anything. When I talked to Max today about
what that could mean, he reminded me the base they hit was his satellite uplink center.”

“Meaning that instead of taking something, Non and his flying ignoramuses might have left something behind.”

“Exactly,” said Alex. “Which is why I was wondering if I could borrow Winn after lunch. With the information Max gave me and your independent CatCo satellites, he’s in a better position to corroborate Lord’s suspicions. It’ll be apples to apples, unlike with the military satellites at the DEO.”

“Borrow away,” said Cat with an elegant wave of her hand. “Just be sure I get him back in one piece. Winslow and I might have had our differences, but his actions over the last week have shown him to be a trusted ally. He’s too valuable to lose to your underground stormtrooper bunker.”

Alex grinned. “Trust me, the DEO can’t afford Winn. He’s way out of our league.”

“Don’t you forget it,” said Cat, winking.

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Cat and Eliza both chuckled later when Alex, who’d been waiting somewhat impatiently for Winn to return to his desk after lunch, bolted in the middle of a sentence as soon as she saw him crossing the bullpen.

“I apologize,” said Eliza, taking another sip of the ginger-lemon tea Alice had served with their lunch. “She’s been this way ever since she was little — a heat-seeking missile locked on target, consequences be damned.”

“Alex’s single-mindedness and disregard for the consequences have saved Kara’s life too many times for me to be worried about hasty goodbyes, Eliza,” said Cat, smiling. She finished her miso soup and set the bowl on the long table, reaching for her own cup of tea. She grimaced slightly before she took a sip.

Eliza saw.

“Are you not feeling well?” she asked. She looked at the remnants of their catered lunch and realized Cat had restricted herself to just that small bowl of soup and tea. “Should you be working? Can I do anything to help?”

Cat waved Eliza’s concern away with an elegant flutter of her hand. “I’m fine,” she assured her. “I’m sure it’s just a touch of separation sickness. I’ve worked through worse. Ask me about the year Carter had croup and I had walking pneumonia — it was during that terrible tsunami that killed so many in Indonesia. A little nausea is nothing.”

“If what I read about separation sickness in the Kalex files is at all accurate, Cat, it’s more than ‘a little nausea.’ Are you sure I can’t help?” She abandoned her teacup on the table. “After all, I originally came here to ask you about the Daat Kyashar...”

Cat’s gaze flicked toward Alice, typing serenely at Kara’s desk, then lighted on Eliza. “And as appreciative as I am of your concern, Eliza, and for your offer of help,” she said carefully, “I’d rather discuss that topic at home, with Kara and Carter present. Kara is anxious enough without my adding ex-parte discussions with her foster mother into the mix. And I’m sure Carter’s input will be essential to your understanding of the scope and breadth of the changes we’re experiencing.”

Eliza sat back and looked away. “Cat, I apologize. After everything we talked about today, I’m
jumping without looking. Again.”

“Let’s just say the heat-seeking missile doesn’t fall far from the Harrier jet,” said Cat warmly.

“Because that sounds so much better than ‘helicopter mom,’” said Eliza, chuckling. “No wonder the girls roll their eyes at me so much.”

Cat was about to respond when her cell buzzed on the table. “Forgive me,” she said, seeing the name on the screen, “but I have to take this. It’ll only take a moment.” She answered with a smile.

“Anjana. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“No pleasure, I’m afraid, Cat,” said the head of CatCo’s broadcast division. “You know we’ve been monitoring the social media platforms with a little more attention to detail since, well…”

“I’m aware,” said Cat, stiffening. Siobhan Smythe might have lost her career over her unethical behavior, but that didn’t mean Cat had forgiven her for it, especially since it had put Cat’s family at risk.

“About an hour ago, a concerning hashtag threw up a red flag after it had reached its five-hundredth retweet. #WhereisSupergirl? says Supergirl hasn’t been seen anywhere in National City since the incident at that club downtown on Friday night. Now Twitter users are tagging CatCo in their discussion, asking if we know anything. So…” Anjana hesitated. “Do we?”

“What would make you think I—”

“Cat, don’t,” said Anjana. “You might be able to put others off with that cutesy ‘Who, me?’ deflection, but I have archival footage. We’ve done our best over the years to keep her in the distance, to show her from odd angles or in motion, but we can’t manage it all the time. Anyone with a pair of functional eyes and too much time on their hands would know in less than five minutes.” She laughed but it was rueful. “I mean, Christ, Cat, her smile alone!”

Cat closed her eyes. “Are you asking if CatCo has an official statement on Supergirl’s whereabouts or are you asking me personally?”

