# Phantasmagoria

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**Summary**

Kara meets Maggie first. They're drawn to one another, but Alex enters the picture and that complicates things. So does Lena, who gets more love than she bargained for.

Or: Maggie and Kara are dating, they decide to open up their relationship and give polyamory a try. A whole lot of love gets added to the mix. Expect four characters trying to do right by each other whilst exploring various romantic/sexual dynamics and permutations. There’s love, joy, epic slow burns, collateral damage and might-have-beens. (Do not expect: the hotly requested foursome. Not in this story, friends!)
The fires are under control but smoke still plumes into the night. Maggie’s finger is splintered, her rib is cracked and she’s on her fifth cup of coffee for the night. It hasn’t helped; she can barely keep her eyes open.

All things considered, she’s lucky to be alive. Not bad considering their alien mascot went rogue. And she thought Gotham was dangerous. She thinks of Kate and pushes her out of her head.

A blinking streetlight draws her attention, along with the preppy blonde walking in the dark. A raindrop hits her windshield and then another. Maggie slows the car. The blonde keeps walking until Maggie flashes her lights at her.

She stops. Maggie rolls down the passenger side window.

“Am I in trouble?” The woman asks. She almost looks guilty.

“Need a lift?” What she really wants is a beer, some pizza and to crawl into bed. The blonde approaches the window, manicured nails and hands neatly on the door. She’s young. Cute. “Looks like you’re out past curfew.”

“What?”

Maggie smiles. “It’s starting to rain. And unless you haven’t turned on a television in the past twenty-four hours you know Supergirl’s lost it.” The blonde frowns gently, adjusting her glasses. “It’s not safe out.”

“I appreciate it but I’ll be fine on my own.” She pulls back and walks.

Maggie keeps the window rolled down, still traveling much too slow. “Hey, people are going to start thinking I’m looking for the wrong kind of company if you don’t get in.” She waves her splintered finger. “I’ll stop being a pain in the ass once you let me drop you off at home.” Maggie pulls the car over and leans to look out. A moment later the blonde walks over and gets in. She’s on edge. “Rough night?”

“Yeah. You could say that.” She looks her over apprehensively.

“I look like someone out of a police lineup, huh?”

“You look hurt.” So much concern in her voice, sweet like maple syrup.

“Ah, it’s just a scratch.” A few cuts on her face, a broken rib and she still has a car, unlike other officers. “Name’s Maggie Sawyer. I’m a detective with NCPD.” The woman’s quiet. “Mind telling me your name? I promise I won’t run it for any warrants.”

A smile almost touches her lips. “It’s just Kara.”
“Nice to meet you, ‘just Kara.’”

They end up at a hole in the wall with greasy burgers and fries, Miller Lite on tap. A hidden gem and occasional dump. Kara insists on paying. It seems to mean something to the girl so Maggie lets her, watching her pull the perfectly flat bills from her clutch purse, saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ to the bedraggled cashier. Maggie would kill for a beer but can’t justify getting behind the wheel after tossing one back.

“This is amazing. I’m bringing Alex here.”

Who’s Alex? Probably a boyfriend. Maggie smiles. Rare to see a cute girl pounding away at a meal like that. Maybe it’d be different if it was a date. Now and then Kara turns distractedly towards the dinosaur of a TV playing behind the bar, watching Supergirl’s antics. Whatever the meal did to restore her mood, the news has stripped right away. “You usually wander National City when it’s in the midst of crisis?”

Kara wipes her lips with a napkin and has a sip of soda. “You talk like I’m a damsel in distress.”

Maggie folds her arms on the booth and leans forward. “In my defense, you looked to be in distress.”

“I’m not a… um.” She frowns, considering. “Agh, Winn and Ms. Grant would be so disappointed right now. The witch with the shoes? I don’t melt in the rain.”

“You don’t look like a witch to me.” Flawless skin, bright blue eyes, flushed cheeks and lips. Supergirl might have knocked her around tonight, but even in her condition she can see.

“Sometimes witches don’t look like witches.” Maggie smiles, wondering why she’s contradicted the entire point she was trying to make. “I was trying to clear my thoughts. That’s not illegal.”

“Consider clearing them somewhere else. I saw a lot of crazy shit tonight. National City’s got more polish than Gotham, but a hell of a lot more aliens.”

“What do you have against aliens?”

“Nothing, when they’re not throwing cars at me and trying to destroy the city.” Kara winces. “A few of my buddies are in the hospital tonight.”

Kara breathes unevenly. “Will they be okay?”

“Yeah, they’re tough. Bullets don’t bounce off of us. We just have to keep going. We don’t get as many damned parades, either.”

“I think you’re brave.”

Maggie leans back into the booth. So damned earnest. She laughs, not sure how to believe it.
Maggie pulls the earphones away and trots over to her. It’s early morning, the air wet and grey. Kara leans into the dewy railing, overlooking the water. “If it isn’t ‘just Kara’,” Maggie smiles, wiping sweat off her forehead with the back of her hand. She usually jogs the park in the early morning but has never seen Kara before.

“Maggie,” her face lights up like the sunrise. Maggie’s momentarily staggered by it. “It’s good to see you.” She lowers her glasses, adjusting them back up her nose. There’s a small crinkle. “Maybe you should try to take it easy for a while.”

Maggie laughs. So the junior librarian gives lectures. “You have x-ray glasses or something? I’ve never been good at following doctor’s orders.” Kara’s wearing one of her little sweaters, a pearl necklace. “You’re not working out.” But it looks like she works out.

“I’m waiting for Ms. Grant’s favorite coffee place to open up.”

“You a secretary?”

“Personal assistant. Slash, slave, depending on the day.” She looks her over. “How are your buddies? The ones who were in the hospital?”

“Hopped up on IVs but making a speedy recovery. Supergirl is trying to get back into the good graces of National City.”

“How’s she doing?”

“She’ll get there. We all have bad days, right?” Kara nods, though somewhat morosely. “You okay? None of the coffee shops open up for another hour.”

“I have a lot on my mind.”

“Your boss a bitch?”

Kara laughs. Busted. “She’s… challenging.” Maggie nods. A bitch, then. “But that’s not it.” She shakes the thoughts away. “Actually, I’ve been thinking about you.”

Maggie perks. “You have?”

“Yeah. That night… it was a bad night for me and for you. I wasn’t thinking. You dropped me off and… well, I didn’t know how to get a hold of you. I didn’t think to until after the fact.”

“So you camped out here, hoping to catch me on my morning jog?” Kara fidgets. “That was a joke.”

“Oh.” A nervous smile. “You were injured. You’re still injured. And you’d had a long crappy day and you still gave me a ride back. That was really decent.”

She smiles wryly. “I try.” And often fails.

“So, let me take you out for a drink? Or dinner?”

“You already bought me dinner. You’re not trying to get me go steady are you?” Kara’s eyes widen, a line cutting her brow. “Cause I’m kind of already going steady with someone else.” Even if it’s on the rocks. Even if they haven’t talked in days.

“It’d just be dinner. Or drinks. Or dinner and drinks.”
Maggie smiles. “How about tonight at nine? Corner of State and Elm?”

“It’s a date.” She grimaces. “A non-date date.”

Maggie slips the ear buds back. “I’ll wear something pretty.” She takes off, fighting the urge to look back.

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She arrives five minutes early but Kara is already there, sitting at a high top table, looking around uncomfortably.

Maggie watches her from a distance. There’s something different about her. Her hair is loose around her shoulders, pulled back from her face with a small clip. She turns to her, smiles and slips her glasses on.

Maggie moves over. Kara slips down from her chair. “Hi!” She gives her a brief, tight hug. She’s tall. And smells like fresh laundry. “Sorry, too soon?” she adjusts her glasses.

“I’ll survive.” Maybe. Her rib isn’t feeling too great about now. Kara’s wearing a white dress with a thin red belt. Maggie briefly imagines unlatching it and forces herself to take a seat across from her. “So this isn’t your usual place, is it?”

“How can you tell?”

She cocks her head. “Pretty obvious if you know what to look for. I prefer dives myself.” But taking her to her usual place is out of the question.

Kara grabs her purse, a light purple color and starts to stand. “Let’s go there, then.”

“You wouldn’t like it.”

“Why not? I can be adventurous.”

“Let’s be adventurous some other time.” It took forever to find parking. “Get that coffee for your boss?”

“I’m still alive, so, yes. Arrest anyone today?”

“Not yet, but the night is young. I don’t get to stop being a cop just because I’m off duty.” She flags a waitress over. “I’ll have a beer,” she looks at Kara, “what are you having?”

Kara takes a breath, the decision paramount. “Can I get something with an umbrella in it?”

The waitress moves on and Maggie laments the twenty dollar drink Kara’s ordered. “You look nice.” Kara smiles. Maggie’s flustered. “I was joking earlier about the something pretty.” She picked something out but shoved it further into the closet than a homophobic republican.

“Looks to me like you’re getting plenty of attention.”

Maggie looks around. An ex and a few guys she’s collared. “Take it from me, not all attention is good.”
“Tell me about it.” The waitress comes back with the drinks and Kara smiles at the colorful drink in front of her, plucking the cherry free and eating it. “I frickin love these.” She has a drink, folding her arms on the table and setting her gaze on her. “You could have brought your boyfriend.”

“My what?” she shakes her head. “I don’t have a boyfriend.”

“You said you were going steady…”

“I was kidding. I mean, I’m seeing someone but I don’t think it’s going to work.” I’m a serial monogamist, how about you?

“Why not?”

Maggie takes a long drink of her beer. “I’m emotionally unavailable. And never around. Work keeps me busy, you know?”

“But you’re here with me. You could be home with them.”

“Usually has to be an open line of communication for that to happen. I might have been ghosted,” she says with mock alarm. It wouldn’t be the first time.

“That’s too bad.” Kara reaches out and takes her hand, giving it a gentle squeeze before pulling her hand back.

Maggie wonders if she’d be up for going back to her place. And this is why you can’t keep a relationship.

“How’s your love life? Hell, I know we just met, but we’ve got drinks. Sometimes a stranger’s the best person to tell your secrets to.”

“Like a taxi driver.”

“Yeah. Or a priest.”

Kara smiles, fiddling with the clasp of her purse. “I’m not seeing anyone. I’m not really good at that kind of thing, anyway,” she tells the purse. “And I’ve been sad.” She waits, thumb grazing along her glass. “I lost my aunt recently. She was killed. And…” her eyes fog over. “I’ve been struggling with everything. It’s… it’s just been really hard.”

Maggie sits up. “I’m so sorry. Have you talked to anyone about it? Maybe a counselor or…” Kara shakes her head. “Maybe you should.”

“I don’t know how to talk about it.” Her eyes darken momentarily. “She wasn’t a good person.”

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She has one too many beers and relinquishes her keys to Kara when she asks. “Know how to drive a stick?”

“I do a little bit of everything.”

They walk to the car, Kara sober as anything despite Maggie being certain she drank more than she did. She never thought of herself as a lightweight. They slide into the seats, the windows fogging with their breath. Kara smiles over at her. “Buckled up?”
Maggie jostles it for her. “Yes, ma’am.” Kara drives, the windows rolled down, cool air hitting their faces. Maggie watches their hair flutter, the reflection of night lights in her glasses. “Anyone ever tell you you look like a dorky Supergirl?”

“It’s not nice to call people dorky.”

Maggie chuckles. “Cut me some slack, I just had a sixteen hour day.” Kara turns on the radio, some slow trippy techno jam. “This the kind of music you’re into?”

“I like music that makes me happy.”

“Are you happy, Kara?”

“Of course I am.”

Maggie doesn’t believe her.

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They take the stairs up, three flights. Paint flecks off the railing. Whenever she’s brought girls by they make a face. Kara doesn’t make a face. Even as the stairs creak under their weight, as Maggie leans a little too heavily against the rail.

They arrive at the landing. The overhead light buzzes, flickering orange before snapping off. Maggie laughs. One day she’ll get out of this dump. National City has a higher cost of living than Gotham. “You impressed yet?”

“I didn’t know you were trying to impress me. That’s kind of cool.” She mutters the last.

Kara gives her the keys. Maggie takes them, their fingers brushing. Maggie fumbles with the door lock. She’s not drunk. It’s dark. Or both. She’s ready to ask Kara to turn her cell phone light on when Kara covers her hand with her own, leading the key to the lock and turning with her.

“Thanks.” She pushes the door open. She has an internal debate that doesn’t last very long. It never does. “Hey. Um. You want to come in?”

Kara leans into the wall, ignoring the apartment but facing her. All Maggie sees are the outlines of her face, the blue in her eyes. “Do you think that’s a good idea?”

“No. But I’ve never played it safe.” It’s one of her less attractive traits. So her exes tell her. She bows her head, smiling with embarrassment before switching the lights on. Even from the hallway she can see the place has been trashed. “Wait here.” She moves ahead, taking in the space. It’s clear. She takes a breath and sighs, turning chairs upright, picking up the lamp knocked off the table.

“Oh my God,” Kara ventures in, danger be damned. “Have you been robbed? Or… do you have a cat?”

Maggie smiles. “I’ve got a few catty ex-girlfriends.” And Kate’s enemies never played nice. Shit. Maybe she should have never left Gotham. “I’d like to tell you this is out of the ordinary but…” she pulls the cell phone from her jacket and rings Darla. She has to make sure she’s safe. Or… rule her out as the culprit. “Hey, uh. You okay?” Maggie pulls the phone back from her ear. Jesus. “You know, you can call me, too.” She listens. “It’s just that someone trashed my place and I
wasn’t sure if—” She masses her neck. “Yeah. Got you loud and clear.” She ends the call, pushing the button on the screen. Easy, but not as satisfying as slamming a handle down.

Kara touches the side of her glasses. “Are you okay? That was…” she shakes her head. “I can help you clean up.”

She tosses the phone aside. “You know, that’s not why I invited you in here.”

“Why did you invite me in here?” Maggie feels a flush of heat crawl up her cheeks. Kara looks away from her, righting the dining room table. “Should we file a police report?”

“We could but I guarantee you they have better things to do with their time.” She runs a hand through her hair. “This isn’t the worst thing that’s happened to me.” Kara nods absently, settling the table cloth over the table. She runs her fingers over the cloth. “It’s small, right? I eat a lot of tv dinners.” Usually on the couch.

“That’s awful,” she says genuinely. “Food is… it’s more than food. It’s relationship building. You should learn how to cook,” she says.

“I know how to cook. But it’s not fun cooking for one. Especially after a long day.”

“What about your steady?”

She laughs. “I don’t tend to go steady for very long. And after a long day I’m usually beat.” TV dinners and dive bars it is. She goes over, picking up the cracked picture of Darla and setting it facedown again. “So what’s your excuse? Bet the boys go crazy over you.” The girls, too.

She’s sheepish. “Not really.”

“You mentioned your aunt. They catch the person who did it?” she doesn’t remember seeing a case like that.

Kara smiles sadly. “Yeah.”

“And?”

“It doesn’t make anything better.”

Maggie heads to the fridge, pulling two beers out. She offers Kara one. “This usually helps.” Kara looks at the bottles and back to her. She picks up another few things while Maggie uncaps the bottles. “Want to order a pizza?”

“I should head out. I have another early work day.”

“Oh. Yeah. Sorry.” She tries to contain her disappointment and follows her to the door. “Thanks for being my DD.” She blinks. “Were your drinks virgin or…” they weren’t virgin prices.

“The point was for you to have a good time, guilt free.” Maggie doesn’t tell her how easy ‘guilt free’ is for her. “You wouldn’t let me drive if I was drinking.”

Maggie leans into the doorway, smiling up at her. “Right.” She takes her wrist. “Sure you’re not up for forgetting our worries? Just for the night?”

Kara’s lips part. She’s surprised. She’s blushing. “What about Darla?”

“She’s old news. I’m old news.” She eases her thumb along Kara’s wrist. “Let’s make a night of it.
I would really love to go down on you.” The words tumble out of her. Kara doesn’t gasp but she pulls her hand away. She did it again. Crossed the line. You’re a real fucking sociopath, you know that? She doesn’t agree. She’s just. It’s just…

“I’m going to go.”

“Jesus. Um. Yeah. Look, I’m…” Kara walks off. Maggie follows her and knows she shouldn’t. Some of her balance has been restored to her. She catches her on the second flight.

“That’s not why I came here.”

You didn’t come at all. Drum roll. Maggie takes a breath. “No. No. Of course not.” Why did you come here? “Sorry,” she mumbles, touching her lips. Kara exhales. “That was…” she smiles, because she’s so embarrassed, because she can’t think of the fucked up implications. “That was really shitty of me. I can give you a rundown of excuses. That it was the beer or the night. Or that I’m lonely and you’re cute. But mostly, you’re here.” Kara looks at her thoughtfully, hurt somehow. Which is record time for her. “I’m a cop, not a saint.”

“No one expects a saint.”

“You really are naïve.” She takes the steps down. Once again, Maggie follows. “Hey, slow down. I’m a good cop. Not so great at everything else. Good at making fast friends and losing them just as quickly.”

“Maybe you should think about that.”

“I do. I have. Sometimes it’s better not to think.”

Kara stops and looks at her. “That’s lazy.”

“But easy.” She sighs. “Hey. I meant everything I said tonight. All of it. I know it’s not pretty. A lot of what I’m good at happens in the bedroom.”

“So what, you’re like some shallow…sex thing with a badge?” Sex thing? “There’s more to you than that. You’re more than beer and your job and… cool bedroom tricks.”

Maggie smiles wryly. “How would you know?” She jams her hands into her pockets. “Hey. I know you’re probably never coming back and I don’t blame you. No good deed goes unpunished, right? But I really like you. You’re not like anyone else.”

“Did you detective that out?”

She laughs. “I’ve got my ways.” Kara looks uncertain. “Normally I’d turn on the charm. I’ve got it sometimes. And it might even work. But girls like you should stay far away from girls like me.”

“You’re not as scary as you think.”

“That’s what all my exes say.” They think it’s romantic to try to fix her, as if she were some pet project.

“I’m not an ex.” A beat. “I hope your heart feels better soon.” She smiles back, a melancholy that transcends her years and then she’s gone. Maggie watches, resisting the urge to chase her outside, keep her in her line of sight.
The Supergirl fallout is getting out of hand. No one trusts her. Crime is up forty percent. NCPD is getting hammered. Criminals are having a field day. Her shifts never end and she’s back to walking the beat. Never minded it before, sometimes that’s where all the action is, but it’s beginning to wear on her. Not all her boys are out of the hospital yet and someone has to pick up the slack.

It’s 4:11 am. She drives. Streetlights dim and pulse. She blinks fast and they come back into focus. The police radio coughs static, rousing her. Nothing important. She punches the radio on. News. Reports of a freight truck found in the middle of the highway, riddled with bullet holes. Where the hell was Supergirl for that?

She swerves and gets back into her lane, rubbing her eyes. The streetlights move in blurs. The world in slow motion. She’s almost home, she’s almost…

There’s a crunch. Whirring. She opens her eyes. Supergirl stands bright in the headlights, hair and cape billowing in the wind. Maggie looks around her. Half the car is on the bridge, the other hangs in the air. She takes her foot off the pedal. Supergirl pushes the car back onto the bridge. Maggie gets out, going around to the front of the car, assessing the damage, looking at the smashed railing. “Jesus.” She looks below. Hundreds of feet of air. “That’s really high. You saved my life—”

“What were you doing?”

Uh oh. Now she’s pissed Supergirl off. Great. “Uh—I wasn’t doing anything. Trying to get home.” Supergirl crosses her arms. The lights cast a glow on her. She’s almost too bright to look at. “I probably should have pulled over. I screwed up.” That’s new. And now she has to explain the car to the department. Shit. “Hey, maybe if you worked a little harder NCPD could take a break.” Supergirl keeps her arms crossed, eyebrows narrowing. That was unfair. She should apologize. “Crime’s way up.” Or she could continue attacking. It’s what always happens when she goes on the defensive. Supergirl looks away, Maggie doesn’t know to what. “Why didn’t you stop that truck thing tonight?”

“Can you make it home?” She asks irritably. “Do you have a friend who can come get you?”

“I don’t have many friends. And I can make it home on my own.” She shrugs as if the admission were irrelevant. Supergirl doesn’t seem satisfied with the response. “I’ll call someone at the station. We’ll take care of all of this.” She shoves her hands into the NCPD jacket. Supergirl turns around, walking away. Does she need to piss off National City’s hot pet alien? Probably not. She’s gone rogue before. And she did just save your ass. Maggie takes a few quick steps to catch up with her. “Hey. Wait up.”

Supergirl whirls around but she’s fuzzy, Maggie’s eyes still not fully adjusted to the light and the darkness. “What do you want?”

“Nothing. Just… thanks. For saving me. And forget what I said. I know you’ve been working hard. For what it’s worth, I’m rooting for you.”
She keeps walking. “Just get home safely.” She shoots up into the stars.

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Maggie recognizes the ponytail at the coffee counter. She nearly turns around, would, if Kara hadn’t turned first. Kara’s face is blank, then dawns recognition. Maggie approaches, happy she doesn’t have a tail to go between her legs. “Hey! Long time no see.” Not long at all, really. Not even two weeks. Not long enough to stop the heat rising up her cheeks. Maybe Kara’s forgotten. “Come here often?”

That little line in her brow. She hasn’t forgotten. “Yes. As a matter of fact. Repeat customer.” She touches her glasses. Cute. “They always have my order ready to go.” She lifts the white box and Maggie sees the grease already beginning to seep through. She moves past her and Maggie nods to herself, shakes her head, moving to the counter when she hears Kara’s voice again. “Hey. You wouldn’t happen to have a few?” She lifts the box again. “I have donuts. That’s a good cop bribe, right?”

Maggie laughs. No. No. No. She is not doing this. She already got a lecture from Supergirl; she doesn’t need another one from the geeky librarian. “Yeah. Just let me grab a coffee.”

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Kara’s letting her pretend she never offered to eat her out and Maggie’s grateful. She chews on a donut, sipping on coffee. Kara’s on her second donut with no signs of stopping. They sit on the park bench, overlooking the water. It’s another grey, salty day. People pass by in light jackets, walking their dogs.

“Your boss sounds scary.” Maggie says. “Shouldn’t you be at work?”

“I called out. Again.” She sighs, leaning back into the bench before Maggie can wipe the water dew away. Her sweater is thin and white. Maggie wonders if she’s cold. “Miss Grant is going to kill me.”

“I’ll cuff her if she does.” Kara smiles but it’s gone just as quickly. “So, what’s up with you? You don’t look like the type to fake sick days. I bet you had perfect attendance in high school.”

She laughs. “Am I that obvious?” She adjusts her glasses. “Work’s been…” she gives a slow shake of her head. “It could be better. I messed up and now everyone’s lost faith in me. It’s… discouraging.”

“Hey, we all have bad days. Take a break. Spend time with friends or family…” Kara rests her chin on her hand, looking out into the distance. “Is there anyone special or…”

“My sister’s gone.” Her eyes mist over.

A beat. “Oh my God. Kara. Did she die?” First her aunt, now her sister? How much has this girl lost?

She’s startled. “No.” Oh. Why’d she say it like that? “I’m just being a baby.” She smiles in that way that isn’t a smile at all. Trying to reassure her, trying to reassure herself.

“I take it you’re close.”
“Yeah.” She clears her throat. “Um, how’s your job? Getting any easier? Any parades?”

Maggie smiles, finishing her donut and wiping her fingers on the napkin. “No parades. Yeah, I guess the two of us are in the same boat. Pissed the boss off. I…” she shakes her head. “Until my superiors give me the go-ahead, I’m grounded, pushing paper. Probably shouldn’t have had this donut.”

“What happened at work? Beat someone up?”

Wouldn’t be the first time. “Yeah, that’s me. I’ll be back out in the field in no time,” she says. She can’t talk to her about Supergirl saving her ass. About falling asleep behind the wheel. Deflect with humor. An obvious lie, charming enough so she doesn’t have to explain. Works eight times out of ten, which is often enough. She should let people think they know her before they find out about her screw-ups. That’s how things build. Kara looks at her studiously and has a drink of her coffee. “I’m sorry you’re having a rough time. I hope it gets easier for you.” She gets to her feet. “I gotta get down to the station. Thanks for the donut. Guess I’m in your pocket now.” The expression seems to puzzle her and Maggie waves it away. “It was good seeing you. Take care of yourself?”

Kara nods. Maggie moves off, doing a half a circle before returning to the bench. Kara’s started on the last donut. Is she a stress eater? She’s going to get fat. “Do you need a lift somewhere? I’ve got some time.” Not much. Not enough that she isn’t pushing it by offering. She needs to let this girl go and somehow, she just can’t let her go.

“No, I’m okay.” She stands, moving to throw her box away.

Maggie waits, the cold of the air sinking into her skin. Kara returns. “Hey. Um. I know this is … probably a really stupid idea but I’m going to go out on a limb here. What do you say to dinner tonight? Only perk to being stuck behind the desk is the hours aren’t as long. It’s on me. If you’ve got nothing else going on—” She grimaces, not sure if she’s waiting to be chastised or for rejection.

“I think Hank would tell me I need to clear my head.” She nods affirmatively. “So, yes. I accept. If that’s okay—”

“Of course it’s okay; I asked.” Maggie smiles, surprised she’s agreed. “All right. Great. Meet... I don’t know. Out somewhere? Your place? My place?”

“Your place is fine.” She seems distracted, as if hearing something in the distance. There’s no nervousness, no bashfulness at the possibility of returning to her apartment. “I have to go.”

Somehow, she loses her. There one minute. Gone the next. “We didn’t pick a time,” she calls after her. “Seven?” she mutters. “TV dinner for one, then.”

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She gets into an argument with the captain. They’ve taken her gun, given her cases to the idiot who can’t tell his head from his ass. What about Johnson who shot that alien kid weeks ago? He’s still out in the field! It was an argument she didn’t win, an argument that was lost the minute she called her direct superior a racist, sexist douchebag. Now she’s on unpaid leave.

She stops at the dive bar and has a few beers before cabbing home. When she arrives it’s nearly eight. The door is open. Her hand goes to her side but there’s no gun there. Only Kara, sitting on the couch, flipping through the Gotham press clippings of Batwoman she left on the coffee table. Maggie takes them from her, more aggressively than she means to.
“I thought we said seven,” Kara says.

“I don’t remember that.” She stuffs the articles in the nearby shoebox she keeps them in. “How’d you get in?”

“The door was unlocked.”

How? She’s sure she locked it. “Huh.” She looks her over. “I need a shower. That cool?” Kara nods. “Help yourself to anything in the fridge.” There’s nothing much in the fridge. She goes to the bathroom and looks back at her. “I’ll be much better company after I’m done.”

She hopes so, anyway.

xxx

Kara’s opened beers for them, heating up two different frozen meals in the microwave: chicken alfredo and Mexican fiesta fajitas, but only after staring dubiously at the frozen trays.

They sit at the small kitchen table, listening to the microwave spin. “How was the rest of your day?” Kara asks.

Maggie drinks her beer in response, aware the shower water is soaking through her shirt, wary the material will become transparent at any moment. “No offense but I’m not much of a talker.” That line cuts into her brow again. “I don’t mean to be a bitch. Sorry. Bad day.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

She bites her tongue, grateful to keep her mouth shut. The microwave beeps and Maggie pulls out the chicken. “What do you think? Up for this or the fiesta?”

“I don’t have a preference.” Maggie gives her the chicken. She waits patiently, not pulling the plastic from the meal until Maggie’s is ready. “You know this isn’t food, right?”

“Are you some kind of foodie? Of course this is food. You eat it.” Kara makes a face. “Fine. You want to go out somewhere?” She’s annoyed she’s wasted a meal. Kara keeps checking her phone screen, dimming it as quickly. “You have a hot date?” she nods at the phone.

Kara smiles wryly. “Definitely not.” She drinks her beer. “Just someone I’m… someone I’d like to hear from.”

“Should you call them?” She shakes her head no. “I have to admit, I’m surprised you came back here after the way we left things.”

“How we left things?”

Is she fucking with her? Doesn’t seem like the type. “You know. With me begging you to go or stay. I can’t figure it now.” She smiles. Kara crosses one leg over the other, fingers inching along the curves of her beer bottle.

xxx

Kara’s mouth trembles open, excitement or nerves, Maggie doesn’t know. She knows the urgency and reservation, has lived it too many times to count. This kind of thing is comfort food. They’re on their feet, Kara’s breath unsteady, Maggie pulling that small tab down the back of her dress,
Kara letting her.

They make it to a wall. Maggie feels bad about that but makes sure that Kara doesn’t feel bad about the rest of it. *What am I doing? What am I doing?* A frenzied prayer, arms lifted as if the police told her to put them up. As if afraid to touch her. *You really don’t know?* Maggie stands on her toes, presses her mouth to hers again, testing the waters, drawing away, relieved when Kara chases after the kiss.

The dress falls to the floor. Maggie continues her exploration, guided by Kara’s breathing. Now her knees are weak, even if it’s Kara who’s pressed her palms to the wall as if bracing herself. She wonders where Kara puts those donuts. It doesn’t matter because this is the only day in the past few weeks that she’s felt normal, that she’s felt good, worthwhile. Soon she’s kneeling before Kara and her heart’s smashing against her chest like she’s never done this. Maggie trails her hands and lips along her thighs before kissing her. She’s sweet and flushed and beautiful. Her breath is like a song.

xxx

Maggie dumps the TV dinners, untouched, into the trash. She’s hungry but thinks all things considered this was worth skipping dinner for. She finds Kara’s dress on the floor and picks it up, draping it carefully along the back of the couch. She looks around seeing if anything else needs to be tidied.

Is that a hole in the wall?

She goes it to it. Yep. A hole in the goddamn wall. Right where she pushed Kara. Jesus. This place is a dump. She mentally begins preparing for her argument with the landlord when she inevitably calls him to get it fixed.

There’s a rustling in the bedroom. She goes, tentatively pushing the door open. It’s still dark, the streetlight outside shining a bleak orange into the room through the blinds. Kara sits up on the bed, sheets pulled close. They stare briefly, both looking away. Maggie clears her throat. “Hey. You okay?” Kara nods quickly. She moves closer. “We okay?”

“Yes.” She seems puzzled. “Yes.”

“You sure? You kind of don’t look okay.” A beat. She wants to make a joke about the ‘sex thing with a badge’. She doesn’t. She doesn’t currently have a badge. “Um—I can wait in the living room.”

“No. No. That’s crazy. This is your place. It’s fine.”

Maggie sits next to her apprehensively. “You weren’t drunk were you? I could swear you weren’t even buzzed.” *She* was buzzed.

“I don’t get drunk.” She smiles. “High tolerance, I guess. Or. Metabolism.”

“You do crossfit?” Kara stares at her curiously. “Cause, damn.”

“What?”

Maggie laughs, embarrassed. “That was my really awkward way of asking if you work out. They break the mold when they made you or what?” Now she’s embarrassed her. Typical. This is, more often than not, where she begins to fumble. She looks at her, not sure when her hair got loose, when the glasses came off. Something niggles at her. Something she can’t put a finger on. “Um.
You know, I never do this,” she lies.

That seems to relieve her. “Me neither.” Anyone else, Maggie might smirk. But this she believes. Shit. Kara covers her hand, but briefly, as if to make sure she isn’t imagined. “I’ve got all these thoughts racing through my head. The last few weeks have been crazy. I just feel like… I haven’t been able to get a good grip on anything.” She takes a breath, nods to herself. “And I don’t really know how to manage any of this. Or what I’m supposed to do or say. Or what you’re supposed to do or say.” She bows her head, fiddling with her fingers. Maggie experiences a jab of guilt, a jab of lust. “How quickly do I leave or… How quickly do I get dressed?”

“I’m not in any hurry if you’re not.”

Kara laughs, her hair falling over her face. Maggie pushes it back, looks at her, wondering if she’s real. How is this woman in her bed? Kara takes careful hold of her arm. “Are you okay?”

“I’m more than okay.” She waits, breathlessly, as Kara leans in tentatively to kiss her. She’s hit with a jolt of adrenaline. The kiss is tentative until it’s not. Easy until it’s desperate. Maggie pulls the blanket back, climbing into the bed. Kara meets her eyes. She’s careful when she takes her shirt. The air from her lungs.
A/N: I'm kind of playing with all sort of random Maggie canon and sorrrrrrt of setting this up for when it transitions into season 2? Eh. This covers from 1x18 - 1x20. Lightly. Short chapter. Y

xxx

Maggie doesn’t recognize the guy Kara’s with. Tall, scrawny, cute, if you go for that sort of thing. For seconds she only watches, the way she leans into the railing, laughing at whatever he’s saying to her. Maggie’s never seen her that way.

At least she’s safe. It was only hours ago that that pasty Livewire and whoever her shrieky friend is were terrorizing National City. She saw Supergirl from a distance, falling from the sky, taking a bolt of lightning meant for a helicopter. She does that sort of thing on the regular without even thinking, and here she is, anxious about approaching a fuck-buddy who’s out with some guy. Screw this. She’s a cop, for God’s sake. She’s not going to let this pipsqueak intimidate her.

“Kara, hey,” she goes over, waving.

Kara’s surprised to see her. Maggie isn’t convinced it’s the good kind of surprise. Maybe this was a mistake. They know each other best in the bedroom. That’s all it is. Even if she finds herself thinking more of Kara’s smiles, her disarming bashfulness, the way she surprises her with fire when she least expects it. She should know her better by now but Kara’s unexpectedly guarded.

“Maggie, hi,” she smiles. Maggie looks at the guy. “Um, this is my friend.”

“Cousin,” he says.

“Yes.” She makes a face as if she knows she’s screwed up the line. “Cousin. Barry. Allen. Barry Allen.” They’re lying to her. Maggie doesn’t know why she just knows that they are. “He’s in from out of town.”

“Oh, yeah? Where you from?”

“Central City. Trying to get back, but enjoying my Kara time. You meet the coolest people here, by the way. And you must be one of them, if you’re on friendly terms with this one.” He looks between the two of them. “You two work together?”

“That’s a negative,” Maggie says. Kara is fiddling with the belt around her waist. “I gave her a ride the night Supergirl went rogue.”

Barry looks between the two of them. “So you two know each other?”

“Of course we do. She gave me a ride,” Kara shakes her head. “But we have to go do that thing now.”

Barry arches an eyebrow. “What thing? Oh. The thing. I really need to do that thing. Maggie, it was a pleasure to meet you. See you on the flip side. If you ever get around.”

“See you later, Maggie?” Kara pats Barry on the back. “Let’s go!”

They go, Maggie frowning after them.
Supergirl walks into the police station. Maggie sees her. Doesn’t see her. Supergirl stoops beside her but Maggie keeps working on the data until her chair is turned.

“Kara Zor-El. Myriad will do what you cannot. Save National City. Save humanity and this worthless planet.”

Supergirl’s face is lined with concern. “It got you too, didn’t it?” Maggie stares at her. Supergirl cups her face. “I’ll get you out of this. I’ll get us all out of this.” A beat. “If I don’t come back… thank you for everything. And if you ever meet my sister, Alex—I hope you love her as much as I do.”

She settles her hands on the armrests, lifting to touch their lips together. Maggie doesn’t return the kiss. She doesn’t watch her go. She turns her attention back to the computer. There’s work to do.

Looking at Kara makes her feel as if she’s got something on the tip of her tongue. Something scratches at her mind but she can’t get to it. She hasn’t been able to stop thinking of Supergirl. Maybe because things feel flimsy between them and Supergirl’s the only reason they met.

Kara asked to meet but Maggie isn’t sure why. They haven’t progressed to quickies. Kara’s holding a donut as if for strength.

“What’s going on?” Maggie asks.

Kara talks to the donut first and then to her. “This isn’t a good fit for me.” Maggie opens her mouth. “What we’ve been doing. It’s … crazy. It’s not who I am.”

“What? Who are you?” What does she mean? Casual sex? Gay, bi, whatever she is? It wouldn’t be the first time a curious girl got her kicks and ran. She feels sick. “What are you talking about?”

She stands. “Just forget about me.”

“What?” Why? How?

“I have to go.”

“Kara—” Maggie follows her. She needs aspirin. Her head is killing her. Water hasn’t helped, caffeine hasn’t. This doesn’t. “Will you wait a minute?” She latches on to her hand. Kara pulls it free, and Maggie thinks her arm will be ripped out of its socket. “What’s going on with you?”

“Nothing.”

“No, something. You’re lying to me. Is this about that guy? Your cousin?” A beat. “He wasn’t your cousin was he?”

She looks lost. “No.”

“Is there someone else?” Jesus, listen to yourself. Chasing after a girl in a cardigan.
Her eyes shine, her cheeks are rosy. Guilt? No. “Yes. There’s someone else.” Not guilt. She looks heartbroken.

“I’m really trying to understand this. Help me understand.”

“You don’t need to understand it.”

There’s that fire. Bright enough to obliterate the dark. To obliterate her. It stuns her into momentary silence. “All right, I get it.” She smiles somehow, even as her head feels like it’s going to explode. “Well, have a nice life, then. On second thought, don’t.” She turns. She has to get back to work. She has to take care of this headache.

“Maggie…”

“No, forget it. I will.” She stops, looking back at her. “You were a lousy lay anyway.” Low blow. Kara’s face falls, before going blank. She nods slowly, resolute before turning.

Maggie thinks to apologize, but no. Fuck her.

xxx

The headache lifts hours later and with it goes the excruciating pain that previously left her muddled and indifferent about Kara. She considers calling her but is too embarrassed. Why did she say that to her? It was obvious Kara hadn’t done anything like that before.

It was… sweet and awkward. She’s over training women taking their first forays into the ways of sapphic love but Kara was… Maggie thinks of Kara’s hands gliding tentatively over her, cheeks flushed and hot to the touch. Her eyes… she’s never seen eyes like that. She’s never seen anyone so beautiful. Been with anyone so beautiful. And she rejected her. So you lashed out the way you always do.

She considers calling her but goes to the bar instead, throws back a few beers, meets a blonde and takes her home. She knows her way around the bedroom but who cares. When it’s done Maggie wishes it hadn’t happened and wants her gone.

She throws some clothes on and leaves her in the bedroom, going to the living room and sitting on the couch. She picks up her phone and goes to Kara’s most recent text.

Can we meet at the park in 20?

The last message before that:

I hope this doesn’t wake you. Had to go. Work emergency. Next time we’re really having dinner. Can’t wait. Xoxo

None of this makes sense. Is she straight? Is she messing around with that guy? Did she just freak out? Who’s the someone else? Maybe Kara just needs time to figure it out. She could call her.

And then what? Demand answers? Apologize? Ask if she wants to come over? Shit. She scrolls through her contacts. Kate isn’t in there but she’s got her number memorized and Kate can always get a hold of her if she really needs her. Gotham or not.

She massages her forehead. Maybe she can blame it on the headache. Kara has been understanding
before. So what if there’s another woman in her bed? She and Kara weren’t dating. They never had those conversations. Maybe they should have. Maybe before she called her a lousy lay.

She goes back to her text and types out several messages, deleting all of them.

It doesn’t matter. They were never going to work. Out of sight, out of mind. She deletes the text messages, she deletes her phone number.

She’ll never see her again anyway.
A/N: I've named Maggie's random girlfriend, btw, because it was just too cumbersome for her to not have a name.

xxx

Maggie hasn’t seen Kara.

That’s fine. She has a girlfriend now. Linda. Blonde. They have almost nothing in common which is slightly more than she had in common with Just Kara. This is what she’s used to. Kara was too, in a way. Really, she needs to forget about her. She has forgotten about her. Just about. It’s hard when she sees her everywhere or thinks she does.

She throws herself into work, taking double shifts, trying to keep up with the Cadmus assholes who are terrorizing the city. The last thing this city needs are human supremacists bent on hunting aliens. She spends what little free time she has at the alien bar, searching for clues, hanging out with nice people. She shouldn’t feel more at home with them than with the crew down at the station, than with humans, but she does. They’re kinder. Maybe they’ll teach her a thing or two.

She has a beer, snacking on peanuts. The news plays on the tv. Footage of Supergirl zipping around National City, saving the day. Some of the cops get pissed at her. They call her a vigilante. She takes all the glory. But crime has decreased. People feel safer going out onto the streets. What does she do it for? Who does she do it for?

There’s a shot of her, blue eyes determined and focused. Maggie feels a pang of sadness but isn’t sure why. She takes a drink of beer. Darla wipes the bar down in the opposite corner. “Hey, Darla, Supergirl ever come in here?”

“Why are you asking me? You practically live here.”

Maggie runs a hand through her hair, smiling. “You know, you dumped me.”

“Are you looking for a new girlfriend? Is that why you’re asking after her?” She stares her down, angrily pouring a pint of beer for one of the other customers. Maggie lowers her gaze and stares at her basket of peanuts. “You’ve already got one.” She scoffs. “You’re something else.”

Maggie nurses her beer. Fights to keep indifferent. She is not going to be shamed out of here.

xxx

So an unhinged alien has kidnapped her. So much for them being above that kind of thing. She’s irritated, pulling at the rope wrapped around her wrists. At least there’s no rush to get home to the girlfriend. What if she dies in this shitty warehouse?

She sighs inwardly. She’s been in worse situations than this. Much worse, but she doesn’t have to like it. Now this alien is taunting her for spending time in their community. Maggie doesn’t explain that she knows what it is to be an outsider, to want a safe refuge. She already told the hotshot pain in the ass DEO agent Danvers. So much for their celebration on the Alien Amnesty Act. Watching
this alien psycho try to assassinate the president on live TV isn’t going to help the escalating tensions in the city.

“You know, I usually have dinner with a girl before I let her tie me up.”

“Keep dreaming, alien lover. Even when we entertain a relationship with you, know that you are beneath our kind. All humans are.”

“Beneath isn’t all bad,” Maggie says.

The redhead sneers. There’s a crash. Supergirl lands. Of course she’d show up. My hero. She’s struggling with the ropes when Danvers gets to her, setting her loose.

She’s nearly set on fire, knocked around a few times before she does her best Dottie Henson against Redhot’s skull. Aaaaand she’s down. Maggie grins, not remembering the last time she felt this alive. “You guys are fun.” She tosses the plank aside and picks up her gun, holstering it.

Danvers trots over. “Nice swing. You okay?”

Maggie looks down at her jacket. It’s torn. Her arm is throbbing. “Just a scratch.” She puts her hands on her waist looking her over. “You weren’t so bad yourself.” Maggie looks to Supergirl. She really is gorgeous. She thinks of the police station. Why is she thinking of the police station? “How’d you track me down? You use your krytonian eyesight or something?”

Supergirl lugs Redhot off the floor, picking her up as if she were a damned twig. “Actually, Agent Danvers knocked some skulls until she got the answers she was looking for.”

“That so?” Maggie looks at Danvers again. “Didn’t think you were corrupt.”

“She’s not,” Supergirl snaps.

Maggie laughs. “I was joking. Thanks for the help. Both of you.” Danvers nods and a swarm of DEO agents fill the space, forcefully taking the alien menace from Supergirl. Danvers converses with several of the agents. Supergirl hangs back, lifting into the air, eyes glowing blue, apparently scanning the building before landing again.

Maggie wanders over. “So, we meet again.” Supergirl’s eyes are steady. “I wouldn’t expect you to remember. Um. You saved my car from going off a bridge a while back.”

“Right.”

Okay. “Supergirl and the DEO. Not a team-up I would have imagined.”

“The DEO works to keep National City safe. So do I.”

She’s surprisingly brusque. Maggie walks alongside of her when she does. “I heard you tell that Redhot you thought her views on the Alien Amnesty Act were cynical. I hear that. But would you sign up? Whoever you are under that cape, and let the government know?” Supergirl crosses her arms. “I don’t agree with her methods—but her concerns are valid. It’s happened before. I wouldn’t want to be on some database based on a minority status.”

Supergirl uncrosses her arms. “Agent Danvers can patch you up at HQ.” She’s up, up and away. Maggie slides her hands into her back pockets. She’s got that sick feeling in her stomach again. So this is how it feels to be disliked by the girl of steel, personification of sunshine.
Danvers nods at her. Maggie follows.

xxx

Danvers suggests drinks. Tempting. Maybe even feasible if she wasn’t straight. Another night of terror in National City with the alien fight club. Danvers was looking good. Cleans up nice. Supergirl showed up to save the day and got thrashed. Maggie wonders if she’s okay.

“Hey,” her hot-date girlfriend, Linda, slaps her face playfully. “You haven’t forgotten who you’re here with, have you?”

Maggie smiles. “How could I?” She leans forward to kiss her—sees a flash of that blonde ponytail out of the corner of her eye. Stops, follows it. _Shit_. It’s Kara. She sits in a corner, a candle on the table, a notepad in hand, a laptop. There’s a glass of wine in front of her and a burger the size of her head. She wears a white dress, a red belt around her waist. Fucking Noonan’s. Everyone comes here. Maggie stares.

“Do you know her?”

Maggie tries to remember the last time she saw her. The day of the headache at the park, of course. She even remembers the time, around 2:15pm. She’s not with that guy. Has it been weeks? Months? She’s gone hot.

“Hey,” her face is slapped again, not as playfully this time. “What’s the matter with you? You just spaced out.”

“I thought I saw someone I knew.” She tears her gaze away, focuses on her. Doesn’t want to. She’s plain. Nice enough. But there’s nothing special about her. Nothing particularly bright, either, if she thinks that this is a good idea. She doesn’t know whether Kara’s smart. She doesn’t know where she went to school. All she knows is that she’s an assistant to Cat Grant. She only talked about her aunt, and that was briefly. She doesn’t know anything else. But she has an old soul. Somehow she does, despite having an earnestness that’s crippling. Beguiling. She glances over again and Kara looks up.

They freeze, eyes momentarily locked. Kara thins her lips, ducks her head. Jesus, she’s embarrassed. She’s ashamed. _She’s probably thinking of what you said, asshole_. That can’t be it. It’s been… Jesus. She can’t think of it. Long enough. Yeah, it was a dick move but it was long ago. She can’t have thought of it too much. _She’s the one who walked out on you, remember?_ Yeah. Kara is the one who walked out. Why should she feel guilty about it? _Because you should damn well know better._

“Maggie.” Maggie blinks, looks away again, touches the beer in front of her, looks to Linda in front of her. “What’s the matter with you? You know, first it was that cop you were with—”

“Danvers? She’s not a cop,” Maggie mumbles. She’d probably be insulted to be thought as such.

“And now this blonde. I saw the way that cop looked at you, by the way. How she looked at me.”


“Then be with me. Half the time I wonder if you even want to spend time together. You’re always at work and when you’re not you’re distracted.”
Maggie shakes her head. “Work’s been nuts. There’s a lunatic running an underground alien fight club. She knows so and so, the way her kind usually do and I had to cut her loose. It’s bullshit. Don’t get me started on Cadmus.”

“I get that work is stressful but leave it at work.”

As if it were so easy. She isn’t selling card stock or waitressing. Her work affects lives, sometimes even saves them. Why doesn’t she get how important it is? She bites her tongue. “Yeah. You’re right. I’m sorry.” It’s easier than arguing. Soon the waiter comes over. They order. Linda tells her about her day but Maggie only hears it in pieces. Every now and then she looks around. Kara’s still there, typing furiously. She orders another burger. Maggie smiles. When she looks back Linda is glaring.

“I’m going to the ladies room.” She takes her purse.

Maggie wonders if she’ll return. She finishes her beer and scans the room anxiously. Her phone goes off and she checks it, hoping it’s Kara. It isn’t. It’s Danvers. Next time. There’s a roulette table gif. Maggie smiles faintly, sending an emoji of a snake and cuffs before stealing another look at Kara.

Finally she stands. Jesus, the least she can do is say ‘hi’. Or you could leave her alone. But she isn’t sure she has a choice in the matter. Maybe it’s compulsion that makes her go to the table. Kara continues to type, the little line in her brow dug deep. Maggie touches the table and wonders if the alcohol is why her stomach is doing flips. “Hey.”

Kara looks up. Her lips part. This is the part when any of the other women she’s been involved with tell her to fuck off. Kara drops a hand into her lap. The other stays on the edge of the laptop, stroking it absently. “Hi.” She averts her eyes to the computer monitor and Maggie thinks that’s it. Kara looks back at her though she’s having trouble doing it, as much trouble as Maggie is having not staring. “It’s been a while.”

“Yeah.” She stands awkwardly, unsure if she’s waiting to be invited to sit or if she should be looking over her shoulder for Linda. “How you been?” She touches her forehead absently, thinking of the headache that day. “Cat Grant still making your life a living hell?” Her work is the only real thing she knows to latch onto. Bringing up her aunt’s death or killer would be in poor taste. Maybe this whole thing is in poor taste.

“Cat’s moved on. I’m a reporter with the Tribune now.” A hint of pride creeps into her voice; her smile is sad.

“That’s a big step up. Congratulations.” She needs to continue the conversation. “Do you like it?”

“I do. Bringing the truth to the masses. What could be better?”

Maggie shifts. Plenty. They could undo their last conversation. Kara could be lecturing her on her food choices before they end up in a makeout session, before they end up in bed. “National City is never short of stories to tell.”

“If Snapper doesn’t throw me out a window I’ll always have a job.”

“New boss?”

She scratches behind her ear gingerly. “Kind of switched out one pain in the ass for another.”

“You’ll persevere.” She clears her throat. “Um. Listen, Kara—”
“Your date’s back.” She nods to the table. Maggie looks. Yes. She’s there. And seething. Unlike their food. “I should get back to my article.”

“Yeah. Sure.” She nods. “I shouldn’t have”— Kara gives a little shake of her head but doesn’t look at her. “Um. Look, I know this is a long shot—but … could we maybe catch up sometime? I’ve… I’ve been doing some thinking and— And I’d really… I’d really just… like to explain.” As much as she’d like Kara to explain.

Kara folds her arms on the table and looks at her. “Explain what?” It’s a challenge. Maggie isn’t ready to take it. There’s a coolness to her. Similar. From where…? She touches her glasses. “I don’t think it’s a good idea for us to meet. It just seems,” she enunciates as if crafting the words as she speaks them, “as if … we get carried away.” She stumbles over the next. “Not that you’d want to get carried away.” She doesn’t look at her.

“That isn’t…” Maggie takes a breath, smiles. She tries to mentally will Kara to look at her. It doesn’t work. “I shouldn’t have asked.” She isn’t ready to part from her but doesn’t know how to stay. “Goodnight, Just Kara.”

She looks at her, a flash, really. There’s a quick, false glimmer of a smile that vanishes before Maggie can remember it. “Enjoy the rest of your night.” She takes a nervous drink of wine.

Maggie wonders if she’d go to the bathroom with her. Car with her. Alley with her. Wants to feel her flesh pressed to hers again. It’s physical. It’s stupid and physical. It’s a mystery she can’t solve. She tries to shake the thoughts. She needs to get her head on straight. She returns to her table. Her food is cold. Maybe all she needs is a cold shower.

They eat in silence and wait for the bill. Maggie’s fishing some bills out of her wallet when Linda speaks. “You’ve been obsessed with that girl the entire night.”

“No, I haven’t.”

“Who is she?”

None of your business. “No one.”

“I can’t tell if you’re a pathological liar or if you actually believe that.” Maggie frowns. “Would it kill you to focus on us for like, a minute?”

“What us?” Linda pales. Maggie wishes she’d used her inside voice.

When she speaks her voice shakes. “I am really tired of you gaslighting me. You make me feel crazy.” Maggie puts the bills on the table. “I’m done with this.” She stands, grabbing her purse. “I’d heard stories about you but I thought they were exaggerated. Bitter ex-girlfriends, you know? But they’re right. You are a sociopath. Don’t call me. I never want to see you again.” She turns so quickly the chair comes crashing to the floor.

Everyone in the restaurant turns to look at her, everyone but Kara who is gone.
SuperCop

Chapter by the_diversionist

A/N: WTF was episode 2x13? Uuuuuugh, I'm starting to hate this show. Here's SuperCop.

xxx

Maggie finds her in the hole in the wall restaurant, getting a bagged meal to go. She is a diamond in the otherwise rundown shop. Last time they were here Kara mentioned an Alex. Danvers has been talking about a Kara. Maggie hasn’t asked, hasn’t wanted to encourage the ramblings. Hearing the name is always like a hit of shock therapy. Jolting and painful. It can’t possibly be that Kara. The world is random, and often times cruel but it isn’t out to get her.

Kara turns, a chagrined smile on her lips upon spotting her. Maggie saunters closer, hands in her back pocket. “I got you hooked, didn’t I?” She nods at the bag.

“Yeah. I guess you did.”

Maggie waits for Kara to touch her glasses but she doesn’t. It makes Maggie wonder if she ever knew her. You never did. You knew her the way you’ve known other women. Nothing more. There’s a line forming up behind her and Kara steps aside, Maggie does too, letting the people move on ahead. Great. Now it’s going to take twice as long to order, but she hasn’t seen Kara in weeks and skipping lunch might be worth getting a conversation in. She tells herself it isn’t pathetic. “You in a hurry?”

Now she adjusts her glasses. “I’m probably going to regret this.” That’s what all the girls say. Maggie bites her tongue. “I was going to have lunch in the park… if you’d like to join me.”

“That depends. You going to tell me to take a hike again?”

“Should I?”

Maggie crosses her arms. She bites back her comment. She doesn’t want to be the lesbian couple fighting at the restaurant. You’d have to be a couple first. “I have been known to behave on occasion.” Her phone rings. She looks at it. Danvers. She silences it and puts it away.

“Work?”

“No. Luckily for the two of us I got Supergirl to watch over National City on my lunch break.” No need to mention that she’s pretty sure Supergirl hates her. Kara smiles. Maggie realizes her memory of it was off. The line at the counter is going out the door. “Your food is probably getting cold.”

“Probably.”

Her stomach grumbles. “Raincheck?”

“I’m willing to share if you are.” She turns her head, listening again. She did this once at the park. The day they agreed to dinner at her place. “I have to go.” She shoves the bag of food at her and walks out the door.
Maggie exits the building, searching for her. She’s gone.

xxx

Alex is kicking her ass at pool and Maggie doesn’t care.

Where does Kara have to go? Three times now she’s had to go. Where? It’s not like she’s out saving the world. She’s disappointed. She plays another few games before her interest tapers out. She offers Alex the promised money but she won’t take it. Instead they end up at a booth and Alex nervously chatters about the latest alien the DEO took down.

Maggie watches her drowsily as she fidgets. Habit makes her reach across the table, sliding her fingers over Alex’s nervously tapping on the table. “You’re driving me crazy.”

Alex grimaces. “Sorry.” Maggie waves it away. “So, the night is still young. Did you want to hit the town? Maybe go to a club? We could go dancing.” Maggie arches an eyebrow. “Not together. Obviously. You know. As friends.”

“You mean you don’t want to flirt and kiss to get some frat boys’ attention?” Alex turns red. “I’m just fucking with you, Danvers. I can keep my lesbian hands to myself. We do have self-control.” She typically doesn’t but she doesn’t need to say that. “And no, I’m not including you in that ‘we’.” Or should she? Shit.

“Right. We, we are not a ‘we’.”

Maggie narrows her eyes on her. She will not get into attempting to understand that sentence. It could be anywhere between French, a crude joke or a lady-doth-protest-too-much denial.

“Anyway,” she stands. Alex hurries to her feet. “I think I’m going to call it a night. High five on kicking my ass at pool?” Alex looks at her hand and awkwardly high fives her. Sometimes Maggie wonders if she’s an alien.

“Want me to walk you out?”

“Naw. I’m a big girl. Gotta settle up my tab anyway. And Darla will lose her shit if she sees us walk out together.”

“You afraid of her?”

Maggie scoffs. “I just don’t want to piss the bartender off. When I order a beer, I just want a beer, you know?”

“Gotch’a.” She nods. “Well, goodnight.” She lingers a little long and goes on her way. Maggie frowns after her. She tells herself she’s reading too much into the situation. Alex Danvers is not into her. What if she was? Ah, it doesn’t matter. It’d never work. And not just because she’s straight.

She starts to make her way to the bar before stopping. This is ridiculous. She can’t sit around waiting to run into Kara. She has to call her. Somehow she still remembers her number but doesn’t anticipate Kara picking up the phone. She’s probably removed her from her contacts.

It goes to voicemail and Maggie freezes. She ends the call, kicking herself. She’s so distracted she leaves, forgetting to pay.
She’s peeling the plastic back from her tv tray when there’s a knock at the door. Maggie adds another twenty seconds to the microwave and heads over, swiping her gun off the coffee table. It’s nearly two in the morning. No one should be here at this hour. She looks through the peep hole. 

Kara?

Maggie sets the gun aside and opens the door. She stares before getting a hold of her senses. “Um, come in. Sorry, it’s a bit…” disheveled at the moment. She picks up her NCPD jacket, slung over the back of the couch, a pair of socks from the floor. Kara looks around as if it were the first time. Her eyes fall to the wall where Maggie pushed her to. The hole is gone. Kara frowns lightly. “It’s so good to see you. Is everything okay? It’s… it’s late.”

“It is. Yes.” She holds her purse tightly. “I probably should have called.” She hesitate. “You called me. But you didn’t leave a message and so I thought. I’d… invite myself over like a weirdo in the middle of the night.” She touches her glasses, smiling down at the floor in embarrassment. “I’m sorry. This… is rude.”

“No. Are you kidding me?” She looks at the windows and the patter of rain. “It is raining. Raincheck?” Shoot me. She tosses the jacket onto the kitchen chair, chucking the socks into the bedroom. “Besides, these do tend to be more of our meeting hours.”

“You’re a night owl. How could I forget?” Maggie smiles. “Was there something you wanted to talk about? I thought maybe there was…” she halfheartedly waves her phone.

“No. Nothing.” She nods, chagrined. “I mean, tons. I know this is going to sound… crazy but I miss having you around?”

“We didn’t hang out very long.”

“Yeah. Not long enough by far.”

Kara scratches her ear. “Um. Cooking up one of your tv dinners?” She goes to the kitchen, getting it out and setting it back into the microwave for another eight seconds. “You should start preparing your meals ahead of time.”

“I’ve told you, cooking for one is a drag.”

“Back to one?”

Maggie flushes. “Yeah, it’s uh. It’s that Sawyer charm. I just can’t beat them away.” The microwave beeps and Kara takes the meal out, setting it on the table. How domestic. She’s never been good at domestic. “Hard to believe, isn’t it?” Kara smiles faintly. “So I’m just going to say this while I have you here. And you don’t have to believe it—and you don’t have to forgive it—but I am sorry. About what I said at the park. I was.” She looks at the floor. “I was angry. And hurt.” She gulps a breath, daring to look at Kara again. “It wasn’t my finest moment.”

Kara leans into the kitchen counter. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

“I tried.”

“Weeks later. When you were out with your girlfriend.”
Maggie’s face goes hot. “You told me to forget about you.” Now Kara looks away. “What was that? Yeah—I was a bitch. But all of that stuff you said… it came out of nowhere. I thought we were having a good time.”

“I thought we were, too. But then it turned out you weren’t.” She looks down at the floor, her cheeks rosier than usual. “And that’s fine. I said I hadn’t done anything like that before. But, um,” she smiles, she smiles now, and Maggie can’t breathe, “but I guess it was obvious.”

“We all have to start somewhere. And I was lucky you chose me.” She goes to the fridge, embarrassed, pulling out two beers, wondering if she’s falling into a routine, if she wants to follow the same path she followed previously to get them to where they ended up. She offers her a beer. “I don’t know why you did. I still don’t understand anything about you. Why did you run off? Why did you tell me to forget about you?”

“It’s complicated.”

“I’m a detective. Complicated is what I do.” Kara takes the beer. “I know you don’t owe me anything. I just want to know. I think I’d feel a little less crazy if I knew?” She sets the beer aside and looks up at her. “If this was an experiment for you… you can tell me.” She doesn’t want to hear it but she’d rather know. “You can tell me and I’ll forget about it.”

“I thought you already had.” She shifts her stance. “I was experimenting.” Maggie stills. Kara licks her lips. “Not… not how you think.” Her brow knots up. “You’ve had two different girlfriends in the time I’ve known you. And that’s fine,” she says quickly. “That’s… Do you hate being alone?” Maggie doesn’t answer. “I have a sister and a handful of friends but I’ve never known how to be with anyone. I’ve always had to be careful. I just wanted… I just wanted to not be careful, for once in my life. I wanted to be irresponsible.” Her eyes shine. She blinks it away. “I just wanted… to feel human.”

Maggie exhales. “Are you not human?” Kara flicks her eyes to her. She used to hunt sea glass down while the other kids were at beach bonfires. She liked the blue glass. She never found any so radiant and bright as Kara’s eyes. “Sorry, I just mean…” I investigate alien sightings. She thinks of Supergirl kneeling before her at the police station. “I’ve kissed you. I’ve touched you. You’re warm and alive. You’re human.”

Every ounce of her being wants to reach out and pull her close. She resists. Until Kara sets the beer aside, leans forward to whisper into her ear, lips tickling along her flesh. Maggie manages a stunned nod of agreement, heat coursing over her as Kara’s fingers hook into the waistband of her sweats. Maggie remembers she’s wearing nothing underneath. Kara’s surprised, too.

Maggie takes Kara’s face in her hands. It’s hot to the touch. She resists. Until Kara sets the beer aside, leans forward to whisper into her ear, lips tickling along her flesh. Maggie manages a stunned nod of agreement, heat coursing over her as Kara’s fingers hook into the waistband of her sweats. Maggie remembers she’s wearing nothing underneath. Kara’s surprised, too.

Maggie takes Kara’s face in her hands. It’s hot to the touch. She lifts her face closer, drawing back when Kara pulls near. Kara closes her eyes momentarily. Maggie barely hears her but reads her lips. Maggie. Please.

She ends up on the table but the TV dinner ends up on the floor. Kara sets her glasses aside. She flickers in the shitty, dingy kitchen light. Maggie lets her draw her sweats away. Cool air rushes to her skin. Kara hovers over her; hesitates. “I don’t want you to be bored.”

Maggie shakes her head. “Not gonna happen.” She pulls Kara close. That same trembling mouth against her own. The nervous request for instruction and Maggie lightheartedly providing it. She sighs, watching the ceiling fan spin overhead, biting down on her clenched fist so she doesn’t have to hear it from the neighbors about the thin walls.

She comes, grateful she has, nearly laughing at how relieved Kara looks. She considers high fiving
her. She doesn’t, letting Kara pull her to a sitting, focusing on the sensation of Kara pushing the hair back from her face. Maggie looks at her. She’s beautiful. Too beautiful. Is she even human…?
She feels a small stir of panic, despite being a part of her, despite tasting herself on her lips.

A/N 2: I can't wait until we see Maggie's apartment and it's all posh. Though it almost looks like she's moved in with Alex at this point?
Maggie wanders CatCo. She doesn’t like it. Too bright, too shiny, too plastic. Everyone has 1000 megawatt smiles and they look at her like they’re considering calling security. “NYPD, assholes,” she mutters under her breath.

She sees a tall, dark and handsome in an office the size of one that twenty cops share at the station. He stands, straightening his tie and making his way over to her. There are about thirty monitors behind him, running news. She thinks of the NYPD, understaffed, underfunded, cops going out in ratty gear and she feels a sting of bitterness. How much money have they lost since Supergirl came on the scene?

“You’re not the receptionist,” Maggie says.

He smiles. “No. I’m not.” He scans the building. “She might be with our new intern. Can I help you find someone? You’re a cop, right?”

“That obvious? Maggie Sawyer. I’m looking for Kara.”

“James Olsen,” he has a firm handshake. “I’ll take you to her office,” Maggie follows him, ignoring the stares and the constant ring of the phones. “How do you two know each other?”

Maggie flashes back to Kara’s breath, hot and panting against her ear. I’m an experiment. “New friends,” Maggie shrugs. It seems the easiest explanation. “She asked for a statement on the new wave of Cadmus attacks. I can provide that.”

“They’re punks. Their time is coming.”

“If I have something to say about it.”

He nods her on ahead. Maggie thanks him and goes. She hangs back at the door, watching Kara type furiously before slowing, adjusting her text and starting again. “Knock, knock.” Kara turns, smiles. Maggie isn’t in the habit of visiting her friends at work. It’s pure luck and convenience when they happen to work at the bar. “Your own office. Fancy.”

“Apparently a lot of people wanted it.”

“I’ll open a case if a jealous co-worker gets out of hand.” It’s odd to see her here. Bright, vibrant, clear. “Um, James Olsen pointed the way. He your boss?”

“No. Yes, but not really? He’s more of a friend.” Her eyes are momentarily far away. Huh. She takes the jump drive Maggie offers.

“I can’t share much about Cadmus, but what I can is on there.” Kara’s already plugging it into the
computer. “They’ve taken over a few banks now. Even Supergirl can’t take them down.”

Kara flicks through the grainy street cam footage and Maggie goes closer, looking over her shoulder. Kara shifts, half turning her face to look at her. “She’ll think of something.”

“Hopefully soon. Gun sales are through the roof and the last thing we need are vigilantes trying to take back the streets. It just gives Cadmus more incentive to fire back.”

“How’s NCPD dealing with it?”

“It’s being managed but officers are starting to panic.” Just when they’d finally calmed down over Supergirl going nuts.

“Does that include you?”

“It’s nothing I can’t handle.” She sees her reflection in Kara’s glasses, dark amidst the light. “I told you, I’m no stranger to flirting with danger.”

“Flirt with me, not danger.”

Maggie laughs. “Fraid I can’t. Here on duty.” Not that it’s ever stopped her but she’d hate for Kara to think she’s wrapped around her finger. “You had questions for me?”

“Mh. Any leads? Know where they might be hiding out? How to track them down? Any names?”

“Not sure how that figures into the article you’re writing. Even if I knew I wouldn’t be able to tell you.” The last thing she needs is to leak an ongoing investigation to the press. She’d like to hang on to her badge. It’s a non-issue anyway. They haven’t been able to find anything solid yet. It might be time to call Danvers in and see what they can come up with.

“You’re no help.”

“Sorry.” She isn’t. It’s best not to give the Tribune a quote anyway. Maybe she just wanted to see Kara. “Now that you’ve made use of me, you coming by for dinner tonight?” They’ve yet to make it through a meal together. If they keep it up ‘dinner’ is going to be code for ‘sex’.

“I didn’t know this was quid pro quo.” She ejects the jump drive and holds it out to her. “But sorry, I can’t. I have a gala thing with Lena tonight.”


Kara laughs again, different than Maggie’s heard before. Contemptuous? She stands. “I’m not going to do that. Lena’s a friend and I already promised. It’s for charity.”

“And if I warned you that befriending a Luthor was dangerous business?”

“I’d tell you that I trust her. And that I’m a big girl.” She still holds the jump drive out for Maggie to take. “Or is it only okay when you’re the one flirting with danger?”

Maggie plucks the drive back. “I’m a cop.”

“You don’t know who I am.”

“You’re right; I don’t.” Normally she’d have her figured out. Normally it wouldn’t matter.

Kara straightens her long sleeved blouse, a deep blue color. Maggie follows the movements of her
hands along her sides. She tries to find her eyes but Kara looks elsewhere, to the door where a hipster with a bow tie and wayfarer glasses has suddenly appeared. Kara withdraws. “Mike! There you are.” A glance at Maggie. “Let’s hang out some other time.” Kara touches her wrist gently, moving past her out the office.

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Kara’s nowhere to be seen at the gala, which is for the best given the Cadmus attack. True to Kara’s word, Supergirl ends up saving the day with the help of the intrepid Lena Luthor. To make matters worse, Maggie can’t even console herself on having closed out a high profile case. Instead, she’s left with dead Cadmus agents on a slab, and medical professionals unsure of how the hell they were remotely killed. And here she thought the hot pet alien was the weirdest thing about National City.

All she wants is a beer but what she has is a stack of paperwork and the aggravation of knowing that Cadmus beat her again. She wonders what Kara would think. She sits at the station, sipping shitty coffee, reading and re-reading what she’s written until her vision goes blurry. When Danvers asks to meet at the alien bar, she jumps on the opportunity but wishes she hadn’t.

She should have seen it coming. She did and she ignored it. So here it is. Alex Danvers, collected and hard assed DEO agent, coming to terms with who she is and unraveling. She’s raw and earnest… vulnerable. The shitty night doesn’t matter. Only this matters. Danvers trusted her with this…piece of herself. It’s important. She doesn’t always know how to be warm and kind. She tries for her. And Danvers, shaken and maybe a little lighter, takes her leave.

Maggie watches her go, watches the door close behind her, is half tempted to chase after her. And do what? She’s attracted to you and she’s nice. The best thing you can do is keep her at a distance. The way she told Kara to keep away from her? The way she ended up chasing her down when she did?

Fuck. She covers her face with her hands and exhales. Alex is in for a long, shitty road. She hopes it goes better for her. Doesn’t pray much, but sends thoughts somewhere, for someone to watch over her. What is God? What are Gods? Do they fly in the sky, red capes billowing? If not that, what? The thoughts are disturbing. She tries to put them out of her head.

Her phone goes off. Maggie rubs her forehead and looks at it. Kara.

Saw you on the news tonight. You looked very serious.

Maggie texts back. Can’t help that I don’t have Supergirl’s sunny disposition. That gala was a shitshow. You okay?

I got out of there before the action happened. I miss all the excitement. :(  

Maggie smiles, starts to text back before deleting the message. Lena was at the gala, looking stunning. So was Mike and James Olsen. She tells herself she isn’t jealous. She thinks back to Danvers. Danvers who saw someone in her, someone worth confiding in. She’s overcome with annoyance at Kara, knowing full well she has no reason to be irritated. She shuts the phone off to curb any temptation to text back.

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I just saw on the news that the Cadmus guys were killed while in custody? That couldn’t have been easy. Let me know if you need to talk.

Talk. They don’t talk. Their conversations are morsels. Enough to show they’re capable of talking, to remind themselves they aren’t animals. Danvers has been feeling sorry for her since Linda kicked her to the curb. She hasn’t known what Maggie has been doing to pass the time, wouldn’t know that the initial shitty mood was likely more related to leaving things unfinished with Kara. She doesn’t tell Danvers about her. Even if Danvers didn’t have a crush on her she wouldn’t. It doesn’t seem like the kind of thing she’d approve of. And anyway, one person in the city looks at her like she’s something. That’s worth holding onto.

Days pass. Maggie doesn’t send Kara a response and Kara doesn’t visit.

It’s why she’s surprised to find her standing at the bottom of the NCPD steps. The sun shines on her. She glimmers. Maggie takes the steps down slowly, trying to get her bearings. Soon she’s standing in front of her. It wasn’t long enough. “What are you doing here?”

Her smile is unreadable. “I wanted to make sure you were okay. You haven’t called or texted so I wondered if something happened or if maybe I did something—”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. That’s why I’m here.”

“Come to get a scoop for the Tribune?”

“No. I came to see you.”

Maggie bites her lip. “Did you drive?” Come to think of it she doesn’t even know what her car looks like. Kara doesn’t give her a lift anywhere. Maggie never walks her to her car. Kara doesn’t ask.

“No. No car. Bus. I took the bus.”

Another lie. She lies all the time. It’s dizzying. If she lies about the little things, what else does she lie about? Maggie wonders where she’s come from. She’d love to say the NCPD is a long way from home but she dropped her off once and isn’t sure it was even her neighborhood. Kara’s never invited her over. Maybe Kara had her drop her off at another location so she couldn’t double back in case she was a sociopath. “So?”

“It just seems like you’ve been keeping your distance.”

“Maybe this is who I am.” Maybe this is her pattern. “You don’t know me.”

Kara laughs, incredulous, nervous, maybe hurt. It’s possible she’s only seeing what she wants to see. “Um. Okay.” She straightens the hem of her light pink sweater, fingers trying to hook into pockets in her jeans where there aren’t any. She’s awkward, even if her gaze is often so sure. “I just hope this isn’t about the children’s fundraiser because I’m not going to apologize about that. I went. You and Supergirl got the bad guys.” Her smile falters. “If you want me to stop coming around you can tell me.”
Her lips are bruised and tender when they pull away. Kara remains fresh faced and flushed. She slides the glasses up her nose, studies her face. Maggie’s cheeks heat under her stare. “Oh,” a little pitying sound as Kara traces her lips with her fingers, brushes a little kiss onto them. “I got carried away.” She winces, as if a kiss alone could kill her.

Did they get carried away? Only now does Maggie feel the slight throbbing of her lips. Maggie offered Kara a ride back to CatCo but Kara asked to be dropped a few blocks away, on one of the scarier streets in the city. They’ve been parked in the shadows for close to an hour now. Kara hasn’t gotten out and if Maggie’s honest with herself she knows she doesn’t want her to. “That’s the point. It’s just fun, right?” Kara nods.

They get carried away again. They get so carried away, Kara forgets about CatCo and Maggie wonders if she ever intended on going there. They drive around, not saying much of anything, leaving the city and cruising the outskirts, along the curves of the mountains. They keep the windows down, listening to the radio.

Maggie only pulls over when Kara asks her to, at a bluff overlooking the city. It’s dark and the lights shine in the back, but none so bright as Kara, straddling her, pulling her glasses away and staring down at her. Maggie pushes at the sweater and Kara lifts her arms, helping her take it off. Whatever anger she has, resentment, it fades.

Kara’s warm and soft. Her breathing is controlled. Something about her is always controlled. Maggie wants to ask her about it but Kara holds her other hand to her heart, keeps it pressed there. It beats like a drum.

Later they sit on the hood of the car, looking out at the skyline. “I like coming here,” Kara tells her. It’s the first time she’s spoken without prompting and Maggie listens. The location isn’t exactly easy to get to. Does she come here with other experiments? “The lights are like stars.” She sighs a little. Maggie doesn’t tell her that a lot of shit goes down here. She probably shouldn’t have pulled over but she’s glad she did. “So many people. Coming home to loved ones. Or maybe they’re on their own, leading their best life. If you weren’t here with me you might be at home, heating up one of your tv dinners.” She smiles.

“What would you be doing if you weren’t here?”

“Searching.” Her voice is different, familiar. Then she gathers herself. “I’d probably be watching some show. Stuffing myself with potstickers.” She looks at her. “But I’m glad that I’m with you.”

Maggie stops herself from returning the words. She looks at her. “This is just hooking up.”

“Yeah.” She says it so confidently that Maggie finds herself nodding almost before she’s finished saying the word. “Dating isn’t something I get to have.”

“Why not?” But she just looks sad. “You said you don’t know how to be with anyone but have you ever tried?” She nods. “I don’t get you, Kara.”
“What’s there to get? I’m Kara. I’m…” she laughs. “I’m just Kara.” They stare out at the city, watching blades of grass bend in the breeze. “Sometimes I wonder if I’ll ever know who I am. It always feels like I’m making it up as I go.”

“Hey. We’re human. That’s what we do.” Kara smiles wryly. “Can I ask you something?” She nods. “Why me for your experiment? To be irresponsible and reckless?”

“You were in the right place at the right time. Or the wrong place at the wrong time.” She looks ahead, serious, before glancing at her. “I recognized something in you.” A beat. “It couldn’t have been anyone else.”

“Care to explain what and why?”

“Sorry. I can’t.”

Maggie drives her to what Kara says is her apartment building.

Kara fidgets the entire time, pulling at the seatbelt strap, leaning into the window, saying little. Maggie pulls the car over. Kara doesn’t get out. Maggie turns the car off. “You going to invite me in?” She knows Kara’s not going to invite her in.

Maggie looks at her, she can see her ear, the curve of her jaw, the hairpin that’s out of place, a lock of hair loose from it. She can only ever see her in pieces.

Kara looks at her. “Do you want to come in?”

“Would you let me?”

“Yes. Of course.” She undoes the seatbelt, which is as far as they got the first time Maggie attempted to drop her off. She shifts to face her. Maggie wonders what Kara’s apartment looks like. It can’t be a dive. She only sees Kara in the shadows but it’s obvious from CatCo, from the way the sun touches her, that she belongs in the light.

Maggie keeps her hand on the car keys before settling it on her lap. Kara adjusts her hair pin, undoing any evidence of their evening activities. “Um.” Maggie frowns, staring at her hands before looking at her. “Hey. I don’t want this to sound like… however it’s going to sound—but are you seeing someone else?” Kara arches her eyebrows. “I know it was a while ago but at the park you said there was someone else.” Kara straightens her hair, seeming to puzzle her words over. “And at another dinner you were down because you hadn’t heard from someone. I’m not one to judge.” And it isn’t as if she hasn’t bedded unavailable women. “This is fine. I just want all our cards on the table. I’m not really into surprises.”

“It’s complicated.”

“Jesus, Kara. It really isn’t. It’s a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ question. I just want the truth.”

Her eyes cloud over, the little furrow in her brow. “I’m not sleeping with anyone else, if that’s what you’re asking.”

It was and it wasn’t. Maggie breathes easier. “I’m not asking you to introduce me to anyone.”
“Yeah, okay.” A too ready agreement. “I mean, you already know everyone.”

“I do?”

She winces, massages her head. “James and… Mike. Barry.” She takes a breath. “And I’m not… I’m not with them, if that’s your next question.”

It wasn’t but she’s glad to hear it. Even if Kara sounds angry. What’s she like when she’s angry? Really angry? “Do they know what’s going on with us?”

“No. Have you told your friends?”

“I told you; I don’t exactly have many friends.” Except Danvers. And Kara. And Kate. She thinks of earnest Alex Danvers, pouring her heart out, contrasts it with the enigma next to her. At the end of the day, she doesn’t have anyone. She shoves the key into the ignition, trying not to dwell on the thought. Shit family. New town. Chip on her shoulder. “Not much of anyone to tell.”

She considers that. “Can we keep it between us?” Maggie nods halfheartedly. “Everyone likes to tell me what to do. What I should feel. I don’t know what this is. I just know that it’s new and exciting. I like you. I like how you make me feel. I don’t want to share it. I don’t want to explain it.”

“So I’m what, a dirty secret?” Again, it wouldn’t be the first time. What’s been old hat is beginning to wear.

“No. No.” She touches her glasses. “It’s not like that. I promise. It’s me. It’s … hard to explain.”

“Never heard that before,” Maggie says. Kara’s lips part. She leans back into the seat. “Hey, no big. We’re fuck buddies.” Kara frowns. “But it’d be nice if we were friends too? I’m not too embarrassing to be seen out with in public, am I?”

She laughs, bright and genuine this time. “I don’t think anyone would be embarrassed to be seen with National City’s hottest detective.”

Then why can’t she shake the sense that she’s hiding something from her? The words should be reassuring. Now she’s more confused than before. “Know them all do you?” Kara grins. “You’re pretty mysterious for a girl who doesn’t look like she’s ever seen the inside of a principal’s office.”

“Well, you’d be wrong about that. Anyway, mystery’s overrated. I’ll take simple any day.”

“Is that why you’re seeing me?” Maggie smiles as the alarm dawns on Kara’s face. “Teasing. Look, I didn’t mean to be a drag tonight. Or ignore you. I haven’t exactly been hitting it off with the women in my life. I don’t want to run you off either.”

“I get it.”

She’d expected a follow up question, prying, but Kara doesn’t pry. Kara’s guarded. Or maybe she doesn’t care. Her phone rings. Kara fishes it out of her purse. Maggie sees the contact picture, the name Alex and her stomach drops. Kara picks up.


“Don’t count on it.”
Kara smiles. “I would have invited you in.” She opens the door, shuts it, kisses her. She touches Maggie’s lips again, flicks her eyes to hers, smiles faintly. “Sorry for the bruised lips. At least I didn’t break your nose.”

“Something you’re in the habit of doing?”

She laughs, opening the door. “Goodnight, Maggie. Thanks for the ride.” She shuts the door.

Maggie waves, starts the car. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Sisters. Jesus fuck shit. She tried to ignore it. She tries to shut Danvers out. She tries to not put two and two together. The little sister that Alex is crazy about: Kara. Kara fucking Danvers.

She’s hot. Cold. Sick. She’s thinking of the police station. That memory, non-memory that won’t go away. Supergirl before her. *If I don’t come back… thank you for everything. And if you ever meet my sister, Alex—I hope you love her as much as I do.*

Maggie brings a shaking hand to her face, pulling her hair back. It’s a coincidence. It’s a made up memory. She adjust the rearview mirror, looking back to where Kara was standing but once again, she’s gone.

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*A/N 2: Where’s the dropdown menu for this bluff overlooking the city? I should add it as a character tag. In Dragon Age it’s the bathtub... in Supergirl it’s that fucking cliff.*
Kara’s at the alien bar drinking with intern Mike.

Maggie isn’t sure Kara knows she’s there. She could be ignoring her. She could be too focused on Mike. Her cheeks are flushed. Is it alcohol or the company? What is she drinking? She looks to M’gann, wonders if she’d tell her what was sent over. She thinks of Supergirl, stopping her car from careening off the bridge, her stern warnings, her dismissiveness and ice.

Kara’s wearing pigtails. She’s chortling. It can’t be her. It can’t be. But Danvers works with the DEO. She and Supergirl seem close as anything. Alex is Kara’s sister. She wishes she could unlearn it.

She hasn’t told Alex she knows Kara. She doesn’t know how to tell her without lying. It’s still lying if you don’t say anything. Maybe, but at least she gets to keep her around. Maybe she’d be cool with it but Maggie doubts it. If Danvers is this freaked out about being gay, chances are she has no idea what Kara’s been doing.

Maggie loses interest in playing pool. She can’t focus. She heads to the bar to score a beer, turns to see Kara laughing at something. She’s never seen her laugh like that. Who is she? Who’s the real Kara Danvers?

“Hey!” Alex sidles up beside her on the stool. She bristles with nervous energy.

Maggie stands straignter, smiling. “Long time no see, Danvers.” She hasn’t been around since she sort of came out to her. She worried. “What brings you to the neighborhood?”

She folds her arms on the bar and orders scotch. Liquid courage. Maggie can’t blame her. “Maybe I was looking to kick your ass at pool again.”

“I don’t know that my ego can suffer another crushing defeat. Why don’t we not and say we did?”

Alex smiles. “We could do that; it’s not as fun though.” She takes the drink M’gann slides to her and nearly downs it in one gulp. She closes her eyes. Maggie studies her face. They don’t look like sisters. They can’t be sisters. Not really. “What are you up to?”

“You know me. I needed a little something to unwind. Pool and some fine company tend to do the trick.” She flicks her eyes away looking to the bar, ignoring Alex’s gaze, trying not to look back at Kara. “But enough about me. How’s everything with you, Danvers?”

“Um.” She runs her fingers nervously through her hair. “I’m just trying to adjust. To everything.” Maggie nods. “I can’t shut my thoughts off. My brain is always… spinning.”

“It’ll be like that for a while. Scary, I know. But exciting, too. Coming to learn who you are. Not feeling like you’re just trying to mash yourself into a shape you don’t fit.” She touches her beer, turns her back to the bar, looking at Kara. “You’ve got new eyes, Danvers. Time to take advantage.”

“I don’t know what to do next. I mean… do I come out? Do I not come out? I shouldn’t come out.
Right? I’m not… with anyone."

“You can’t hold back because of that. You gotta take a leap.”

“Yeah, right. My mom would lose it.” Maggie starts to argue. “You don’t know her. Nothing I do is ever right. It’s like I screwed up all her plans just by existing.”

Oh. That kind of mom. Maggie has a drink. “What about your dad?” Alex narrows her eyes. Sore subject. “Or your sister? You guys are close.”

“Yeah.” Maggie winces, having hoped she’d argue. Alex finishes her drink and orders another. “Kara’s just…” Just Kara. “I don’t know, Maggie. I’m scared.”

“Didn’t think anything scared you.” Maggie looks at her. Alex quickly looks away and down to her drink. “Well, if anything, you’ve got me in your corner rooting for you. And whenever you’re ready, and out, I’ll be your wing girl. What do you say?”

Alex smiles nervously. “You, my wing girl?”

“It’ll be an easy job. You’re fresh blood. Cute. No baggage. Yet. They’re going to eat you up.”

Alex clears her throat. Maggie finishes the beer. Kara is standing unsteadily. Alex stands. “Oh, God. She never drinks.” She abandons the scotch. “I have to take care of her.”

She’s drunk. She can’t believe it. “Do you need any help?”

“No, I got it. I’ll introduce you some other time. Promise.”

Kara stumbles and Alex is at her side in a heartbeat, wrapping an arm around her waist, holding her up. Maggie stands back uncertainly, watching them, not belonging. Kara glances at her, but just as quickly, as if having seen through her, she looks away.

xxx

“Hey. Kara. It’s me. Maggie. I haven’t seen you in a few days.” Not since the alien bar. Why was she at the alien bar? Why would Danvers bring her to the alien bar? Her head hurts. “Call me back. I’m the one who’s supposed to ghost you, remember?” She winces. “That was a joke. Um. Talk to you soon.”

Maggie keeps the phone nearby but Kara doesn’t call or text. Maggie closes the microwave door, sets the timer for three minutes. She watches the tray whir, the light pulsing.

xxx

Maggie wanders out.

There’s a dog barking in the distance, the sound of laughter and glass clinking. The metal door bangs open behind her, hitting brick. Maggie turns. Alex. Her breath fogs in the night.

Maggie sees it in her face: fight or flight. “What’s up?” she asks.

Alex steels her resolve. Maggie knows it’s going to happen, somehow can’t stop it from happening.
Alex kisses her like it’s life or death, cups her face as if she were something precious. She smells of perfume and gunpowder. Maggie’s lips are stiff before parting. Alex moans softly. For a moment, moments, Maggie loses herself in the kiss, returning it heatedly. She’s pulled closer.

Kara hasn’t returned her calls. She hasn’t returned her texts. If it were anyone else, maybe. But sisters. They’re sisters. Family matters. It matters to some people. Maggie breaks the kiss and pulls away. “Um.” She swallows, brings a hand to her lips. “I’m sorry. It’s a bad idea.” Alex blinks and looks around her, as if disoriented. M’gann comes out, a garbage bag in hand. She looks between the two of them, sets the bag down and goes back inside. Great.

“I shouldn’t have done that.”

Maggie sees the shame washing over her. That self-loathing. It’s the last thing she wants. She wants to explain it. She can’t explain it. “Danvers, it’s fine.”

Alex is shaking her head. Her eyes glisten. “I’m sorry. This was stupid.”

“Alex—”

“I’m going to go. I’ll see you.”

Maggie bites her tongue, forcing herself still, trailing her tongue along her lower lip. Exhaling.

xxx

Maggie watches the footage of Supergirl battling a giant alien. It’s 2:13 in the morning and there’s a knock at the door. Maggie mutes the tv, leaves the gun on the coffee table and pulls the door open. Kara stands with her arms crossed. “You live,” Maggie says.

Kara enters. Maggie carelessly shuts the door behind her, moving past Kara and taking a seat on the couch. Kara looks at the tv and to Maggie. “Can you shut that off?” Maggie doesn’t. Kara goes to the tv, searching for the power button before turning it off. Maggie considers turning it back on but looks up at her instead.


“I can’t see you anymore.”

Maggie thins her lips, her nose flaring. She twines her fingers tightly. She screws up her mouth to talk but can’t say anything.

“Alex is my sister. And now you know that.” Maggie considers the phrasing. “And she has feelings for you. And she kissed you. I can’t—look her in the face and keep pretending this hasn’t happened.”

“Then don’t pretend. Tell her the truth.” She gets to her feet. “Danvers is a big girl. She’ll get over it.”

Kara’s shaking her head. “I can’t lie.” Liar. “This is important to her. You’re important to her.” Maggie feels herself shake but isn’t sure if it’s with anger or something else. “She wouldn’t understand.”

“So don’t tell her,” Maggie says. Kara heaves a breath, frowning. “You didn’t want anyone to
know. Including her. This doesn’t change anything.”

“It’s changes everything.”

“How?”

“She’s upset.” Maggie doubts she’s the only one. “You really hurt her.”

Yeah. She knows. “That’s life.”

“What’s wrong with you? She’s your friend.”

“So I should have kissed her and let her take me home? Are you trying to talk me into taking your sister to bed?” It would be easy. It might be interesting. It would be boring. “Should I call her while you’re standing here? Do you want to make a night of it?”

Kara’s close in the blink of an eye. Maggie doesn’t know how, she doesn’t know if she’s lost time, but she’s there, eyes flashing, towering over her. “Is that what you want?” Maggie asks softly.

Kara’s voice shakes. “You know it isn’t.” She bows her head. “Alex has sacrificed her entire life for me.” What does that even mean? “She needs this. I don’t need this.”