“CatCo has no reason to respond to random Twitter interrogations and you owe me nothing at all, personally or professionally.” Anjana paused to choose her words carefully. “I’m respectfully suggesting our friendly neighborhood Kryptonian might want to make a brief but auspicious public appearance to allay community fears. Before this mysterious absence gets picked up by Snapper Carr and puts you back at the top of the evening news cycle.”

Cat’s eyes snapped open. “Do I pay you enough?” she asked, genuinely curious.

Anjana laughed again, this time with delight. “You do, but if you’re offering, I’m not above one of these little bonuses you’ve been handing out all week.”

“Done. I’ll walk it down to your office first thing tomorrow morning. In the meantime, it appears I have a phone call to make.”

“Ta,” said Anjana. “Say hello to Kara for me. I’m looking forward to working with her when her internship begins.”

Cat smirked. “I’ll bet you are. See you tomorrow.” When she hung up, she shook her head, staring at Eliza with a look that was partially exasperation and partially good old-fashioned dismay. “What part of secret identity is so hard for Kara to understand?” she asked.
“Oh,” said Eliza, giggling. “Someone else has figured things out, have they?”

“The head of my broadcast division and try ‘has known for years.’”

Eliza grimaced. “I know the feeling. I’m pretty sure my two closest neighbors not only knew but actively kept an eye on Kara, especially during her teens. If I had a nickel for every cryptic phone call I received over the years…” She gestured to Cat’s cell phone. “Is there a problem?”

“Nothing an unscheduled but very public sighting wouldn’t fix,” said Cat, rising. Her movement apparently caught Alice’s eye, because the redhead finished her typing and rose as well, straightening her jacket as she headed for Cat’s door. “I’m going to call and suggest that very thing,” continued Cat, shrewd eyes tracking Alice’s path. “Would you mind returning to the penthouse to stay with Carter while she’s out?”

“Of course not.” Eliza stood and tossed her linen napkin next to her plate. “Can I help with this?” She nodded at the remains of their lunch.

“I’ve already taken care of it, Dr. Danvers,” said Alice, smiling as she entered the room. She crossed to the table and began to stack plates and bowls at the end of it. “Jerrod is on his way up with the cart.”

“Thank you, Alice,” said Cat. “I need to make an urgent phone call and Eliza has an appointment. May I have you escort her to the car? Use the private elevator; it will be quicker.”

“Absolutely, Miss Grant.” Alice extended her arm toward the door. “After you, Dr. Danvers.”

Eliza leaned in to buss Cat’s cheek as she had when she arrived. “Thank you for everything, Cat,” she said. “We’ll talk more tonight.”

Cat squeezed Eliza’s hand briefly. “I’m counting on it,” she said, smiling as Eliza departed. Then she scooped up her phone and headed toward the balcony, dialing as she went. After a moment, she said, “Hello, darling,” and sighed with relief.

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Winn Schott headed across the bullpen, hands balled into fists at his side. When James had asked him to lunch earlier, Winn had been excited. It wasn’t often the two of them got to spend time together one on one, and proximity to James had always improved Winn’s coolness factor. Lunch at Noonan’s with his friend was just the thing to brighten an October Monday at CatCo — or so Winn had thought. He’d been so wrong.

“Winn!” called Alex. “Winn, wait up!” She hurried to Winn’s side, ignoring the curious glances of the other CatCo employees in the room. “Hey,” she said, grabbing his arm. “Didn’t you hear me?”

“Alex?” Winn scowled even more deeply than he had been. “What are you doing here?”

“I need your help with something,” she said, looking around furtively. “You know, something for Kara? Cat said I could borrow you.” When Winn didn’t react to her request, Alex frowned. Normally being asked to help on something related to Kara would have sent him over the moon. “What’s going on?” she asked. Seeing his half-empty Noonan’s cup, she added, “Bad lunch?”

Winn snorted. “The food was fine,” he said. “The company?” He wagged his hand. “Meh.” He slammed his to-go cup onto his desk. “I mean, did you know James was moving to Midway City? That he’s put in his two weeks’ notice? Am I the last to find out everything around here?”
Alex sensed there was more to that last question than just James’ news, but she focused on that, because, no, she hadn’t known.

“He told you that? Did he say why?”

Winn dropped into his chair and crossed his arms over his chest. “He said there was nothing left for him here, that he and Lucy weren’t working out and he’d had some sort of offer — something about less money but a better opportunity.” He finally looked up at Alex. “Better opportunity? Outside CatCo?” Winn scoffed. “I don’t think so. Which means he was lying.”

Alex would have thought that conclusion wildly off the mark a month ago, but stranger things had happened — were happening even now. She couldn’t fathom what reason James would have to lie about something so mundane, but then, she didn’t know him all that well.