She fights the cold. “So you’re what, passing the baton?”

Kara drops her chin.

“Do you think coming out would be this hard for her if she knew you fucked women?” Kara doesn’t look at her. “She still thinks we’ve never met. Does she know anything about you? Does anyone?” Kara says nothing. “I’ve seen you drink a lot, Just Kara. First time I’ve ever seen you drunk is at the alien bar.”

“So?”

Maggie cocks her head, shrugs. She sits again. “What does she see in me that you don’t?”

Kara hardens her jaw. “It’s just sex.”

She laughs. “All right. Well, I’m glad we’ve had this chat. You know where the door is.” Kara lingers in the doorway, forehead pressed to the doorsill. “Piece of advice? Get a dildo. You can get off, clean it up and lend it to your friends. Best of all, you don’t have to take it anywhere. No one has to know it exists.”

“Maggie. You’re more to me than that.”

“Yeah? I don’t believe you.”

xxx

Kara flexes her hand and strikes the car again. The metal crunches and groans. She yanks her hand back. A small river of blood streams over her knuckles. She’s not a hundred percent yet. Cadmus drained her. They took her blood. But Jeremiah is alive. Mon-El is safe. She’s free.

She moves around the car to the driver’s seat, pulls the door from its hinges, beating it into the hood of the car, into the windshield. It shatters, sending glass flying. She continues to batter the
car, grunting, screaming before cleaving it in half with one final swing of the door. The birds circling overhead disperse.

She breathes hard, spent, looking up to the skies shrouded in dense clouds. The sun is only a faint outline.

The car smokes, crackling with electricity. She slides into the driver’s seat, looking to the severed half of the car. Her fists sting. She leans back into the seat and closes her eyes. Maybe she should have handled things differently.

The thoughts spiral. She opens her eyes to look at the mountains of cars in the junkyard. It would be easy to level this place. A few well-placed heat vision strikes and the fire could be seen from the next city over.

She gets to her feet. She walks. The cape flutters behind her. The blood dries on her hands.

She’d seen Alex and Maggie together but hadn’t known they were friends. Why hadn’t Alex told her? Why hadn’t Maggie? Nobody talks.

Alex has been withdrawn. The Guardian is rolling through town like he owns it. The head of Cadmus is Lena’s mother. Kara rolls her fingers, not remembering the last time she felt so angry. A moment later she remembers when. She remembers who she met that night. But that was different. It was chemical. Safer. This is something else.

She takes a deep breath and turns her earpiece back on.

Alex’s voice immediately comes on. “Supergirl, where are you?”

“Nowhere.”

“You can’t go radio silent like that. You’re not steady yet. Get back to HQ.”

She places her hands on her hips, looks at the dirt and dust on her boots. The last thing she wants is more testing and prodding, as if she were an alien specimen. Isn’t it enough she had to get it from Cadmus? “I have some things to take care of.”

“There’s nothing going on. HQ, now, Supergirl. It’s not a request.”

She shuts the earpiece off. She flies, weaving through bitterly cold skies, weaving through lightning storms. She stares down at the city. It’s so small from this distance. Hours later she arrives at the DEO.

Alex grabs her arm forcibly and drags her down to medical. Kara goes, letting Alex shove her onto a medical bed. “What’s going on with you? I was worried sick.” Alex looks at her bloodied hands. “What happened?”

“It’s just a scratch.” She massages the dried blood from her hands but it leaves a stain.

Alex finds some wet wipes and cleans the blood from her hands. “The fact that you can even bleed right now means you shouldn’t be out there.”

“You can bleed.” So can Maggie. “You’re out there.”

“I’ve had years of training.” She studies Kara’s hands and Kara fights to not take them back, knows where they’ve been, where they’ve touched. “You’re flushed.” She press the gummy strip to her
“I hope you don’t have a fever.” It’s hard to stand still. She fights to not tear herself away and leave. “Stop fidgeting. I know you’re anxious to prepare for game night but you’re not leaving until we get through this.” She’d forgotten about game night. Maybe she can cancel it. “Everyone’s coming. I invited Maggie.” Alex looks at the heart monitor as the readings spike. “What?”

“Don’t you think you should have asked me?”

“What’s the big deal?”

“Are you ready to see her? Don’t you need time?”

She gives a small shake of her head. “I overreacted. I’ve been biting her head off this whole week.”

“How has she been?”

“She’s been patient. I need to cool it.” She continues to take readings. “I was in a hurry and I thought she felt the same. I already felt like I’d lost so much time.” She smiles sadly. “Maybe it is a little like you throwing yourself into being Supergirl.”

Sometimes she throws herself into things. “Any girl would be lucky to have you. It doesn’t have to be Maggie.”

“I know. I wish I didn’t like her. I’ll get over it,” she nods, trying to convince herself, “But I want you to meet her and get to know her. I know you only usually see her throwing down but she’s funny and sweet. It’s… different from just being out in the field.” Kara thinks of flashing lights, microwaves humming, her lips gliding. “I hope you’re not mad that I invited her.”

Kara grips the bed, keeps her face tucked down as Alex continues to scribble notes. “It’s fine.”

xxx

Danvers gives her directions to Kara’s place for game night. Now she has an apartment number, 4A, which is more than Kara ever gave her.

She cabs, having had a few beers to try to relax. She’s insane to show up for this. Things with Danvers have been awkward. She shouldn’t have kissed her back. She shouldn’t have accepted the invitation. But this is a peace offering. The premise is a lie but Maggie is willing to take her up on it. Even if she wants to puke.

She opens the building door and climbs the steps to the third floor. There’s laughter coming from the apartment, men’s and women’s. She’s never been good in big groups of strangers, though it’s something that’s gotten easier with age. She wipes her forehead and takes a breath, lifting her hand to knock.

She lowers it and takes out her cell, dialing Alex’s number and making the walk back down the stairs. She feels shakier with every step. “Hey, Danvers. It’s me. Um. Something’s come up and I have to head back to the station. It was nice to be invited. I know things have been weird… but I want us to stay friends. I think I’ve taken for granted what a great friend you’ve been to me. And that… that doesn’t happen often for me.” She’s saying too much. “I did want to meet everyone. Maybe some other time. Um. Okay. See you later.” She winces, ending the call. Fucking coward.

She isn’t sure who she’s unable to face. Maybe the both of them. She hasn’t forgotten Kara reluctantly turning away the last time she visited, the door slipping open with her departure before
Maggie slammed it shut.

Maggie reaches the building door and pulls it open. Kara’s on the other side. Maggie swears inwardly, steps back. She shoves her hands into her jacket. “I just left your sister a voicemail.”

“I heard.” She grimaces, touches a hand to her glasses, leaves it there. Her fingers shake. There are scratches on her hands.

Maggie wonders where she got them. “Can I go?”

Kara hesitates. “I know we didn’t leave things in a good place.” Maggie lifts her chin, a mean smile on her lips. “I could have… said things better.”

“I’d say you got your point across loud and clear.”

“Alex really wants you to be here.”

“Yeah? Because she said you’re the one who invited me to game night.” Kara takes a breath and lowers her face. “I didn’t buy it, if that helps.” Not that she wants to help. Kara leans back into the wall, folding her arms gingerly, looking deep in thought. “I like Danvers a lot, actually. She’s sweet. It’s kind of hard to believe you’re related. I can’t figure you out. You’re all surface.” Kara’s jaw tightens. “I’m going to head out.”

She lifts her head, fixes her with her eyes. “Can’t you stay?” Maggie shakes her head. “I’ve never lied to Alex.” Maggie waits. “I just want you to know that.”

But it isn’t true. “That doesn’t sound healthy.”

“It is healthy. It’s normal.”

“Siblings who don’t lie to each other? Sounds weird to me.” Maggie takes a breath. “Just let me walk out of here.” Kara blocks her path. Stopped by a blonde in glasses with a maroon cardigan. They should take her badge. “What are you doing?” Kara’s eyes are dark. There’s the sound of footsteps and Maggie looks to the staircase. Danvers.

Alex blinks, smiles. “Hey. I was looking for Kara.” She spots her, puzzled. Kara takes a step back. “I got your voicemail. I thought you had something at the station.”

Maggie bites her tongue and smiles. “False alarm.”

“That’s great.” She takes another step down, looking between the two of them. “I see you two have formally met.”

“Yes,” Kara says. Her hand half lifts before she lowers it tensely to her side.

“Come on up,” Alex says, “I’ll introduce you to everyone.”

Maggie follows, Kara on her trail. Maggie looks back. Kara’s face is tense and pale before it relaxes into nothingness, a wall once again.

xxx

The apartment is open, spacious. Bulbs send golden light spilling over every colorful surface. It’s nicer than Maggie expected. A lot nicer. She thinks of her creaking stairs and the front door with
the peeling paint. She doesn’t belong here. A group of guys turn away from the piles of food to face her. James Olsen. Mike. Without glasses. The last one she only vaguely recognizes before she remembers seeing him at the DEO.

“Maggie, this is everyone,” Alex says. “James, Winn, Mo—Mike. You’ve already met Kara.”

“Hey,” Maggie says awkwardly. Does anyone outside of Winn know what Alex does for work? How does she explain how she knows her? “Um. Thanks for having me.” They all toss exuberant greetings at her. Winn is fidgety.

“Want a beer?” Alex goes to fetch one before Maggie can answer.

Yes, she wants a fucking beer. Kara stands at her side, fingers anxiously teasing along her white blouse before moving past her to kneel at the coffee table, grabbing a slice of pizza. Maggie feels James’ eyes on her. She knows he’s going to ask. “We met, briefly,” she says, cutting him off. “Kara needed a police statement for an article.”

“Right,” he nods. He’s thinking more than he’s saying. “Well, it’s good to see you again.”

“Yeah, you too.” Not really. Alex comes back with the beer and Maggie takes it, hoping to ease her nerves. The guys are huddled up on the couch, Mike with a cast on his leg. Alex has taken the single. Her options are to keep standing or sit beside Kara. She stands.

“Did I hear you say you gave Kara a police statement?” Alex asks. “When was this?”

“A while ago,” Kara says.

“It wasn’t that long ago,” Mike says. Kara glances at him. He lifts his eyebrows.

“I didn’t know you knew each other,” Alex says, puzzled. She looks at Kara. “That’s… Why didn’t you mention it?”

Maggie shrugs. “Can’t assume every Kara in National City is your sister, Danvers.” A lie, a truth, a lie-truth. Maggie wonders what would happen if Alex found out about them. Not that there is a ‘them’ anymore. Not that there ever was.

The group falls into what she assumes are the usual dynamics. Maggie watches from the outskirts. The occasional game of Scrabble aside she isn’t much for board games. They all seem so young. Maybe they’re just happy. Maggie doesn’t know what to say to them. She’s not used to spending time with people this wholesome. But she hasn’t forgotten Kara’s mouth trembling against her own. Nothing makes sense.

She wanders into the kitchen, tempted to open the refrigerator door and see what kind of food Kara stocks it with, tempted to look through the cupboards. She doesn’t. It seems too intimate, which is silly, all things considered. She nearly jumps when Kara ends up beside her, circling the island for thirds of the takeout. “Help yourself to anything,” Kara tells her.

Yeah, right. Maggie tenses, unsure if she should look at her, if something will show in her expression. “Nice place.”

She doesn’t look at her. “I told you I’d let you in.”

She makes it sound like she’s a vampire. “Technically your sister invited me.” She looks back at the group and wonders why she’s stayed as long as she has. She tells herself it’s for Danvers’ sake. To try to repair things. She sets her beer on the counter, warm from the ones she had prior to
visiting. “Can I get a glass?”

Kara steps close before reaching into the top cabinet and grabbing one. She holds it out. Maggie tries to take it but can’t pull it away.

“Whatcha guys doing?” Alex comes to stand next to them.

Kara releases the glass. Maggie nearly stumbles.

“Stocking up,” Kara says. “I took the last potstickers. Sorry.”

“No, you’re not.”

She scrunches her face, smiling. “No, I’m not.” She returns to the guys, leaving the two of them. Maggie fights whiplash.

“She’s unbelievable.” Tell me about it. Alex rolls her eyes. “Need another beer?”

Maggie nods at the one she has. “Still working on this one. And I need to hydrate.” She fills the glass, downs it, fills it again and repeats. She’s not sure whether she wants to call Kara out for fucking with her head or push her onto the bed. “Your friends are fun.”

“Yeah. They’re all right,” she smiles. “Your voicemail was really nice.” Maggie doesn’t know what to say. She wasn’t supposed to be around when she heard it. “I know I’ve been acting kind of intense.” Danvers family trait. “We’re not dating. We were never dating. Or flirting.” Maybe there was a little flirting. What’s the harm in flirting with the straight girl? Shit. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t even worry about it.”

“So you don’t think I’m crazy?”

“Have you met my exes?”

“Actually…” They laugh. Maggie can’t tell her she’s the one that usually screws things up. She looks at Kara, eating happily, her fingers trailing absently along the edge of a card before laughing at something that Winn says. The boys are enamored. Does she know? “So we’ll forget about the kiss.” Maggie nods, wondering if she should. “Was it bad?”

Maggie picks up her beer again, hoping a familiar object will ground her. “That’s a dangerous question.”

“It was bad.”

“Um. Look, I don’t want you to take this the wrong way. But it was awesome?” She clinks their drinks together. “What’d I say, Danvers? Fresh blood.” Alex tries to hide her smile. Kara dips her head, fingers brushing along her ear, scratching along her neck.

They leave, headed to a neighborhood bar to close out the evening. Kara stays behind, trying to bury the tension in her fingers and jaw. She bids them goodbye, hugging Alex tightly on her exit. “You okay?” Alex asks. Kara nods. Alex kisses her cheek and goes. They stream out, one by one, all insisting she come along, all except for Maggie who avoids her eyes. Kara closes the door, making her touch light, turning the lock.
She takes a breath. She cleans.

She sits at the window, looking to the night sky. The lights are off in the apartment but National City is bright; it cloaks the stars. She could go closer. She could go higher. She could touch them.

She looks at her phone. 11:15pm. Hours pass.

She leaps out the window, shooting up into the sky. She prowls. She stops a mugging, laughing when she sees the gun. Somehow that scares the mugger more. He drops it and runs. She catches him and drops him off at the NCPD, only realizing after the fact that she never checked in on the woman that was nearly mugged.

She returns home, unsatisfied, digs through the fridge and drinks a bottle of water. There’s a knock. Kara walks to the door, boots stomping until she changes at the last second and opens the door.

The light from the hall spills into the dark of the apartment.

Maggie keeps her hands in her back pockets. They stare at each other, Maggie’s eyes narrowed. “I got your text.” Her voice is brittle. Kara steps aside. Maggie walks in. “Why am I here?”

“I wanted to talk to you.” She shuts the door.

“You weren’t interested before.”

“Did you have fun tonight?”

“Don’t. Don’t do that.”

The tension that abated with the group’s absence returns. She touches her hands anxiously, touches her glasses and moves further into the living room. Maggie remains by the door. “Can you come closer, please?”

Maggie squares her jaw, debates it. Eventually she moves closer. She doesn’t take a seat. Kara sits, thinks maybe it will help if she doesn’t seem so tall. “What happened to not seeing me anymore?” Kara doesn’t know how to respond. “Do you mean anything you say?”

“Yes.” A beat. “I try.” She brings her hands to her forehead, feeling sick in a way she hasn’t before. She forces her hands to her lap. “You said a lot of things that weren’t fair.” Maggie cocks her chin up. Waits. “You’re not…” she struggles, her cheeks heating. “You’re not a toy to me.”

“What am I, then?”

She’s at a loss. “I hate that you kissed Alex.”

“Why? Who cares what we do on the side? What’s between us is just sex. You wanted me to go to her.” She sounds angrier with every word.

Her fingers twitch. She forces them still. She takes her time, waiting until she’s sure she can speak. “You don’t understand.”

Maggie walks to stand in front of her. “Explain it to me.”

Kara looks up at her helplessly and back to her hands. How can she explain what she barely understands herself? “The night that I met you was one of the worst days of my life. There were a lot of reasons,” she explains before Maggie asks.
“You seemed pretty normal to me.”

She seems pretty normal to a lot of people. “Thank you.” That wasn’t the right thing to say. She feels Maggie’s stare but can’t look up from her hands. "I've never met anyone like you before. No one talks to me the way you do. Or challenges me in the way that you do. You treat me like I'm somebody else.” She sees Maggie shift to cross her arms. “I’m freer with you.” Her throat is tight. “And that matters to me.”

Maggie crouches. Not meeting her eyes is no longer an option. Maggie brings a hand to her face. It's warm. Kara exhales shakily. "Man, oh, man,” Maggie’s voice is quiet. “What am I going to do with you?”
The shelves have been cleaned out at every grocery store as people frantically mow each other down to get the last of the turkey stuffing. Maggie abandons any wild notion of cooking a post Thanksgiving dinner and picks up a six-pack instead.

The checkout lines are outrageous and she chooses one at random, kicking herself for not realizing the stores would be packed. She resigns herself to at least a half-hour wait.

She waits, her thoughts returning to the Danvers sisters. Alex continues being one of the coolest, most competent women she’s ever met. She’s smart. Gorgeous. A good kisser. Into her. Best of all, she doesn’t seem batshit crazy. She wonders if things would be different if she’d met Alex first.

The cashier finally calls her up. She stopped IDing her long ago. “Going home for Thanksgiving?” she asks.

“Oh,” Maggie nearly tells her she doesn’t have family in National City, that she doubts she’d be spending time with them if she did. “Yeah. Thanksgiving’s all about family, right?” She takes her beer, wishing the cashier a happy Thanksgiving and exiting against a crowd of people rushing in, family members shouting about butter and rolls. Maybe she’ll hit the alien bar after her Thanksgiving shift. Maybe Kara will visit.

She’s been anxious since leaving her on game night. Maybe going back after the bar was a stupid idea. Maggie kissed her. Kara kissed her back. They got carried away.

Afterward, they dressed quickly and sat in silence. Maggie studied Kara’s face, quietly anguished and withdrawn. Maggie left not too long after.

She hasn’t heard from her since.

xxx

Maggie makes the one call that matters and then its on to work.

She’s hoping for a quiet Thanksgiving but there’s enough family drama to keep her busy throughout the shift. A domestic caps the night off. Maggie walks the home-slash-crime scene. It still smells like Thanksgiving dinner. Blood’s splattered on the walls. CSI comes around taking pictures while she carefully steps over the bodies. Open and shut case.

She drives back to the station. The streets and highways are relatively abandoned. She thinks of the night she drifted off and Supergirl saved her. Should she confront her about it? Does it matter?

She stops for a coffee at Dunkin’ Donuts before returning to the station. Jones at the desk looks up from the pizza he’s working through. “Hey, how was the—?” He mimes putting two rounds in his head.

“Don’t ask,” she says moving on. Her neck hurts, her head hurts, her body hurts. She tries not to think of the bodies in the home but knows she’ll have to write a report, comb through the pictures later. She hopes the captain will give the statement to the media. She wonders, briefly, why she
bothers with this line of work.

“Oh, uh. There’s a hot chick waiting for you in your office. New girlfriend?” He puts his fingers up in a v and wags his tongue at her. “Noice.”

She rolls her eyes. “You’re disgusting.” She has no idea who could be waiting for her. It wouldn’t be Kate. A Danvers? One’s easier to handle than the other. Maggie catches her reflection in the glass and winces. She has a drink of coffee, burning her tongue, pulls her hair loose and walks into her office. It’s not the Danvers sister she hoped for.

Alex gets to her feet. “Hey! Happy Thanksgiving.” She lifts a plate wrapped in tin foil. Her eyes are bright, her cheeks flushed. Has she been drinking? “The most delicious leftovers in the galaxy without the awkward family dinner to sit through.”

“A winning combination,” Maggie takes the plate. She doesn’t smell alcohol on her and feels guilty for thinking it. “You didn’t come here just to bring me this?”

“Yeah. Is that weird?”

“Um. No. That’s real sweet of you. Thanks, Danvers.” She considers hugging her but decides against it. “How was the big day?”

“The wine helped me get through,” she says. That answers that. “I tried to tell Mom about—you know… but there was never a good time.”

“You’ll get there. Everything went off without a hitch otherwise, yeah? No big family drama?”

Her brow knits a little. “Okay enough.” Maggie pulls the tinfoil back from the plate. “Kara’s been acting weird since I came out to her.”

She looks at her. “Weird how?”

“I don’t know. There’s just this… disconnect between us,” Alex says. Maggie clears her throat, stabbing into the stuffing. “It’s the first time things have felt that way. Um. The first in a long time.” Maggie wants to ask. Alex waves it away. “But! I did not come by to angst. I wanted to see you. I was afraid without a proper meal you might have had beer nuts for Thanksgiving dinner.”

“What’s wrong with that?” She laughs and takes a bite of the potatoes. “I’ll never complain about a cute girl bringing me food.” An awkward silence follows. “Sorry, I shouldn’t … Long day.”

Alex shakes her head. “Get bored when you’re not hunting aliens?”

“Nothing’s quite as fun as riding with the DEO. Tell you the truth, I’d take aliens to humans, most days.” She stares at the food on the plate and wonders what Kara’s doing. She considers asking but knows she can’t. She ought to focus on the Danvers sister in front of her.

“Bad day?” Maggie gives a small nod. “I’m here and I’ve got time. Why don’t you tell me about it?”

Maggie does, cautiously at first and then more readily once Alex doesn’t go running. She reveals more of the gruesome details than she intends. Alex listens attentively. She’s used to the women in her life telling her it’s too sad or disturbing to hear. To not bring it home. To not talk about it at all. To go see a therapist. Alex says nothing. “Was it too much?”

A breath. “I mean, it’s awful? But I’m glad you told me. You can’t keep that kind of thing bottled
up. It’ll drive you nuts.” Maggie nods lightly. “Do you see a lot of things like that?”

“More than I’d like. But not as often as in Gotham. Everyone’s crazy there,” she mutters, not wanting to relive some of her past memories.

“Well, call me selfish but I’m glad you’re in National City now.”

She smiles faintly. “Yeah. Me too, Danvers.”

xxx

Kara stares at the door, unsure whether to knock or walk in. She takes a breath and pushes the door open. Lena’s working at her desk. She clears her throat. Lena looks up, smiling with surprise. She stands. “Kara! Hi. We didn’t have plans. Tell me we didn’t have plans.”

“You forgot.” She watches the dread sink into Lena’s face and smiles. “No, we did not have plans.”

“You devil,” she comes closer, giving her a hug. “Happy Thanksgiving.”

Kara holds her briefly. She’s different from Maggie. Taller. Fuller. She dresses exclusively in designer label clothing. She wears delicate perfume.

It’s late. She’s been restless. She was flying over National City when she spotted the L-Corp building and the light in Lena’s office. She didn’t think to invite her to Thanksgiving. Given that she was just recently kidnapped by Lena’s mother, she doubts Alex would have agreed. But she didn’t think to invite Maggie either. They’re both alone. They’re all alone.

What would it be like to have Maggie in her apartment during the day with everyone there? It exhausts her to think about it. It’s too hard being so many people at once. And seeing Maggie is dangerous. She isn’t as strong as she thought she was. She remembers her fingers moving too anxiously, popping the buttons off Maggie’s shirt. She remembers them clattering along the floor. She remembers her own terrifying desperation.

Kara shakes the thoughts away and releases Lena. “Happy Thanksgiving,” she presents a plate of food: her leftovers.

Lena takes the meal. “What’s this? A paper plate? Mother would be horrified,” she says gleefully, bringing it with her to the couch. “Want to pour us some wine? You know where it is.”

Kara does, she goes to it, finding the glasses, pouring the wine. She only ever had beer with Maggie, cocktails the one night they went out together. Lena and Maggie are nothing alike. They’re not like anyone she knows. Something about them calls to her like a beacon. In a way, they’re aliens, same as her.

Kara returns to the couch and hands the wine over. Lena flips the fork in her direction. Somehow everything she does is smooth and flirtatious; she’s absent of Maggie’s rough charms. “Are we sharing?” Lena asks.

“This is all for you. I have plenty back home.” She meant to, anyway, but they ended up sending some with the boys. Alex packed a meal for Maggie and Kara watched, feeling a dull hollow beat inside of her, a hot flash of anger she immediately buried.

“Did you cook this?”
“Not all of it.” She waits. “Tell me this isn’t the only Thanksgiving meal you’ve had today.”

“Oh.” Lena’s cheeks redden. “No. There’s this little restaurant, hidden gem. I actually read about it in CatCo magazine ages ago. Apparently they do a Thanksgiving meal every year that’s to die for.” She slows, her smile waning. “I had to try it.”

She wonders if either Maggie or Lena spent time with family. Kara knows nothing about Maggie’s family. Too much about Lena’s. But she senses how it affects the Luthor. She smiles. “Was it everything you dreamed?”

“And more.” She sets the food aside and Kara wonders if she’ll perpetually spend time with women who can’t eat a meal. She picks up the wine. Kara considers asking her about Lillian. But she can’t. Not today. “You look serious. Everything okay?”

Kara leans back into the couch. *Everything’s a mess.* “Yes. Things are great.”

“Uh huh.” Lena picks up the plate of food again with a roll of her eyes. “I don’t believe you, for the record. And don’t tell me you’ll actually write that down somewhere,” she nods to Kara’s purse. “If I can’t get a break from the paparazzi on Thanksgiving I’m really screwed.”

“Paparazzi?” Lena chuckles. “No. You are not ‘screwed’. Tonight, I’m here for the company.”

A mischievous grin. “At this hour of night. You know, most people are fighting off a food coma or spending time with their families.”

“Yeah. But friends are good, too. Friends can be like family,” she smiles. Lena returns it. Is Maggie a friend? How can she not even know? But Alex is family. As much family as Maggie in some ways. They’re not really sisters. Not really family. The thought makes her sick. She shouldn’t think about it.

xxx

Kara shows up at the usual time of night. There’s something harried about her. Maggie has some idea why, wishes they could talk about it. “Hey,” Kara forces a smile.

“Hey.” Maggie leans into the doorway, unsure whether to let her in. She’s tired. Too tired to give in to any temptations she might have.

Kara’s fingers tighten around her purse strap. “I heard what happened at the alien bar. Are you okay?”

“Better than I was a few days ago.” Her body aches thinking about it. A lot of aliens died. Many who treated her better than her so-called family. Supergirl must be carrying that weight too. “I’ve had some time to process it.”

“I wanted to come sooner.” She hesitates. “This is the soonest I could make it.”

“Why didn’t you text?” She could have done that, at least. “Where were you?” She suspects she knows where. Does she want her to come clean? Does she want to make her feel bad? Maybe she just wants to know if she’s capable of telling the truth.

“I was… I was busy. But I know you like it there.”
“Yeah.” She shifts her stance. “It’s been a hard few days.” She smiles despite herself, weary. Kara’s not affected. Doesn’t it affect Kryptonians? More things they won’t discuss. “I’ll never understand why people do the things they do.” She pulls the door open, unknowingly having made a decision.

Kara gathers herself and enters. She looks around. “How was Thanksgiving?” she asks quickly. Maggie shrugs. Didn’t Alex tell her? “I meant to see you, but.” She doesn’t quite look at her.

“We’re pretty good at throwing ourselves off track, aren’t we?” Though Kara’s better at it than she is. She sits. Kara joins her. They face each other, knees carefully not touching. A thick silence hangs in the air. What’s she thinking of? She told her once. Maggie’s afraid of Kara telling her again. Her words of vulnerability are like a riptide, pulling her under. But she can’t fall for that. She’s the girl of steel. What if they don’t talk? What if they never talk? They could keep each other’s bed warm. They could say nothing that matters. It could be business as usual.

Maggie forces herself to speak. “What are we doing?” Kara doesn’t say anything. “I’ve got you under my skin. I could tear myself apart and I wouldn’t be able to get to you.”

Kara laces her hands in her lap.

“National City’s had a lot of hard days lately. And I have, too.”

“You can talk to me.”

Kara looks at her with so much caring. It twists into her like a knife. “Yeah. Maybe. But you’re never here, Kara. And every time you go away I never know when I’ll see you again.” She sees Supergirl more than she ever thought she would. But Supergirl never looks at her. Kara touches her glasses, for an instant nearly pulls at them. Then her hand is in her lap again. “Everything feels like borrowed time with you.”

Her lips press together, part to speak. She shakes her head. “It’s not.”

“Okay. But you have to admit that the Alex thing makes this more complicated. It’s obvious how much you two love each other. This is just sex. It’s supposed to be easy and fun and relaxing. But it’s not. Not just because of Alex. I don’t get you.”

“You keep saying that. Why do you have to get me?” She asks, frustrated. “I’m not… trying to be complicated. Or mysterious. I just…” she frowns, stops, the line in her brow cutting deeper. She massages her temple. Her chin quivers. She stops it. “You’re overthinking it.”

“Maybe I am. I haven’t forgotten what you said on game night. All I do is think about you, Kara.” She smiles, but it shakes. They look down at their hands at the same time. Maggie forces herself to look back at her. “That doesn’t happen often for me. I’m not good at being alone. You asked me once if I hated it. All I know is nine times out of ten I’ll take something to nothing. I met you and you were cute. You were different. And we had fun. But I’m … um.” She clears her throat. “I think I’m starting to want something you can’t give. I’m not angry. Maybe I’m disappointed,” she laughs a little, embarrassed, hurries on to finish her point, “but you said it yourself; you don’t know how to be with anyone and… and I should probably start taking care of myself.”

She stands slowly. “You don’t want to see me anymore.”

“I think that would be best.” Maggie smiles faintly. “If we keep this up it’ll get harder. I already feel a little crazy when I’m with you.” Or not with you. “You said we shouldn’t see each other anymore and you were right. We’ll screw something up and Alex will get hurt. It’s not worth it.”
Kara gazes at nothing in particular.

“All of this has made me realize I’ve been a lousy girlfriend. Not to you, we weren’t…but before.” She was normal with Kate. That was long ago. “I want something normal. This…this isn’t normal. You aren’t normal. Neither am I,” she says quickly. Kara touches her forehead as if warding off a headache. “I want to be able to come home and tell someone about my day. Or know that I can have a meal with them during the holidays. I want to hear about their day, too. You shut me out.”

“I don’t mean to.”

“I believe you.” She gets up. “But work is too hard. I can’t come home and fight with you, too.”

Kara takes a shaky breath. “Is this about Thanksgiving?” Her voice wobbles momentarily. “I wanted to see you,” she says again. “I…was just worried that…”

“I know. Me too.” Maggie goes closer, takes her arm. “Hey. We can always tell Alex. It’ll suck but you’re close. We can all move past this.”

“You’re asking me to choose between you and my sister,” her eyes glisten. She turns away from her. “As if it were a choice.”

“Yeah.” She smiles sadly. The air is scarce in her lungs. “I know it isn’t.”

“The last time we talked, I told you things that… They were hard things.”

Maggie waits. She doesn’t let go of her. Isn’t willing to just yet. “You can still tell me. We can be friends.” Years seem to stretch out in silence. She panics, suddenly, terrified that Kara will walk out of her life forever. She can’t. She’s dizzy. “I care about you.”

“I have to go. I’ve stayed too long.” Her voice is a ghost. She moves, until she’s slipped from Maggie’s fingertips and she’s gone.

xxx

Supergirl watches Mon-El through the glass, wondering if he’ll die. If he does, it’ll be because of her family, just as they’re to blame for the vendettas of those sentenced to Fort Rozz and the deaths at the alien bar. Her family did this. Now Cyborg Superman and Cadmus has utilized her family’s bio-weapon against all aliens that aren’t Kryptonian. She wants to throw up thinking about it.

Alex comes to stand beside her. “You okay?” Kara doesn’t answer, keeping her arms crossed, watching Mon-El’s vitals. “What’s happening isn’t your fault. Cadmus kidnapped you, they took your blood. You couldn’t have known what they were going to do with it.” She squares her jaw, unable to say anything. “And you’re not responsible for what your parents have done.” Alex moves in front of her. “Hey.” She takes her face in her hands. “We’re going to fix this.”

Kara nods stiltedly, pulling her face from her hands. She sees Alex’s confusion. Runs a hand through her hair.

“Talk to me,” Alex says.

Kara shakes her head. “I’m frustrated,” her voice shakes. “Every time I learn something else about my parents…I feel like I’m losing a piece of them. All I have left are my memories. And now they’re tainted.” Alex rubs her shoulder reassuringly. Kara wipes her face with her hand. “Cadmus
is responsible for this but it wouldn’t have been possible without my father’s work. First Myriad and now Medusa. My family keeps inflicting death and destruction onto this planet. And if I hadn’t been sent here it never would have happened. Earth would be safe.” Safer, anyway.

“Your family never intended any of this. Beating yourself up doesn’t do anyone any good.” Alex takes her arms, keeping her still. “We’re going to get through this.” She looks into her face, eyes narrowing. “But there’s something else. What is it?”

“Nothing. I’ve got a lot on my mind,” she moves away from her, wandering the DEO restlessly, fingers clenching and unclenching. It’s pointless to think about Maggie. What matters is calming herself, burying the anger coursing through her, the anger she fears wasn’t just a byproduct of the red kryptonite.

She only stops when she’s arrived at the room where they’ve set up her mother’s hologram. The door slides shut behind her. She hasn’t visited it in a long time and it seems off, somehow. The memory of Astra is fresher in her mind, eyes bold and defiant. The hologram observes her with a peaceful, benign smile and flat eyes. It makes her angrier. Her own mother used her to ensnare Astra. Astra nearly killed J’onn, caused other irrevocable damage. Her father created Medusa. What if she ends up sowing that same hate and destruction? She’s been careless, almost indifferent with Maggie. Why doesn’t she know how to be with anyone? Mon-El accused her of being a Kryptonian supremacist. What if she’s like them, somehow, somewhere deep inside?

“Kara,” the hologram says.

“Everything you and Father said to me on Krypton was a lie. I don’t know even know what kind of people you were, anymore. Who I might have been if I’d stayed there.” Alura stares back at her. “Say something!”

“You have not asked a question.”

“Why did you and my father lie to me about his work?”

“Any lie that was told was likely intended to protect you.”

“But you didn’t protect me! You sent me here! Every day I’m fighting something else.” Her eyes burn. It’s Thanksgiving. She’s got Alex. She’s got Eliza. But everyone else is gone. She could have had Astra. No, you couldn’t have. Not without losing J’onn. But J’onn isn’t family. She goes hot with anger again. With guilt. “And now I have to bear the shame of your actions. I have to clean up the mess; I have to atone!” The hologram stares blankly at her. “How could you do this to me?”

“I’m sorry. That is not a query I can answer.”

Kara covers her mouth with her hand, stifling a scream. The door opens behind her. Alex strides in, shutting the hologram off. “Hey, hey,” Alex wraps her arms around her. Kara nearly fights her but her body relaxes, the tension slipping away. Alex has always been able to calm her, no matter how scared or sad or angry she feels. It’s always been that way. Killing Astra created a rift. It was so small, Kara thought she’d forgotten it. But then the red kryptonite happened and every ugly thought she’d ever had bubbled to the surface. She’s tried to forget them but she hasn’t. The situation with Maggie is only aggravating it. She can’t be angry at Alex. She can’t allow herself the luxury of resentment. Even if Alex was gone at the time, even if she met Maggie first, even if Maggie has given her something no one else has. She needs to forget her. Maggie wants normal. She’s not normal. She can’t ever give her, or anyone, anything resembling normal.

She rests her forehead on Alex’s shoulder, squeezing her eyes shut. Alex strokes her hair.
Everything is happening at once; she feels like she’s overloading. This anger she has, this resentment, she has to let it go. She has to get it out of her.

She exhales shakily. “I’m sorry.”

Alex doesn’t let her go. “What for?”

Kara doesn’t answer.

xxx

Hank Henshaw is beating her again.

It doesn’t matter how angry she is, how much she wants to hurt him; she’s unfocused. There’s smoke and dust all around her. Now Lena’s here; running towards her. “Stay back!” Kara yells.

NCPD is moving through the front doors of L-Corp. Maggie is there, gun leveled at Cyborg Superman. He ignores them, focused on Lena for the time being. He lifts a slab of concrete, rearing back to hurl it. He’s going to kill her.

She has to get up. She has to. She slams a fist into the floor, getting unsteadily to her feet and dashing to Lena just in time to stop her from being splattered by the debris. The concrete crashes into her, turning to dust. Kara sways unsteadily but stays upright. Lena is safe. She looks at her, terrified. “Go!” Lena runs.

Kara rushes towards him again; they fight. His fist pummels into her face, into her stomach. He flings her into columns as if she were nothing. Physical pain is practically an abstract idea to her. Something that happens to other people, something she usually has to imagine. But this hurts. His hands clamp around her throat. She’s slammed into the ground. She doesn’t need many things. She can survive just about anything. She’s told herself that over and over again, when her world is collapsing, when everything is falling apart. She does need air. Her vision begins to blur, his fingers squeezing until black ebbs at her vision. She wishes it wasn’t this face killing her.

Maggie says something but Kara doesn’t hear it. Cyborg Superman looks down at her, indifferent as the bullets bounce off him. “All this time trying to save the world. Who’s going to come and save you? No one’s coming to your rescue.”

A bullet hits his faceplate, knocking it off. He turns away from Kara, irritated, focusing his attention on Maggie. His metallic eye glows, charging. Kara tries to reach up, tries to block it and fails. He fires a concentrated blast. Maggie falls back like a rag doll. The blood drains from Kara’s face. He smiles, amused.

For the moment, he’s distracted. Kara takes the opening, knocking him back. He struggles to get up and she has a choice to make: go to Maggie, make sure she’s okay or try to take him down once and for all. She doesn’t hesitate. She moves towards Maggie. Another regret for later, another choice that’s no choice at all.

xxx
Maggie rattles the pills in the bottle before flushing them down the toilet.

The pain meds were prescribed at the DEO but she doesn’t need to pick up new habits. She’s seen it happen often enough and isn’t willing to risk going down that road.

She moves her arm experimentally, wincing as the stitches pull at her skin. Danvers patched her up but she’s in for two scars where that freak’s hit went clean through. It feels as if she’s been stabbed through with a fire poker. She can only imagine how bad it’ll feel when the numbing agent wears off.

She needs to inspect the damage. She pulls at the DEO shirt Alex lent her. It’d be nice if she had a little help though she doesn’t fool herself into thinking Kara would ever play nurse maid, no matter how often she’s helped her take off a shirt. Maggie tugs, grimacing, pausing to adjust to the pain before finally managing to get the shirt off. The effort leaves her cold and sweaty. The bandaging has spots of blood on it. She isn’t sure whether it’s normal or not.

Her other shirt, bloody and stiff, sits on the coffee table, stuffed in a baggie courtesy of the DEO. She sits on the couch, trying to recover her breath, remembering earlier parts of the evening only haphazardly. Supergirl scooped her into her arms at L-Corp before taking her to the DEO. Maggie was mildly disoriented when they arrived. She only caught glimpses of things: the grey of concrete, the sheen of glass, Supergirl’s reflection carrying her steadily to the medical bay. Everything moved in slow motion. Supergirl settled her on the medical bed gingerly, looking down at her, hand nearly touching her own before leaving Alex to take care of her.

Maggie didn’t see her after that. She was out, saving National City. Maggie left, despite Alex’s protests that she needed rest. She went to the station to write what reports she could manage. She had the grim satisfaction of seeing Lillian Luthor dragged in but no Lena. Eventually one of the guys at the station gave her a lift home. But it doesn’t feel like a home.

She goes to the closet when she starts to shiver, trying to find an easy shirt to slip into. She gives up a few minutes later and throws on a hoodie instead.

She could use a beer. Maybe it’s been long enough for her to have one. She retrieves one from the fridge but struggles to uncap it. She gives up, putting it back. Her stomach grumbles and she opens the freezer door, taking out the newest meal, a cheese tortellini dinner. She fights with the plastic cover before taking a knife out of a drawer, stabbing a few holes into it and throwing it into the microwave.

It whirs. She touches her shoulder absently, ignoring how it burns. Was it a mistake to end things with Kara? No. It was getting out of hand. They were going to hurt Alex. They were hurting each other. It wasn’t exactly healthy. Kara wasn’t absent because of Supergirl. She was absent because she didn’t want to be near. Alex created an irreparable conflict. Or maybe she wasn’t worth sticking around for.

They were never a good match. And anyway, it was starting to scare her. Yeah. She can handle bullets and the tin man but she’s afraid of the girl in the cardigans. The one who left her waiting and never explained. The girl who didn’t need her.

She should have never gone back to Kara’s place on game night. She should have never kissed her, let Kara take her to bed, met her eyes as she touched her and kept her close.

She’s angry, suddenly, at her own stupidity. The microwave beeps and she pops the door open, retrieving the food too quickly and dropping it on the floor. She swears, kicking the plastic container. Tortellini scatters across the kitchen floor. She stares at the mess blankly before running
her hand under the faucet, letting the cold splash away the scalding sauce that spilled over her palm. She cleans up the mess.

By the time she’s finished she’s exhausted. She watches Supergirl on the nightly news before shutting the television off, going around the apartment and doing the same with the lights. The streetlight flickers into the bedroom window. Maggie remembers Kara in that light. She closes the blinds, sliding under the cool sheets, lying down. She stares at the empty space beside her. Responsible shouldn’t feel this shitty. An hour passes. She can’t get comfortable.

She picks up her cell phone from the night stand, scrolling through text messages. She holds her finger over Kara’s last thread, ready to delete it. She doesn’t. She can’t.

She sets the phone aside. She searches for sleep, begs for it. She doesn’t find it. Hours go by. There’s a shadow in the blinds. A woman’s figure. A cape. Maggie forces herself to a sitting. Her injury feels as if someone’s poured acid into it. It doesn’t matter. She holds her breath and waits. She waits, it seems, for an eternity.

But the shadow turns and goes.

xxx

A/N2: YES, this is still a SuperCop story. Y Did everyone like how I basically posted a SuperCop / Sanvers / SuperCorp/ Kalex chapter? I really did cut this one down a lot. As always, thank you for the encouragement. You guys get me pumped to write! Also, excuse the timeline fuckery because the shows own timeline fuckery messes with me. I hate Dunkin' Donuts but all the cops I know love it? Finally, I know Maggie's wound seems more intense but I wanted to give her something to actually worry about rather than that little cat scratch she got in the episode.
Maggie wanders Kara’s apartment. The balcony doors are open, the thin curtains billowing in the breeze. Sunlight floods the space.

Maggie keeps her hands in the back pockets of her jeans. Kara studies the way the natural light caresses her. Maggie looks at the framed photographs on the wall. She spends too long on them. Kara suspects she’s avoiding looking at her. It’s been weeks. No. Longer.

“This is a nice shot,” Maggie says.

Kara remains at the kitchen, looking at the photograph she points to. It’s the one James gave her. She struggles with it, still unsure whether it’s the most accurate depiction of herself or an illusion. “James took that. He gave it to me as a gift a long time ago.”

“James Olsen your boss-slash-friend?”

“Yes. He used to photograph Superman in Metropolis.” Maggie looks at her, “Which is … um… a completely unrelated aside.”

“Yeah? Well, he must really care about you.” She cocks her heads towards it. “Cameras don’t lie.”

“I think cameras lie all the time.”

“I’m listening.”

There was Bizarro. And the stuff with the Guardian gunning people down. Cameras don’t capture the complexity of a subject. They’re facts, not truth. It’s too hard to explain, especially to someone she’s barely on speaking terms with.

Maggie gets tired of waiting. She continues her walk around the apartment. She’s no less relaxed than she was with the group on game night. She stops by the door, looking at the letter holders. “Eliza gave those to me when I moved in,” Kara tells her. “They used to be hers and I always thought they were funny. Or romantic.”

Maggie cocks an eyebrow. “Romantic?”

“I read a lot of epistolary novels when I was younger. You sit down and write a letter. You pour everything into it and send it out. And maybe you get something back.”

“And when you don’t?”

“Then you try again later. If it matters.” Truth be told she’s written few letters. The one to Adam being the most recent in memory. Unless holiday cards count. She thought about sending one to Maggie for Christmas. She wrote it out before throwing it into a drawer instead. “Do you write letters?”

“I figured out when I was a kid that putting your feelings down on paper never leads to anything good.”
“But letters are special. Messages… they’re these moments in time… like memories… preserved.”