“I’ll ask Cat, see if she knows anything,” Alex said, and she squeezed Winn’s shoulder to offer him some semblance of support. “In the meantime, about that thing…?”

Winn stared up at Alex blankly for a second, then bounced upright in his chair. “Oh, right! That thing!” His face crumpled into consternation. “Um, what thing exactly?”

Alex explained what she was looking for in the most general terms she could manage, which only ended up confusing Winn.

“But, like, the D—” He caught Alex’s warning glare just in time. “Er — your team has the best communications network anywhere. Why do you need me?”

Alex braced both hands on the edge of Winn’s desk and glared at him. “Because it wouldn’t be an apples to apples comparison,” she said lowly. “Lord Technologies is a privately held corporation, like CatCo.”

It took a minute for the penny to drop, but once it had, Winn was up and running. “Right,” he said and he turned back to his workstation, typing like the wind. “Good point. So you need me to analyze his satellite signals the same way I would analyze ours — to see if there’s anything weird floating around up there.” He glanced nervously at Alex, who hadn’t moved a muscle. “It might take a few minutes,” he cautioned her. “These solar flares have been playing havoc with my equipment for the last few weeks. You have no idea how happy I’ll be when they go away.”

“These what now?” asked Alex.

Winn’s fingers slowly stopped their lightning speed movement. “Solar flares?” he repeated. “We’ve been getting two or three little ones a day for about a month now, but there’ve been a few big ones, too. Big enough to briefly knock out our sat...ellites…” The lightning fingers were back. “What if…?”

“What if what?” urged Alex.

“What if that attack at Lord Technologies coincided with one of the larger solar flares?” After a minute, he had his answer. “It did! There was an eleven-minute blackout in one of the server farms associated with those particular satellites — the perfect amount of time to upload...a nasty...little…” His fingers flew over his keyboard in a crescendo that ended with a flourish when he slammed the Enter key. “Bug.” Winn pointed at his screen, grinning smugly. “There it is. A virus embedded in the C-band spectrum.”

“A virus that does what?”
Winn’s face fell. “I — uh — I don’t know. That’ll take more time to figure out. More than just an afternoon. If it’s encrypted, it could take months.”

“We may not have months,” snapped Alex, thinking frantically about what Non’s next move might be. “The server farm will spread that virus to whatever computers are connected to it but you said there were others, right? Other server farms fed by those satellites?”

Winn nodded. “Lord has seven total — that we know of, I mean. Ones in National City. Miss Grant thinks he has others, maybe in Nevada or Arizona, but she can’t prove it.”

“There haven’t been other large-scale attacks at server farms; we would have heard.” Alex began to pace in a tight circle next to Winn’s desk. “What about other things — burglaries or incidents reported to security?”

“Coinciding with blackouts caused by solar flares?” Winn went back to typing. “Yeah. One reported a tripped alarm but no sign of a break-in. They chalked it up to the blackout. Two more had incidents where blackouts caused electronically locked doors to open unexpectedly. There was no sign of foul play except for a stray cat they found sleeping under a server rack in one of the warehouses. Aaaaand…” He finished typing and sat back. “One security guard reported finding a drug addict who spoke no English wandering around behind their building looking through trash cans during one of the blackouts. He says he scared him off. Hasn’t seen him since.”

“Nothing at the other two farms?” asked Alex.

Winn shrugged. “Nothing reported.”

“Which might mean they’re the next targets. Whatever Non’s up to, he wants a wide reach. He’s not going to let these two go.” Alex looked outside at the sunshine. “Any more solar flares on the horizon?”

“NOAA thinks the storm might end soon. Says there might be one or two big ones in the next forty-eight hours, then all quiet on the solar front.” Winn chuckled at his joke. Alex ignored it.

“Which gives us time. Not much, but more than we had an hour ago.” Alex turned and grinned at Winn. “I could kiss you,” she said. “I’m not going to because my girlfriend is armed and dangerous and wouldn’t like that at all, but it doesn’t change how grateful I am.”

“Girlfriend?” asked Winn, eyebrows tenting up over sad brown eyes. “You too?”

Alex laughed. “Oh, buddy. Wrong tree. Wrong forest.” She clapped him on the back. “I’m sorry.”

“S’okay,” he sighed. “It’s become an alarming trend in my life. I’m getting used to it.”

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Midday sunlight bathed Kara in its soothing rays. She wished she felt it.

After they’d mainlined half the new season of “The Great British Bake Off” in one sitting, Carter said he wanted to go outside for a while. The house was stuffy and dark, he complained, and he was tired of loafing around on the couch. Couldn’t they go to the park or something?

Kara, hesitant to go anywhere too public, had offered a compromise, and here they both sat, up on the rooftop terrace, each of them basking in the warmth of an oddly balmy October day. Carter read while Kara dozed, hoping the sunshine would help melt the ice in her heart.
It wasn’t working.

The lightness and space she’d felt earlier after her cry seemed to be receding, eaten up by the massive shadow in her head, dark enough to block the sun. Where was the heat? Where was the light that had given her so much on this planet, more than she’d expected, more than she’d wanted?

Rao, red with soft, luscious luminescence like the comfort of the womb had given her to Sol, harshly bright, burning, consuming itself with a gleaming, ravenous, white-hot roar, filling her cells with a power she hadn’t known existed anywhere in the Universe. And though she could feel that power coiled within her, ready to spring forth at the slightest thought, Kara knew it couldn’t help the storm raging in her heart and head.

She wanted to face that storm. Some part of her knew that was the only way to break its hold on her.

Instead, she hid, powerless against it, angry at herself and ashamed.

But maybe….

Kara frowned.

Maybe the answer wasn’t facing it or fighting it, but surrendering to it, letting it take her, letting it swallow her whole. After all, who could stop her from making that choice?

She was so tired and holding on seemed like such wasted effort when all she wanted to do was sleep. Sleep and never wake. Floating in an inky dead nothingness for—

Kara’s phone buzzed in her lap and her eyes snapped open. She fumbled for the device, disoriented, and shielded her eyes from the midday light. She answered on the third ring, groggier than she thought she should be for just a nap in the sunshine.

“Hello?”

“Hello, darling,” said Cat and Kara could hear the smile in her voice. “How are you feeling?”

Kara wanted to say empty. Empty like places forgotten to time and memory, like the spaces between atoms. Empty like the hole where Krypton had been once, a long time ago.

She didn’t say it but she took too long to answer and Cat was no slouch in reading between the lines.

“Kara,” she breathed, and Kara heard the love and the guilt permeating the name. She wished she could feel them both through their bond, could taste them again, in all their bright and sour glory. The flavor of Cat’s emotions in the Daat Kyashar was so different from how Kara experienced her own and she missed the pop and sizzle of them. More than anything else, Kara loathed being untethered, left to face the questions and the darkness in her head alone.

“I’m okay,” she said, but they both knew she was lying. “Is something wrong?”

“Social media has started asking where Supergirl is, wondering if she was hurt or worse during the incident at the club on Friday night. Anjana suggested a brief public sighting—”

Kara groaned. “Couldn’t Hank do it?” she snapped. “I mean, I’m not exactly at my best, am I? And I’ve got Carter with me, or have you forgotten that, too?”

Cat ground her teeth, thankful the phrase ‘biting one’s tongue’ wasn’t meant to be literal. Otherwise, she’d have bitten through hers several times over by now. Anger churned inside her and lapped at
her reason, eroding it. She knew how easy it would be to give in, to let that slick, oily tide carry her along only to dump her into a roiling sea. But the easy thing to do wasn’t often the right thing to do, especially here. Kara’s uncharacteristic irritability was a symptom of something much deeper and Cat knew it was both a cry for help and a means of pushing that help away.

“I haven’t forgotten,” she said evenly. “Eliza is on her way to stay with him. If you’d rather not go, though, I could call your sister to arrange an alternative. You’re right; I had forgotten we had options on that front. Would you like me—”

“No,” said Kara, scowling. “Don’t call Alex.” She blew out a harsh breath. “I’ll do it. When Eliza gets here, I’ll — I don’t know — I’ll go see if there’s a bus accident or a mugging I can stop or something.” Her petulance faded as her words did, though, and shame rushed in to fill the vacuum. “I’m sorry—”

“Don’t apologize,” said Cat. “Kara, I know you’re hurting but I also know we’re going to get through this. It’ll take time but we have that. We have all the time in the world, sweetheart. I’m not going anywhere. Stronger together, remember?”

“I remember,” replied Kara, and her voice broke on the words. All she wanted was to go back. Before the Black Mercy, before Pearl, before that moment in the walk-in closet when she’d thought about severing their bond. Back to the first home she’d had in such a long time, safe and happy inside the golden bubble of Cat and Carter’s love.

“I love you,” she blurted, grasping for that feeling of normalcy, but the words were small and the feeling slipped away.

“I love you, too, darling,” said Cat, blinking back frustrated tears. She felt she was failing Kara, that she should be doing more but what? What on Earth could help her ailing alien superhero when medicines and doctors and traditional therapies couldn’t?