“That’s what cameras are for.” She moves on, her footsteps resounding. She stoops, looking through the bookshelves. She pulls out a thick text on plants and flowers. “Green thumb?” she flips through the colorful pages.

Kara goes closer, fingers tangling nervously. “Eliza got that for me when I got here.” She shakes her head. “When I was adopted, I mean. She had a lot of flowers,” that isn’t a complete lie, “and it was all …so new to me. We spent a lot of time in the garden.” She remembers being devastated when a rainstorm destroyed it. Everything was new to her then. Everything seemed fragile.

“There’s a lot I’ve never seen in here,” she says. She reads through some of it. It’s the first time she’s relaxed since entering the apartment. She wears one of her leather jackets, jeans with a belt slung around her waist. Her face is soft. She glances at her and Kara looks away. Maggie turns back to the book, staring at the same page for minutes before returning it to the shelf. She remains stooped before she smiles, pulling out a book on bonsai trees. “I have this.” A beat. “A newer edition of this.”

“I never saw it.”

She smiles wryly. “You didn’t exactly take a tour of my place.” It’s the first indication that’s been made that they’re not complete strangers. Things feel shaky again. “There’s a lot you don’t know about me, ‘just Kara.’” It’s true. Kara wishes it weren’t. Maggie looks at the book a few minutes longer and puts it away.

“You can borrow that.”

“I already have it.”

“Oh. Right.” She nods.

Maggie stands. They’re a foot apart. “Why are you acting so weird?”

She smiles, laughs. “I’m not acting weird.” Maggie plants her hands on her hips and looks up at her. “You know why I’m acting weird.” Kara stands uncomfortably. “Why aren’t you acting weird?”

Maggie dips her face, looks back up at her. “It’s been a while. How have you been?” The collar to her jacket has lifted. Kara reaches out, setting it back into place. Her fingers graze her neck. She’s warm. The door rattles. They separate, Kara retreating to the kitchen. Alex comes in. “Danvers,” her voice is bright, nearly high pitched. Kara wonders if she’s surprised, if she’s genuinely happy. “What took you?”

“Ugh, don’t get me started,” she leans over and kisses her. Kara looks away. When she looks back Alex is whispering something in her ear. Maggie smiles. It falters when she notices Kara.

Kara takes the wine Alex has brought, focusing on every step, losing her balance and slipping before catching herself. She stops, lowers herself to the floor. Maggie’s shirt button from game night. Kara remembers her shaky apologies after she ruined the shirt.

“What is it?” Alex asks.

Kara folds the button into her hand. “Nothing.”
Alex sleeps.

Maggie watches her before rising. She dresses. She has to get ready for work. She can’t stay here too long. They may be dating but she’s not looking to rent a U-Haul.

*When are you going to take me to your place?* Alex asks. Maggie doesn’t know when. When she’s ready to see her as a fixture there. When she moves. When she’s forgotten how many surfaces she’s fucked her sister on.

Not telling Alex was the right thing. So why does she feel like not telling Alex was the wrong thing? It’s a moot point. It won’t come up. She’ll have the occasional family meal with Kara and Alex. She’ll feel like the sociopath she’s been accused of being, but it’ll be drama free and everyone will be happy. And by everyone she means Alex. Kara will wear her wholesome grin and act like that person Maggie doesn’t recognize.

It’ll be fine.

She and Alex have meals together. They talk about their day. They play pool. They do normal things, including sex. They’re different, Kara and Alex. They say her name differently, breathe differently, taste differently. *You’re going to hell.*

Probably.

Alex adores her. Maggie sees it. Not many have adored her. Alex sees her as something more than she is. A light in the dark, maybe. It makes her feel like an imposter. *You are.* No, she’s genuine about this.

Alex is sweet. She has bouts of seriousness. It’s rare that Maggie comes to visit and she doesn’t have a drink in hand. But she’s perfect. On paper she’s perfect. On paper they’re perfect.

So she tells herself to forget that Kara hates that she and Alex ever kissed, and tells herself Kara doesn’t mind that they’re doing much more now. Kara wants Alex to be happy.

She’s grabbing her jacket from the coat rack when Alex wakes up. Maggie goes back over, slipping into the jacket. “I’m just heading out. Go back to sleep.”

“You should come back to bed. It’s early.”

“Believe me, I’d love to, but I’d like to keep my job.” She kisses her. It’s a nice kiss. It’s tender. She doesn’t leave the marks Kara has. “We’ll see each other later?” Alex nods. Maggie kisses her again and goes.

Feelings, affection, all of that builds. It isn’t spontaneous. Especially with friends. Alex is a great friend. Though not with benefits. She’s a girlfriend. She’s funny, she’s smart, hot. That spark will come. It’ll happen. It hasn’t yet but it will, maybe.

xxx

They meet at the alien bar at Kara’s request. There’s another story she’s working on. Missing girls. Maggie brings what information she has and tells herself she’s only meeting with her on a professional level. When she can’t quite convince herself of it, she tells herself it’s normal to be drawn to her still. As long as she remains committed to Alex, it’s fine. As long as she’s appropriate, it’s fine.
She tells herself that when she runs after Kara, meeting her outside, amongst the trash cans where Alex first kissed her. She tells herself it wasn’t symbolic. Anyway, the kiss was good.

Kara slows. She’s wearing a checkered flannel shirt and jeans. It isn’t the look that she’s used to but it works for her. “Did you think of something else?” Kara asks. She is frighteningly good at pretending they don’t know each other.

“Yeah. I did.” A beat. “But it has nothing to do with the missing persons.” Once again she finds her hands on her hips. She wonders if she’s trying to look more imposing. “I’ve just been thinking that this thing we’re doing is stupid. We’re friends.”

“Are we?”

Maggie’s unsure. “We could have been.”

“But we weren’t.” That steel again.

Maggie nods slowly. “Look, like it or not I’m in your life now. Alex insists on spending time with you.” Kara crosses her arms. “And that makes sense. Of course. But does it have to be so shitty?”

“I think it would be best if we stuck to this kind of thing.” She waves the jump drive at her. “We’ve tried to stay away from each other. We suck at it.” She shakes her head. “So however awkward it is, we need to suck it up.”

“How is that fair to Alex?”

“This isn’t about Alex. Look, Maggie.” She steels her jaw. “I hate how this feels. I don’t like feeling as if… we’re pulling the wool over her eyes. But telling her right now… I’m afraid that would be more about us feeling better about ourselves. She’s happy. For once in her life, there’s something in her life that isn’t about me. I won’t take that from her.”

Maggie’s fingers tighten. “But you care about me.” Kara makes a face, disgusted, tired maybe, and moves on. Maggie follows her. “If you didn’t it wouldn’t be such a big deal. We could move on and forget it.”

Kara stops. She looks at her. “I don’t want to hear it. I don’t want to hear you saying those kinds of things.”

“Why not?”

“Because it makes it sound like you’re screwing Alex around, okay?”

“I’m not doing that. I’m not.”

Kara takes a breath. “Okay. Good.” She sounds exasperated. Maggie wonders if they’ll always fight. “I don’t think we should talk about this anymore. About whatever happened with us.”

“‘Whatever’ happened with us?”

“You wanted something normal, Maggie. You’ve got it.” That’s questionable. She bites her tongue. “I just think the more we talk about this while Alex is in the dark… I don’t know. It feels gross. So… let’s not. Let’s pretend we’re strangers and we’ll get along for Alex. And that’ll be that.” Maggie bites her lip and nods slowly. “All right?”

“Yes. All right.” She scratches her forehead. “So I guess now would be a bad time to mention that
Alex wants us to do a dinner thing together?” Kara doesn’t quite glower at her. “I’ve tried to talk her out of it but she’s beginning to think I don’t like you. And I don’t know what’s better, frankly, but I told her I’d ask. So here I am, asking.”

She sighs.

“You don’t have to look so put out,” Maggie says. “I asked. If you want to tell your sister you’re not interested, go right ahead.”

“I don’t want to be the third wheel.”

_You are the third wheel._ Or Alex is. “Bring a date. I don’t care.” She walks off. “And text your sister whatever you decide. I’m trying to make this work.” But she doesn’t know what she means, the dinner, the relationship, their relationship. She’s trying.

xxx

Slaver’s Moon was awful. Not only did she get her ass firmly handed to her thanks to the red sun and the mad hijinks of I-only-own-one-dress Roulette, but she still isn’t sure how many were enslaved prior to her arrival. She’d still probably be there if not for Alex. Alex always saves the day. Alex who glows recently because of Maggie Sawyer. But she can’t get distracted by that. Now that she’s back, she needs to salvage her friendship with Lena Luthor.

The last she spoke to her as Supergirl they argued. They haven’t spent much time together since Lena’s ‘gotcha-I-wasn’t-really-going-to-nuke-all-the-aliens-in-National-City’ stunt. Since then, Lillian’s been taken into custody. Lena has been shutting out the world and Kara can’t say she hasn’t been doing similarly. She needs to contain herself.

Now they’re eating ice cream and watching some sci-fi alien thing Lena insisted on. Kara pulls the blanket closer to her as the xenomorph makes its way around the corner. Kara glances at Lena.

“You know, this is not representative of all aliens.”

“It’s not?” Mock shock. She smiles, digging into her vanilla ice cream. “I know you like musicals and romantic-comedies but I get to pick. You’ve ditched me twice now.” Kara grimaces. “You keep it up and I’ll start to get a complex.”

“I’m a terrible friend.”

“I didn’t say that.” She stops, raptly watching the creature’s tail slide through the metal grating. Its victim ensnared, she talks again. “Anyway, it’s good to come here with you. It’ll get my mind off the more salient parts of my life. You know, I love Lex. Being his sister has brought me a share of negative attention and I’m used to that. But this is different. I turned her in. What she did was horrible. But what I did?”

Kara takes the ice cream from her and sets it aside. “I know it must be awful to feel like you’re turning against your family. But you did the right thing. It couldn’t have been easy. I’m proud of you.”

“Did I have to lose my ice cream for that?” Lena smiles. Kara gives her hers. Lena takes it, clears her throat. “Thank you. I mean it.”

“What are friends for?” A beat. “Oh. That reminds me.” Lena looks at her expectantly. “Um. My sister is dating someone.” Her eyes narrow. “Maggie,” she says the name quickly, afraid to keep it
on her lips and tongue. She grimaces, unsure if she was supposed to say that. She shakes her head. “She’s been inviting me to spend time with them but I haven’t. Not as much as she’d like.” She touches her glasses. “It’s hard being the third wheel. So Maggie suggested I bring someone to dinner. Um. So that’s my question. Do you want to go with me to this dinner?”

Lena stares at her. “You want me to go to dinner with your sister and her girlfriend.”

“At a restaurant. I don’t know which one.”

“Kara Danvers. Are you asking me out on a date?”

“No. No. Sort of, but no. It’d be as friends.” She takes her hand. It’s warm. Soft. She lets it go. On screen an alien chestburster pops out of a man’s chest. Kara blinks and looks back to Lena. “I just… I need to fix things with my sister but things have been… weird. So, what do you say? Help me out?”

Lena laughs, puzzled. “You brought yourself and Supergirl to my gala. I think that means I owe you. I’ll go.” A beat. “But you do realize your sister looks at me as if I were a bedbug whenever she sees me? Are you sure it’s a good idea for me to come along?” She has some of Kara’s ice cream.

“Yes, of course. She’s happy now. She’ll love it.”

Lena smiles dubiously.

xxx

Lena Luthor is dressed to the nines. Maggie watches her glide to the table alongside of Kara who wears a modest dress. Alex is stunning. Maggie wears a tailored jacket and jeans but feels underdressed. “What is she doing here?” Alex breathes into Maggie’s ear.

“I might have told your sister to bring someone?” She wasn’t expecting Lena Luthor. Of course she brought Lena Luthor. Maggie wonders if she’s trying to piss her off or make her jealous, then wonders whether Kara would bother making the effort. Either way it doesn’t matter. It won’t work. She’s dating Alex.

She and Alex stand. Kara hugs Alex tightly, nods absently at Maggie. “I think you remember Lena.”

Maggie looks her over. Are her eyes blue or green? Her perfume is intoxicating. Lena leans forward, pressing a kiss delicately to Alex’s cheeks. “How could I forget the woman who saved my life? You look lovely.” She looks at Maggie, sizing her up. “I’ve seen you on the news, Detective.”

Discussing Cadmus. “Back at you. You can call me Maggie.”

“It was kind of you to extend me an invitation,” she says.

“You can thank Kara,” Alex says. Kara’s smile tightens. They all take a seat. “But I’m happy someone’s been able to drag her out of her apartment.” The waiter comes by and fills their wine glasses. “How long has this been going on?”

“I’m sorry,” Lena looks at her quizzically. ‘This’?

“She means dating, don’t you, Danvers?” Are they dating? They can’t be dating. She wouldn’t be surprised if they were dating.
“Oh. We’re not,” Kara smiles awkwardly, touches her glasses, “we’re not. We’re not.”

“We’re not,” Lena repeats soberly, before breaking into a smile. “You don’t have to protest so vehemently.”

Kara smiles at her. “You know that anyone in National City would happily switch places with me. But I promised this wouldn’t be a date. Not a date date. Just a regular friend date.”

“As regular friends are wont to do.” Lena looks to her and Alex. Maggie wishes she weren’t warm and likable. She imagined a stiff, icy bitch. A sociopath. Just like Lillian. Maybe she has a talent for putting on a good face. “So, you two are dating.”

Alex looks at Kara. She winces. “Sorry. I didn’t know if that was still a thing.”

Lena looks to Kara with mild alarm. “Oh, this is—? I won’t breathe a word. Admittedly, I’m surprised you could keep each other hidden away. I don’t think I could.”

Maggie barks a laugh. Yeah. She’s good at that. Better than most.

“No, you don’t get to laugh,” Alex says, “I had to talk her into dating me,” she tells Lena.

“Did she?” Kara asks.

It’s not hard to talk a serial monogamist into dating. Anyway, Alex didn’t talk her into it. Ending whatever she had with Kara took it out of her. Alex was a friend. They hung out. They drank and played pool. They kissed. They hung out some more. It was fun. It was like dating. And Alex seemed so happy. Seems so happy. And sometimes she feels the same, shards of happiness. She’d forgotten the feeling, but has felt glimpses of it with her. Glimpses, that despite her attraction and fascination, she hadn’t felt with Kara. That’s something. “She didn’t have to twist my arm too hard.”

Lena feigns shock. “I would hope not. Surely you have eyes.” Maggie’s looking at Kara. Kara’s attention is focused elsewhere. Maggie looks back at Lena, who’s noticed her gaze on Kara, cocks an eyebrow. Maggie returns her attention to Alex. Wraps an arm around her. “A woman who saved my life. I might never let her go.”

Lena raises her wine glass. “Wise woman. To the happy couple,” she looks at Kara, “And new beginnings.”

What the hell does that mean? They raise their glasses and drink. The rest of the evening is spent on banal conversation. Lena Luthor means they can’t talk about about DEO business or Supergirl.

Maggie focuses on Kara, just returned from a slaver planet. Alex’s resulting freakout the final confirmation that Supergirl is her sister. So now Alex knows that she knows. But Kara doesn’t know that she knows. Or how long she’s known. She should tell her. Tell her before Alex tells her. Not that Alex knows how long she’s known. Fuck.

“So, Lena, how’s L-Corp doing?” Alex asks. Kara gives her a sharp look.

Lena doesn’t notice, anxiously picking up a glass of water. “It’s … it’s staying afloat. You may have seen it in the news lately.”
“How could we miss it,” Maggie says. “And Kara’s written a few articles.”

“Carefully vetted articles,” Kara interjects.

“Still,” Maggie tells Lena, “Must be nice to have a friend in the press.”

“To write objective articles, yes,” Kara stresses.

They stare each other down for seconds. Lena and Alex look between them.

Lena speaks first. “I’m not going to pretend I’m not grateful to Kara. But that has nothing to do with her journalism. She’s been a true friend to me. Not many have.”

“How?” Kara shakes her head, “you don’t have to explain yourself.”

“I don’t know. I think the detective has her doubts.” She sets down her wine glass. “If you have questions, ask. Or would you prefer to ask them back at the station?”

Maggie smirks. Alex squeezes her hand and Maggie isn’t sure if it’s a warning or support. All she knows is Kara looks disgusted again. Lena’s eyes have gone cold and defiant. Ah. There’s the Luthor.

“Maggie has no questions,” Alex says. “Because we’re on a date. Not at work. Right?” another fierce squeeze of her fingers.

“Right,” Maggie says cheerfully. Though she doesn’t trust for a second that Lena isn’t involved in some way with her mother or Cadmus. Not with that family.

“Good. I’d hate to spoil such a pleasant evening,” Lena says. She looks thoughtful. “So, on Thanksgiving, this one brought me a plate of leftovers,” she looks to Alex, “did you help with it? It was delicious.”

Kara saw Lena Luthor on Thanksgiving. Maggie feels sick but isn’t particularly surprised. Kara doesn’t look as if anything is amiss. How can she do that? Does she just turn her feelings off?

Alex tries to recover from her surprise. “I did some of the cooking. You know, Kara never told me she did that.”

“It was my first Thanksgiving in years with someone special,” Lena says. They both look at her. “That is, with a friend or family.” She toyeds with the stem of her wine glass. “It’s always nice to have a reminder that there are people out there that care about you.”

Kara takes her hand, squeezing it gently. “Not just me.”

Maggie doesn’t know who looks on more intently, she or Alex. Kara releases her hand and Lena clears her throat, excusing herself to the ladies room. Alex joins her. Maggie isn’t convinced she doesn’t plan on taking her out. Kara touches the cutlery absently, not looking at her. “So you’re dating Lena Luthor now?” Or regular friend dating Lena.

She looks at her incredulously. “I’m not dating anyone.”

“Have you told her that?” Kara scoffs. Maggie feels stupid. “It’s obvious that she’s crazy about you.” Kara looks back at her, arms crossed. “Well?”

“Well’ what? What do you want me to say? Lena’s my friend.”
“Lena’s mother is the head of Cadmus. You should know better.”

“You’re dating Alex and you think that gives you the right to tell me who I can or can’t date?” Kara smiles, a sort of mean smile she doesn’t recognize. “I didn’t ask for your opinion. You don’t have a say in this. You don’t have a say in any of it.” She stands, grabs her purse, sets money on the table.

Lena and Alex are returning. Alex is alarmed. “Wait, are you leaving already?”

“Yeah. Sorry. I have a long day tomorrow.” She gives Alex a tight hug, whispers something in her ear, touching her face, hair, smiling and pulling back. “Maggie.”

Maggie looks up at her but has nothing to say. Lena and Alex say goodbye. Then they’re gone. Maggie wants to chase after her and argue. She stays put. The dessert comes.

“I have to give it to her, she’s charming.” Alex complains, cutting into the tiramisu. She gives Maggie a spoon. “You don’t think they’re really together, do you?”

“I think it would be a bad idea for a super to get involved with a Luthor.” She massages her forehead. Kara’s a fucking headache.

“I don’t know what she’s thinking. But Lena seems really into her. And she’s gorgeous.” She has another bite of the dessert. “I still don’t trust her.”

“That makes two of us.” She takes a bite, deliberating. “Do you think your sister swings that way?” Does Kara tell her anything?

She nearly chokes on her cake. “No. Absolutely not.” A beat. “I mean, I don’t know. Kara’s always been very private about that stuff. Relationship stuff. I can’t believe she didn’t bring Mon-El.” What? Alex finishes the wine glass. “But forget about her. Please tell me you still want to go dancing?”

Maggie smiles wanly, leans over and kisses her. “Try to stop me.”

xxx

It’s early morning. A jogger called in a body. Luckily it turned out to be a college kid, blacked out drunk. Safely stowed in an ambulance and on his way to the hospital, Maggie climbs back into her car.

The sun’s beginning to rise, lighting the sky in pinks and purples. She rides the curving roads, remembering when she drove this with Kara. Remembering how soft her pink sweater was, the way the pin in her hair got loose. That was the night she found out about Alex. That was the night she found out about Supergirl.

She sees that bluff now, reflexively slows the car. There’s a figure sitting at the edge. She pulls the car over and shuts the engine off, gripping the steering wheel for too long. Eventually she steps out, shutting the car door. Kara looks back. Maggie remains where she stands, a hand on the hood of the car. Kara stands. She’s wearing jeans and a long sleeved shirt. No shoes. No socks.

Maggie fights to not go to her. Things are good with Alex. Things are normal with Alex. Things are dull with stability. But that’s a relationship, isn’t it? They’re good at talking. The sex is good. She can’t fuck that up. It would be stupid to fuck that up. She has to say something.
“You forgot your shoes,” Maggie calls out. Kara remains where she stands. Maggie goes closer. The air is cooler. “That’s awful close to the edge.” She looks down. She doesn’t know how many feet the drop is. Enough to reduce someone to a stain. “What if you fall?”

“I won’t fall.”

Sounds nice. “How’s Lena?” Kara doesn’t answer. She sighs inwardly, digging her boot into the grassy mound. “Look, I know I keep acting like an asshole. That’s not my intention.”

“You’re pretty good at it for someone who’s not trying.”

“In my defense, you make me feel crazy.”

“That’s a crappy defense.” A beat. “Lena’s fine. I like her a lot. I liked you a lot.” Liked? “Things are the way they are. You’re making Alex happy. So I’ll try to forget all the stupid things you say. And all the rest of it.”

“What if I don’t want us to forget?” Maggie inhales, looks at the rising sun, the blurring colors in the sky. “Are you happy?” She asked her long ago. She didn’t believe her answer then.

“I’m fine. I’m always fine.” She digs her toes into the grass, bows her head.

“Say it.”

“I can’t.” She sounds apologetic. Remorseful.

“Oh.” The breeze picks up, pulling at their clothes and hair. It carries the scent of the ocean from the distance. “I have to tell you something. I don’t want to say it. I’m afraid of how it’ll change things between us. You’re already so far away.”

She looks worried. “You can tell me.”

“Yeah. I know.” She takes a breath. “I know.” Kara stares back at her. “I know. About you.” Panic in her eyes, swiftly hidden. “Um. When you went off to that other planet. Alex lost it. She dumped me.” She smiles grimly. She considered leaving it then and there. “And I pretended with her, that that’s how I’d figured it out. I did that because I thought it’d be easier. But I knew before then. I have you in my head. I have memories of you, at the police station. Telling me about Alex. Kissing me.”

Kara wraps her arms around herself, releasing a shaky breath. She brings a hand to her mouth, lowering her head in thought.

“I’m not going to tell anyone. I wouldn’t. I just… I wanted to tell you before Alex told you. I should have figured it out sooner. Dorky Supergirl, right?” She doesn’t say anything. “I know you’ve saved me a few times. I know I haven’t been good to you. I haven’t been as understanding as I should be.”

Still, nothing.

“But you do a really good thing. For everyone in National City. Everything, in some ways, compared to what I do. And I know it probably means nothing… but I’m proud to know you.” She takes a breath. “You make me want to be a better person, Kara.” Still, silence. “Can you please say something?”

“You don’t make me want to be a better person.” The words are unexpected. They sting. She turns
her eyes, pale azure, to her. “When I’m with you I want to lose control. Do you know how
dangerous that is for someone like me?” She thinks of the night they met. The night Supergirl
terrorized National City. Yeah. She knows. Kara’s fingers tremble against her mouth. “When I’m
with you I just want to be selfish.”

Maggie suspects she knows how. She wants her to give in. Wants it more than anything. It
wouldn’t be right, but it wouldn’t be the first time she’s hated herself. But Kara hating herself. That
doesn’t sit well with her. She doesn’t know how long it takes her to find her voice. “I’m not worth
the regret.” They’ve done this before.

“I can’t believe you know.” Her voice is fragmented. The sunrise colors her face.

“You can trust me with this.” Why didn’t she want her to know? Kara keeps a rolled fist over her
mouth, eyebrows furrowed. Maggie waits. “Hey. You’re still ‘just Kara’ to me. This doesn’t
change anything. I can’t wrap my head around you.” She smiles. “I’ll never wrap my head around
you.”

Kara shifts. For a frightening moment Maggie thinks she’ll jump off the cliff. But she doesn’t.
Instead, Kara wraps her arms around her. It hurts. Then her grip relaxes. Maggie breathes again,
closing her eyes, puzzled by the blanket of warmth washing over her. She sighs softly, an arm
wrapping briefly around Kara. She doesn’t want to let go. But she lets go.

Kara touches her glasses, takes a step back. Maggie considers offering a ride back but can’t think of
a way that doesn’t end what she’s got going on with Alex. “I’ll see you later?”

Kara nods. Maggie turns. When she looks back, she’s still there, watching her. When she slides
behind the wheel, she’s gone. Maggie exhales, runs a hand over her face. What if screwed it up?
What if she screwed everything up?

xxx

a/n 2: Guest starring the Mulholland Drive-esque bluff/cliff.
Maggie leaves the alien bar hours before closing. She hasn’t slept in days and has been biting everyone’s head off as a result. She digs in her pocket, fishing for her keys when Supergirl drops beside her, a bright smile on her face. She looks more at ease than Maggie remembers. Maggie walks faster, casting only the briefest glance in her direction. “Hey.”

“Hey!” She keeps up with her easily. There’s a bounce in her step.

“You’re in a good mood.”

“I just kicked my arch nemesis’ ass.” She mimes a punch. “I mean, I’ve fought her three times and that’s the most I’ve fought anyone. So arch-nemesis? Though I think I’m starting to get through to her. We might be working our way up to frenemies.” A sigh of relief. “Rao, it feels so good to just be able to say that without coming up with five different excuses about what I’ve been doing.” Maggie gets to the car, jams the key into the lock. She opens the car door without looking back at her. Supergirl takes hold of it before she can get in. It doesn’t budge. Jesus. How many times could she have reduced her to paste? “What’s wrong?”

“Outside of lying to my girlfriend for the past few weeks, you mean?” Kara lets go of the car door, Maggie turns, leaning into the frame of the car and facing her. “I can’t keep doing this. I can’t keep lying to her.”

Kara looks at her as if she’s just grown three heads. “We said it’d be better this way.”

“No, you said that. Maybe it was different before,” she says. “It took a while to get into the swing of things. But I really like her. No one’s ever treated me the way she has. You know how good she is.” Kara inhales, looks off in the distance. “I don’t know what I expected with her. But if things get more serious... I need to tell her. And if she hates me, she hates me. And I’ll lose her. And I’ll deserve it.” Her eyes water. She blinks them quickly, surprised, embarrassed.

Kara stands, deep in thought, her good mood gone. “I’ll tell Alex. I’m the one who said we should keep it a secret.”

“No.” She massages her forehead. “I’m her girlfriend. It should come from me.”

“I’m her sister. Maybe we should talk to her together.”

“No. That’s a bad idea.” And Alex has guns. Kara will walk out of it but she won’t.

Maggie sees the panic bubbling in her. “What are you going to tell her? Everything?”

“Yeah, Kara. That’s what honesty is.”

Kara steps back, running a hand through her hair.

“I know this will screw things up between you. Maybe for a long time, but she’s your sister. She loves you. She’ll forgive you. But I can’t keep this hidden anymore. I thought I could. I thought I
was better at this kind of thing. I’m not.”

“You have a conscience,” she’s almost playful. Maggie glowers. Kara sober. “Then at least tell her that I asked you not to tell her.” Maggie shakes her head. “Why not?”

“If I point fingers she’ll think I’m trying to not take responsibility.” She was doing better. There was a shift. Things were improving between them. The tension with Kara was dissipating. She found herself thinking about Alex during her workdays. Looking forward to stopping by at her place after work. “I have to do this.”

“Yeah. Okay.” She hesitates. “I’m sorry I put you in this position.”

“I made a decision. Now I’m making another one.”

Kara nods. “Good luck.” She turns and goes.

xxx

Kara doesn’t text Alex. She leaves Maggie and flies the city in a fugue. Hours go by. She’s a block of ice. The sunrise is too many hours away. Her anger seems petty now. So what if everyone has always made her every decision? They’re trying to take care of her. So what if Alex killed Astra? She was saving J’onn. So what if she just wanted something that was her own? She’s Supergirl; she belongs to the world. She doesn’t get to have things. So what if being with Maggie was the biggest freedom she’s ever known? Freedom isn’t for someone like her. Was she trying to protect Alex? Or was she trying to protect herself?

She feels weak. She drags her feet, climbing the floors to her apartment. She stops at the head of the stairs. Lena and Alex sit by the front door; Lena has a careful hand to her shoulder. Kara doesn’t understand why Lena’s here. Then she remembers: she promised to watch movies with her tonight. Livewire distracted her. The conversation with Maggie distracted her.

Kara doesn’t take a breath. She wants to run away. She almost considers it. Lena notices her first. She stands and approaches. Kara wonders if she’s been poisoned by kryptonite. She’s never felt so shaky and weak. “I missed movie night,” she apologizes.

“In a grand turn of events. It’s fine. I’m not going to lie. I’m disappointed.” She glances back. “But that seems minor, all things considered. I saw your sister. She’s really upset and I didn’t feel right just leaving her here.” She looks back at her. “She won’t tell me what it’s about. Not that I blame her, we’re practically strangers.”

“Thanks for staying with her.” She takes another breath. Lena looks at her curiously. “I’m really sorry I keep screwing up our hangouts.”

“You’re a busy girl. I’ve never questioned that.” She squeezes her shoulder. “I’ll let you take care of her.” Lena looks back at Alex. “I hope things get better for you.” She walks over, pulls out a business card. “If you ever want to grab a coffee or talk. I only have the one friend and she has a knack for standing me up.”

Alex stares at her for seconds then takes the card numbly. Kara bows her head. Lena brushes past her with a ‘goodnight’. Kara still doesn’t move.

Alex remains on the floor. She’s still in her DEO clothes. Kara forces herself to walk down the hall. Her legs are unsteady. Alex looks up at her. Her eyes are red. There are tearstains on her
cheeks. Kara’s heartbeats are too loud. She can hear them. She can hear Alex’s. She extends a hand to her. Alex slaps it away.

xxx

Kara sits. Alex paces. She’s furious. She’s devastated. Kara grows sicker with every passing second. Alex doesn’t say a word. Neither does Kara. She doesn’t know what to say. There’s nothing she can say.

“If Maggie hadn’t told me, would you have ever said anything?”

Kara keeps her hands folded in her lap. I don’t know.

“What?”

Her heart is beating too fast. “I don’t know,” she stammers. Alex stands in front of her. Kara focuses on the material of her pants, on the belts wrapped around her waist and thighs. She can’t look up at her face. She attacked National City. She attacked NCPD. She didn’t feel as ashamed then as she does now.

Alex’s voice rattles. “You lied to me.”

Her voice breaks. “I know.”

“You both lied to me.”

Kara looks up at her. She hates seeing Alex cry.

“Maggie’s not who I thought she was,” Alex shakes her head. “I thought that she was—decent and… true. All this time I thought she respected me. That she was being… so… goddamn gentle with me throughout all of this.” She laughs. “I’m such an idiot. The way you two were around each other. I should have seen it. I should have noticed something—”

“You can’t blame yourself. We should have—”

“Shut up.”

Kara does.

“I get why someone would do anything to keep you, Kara,” her voice has gone wispy like. “And I understand why she could care about you. I hate that she lied to me. I don’t deserve to be lied to. But you—you I don’t understand. You tell me everything. We’re a packaged deal.” Her smile shakes. Kara’s lip quivers. “We’re supposed to be better than this.”

“You are.” She takes her hand. “You’re better than all of this. You don’t deserve any of it.” She takes off her glasses, wipes at her eyes, forcing the tears to stay in.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t want to hurt you.”

“Cut the crap, Kara! Hurt is a part of life. You know I’d take the truth, no matter how painful, over being lied to. We’re adults!” Kara doesn’t say anything. “I didn’t even know you were that way! Gay.”
“I’m not—”

“You were sleeping with her.”

“I know. I just mean… I’m not… It’s not only women…” She doesn’t want to have this conversation right now. She’s not saying the right things. Alex seems angrier. What is she thinking? That it never mattered to her? That she’s above such petty things like sexuality? She tries to explain. She rambles. “You told me how special she was to you. You were so nervous and… smitten. I’d never seen you like that. I’d never seen you that happy. And I was afraid telling you… saying—”

“‘Been there, done that’ wouldn’t have been appropriately sentimental? I admit, it doesn’t have the same ring as ‘I’ll go get the alien, you get the girl’.” She smiles bitterly. “I remember thinking about that, over and over again. It seemed so perfect and sweet. So… Kara Danvers.”

Kara exhales shakily. “I meant it. I wanted that for you.”

“Have you been with other women? Are you sleeping with Lena?”

“No.”

“To which?”

She looks up at her. “Both. Lena’s a friend.” She’s tired of explaining Lena to everyone.

“Then Maggie’s the only woman you’ve been with.” Kara lowers her head. Alex laughs caustically. “So, she bagged the Danvers sisters, one after the other. She’s a real piece of work.”

“Don’t say that.”

“Don’t say what?”

“Maggie cares about you. She’s a good person.” Alex glowers. “I asked her not to tell you. It’s my fault.”

She continues as if she hasn’t heard her. “What I don’t get is how this whole thing started. How did you end up with Maggie before she and I met? You kept her hidden away from everyone in your life for months. What the hell, Kara?”

“I met her the night I attacked National City. I’d hurt her. I’d put her friends in the hospital. I was out walking and she offered me a ride. She was different. She thought I was… But nothing happened. She had a girlfriend and…” I would really love to go down on you. “I would really love to go down on you. “I don’t know. I was scared. And then you were gone, off to look for Jeremiah. To keep J’onn safe.”

“So it’s my fault.”

“No. No.” She grounds her jaw. “I was really messed up from everything that happened. I felt… alone and abandoned. Everyone was gone. She didn’t know anything about me. I didn’t know how much I needed that until she treated me as if I were anyone else.” She claps her hands together. “I shouldn’t have kept it from you.” Her voice is unraveling with every word. She can’t steady it no matter how hard she tries. She tastes salt on her lips. “I’m so sorry.”

Alex stoops in front of her, places a hand over Kara’s, keeping it still. Kara feels herself calming. “Have you slept with her since we’ve been dating?”
“No,” she leeches on to the question, grateful for it. “No. I swear.”

“What about after I told you how I felt about her?” Kara sniffs. She sees the hope in her eyes. Kara covers her face with her hand. She can’t look at her. Alex exhales. She lets go of her hand. She stands. “Okay. I’m going to go.” Kara lifts her face, oblivious to the tears running down her cheeks. “Um.” She sounds dazed. “I love you, Kara. That’s never going to change. I’ll work with Supergirl at the DEO. But don’t call me. Don’t text. I don’t want to see you for a while.”

She walks out but doesn’t bother closing the door behind her.

xxx

Maggie slips the Barenaked Ladies tickets into an envelope. So much for her surprise. It would have been a good show. Maybe Alex can still enjoy it. She folds the envelope, stuffing it into her jacket pocket. She’ll drop them off later. Maybe get someone to give them to her and hope she doesn’t unleash another shitshow in the process.

Her good intentions have gone off as swimmingly as making wishes on a monkey’s paw. Cutting things off with Kara was the right thing to do, trying to put everything into her relationship with Alex was the right thing to do, telling her the truth was the right thing to do. Her timing was off every time. All she’s managed to do is make the Danvers sisters feel like shit.

What do you mean you were involved with Kara? What are you saying to me?

She leaves her apartment, unsure if she’s grateful that she never invited Alex over. She doesn’t want to be stuck with bad memories. She wishes she could say the same for Alex. She should have told her somewhere else. She’d been stupid to think they could work things out. She hoped, at worst, Alex would want a break. Some time to process things. She could take that time to make amends and finish clearing Kara out of her head. They could have a fresh start. Alex didn’t agree.

Get out. Don’t come back.

Maggie runs through a mental list of the names Alex called her. A liar, a manipulator, amongst other things. It isn’t new. It still hurts. She was hoping she’d become better. Now she only hopes to salvage the friendship they had. She needs that. Because it’s gotten to the point where she can’t imagine not having her around. Because she gave her more kindness than anyone ever has. Because she made her feel like she was worth something. Maybe not in the end. She took it all back. But it doesn’t matter. She still needs to tell Alex that she’s no less worthy because of her and Kara’s screw up, but she doesn’t know how. And what does praise mean from someone like her?

She wants to text her. She doesn’t text her.

She picks up a coffee, feeds the meter and walks to the park. The geese are out, prowling for food, harassing park walkers. Maggie goes to the railing and looks at the water. A few seagulls squawk overhead, fighting over a bagel someone left behind. Maggie takes out her phone. No text messages. No missed calls. She can’t contact her. She won’t do that to her.

Can you please let me explain?

What is there to explain? You’ve been lying to me!
I know. And I’m sorry. But it was almost half a year ago. I didn’t know you were related. Nothing has happened since you and I got together.

Since we got together? Don’t you get it? This isn’t someone I won’t see and never think of again. It’s my sister.

It’s been strange to return to her tv dinners. To her nights alone. It’s disorienting how quickly she fell out of habit, as if she’d been craving to end that solitary existence. One night stands aren’t enticing her. She cried after Alex ended things. Not since. Maybe it’s for the best that Alex tossed her out on her ass before she got too invested. She misses her.

*How could you let me get involved with you, let me care about you, sleep with you and not tell me? Jesus, Maggie, what’s wrong with you?*

*I know I’ve been unfair. I was wrong. Everything just spiraled out of control.*

*You let that happen. You.*

Maggie mulls it over, sipping on her coffee. A goose honks at her and she moves on from the railing, making room for a park visitor with grapes for the animal. She wonders how Kara is. If Alex confronted her. If they’re still on speaking terms. She hopes so. She’s afraid to talking to Kara will only hurt Alex further. Hasn’t she done enough? Even thinking of Kara makes her feel guilty.

*How could you get Kara mixed up in all of this? You took advantage of her.*

*No, I didn’t. I didn’t force her, Alex. She knew what she was doing.*

*She’s never been involved in anything that isn’t puppy love. She doesn’t get how these things work.*

*It’s not as simple as that.*

*So it’s more complicated than just sex? Maggie hadn’t answered. I’m feeling so much right now. So much anger. I can’t be this angry. I can’t be angry at her. I can’t blame her. I can’t hate her. Not without it ruining us. So just let me blame you. Please. Just let me hate you.*

Maggie walks to her car and drives to Alex’s apartment. She must be at DEO headquarters. She writes her name on the envelope and drops it into her mailbox. Maybe she’ll know who they’re from and trash them. Alex never took her around to the group after game night. Outside of Kara, she knows of no one to have pass the tickets along to Alex. And she doubts Kara would speak to her.

She closes the mailbox. No Alex. No Kara. She takes the steps down from Alex’s place, acknowledging to herself that she’s alone again.

xxx

Kara lands a few footsteps behind her. Alex hears her and sighs. She always hears her. Kara stumbles, the anxiety she talked herself out of returning full force. She trots the last few steps to catch up with her. Alex’s face is made up, her hair styled. If she didn’t know better, she’d think Alex had gone out on a date. But who with? Her skin smells faintly of sweat and perfume, cigarettes, not cigarettes... she tries to place the fragrance.
She knows enough not to ask where Alex has been. “You missed all the excitement tonight,” she forces enthusiasm into her voice. It’s tough. Tougher than fighting aliens hell bent on killing her.
“We were invaded by not one, but two white martians.”

“Yeah.” Alex keeps walking. “J’onn told me.”

“I keep forgetting how big they are. And how hard they hit. Do you think the DEO has insurance that covers all the damage we do to it on a regular basis? Do you think that comes out of our paychecks?”

Alex stops, exasperated. “What are you doing?” Kara stills, shaken by her tone. I’m talking to you.
“I told you what I needed. Cut me some slack.”

“But I miss you.” But it’s Earth Birthday. She made plans for country line dancing. She made them weeks in advance, hoping that things would be better between them. That they would, at the very least, be on speaking terms by now. But things haven’t gotten better. She didn’t cancel the reservation, stupidly hoping even in the final minutes that Alex would come back into her life.

She’s spent the last few weeks floating in a black hole. The last time Alex left, she was adrift. She found Maggie. But Maggie hasn’t been around, neither has Lena, Winn, James. And if they were, it wouldn’t matter. It’s not the same without her. She’s spent a frightening amount of time cooking. Cleaning. Starting over again. “I was hoping it’d been enough time.”

Alex licks her lips, stares down at the ground, back at her and says nothing.

“I’m not used to not having you in my life, Alex.”

“We all have to grow up sometime.” She settles her hands on her hips. Kara watches her hands, know what it means when she does that. She looks to the stars in the sky, trying to find strength. “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking. So much thinking I haven’t slept in weeks. And it all makes sense. You two were so weird with each other. You tried to get me to move on. You looked… so sad around me, Kara. And I felt it in my heart. I felt it breaking for… whatever pain it was that you were carrying and couldn’t share.”

Kara stands straighter, touches her glasses. Alex has always known her best. It comforts her. It kills her.

“I never understood why you apologized at the DEO the night Cadmus was terrorizing the city with Medusa. It bothered me. I thought I’d missed something. But I understand now. And I know that whatever happened with you and Maggie… it goes beyond… it goes beyond me leaving. It goes beyond red kryptonite. Because I know you, Kara. You never do anything without a reason. Rationally I know all of that. And I want so much to be able to logic it away. To dissect our feelings and motivations and analyze it and just move on.”

Kara shivers.

“I know you’re still angry with me. For Astra.” She nods. “For… being controlling. For making you hide who you were for as long as I did.” Kara’s eyes burn. “It’s always been difficult for us to talk about the hard things. Because we’re all we have. And it’s scary… to think that we could cross a line. This… thin and murky line… something that we can never walk back from. And sometimes I don’t push those conversations because I think you’ll tell me I’m not family.” Her voice shakes. “And the first time I heard you say that it nearly killed me.”

Kara’s legs are weak. I didn’t mean it. But she has thought it more than makes her comfortable. It’s
an uncomfortable, grating truth she fights to bury.

“Sometimes I worry that fear will ruin us. I don’t know what’s going on with you and Maggie. At minimum you’re friends? And you hid that from me, too.”

Kara looks at the ground.

“If you need a friend, Kara—go to her. If you need more than that—” She covers her mouth with her hand, brow furrowed. She drops her hand. “That’s fine.”

“It’s not fine.”

“No, it’s not. But I don’t have a claim to either one of you. Clearly you’re getting something from her that I can’t give you, that others haven’t been able to give you. I don’t know what it is. Maybe you don’t either—but I refuse to believe you’d risk so much of what’s good about us for a lay.”

Words escape her. She needs to say something. Show her she’s listening. But she comes up empty.

“Yeah. That’s what I thought.”

“I know there’s nothing I can say that would make this right. But Alex—”

“You’re right. There’s nothing you can say. What hurts the most in all of this— God, Kara. I wish you’d just told me.” She shoves her hands into the pockets of her jacket. “I wish you’d trusted me. Instead, you trusted her. You two made a pact—” her voice is rising. “I’m going. “

“Wait.” She steps closer. “We can talk. Please, Alex. Can’t we talk? We can go out for a beer or… or we can just sit together if you don’t want to say anything—” Please, Rao, don’t leave me alone tonight.

“No. No, Kara. I love you.” She runs a trembling hand through her hair. “But you’ve been shutting me out for months. If you want to talk, go talk to Maggie. Or do more. But I don’t want to hear about it if you do. I need time. I’m sorry. I just can’t find it in me to be the better person right now.” She backs away, walking in the opposite direction. Kara stands there, immobilized, trying to remember how to move again. “Hey.” She turns back. Alex smiles, small and sad. “Happy Earth Birthday.”

xxx

Maggie opens the door to the microwave and remembers she hasn’t grabbed a meal yet. She goes to the freezer and looks at the selection she’s recently stocked up on. Veggie fajitas, curried rice, an assorted collection of ‘fiesta’ and ‘Asian fusion’ meals.

She grabs one, shutting the freezer door and looking at the microwave instructions. She gives up halfway, a frozen meal is a frozen meal. She rips it out of the box, looking at the icy block for seconds before peeling back the plastic cover and setting it in the microwave. She closes the door and sighs, setting it for four minutes.

The Barenaked Ladies concert was a few days ago. She considers asking her friend at the venue if the tickets were upgraded upon arrival, if Alex went. If she smiled.
There’s a knock at the door. It’s not even nine yet. She has no idea who could possibly be visiting. She picks up her gun and goes to the door. Sees who it is. She sweeps her hair back from her face, sets the gun down on the coffee table. Stands paralyzed.