A splinter of memory flashed across Cat’s brain just then — a red steam engine puffing through the Scottish countryside besieged by a diaphanous malevolence — which gave her an idea. It wasn’t much of one but it was better than sitting on her hands. “I’ll be home soon,” she promised, looking up to see Alice returning from escorting Eliza to the car. As she waved her junior assistant into the office, she added, “Please be careful when you go out. I won’t know if you’re hurt or in danger.”

“I will,” sighed Kara, resigned now to her task. “I’ll call when I’m done.”

“Good. Remember, shorter is better. Do just enough to catch Twitter’s unblinking eye.” Cat hated that they had to be so conspicuous but a Supergirl sighting now might be enough to prevent a media frenzy later. Cat thought they had already suffered through one too many of those this week. “When you get home, there’ll be a surprise waiting for you,” she said, the smile back in her voice.

“A surprise?” asked Kara dubiously. “What kind of surprise?”

“One that won’t require you to do anything but lie on the couch,” Cat assured her, hearing the worry in Kara’s voice. “I promise.”

Kara wasn’t sure she believed Cat, but she’d already ended the call.

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“General?” Tel-Van held a tablet interface out to Astra but she didn’t seem to notice him. Instead, she glared at her workstation’s monitor as if it had personally offended her. She’d been staring at it that way for some time.
“General?” he said again, louder this time, and he thrust the tablet closer to her. He dared not touch her — a violation of that magnitude would likely be fatal — but the information he’d received from one of this planet’s more advanced satellites was time-sensitive and he knew she’d want to see it.

Astra ignored him. She didn’t even blink.

Since his assignment to Astra was punishment for his near failure with the placement of the Black Mercy, Tel-Van hadn’t exactly been expecting camaraderie from her, but he had been expecting interaction of some sort. At the bare minimum, he expected to be given orders and to carry those out, but his only direction had come from Non before he’d left on his reconnaissance mission: predict when the next strong solar flares would erupt.

Once Non had that information and the two remaining Lord Technologies server farms were infected with the virus they’d created, they could move on to the final phase of Myriad and National City would be theirs. Tel-Van had in his hands a promising report of pre-flare activity indicating they could strike sooner than anyone had predicted. Technically, nothing was stopping him from passing that information on to Non directly — nothing except ten thousand years of Kryptonian military hierarchy and protocols, that is.

The regulations were clear: unless his superior officer was dead or severely incapacitated, Tel-Van could not usurp her rank to communicate with her equals. Non would have his head if he did and Tel-Van didn’t want to die on this backwater waste-planet any more than the rest of his Kryptonian brethren did. However, as he stood there contemplating whether or not he could convince Non that Astra was incapacitated, Non saved him from having to make that decision.

He swept into the control room in a rage and headed like a missile toward Astra. Astra turned just in time to see Non’s outstretched hands before they closed around her throat. He dragged her out of her chair and slammed her into the wall. Tel-Van scurried out of the way.

“What have you done?!” growled Non. A red glow rimmed his eyes and he was angrier than Astra could ever remember seeing him. She clawed at his hands but they gripped tighter, strangling her. “Take...your hands...off...me!” she gasped. She had little leverage with her feet off the ground, but she tried to kick at him anyway, landing a few choice blows which he ignored. “What...is the...meaning of this?”

“SHE IS ALIVE!” Non roared, and he was so close to her face Astra felt the hint of ice in his breath. “I saw her — your niece — downtown, putting out a fire in a warehouse, shaking hands with grateful human vermin!” He shoved Astra hard and pressed into her, his eyes glowing redder by the second. “Which means she survived the Black Mercy, something she couldn’t have done without help — your help! So I will ask you again, my wife. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?”

Astra did not answer. Instead, she fired off a single blast of heat vision at point-blank range.

Non made a sound very close to a yelp and let her go, leaping backward out of the line of fire. He scowled and swiped at his cheek where a scorch mark healed over, then disappeared.

Astra rose from the floor where she’d fallen and fired off two more shots at him. He dodged them but they weren’t meant to connect. They were swats at a gnat.

“I am a member of the royal house of In-Ze, the daughter of QUEENS!” She strode toward him, unafraid, fists curled at her sides. “I am in command here. Have you forgotten that again?” she asked, smiling at him with a serpentine twist to her lips.
Astra shot at Non like an arrow, pushing him into the wall. She was on the offensive this time and
gave him no chance to mount a counter-attack. “Whatever you saw, you were mistaken, husband.
Do not forget the rumors of a shapeshifter helping the humans. Perhaps they seek to hide their
vulnerability. Or perhaps they bested the creature and saved her from its grasp. Either way, it was
none of my doing.”

She ground the lie out from between gritted teeth and shoved him harder into the wall. The metal
groaned and creaked. Astra let him go before it succumbed altogether.

“The human vermin do not possess the technology nor the intelligence to overcome the effects of a
fully engaged Black Mercy,” he spat, rubbing feeling back into his shoulder. “You overestimate
them.”

“And you underestimate those who might seek alliances with them,” she shot back. “That fugitive
Mohlkanite saved their lost soldiers. He works with them now.”

Non waved that statement away dismissively. “Mohlkanites are a slave race. They seek to be owned;
nothing more.” He walked over to where Tel-Van watched their argument with wide eyes and
snatched the tablet from his hands, scrolling through the data.

Astra knew differently about the Mohlkanites, of course. She’d studied their superior building and
mining skills as a young woman, knew of the vast wealth they had amassed offering those services to
other races. The fabled beauty of the Sunken Cities of Mohlkiin, their home planet, was said to rival
even Krypton’s capital city Kandor — before the slave traders of Daxam had plundered them, that
is.

Clearly, Non saw only the potential of a slave.

“Excellent,” said Non when he finished with the tablet. He tossed it back to Tel-Van without looking
and strode to his workstation, bringing several predictive solar flare models up on his screen. He
plugged in the data from the arctic satellite and almost smiled. “We’ll soon be able to finish re-
purposing Maxwell Lord’s crude technology to our needs. Then it won’t matter who has made
alliances with whom.” He sneered at Astra. “All will fall under our command.”

Astra nodded sharply and went back to her workstation, sending word to her soldiers to prepare for
an imminent attack, all the while wondering what she would be doing now had she taken Alex
Danvers’ offer to join Kara and her friends.

She flicked her gaze to the coward Tel-Van, then to her husband, sure of only one thing: whatever it
was, it would no longer involve carrying out Non’s orders.

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When Kara returned to the penthouse smudged with soot from head to toe, she found Eliza helping
Carter with his homework at the dining table.

Nothing surprising there, she thought morosely, remembering Cat’s promise.

Eliza’s smile when she looked up slowly faded. “Kara, honey?” she asked, rising from the table.
“What on earth happened?”

“Warehouse fire,” said Kara. She sidestepped Eliza’s offered embrace and grabbed a glass from the
dish-drainer, filling it from the tap. She drank down three glasses of tepid water before elaborating.
“Artisanal bread flour distributor. Set off by someone on their smoke break, they think. Someone
who didn’t see the signs.”
"Is everyone okay?" asked Carter, pencil poised above a legal pad. Books opened to various chapters surrounded him like sandbags around a foxhole.

Kara nodded. “Only ten men were working in the warehouse and only one was burned. A couple of others had smoke inhalation. Everyone else was out making the afternoon deliveries.” She filled her glass a fourth time, adding, “My favorite bakery uses their flour, I think.”

That meant nothing to Eliza but Carter grinned before he could catch himself. “Oh. Um.” He tried not to look down the hall. “That’s too bad.”

A tingle of suspicion made the base of Kara’s skull itch, but she couldn’t muster the energy to care. She wanted to take a shower. Plus there was the tiny issue of the promise she’d made to Cat. And the promise Cat had made to her.

“I’m going to go get cleaned up,” she said, fishing her phone out of one of her boots. “And I told your mom I’d call when I got home. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

Now it was Eliza’s turn to grin maddeningly. She too fought the urge to glance down the hall.

“Take your time,” she said, waving cheerfully as she sat back down at the table. “Carter and I are catching up on his schoolwork so he won’t be behind when he goes back tomorrow.”

Kara didn’t like the idea of Carter returning to school so soon after an attack by Non and she knew Cat would like it even less. She reached out through the Daat Kyashar to ask if she’d approved the move and realized her mistake as soon as she encountered the impenetrable black wall in her head. Cursing under her breath, Kara tapped the screen of her phone instead, trying not to stomp her way down the hall.

Cat answered on the first ring.

“Are you alright, darling?” she asked and the genuine concern in Cat’s voice warmed Kara’s cold heart a degree or two.

“I’m fine,” she said, still irritated. “Is it on Twitter yet?”

Cat chuckled and Kara heard the sound coming from two directions at once, like a strange reverberation.

“Wait — Cat, where are you? I can hear—”

“I promised you a surprise, didn’t I?” asked Cat, voice laced with synthetic innocence. “But it can wait until you’ve showered. You’re more ash than superhero at the moment based on these pictures I see.” She gentled her voice. “Change into something soft and appropriately slouchy, darling, and meet me on the west-side balcony. You’re off duty for the rest of the day.”