The microwave’s beeping jars her out of her reverie. She goes to the door and pulls it open. Maybe she won’t still be there. She’s still there.

Kara stands primly, wearing a pastel pink jacket and jeans. She takes a deep breath, smiling nervously. “Hi.”

Maggie steps barefoot into the hallway, closing the door behind her. “Kara, hey.” She shouldn’t sound as surprised as she does. “What are you doing here?”

They haven’t seen each other in nearly a month. Maggie hasn’t dared to reach out to her, hasn’t been sure she’s wanted to. The weeks have passed in a haze. She’s thrown everything into work. She always has. It was a return to normalcy that no longer feels normal. She hasn’t been spending time at the alien bar. She hasn’t caught a glimpse of Alex at any of the crime scenes. She’s only seen Kara on the news.

A couple that lives down the hall squeezes past them, holding hands and laughing about something. Maggie looks after them, wondering if that kind of thing will ever be attainable. Kara shifts her weight, waiting for them to go inside before speaking. “I wanted to see you.” An awkward silence follows. “But um. I’m not sure if you’ve wanted to see me. I haven’t heard from you.” Her hands settle on the waist of her jeans, sliding to the belt loop before falling flat at her side. She looks to the floor before looking back to her. “Is this okay?”

Inside the microwave beeps indignantly: the frozen dinner is ready. Maggie leans against the wall, crossing her arms. She isn’t sure how to answer what are essentially two questions. She’s no longer sure of what the truth is. Whatever it is or was, has been diluted by a month of questioning and regret.

“I know that you usually do the talking. Usually I let other people do the talking. It’s easier to hide in plain sight when you’re able to just… disappear. And when you’re quiet people project what they think you are onto you. It makes things easier. Especially for someone like me. But sometimes it’s harder.”

She’s rambling. She’s never heard Kara ramble. More often than not she’s taciturn. “We shouldn’t talk about this out here.”

“I won’t say any more. And you don’t have to let me in. What I wanted to say is… I’ve had a lot of resentment, for a lot of people, for a lot of things. I don’t know if it’s their fault. I keep it all inside. Cat Grant once told me I don’t get to be like other people. I don’t get to have bad days. I hated it at the time but she was right. So after the red kryp—the incident—, I told myself I needed to go back to where I started, because freedom is dangerous for me. The bulk of my life has been spent… living in these confines… I hated it. I always thought I was caged but those limits kept me safe.”

Maggie tries to make sense of it. This is the most Kara’s ever spoken to her. She looks at her, as if she’ll reach understanding simply by seeing her face, her nervous tics. “I don’t know what you’re trying to tell me.”

“I’m not saying it right,” she mutters, frowns, as if having missed a beat, a line. “When I met you, you were removed from everything and everyone I knew. I didn’t have to lie or explain. As long as anyone didn’t know about you, I could have another sliver of freedom. I could have this other life. I could pretend to be normal and you wouldn’t know enough about me to tell me where I had it
wrong, where I could be better.”

Maggie wonders who tells the girl of steel she has to be better. She wonders why someone like that would strive to be normal. Why be normal when she’s already better by virtue of existing? “But you did lie to me.”

“But they weren’t real lies. Malicious lies.”

“A lie’s a lie.”

“Yeah. Maybe.” She looks down, frowning. “I was taught to lie to lie to survive. It wasn’t lying; it was… camouflage. It was safer than the truth. But now I’m always confused. I’m not comfortable with the things I want and feel. I never know if I want them or think I should want them. Or if I’m only talking myself out of the things I don’t want because I don’t think I’m allowed to have them.”

Maggie sighs softly. And she thought she was confused. “Kara, not everyone knows what they want one hundred percent of the time. Everyone lies a little. Sometimes you have to, to get by. Sometimes we do it because we’re scared. It’s not always right but it happens. You needed to survive.”

She shakes her head. “I didn’t hide you from everyone to survive,” she says. Her cheeks are rosy. “I’ve been selfish. And now everything’s out in the open. About you, me, Alex.” Maggie swallows, squaring her jaw. “It scares me.” She looks at the ceiling, taking a small breath. “You know who I am… There’s nowhere to hide. And I wonder if that, more than anything, is what I was trying to avoid. I really hurt Alex. I really hurt you.” Maggie looks down. “I know I should be the kind of person who lives as honestly as they can. But in practice… I don’t know.” She scratches her neck gingerly. Maggie meets her eyes. “I know you don’t feel like you understand me. I don’t understand me. I’ve never had the space to figure that out. I know this doesn’t excuse what I’ve done or how I’ve behaved. But I thought I should try to explain.” Maggie purses her lips. “I know that’s a lot.”

“Yeah.” Seconds pass in heavy silence until one of the neighbors blasts their stereo, sending deep base tones down the hallway. “I don’t know what to say.” It’s easy to fall under her spell. She needs to break it. Needs to not ask the questions whipping around her mind. She needs time to think of what she’s said. “How’s Alex?”

The question flutters her. “She’s sad and angry. But… it’s Alex. She’s unstoppable.”

Maggie smiles grimly. “Yeah. She’s a hell of a girl. Are things okay with the two of you?”

Her smile is strained. She laughs tensely. “Um. No. Things are terrible, currently,” she touches her glasses. “But we’ll get there.” We’ll have to get there, she seems to say.

“And if she knew you were here?”

“It’d hurt her.” Her expression changes, seeming tired. “She accused me of hiding what happened between us because I wanted to preserve something. She said you were giving me something no one else has.” She touches her glasses again, eyes narrowed thoughtfully. “She said a lot of things.” She can’t ask if Kara agrees. Her heart can’t take it. “But how are you?”

Maggie smiles, bows her head, gives a light shrug. “I’m getting by.” She scratches her nose. “You know. Adjusting.”

“Are you in love with her?”
“No,” she’s surprised at how quickly the answer comes. “But that doesn’t mean she isn’t important to me, that I don’t miss her.” Kara’s eyes are far away. “She was a part of my life and now she wants no part of it.” Kara nods slowly. “This isn’t easy.”

“I know. I thought maybe…” her brow furrows. “I don’t know what I thought.”

Is that true? Or is she afraid to say what she’s thinking? “Kara. Feelings aren’t black and white. They’re not… righteous or clean. Sometimes they don’t make a lot of sense.” The next words stick to her mouth. She forces them out. “I was starting to feel something for Alex. It was such a relief,” she smiles guiltily. “But I’d be lying if I said I’d been able to stop thinking about you. I wanted to. Maybe I didn’t try hard enough,” she tries to stick her fingers in her pockets, realizes she doesn’t have any in her pajama pants. “I thought if I just tried to do the right thing—if I tried hard enough, if I cared for her the best I knew how, if I never acted on that occasional intrusive thought, I could overcome it. We would overcome it.” She dares a look at Kara. She looks back patiently. “And I don’t know if that means I was giving it my all or if I was just fooling myself.”

“I don’t know either.”

She sighs tiredly. She hadn’t been prepared for this conversation. She doubts Kara was either. Their conversations have never stretched out; it’s almost as if they were afraid to get to know one another, to reveal the tricks up their sleeves, to end whatever fascination there was between them. “I’m not sure where that leaves us. If anywhere.” She crosses her arms, uncrosses them, presses her back to the wall. “Are you here to say goodbye?” She should be used to all the goodbyes by now. Everyone leaves.

“I hate goodbyes.” Maggie doesn’t know if it’s an answer or deflection. Kara wipes her palms on her pants. “I didn’t think this through.” Is she talking aloud? Is she talking to her? Maggie waits. “I feel guilty being here.” Maggie nods softly. “But I wanted to see you. I wanted to ask… um.” She brushes her fingers over the knot on her brow. “I wanted to ask if… if maybe you wanted to be a part of my life. That sounds—that sounds bigger than…” She exhales. “I think about you. The things you say and the way you look at me,” another laugh that goes down the hallway because Kara doesn’t look at her. She confesses to the walls, to the ceiling, to her bare feet. “And I don’t know what it means but I’d like to find out. If I don’t see you, I can’t.” She bites her lip. “Maybe I’m being selfish again. But that’s what I came to say. Ask.”

Maggie tenses. She curls her fingers. She wants to reach out to her. She can’t reach out to her. “We tried this before. What’s changed?”

“What do you mean, what’s changed? Everything has changed. You’re not with Alex. She knows about us. You know about me,” she says more quietly. “You said you wanted something I can’t give. Maybe that’s true. Maybe it isn’t. I can’t make you any promises. I need to figure things out. I need to figure me out. I’m still learning.”

Maggie watches her uncertainly.

“I know we did things on my terms last time. It doesn’t have to be that way. Maybe all you need is a friend. Or maybe you don’t need any of this.” She doesn’t quite look at her. “All I want is what you’re willing to give.”

Maggie pushes away from the wall. What she’s willing to give. Is that nothing? Everything? “Kara. I don’t know.” Why doesn’t she know? Isn’t she what she’s been wanting from the get go? To not be hidden away, to have Kara in her life, needing something from her. “I’m not ready to put my heart through the grinder again. It’s hard. And I’m not feeling brave.” There’s only so much she can stand.
Kara backs away, nodding halfheartedly, fingers touching nervously along her mouth. “I wasn’t careful with you. I know you don’t trust me, but I hope someday you will. Because I trust you.” She touches her glasses again, her lips shift in what ought to be a smile but is steeped in sorrow. Pain flares in Maggie’s chest. “Okay.” She turns. She takes the stairs down.

Maggie breathes. She lets her go.

She tries to unspool the tangled words that spilled out of their mouths as they fumbled to explain what they themselves don’t fully understand. It wasn’t a conversation for a hallway. The questions and revelations aren’t anything that can be resolved in a matter of hours. Maybe they’re not questions that can ever be answered.

It would be easiest to let it go and forget her. But she’s tried that before and has failed miserably every time. She chases her, maybe, because she can’t ever let a bad idea go to waste, because she gets off on dangerous risks, because she’s a sucker for punishment. Or maybe she just likes her.

She takes the stairs down quickly, catching up with her at the door. Her feet are cold. She hopes there are no stray needles or broken glass littering the entrance. Her chest heaves. She doesn’t know what she followed her to say. Kara waits. Desperation has seized her. “Why don’t we take it slow? Can we take it slow?” Please.

Kara smiles, slow and relieved. A thoughtful nod follows. “Yes. Of course,” she lowers her eyes. For a moment Maggie thinks she’s trying to hide something. She realizes it’s only sheepishness. “You have my number. Call me when you’re ready.”

Maggie lets out her breath. “I will.” Kara bows her head, biting back a smile, pushing on the door to the outside. A warm breeze sweeps in. She’s taken a few steps, her footsteps ringing on the sidewalk when Maggie calls out to her. “Goodnight, Kara.”

Kara’s sidelong smile makes her heart patter. “Goodnight, Maggie.”

xxx

A/N: That was fun. Next chapter... HRM. I’m not sure yet.
A/N: Have some Alena. Alex x Lena. You DO need to have read SuperCop for these. SuperCop and Alena intertwine.

xxx

Alex walks into the office, bright and gleaming like white sand under the glare of the sun. Her eyes adjust, finding the shades in the hues until shapes and objects emerge from the nothingness.

She’s convinced there’s been a mistake, that the assistant has led her to the lavish office of another top level L-Corp executive.

Doubt is put to rest as the chair she previously assumed empty turns and she’s facing Lena Luthor. This was a mistake. The words loop in her mind. She slips Lena’s business card into the pocket of her suit jacket as Lena gets to her feet. The last time she saw this woman she was sitting on Kara’s doorstep, her face dry with streaks of tears. She said nothing. Lena soon stopped asking questions. She waited. Kara arrived and Lena left.

“Agent Danvers,” Lena moves around the desk, smiling but obviously puzzled. “What a surprise.” She’s reserved. Different than she is with Kara. Is she still interested in her? Has Kara been ignoring her to spend time with Maggie? Or is she nervous because the news of her mother’s trial has been firing up the media? “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“This is a little embarrassing.” No, it’s mortifying. “I lost your business card. A few weeks ago.” Her ears are warm. “I was a bit of a mess the night you gave it to me.” It’s too much to hope that Lena’s forgotten it. How long did she sit with her? For hours? It’s only when she heard Kara’s footsteps that she slipped back into her heels.

Lena smiles wryly. “I’ve had a few of those nights myself.”

With her mother’s upcoming case she doesn’t doubt it. “I’m really embarrassed you saw me that way.”

“You shouldn’t be.” She takes a careful step forward. “I hope it hasn’t bothered you.” Alex lifts her head questioningly. “It’s just that sometimes these things happen; we find ourselves in these vulnerable positions and instead of focusing on healing we play it over to death in our heads and drive ourselves crazy.” She laughs. “And in any case, you did save my life all those months ago. I think I’m obligated to hold you in high esteem.”

“What a relief.”

Lena laughs again and Alex isn’t sure that she isn’t just humoring her. “Ms. Danvers—”

“Alex is fine,” she interrupts and wonders if she should have corrected to ‘Agent Danvers’.

“Axe.” She tries it out, eyes narrowing thoughtfully, “I hope you didn’t go out of your way to apologize for that night. Truth be told, I only hoped things had improved. You were there to see Kara, so I imagine that must have helped.”
Alex smiles, lies. “Yeah.” She doesn’t want to talk about her.

“Good.”

“I wanted to thank you for what you did. I don’t have a lot of nights like that.”

“I wouldn’t judge you if you did.”

She nearly thanks her again but stops herself. “Well. Um. Okay. I’ve taken up enough of your time.” Her hand slips into her pocket once more, fingers brushing the card. She crushes it, moves to the door. Lena walks with her. Alex stops short at the door. “Ms. Luthor—”

“Don’t say that. It reminds me of my mother. Lena’s fine.”

“She’s going to puke. Her palms are sweating. “What would you say to letting me take you up on your previous offer? Coffee. Or talking.” Why is she doing this? Is this about Maggie? Is it about Kara?

“Does it have to be one or the other?”

Alex glances at her hand on the doorknob, releases it to let the door slip shut. Her hands settle on her hips. “I guess not.”

“Listen, Alex—” she seems chagrined, eyes like a green apple, like a serpent, narrowed in thought, “the last thing I want to do is be rude—”

A Luthor being rude. She wonders what kind of horror that would entail. “If you can’t make it—”

“If I could just get a little clarity—” they talk over each other. Alex gestures for her to continue. “I read the news. I know what they’re saying. You were there when Lex sent his minions after me. You’re an FBI agent so I doubt you don’t have some involvement in my mother’s investigation.” Alex shifts her stance. “And your girlfriend Detective Sawyer didn’t make her displeasure unknown.”

Alex tries not to pinch her mouth in irritation. Oh. Yes. That makes sense now, too. “You can be blunt, Lena.”

“Right then. Is this coffee date business or pleasure?”

Alex feels her lips twisting into a grimace, into a smirk. She forces a smile, completely natural. “Pleasure.”

xxx

The alien bar isn’t an option for a number of reasons, Kara and Maggie chief amongst them. Alex doesn’t want to steep herself in bad memories; they come at her like phantoms. She savors a glass of bourbon, letting it course through her like corrosive acid. It’s warm. She barely feels it anymore. She slips the bottle into her desk, shuts it before changing into her civilian clothes. Supergirl comes around the corner, lips thinning and going to her locker. She pulls the door open, looking into the small mirror.

Alex feels stupid for ever having brought Maggie here. She wonders whether Kara and Maggie are seeing each other again, whether they’ll make some valiant effort to keep away from one another to
honor her. As if such a thing could matter now. She tells herself she’s being unreasonable, but did Kara really have to fuck the woman who made her realize she was gay? The first woman she involved herself with, the first one to make her realize how much all of this could hurt? She pulls her leather jacket on.

Supergirl glances at her. “Headed out?”

Alex shuts her locker. “What do you think?” She leaves. The fire burns in her. It’s the bourbon. No, it’s the anger. It’s the shame. It’s Kara, clearly hurt by her words. She knows she’ll get over it. She wonders when. Outside it’s raining. The drops fall frigid and heavy. Alex runs to the nearby awnings and waits several minutes for it to slow. It doesn’t and she hops onto the subway train, dodging teens popping their gum and instagramming duckface, trying to avoid the gaze of the guy she thinks might be masturbating.

The train arrives at the station soon enough and she takes the steps up, avoiding a brown bag and a puddle of piss. Too bad she can’t just fly everywhere. The rain has lessened considerably and minutes later she’s reached the café. She hasn’t been here before and came at Lena’s recommendation. It’s dimmer than she expected. The walls are painted a burgundy color. Candles burn in the center of the small round tables.

Alex wipes the rain from her face, hoping the rain hasn’t made her smell mildewy, and finds Lena sitting at a corner table by the window. She looks out, entrenched in thought, arms out on the table and laced as if she were on the brink of prayer. Alex wanders over, watching the glow of her profile in the candle before Lena turns to her. “Am I late?” she asks.

Lena smiles, stands. “No, you’re right on time. I just got here a few minutes ago myself.”

“And you’re not soaking wet.” She wipes rain from her jacket.

“Oh, I was brought on my sedan chair. It helps.” Alex lifts her eyebrows, smiling, perhaps, too brightly. “A joke. A bad one.” She nods at her phone on the table. “I just read an article about the Luthor fortune, detailing the brands and items I absolutely cannot live without. It’s all rubbish. I might as well make light of it.”

“Yeah? I think I’d go knock the reporter out.”

“I don’t see how that could possibly go wrong if I tried it.”

“You won’t, if you swing properly.”

Lena smiles, perplexed. She extends a hand, Alex reaches to take it before Lena leans close for a hug. Alex’s hand ends up on Lena’s stomach and both pull away, embarrassed. “That was awkward,” she says quietly. They sit and Alex looks around. “I spend most of my time with business partners when I do go out. I’ve traded friends for the city; so I’ve tried to get to know it intimately. I know it’s a little secluded but I’m feeling a little shy these days.”

“Because of your mom.” Maybe she shouldn’t have said it so bluntly.

“I miss when it was only one family member I had to apologize for. You’re lucky, you don’t know what that’s like.” A waitress comes by with the menu. Alex looks at the prices and nearly walks out. “Are you sure they’re not going to open up a criminal investigation on you, Agent Danvers? Out in public with a Luthor; that is bold.”

She’s warm. She smiles. How much of this is bravado? How much is genuine? The Luthors aren’t
to be trusted. Can the apple really fall so far from the tree? “Maybe you’re the one who should worry. Any of these civilians figure out what I do they might think you’ll be following your mother soon.”

“They already think that,” she says, unbothered. “What should we have…?” She points to the menu. “The chocolate torte is to die for.”

Alex looks at the price. Twenty-seven dollars. Twenty-seven dollars for gluten-free cake. “You get a whole cake for that, right?” Lena laughs softly. This is insane. She wants to argue but does she really want to look like she can’t afford twenty-seven dollars while she’s out with the billionaire? Alex studies the coffee drinks, the journey the beans and owners go through to bring them to National City. “Can I get scotch?” She asks the waitress when she comes by.

“Of course. And for you, Ms. Luthor?”

“I’ll have a glass of the cabernet. And the chocolate torte.”

“Would you like two spoons?”

“Oh—that’s not—” Alex starts.

“Yes, that’d be lovely,” Lena says. The waitress absconds with the menus and Alex tries to mentally calculate the cost of each bite. “You’ll love it,” Lena tells her. Alex nods in resignation. “So, tell me about your day. I imagine an FBI agent sees a lot of excitement.”

“No as much as you’d think.” Real FBI agents prepare in advance, map out operations. On the contrary police officers often have to deal with crisis situations immediately, rushing towards potential unknown dangers. The DEO is a curious hybrid of both, but these days she’s spent more time out of the field than in it. She spent a lot of time on dinners with Maggie, on preparing for their dates. She should get back out on the field.

“You’re being modest.”

She is. “I’ll have you know I push more paper than perps.”

“Luckily for the perps. I’d hate to get on your bad side.”

*That makes two of us*, Alex thinks. The waitress comes by with the drinks and cake. Alex stares at how dainty it is and resolves never to return. “I could eat that in two bites.”

“If you’re nice and let me have one, I’ll let you have the other.”

Alex tries to figure if Lena is flirting with her, or if it’s simply in her nature to use the appropriate lilt, the playful turn of phrase. She picks up the scotch and drinks, feeling calmer. Lena follows suit with her wine. They reach for the same spoon, apologizing and grabbing separate ones. “You mentioned not having many friends. Somehow I find that hard to believe.”

“If you give it a moment’s thought it’s not hard.” There’s flint in her voice but she smiles. “It’s not so bad. I tell myself it gives me the time to really focus on the company. It doesn’t matter how many people you employ, the quality of your product, Fortune 500 standing, being on the list for greatest places to work—it doesn’t matter if the public relations piece isn’t in place. We were doing better for a while.”

“Until Cadmus hit the news.” Until your mother hit the news.
“I thought you might bring your detective along tonight. It made me frightfully anxious, if you can believe it. I’ve learned that some people love saying ‘I told you so’ more than anything.”

Alex doesn’t know that Maggie is one of those. “You’d be surprised.” Maggie’s good at keeping things to herself. “And we’re not. Um.” She clears her throat. “We’re not together anymore.”

“I didn’t know. I’m sorry—”

Alex shakes her head. “I’m glad it’s done. It wasn’t working. We had very different ideas of what makes a relationship work.” She can’t get the image of Kara and Maggie together out of her mind. She recalls bashfully telling Kara about their first time together and her cheeks flush in humiliation. Lena takes the spoon to the edge of the torte. “It’s for the best.”

“It’s never easy to lose someone we care about. Even if it is for the best. Sometimes the stars don’t align. You think they will and they won’t.” Is she talking about Kara?

“Are you seeing someone?” Alex asks, winces. They don’t know each other. She has no right to ask. But Lena is amiable. She always looks like she walked out of a high-end perfume ad.

“No. Even the money isn’t enough to entice people.” She has a bite of cake, relishing the taste, eyes narrowed. “Not that I’ve hired anybody,” she says quickly. “A few people have manifested in my life. I’d think ‘here we are, finally, someone honest’. There’s always an agenda. It’s always disappointing.” Alex has a bite of the cake. The flavors explode in her mouth. Worth every penny. “Now the only people knocking on my doors are reporters.”

“Maybe you should take up with one of them.”

“To be fair, there’s only one reporter in particular who knocks on my door.”

“And…?”

Lena flicks her eyes at her, looks back to the torte, smiling, embarrassed. “And the stars haven’t aligned. I don’t think they’ll ever align.”

Alex has another bite of the cake. “Maybe they’ll align for someone else.”

“This last name has made my odds slim.”

“Why not change it?”

“No. I could never do that.” Her eyebrows burrow in thought. “You know, I don’t agree with my family on anything. Their actions and philosophy disgust me. They’re cruel and xenophobic… Misguided. I know all of that but I still love them. Love goes against all reason. It’s a bit of a nuisance for a scientist.”

“Yeah. Tell me about it.”

Lena slides the plate towards her. “Last bite’s yours.”

xxx

Lena pops open her umbrella, it’s a bright crimson, brighter than Kara’s cape; a beacon in the darkness.
They walk together, the rain tapping steadily on the umbrella. Alex’s shoulder and neck are wet from the rain. Lena glances at her as they walk past the few strays meandering the sidewalks. “You’re getting soaked.”

“I was expecting a sedan chair.”

“I gave my carriers the night off.” They wander further and Alex isn’t sure how much longer they’re walking or where they’re headed. “Contrary to popular belief, I don’t bite.”

“Is that popular belief?” Alex asks. She takes a step, then another, shifting closer with each one, until her jacket is brushing against Lena’s bare arm. “Better?”

“You tell me.” If it were Maggie she’d wrap an arm around her waist, around her shoulders. It’s not Maggie. It will never be Maggie again. In heels Lena stands at even height with her. “Do you want to talk about what’s bothering you?”

Alex glances at her, bumping her in the process. She takes hold of Lena’s arm to steady her. They stop for a moment before Alex releases her and they walk again. “That’s a big assumption.”

Lena stops again, beneath a streetlight this time. Alex stops, too. Lena tilts the umbrella back to better look at her and Alex watches the glow around her, the red sun halo of the umbrella as the rain falls. Alex steps closer to stay out of the rain. “All right,” Lena smiles up at her and Alex is once again taken aback at how attractive she is. “For what it’s worth, I’m not expecting you to bare your heart to me. I am a good listener. And smart.” Alex smiles faintly. “If you’re not here for a criminal investigation and you’re not here looking for a friend, I can only wonder about your intentions.”

“You’re jumping to conclusions.”

She considers. “Alex, if you’re worried I’ll tell Kara—”

“What does she have to do with it?”

“I’d wager everything. She invited me to a dinner where I wasn’t wanted. You know she’s my only friend in National City and you haven’t said her name once tonight. You haven’t said her name since we saw one another in her apartment hallway.” Alex stares back at her. “I find that a bit odd. Wouldn’t you find that a bit odd, Agent Danvers?”

“There are a great number of things I find odd about you, Ms. Luthor. I don’t press.” Not yet.

“Ms. Luthor,” she chuckles. “I’m in trouble now.”

“That can’t be new for you.”

Lena flicks her eyes to her, a smile dancing on her lips and Alex doesn’t know if she’s playing coy or if she ought to worry. “But maybe it is for a paper pusher. Are you sure you should be so cavalier with the menace of National City?”

“You’re no menace.” Not yet.

“Then what am I?”
“In love with my sister.”

Lena blinks, startled. Alex falls back into the rain, thinking, too late, that she’s pushed the game too far.

xxx

Lena’s quiet for a long time. She doesn’t respond to Alex’s words and Alex doesn’t press the issue. Of course she’s in love with Kara. Who isn’t in love with Kara? It’s never been a competition with her; how can you compare to someone who might as well be a god? How can she, could she, when even her own parents preferred her?

Alex holds on to the umbrella, her fingers white around the handle. She slows when she hears the pounding rhythmic beats of bass. She’s in a bad mood and she wants a drink. She looks at the stairs, leading into darkness, to an iron door cast aglow with crimson light. “Let’s stop in.”

Lena looks from the door to her, askance. “I don’t think so.”

“Why not? The rain’s not going to let up any time soon. We could have a few drinks.”

“My mother has an upcoming trial—”

“And no one would ever think to look for you here,” Alex says. “Let your hair down. Never know until you try it.” Lena’s uncomfortable. Alex takes her hand, wrapping her fingers around the handle of the umbrella. “Call your driver. I’m going in.” She takes the steps down quickly.

When she first joined the DEO it was hard staying away from the club scene. She’d become addicted to drinking, dancing, looking for something that she couldn’t get at home. It was always out of reach. And she was only ever briefly satisfied. She climbed out of men’s beds, stumbled to her car, feeling empty. Sometimes she’d call Kara, drunk, talking to her long enough to sober up. Sometimes Kara just talked to her when she insisted on driving home anyway, arguing that she was all right. Kara would make sure she made it home okay without hurting herself, without hurting someone else.

Fuck. Kara.

She touches her forehead lightly and shoves the door open, letting the colors, sounds and smells wash over her. Lena can stay outside. It’s not her job to watch over Lena Luthor. Why is she even spending time with her? Was she hoping she’d tell her stories about Kara? That she’d have some idea of what’s going on? Only she’s ever known that. And not anymore. Now Maggie knows. Maggie knows things she’ll never know and it makes her sick. She heads to the bar, eager to throw herself into the anonymity. She’s not sure of anything anymore, this and a drink feel like home.

She has three drinks in quick succession, enough for her to feel limber and light, to feel warm. When Lena sidles up beside her, Alex doesn’t recognize her. She’s let her hair down. A hint of arrogance has taken over the playfulness, over the uncertainty. She’s out of her element; that part is obvious, but her chin is held high and defiant, her eyes, when they’re colder, are more blue than green. “Want a drink?” Alex asks. “I’m buying.”

“They won’t have what I like.”

“So settle, for now.”
Lena laughs caustically.

“I didn’t think you’d come down.”

“What can I say? I’m full of surprises,” her eyes narrow looking at the group; tattooed punks with shaved heads, piercings, torn clothing, political agendas. On the dance floor men and women gyrate; lights strobe out menacingly. “You could drink at home.”

“You can’t get everything you want at home.”

“Is this the best place to find it?”

“Are you asking or lecturing?”

Lena considers but doesn’t answer. Alex occupies herself with another drink while a few men come over, offering to buy Lena drinks, asking her to dance. She politely declines, growing more anxious with every offer. Maybe it isn’t as anonymous as Alex thought. The longer she’s in here the hotter it feels. She slips out of her jacket, leaving it on the bar stool and wading out onto the dance floor.

There was a time she thought things would turn out differently. She would become a doctor. She’d go to the best restaurants, wear the best clothes. She’d have a successful, normal life. Her mother would be proud of her. Kara would stop consuming her life. Kara would stop consuming her thoughts. Every waking moment wouldn’t be lived for her. It wasn’t fair how beautiful she was, how super. It came to her without trying. She busted her ass for everything she ever got and was told to try harder. Sometimes no one even noticed.

She remembers being told she’d have to cut her hair when she joined the DEO. She’d have to discard her makeup and learn to let go of superficiality. She hated leaving pieces of her femininity behind because it seemed crucial. It was amor against an unknown enemy. She hated J’onn. She hated her parents for asking her to give up her life for Kara’s sake. The one thing that came out of it was that she and Kara were unstoppable, inseparable. Loyal. What a joke.

She moves to the music, eager to get lost in something that aren’t memories of Maggie lying to her, all those instances she was being made a fool of, how she failed her father, how her mother thinks she’s failed, period. Two guys come up to her, gripping her hips. She slaps their hands away but dances with them anyway, draping her arms over one’s shoulders, leaning back and swaying to the music with the other.

In the distance, Lena leans into the bar, watching her. The anxious look has left her, replaced with a sort of scientific curiosity. Alex stares back. She’s the most beautiful thing in here. She’s irritated again at her gayness, would feel more powerful if she could just revel in the power she has over men. She leaves her dance partners, getting to Lena, taking her hand and tugging. She expects resistance. It’s there but soon Lena follows.

Alex trails her fingers along Lena’s arm before pulling it over her shoulder, placing another hand on her hip. She pulls Lena closer to her. Lena stiffens before relaxing. She’s warm. Alex is surprised to feel a staggering and insensible current of desire course through her. It’s hot and piercing where she’s only been cold and numb for weeks. She momentarily panics. Lena’s eyes aren’t on her. They watch around, vigilantly, like a predator, like one accustomed to being hunted.

The music continues, pulsing and frenetic as bodies squeeze all around them pressing them closer together. It’s too loud for conversation. Alex brings her lips to Lena’s ear, smells her perfume, feels drunk in a way the alcohol hasn’t managed yet. She means to ask why she came into the club, out
to the dance floor with her, but her lips remain where they are and she says nothing.

She’s lost a sense of the music, the rhythm stripped from her as she can only focus on the immediate; the scent of Lena’s skin, the heat of her body, her eyes, kryptonite green and dangerous. Lena shifts, enough so that they’re kissing distance, before shifting again. “What are you thinking, Agent Danvers?” She has to whisper the words into her ears. “That I’m in love with your sister? That I’m a menace to National City?” Alex isn’t thinking as much as she ought to be. “Are you wondering whether you’ve had enough to drink to do something reckless?” Her voice is smoky, impossible to latch onto. Alex doesn’t have an answer.

Lena palms her face, thumb firmly beneath her chin. Alex looks at her, unsure if Lena wants her to swallow her answers, whether she intends to bring her lips to her neck instead. She stands helplessly, feeling warmth pool between her legs, unsure if Lena feels the same, on a physical level, or if she’s like so many of the others in her life, unaffected.
Kara meets her despite the early hour and the rain. The day is a sticky cold but the coffee is warm. Kara approaches, wearing an over jacket and jeans. Her hair falls over past her shoulders, pinned at the sides to keep it out of her face.

Maggie studies her in a way she was unable to before. Before she could only look at her in glances before she had to turn her face away, the intimacy, the daring making her uncomfortable. Kara smiles when she reaches her. Her jacket and glasses are beaded with rain. Her hair is darker, like honey, when wet.

“Hi,” Maggie smiles, staring for too long before remembering to hand her the coffee. “Nice day, huh?”

“It is a nice day. I get to see you.”

Maggie bites the inside of her lip. Smiling has always been like showing her hand. It gives away too much. Kara shows no sheepishness for the words and Maggie wonders what it’d be like to be able to speak so earnestly. Kara looks up at the sky; grey clouds swirl, moving swiftly as the wind picks up. “Don’t suppose you could go up there and clear this out?”

She laughs, falling in line next to her and Maggie feels bad for making her meet in the rain. There’s still much to talk about. She wouldn’t know where to start. She has no idea where they are, how they go on from here, what Kara wants from her, what she’s looking for, what she expects. It seems that she knows nothing. “I was really happy to get your text.”

“Yeah?” She waited days to contact her. It felt like an eternity. It felt like no time at all. She needed time to sort through all her fears and insecurities, to dampen any expectations and hopes. She was nervous. She still is nervous. She doesn’t know what she’s doing. She thought she’d have this grown up thing down by now but it always seems to elude her. “I was worried about texting too soon or waiting too long.”

“I did, too. When I went to your place,” she clarifies. They walk. A jogger runs past with a dog on a bright yellow leash. They watch them go and Maggie isn’t sure if Kara’s looking at the cute guy or the dog. She thinks she could save a lot of trouble for herself if she just got a pet. “I know I said a lot of things. A lot of those things I hadn’t thought about until I said them to you,” her brow furrows. “I just hope we have the time to talk about everything. Not now,” she says quickly, “I know we’re taking things slow. But eventually.”

“Yeah, I’d like that.” Every admission, every agreement feels like ground lost. But maybe part of her problem is thinking in terms of strategy, thinking of relationships as minefields in a war. “Can I ask you something?” Kara looks at her. “Why the glasses? As far as disguises go they’re kind of lousy.”

She’s dismayed. “You don’t like them?”

“They’re cute.” You’re cute. “But something tells me you have 20/20 vision. Or… whatever your equivalent of that is.” Kara smiles. “What’s funny?”

“Nothing. It’s nice to not get nervous about how to respond.”
“So that’s it, no more getting nervous around me?”

She laughs. No, giggles. “Um. No. It’s too late for that,” she smiles down at the wet grass, “I’m nervous now. Really nervous.” Oh. Kara explains about getting to Earth and being unable to control her vision and hearing. “Everything scared me. Trains, cars, birds. Everyone thought I was weird. It wouldn’t have been so bad if I couldn’t hear everything they said about me. It wasn’t like that on Krypton. Neither was being able to see through everyone. It was terrifying. When I got over the initial shock the only thing I felt was fear and… grief.”

Alex told her what happened to Krypton. She can’t fathom losing an entire world. Her parents kicked her out when she was a kid but she still had family. It felt like her world had fallen apart but there was still a world. “I can’t imagine how hard that must have been.”

“Yes,” she waits to hear a hitch of emotion but outside of the crinkle in her brow, her voice is steady. “There was a lot I was meant to do but I never had the chance. Clark left me with the Danvers family. I didn’t question it then. I didn’t know him anymore and he didn’t need me. For a while everything felt pointless. My purpose for coming to this planet was gone. I had a family that wasn’t my family. I hated it. All I wanted was for everything to be normal again. To turn everything off. I didn’t know it at the time, but Eliza and Jeremiah worried the constant overload would drive me crazy.”

“But it didn’t. You’re still here, of sound body and mind.”

“That’s where the glasses come in,” she says. She taps them. Maggie doesn’t know whether it’s to make a point or for comfort. “Jeremiah made them for me.” She lifts a hand as if to whisper a secret. “They’re lined with lead.” Oh, right. She somehow knew that too about Supergirl. “In time I was able to control my vision but I’d promised Jeremiah to always wear them. And eventually they became a part of me.” Now she frowns, thoughtfully. “I know they’re dorky.”

If things were different she might kiss her, make a joke, flirt. “They look great.” She has a drink of the coffee, the rain is starting to lighten and the rogue geese are flinging themselves out of the water to beg for food. She looks at them warily.

“I don’t believe you.” They walk another few feet. “Why did you pick me up the night we met? You were hurt. It was a bad night for you.” She scratches her temple. It was a bad night for both of them. “I never apologized,” she murmurs.

“You’ve made up for it, ten-fold.” Kara’s little frown deepens. “Truth be told, I was worried about you. It was raining and National City had just been attacked. You seemed…” Kara waits. “Vulnerable. Sorry, is that insulting?”

Kara shakes her head.

“I felt useless that night. I think all of NCPD did. I just wanted to go home and have a drink and fall into bed. And then I saw you.”

“But we didn’t see each other for a while after that.”

After the food, after she dropped her off, no. “I was surprised when you tracked me down. I didn’t mind.”

“You had a girlfriend,” Kara says thoughtfully.

Maggie tenses. Yeah. She had a girlfriend. It was on the rocks. It hasn’t stopped her before. She wonders how she came to be such a shitty person. “I was rude.” It was rude. It was honest. So
often they’re the same, seldom as people are to admit it. She saw Kara Danvers with her saccharine sweetness. “Kara, to be honest—” she tries to think of how to explain it. “I think I saw something in you that was… so unlike me… I was drawn to it.”

“How can you tell that just from a look?” Kara glances at her. “I don’t think we’re so different at all.”

“We’re nothing alike,” she snaps. Kara’s taken aback by the sharpness of her words. One of the geese comes to bite at her jacket and Maggie waves it away, irritated that it’s interrupting now. The goose continues undeterred. “I don’t have any snacks,” she tells it.

Kara leans down, giving it a light pat on its rump and sending it on its way. She has a drink of her coffee. “Why are you angry?” Maggie glowers. “Don’t tell me you think I’m perfect. I’m not. I’m not even close.” But she’s light years closer to it than she is. “You’re not giving me the silent treatment already, are you? There’s only so much of that I can take.” Maggie feels some of her anger slipping away. “I know you think what you said that night was rude. Maybe it was. But no one had ever spoken to me that way before.”

“I said I was sorry.”

“I don’t want you to be sorry. I’m not asking for that.” They stop walking, Maggie finally tearing her eyes off the geese and looking back to Kara. “I know it’s hard to believe that no one’s ever said something like that to me. As old as I am. In this kind of world. But I look a certain way. Or maybe it’s only that Alex was always around, ready to knock out anyone who thought of getting any ideas.” They frown at the name. “I don’t even know what I’m trying to get at. Other than to say that you shocked me that night. Your words stayed with me.”

Her offer had been sincere, despite how humiliated she felt after saying them. Who was she to say something like that to someone like her? But neither are what they seem. She was happy to follow through at the time and subsequently. She wants to ask if Kara agrees but it’s too much. It’s too forward; it’s too frightening. She tries to still the memories that are surfacing, the careful way Kara rolled her hips. Maggie thought she was shy. Maybe she was. Maybe she was trying not to kill her. Maybe it was both. It explains the hole in the wall if nothing else. “I didn’t want to offend you.”

Kara smiles bashfully, touches her glasses. “I wasn’t offended.” Her phone chimes and she takes it out of her jacket, some of the cheer falling from her face. “It’s J’onn. I have to go.”

“Yeah, sure.” She swallows. “Be careful.”

Kara nods. “Thanks for the coffee. And the talk.” She waffles. “Would a hug be okay?” Words stick in her throat but she must make some acknowledgment of assent. Kara hugs her, holding her lightly. Maggie’s face buries briefly in her neck, damp and warm with rain. She doesn’t let herself close her eyes, doesn’t want to trick herself later into thinking any of this could have been imagined. Kara pulls away. “Can we do this again soon?”

“Let me know when and where,” Kara smiles. “Um, give me your coffee cup, I’ll toss it out for you—” it seems stupid to offer. She can fly halfway across the world in seconds. But Kara hands it over with her gratitude. Maggie holds on to them, unable to do anything but watch as she slips away.
Kara’s in the booth by the time Maggie makes it to the alien bar. She’s running hours late, having to sit through a briefing on the new investigation being launched against Lena Luthor and any possible ties to Cadmus. Kara begins to stand but Maggie waves at her to remain sitting. Kara does, seeming somewhat disappointed.

“Sorry I’m late,” she unzips her jacket, taking a seat, “I didn’t get lost in another bar on the way, promise.”

“Is that something you do?”

It’s something she’s done. She sees Darla from the corner of her eyes shooting daggers. Maggie phoned her the night she offered to go down on Kara. Her cheeks are hot. What if Alex shows up?

“She’s allowed to come here,” Kara says. Maggie swears inwardly. “I’m not going to hide. I love her, but…” her mood darkens by the second.

Maggie takes her hands, holds them when they begin to fiddle, before realizing what she’s done. She lets go. “I shouldn’t have brought her up.”

“She’s not Voldemort. We can say her name.” She touches her glasses, hands circling anxiously around her glass. “But I’d rather not talk about her.” She looks at her covertly. “Do you want to talk about her?”

“No. God, no.”

Kara looks her over. “Are you okay? You seem a little wound up.”

“Nothing a beer can’t fix.” She sits up straighter on the booth. “I know we’ve had this knack for going radio silent before but… I’m glad we’re moving away from that pattern.”

Kara brightens. “Me too.”

Intern Mike, Mon-El, comes up to them, a little notepad in hand. Alex told her that he kissed Kara sometime around the Medusa attacks. It bothered her at the time. Maggie presses her back to the seat. It’s just as well as he completely ignores her.

“Kara. Kara Danvers,” he smiles as if he’s outdone himself with a joke. “What can I get you?” his gaze drifts to Maggie. “You’re Alex’s friend.”

Kara grimaces. Maggie smiles. Alex’s friend. She’s the friend a lot. “Um. Yeah. Maggie.”

He stretches his hand out. “Intern Mike. Also Bartender Mike. I prefer this one, a little more laid back.”

Maggie shakes his hand. His palms are smooth. “Cool. Can I get whatever’s on tap?”

“Sure, thing, boss.” He flashes a grin that he shifts to Kara. Kara shakes her head. “Should I not get her what’s on tap? Or was it the ‘boss’ thing? I heard people like to say ‘boss’ as a compliment. And it’s better than the other compliments I’ve given. Especially to the women.”

“No, Mon-El,” she shakes her head again. “Maggie knows who I am and who you are… so… I just want you to know that she knows.”

He smiles, and then it falters. “That’s an exclusive club. You two barely know each other. Not that you and I know each other. We’re friends. Friennnds. Right?”
Maggie lifts an eyebrow. Kara touches her glasses. “Right. Can I get a water?”

He slaps his pencil on his notepad. “Two tap waters coming up.”

“No, that’s not—,” Maggie watches him return to the bar. He glances furtively in their direction. Another one bites the dust. She returns her attention to Kara who frowns as intently. “I’m surprised you told him about us.” She sits up. “Not ‘us us’, she laces her fingers on the table, “I just mean— I know what you said about hiding. You don’t have to rush it, I mean,” she doesn’t know what she’s saying.

“I don’t like hiding all the time. Hiding and privacy are different. One’s about safety and security and the other is about your own corners and time.” She waves it away. “I don’t want to hide you.”

She scratches her neck lightly, watching her face. “Then I’ll stay out.” Kara doesn’t react. “Why don’t you tell me about your day?”

“Yes. Okay. That’s why I mentioned Mon-El.” Maggie’s stomach knots, unsure where the conversation could be going. “I told you how I missed the train with Clark. When we found Mon-El and I learned he had powers I wanted to do what I was sent here to do. Once I was sure he was safe.”

“Right…”

“It’s just… I can’t help but think that I’m a bad teacher? Everything I tell him goes in one ear and out the other. He doesn’t focus on the right things. He never listens to me. I know he’s a Daxamite, and I swear I’m not prejudiced, but he’s one of the most selfish people I’ve ever met.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Slow down.” She’s never heard her this fired up. “What happened?”

“A few weeks ago we went to fight Livewire,” she whispers the name, “and instead of watching over the police like I asked him to, he abandoned them to try to help me. And they could have been really hurt.” A few seconds pass. Kara blushes. “I know that’s… ironic coming from me.”

Maggie smirks. “Since you broke my finger and a few ribs, you mean?” Kara covers her face with her hands. Maggie pulls them down.

“I feel awful.”

“I’m still in working order.”