Kara sped through her shower and met Cat on the balcony as requested, still toweling her hair dry. Cat sat in the club chair next to the couch, scrolling through something on her phone — her Twitter feed, probably. A gigantic chocolate cake sat on the table in front of her, decorated with tiny red trains.

Kara’s stomach growled.

Cat glanced up and smirked at the startled look on Kara’s face.

“Some things will never change,” she mused. She discarded her phone and rose, skirting the table to
pull Kara into her arms.

Kara resisted at first, but only for a second. The familiar scent of Cat’s perfume and the familiar heat of her body melted Kara’s hesitation and she curled into the embrace. The towel, forgotten, dropped to the balcony floor.

“I’m sorry,” whispered Kara and emotion bubbled up inside her like a geyser, strangling her, blurring her vision with tears. “I’m so sorry, Cat — for earlier — for everyth—”

“No apologies,” ordered Cat, pulling back from their embrace just enough to shake her head. “You’ve done nothing wrong. Having emotions, being angry or sad or both — you’re allowed those things. You’re allowed to be human.”

“But I’m not human!” Kara cried, and she yanked herself out of Cat’s arms. “I should be able to handle this! I should be better than this!” She crossed to the balcony railing and stared out at the horizon, not seeing it. “It’s not as if I haven’t faced it before.”

“True,” said Cat, and she returned to Kara’s side, determined to reconnect with her hurting lover in whatever way she could. “But you were a child then, darling. A stranger in a strange land. And the people you needed the most, who should have been there for you, were too busy trying to protect you. On both sides of the universe.” She put her hand on Kara’s forearm. “They did the best they could — all of them — but it wasn’t enough.”

Kara fought her tears but even that seemed to be too much for her. They spilled over her lashes in angry rills. “No,” she agreed bitterly. “It wasn’t.”

“It’s okay to admit that, Kara,” said Cat softly, her grip tightening. “It doesn’t mean you love them any less.”

Now Kara turned to look at Cat, desperate hope warring with desperate grief in her eyes. “It doesn’t?” she asked, and her voice cracked on the question because she had always thought it meant exactly that — that she was ungrateful, that she was selfish, that she hadn’t deserved any of it. Not her survival, not her adoption, not anyone’s love or protection.

“It doesn’t,” Cat assured her. “Your parents and foster parents were doing the best they could with the resources they had at hand and despite that, they still fell short on nearly every measure. No matter how noble their motives, their actions caused you pain. Your emotional response to that pain is valid. No one has the right to deprive you of it, not even you.”

Cat slid her hand into Kara’s and tugged her toward the couch, kicking off her shoes as she went. She hadn’t planned to stay — she had so much to do — but Kara needed her right now and that took precedence over everything else. She settled in the nest of blankets she’d made for Kara, then invited the disheveled, sniffling Kryptonian to join her.

Kara collapsed into Cat’s embrace like an old barn succumbing to the passage of time.

Cat kissed the top of Kara’s head, then tucked it under her chin, letting her fingertips drift up and down Kara’s arm.

“How do you think your parents wanted you to go without them that terrible day, Kara?” she asked, her voice soft but serious. “Don’t you think they would have given anything — everything — to have made that journey with you? To have been by your side all this time, helping you become the astonishing woman you are?”

“I… I don’t know,” Kara said. It had all happened so fast. Months of conversations with her parents,
urgent what-ifs and contingency plans too terrifying to contemplate, had changed from conjecture to necessity in the blink of an eye. All Kara remembered was the panic and confusion. How utterly afraid she’d been. Of it being too late. Of time running out. Of everything she’d ever known burning away.

“I do,” said Cat. “Because I know how I’d feel if it was my child. If there was only time to save one of us, I would choose Carter every time, but every single cell in my body would want to go with him, would cry out for him, would cling to him desperately.”

The truth of Cat’s words buffeted Kara like echoes of a misremembered past. She’d learned just how far she would go to protect Carter the instant the Daat Kyashar had made him her son, too. The bond’s stubborn darkness now didn’t change how she felt and Kara remembered her vow to Cat as if she’d only made it moments ago: she would protect Carter “as long as breath or blood remained.”

Had it been that way for Kara’s parents? Their marriage had been arranged for political gain and she was created rather than born, a product of the Codex where genetic imperfections could be minimized or eliminated. Had Alura and Zor-El loved her with the same desperation and dauntlessness as Cat loved Carter, a son born of love?

It was too dizzying a question to think about right now.

“And Eliza? Jeremiah?” she asked instead. Because they, too, were a part of this, had always been a part of this.