“Yes. Yes, you are.” She clears her throat. “Anyway, he told me he liked me and I told him I didn’t feel the same way.” Oh, thank God. “I just can’t be with someone who’s so selfish. Who’s so… thoughtless.” Do you know who I am? “And it makes me think that he’s never cared for hope, justice and the American way. I think he just wanted to impress me. You have to do good deeds for yourself and the wellbeing of others, not to… I don’t know, get a pat on the head.”

Maggie suspects he’s looking for more than a pat and likely not the head she’s thinking. “So what happens now? Does it matter why he does it if he helps people?”

“It matters.” She looks towards the bar. “Anyway, he hasn’t helped anyone yet. Am I being too hard on him? Everyone acts like it.”

“I have no idea. I don’t know the guy. But what I know of you seems kind and patient. Maybe you’re right to be frustrated.”
“I don’t know.” She looks to the bar again, eyes narrowed gently. She looks back to Maggie. “Do you know who that woman at the bar is?” Maggie looks. Darla. Great. “She’s been looking at you and me all night.”

“No idea,” she says quickly, before grimacing. She gives a slow shake of her head, frustrated. “Um. That’s Darla.”

“Darla?”

“Yeah… the ex. One of the exes. I’ve had a few.” She laughs, pushing a lock of hair behind her ear.

“Is that why you’ve been so tense? Why did you say you didn’t know her?”

Maggie twines her hands, untwines them, leans back into the booth and crosses her arms. “It was the first thing that came to mind.”

“A lie?”

Yeah. A lie. “Hey, I’ve been around the scene for a while. It’s small, even in National City.” She’s getting defensive again. “I didn’t even want to come here. Darla and Alex both hate me,” and Linda for all she knows. And Emily. Is there an ex that doesn’t hate her?

“You can’t avoid every place where you might run into an ex.”

“Well, Darla’s mean. And it’s not like I cheated on her.” But she would have if Kara hadn’t turned her down that night. She tells herself it’s not as big of a deal when things are headed towards splitsville. Kara frowns at their hands. “She was my girlfriend the first night I took you to my place. And she was pissed when I moved on and I’ve moved on a few times since then.” Kara looks at Darla again and back to Maggie. “You wanted to come here and I didn’t … I didn’t want to ruin it.”

“You haven’t. But you can talk to me. I know you had a life before me. And I’m sure it’s filled with… interesting people and stories. That’s fine. You don’t have to tell me everything. But don’t lie to me.”

Maggie’s jaw hardens.

“And I know I lied to you,” she says quietly, “but that was different.”

“You wanted me to lie to Alex.” Maybe that’s the reason there longer is a she and Alex. “How was that different?”

“Maybe it wasn’t. I don’t know, Maggie. I wanted to protect her.” She looks at a loss. “Maybe I wanted to protect us, too. But I was wrong. And you paid for it and I’m sorry.” Kara takes her hand in hers. “We can talk about it more if you want. But can we promise to just… try to put our best foot forward? I’d really like to try that with you.”

Maggie nods stiffly. Darla comes with two glasses of water, slamming them down. Water and ice clatters onto the table, spilling off the sides, soaking napkins. They pull back. Darla doesn’t hang around. “What the hell, Darla? And I ordered a beer.”

“Go to hell, Maggie.”

“That’s rude,” Kara calls after her.
“Go stuff yourself, Blondie,” Darla returns.

“See?” Maggie says, jamming the straw into the cup of water. “Real charmer.”

xxx

Maggie’s going through the stack of police reports on Cadmus, handwritten and riddled with spelling errors, when Kara peaks her head around her office door. Maggie shuts the files, flipping them over and standing up.

“Hey!” She’s chagrined at her own enthusiasm, feels the gentle pain in her cheeks, unaccustomed to smiling recently. She looks at the clock. It’s a little past one in the afternoon. “What brings you by?”

“The guy at the desk pointed the way,” she says. Maggie looks past the door. Jones. Great. She can’t wait to hear his commentary later on. Kara reaches over, adjusting her collar. Maggie tugs her fitted vest lightly. Kara gives it one last pat. “You look nice.”

“Oh. Thanks. You too.” She hurries to clear the jacket and her bag of shit from the chair in front of the desk. Kara sits. “You never answered my question.”

“I wanted to see you. So I went home and made sandwiches so I’d have an excuse,” she laughs at herself, touching her glasses. Maggie stares, terrified she might be in love. “So, here you are. Peanut butter and jelly.”

“You didn’t have to slave in the kitchen for me.”

“It’s just a sandwich.” Maggie tells herself it’s just a sandwich. “But I saw it in a movie once. So I wanted to bring you lunch. That’s not stupid, is it?”

“No. It’s not.” Kara cheers and digs into her tote bag, producing two sandwiches and handing one over. Maggie thinks to sit on the desk but moves around to take a seat behind the chair. She unwraps the sandwich from the plastic wrap, smiling without knowing it. She thinks of Alex bringing her Thanksgiving dinner when Kara was with Lena and her smile fades. Kara’s already biting into her sandwich, wiping some jelly from the corner of her mouth delicately. “I would have powered through lunch if not for you. So thanks.” Kara smiles and Maggie has a bite. Comfort food.

Her parents used to make her PB&J sandwiches, packing them up for her in a My Little Pony lunchbox alongside of boxed juice and soup in a busted up thermos. It reminds her of a more innocent time when she didn’t know how fucked up the world was, how easily people could be discarded. When family meant something.

“What are your parents like?” Kara asks.

She isn’t expecting the question. She takes another bite of the sandwich, letting the sticky peanut butter momentarily glue her mouth shut. She chews another few seconds, her fingers digging into the bread. She swallows and wishes she had water. “They’re parents. There’s not much to say about them.”

“Is that normal?”

Maggie scratches her cheek, shrugs. How do you tell someone you care about that your own
parents don’t want you? “Why are you asking?”

“I’ve been thinking about family lately. If what they are makes us who we are.” Jesus, she hopes not. But it would explain why she’s a fuck up. “Mine died when I was twelve.” Kara holds the sandwich up but doesn’t bite into it. “And I wonder what I would have been like if they’d raised me. Who I wouldn’t be.” Maggie has another bite of the sandwich. “Don’t get me wrong, Eliza and Jeremiah are great. You couldn’t ask for better adoptive parents. And a sister. Of course. Of course.”

Maggie goes to the water cooler and brings back two cups, setting one on the desk for Kara. “I don’t doubt Eliza and Jeremiah were good to you. Missing your parents doesn’t take away from what they did.” Kara smiles weakly. “Is something on your mind?” Kara has a drink of water, shaking her head. “You’ve seemed sad.”

“Why would I be sad? I have a job I love. We’re getting to know each other.”

“Kara. Come on.” She sets the sandwich down. “Is it Alex? She’ll come around.” Not to her, though. Kara touches her glasses, shakes her head again, folds her hands in her lap. “It has to be something.”

“It’s nothing. Really. Don’t worry,” she stands, gathering the plastic wrap, clearing the crumbs from the desk. Maggie stands too, watching her toss it in the nearby trash bin. She flashes a dazzling smile.

Maggie shuts the door to her office, pulling the blinds shut. Jones will likely ask if she ‘fingerbanged’ her. Kara freezes. Maggie takes a breath. “Don’t do that.” Kara is ready to argue. “This thing you’re doing. You don’t have to do it. You don’t have to tell me. It’s okay. But don’t pretend nothing’s wrong. Let me pretend you think I’m smarter than that, all right?”

Kara smiles wryly, nods, stares at the coat rack. Maggie notices one of the branches has turned down. Another has fallen off and lies buried in dust in the corner. How many times will she have to fix it? Maybe she should just throw it out.

Maggie forces herself to say the one thing she doesn’t want it to be. “If you’ve thought things over and you’re not into this—”

“No. No way.” Kara meets her gaze, slides her fingers along her wrist, over Maggie’s palm before pulling them away. “I am definitely into this. Are you?”

Kara’s touch still lingers. She forces herself to not trace her path. Tries to sound like she’s got her shit together. “Well, yeah. You’ve got your ways.”

Kara studies her, bites her lip. Maggie lets her breath out slowly. “We’ll talk more later?”

“You got it.” She takes her wrist, feeling as if sparks were shooting from their fingertips. She looks up at her. “Thanks for the surprise lunch.”

Kara’s eyes flick down to her lips. “Next time you can surprise me.”

xxx

Her caloric intake makes sense now. Kara talks animatedly about her day at CatCo with the enthusiasm of someone who’s finished their first school day of the new semester. She makes her
way through a handful of donuts while she talks, opining over Snapper, James Olsen and the glorious, long lost days of Cat Grant. Maggie suspects she needs a map with photographs and red lines to keep track of it all.

“So,” Kara tells the pomegranate glazed donut in front of her. “Are we dating?”

It’s not fair how quickly the question throws her into a panic. “Not your best segue work.” She laughs nervously, nods at the donut. “But I think it’s safe to say you two have already made it past first base.” Kara’s eaten three quarters of it. Maggie reaches across, tearing off a small piece.

Kara lifts her eyes and Maggie holds the crumbs of donut in her hand. She eats it, the sweet, tart taste spreading over her tongue. “I’m serious.”

Maggie’s stomach dives, flips. She wipes her fingers off on a napkin. “That’s not a decision one person gets to make.”

“Should I not have asked?”

Kara once said dating wasn’t something she got to have. What changed? Is it just that she knows her secret identity or is there something else that’s triggered a change? Maggie tells herself that Kara has only asked, not suggested. She doesn’t know if this is taking it slow. What is slow? Sex? Kisses? Talk? “Do you want to be dating?”

“I want to be with you,” she touches the donut and Maggie doesn’t actually know who’s winning the competition for her affections. “I miss what we were.”

What they were? They were nothing, except on kitchen tables, walls, in cars on bluffs. Maggie’s face warms, fingers curling around the napkin in front of her. Outside the sun is glinting off the sidewalk and the surfaces of cars, heat waves make everything hazy.

There’s a loud bleat on the television, ‘EXCLUSIVE’ plastered in bold red on the network’s news hour. The anchor opens with a picture of Lillian Luthor: Human Loyalist or Terrorist?

For the next few minutes, the anchor runs over the details of Cadmus. Moments later they splash Lena Luthor’s picture and a shot of the L-Corp building. Lena Luthor, Lillian’s daughter, is expected to testify against her in the coming months. Kara frowns. “It’s not right that they’re doing this. This is tabloid journalism.” She digs the phone out of her purse. “I should text her.” She ignores her and spends the next few minutes composing a message she doesn’t share before sending. “I can’t believe the NCPD isn’t providing her with a security detail.”

“We don’t provide security details to people who haven’t officially been ruled out as suspects in an investigation.”

Kara looks at her disbelievingly. “But she’s innocent.”

“She’s not innocent until it’s proven in a court of law.”

“That’s not how it works. That’s not how it’s supposed to work.”

“That is how it works,” more often than not.

“How can you say that? You’re a cop.”

“Kara, I don’t want to fight. And hey, you’re not entirely wrong. I know what the justice system is supposed to be but in practice it’s something else. You and Lena Luthor? Sure, maybe you’ll get a
“Lena’s tough.”

“Lena’s had to be tough because she has no one else.” *Welcome to the club.* “She’s only alive because I’ve been there.” Kara shakes her head, frustrated. “Well, if the NCPD isn’t going to do their job then I will. Someone has to.” Maggie taps her fingers along the side of her teacup. Kara turns her attention from the tv and looks to her. There’s something in her face. There must be. Kara frowns. “She’s my friend.”

She hasn’t seen many friends who have chemistry like they do. “Yeah.” She clears her throat, straightening her shoulders and lacing her fingers, leaning closer to her on the table. “Look, I know you say that but I still think she has feelings for you.”

“Does that mean you want me to stay away from her?”

“Fuck yes it does.”

“Okay.” Kara seems to relax. “Because I’m not.” Maggie nods, happy she didn’t ask for something Kara would never have agreed to. “She’s important to me. And I can’t explain it... but I need her, okay?” Maggie has no words. All she has is the cold come over her, the twisting of the knife in her stomach. She’s overreacting. She’s jealous. She’s insecure. But is she making too much out of it? Kara doesn’t deny that Lena has feelings for her. Does she not believe it? Or does she know? “Hey,” she leans over the table too, grabbing her wrists gently and tugging them closer. Her thumbs stroke along her hands. “You’re the one I want to be with.”

Want, want, want. Need. She has to joke. “The cop over the billionaire? You obviously haven’t seen what my take-home check is.”

“Are you implying that I’m a gold digger?”

“Why else would you want to be with me? My winning personality? Come on, you can’t make that much at CatCo. Unless you’re moonlighting.”

She smiles. Maggie wants to smile too. Moments later she realizes a shadow has fallen over them. She looks up to see Alex standing at their table. Fucking Noonan’s. She yanks her hands back. Kara’s surprised before noticing. How didn’t she notice? Kara pulls her hands into her lap and Maggie watches her face, how it shifts and retreats until all that’s left is pale and strained.

“Well,” Alex says breezily, “that didn’t take long.”

Maggie has nothing to say. Can’t think of anything to say. Her face is burning. She hasn’t seen her in a while. It hits her like ice water.

Kara touches her glasses tentatively. “Alex. Hi. You should join us.”

“No, thanks. I’m just passing through.” She looks at them and Maggie feels herself wither. It’s odd how little she’s thought of her since she and Kara started seeing each other again. She doesn’t know if some self-defense mechanism kicked in to spare her from heartache. Her age-old trick for
getting over a lover by getting under another doesn’t apply here. But seeing her face, the soft curl of her hair, she’s reminded of the loving way Alex greeted her when she got home, how passionate she was when they made love, the patience with which she listened to her day. Conversations were simpler with her. They didn’t require footnotes and bookmarks and scrambling feverishly to find a missed passage on a previous page for insight. “Cat got your tongue, Maggie?”

Maggie takes a breath, crosses her arms. “Hey, Danvers.” Kara is staring down at the table, forehead knotted. Her heartbreak, once the attention is off her, is evident. She forces the following words. “Look, if you’ve got a few minutes why don’t you hang out? Kara and I were just talking.”

“What else does someone do at Noonan’s?”

“I don’t know? Eat?”

Alex smiles. It isn’t a particularly nice smile. Kara slides out of the booth. “I’m headed to the ladies.” No, no, don’t leave me with her. “Be right back.” She looks to Alex, longingly, before moving on. Alex doesn’t look at her.

“So,” Alex says as soon as Kara’s moved on, “looks like it wasn’t just a sex thing.”

Never said it was. “I’m not talking about this with you.”

“She’s my sister.”

“Then act like it.” She looks up at her. Alex frowns. “You want to hate and blame me, fine. But I thought the whole point was that you wouldn’t take it out on Kara. What happened to all of that?”

She gets to her feet. “I know you, Alex. You’re a better person than me. You’re a better person than most people. I know how much you love her. Just…”

“Get over it?”

Maggie sighs, bowing her head, sticking her hands in her back pockets. “That’s not what I said.”

“But it’s what you wanted to say.”

Maggie looks off to the side, at the businessmen and women having a drink to finish out their day, the young families sitting in the corner while waitresses step over discarded french fries. Alex has a hand on the table looking down at her. Maggie’s irritated. She hates feeling like she’s been backed into a corner. “Yeah, maybe.”

“You’re unbelievable. You don’t get why this would upset me? Can you imagine, for even a second how it must feel? Do you feel? Anything?”

This isn’t the first time the accusation has been lobbed at her. She shakes it off. “I know you’re mad, but do you really want me to be the reason you blew it with your sister?” She scratches her forehead. “I don’t get it. Do you think I gave you months of my life, allowed myself a little happiness and to believe that we could really be something so I could shit all over it? Or did you want me to keep my mouth shut and pray it never came up? Christ, Alex. I wanted us to be better than that.”

“You made me think that you cared about me. You told me about you and Kara. And you acted like you wanted us to stay together. But here it not even two months later and you’ve moved on. Did you ever care about me? Or were you just waiting for things with you and Kara to work out?”

“I did care about you. I do care about you. You didn’t want to see me anymore.” Her throat is
“closing in on itself. She stuffs her hands in her pockets. Her voice is steady but her fingers shake. “I’m not sure what you wanted. For me to sit around miserable? To beg for you to take me back?” Would you have done it?”

“All I wanted, Maggie, was for you to love me.”

“Is that all?”

Alex smiles bitterly. They call her name at the cash register. She doesn’t say goodbye, she doesn’t look back. She acts like she never existed at all.

Maggie sits in the booth, frustrated, unsure how this happened, hoping they won’t be remembered as the lesbians fighting at the restaurant. First Linda, now Alex. If she and Kara fight they’ll probably trespass her. She wants to leave. She puts her hands on the table but she’s jittery, unable to stay still. She waits another ten minutes, watching Alex walk out with two coffee cups and a boxed meal. She frowns, watching her go and waits another five minutes for Kara.

She gives up, moving to the restroom, hoping she doesn’t have food poisoning. She finds her standing in front of the mirror, hair tied back loosely, hands flat on the sink. Her face is wet, her glasses off. She sees her and slips them back on.

“All those donuts catch up to you?” She has to make a joke. Kara’s eyes, harrowed, are less so now. Did she imagine it? Kara smiles wanly, touches her glasses, adjusts them. Maggie leans on the door, keeping it shut. “You okay?”

“Why did you pull your hands away so quickly?”

“Is that why you’re upset?” Kara shakes her head delicately. “I don’t know. It was reflex. I didn’t want to hurt her. Or make things worse between you.”

“We’re not doing anything wrong.”

“Yeah. I know.” She hesitates. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean anything by it.” Kara stays at the sink. Maggie inches closer. She wants to touch her. She leans against the wall instead.

“Is she still here?”

“No. She took off. We didn’t really talk.” She finds herself tangling her fingers and pulls them back. “It’s going to be okay.”

Kara doesn’t say anything. Maggie lifts a hand to her arm. It’s cold to the touch. Kara exhales shakily. Maggie turns her, taking her face in her hands, looking up at her. She leans close.


She doesn’t understand. Not really. But she nods and wraps her arms around her, pulling close. Kara is still, her arms at her side, breathing softly against her neck. There are flecks of ceramic on the floor, the polish on pieces of the sink peeled away.

xxx

Maggie stands at the door with a brown grocery bag in her arms. Kara isn’t expecting her, had been
watching Pillow Talk beneath a blanket, eating popcorn. “Hi,” Maggie says. She smiles almost shyly into the bag before looking back up at her. “I know we didn’t have plans but I hoped you wouldn’t object to a surprise visit?”

“Not at all. Sorry, I didn’t mean to just stand here.” She ushers her in.

They last saw each other at Noonan’s. The day was blistering hot and still, Maggie stood with her, talking by her car for nearly twenty minutes. Beads of sweat dotted her forehead but she waited, telling her about a dog that led NCPD on a wild goose chase a while back. By the end, Kara was smiling and asking questions.

Maggie steps through the door cautiously and Kara feels a shift. This is the first time Maggie’s visited of her own volition. Last time there was a disconnect between them. The apartment itself seemed like an obstacle to overcome. But she’s here. And Kara’s relieved because it means things must be better. She must be doing better. She looks down at her outfit. She’s wearing sweatpants and a sleeveless shirt with a cat riding a skateboard. “I would have dressed like a grown up if I’d known you were coming.”

“It’s cute.”

Kara shuts the door behind her, a surge of nervous energy making her restless again. “I don’t know if ‘cute’ is the look I want to go for with you.” She’s always ‘cute’. She doesn’t want to be cute.

Maggie smiles, as if the comment were silly. “So,” she says, “I went to the grocery store.” She pulls out flour, dark cacao, sugar, baking powder and ice cream. “I thought, I don’t know, that we could make brownies.” She looks at the tv in the corner. “Or I could make brownies and you can watch your movie or…” Kara presses a finger to her lips, has always wanted to do that, is surprised when it works. She shuts the tv off and returns to the kitchen. “I shouldn’t have invited myself.”

“I’m happy you’re here.”

A flash of her dimples. “Yeah, me too.” Kara thinks of her smile, her words, wondering if she was only waiting for the validation to admit how she really felt. Kara takes the ice cream and sticks it in the freezer, looking through the other items she brought. “I wasn’t sure you had everything. I kind of just googled the ingredients…”

“I haven’t made brownies in forever. The last time was with…” With Alex. The last time was with Alex, when they’d stopped Myriad, thrown Fort Rozz back into space. Alex was giddy with victory, with saving her. She was too. But she hadn’t forgotten Maggie’s words. She considered walking back into her life before deciding against it. How could she explain? How without sounding like a crazy person? “It was a while ago.”

She knows. “Was this a bad idea?”

“No. This was a great idea.” She grabs her laptop from the living room, bringing it to the kitchen. They stand side by side, Maggie resting an elbow on the island while Kara opens multiple tabs with different cooking blogs she has bookmarked. Maggie peers at the screen, as she scrolls through photosets of batter and finished products. “Help me pick.”

“You’re the foodie. I’ll let you decide.”

Kara chooses a recipe and they spend the next twenty minutes putting the ingredients together, maneuvering around each other in the kitchen, hands grazing shoulders and the small of their backs as they reach for bowls and spoons. Once it’s stirred and poured they throw it into the oven,
retreating to the couch while they cook.

“T’m sorry I was weird at Noonan’s,” she says. This is the longest Alex has ever been mad at her. Maybe without Eliza’s influence her grudges might have lasted longer. Part of her is irritated that Alex could dare be angry at her about this; she did, after all, kill her aunt. But the longer she lets those thoughts slither, the unsteadier she feels. She listened only for seconds after she left the table but it was more than enough. It was wrong to do it. She doesn’t know why she did it. “Seeing her took me off guard.”

“It’s fine. This is going to be awkward for a while.” She shifts on the couch to look at her. “I don’t mind.”

“She wasn’t nice to you.”

Maggie bows her head, thinking. “She doesn’t have to be.” Kara circles her arm around the back of the couch, scooting closer. “Compared to a lot of my exes she’s been sweet. I had one that slashed my tires and busted the windows.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah, I’m a real class act.”

Despite her smile, Maggie looks down at her hands, not her. Kara doesn’t know what she could have done to provoke that kind of response. “So do you date a lot of crazy people or are you just good at pissing people off?”

“A little of both.” She crosses one arm over the other, holding it, fingers pressing down before she lets go. “I haven’t ever managed to nail down this dating thing. I work a lot,” she frowns.

“You’ve made it to see me. I know you saw Alex.”

She smiles, forced. “Yeah.”

She’s embarrassed her. “Do you wish you were still with her?”

“Don’t ask that.”

“Why?”

Her forehead crinkles. She doesn’t answer right away. “Because right now I’m here with you. And you’re the only person I want to be with and you’re the only person I want to think about, okay?” Kara glides her hand along the top of her hair, brushing it back from her face. Her fingers tremble. “I just want it to be us. Even if it’s just for tonight. Is that okay?”

Kara nods tentatively. The next few minutes pass in silence as Maggie’s eyes fog in memory. What’s she thinking about? Kara realizes she doesn’t really know her, that whatever understanding she may have granted Maggie when she uncovered her identity, doesn’t grant her the same knowledge in return. Is Maggie private? Or am I just bad at this? She’s still thinking about it when Maggie heads to the kitchen to mix the frosting.

Kara watches her dig through the cabinets uncertainly, offering no help, wanting only to observe her movements, her discovery. She finds a bowl, pulling close to the computer to check every now and then, mixing the ingredients together. Kara wanders closer. “I always ask the wrong questions.”
“Not good for someone in your line of work. Or mine.” She stops and looks at her. “There are no wrong questions, Kara. Some just suck more than others.” Kara goes closer, folding her arms on the kitchen island. “I just think that sometimes we get stuck in these routines… or these thoughts… and the more you get trapped by it, the more you keep doing the same old shit. I’m tired of doing the same old shit.”

But what routines is she talking about? “I’ll try to be better.”

“That’s not what I’m saying. It’s me, okay?” Kara doesn’t agree but nods anyway, thinks it’ll diffuse the tension between them if she does. “Now, do you want to try this?” She lifts the spatula, laden with chocolate. Kara has a taste. It’s rich, smooth and buttery. Kara smiles, licking the corner of her lip. “Good?”

“Amazing.” Maggie smiles and sets it aside. “Will you come back to the couch with me now? I promise I’ll stop asking weird questions.” Maggie chuckles and follows. They sit. “Do you want to take your jacket off?” Maggie laughs. “What?”

“You trying to seduce me?”

She wouldn’t know how to do that. Especially with someone like Maggie who seems to have such a handle on things. She’s not sexy or cool or smooth. “The oven’s going. It’s warm in here.”

“Nothing your ice breath can’t fix.” But she smiles, starting to remove her jacket. Kara observes, mouth dry, before leaning forward, taking hold of the lapels and pushing it off her shoulders. For a moment they’re stopped, staring at one another before Maggie relaxes, letting her push it away. She sets it aside. Maggie wears a plain white shirt, thin. Kara moves without thinking, bringing her fingers to the bottom of it, starting to lift. “Hey,” Maggie says.

“I want to see how it looks.” She winces. That sounds wrong. “I’m not—I’m not…” she takes a breath. “At L-Corp. With Cyborg Superman. I know what he did. I was there. Which you know.” Cat Grant would tell her to stop talking. But she can’t stop talking. “I just wanted to see how it left you,” she finishes awkwardly. “When you saved me.”

Maggie parts her lips, perplexed. “Maybe ask?”

“Can I see?” Several tense seconds pass. Maggie raises her arms. Kara pulls the shirt over her head. Her heart pounds. Her lungs burn. Kara feels similarly. She keeps her gaze steady, despite how she wants to look at the rest of her. There’s a scar. She was hoping she wouldn’t scar. The skin is still pinched together, redder than the rest of her. “I’m sorry.” She doesn’t know if Maggie hears the words.

“Don’t be.”

“I tried—”

“Yeah. I know.”

Does Maggie ever think of how she saved Lena, but was unable to stop Cyborg Superman from hurting her? Why didn’t she stop it? Was she weak? Could she have done more…? Does Maggie think she failed her? She probably does. She’ll probably never bring it up. She settles her hand on the nape of Maggie’s neck, leans forward, kisses the scar. Her lips linger. Maggie’s chest heaves. She brings a hand to her hair. She doesn’t know how long they stay that way. Kara gives her the shirt back. Maggie slips it on and goes to the kitchen when the oven dings.

She hangs out there, waiting for the brownies to cool while Kara worries she’s done the wrong
thing, said the wrong thing, is inescapably weird and Maggie will want nothing to do with her. Maggie starts to frost the brownies and once more, Kara goes over. “Was that wrong? What I just did?” Maggie shakes her head, licking a dab of frosting from her fingers. “You just seem weirded out. It was weird.” What is she thinking? She’s confused. They went from sleeping together almost immediately to not being allowed any contact, any glances, to this. She doesn’t know how to traverse this terrain. She wonders if she’ll ever know or if Maggie is some unknowable figure with no map.

“It was weird? I don’t mind.” She sets the spatula down. “I always feel a little like I’m naked when I’m around you, anyway.” She smiles nervously but doesn’t look at her.

Kara saunters closer. “I don’t know what that means. Is that bad?”

She plants her palms on the island. “It’s different. Usually I’ve got the answers, you know, for every situation. I like to be ready for things. But you’re not like anyone else.” She cuts out a giant slab of brownie for her. “Wait, wait,” she says, “close your eyes.”

“You, I took my shirt off. You can close your eyes.” Kara closes her eyes, happy to play along, hoping she won’t run out on her the first chance she gets. She hears Maggie move past her but still keeps her eyes closed. She returns. Kara hears a flick. Moments pass. “Okay. Ready.”

Kara opens her eyes. Maggie holds up the brownie, a generous scoop of ice cream next to it, sparking candles lively in the shape of a K. “They’re cute, huh? We don’t have a thing yet. You know… like an inside joke thing. But these made me think of you. They’re bright. They just shine and shine. They don’t go out.” Kara doesn’t say anything. “I know it’s corny,” she’s embarrassed. “Too corny?”

Kara clears her throat. She shakes her head. “This is… um.” She touches her glasses. Nods. “Thank you.”

A gentle smirk. “It’s just a brownie. It’s not even magic.”

“It is to me.” She looks at it. Sets it down. She wants to tell her about Earth Birthday, about how lonely she’s felt since then. She doesn’t know how to tell her without throwing Alex under the bus. Without, perhaps, throwing Maggie under the bus. She doesn’t know how to tell her how hard it is to shine and shine. “I want to kiss you.” But she’s afraid. “Can I kiss you?” Maggie, who offered to go down on her after knowing her a grand total of six hours, looks unsure. “Is it too fast? It’s just… It’s been weeks now. And I want to.”

This is easier in the movies. A chase scene at an airport. Running after the cab. Showing up impromptu at a lover’s house when it rains to make a heartfelt confession. She hasn’t dated much. Not really. Everything fizzles quickly and somehow it’s always a surprise to her, despite her sometimes disinterest.

She still isn’t sure whether they’re dating. But she knows that Maggie knows more about her than any family. She knows she’s Supergirl. She rarely brings it up. She doesn’t expect her to have all the answers. She lets her ask question after question. Maggie’s quiet for what seems like years. Kara grows nervous. “What do you think?”

Maggie looks up at her. “Um. I think that everything’s been going pretty well. I’m kind of getting used to you being around. I know you need to figure a lot of things out. What you feel. How you feel. About you, about me.” She smiles. Kara knows that’s smile. She’s seen it startle her in the
reflection of mirrors. Cracks that have to be masked. “I just. I want to kiss you. But I don’t want to have to forget that I kissed you—”

Kara leans forward, pressing her lips to hers. Maggie’s words fall away in a blur of a kiss that ends as quickly as it begun. Kara pulls back to assess her face. She stays close. “I know that I’m not good with words. The things I feel... they never come out in a way that’s pretty. I don’t know a lot. But what I do know is that I feel less sad when you’re near.” Kara doesn’t know why she says it. Maybe she should have only said that Maggie makes her happy. She can admit now that she’s happy Maggie is no longer with Alex, that she was unhappy when they were together. It’s so obvious. How can something like that surprise her? “I want you to continue to be near.”

Maggie places a hand on her neck, another cradles her face. She kisses her, soft and slow. The candles continue to spark. Kara closes her eyes, kissing her back, matching her tempo. She tries not to shoot up into the stars as her senses, long dormant, ignite. She wants her so badly she shakes. She tells herself to take it slow, threads her fingers through Maggie’s hair, kissing her deeper. This is everything. For now, for this moment in time, it’s everything.

xxx

A/N: Guest starring rogue geese. Is there a talented 12 year old reader that could make a gif of either geese chasing Maggie or Maggie kissing Kara? That would be rad. But the geese would be cooler, I think.
Lena’s mouth is hot. The skyline of National City is painted in colors against the night. This is insane. From the office, to the café, to the club, here. Alex Danvers, with Lena Luthor, in a 5-star hotel. It’s been years since she’s lived this kind of life. Lena gives it to her in glimmers and Alex can almost remember when she used to shine.

She comes first, her feverish desire pushing her to the edge sooner than she expected. She’s breathless and embarrassed. Lena remains, a splendor beneath her, flushed cheeks, lips like the red rose. Lena lifts slightly, kissing her forehead. Alex closes her eyes.

She’s nothing like Maggie. Not in any sense. Her eyes seem to dance between plains, always shifting. And here she is, pressed naked to her, in a way she couldn’t have imagined being pressed to another woman the night Maggie kissed her. What was she thinking? That it’d be forever? How stupid was she? How naïve. She wants to cry.

Lena lifts her hands to her face. Alex opens her eyes. “It’s all right.”

Alex tells herself she isn’t so transparent. She kisses her again. Lena’s mouth parts for her and Alex’s hand finds its way to the inside of her thigh, rising higher. When her fingers slip into her again she breaks their kiss.

She listens to Lena, staring at the wrinkles in the pillow beneath her head, breathing against her shoulder, until Lena shakes, hitching and drawing closer to her before stilling.

Their eyes lock for an instant before flicking away. Alex wonders if she made her come, if she gave in to expedite time the way she did so many times with the men she let take her to bed. Alex lies down beside her, catching her breath, her fingers still slick. She rubs them absently, a calm slowly settling over her.

Lena looks at her. “Better?”

She waits for the joke, for a smile, a taunt. She’s somber and earnest. Better what? Better a thousand different things. “Yeah.”

She dresses, Lena stepping into her heels, Alex watching her zip the back of her dress, tie her hair up. Nothing is out of place and the fact that she stands before the mirror seems more coincidental than anything else. She doesn’t look at herself but her eyes catch Alex’s in the reflection.

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay?” Lena asks. “It’s late and the room’s paid for.”

“I should get going.” She’s afraid to stay the night. She’s afraid of what it could mean, what it has meant. She remembers telling Kara about her first sleepover with Maggie. She doubts Kara would be as charmed by this. Maybe she’d pretend to be happy like she did the first time. How often does she pretend without her knowing? Why doesn’t she know her better? “I keep long hours.”

“Pushing paper,” Lena reapplies her lipstick. Alex slips into her jacket. She isn’t convinced Lena’s believed a word she’s said to her all evening. “I’m no stranger to long work hours myself.”
“Is that where you’re headed?”

Lena puts her earrings back on. “Are you still interested in where I’m headed?” She pulls a hand back through her hair to make sure it’s in place.

“I’m curious.” Home? Where does she live? “Not enough partying for you tonight?”

“I wouldn’t say that.” Lena laughs softly. “I’m returning to L-Corp. I’ll admit burning the midnight oil gets a little tedious at times but a visit from Supergirl tends to lift the spirits.”

It shouldn’t surprise her. They’re friends. She succeeds in not flinching. “If I had Supergirl waiting for me at the office I’d be eager to get back, too.” She sees her smiling reflection in the mirror, how bright her eyes are, brighter than they have been in weeks. She wonders where she pulls it from.

Lena smiles wistfully. “Mh. Well, to be honest with you, she never stays as long as I’d like.”

Alex spends the subsequent days at the DEO, sorting through their collection of alien slides. She eases them beneath the microscope, studying the images on the monitors and taking notes.

Things are relatively quiet in National City but she’s smart enough to know it won’t last. Peace rarely does. She hasn’t been able to wave away the guilt of sleeping with Lena Luthor but knows she’s done nothing wrong. They’re adults.

The questions come regardless. What would Kara think? What would Maggie think? What does Lena think? What was she thinking? Jesus. Lena Luthor. Kara’s crazy about her. She hasn’t found a concrete reason to distrust her, outside of her family name, yet she remains cautious. Alex recalls waiting by the hotel elevator until Lena came by with a key card to the room, flashing it as if it were their one way ticket to paradise.

It was good. It was really good. Make her feel ashamed good. She doesn’t know her. Her mother’s a terrorist. She’s not Maggie. She hears a flurry of voices and glances past the office window to see Supergirl passing through. Their eyes lock momentarily before Alex returns to the slides.

Did she visit her at L-Corp after Lena left the hotel? Maybe you’d know if you talked to her.

She turns away from the slides when her phone chirps. Alex looks at the screen. Ms. Luthor. Alex picks up the phone and reads the message. You don’t text. You don’t call. I’m beginning to think you bamboozled me out of my innocence.

She very much doubts that. So sue me.

I’ve had enough of courts. Invite me to dinner. I’ve had a long day.

Alex stares at the text message. What the hell. Join me for dinner.

Let me think about it.

A few minutes later Lena texts a time and directions.
Dinner happens at a restaurant by the water. Alex isn’t dressed for the occasion and feels self-conscious but Lena takes no notice. She looks through the exorbitantly priced but sparse menu and orders a bottle of wine for them.

“I can’t remember the last time we saw each other,” Lena tells her.

“Very funny.”

A twinkle of a smile. “Believe it or not, I don’t get many nights out on the town. When I do, everyone tends to know about it.”

“The press can’t get enough of you.” They smile wryly at that. “You could try staying out of trouble.”

“How can I? It’s in the name. Names are like fate, aren’t they? You can’t escape your destiny.” She’s still looking at the menu and Alex doesn’t know if she sees her frown. “Do you buy into that drivel or are you more sensible like your sister?”

“Kara’s not sensible.” Befriending a Luthor. Coming out of the shadows to put her life at stake. Seeing Maggie. What could they possibly have to talk about? Maybe they don’t talk.

Lena looks up at her. “But I think we can agree she’s no sourpuss like you.”

“Why did you invite me here?”

“You invited me.”

“At your urging.”

She smiles, no doubt seeing her frustration. “I thought we were going to try our hand at friendship.” She meets her eyes. “We tried our hand at it last time.”

Alex shifts in her chair. “I don’t know if that’s going to work.”

“I thought we got along. Was I mistaken?”

“No. You weren’t,” she admits reluctantly. “I had a good time,” she admits. “but—”

“Isn’t that reason enough? More reason than Kara or my name. Look, Alex—I’m not asking for a lifetime commitment. I doubt you are either. But why not enjoy each other’s company?”

“When was the last time you saw Kara?”

“I don’t remember.” Alex scowls, wondering if she’s trying to play with words again. “Not since I last saw you. Does it matter?”

“I guess not.” The wine comes. They’re quiet as it’s poured. The waiter moves on his way. “But you don’t deny that you are in love with her,” she presses. Who isn’t? Who doesn’t fall?

Lena makes a face as if she were thinking about it before her lips pull into a smile. “You’re in love with your detective Sawyer. I don’t ask about her. And I don’t ask about Kara.” Alex’s lips tighten. “Some things are painful to talk about.” She picks up her glass wine. “And I know you won’t tell me.”

“I don’t know you.”
“I’d say get to know me, but,” she lifts her eyebrows, has a drink.

“Are you gay?”

“No. But when in Rome.” She sets her eyes on her. Alex stares at her evenly, despite how flustered she is. “You’re going to have to learn how to take a joke. Before you ask, I am not in the habit of taking strange women to bed. What about you?”

Alex grabs the wine glass. “You are strange,” she hears the nervous timbre in her voice.

“But you’re not.”

Before Kara and the DEO, she made it a point to shine. Now she has to blend in, be unobtrusive, forgettable. “Why do I feel like I’ve just been insulted?”

“You tell me.”

She sets the wine down and leans closer. “You have a habit of deflecting questions.”

“Do I?” Alex leans back. “In any case, you’re the one who deflected my question. Not with a question, mind but I still noticed.” She mirrors her, leaning back into her chair languidly. “Do you think I asked you here to suggest a relationship?”

“Then you admit that you asked.”

Lena smiles, twining her hands and slipping closer. “The only thing I’m interested in cultivating is a friendship.”

“The way we cultivated it last time?”

“Would that be wrong?”

“I don’t do that.” Lena cocks an eyebrow. “I’ve never done that.” She clears her throat. “Not with women. I did it with you,” she says more quietly, “but Maggie was the first. It’s just that I didn’t know about being that way. Not until recently.” She bites her tongue to keep from rambling. Her fingers tap on the tablecloth. She waits for the scorn, the amusement.

“I shouldn’t have made light of it. I’m sorry.” Alex gives a slight shake of her head. “Truth be told, I’ve always been attracted to women in a way I haven’t been to men. As soon as I realized it… “ her brow furrows. “Well, I was already the family pariah and the Luthors have exacting standards. Our name is everything.” Her eyes drift off, returning swiftly to the present. “It’s always been a non-issue. I’ve had a great deal to occupy my time. My studies, my creations, and later on, L-Corp.”

“Maybe. But it sounds like you’re making excuses.”

“I’ve never been allowed excuses, Agent Danvers. To be forthright, I’ve only loved three women in my life. One was my birth mother. The other is Lillian.” She pulls back. “So call me pragmatic.”

“I don’t understand. You seem…” she searches for a word. “Selective.”

“And you aren’t?”

“Why did you sleep with me?”

“Because you wanted me to.”
It can’t be so simple. Lena’s attractive and rich. She doubts many would let the Luthor name stop them from getting her into bed. “I think it’s more than that.”

“Do you want me to tell you you’re special?”

“I want you to tell me the truth.”

“You saved my life. You’re capable. Intelligent. Beautiful. There was ample reason.”

Alex abandons the line of questioning, knowing when she’s wasting her time, when she won’t get a straight answer.

xxx

There’s a photography exhibition nearby. Alex agrees to go. There’s nothing happening at the DEO and no one to go home to. The gallery is abandoned save for the two of them. “Tell me about you,” Lena says.

They stop in front of a landscape of National City. Alex stares at the skyline, thinking of how often it’s been nearly obliterated. Everything she does is for Kara; but everything she does is for this city. She wonders when a chore became a passion, a lifeblood. “What would you like to know?”

“The same you know about me. Your work, your family. You can skip Kara.”

She has no life without Kara. The thought makes her sick. She takes a breath, ready to speak before hesitating. How much does Lena know about her? She fooled them into thinking she was working with Lillian during the Medusa attacks. Cadmus has her father. Does Lena already know she’s a DEO agent? Did Lillian tell her? Is she waiting for her to hang herself with her own words? “I’d rather hear about you.”

Lena laughs, her laughter bouncing off the gallery walls. “You mean you haven’t had your fill of me?” Alex smiles wanly. “There isn’t a day that passes without a story on me in the paper. Type my name into google and you’ll get thousands of results. You’re an FBI agent. I don’t take you to be the kind of woman that goes into a situation unprepared.”

“I’m not a fan of it, no.”

“But you’re not strictly by the book. If you were, I doubt you’d be here. Given who you are. Given who my mother is. Given who I am.” Lena turns her face to look at her. “Fidelity. Bravery. Integrity. You must have some involvement in the ongoing investigation against my mother. Against me.” She scoffs slightly. “Isn’t it something? The only women in my life are those bound ethically to investigate it.”

“Oh maybe we think you’re fascinating.”

She smiles, moving on to the next photograph. It’s a shot of Metallo battling Supergirl. Alex has never seen it before. Who took it? Lena stares at the photograph. Alex looks at Kara’s face, fierce and determined. “My mother’s handiwork. To think of how she wastes her intelligence.”

“Why did you call the police on her?”

“It should be obvious why. Though maybe it would have been better not to. It seems to have caused me more problems than it did her.”

“You’re not sitting in a prison cell because of that call.”
“Oh, I’m imprisoned all right. Where can I go without being recognized? I’ve changed my number countless times but it does nothing to deter the death threats I’ve received from the more virulent anti-alien groups. Death threats, rape threats, and repeat.” She sounds nearly bored by it.

“That’s terrible.” Lena says nothing. “At least you get a break from it for now. Looks like this is the best time to take the tour.”

“Ah. I gave them a sizable donation tonight so they could keep this open another few hours for us.”

“That’s generous.”

“It buys L-Corp good will and gives me a respite. So it’s not so generous after all. If you look hard enough, you can find always find a reason to twist good intentions. That’s always been my experience. The media is quick to remind me. Random idiots on the internet. And my mother. Always my mother.” There’s a silence. “The solitude is easier.”

“Do you like being alone?”

“I always have been. Except for Lex. But that ended.” Alex looks at the photograph, wondering if Lena knows that she was the one to shove a metal pipe through Metallo’s heart. What would she think? Would she be impressed? Disturbed? “What about you?”

“You’ll have to be more specific.”

“Solitude.”

“I bear it.” She bears a lot. They move on. “Work keeps me busy.”

“Sounds like you’re making excuses.”

“I wasn’t allowed excuses either. I had my family. That’s enough.”

“Is it still enough?”

They arrive at a photograph of Fort Rozz, a stunning black and white shot. Alex steps closer. Supergirl’s there; lifting it. She licks her lips and swallows. “Who took this?” Alex asks. She looks for the photographer’s name but there isn’t one. She glances back at the other photographs and sees no names on those either. No prices. She turns her attention back to the photograph. “Kara must have told you she’s adopted. It’s probably obvious.”

“She mentioned it. It’s one of the things we bonded over.” Lena bows her head, smiles. “And I was trying to find common ground between us when in all likelihood I’ve just insulted you.”

Alex wrinkles her nose and finds a smile. “Believe it or not, the Danvers family isn’t perfect. Tell me about your mother.”

“Is ‘maniac’ not description enough? She’s rigid, cold. Brilliant. I read her papers from a very young age. Lex did, too. He introduced me to them. I don’t think she wanted to share them with me but her work drew me to science. To creation. I thought if I could show her I understand, that I aspire and have… ambition. I thought maybe she would love me. People think children are stupid. But they’re not. They’re like animals. They sense danger. They’re all quite… primal.” Alex stares at the photograph. “Do you like it?”

Her voice travels, sounding closer than it is, Alex recalling the warmth of her breath against her ears. “I don’t know what it is.”
“That,” she says, “is the world.”

xxx

Lena picks up the FBI badge. Alex watches as she weighs it in her hands, turn it left and then right before throwing it back carelessly onto the table. She wanders the apartment, observing but touching nothing. “It suits you,” she says eventually.

“How do you figure?”

“It’s stony and grey,” she smiles, “but lovely despite that.”

Alex goes to the kitchen. There are no family pictures on the walls. She wonders if she’ll always live like a soldier, ready to leave at a moment’s notice, her life stripped of all sentimentality. Since joining the DEO Kara has been the lone exception. “Want a drink?” Lena shakes her head. Alex pours herself a glass of scotch. “I’ve been trying to think of how to apologize to you for the past half hour.” Lena looks over. “I’ve been… antagonistic. So. I’m sorry. I have a lot on my mind.”

“The usual suspects?” Lena asks. Alex returns a pale smile. “Don’t try to tell me you have a naturally sunny disposition?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” She holds the drink for strength. “Maggie told me she and Kara were involved before we were together. For months.” The hurt seeps into Lena’s face. It makes her feel saner. “It must have been a shock.”

“I freaked out.” She tops her drink off. “You didn’t know.”

“No. Though on the night of the dinner I thought—.” Alex waits. Lena shakes her head. “I’m surprised you told me.”

“I needed to tell someone. Because I’ve been feeling like I’m going to explode.” She frowns lightly. “The two women I cared for more than anything— I’ve had a lot of anger.” She finishes her glass. “Sure you won’t have a drink?”

“If you’d like.”

“I would,” she gets a glass out and pours. “Drinking should be a social activity. Do it too often on your own and you’re a drunk.”

“Are you worried that’s what I’ll think?”

She blushes. “It was a joke.”

“It flew right over my head.”

“I wager that doesn’t happen often.”

“Mh.” She drinks.

“For what it’s worth…” Alex sets her glass down. “I know I’ll never understand how things are with your mom. But I know what it is to feel like you’ll never measure up. I wish things were better with mine. What you said about it being primal... It’s obvious when you’re not the favorite child. I was an only child for fourteen years. And then I wasn’t. Mom stopped looking at me the same way. So then you have to work for everything that you took for granted before. You’re always working for it. Like a mouse on a wheel. Going nowhere.” She wipes her lips gingerly, still tasting
the scotch on them.

“Does it still feel that way?”

“Sometimes.” She refills her glass. Lena places a hand over Alex’s, cupping the glass.

Lena’s fingers slide over hers, touching the glass. “Why don’t we indulge in something else?” Her chest tightens, fingers twitching against Lena’s. “Sometimes recklessness is a word we use when we find something unexpected. I know you’re not in love with me. You know I’m not love with you. If you must know… it isn’t often I’m wanted. I saw how you looked at me the night we went out together and I liked it.” Lena’s hand falls away from her own. “That isn’t to say it means nothing. We can have meaning. It doesn’t have to be everything. But sometimes, ‘something’ has its own merits. Friendship can mean many things.” Alex looks to her. “You invited me here.” She crackles with nervous energy.

“You’re just lonely.”

“There’s no ‘just’ about it. There are people out there who are ‘just’ dying. ‘Just’ starving. It still hurts.”

Alex brushes her fingers along her face.

xxx

Alex glances back from the stove.

Lena sits at the kitchen table, a blanket wrapped modestly around her. Maggie used to sit there in her oversized shirts, griping about work. She would look up at her, smiling as if she were the sun. Lena keeps her head bowed, reading an old CatCo magazine.

Alex sets a plate of eggs, bacon and toast in front of her. Lena smiles. “Is this for me?”

Alex sits across from her, her own plate in front of her. It’s nice to cook for someone else. “And coffee is coming up. Sorry, no caviar.”

“Heathen.” A beat. “That’s sweet,” she seems genuinely startled. “Thank you. I suppose I did know you cooked. Lovely Thanksgiving dinner and all.” She sets the magazine aside, folding her arms on the table to gaze at her, picking up the fork.

“I thought I’d beat you to the punch before you dragged me to another restaurant to burn a hole in my wallet.”

“You love the food.”

“I love my money more.”

“I’ll make sure to pay you back. Every penny.”

Alex gestures at her with the fork. “Nice dress. What’d it set you back?”

“A few hours in bed with a very generous woman. Don’t worry, I’m not planning on making sleepovers a habit.”

Alex cuts into her eggs, having a bite. Maggie spent a few nights over. Not as many as she would have liked. It was better in the end and then it ended. “Are you used to being thrown out first thing in the morning?”
“I’m not used to sleepovers at all.” She bites into the toast, goes to the kitchen, studying the coffee and pouring two mugs. She brings them back, carefully balancing the blanket. Silly, considering. She sets a coffee in front of her.

Alex slides it closer. “You could waitress.”

“Sure. I’ll leave the company behind. Mother would love it.” She sits again. “She could take back Lex-Corp and return it to its alien hating megalomaniacal ways.”

“She could try.”

Lena smiles. “I had fun last night. Not just…” she laughs lightly. “But talking. It’s nice to have someone for that.”

“Yeah.” One tentative kiss turned into another. Then Lena was on the bed, Alex undoing the garter belts and peeling her stockings away. “So, is this a thing we do now?” she has a drink of coffee, lamenting she can’t make it an Irish, hoping she doesn’t sound as nervous as she feels. “What will your friends think?”

“I’m afraid what my friend thinks would be up to my other friend.” She flicks her eyes at her. “Something tells me you’re in no hurry to talk about our friendship.”

“Are you ashamed of it?”

“No.” She has a few bites of food. “People make the mistake of assuming that a person has to reveal everything. Their most intimate secrets, deepest desires. Sometimes friendships exist on very little. On acceptance and trust. On comfort.”

Alex knows she’s thinking of her. “What made you fall in love with Kara?”

“You already know.”

The assistant leads her into Lena’s office.

Lena waits for her to leave before approaching. Alex hands her the coffee and Lena takes it with a wink. “You shouldn’t have.”

Alex smirks, thinking of the text she got from Lena requesting a coffee. She sets the bag of food on the table in front of the couch. They sit, Lena turning to face her, one leg crossed over the other. “It’s a zoo out there.” Getting through the L-Corp entrance proved more challenging than she anticipated. Hordes of reporters and news vans blocked the area, each hairsprayed newscaster breathlessly recounting what flimsy details they have on Lena Luthor before gravely announcing that she’s due to testify tomorrow. “How are you holding up?”

“Better now,” she has a drink of the coffee.

“You won’t convince me that there isn’t a coffee pot here somewhere.”

She smiles. “Guilty as charged. But there’s no Alex Danvers. Honestly, I’ve spent too much of my time looking down at the people below, wondering if the helicopters circling are trying to get a shot of me.” She looks out the glass walls. “That’d be one way to go public about our
Alex considers correcting her but doesn’t think she has the grounds. Friendships are a kind of relationship, even if theirs is only starting. “You just love making a scene.”

“I needed a break from it. You were my unlucky victim.”

“Is that why you called me here? You wanted to see me?”

“Don’t act so surprised.” She stands. “But if you must know, I haven’t only called you here to make coffee runs. How have you been?”

Alex lifts her eyebrows, sighs roughly. “Things could be better. I ran into Kara and Maggie at Noonan’s.”

“That sounds delightful.”

“Oh, yes, it was smashing.” She leans over, opening the box of treats she brought. This is what she’s used to doing with Kara. It’s become habit. Now Lena’s the only one she sees outside of work. “It was awkward. I don’t like how I felt when I saw them together. I don’t like how I reacted. It was… mean and… I don’t know. I should have been better.”

“We lash out when we’re hurt. We make amends. You’ll set things right with Kara.”

“How do you know?”

“Can you bear not to?” Alex smiles grimly. Lena moves to her desk, picking up a thin, rectangular box and bringing it to her. Alex looks up at her. “I did say I had ulterior motives when I invited you. Here they are.”

“What is it?”

“Drums.”

Alex looks at her suspiciously, gets to her feet to take the offering. It’s light. She pulls back the wrapping paper. The photograph of Fort Rozz from the exhibit. Looking at this picture reminds her of that day. It was long and brutal. Myriad was enacted. She fought Supergirl. Everyone’s head nearly exploded. And then Kara left to stop the menace, never to return.

She tries to make herself indifferent, to keep any emotion from her face. Her eyes narrow, feeling wet. It seems stupid now, small, to be angry at Kara for what happened. To keep her at a distance when anything might happen to take her away. She has to apologize to her. She has to make things right between them. Why did it take this picture to remind her? She remembers what J’onn told her after the fact, how Kara had asked him not to tell her her odds of making it out alive. She licks her lips. “How were you able to get this?” she finally says. “I can’t accept it.” But she only says the words, wants to keep it.

“You can and you will. Please. I never get to do anything for anyone. It would mean a lot to me.”

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“You can and you will. Please. I never get to do anything for anyone. It would mean a lot to me.”

“But how did you get it?”

“I was determined to have it. So I found a way.”

Alex wonders if she knows the photographer, if it was captured from Cadmus surveillance. Did she
rent out the exhibit for the night or did she buy out the entire gallery? The picture seems to be from another part of her life. Things were better then. She shouldn’t want this painting. She shouldn’t accept it. But she does. “It’s amazing.” She sets it down, giving her a brief hug before releasing her self-consciously. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” She pulls back to look at her. “It seemed to affect you at the exhibit.”

“Did you bring any home for yourself?”

“No.” There seems to be more to her response than the denial, a sort of sad acceptance of her lot. Once again, Alex wonders if Lena knows who Supergirl really is. “Although,” she says playfully, “I am a fan.”

“Who isn’t?” Cadmus. “Has she made any more late night visits?”

“No. She only appears when I need her. When I need a little encouragement.” She clasps her hands together, looking out the window. “I haven’t been able to focus on a single thing today.” Alex wonders if Supergirl will visit today, tomorrow. “Have you ever had to testify against a family member?”

She remembers being pulled into that room and being asked about J’onn at the DEO. “In a sense. A while ago. It was awful.”

“I was sick to my stomach when it was with Lex. I thought the moral high ground would feel better.” She smiles tensely. “I called the police on her that night. But when I was at her side, all I wanted was to be proven wrong. Even if I felt that it would cause an irreparable rift between myself and Supergirl.”

Alex takes a breath. “Maybe Lillian will come around one day.”

Lena’s nostrils flare, fingers curling, eyes cold. “Oh. I doubt it.”

“You don’t believe people can change?”

“I think people have a core and that’s who they are. The rest is dressing. You can switch it up however you like…but some things can’t be hidden. A person’s true self. Say what you will about Mother, but she knows me. When the police arrived, I saw…ah, it can’t even be called disappointment.”

Alex knows the look well. The pause in her mother’s eyes as she takes her in, lips parting to speak before deciding against it. But she’s warm with Kara. Glows with her. There she is: someone to be proud of. And only known to the world, because her sister failed to safeguard her. “I’ll sit in the audience tomorrow if you want.” Lena looks at her. “Only if you’re okay with it. It’s going to be a hard day.”

“You’d do that?”

“What are friends for?”

Lena twines her fingers, her laughter light and disbelieving.
“You’re getting dressed already?”

Maggie smiles, grabbing her shirt off the floor and pulling it on. “I can’t stay in bed all day.” No matter how much she wants to. Kara lies on her side watching her, reaching over to the nightstand and pulling her glasses on. Is it habit? She doesn’t need them. The apartment glows with morning sunlight. “So. I guess we’re not great at this taking it slow thing.”

“It felt like we took it slow forever,” she says.

Maggie slides her underwear on, standing and going to find her jeans. “I’m not complaining.” Besides, where would she be if she didn’t dive headfirst into everything? She steps into her jeans, pulls the zipper up and buttons them. She sits at the edge of the bed, slowly tugging the blanket towards her. Kara sits up, holding it close. “What are you up to today?”

“I was hoping I could see this hot detective once she got off her shift.” Maggie pretends to consider it. “Am I being too eager? I can’t help it, this is exciting.” She considers returning the words but smirks softly instead. “But before then, I’m off to fight with Snapper.”

“Our ace reporter, kicking ass, taking names.”

She laughs. “Mh, hm.” She kisses her. “And at some point I need to go see Lena. She testifies against her mom today.” Maggie stands, not sighing but her demeanor saying it all. Kara rises, too. A second later she’s standing in front of her, fully dressed. “Don’t tell me you’re mad.”

“I’m not,” she lifts her hands, finds her jacket draped over the couch and slips it on.

“Then what is it?”

Maggie sighs. “Look, it’s not a big deal,” Kara frowns, “but NCPD has an ongoing investigation against her.”

“That doesn’t not sound like a big deal. But why are they looking into her?”

“You know why.”

“You’re not going to find anything.” She’s angry again. “Just because a family member does horrible things doesn’t mean you’ll turn out the same.”

Maggie hopes not. She wonders if Kara will ever get that worked up over her. “Look, I don’t get to call the shots. Captain says jump, I say ‘how high?’”

“They wouldn’t put just anyone on this.” Her frown deepens. Yeah, she’s had run-ins with Cadmus. Yeah, she’s good. “How long have you known about this?” Maggie doesn’t answer. “Days? Weeks?”

“Why does it matter?”
“It matters.”

Maggie bites her tongue, walks to the door. The leftover brownies are siting on the kitchen island. “Long enough. And honestly, Kara, I’m telling you as a courtesy. This is off the record, all right?” Her eyes darken. “I can’t have you interfering with my job. This is a civilian matter, so friend or not, whatever we are or not, you and the DEO stay out of it.”

She scoffs. “Lena’s my friend. I’ll do my best to not interfere with your job, Maggie. But you can’t tell me what to do. Not when it’s important.”

Maggie smiles, bites her tongue so hard she tastes blood. She swallows the iron. “I’ll see you later.” She slams the door shut.

xxx

Alex strolls into her office at the station and Maggie minimizes the folder of pictures she’s looking through, captured off NCTV footage. Her day started off decently enough but went to shit more quickly than she was anticipating. She wonders if Kara is in denial with how she feels about Lena. Then questions whether her inability to understand a deep connection to a woman without attaching sex to it is the problem.

To complicate matters, she’s seen an alarming number of photos with Alex and Lena together, exiting buildings, entering buildings. The time stamps are telling. Something doesn’t add up. Not to anything she wants to see.

Alex wears one of her form fitting DEO shirts. Maggie wonders if she just left a shift. “Danvers,” she doesn’t get to her feet, is still trying to piece together why she’s spending time with Lena. Is this about Jeremiah? Is she trying to get answers? Or is it Lena’s pull, like a vortex? Just what the hell is it with Lena Luthor? “What brings you to the neighborhood? Didn’t exactly hit it off the last time we saw each other.”

“Yeah,” she nods. “I know you’re running an investigation on Lena Luthor.”

Well, she didn’t waste any time. Maggie bites back a swear. Did Kara tell her? Are they back on speaking terms? It’s what she wants, sure, but… “What makes you think that?”

“Winn ran a search on anyone who might be keeping tabs on her. We thought it might be Cadmus. Lo and behold, it’s NCPD.”

She wonders why Alex feels comfortable casually discussing illegal hacking with her. She’d get into it but doesn’t want her to stick around. “It’s not your business.”

“We had an arrangement before. Professional courtesy.”

“And it should never have happened and it’s definitely not happening now.” She stands, places her palms on her desk, tries to look at her and realizes she’s glaring. There is a stack of files sitting on the corner of her desk. She stares at them and counts to ten. “If that was all, you can go.”

“I know how things ended between us,” she says, as if she wasn’t there, as if she didn’t bear a brunt of it, her fucking hatred. It pisses her off. “I don’t forgive you, Maggie. But I can’t just … turn it off.” Turn what off? “I’ve said hurtful things. I said them because I was hurting.” Is she still hurting? Maggie felt only a twinge before she garroted herself, cutting it away before it could sink its claws too deep. “I’m trying to get used to it. You and Kara. But seeing you together feels like a knife in the gut. I wish it didn’t.”
“Why are you telling me this?” She sounds rougher than she means, is defensive and afraid to let herself be affected by her words. She continues, not wanting to hear. “Why are you here checking in on Lena Luthor? Jesus, what is it with her?”

Alex lifts her eyebrows. “She’s testifying against her mother.” Oh, this again. “I want to make sure there won’t be any surprises.”

“I’d say you’ve got a better handle on her than I do.” She sees the surprise in her face, gone almost instantly but there long enough for Maggie to go cold. “You have a job. I have a job. Stay out of my way. I’m not here busting my ass to do your job for you.”

“Maggie—”

“Leave, Alex.” She does. She’s past the main office door when Maggie’s arm whips to the side, throwing the files to the floor.

xxx

Are you finished with your shift?

Kara sent the text hours ago and has yet to receive a response. An uncomfortable feeling, like an anchor buries into her belly. She doesn’t know why everyone in her life is opposed to Lena. They don’t know her like she does. They don’t understand what’s between them. Kara can admit that in some ways, she doesn’t want them to understand. In many ways, being with her is the other side of the coin to being with Maggie.

She knows what it is to struggle with family and a legacy. But she has supports. She isn’t painted as a monster. Some of the reports coming out about today’s testimony terrify her. Despite how Lena’s performance is praised, too many articles spend the bulk of their time focusing on her motives.

Her phone rings and she pulls it out of her jacket, expecting Maggie. It’s Lena. She slides it open, walking the sidewalks of Metropolis under the streetlights, observing the people, going unnoticed. “Lena, hey,” her voice is brighter than she imagined.

“Is this a bad time?”

“Never.” She stops, looking at Superman’s monument, lit up in the darkness. She thinks of James’ warning. Lex and Clark were best friends too. But one doesn’t equal the other. They won’t be the same. “How are you?”

“Since you consoled me several hours ago, you mean?”

She hears the smile in her voice, the sadness. She forces herself to keep still, to not fly to her. She swallows any words indicating she’s happy to console her. She touches her glasses and smiles. “Since then, yes.”

“I saw my mother.” Glasses clink in the background. Kara hears something poured. Maybe she’s having a drink. “It was harder than testifying. I would have thought that impossible given how she watched me the entire time. She smiled as if she were only tolerating the game of a child.”

“I should have been there.”

“Don’t worry, I had a friend there for support.”
“Are you saying I was there in spirit?” She supposes she was.

Lena laughs. “After this miserable night I didn’t think I’d be laughing so soon. You’re something else.”

Kara bows her head, scratching her cheek gingerly. “Um. How was the talk with Lillian?”

“It was… enlightening. She told me she loved me.”

“That’s great!” Is that great? “I mean… do you think maybe you’ll be close to her?” It worries her that they could be.

“I doubt it. Honestly, Kara—the only time she ever cozies up to me is when she wants something. I can’t imagine why it would be different this time. I’ve racked my brain thinking about it but I’m coming up empty. She told me I’m a real Luthor. That I wasn’t adopted. She said a lot of things.”

Kara sits at the foot off the statue. “Do you believe her?”

“I don’t know. If she really loved me I’d think she would try harder. Sneak love messages into my alphabet soup.”

“You ate alphabet soup?”

“I’m trying to make a point. Why won’t you let me angst?”

She’d rather Lena smile than angst but she also knows how crushing the expectation is, how exhausting. “In all seriousness… maybe you need some time to process your feelings with your mom. I know it’s complicated but if you need a shoulder or a friend, I’m here. Or here. But I can be there.” She touches her glasses. “You know what I mean.”

“I do. Admittedly, I think it’s cute when you trip over your words.”

She massages her forehead gingerly. She wants to argue. She wants to laugh. She’s already blushing. “I know there’s another court date tomorrow. So I’ll go—”

“Oh.” That surprises her. “You don’t have to do that.”

“Of course I do. What are friends for? I’ll see you then, okay?” Lena reluctantly agrees and Kara quickly ends the call. She checks to see if Maggie’s responded to her text. Still nothing.

She flies back to National City, not sure whether to hit the alien bar, police station or her apartment first. Her apartment and the alien bar are busts. She drops a street over from the police station, waving and smiling to a bike cop before taking the stairs up to the station.

Jones isn’t at the desk; he’s been replaced by a platinum blonde in her fifties who doesn’t look to be having any of it. “Pretty young thing here at this time of night, bright look in her eyes.” Kara smiles nervously. “You here to report a crime?”


“Sawyer’s been holed up in her office.” Kara stares at her. “That’s who you’re here for, isn’t it? Just close the blinds.”

“Oh, I’m not—” but Morris has already lost interest. Kara blanches and moves back to Maggie’s office. She’s at the desk, a hand pressed to her temple, peering into the computer. There’s a stack
of files on the corner of the desk, going in different directions, pieces of paper poking out. It’s
different from Lena’s focus. There’s an intensity to Maggie, an undertow of anger. “Do I have
to take out a crime ad to get your attention?” Kara asks.

Maggie looks up at her blankly and then puzzled. “What’s a crime ad?” Kara shuts the door.
Maggie looks to the yellowed clock on the wall. It’s nearly midnight. “What are you doing here?”

“I wanted to see you.” She smiles, sticking her hands in her overcoat and moving closer. Maggie
looks back to the computer screen. Kara looks at the trash in the corner and the five Dunkin’
Donuts styrofoam cups there. “Long day?”

“It’s still going.”

“Right. Dumb question.” Maggie doesn’t respond. Kara takes the files and sees Maggie start up.
“Don’t worry. Confidentiality. I know. I’m not going to sneak a peek at your files.”

“I wouldn’t put it past you.”

“I like to think of myself as a dogged journalist.”

“No funny vision stuff, either.”

She smiles, adjusting her glasses, straightening the files, fixing the papers so they’re orderly.
Maggie types, scrolls, frowns. She wishes she’d look at her. She stares, waiting for her to but she
doesn’t. “Will you be out soon?”

“Don’t know.” Seconds pass and eventually Maggie looks at her. “You don’t have to wait. I know
you have work in the morning.”

“So do you.” Maggie isn’t deterred. “Anyway… I don’t need sleep. I’m never tired. Unless, you
know, it’s kryptonite,” she says more quietly. “That does slow me down.” Maggie nods absently.
“Hey. Hey,” the second time, when Kara puts a hand over hers she looks up. “Maybe I overreacted
this morning. I’m not saying I did but maybe.” She feels Maggie’s fingers curling beneath her.
“Last night was really great. The last thing I wanted was to ruin things.”

Yes. They’re bad at taking it slow. And yes, it’s true that it had still felt like forever. They were
nervous as if they’d never done anything like that before. Maggie was so careful. She could hear
her heartbeat, louder than the universe. She had wanted her so badly it felt like millennia before
Maggie finally touched her. She wasn’t able to keep quiet. She flushes again thinking about it.

“You didn’t ruin things,” Maggie turns her hand, for an instant her fingers grazing her palm. Then
she pulls her hand away.

“Are you sure?” She curls her fingers, sticks her hands in her pockets. “Because it kind of feels that
way.” Maggie gives a small shake of her head. “I’m still not sure of what we are. I like talking with
you and being with you.” There’s a crease in her forehead. “Everything’s different than it was
before.”

“What are you getting at?”

“This morning you said…” she tries to think of the wording. “‘Whatever we are’? I guess I don’t
know who gets to decide that. You said before that one person doesn’t get to decide. So do we get
to decide? Do we want to?”

Maggie licks her lips, leans back in her chair and takes a breath. “I don’t know, Kara. I mean,
sometimes you make me feel crazy.”

“I don’t mean to.”

“I know.”

“What does that mean, anyway? I make you feel crazy. That doesn’t sound good.”

Maggie gets to her feet. She stands opposite of her and Kara forces herself to not touch her. “It
doesn’t mean anything. Except that...” Kara waits. Maggie shakes her head. “It’s nothing, okay?”

“I don’t believe you.” She takes her hands. “Come on, let me take you home.”

Maggie finally allows a small smile. “Not sure which way you mean there.”

“Every possible way.”

“Tempting.” Another smile and Kara presses a kiss to her temple, to her cheek. “I really do have to
work, though.”

“You are a workaholic.” There’s a flash in her eyes. She decides not to ask about what Morris at
the desk said. How many girls come visit Maggie at night? How many of them stop visiting soon
after? “Fine. I accept that I’m not charming enough to drag you away from here.”

“Well, we’d hate for you to be unstoppable.”

“You mean you don’t want the world kneeling at my feet?” She thinks of what she said to Alex
when the red kryptonite got into her. She pushes it out of her head. She tries not to think of how
powerful she could be, unstoppable if she didn’t check herself.

“I’d be happy if you settled just for me.”

Kara kisses her, brief, happy when Maggie returns it with the same urgency. “Now you’re just
teasing me.” She touches her glasses. “Um. I don’t know when you’ll be done but I’ll leave the
door to my place open. Feel free to crash. If you want to sleep.” Her ears are hot.

Maggie clears her throat. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Kara kisses her again, fingers trailing along Maggie’s before she goes. Morris at the desk lowers
her glasses, looking at her over the top of them. Just like Snapper. She cringes, feeling like she’s
done something wrong. “Have a good night,” Kara tells her.

“Aren’t you sweet.” Morris fixes her with a long stare. “I give you a month.”

xxx

It’s nearly three in the morning when she leaves the station. Lena Luthor went to visit her mother
at some point in the night. She was there longer than Maggie would have suspected given their so-
called fraught relationship. They don’t have enough to get her call records.

She drives in a daze, thinking of Lena and Alex and Kara and wanting to stop thinking of all of
them. Maybe she should knock back a few beers. The shops are closed but she’s got a six-pack in
the fridge. She ends up at Kara’s and parks outside, debating with herself before letting herself into
the building and taking the stairs up.

Her heart always feels like it has a murmur when she’s around her. It flutters. She feels
lightheaded. She tries the door. It’s open. She enters, closing and locking it behind her, momentarily worried that she’s got company.

She’s in bed, alone. Maggie pulls her boots and jacket off. Kara hears, lifting. “You’ve arrived.” She sounds sleepy despite her assertions that she doesn’t need rest. Maggie crawls into bed with her and Kara pulls the covers over them. “I’m glad you came by,” she gives her a peck on the lips and snuggles close to her.

Maggie feels as if her heart will burst, some of the drowsiness pulling away with her. “You’re hard to resist.”

“So don’t.” But she wants to. Doesn’t want to be completely helpless against her. “Do you want to have dinner tonight?”

“Yes. Where?”

“I don’t care. Not Noonan’s.”

She chuckles. “It’s a date.” Another sweet kiss and Maggie feels herself trembling from cold or nerves or want. “Um.” Maggie waits. Kara shakes her head. “It’s nothing. Get some sleep.”

Maggie nods, starting to drift away. Kara turns on her side and Maggie presses close, wrapping an arm around her waist. She tenses, knowing she’s done it without asking, when they never have before. “Sorry, I’m just tired,” she says.

“That’s why I said to get some sleep.” She presses her back against her, lacing their fingers in front of her.

Lena’s nowhere to be seen but Alex stands at the courtroom doors waiting. Kara squints, not knowing why she does—her vision is perfect and that’s Alex, clear as day. She goes still. Why is Alex here? Does she want to ream her out for supporting her? Is she just keeping tabs on Lena? Alex has given her half-hearted smiles at the DEO. It’s an improvement but it’s not the same. Seeing her only reminds her of how much she misses her.

But she woke up this morning with Maggie in her bed. As much as she tells herself she doesn’t feel guilty, as much as she tells Maggie they have nothing to be ashamed of—as much as she knows it—she can’t help it. Especially now that she sees her. She takes a breath, holding tightly to her purse strap and walking over.

Alex is playing on her phone and doesn’t see her approach. She waits for her to finish texting, look up and see her, the surprise on her face. Kara smiles apologetically. “Hi. I thought I should say hi.” Sometimes she wonders if she ever really mastered English. “I’m here for Lena.” A beat. “I mean, obviously. I’m not here for Lillian.”

Alex cocks her head. “Kara. You’re rambling.”

She spoke to her. Without a scowl, without snark, without a biting tone. Kara takes a breath, feels the air flooding into her lungs, feels the stupid grin on her face. Touches her glasses. “I’ve been known to do that.” Do you still hate me? “I wasn’t—I wasn’t expecting to see you here. Did… J’—Did Hank send you?”
“No.”

Kara waits. She stops when she sees Lena approaching. Kara moves, meeting her halfway. “Hey,” she hugs her. Lena returns the embrace, smiling when she pulls back. “Ready for today?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be. Is it too much to hope that she’ll be on her best behavior given our chat last night?”

“We can hope.” She turns to Alex. “You remember my sister Alex.”

“Of course,” Lena says.

They exchange looks and Kara smiles quizzically. “Actually,” Alex says, “I’m here for Lena. In support.” Kara’s eyebrows lift, lips parting in surprise. “It’s just that we met a while back and we started hanging out.” Kara blinks. “And I know that she’s your friend and—”

“Now we’re friends,” Lena says.

“Right,” Alex nods.

Kara closes her mouth. “Wow. Well. That’s great. Um.” She touches her glasses. “I’m glad. I’m… surprised but I’m happy. I’m really happy.” Lena and Alex shift, exchanging another glance before looking back to her and smiling. Kara smiles back even more brightly. “So we’re all here together today. That’s great. Really great.”

Alex smiles and the courtroom doors open. “Why don’t you go ahead,” she tells Lena. “We’ll be right in.”

“I’ll save you seats to the circus,” she says, moving in.

Kara holds the purse. “That’s really great,” she says again.

“Yeah, I heard the first five hundred times. You’re not going to be weird about this, are you?”

Kara waits for the anger, for the taunt but it doesn’t come. “Weird? Why would I be weird? Lena needs friends. And you’re… you’re you, Alex. So. So, yeah. I’m happy.”

Alex bites her lip thoughtfully. “All right. Great. Because it felt weird keeping it from you. Not that I was keeping it. We just haven’t been talking.” She grimaces. “And I know that’s my fault.”

“I don’t want to talk about blame. Or blame me, if you want. I don’t care. I’m just happy you can look at me again. Talk to me again.” Alex nods, blinking the shine out of her eyes. “I’ve missed you so much.”

Alex steps forward, hugging her. “Me, too.” She keeps her arms locked around her. Kara closes her eyes, breathing deeply. She releases her. “You’re not going to cry on me, are you?”

Kara laughs, blinking quickly. “So you can make fun of me?”

“That was one time and I was fourteen. When are you going to let it go?” They walk into the courtroom. The media is already perched in the back, setting up their camera equipment. She sees a number of cameras honed in on Lena and momentarily imagines zapping them into submission.

Alex goes to sit beside her and Kara hangs back, wondering if Alex was the reason Lena told her she didn’t have to come today. They turn to each other, getting into some quiet conversation and Kara tries to read their faces, glean meaning from it, but can read nothing that belies what they’ve
said.

She goes to sit beside them, feeling for the first time in their presence, as if she doesn’t belong.

xxx

“What happened here today is a terrible thing,” Lena says, her face lighting bright white with all the camera flashes. “I want National City to know that I do not condone the actions of my mother Lillian Luthor or those of John Corben. That’s all I have to say on this matter.”

The cameras continue to click, the reporters chasing after her. Supergirl turns off her selective hearing, unsure of how to right the crane that Metallo knocked down. A squadron of NCPD vehicles are rolling up and she sees Maggie get out of one of the cars, hands at the gun holsters are her sides before her jacket falls down to hide them. She spots her and moves over. “Supergirl. Mind telling me what’s going on?”

“I know about as much as you.” She lets a few of the officers wander past her. “Metallo lost it in court, started attacking everyone. He escaped with Lillian.”

“How the hell was this allowed to happen?”

“Are you saying I should have stopped him? Maggie, I tried.”

“That’s not what I mean. How did anyone get him kryptonite to do this?” She lowers her voice. “I thought Superman took it all.”

She wonders how Maggie knows that. Alex must have told her. “That’s what I thought, too.”

“Then explain this to me.”

Kara takes a breath. “I will try to find out what happened. We both will. But we’re on the same side.” Alex strides over. Maggie and Alex momentarily lock eyes before they shift and look away. A heavy silence passes. “Did you get a look of where they were headed?” She asks Alex.

“No. They vanished in the chaos.”

“Think your new pal Lena might know?”

“What? No.” Kara hates that they speak in unison. They look at one another and back to Maggie. Kara thinks if she had a tail it’d be between her legs. “I saw her in court,” Kara continues. “She was terrified. There was no way she knew this was coming.”

Maggie rubs her forehead. “Well, if you don’t mind the NCPD will parse that.” A few of the uniforms come up to her. “Set up a perimeter. I want this whole area blocked off. And get the media out of here.” They go, scattering in different directions. Maggie returns her attention to them.

“We should probably get back to the DEO,” Kara tells Alex. “Maybe there’s some way to track them down there.” Alex nods. She looks to Maggie. “What will you do?”

“Take down witness statements, look through any available footage.”

“We can do that,” Alex says. “Winn can set something up—”

“You know, I like to think I can still do my job without the help of the DEO,” Maggie says. Kara frowns gingerly.
Alex settles her hands on her hips. She’s ready to say something, glances at Kara and decides against it. “All right. Meet you back at the DEO, Supergirl. Maggie.” She nods and takes off.

Kara crosses her arms. “What was that about?” She isn’t sure if she means Alex and Maggie or Maggie’s mood.

“It’s about the DEO swooping in and thinking they can do everything. I get that you guys have more resources than the NCPD but we still have a job and we do it by the book, all right?”

“All right. We just want to help.”

“It’s patronizing.”

“No, it’s not.” She shakes her head. “What’s going on with you?”

“Nothing’s going on with me. I’m trying to do my job; I’m looking at all the facts.”

“You mean Lena.”

“One of us has to be clear-headed; and if the DEO isn’t going to do it, then I will.”

Kara smiles tightly. “Okay.” She crosses her arms, forces them loose. “I feel like there’s something more than Metallo going on right now. And if there is, let’s talk about it. But not here, not now.”

Maggie steps back, putting her hands on her waist. “I don’t want us to fight.” Her voice shakes and she isn’t sure if it’s with anger or if she’s scared their work will continue to cause friction between them. “I have to go.” Maggie half-nods, moving over to a swarm of reporters refusing to leave the property. “Will I see you later?” They had dinner plans. She still hopes they have dinner plans.

Maggie looks back at her. “Wouldn’t miss it.”

xxx

They’re walking to Maggie’s car when Kara remembers Maggie requested anywhere but Noonan’s. Kara flushes guiltily, doesn’t know how she forgot. It’s always been her go-to, her easy shortcut. Maggie’s been sullen all night, nursed her two beers before deciding she’d had enough.

Kara debates. Does she address it now and apologize or does she let it go and try to make it up to her later? Maggie’s been working long days. Is it worth it to add to her aggravation, especially when she isn’t sure what’s bothering her? Is it Lena? Alex? Her? Rao, she wishes she had some guidance. She wishes she could talk to Lena or Alex about it.

“So this is where we part ways,” Maggie says fishing the keys out of her pocket.

Kara reaches out and takes them. “Let me drive you home.”

“I’m not drunk.”

“Then think of it as letting me spend more time with you.”

“You hate being in a car.”

“But I like being with you.” Maggie relents and Kara opens the passenger side door for her. Maggie gets in and Kara shuts the door, going around to the driver’s side. She starts the car, gets the air conditioning going. She pulls out onto the streets and watches the slow trailing of the lights in the dark. “I’m sorry about Noonan’s,” she says. “I blanked on it. Forgive me?”
Maggie smiles tiredly. “Yeah. But next time I get to pick.”

“Deal.” She drives further, stopping at a red traffic light, wondering what she has against Noonan’s anyway. “You’ve been quiet tonight.”

“I’m just tired.”

“Are you sure? It seemed like you were agitated earlier at the courthouse.”

“Metallo going to town isn’t enough reason to be agitated?” Kara looks at her and doesn’t like the question nor the implication that she doesn’t care about those things. “I was doing my job, Kara. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“It seemed like more.”

“Maybe you’re reading into it,” she snaps. She massages her forehead, sighs, leans back into the seat and closes her eyes. Kara watches her, the hard line of her jaw. Someone behind them honks. The light has turned green. Kara drives on. “Forget it.”

“No, I won’t.”

“I had a job before you, before Alex. I know we’re not as flashy as the DEO but let me do my job without taking it personally. I’ve worked my ass off to get where I am. When I’m not doing my job it shows. I can’t just tell them that a black ops government agency is on it. Even if I could, my work’s important to me.”

“I’m sorry if I came across as not…” she sighs. “I don’t want us to always be fighting about Lena.”

“This isn’t about Lena.”

“Isn’t it?”

“No, Kara. But I think it’s funny that you didn’t mention you were going to be at her mother’s trial today.”

Kara tightens her grip on the steering wheel. “I thought about telling you.”

“But you didn’t.”

“I didn’t want it to seem… I didn’t want to upset you.”

“I just wonder why you felt the need to hide it.” Kara pulls the car over on the side of the road and turns the hazards on. “Why have you stopped?”

“Because I want to listen to you.” Maggie’s brow burrows further. “I know you’re mad about Lena but are things okay with you and Alex?” She looks at Maggie but can’t read her face. The only one she’s ever been able to read is Alex and not even her anymore. “I know you broke up. But there was this… tension earlier.” An electricity. “Am I missing something?” Maggie’s shaking her head. “Do you still feel something for her?”

“Why would you ask me that?”

“It’s just a question.” Maggie doesn’t answer and Kara doesn’t know whether she finds the question insulting, ridiculous or whether she still feels something for her. “Why does Morris at the station give me a month?” Maggie’s so still Kara isn’t sure she’s heard her. “Do you have a lot of girlfriends?”
“What is this?” Maggie sits up. “Why are you asking me about Morris at the station?” Kara doesn’t know how to respond, doesn’t really know why she’s asked. “I’ve seen other women, yeah. You knew that. Morris is an asshole.”

“I shouldn’t have asked.” But why can’t she ask? She turns the car on again and clutches to the wheel. Maggie touches her hand. Kara’s grip softens. Kara reluctantly looks at her. “I swear I’m not trying to piss you off.”

“Yeah, I know.” She covers her face with her hands, sighs. Lowers her hands. Centers herself. Kara waits. “Noonan’s is... I just don’t have a lot of great memories from there, okay?” A breath. “I have been working a lot. Does it bother me that you’re friends with a woman I’m currently investigating? Yes. And I wish I could say that my concern is strictly professional. I know how you feel about it,” she says more quietly. “I’m trying to change how I feel about it. Maybe I’ll get there but I’m not there yet.” She stares down at her lap. “She keeps popping up in every aspect of my life. Work. With you. With Alex.” Kara stops breathing. With Alex? “I don’t know. Maybe it’s as simple as being jealous of her. She’s rich, she’s smart, she’s gorgeous and she’s... so important to you.”

“You’re important to me.” You said you need her, Kara. You’re Supergirl. I don’t know how to compete against someone like that.”

“It’s not a competition. It’s not.” She leans closer, cradling Maggie’s neck with the back of her hand, pressing their foreheads together. “Maybe I’m not one hundred percent sure of what it is that I have with Lena but—” It’s the wrong thing to say and Maggie tenses, seeming to turn to stone. She tries to pull away but Kara doesn’t let her. “I said that wrong.” She takes a breath. “She’s my friend. And maybe it’s a weird and inexplicable friendship but you’re...” she struggles for a word and lets go.

Maggie sits for a moment longer before she steps out of the car and walks to the driver’s side. Kara looks up at her and gets out. “I’ll drive. You can go home.”

“I don’t want to.”

“I want you to.”

Her insides twist. A few cars drive by and Kara looks after them, trying to find words to fix this and once again, frustrated at her inability. Everything is so easy with Lena. There are no demands. No expectations. In some way, no challenges. She doesn’t know how to explain it to Maggie, whether she should. She pulls the inside of her lower lip in, biting delicately. She touches her glasses and exhales. “All right.”

She’s off, flung herself into the sky, racing, racing upwards until she’s nearly breached the surface of the earth. Anger courses through her, slow and hot, despite the altitude. She doesn’t know how long she stays up there. Until the cold settles over her, ice crystals forming on her fingertips. She frowns before hurling back to National City, dropping down in front of Maggie’s building.

Maggie’s shutting the door to the car when she spots her. She frowns, jamming the keys into her pocket and walking closer. “What are you doing here?”

It seems that Maggie is always asking, asking enough that Kara wonders whether she actually wants her around. “Please don’t send me away.”

Maggie lifts her gaze, looking towards the stars before shaking her head, nodding at Kara to follow her. Kara does and they walk into the building, Kara trailing after her, one step after another. The
building lights flicker. She takes in the peeling paint, the creaky stairs and wonders why she lives here. She refuses to believe she can’t afford better.

Maggie opens the apartment, gesturing for her to enter. She walks inside and Maggie moves in, closing the door behind her. She leans into it. She watches her. Moments pass and she pulls her jacket off, throwing it on the couch. She goes to the fridge. “Want a beer?”

Kara shakes her head, twining her fingers anxiously. “Actually, do you mind not having one either? Just for a few minutes.”

Maggie smiles bitterly, sets the beer back inside and shuts the door. “Okay.”

Her chest is tight again. “I know I keep asking you to be patient with me. I don’t know if it’s right for me to keep asking.” She paces. “But please, just let me keep asking.” Maggie touches a hand to the dining room table, doesn’t look at her. When she does, Kara continues. “This… everything with you… has been like learning a new language for me. Baby steps. Every little thing feels big and exciting. And every slip I make is terrifying. Every time I see how I’ve hurt you I think … ‘that’s it’. You’ll walk away. I know what the world sees or what they think I am.” She stops moving and looks at her. “I’ve lost a lot of people. And I’ve let others down. I know I’m not meant to be perfect. I just don’t want to hurt you. And I’m afraid that you’ll hurt me.” A beat. “I’m jealous of Alex. Of what you may feel for her and you know or you don’t know. Of being compared to her.” What if Alex is better? Better at talking, better in bed, better at not making her feel awful about herself? More like a normal adult. “I know you said feelings aren’t black and white. Grey’s hard for me.” She laughs, touches her glasses. “Sometimes I’m afraid of going out and letting the rest of the world in. Sometimes I think it would be easier to live in a fantasy world.” She thinks of the Black Mercy.

“I don’t want you to be fantasy. I don’t want us to be a fantasy.”

Kara breathes easier. “Sometimes it feels like you’re shutting me out. Or you’re… shutting down. And I overreact and I want to be closer and to understand so I push.” She goes to her. “I know I’m not normal. But sometimes I wish I could be. I don’t want to lose this. I don’t want to lose you. I don’t get to have many things.”

Maggie palms her face, smiles tiredly. “Relax.”

“You didn’t want to see me. You didn’t want to be near me.” She stops herself from saying more, afraid her voice will quake. “I just don’t want to be abandoned.”

“If it makes you feel better, nine times out of ten I’m the one getting kicked to the curb.” Kara doesn’t understand. “So, chances are on your side.” Maggie lets her go. “I’m not exactly good at any of this stuff either. It’s kind of a running joke at the station,” she laughs but it’s forced. She touches her hair; it falls over her face before she pulls it back. She takes a seat on the couch and Kara joins her. “I’ve said that I’ve never known anyone like you. That has nothing to do with Supergirl. The way you look at me. I could get used to it, you know.”

“So why don’t we get used to it?” Kara shifts. “Why aren’t we dating? I mean… do you not want to date me? Do you… not want a girlfriend?” Maggie looks anxious. “I said I’d let you take the reins… and maybe I’m falling right back into habits with too many questions again. But I’m curious.” She smiles. “Am I too weird?”

“Sure, you are. But that has nothing to do with it.” She smiles nervously. “You know that expression, the bigger they are, the harder they fall?” A beat. “I’ve only had a few serious relationships in my life. I mess things up. Every time. Before you, in Gotham—there was someone.
And I…” she laughs, leaning forward, elbow on her knee, chin in her hand, “I never thought I’d get over her. She drove me crazy. I didn’t like how she did things. But I never thought I deserved her, either.”

Kara thinks of the newspaper clippings in the box, the ones Maggie was so possessive about. “I thought you’d never met anyone like me.”

“I haven’t. You’re nothing alike. She’s…” her eyes glaze over, she shakes her head. “But what you have in common is… the drive to do whatever it takes for the right reasons. She’s darker than you. She isn’t bottled sunshine, you know…?” Her fingers reach out, toying with Kara’s hair. Kara leans closer. “I’m scared. Of not measuring up. Of ruining things. Of ruining you.”