Cat didn’t answer for a long moment.

“That’s messier,” she said finally, “and nowhere near as excusable as the mistakes your parents made. Alura and Zor-El faced impossible choices under catastrophic circumstances. Eliza and Jeremiah made choices — important ones — on a whim, without much deliberation at all, it seems. But—” Cat forced herself to take a deep, calming breath, to gentle her tone. “But they made their mistakes out of love, too, darling. Though you and I might fail to understand how they came to their ill-advised conclusions, there is no denying they thought they had your best interests at heart.”

Kara sat up in Cat’s arms, her tear-stained face crumpled by confusion. “And you’re saying it’s okay for me to feel that way — that they made mistakes — mistakes that hurt me — even though they took me in when—” She swallowed the unexpected lump in her throat and forced herself to say the thing that was so hard to say. “—when Kal wouldn’t.”

There it was, the final betrayal. Having been rejected by her raison d’etre, Kara had tried to fill the resulting void with earthly perfection, hoping she could carve some semblance of belonging and purpose out of what she’d been left with, no matter how inadequate, how hollow.

Cat’s eyes narrowed with murderous intent. “We’ll talk about Kal-El’s failures another day,” she said tightly. “When you’re feeling more yourself and I’m feeling more charitable. But yes, Kara.” She cupped Kara’s cheek in her palm and her gaze softened. “All parents fail their children. You’re allowed to acknowledge those failures and you’re allowed to love your parents anyway.” She chuckled ruefully. “The survival of the species probably depends on it, actually.”

Tears welled in Kara’s eyes again but she wouldn’t let them fall. Instead, she tucked herself back under Cat’s chin, and whispered, “Okay.”

After a long moment spent wrestling with this new information, Kara finally asked the question of the hour.
“Cat, why is there a chocolate cake with little red trains on the coffee table?”

Cat laughed, but it was self-deprecating. “A bit of Potter-esque inspiration,” she explained. “I thought if chocolate helped with dementor attacks and dementors were an allusion to depression, then your favorite triple chocolate cake from Georgia on My Mind couldn’t hurt.”

“And how am I supposed to eat it, exactly?”

Cat flipped open a cloth napkin on the table, revealing a lone fork.

Kara pouted. “You’re not going to stay and help?” she asked.

Cat wanted to make a smartass remark about this being Kara’s *Matilda* moment, not hers, but the pout was too powerful. “I’ll have one bite,” she said, gouging a small crater out of the buttercream frosting ringing the base of the cake. She groaned quietly at the exquisite flavor then handed Kara the fork. “Now you’re on your own,” she said, extricating herself from their tangle on the couch. “I have dinner to prepare and we have guests arriving at six-thirty.”

Kara’s face fell. “Guests?” she asked plaintively. She wasn’t really up for people. Hell, she wasn’t even up for eating her favorite cake. Having to put on a show for guests sounded positively exhausting.

“Your sister, her girlfriend, Winn, and Hank,” explained Cat, finding and slipping back into her shoes. “Eliza wanted to share the knowledge she has on the Daat Kyashar sooner rather than later—”

“Which explains Alex, Maggie, and Hank,” agreed Kara, “but Winn? Is that a good idea?”

“Good or not, it was Alex’s; not mine.” Cat shrugged. “Apparently Non is up to more than just plant-based horror, something that involves Maxwell Lord’s satellite uplink center. She thinks it means Non has a larger objective. Winn, I’m told, has information that corroborates her suspicions.”

Cat could see Kara wasn’t reassured, so she knelt in front of her.

“Look at me, darling,” she said. When Kara raised her gaze to meet Cat’s, Cat leaned forward to place a single chaste kiss on her lips. “You only have to stay in the discussion as long as you deem necessary. If that’s five minutes or fifty or none at all, the decision is yours to make. Whatever you choose to do, I will support you. Understood?”

Kara nodded a watery little nod and with it came the first real smile Cat had seen on her in what seemed like months.

“Thank you,” she said sincerely. Then her eyes took on a bit of the sky, becoming bluer as Cat watched. “I love you, Cat,” Kara added, and this time it wasn’t an apology, but an affirmation.

“I love you, too, darling,” Cat replied, voice roughened by emotion. She kissed Kara one more time, then stood, nodding to the cake. “If you can’t eat it all in one sitting, I know a growing boy who would love a piece.”

“I’ll save a piece for both of you,” promised Kara before diving in for her first bite. She couldn’t help the sound of sheer delight as the decadent chocolate hit her tongue and she went back for more in spite of herself.

Maybe she could eat the whole thing after all.

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