“How…?”

“I’m not on good terms with any of my exes. The first few you can excuse. But eventually you can’t help but realize the only constant is you. I’ve seen nice girls become not so nice girls. I don’t want to make you bitter or jaded… I don’t want to make you… not you.”

“You won’t.” She cups her face. “You won’t.” Maggie smiles uncertainly. “Should I change into my other outfit? I hear that one’s really inspiring.”

“Nah. I like this one.” She scoots closer, resting her head on her shoulder. They sit in silence for a few minutes. “So, Kara Danvers. What do you say to being my girlfriend?”

Her stomach does flips. Her heart beats like a moth’s wings, flickering around a light. She tries to sound like she hasn’t gone into an excited panic. “That depends. Do we get a cool Hollywood couple mashup name?”


“Mh, but what do you get out of it?”

“An enigma.” Maggie lifts her face to look up at her. “I don’t know how you do it. Every word that comes out of your mouth is sincere. Even when it’s pissing me off.” She smiles. “It’s hard for me to be like that. Even when I want to be. So what do I get? A partner in crime. Someone who pushes me to be better. To be patient. To be kinder.” She looks away from her, embarrassed. “And a hot alien babe. Can’t forget that.”

Kara clears her throat, swallows. “So I’m supposed to pretend I’m your first alien girlfriend?”

Maggie smiles, bowing her head and Kara feels lost again. Reading Maggie is like learning another language. Her silences confuse her, her words, her smiles.

Kara touches her, picks her up, takes her to the wall where Maggie first had her. Only contact seems irrefutable. Transparent. Maggie wraps her legs around her waist and Kara presses her to the wall. Maggie’s heart beats uncontrollably.

Kara remembers how it was the first time between them. The sensation that gripped her, like nothing ever had before. Euphoria. Her body and world come alive. It shocked her, how much she came to crave that feeling. There was something so honest and simple about physical pleasure. It just was. It just is. When Kara kisses her, it’s Maggie’s lips that tremble.
A/N: Rated M for mature. (And Maggie).

Maggie waits at the park, leaning into the railing. Pinks and purples light the water. The geese swim, slowing to a stop when they notice her. She scowls and glances at her watch. 5:58am. She hears footsteps behind her but her wrist is seized before it can go to the pistol at her back.

“It’s too early to be this tense,” Alex lets go and Maggie relaxes, bringing her arms back to her side. She remembers vividly doing the same to Alex the first time she brought her to the alien bar. Maybe that’s what started everything. Those borderline professional touches. While she had a girlfriend. “Unless that was meant for me.”

“That’s not funny.” Maybe nothing is funny anymore where Alex Danvers is concerned. Despite the hour Alex looks awake, almost jovial. She presses her back to the railing. It’s easier to look at the water than at her. “I know it’s early.”

“I was awake.”

Maggie nods. The geese are swimming towards the bank, their beady eyes honed on her. “I figure my DEO clearance has already been revoked so I thought it’d be easier to talk to you in person.”

“Professional courtesy? I thought those days were over.”

Yeah, they should be. She grips the railing, already warming from the heat of the day. She could apologize for last time but thinks there's no use in hashing things over. “I'm just here to tell you to be careful. Same as Kara.” Alex looks at her. “I've been working around the clock on my investigation. The only person that visited county the night before John Corben's testimony was Lena Luthor. I know you've been spending time with her and I know she and Kara are close. It's possible that I may have to bring her in for questioning. If that happens, I don't want you or your sister interfering.”

Alex scoffs. “Seems like a conversation you should have with her.”

“I already have.”

“So your concern was really more of a warning.”

Maggie grips the railing. “I don't really care what way you want to take it.”

Alex turns, facing the water with her. Their shoulders nearly brush. “Something's eating you up.” Maggie hears the smile in her voice and furrows her eyebrows further. “I'm an early bird but I think you might have gotten the jump on me this morning, given how coherent your text message was.”

“It's just habit. And the steady drip of coffee running through my veins.”

“So something on your mind.” Alex says. Maggie smirks tiredly. “You know, this being able to
read you thing doesn't stop because we broke up. What's going on?"

“Look, no offense, Danvers, but I'm not ready to be all buddy buddy with you.” She takes a step away from the railing. “I'm hoping I won't have to pull Lena in but if I do—stay out of it, okay?”

Alex takes a breath and slides her hands in her jacket pocket. “Is that it?”

Maggie doesn't know. She gauges her, tries to determine how authentic she is. Why didn't she realize at the time how much simpler things were with her? It didn’t feel like she had to compete for her affections. It wasn’t so goddamned complicated. “Yeah, I guess.”

“You two dating yet?”

“Am I supposed to believe you'd suddenly be cool with it?” Alex looks off. “I doubt you've forgiven and forgotten. Hate me forever, right?” Not the exact words but what it felt like. Thinking of that night still stings. Stupid feelings.

“I don’t hate you.”

Moving on to Lena Luthor probably helps. She’s irritated she can still wonder what might have been with Alex, if she gave up a solid thing for something fleeting with Kara. Girlfriends and all. She doesn’t know what to say. Shouldn’t say any of it. Better to focus on why she called her here. “You won't run to Lena with this, will you?”

“You could have not said anything and I wouldn't have been the wiser.”

“Yeah, I doubt that.” She takes a breath, looks up at the sun and thinks of her. “I’m worried Kara will do something crazy. Interfere with the criminal process.”

“I'm the one with the short fuse.”

Maggie smiles bittersweetly. “Yeah? You haven't seen how she gets around her.”

xxx

Kara’s there because of course she is.

Maggie ignores her, setting her eyes on Lena Luthor who looks puzzled and then panicked. Maggie shows her the evidence but only lets her view it once. She’s looked at it over and over again, had the IT guys scan it for any abnormalities. Nothing. She brought the kryptonite to county. She got it to Metallo to bust her mother out. She’s guilty.

“Turn around,” she tells Lena. Lena does, in a daze. Maggie pulls the cuffs from her belt, studies her pale, delicate wrists as she places the cuffs on her. The metal clicks into place as she tightens them. Kara’s watching her. She feels her face burn. She wants her to look away, go away, just fucking trust her for once. “Too tight?” Lena doesn’t say anything. Maggie slides her finger between the metal and Lena’s wrist, feels, or imagines, the frantic drum of her pulse. “Hey.”

Lena shakes her head.

“Maggie.” It’s Kara. Maggie looks at the uniforms. Considers telling them to leave. Can’t. Is afraid of taking convenient shortcuts when it suits her. “Maggie, I’m the one who told her to go see her mother.”
“We’ll take her out the back way,” she tells the others. She hazards a glance at Kara. Her cheeks are flushed, her eyes shining. Anger? Sadness? Her fists clench and unclench until finally she crosses her arms. She reads Lena her rights and walks her out the door. The L-Corp staff watches them apprehensively, binders clutched to their chests.

“Tell me there is a back way,” she tells Lena.

“Do you trust me to lead you to it?”

Maggie smiles tightly while the officers walk towards where Lena points them. Kara follows, grabs her arm and Maggie looks back. Kara flinches. “This is a mistake,” she says.

“Kara,” Maggie fights to keep her voice even, to keep from exploding, “I’m going to have to ask you to back off and let me do my job.” She won’t say please. She shouldn’t feel guilty for not saying ‘please’ while working. She’s starting to tremble, feels so goddamned angry for being put in this position, for being undermined while doing her job. Do you respect anything I do? Is the NCPD a joke to you? What would Supergirl and the DEO see in a police officer?

Kara looks away and steps back. Then she reaches out and touches Lena’s arm. Lena who looks at her steadily. “We’re going to figure this out,” she tells her. “I promise.”

Maggie’s nostrils flare. She moves Lena forward more roughly than she intends to.

xxx

They take the elevator down. The uniformed officers discussing the latest football game as if they’re coaches on their off time. Maggie stares at Lena’s back, irritated at how tall she is, looking down at her glistening heels, the meticulous designer clothes. Her perfume is nice. They step out the elevator and go out the back but reporters have parked out there too.

Maggie swears inwardly. “Do you want to cover your face?”

“Why bother? They know who I am.”

Maggie walks her through the crowd, blinking at the flashes of light. Officer Wells opens the rear door and Maggie presses a hand carefully to Lena’s head, pushing her down and into the backseat. Lena scoots over awkwardly, and Maggie leans in, grabbing the seatbelt and strapping her in. She takes hold of the strap, pulling it from her neck, straightening it along her shoulder. She thinks Kara would want her to do that. Their eyes end up meeting. “You all right?”

“I’ve been better,” her smile is light, her eyes cold.

Maggie slams the door shut. She gets into the driver’s seat. Wells sits beside her. They drive to the police station in silence.

xxx

Lena sits primly in the interrogation room. Maggie watches her through the double sided glass. She glances at her phone. Nothing from Kara. She considers texting her but doesn’t know what to say. She’s still pissed about earlier.
She finishes her vending machine coffee and enters the interrogation room, bringing the tablet with her. Lena's hands are cuffed to the bar on the table in front of her. Maggie points to the camera mounted on the wall. “This is being recorded.” Lena looks at it but says nothing. “Want something to drink?”

“Is this the good cop routine? Where's bad cop?” Maggie looks back at her. “Are you bad cop?”

Maggie smiles. “Why don’t you state your name for the record?”

“Have you forgotten it already?” Her eyes don’t match her smile. She looks at the camera. “Lena Luthor.”

“You’ve been read your rights.”

“Yes.”

“But you haven’t called an attorney in.”

“Do you believe I need an attorney?”

“Given the nature of these charges, it wouldn’t hurt.” She laces her hands in front of her. Her jaw is clenched too hard. She looks at her hands. They’re relaxed. “Why did you visit your mother last night?”

“Her attorney left me countless messages, insisting she needed to speak to me.”

“After you had testified in open court against her. You thought it wise to engage with the defense counsel?”

“So bring in her attorney for witness tampering.” There’s a flicker of hesitation. “As wise as I think I am to my mother, she always seems to be one step ahead.” Lena’s fingers fiddle. The cuffs have made her wrists red. “I know what you saw in that video, but it wasn’t me.”

“It’s as clear as day.”

“Technology can be manipulated.”

“That’s an awfully convenient excuse given the rather damning evidence.” She pulls the surveillance video up on the tablet, plays it for her again. She pauses it when Lena turns towards the camera. “That’s your face.” Lena shakes her head. Convincing. Maybe if she believed that J’onn was the kind of man to set her up. “If you are being forced into this and you want to be forthcoming we can work together—”

“I didn’t bring kryptonite into that place, Detective. I would never work to help that man or my mother. After the despicable things that they’ve done! I called the police on her, I dismantled that isotope, if not for me—” she stops, eyes wet, before they’re dry and cold again. She shakes her head. “No matter what I do you people will never believe me.”

“Maybe ‘we’ people know that some are masters at playing the long con.” Maggie knows that she killed John Corben. Or did before Lillian Frankensteined him. “You’re clearly an intelligent and successful woman.” Lena frowns now. Maggie takes a moment. “You say you don’t trust your mother but you still pushed visiting hours and went to see her late at night. The Luthors have a reputation in this country. Why risk it if you’re not involved in some way?”

Maggie grits her jaw. She has to ask. No matter how it will implicate her, how it will implicate Kara, how it will implicate all of them, how it will call into question their ethics and professional boundaries. “Can you state your friend’s name for the record?”

Lena takes a breath. She leans back into the chair. “I’d like to have my one call.”

xxx

They take her to county. Maggie stands back, watching as they take her hands, rolling her fingers over glass to scan her prints into the system. Lena remains composed even as the guys at intake snicker, as the other inmates in dry cell peer out of their cells curiously at her. One smears shit on the glass. She sees urine coming out of the cell while the COs joke about who has to clean it up.

Lena looks as if she’s shut down.

Maggie isn't sure whether she's here to keep an eye on her or, in some twisted way, as support. She could have dropped her off and left. Instead, she stands with the tech taking Lena’s picture. Look straight at the camera. Now turn to the side. Maggie studies the shots. Even her jail ID looks like some edgy cover of Vogue. He gives her Lena’s ID, still warm from the presses. Lena Luthor 925665. Maggie studies the prison number, remembers it. Kara seems so adamant. What if she’s making a mistake? She feels sick. No. It’s not a mistake. Kara isn’t thinking clearly. The evidence is there.

A hefty butch walks towards Lena. Lena looks at her warily. The CO pushes the blue inmate uniform at her. “You need to change. Come with me.”

Lena blinks. “Can’t I change on my own?”

“Hey, boys,” the CO calls out to the others, “Princess Luthor here wants to change on her own.” There’s laughter and whistling. “Let me take you to your suite.”

“Well there’s no need to—” Lena starts.

“Zip it, Luthor. You don’t get to do anything on your own.” She pushes the uniform at her again and again Lena doesn’t take it. “Are we going to have a problem?” The CO throws the uniform at Maggie who barely catches it. “I’ve been here for nineteen hours and the last thing I need is one of the shitheels you bring in giving me lip. When she’s changed let us know and we’ll haul her off to her cell.”

“That’s not my job,” Maggie says.

“Yeah, well I’m real fucking tired of doing mine,” she walks off.

Maggie holds the uniform as if she’s been given poison. She glances at Lena. “I’ll find someone else.”

Lena is white, gives a brief shake of her head. “I just want to get this over with.”

Kill me now. Maggie nods, more to herself, more for incentive, to get moving. “Right. Well, it’s this way.” She walks down the end of the hall to one of the small rooms with a dingy curtain for privacy. She ushers her in and sets the uniform down on the aged table with the rusted edges. She turns briefly, putting on a pair of blue gloves and grabbing a few ziplock bags. She shuts the curtain behind her. “Um.” She touches her forehead. “So you need to remove everything. Not
everything. You can leave your underwear on. And your bra, if it doesn’t have a wire.” Lena looks about anxiously. “They have a metal detector so they’ll be able to tell if it does.” *Stop talking.*

Lena looks around the room, drab and concrete. Outside of the desk there’s only a plastic, scuffed and stained chair. A grey bin on the floor. “Can I turn around?”

Maggie bites her tongue. “Sorry. No.” Her face grows hot. She’s going to fucking let the sheriff hear it about the CO. Lena doesn’t move. “Hey. I hate this as much as you do.”

A soft scoffing sound. “Somehow I doubt that.” She pulls the blouse up slowly, before folding it and setting it beside the uniform. She unzips the skirt next and pulls it down. Her flesh is pale like alabaster. Maggie stands silently, forced to watch, her mouth dry. Has Kara seen her this way? She’s seen this a hundred times. Only now does she feel like a pervert.

“The jewelry too,” Maggie says. She grabs a bin. “You can put it here. We’ll bag it up. And you’ll get it when you go. Or if there’s someone you want to give it to…”

Lena smiles morosely, putting the items away. “Not going to make me squat and cough?”

“Um. No. You don’t have a drug trafficking history, so. I imagine you don’t have kryptonite stashed away somewhere?” *Oh, God, please don’t let her have kryptonite stashed somewhere.*

She smirks gently. “Now that’d be foolish of me, wouldn’t it?” A beat. “Given the seriousness of my charges.”

Has she been with Supergirl? Does Kara differentiate between the two? *Stop thinking with your clit and focus. Forget Kara.* “You need to take the pin out of your hair.” Lena does. Her hair comes spilling down. Maggie bags the items and glances at her, the curves, the expensive, black lacy undergarments. Does Lena see her looking? Does she think she’s attracted to her? Does she know she’s jealous? Does she know she’s beautiful? The longer she’s here, the angrier she gets. “I’m surprised you didn’t call your attorney.” She didn’t call anyone. She shut down and agreed to be taken to county.

“I have a corporate attorney. She wouldn’t be particularly useful in this situation.”

“There’s someone else you could have called.”

“Yes.” She picks up the long sleeved thermal undershirt and pulls it over her head, fixing her hair. “I’m well aware that the NCPD listens in on all phone calls.”

“Is there something you’re trying to hide?”

“There’s something I’d prefer to keep private.” She steps into the pants. Maggie gives her the shoes and watches her place a hand on the desk to keep her balance. “When you’re a public figure everyone thinks they own you. You’re a commodity to them. Something to be eaten up and assessed, judged. Everyone thinks they know me. But very few know me. I prefer to keep those close to me close. And away from… all of this.”

“Do you have many close to you?”

“I thought the interrogation was over?”

“That wasn’t an interrogation. Neither is this.”

“I’d like to keep Kara out of this,” she says more quietly. “I don’t want her to see me here.”
Maggie gives her the picture ID. “Put that on. Just keep to yourself in here, all right?” She opens the curtain and steps back out into the hallway. Lena steps beside her, looking timid, looking smaller. Maggie calls out to the CO, carrying out the bin of bagged items, pushing them at her. Fuck her for making her do this. “She’s all yours.”

xxx

Maggie walks through wreckage at the jail. It’s nearly one in the morning. She’d literally put her head down on the pillow when her phone went off, calling all units to the National City Jail. Lena Luthor is gone after having spent a little over twenty-four hours there. The surveillance videos are gone. Not surprising, but judging by the guards’ statements and the scorch marks on the walls, there’s no question that Metallo was here.

She looks the scene over, waiting until everything has been blocked off, all photographs taken, before exiting and calling Alex.

“I’m at county. Surprised your people aren’t here.” A beat. “Or did you already beat us to the punch?”

There’s a pause. “Guardian was there. He said Metallo flipped. Was there for Lena.”

So, she tells her to drop the investigation into Guardian, because reasons. Alex knew who he was all along. She’s so angry it takes her a few seconds to be able to speak. “So he fought him? Which means he had some inkling that he was going to be there.”

“He was out to prove to Kara that Lena isn’t innocent.”

“Did it ever occur to you that maybe you should have notified the NCPD or county or anyone if you thought something like this might happen? Civilians got hurt, Alex.”

“I didn’t know he was going to be there, Maggie. He went off on his own.”

“Then maybe you should learn to control your pet vigilantes,” she hangs up.

She drives, foot hammering on the pedal, whipping through the streets of National City. She hasn’t slept in days and every time she thinks all the crazy shit has stopped, some new fuckstrocitv rears its ugly head. She hasn’t seen or talked to Kara since she took Lena into custody at L-Corp. She drives too fast, takes the mountain route, veering too close to the edge of the curves until she ends up at the cliff she’s come to with Kara. She doesn’t know why here. Maybe there’s something comforting about it. In some ways she felt closest to Kara here. She needs to remember that before she blows up. She sits on the hood of her car, trying to get her bearings, trying to push away the hurt from her body, the tension that won’t let go.

Kara drops from the sky to stand in front of her. She’s wearing her civilian clothes. Maggie looks around but there’s no one else. The car beams light her up. There’s the crease in her brow. “You really need to be careful when you do that,” Maggie says. She can’t find any energy to sound worried or tired or angry. Maybe that’s a good thing.

“Metallo took Lena.”

“I heard.”

Kara comes closer. “Well? We have to get her back.” Maggie doesn’t say anything. “You took her
into custody, Maggie. You did. I told you she didn’t do this—”

“How does this prove she didn’t? All this proves is that she was working with Cadmus and her mother all along.” Kara’s shaking her head. “Don’t shake your head at me. Jesus, Kara! You told her to go see her Lillian in prison? What the hell were you thinking?”

“I was thinking—”

“You know I have an ongoing investigation against her. Why would you tell her to do that? Do you know how it looks?”

“It doesn’t matter how it looks, Maggie, because she’s innocent!” She puts her arms out, as if for a hug, as if ready to brawl. “I know you don’t believe me,” she takes a shuddery breath. “No one believes me. But I believe in her. If you don’t want to help me, I’ll do it myself.”

“I can’t keep working with the DEO. It’s a violation of—so many things! Lena is a civilian. Lillian is a civilian. Even John Corben is. You need to stay out of this and let the NCPD handle it. I already have people working on it.”

“Really? Because it looks to me like you’re sitting on a cliff stargazing.”

Right. She’s only worked a nearly ninety-hour week. “You don’t respect me. You don’t respect my job.” She laughs caustically. “You told her to go see Lillian Luthor without mentioning it to me?”

Kara fidgets. “I told her to see her mother because I know what it is to lose someone and be filled with so much regret,” her voice shakes, “that it haunts you every second of your day. But you don’t know what that’s like.” Maggie blinks, clears the hot tears from her eyes. As if she’s ever bothered to ask. “You know what? I need to find her. I don’t have time for your jealousy right now.”

She flies away, the force and speed pulling Maggie to the edge of the cliff. Maggie scrambles, dust and rocks falling off the bluff before she regains her balance. Her heart pounds fiercely. She looks down to the city below, lit up like some mini set. She looks to the skies, still trying to get a hold of her breathing, but Kara’s nowhere to be found.

xxx

Maggie sits at her desk, reads through the witness statements, trying to stay awake. She calls out for updates but no leads have been found. Her phone rings. Alex. Maggie massages her forehead not sure if she’s ready to talk to another Danvers sister again. She picks up. “Yeah.”

“Hey, it’s me.” She hesitates. “A few things. Winn was able to go through that security footage that was sent to you. It’s fake.”

Maggie’s stomach sinks. She gets to her feet, cold. “How? I mean—how is that possible, he looked at it before. He said it was real.” Everyone at the station looked at it and told her the same.

“I don’t know—it’s some computer thing you’ll have to talk to him about. It wasn’t Lena. It was Cyborg Superman,” she sounds relieved. “I thought maybe you’d… I don’t know, want to start working that up on your end.”

“Can’t really do that without the so-called real evidence, Danvers.”

“Yeah, well, I could send it to you. Look, I don’t want to step on your toes. Tell me what you want
and I’ll see what I can do.”

Maggie squints her eyes, afraid she’s going to cry out of frustration. All that work for nothing. She was wrong. Kara was right. So much fighting, again, for nothing. Putting Lena through that shitty experience, for nothing. But here’s Danvers, pulling through. “That’d be great. Thanks.” She bites her tongue. “What’s the other thing?”

“Supergirl’s off to get Lena. We were able to pinpoint her location. But um—there’s something wrong with Metallo. The kryptonite is weird or something. We’re afraid there’s going to be a nuclear blast. A kryptonic nuclear blast. It might be best to give the other stations a head’s up to start clearing people back.”

Maggie stops. Everything is still and quiet. She can’t hear the officers outside of her office moving about, the ringing phones. All she hears is silence at the other end of the line. “Yeah—I’ll—Is K—… is Supergirl going to be okay?”

“Yes. Of course.”

“Alex—”

“I’ll keep you updated,” her voice is wispy and broken.

“Hey, don’t hang up.” Alex waits but Maggie doesn’t know what to say. “I… Tell her I’m rooting for her?” She glowers at the floor. She’ll be fine. She’ll be fine. She has to be fine. “It’s going to be okay. Girl of steel, right?” Silence. “Lena’s going to be okay, too.”

“I have to go.”

Maggie holds the phone, dead air in her ear.

xxx

Lena’s place is dark.

Supergirl stands awkwardly in the living room. She doesn’t know how she made it here. She feels weird and weak, dizzy. Her hands are tingling, her heart won’t go still. The refrigerator light shines on Lena as she collects water and brings it to her. “You should sit—I know what that kryptonite does to you—”

Kara smiles weakly, takes the water. “I’m fine.” She uncaps the water, watches the moonlight stream through the glass windows, looks out over National City. Lena’s safe. She just hopes no one else was caught in the blast. Where’s Maggie? Rao, she needs to talk to her.

“Please, have a seat.” She leads Kara to the couch. They sit and Kara maintains her distance, afraid to get too close, too comfortable, too familiar. “Do you need anything?”

A slow shake of her head. She touches her arm. “I’m fine. Stop worrying.”

“I can’t believe you found me. I can’t believe you rescued me. Though I suppose I shouldn’t be.” She crosses her arms, rubbing them. Is she cold? Kara briefly considers wrapping her cape around her. She can’t. Knows she shouldn’t. “I owe you my life.”

“You owe me nothing.” Kara smiles. “I’m just glad you’re safe. And—that Kara Danvers was able
to get a hold of me.” She hates how she keeps saying the last name. She bites her tongue. She has
to get back to the office. She has to get out the story. She has to clear Lena’s name.

“I don’t know how she got a hold of you but I’m glad she did.” There’s a silence. “What you’ve
both done… it really means so much to me. I’ll never forget it.”

“Um. I heard they took you from jail. That must have been scary.”

“I was finger printed and they took my clothes.” She smiles, but not genuinely, more like a nervous
tic. She twines her fingers, unlaying them before threading them again.

She takes Lena’s wrists, looks at them, fingers brushing over her skin. Lena’s breathing slows. Her
heart speeds up. Kara knows what her proximity does to her. It makes her anxious. Lena’s wrists
are free of bruises she might have gotten from handcuffs. Good. “Did they treat you okay?” Lena
nods. “Are you sure? You have to tell me.”

“Some of the COs were a little rough around the edges. But Detective Sawyer was kind. As much
as she could be, given the circumstances.” Her smile flickers. “And Kara got me out of it, as
promised.” Kara smiles tiredly. “I wish I could properly thank her. The way she deserves.” She
meets her eyes. Kara gets to her feet unsteadily, the room spinning more wildly than before. She’s
hot and dizzy. Lena stands too. “Did I say something—?”

“No. Um. I’m feeling a little tired.” She puts her hands on Lena’s arms, rubs them trying to get
some warmth into them. “I have to go. I’m happy you’re okay.” She wants to hug her but leaves
without another word.

xxx

She’s okay, Alex said breathlessly on the phone, she’s okay.

Maggie showers at the station. She slips back into her clothes, moving like an automaton. She’s
been up over twenty-four hours. Her thoughts are scattered, her body pulling her in different
directions. She misses the buttons on her shirt three times before getting it. Now the press
conference has been pawned off on her.

Maggie moves to the briefing room. There are a few sleepy reporters in attendance. No Kara. A
few flashes go off as the cameras follow her to the podium. The effect feels like fragments of time.
She has a written statement. She takes the cheerful upright mic and lowers it a few times, trying to
get it closer to her mouth, irritated when it springs back up at attention. Some of the reporters
laugh. Make a dick joke, the captain would love it.

She decides against it. She touches the mic and it crackles, shrieking. Yeah, that’s about right. The
pot bellied cameraman in the corner yawns, scratching his belly as he zooms in on her. She clears
her throat. “Good evening. Morning.” Twilight. Post witching hour. “I’m here um…” she looks at
the paper, the words blurring. She rubs at her eyes. “As you may know, Lena Luthor was taken
into custody yesterday and was believed to be a fugitive from the law after an orchestrated attack
by Cadmus and their affiliate John Corben, broke her out of National City County Jail. At the time
of Ms. Luthor’s arrest the NCPD had…” she licks her lips, “had what was believed to be fairly
conclusive evidence of her involvement with the aiding and abetting of the individual known as
John Corben and Lillian Luthor. After further investigation of this evidence, it has been determined
that the evidence was falsified in order to wrongly incriminate Ms. Luthor. As such, the NCPD is
hereby dropping all charges against her. The NCPD would like to thank…” she bites her tongue,
“all the hard working officers and technicians with our department who worked so tirelessly to exonerate Ms. Luthor of these charges.”

A reporter raises her hand. “But Detective Sawyer, weren’t you the one who took Lena Luthor into custody? What evidence could have been so compelling that it was found lacking barely a day after the fact?”

Her heart jams into her chest. “I can’t comment on that. I can only say that the NCPD never takes anyone into custody lightly.”

Another reporter’s arm shoots up. “Where’s Lena Luthor now? How is it that you and NCCJ allowed, first, for kryptonite to get to Metallo and for the escape to happen?”

“Supergirl was able to rescue Lena Luthor. I can't comment on the still ongoing Cadmus investigation into her kidnapping.”

“So a vigilante is now doing the work of the NCPD?” Another reporter asks. “Have you been able to speak to Lena Luthor and apologize for falsely incarcerating and endangering her?”

“We followed every protocol when we took Lena Luthor into custody,” Maggie says.

“What about Supergirl?” The reporter asks. “You didn’t answer the question, detective. Is the NCPD now allowing an alien vigilante do its work for it? What about John Corben or Lillian Luthor? Have they been taken into custody?”

Maggie folds her paper. “There will be no more questions at this time.” She leaves the stage, tripping over a speaker wire as the reporters continue to fire questions at her. More cameras click. She goes to her desk. The captain grills her for her performance. Grills her about the lie she told about their techs figuring it out. Maggie sits, letting it wash over her.

It’s still dark when she leaves. She gets into the car, blinking her eyes, slapping her face to stay awake. She did this before. Supergirl stopped her before she careened over the edge. It’s fine. She’ll be fine. She can’t stay at the station for another minute. She needs to get home and to bed.

Her phone rings. Maggie digs in her pocket without looking it. “Sawyer.”

“Hey, it’s Alex.” Alex…? “Can’t believe you’re still up.”

She scoffs. “Yeah, barely.”

“You’re not driving are you?”

Maggie pulls over to the side and turns on the hazards. “No.”

“Good.” A moment. “Um, saw you on the news just now.” Maggie grimaces. “That was rough. I’m sorry.” Maggie shakes her head, bows her head pressing it to the steering wheel. “The video looked real. It’s not your fault.”

“Tell that to Lena Luthor and the captain.” Tell that to Kara. She closes her eyes, rubs them. “I’m glad they’re okay.”

“Me too. You talk to Kara?”

“No. You?”

“No. No, I haven’t. But I know they’re all right.”
That’s just swell. Seconds pass in silence. Maggie sighs. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For snapping at you about Guardian.” That fucking idiot. “For a lot.”

“You’re allowed to go a little crazy on me. Payback.”

“You weren’t too bad.” She smiles tiredly. “I should get going. Thanks for calling to check up on me. And earlier. I don’t hate you, too, Danvers. We’ll talk later?”

A soft laugh. “Sure thing, Margaret.”

She hangs up before Maggie can complain. Maggie stares at the phone, the log time and slips the phone back into her pocket, getting back on the highway. She passes the railing that she nearly drove off. She drives in a fugue. She drives until she nearly slams into the lightpost by her home. She slams on the breaks, hitting the steering wheel so hard the horn honks.

Her heart beats wildly. She reverses, parks, takes the stairs up, climbs into bed. The streetlight burns into her eyes. She stares up at the ceiling. The window’s open. It’s chilly but she can’t be bothered to shut it. She realizes she never took her jacket off and searches her pocket for her cell phone. She texts Kara. *Good job tonight. You were right. I was wrong. I’m sorry. I’m glad you and Lena are okay.*

She sets the phone aside, thinks about how Kara nearly pulled her off the cliff in efforts to get to Lena. She doesn’t even know. If she’d fallen, would she have known? Would she have saved her? Her hand goes to her shoulder. To what Cyborg Superman did.

There’s a whoosh. Her lamp falls off the nightstand and crashes, the door slams shut. Maggie looks at the lamp, in pieces on the floor. It cost her thirty bucks at Ikea. She sighs inwardly. Supergirl stands in the dingy glow, half slumped over. Maggie sits up. Supergirl places one knee on the bed, another, crawls until she’s over her. “I got your text.”

The one I sent ten seconds ago? In the darkness her skin ripples with green light. Maggie touches her face. “Jesus. Are you all right? You should be at the DEO. Why weren’t you at the DEO?”

“You couldn’t text? You couldn’t call? You couldn’t let me fucking know?” “Yeah, okay.” She doesn’t know what she’s expecting. An apology? A hug? For her to ask about the press conference? About her day? It’s the kryptonite. It doesn’t matter. “We should go now. Alex can take a look at you. They can run tests.”

“No.” Kara finds her mouth, kisses her hard. She’s never kissed her as Supergirl and never like this. She yanks the jacket off her shoulders. “Why are you wearing this?” She doesn’t wait for the answer before she’s kissing her again, fingers shaking as they undo the buttons of her shirt.

Maggie says her name once, twice. Kara stops, breathing as unsteadily as she does. “What’s going on?”

“I want to be with you. It just feels like I need to be with you right now.” She speaks low and urgent. Maggie brushes locks of blonde behind her ear. Kara’s lips tremble, her own throb. “Lena told me what you did.” Maggie doesn’t know what that means. The interview? The handcuffs? Undressing at intake? Panic clenches around her throat. “I know you don’t like her.” Maggie
lowers her eyes. “Thank you.” What? Kara kisses her again, as urgent as before. Maggie breaks the kiss. Smiles apologetically. “What is it?”

“Nothing. Um. I’m worried about you. And I’m really tired.” Kara sighs, resting her forehead against her shoulder. “I’m sorry.” Her breath is warm on her skin. Maggie holds her hand to the back of her neck, feverishly warm, the odd green light still flickering through her. “Hey, the kryptonite—it doesn’t make you weird or anything like the red stuff, right?”

“You already think I’m weird.”

“Weirder.”

“No. It just makes me tired and dizzy. It makes me weak.”

“Yeah? You still saved the day.” Kara shakes her head weakly. Maggie runs her fingers through her hair, touching the soft fabric of her cape. What’s it made of? “What happened tonight?”

Another shake of her head. “Talk to me.”

“Lillian used some of Lex’s inventions on me. And Metallo and Cyborg Superman were there. But I’m here. I’m okay.”

“You have green lights running through your skin.”

“It’ll go away.” Maggie pulls back to look at her. Her eyes always look as if they’ve only opened for the first time, full of wonder and hope. But Maggie sees a longing there, sadness. She takes her face in her hands and kisses her. “I thought you were tired.”

“So are you.”

Kara doesn’t wait. Her hands are back to her shirt, her lips hovering over her own. “Let me touch you while I can.” While she can? Kara settles her hands on Maggie’s shoulders, forcing her down on the bed, seemingly puzzled. “Did that hurt you?” Maggie shakes her head.

A kiss, another, Kara stripping her of her clothes bit by bit, tossing them to the side, her hands grazing over her before gripping her more firmly, her fingers, her mouth, moving over her. But still she shakes. “Kara, you don’t have to—”

The words die away as she feels Kara’s tongue on her, inside her, testing or teasing, she isn’t sure, only knows how her fingers clench tightly around the blanket, not the blanket, her cape. Her other hand touches to Kara’s hair, delving, gripping her, drawing her closer. She knows she’s still angry. Hurt. She isn’t sure that Kara actually respects her. She isn’t sure that Kara wants more than a sex thing with a badge. Someone to make come. Someone to make her come. Some fucking rebellion. She wants to yell at her. What if I’d fallen off that cliff, you asshole? But Kara’s okay. And this feels too fucking good to give up right now. Maybe she’s as stupid as she’s always accused men of being. Her body is starting to get away from her.

She did not think Kara could be closer, deeper but she is, she does. Maggie watches in a daze. Supergirl, on hands and knees, eating her out. Her head spins. She’s exhausted. She’s flying, waves cascading over her until she’s swearing, crying out, pressing against Kara’s mouth. She hears Kara’s breath, feels her heat, hands digging into her thighs and ass, as if still trying to be closer. But how much closer can she get?

Finally she comes, going still, breathing raggedly. Supergirl’s short breaths punctuate the air; she pulls a hand back through her hair, the light outlining her in gold. Maggie stares, tempted to ask her to sit on her face before swallowing the words. Kara crawls up beside her, throws the cape over the
two of them, licks her lips, bites down on them, eyes narrowed in thought. “Fuck,” Maggie says.

Kara smiles. “Yeah.”

“Your kryptonian tongue is like the eighth wonder of the world.”

A small laugh. “Not of the galaxy?”

“Haven't looked that far.” Maggie runs her fingers over the Supergirl suit, over the house crest, over her breasts. Kara’s breath comes more shallow. *Yeah, you’re good but not that good.* “Your suit have special … I don’t know, enhancers?”

“No, I’m just sensitive,” she smiles and then it fades. “Sometimes insensitive.” She looks at her. She looks serious.

She doesn’t want to fight about the cliff. Not now when she’s feeling this awesome for the first time in who knows how long. “What's up with you tonight?”

“I thought you liked it.”

Were the multiple orgasms not a clue? Maybe it was the outfit. Her magic kryptonian tongue. That she came here when she could have stayed with Lena. That she's fucking crazy about her. “It's just never been like that before.”

Kara looks at her. “It seemed important to be close to you tonight.” *Why tonight?* She tries to remember if she smelled Lena on her. As if she could. As if she couldn't somehow get rid of it. “I've never held anyone as tightly as I held you tonight. Not here. On Earth.” Maggie turns on her side to look at her. “Imagine holding me as tightly as you can. If I did that to a human…” she looks at her. “Kryptonite is awful. I want to puke and when it's concentrated it burns. But it makes me feel more normal. It makes moments like this realer. If that makes sense.”

She spent most of the night with Lena. She's rarely around kryptonite. It makes these moments realer? Are they not real without the kryptonite? Is she faking it? No, it doesn't make sense. It makes no sense at all.
Want to meet up with a jailbird on the lam?

Alex breathes hard, picking up her water bottle and drinking it down. J’onn strides over. “I hope whatever that text is was worth forfeiting the round.” He looks at her face and she can feel the throb in her jaw where his fist cracked. “Mind telling me why you’ve been so distracted?”

This is the first time he’s asked, despite knowing he could have asked far earlier. She never told him about Maggie, about the discord with Kara. But he knows. “I’ve been trying to work through some things. I’m sorry I’ve been unfocused. I’ll be better.”

He settles his hands at his waist, brow narrowing gently. “Good. We need you here at your best.” He studies her. “I know I’m not your family—”

“You are,” she cuts him off. In some ways he’s been more of a father to her than Jeremiah ever was. He disappeared when she was a kid. She and her mother were left to care for Kara. But no one really cared for her. She spiraled. J’onn found her when she was at rock bottom. He forged her into something better, stronger. He gave her purpose.

“And you’re like a daughter to me. I worry.”

She smiles. “I know. I appreciate it.” She wants to tell him how distraught she was about Kara and Lena last night. She wants to tell him about her vain hopes, that capturing Lillian would lead to Jeremiah. How getting lost in Maggie distracted her, made her forget about finding him for a time, and the guilt that consumes her when she stops to think about it. She wants to tell him all of that but says nothing.

He frowns at her. Maybe he heard it all. “Put some ice on that.”

He leaves and she watches after him, testing her jaw. It’ll bruise but it’s intact. She picks up the phone and hastily fires off a response. I’ll bring the cuffs. Lena responds quickly. What? Alex frowns, walking out of the sparring room. Looks at the text message. Not Lena. Maggie. She responded to the wrong thread. Not Lena. Maggie. She responded to the wrong thread. She stops, mortified, staring at the message, unsure how to respond. Sorry. That wasn’t for you.

Hot date?

She doesn’t know what to say so she says nothing. She hits the showers, thinking of Maggie, Kara, Lena, missed opportunities. When she’s done, she puts her dress suit on, makes sure her gun is holstered, the cuffs at her side, her FBI badge in hand before heading out of the DEO. She wonders, idly, what would have happened if Kara and Lena died last night. Would she leave this life behind? Would she sink into despair? Yes, in a heartbeat.

xxx

Kara’s leaving Lena’s office as Alex walks up to it. Her eyebrows lift and Alex slows, looks at her for the first time since she left the DEO to rescue Lena. A weight she hadn’t known she was carrying, lifts. Kara saunters closer. Lena stands at the door of her office, observing them.
“Alex.” Kara touches her glasses and looks back at Lena curiously. “Are you here to—”

“I just thought I’d check up on Lena, given her most recent ordeal,” Alex says. Lena looks relieved. “I read your article.” Another passionate defense of Lena Luthor. Researched well enough for Snapper to print, but threaded with shades of bias.

“I thought it was important to get the real story to the masses.”

Lena holds on to the door. “She’s a real life savior,” she says. Kara beams. “Just like her sister.” Alex notices her smile dampen somewhat. “Erm—we were finished, weren’t we Kara?” Kara nods. “Let’s hit that paint bar sometime.”

“Yes. Absolutely.” She nods, looking between the two of them. “Um. I’ll be on my way then. You two have fun doing… whatever you’re going to do.” Another touch to her glasses. Alex doesn’t know if she’s meant to reassure her. She’s gone before she can make a decision. Gone too fast. For all she knows she’s already up in the sky and halfway back to who knows where. Maybe to eat three gallons of ice cream. Maybe to Maggie.

It bothers her that she doesn’t know. She used to know everything about her. Kara doesn’t confide in her lately. Maybe she doesn’t need her anymore. You didn’t spend Earth Birthday with her. No.

And she hates herself for it. Did Kara spend it with Maggie? Maggie who can give her the one thing she can’t. A different closeness.

Lena says her name. Alex blinks. “Well, don’t just stand there. Come in,” Lena ushers her inside and looks to the receptionist. “I’ll be meeting with Miss Danvers, so hold any calls and visitors.” After a ready agreement they walk into the office, Lena closing the door behind them. “You never responded to my text message. I didn’t know you were planning on dropping by.”

She spares her the Maggie text story. “Not fond of surprises?”

“Not usually. Though, your sister did just write the most darling article on me. You know, I think she sees me in a way that not many do.” Alex smirks gently. “Not that way. Although—your detective has come close.”

Alex wishes she’d stop calling Maggie that. She keeps her face neutral. She doesn’t even want to consider what Lena’s going on about. “I assume you’re going to stop playing coy and get to the point?”

“Are you in a bad mood?” She looks at her face. Frowns, lifting a hand to her jaw. “What happened here?”

“Just a little friendly sparring at work. I was distracted.”

“By what?”

“A little jailbird.” Lena smiles. Alex clears her throat. “I watched the NCPD press conference.” Maggie looked exhausted and the reporters didn’t let up on her. “Supergirl came through again.” She rushed off without the protective vest. She was willing to die to save Lena. It’s just like her. She would die for anyone. Even those who don’t deserve it. And you sat there and stared at a computer simulation. Lena grazes her face. “I’m happy she was able to save you.”

“I half expected you to come in, guns blazing.”

“Really?”
She smiles. “No. To be honest, I thought I was done for. And to think I hadn’t thought things could get worse after that court day with Metallo.” She laughs but doesn’t meet her eyes. “I’m getting tired of my family trying to kill me.”

Supergirl never returned to the DEO. Were they together all night? “Maybe I was naïve to suggest your mother could change.”

“I wanted to believe it. But she left me unconscious while Metallo was on the verge of a nuclear meltdown. I’d be dead if not for Supergirl. And Kara,” she says absently, “summoning her to my side.” Alex shifts her weight. Lena’s eyes are far off, thinking. “What’s your sister’s connection to Supergirl?” Alex tenses. “Supergirl wouldn’t answer to just anyone. Aren’t you curious?”

“Always.” A beat. “Supergirl used to visit Cat Grant. I assume they met that way.” The lies come easily. To protect Kara she doesn't have the luxury of guilt. She's willing to make ethical compromises. She's willing to risk and strain her personal relationships.

“But you don’t know? How is it that you don’t know?”

Her face heats. “We don’t tell each other everything.” She's surprised the words don’t wedge in her throat. She’s surprised it’s not a lie.

Lena considers that. “How did you meet her?”

Alex smiles. “If you keep talking about Supergirl, I’m going to get jealous.”

“Mh. I doubt that. Shall we discuss that I’m out of jail and haven’t gotten so much as a kiss yet?”

“Did you want a kiss? Have I been called here for a conjugal visit?”

Lena laughs. She touches the cuffs at her side, trailing her fingers along the curves of the metal. “If I were a paranoid woman, I'd think you were here to arrest me.”

“But you're not a paranoid woman.”

Lena smiles, moving past her and taking a seat at her desk. “Maybe I think you’ve brought them to play out some sexy cops and robbers fantasy.”

Alex moves to the liquor cabinet to grab a drink. It isn’t noon but her work makes time arbitrary. It’s just one. And Lena doesn't hassle her about it. “I’m not a cop and you’re not a robber. Though it wouldn't be the first time someone asked me to tie them up.”

“And do you oblige?”

Alex looks over the liquor selection. Lena tells her she only keeps it for the rare office meeting with potential investors and business partners. “Do you want wine?” She asks. Lena shakes her head no and Alex pours herself a glass of scotch. She and Maggie would share the occasional drink but nothing this expensive, rich, smooth. She moves to the chair opposite of the desk, unbuttons her jacket and sits.

“You didn't answer the question,” Lena says.

“No, I didn’t.” She slips the cuffs from her side and onto the desk. Lena picks them up, turning them over in her hands, tightening them, listening to the metallic clicking. Alex remembers a similar curiosity, studying by touching, testing, prodding. The life of a scientist.
“Do you ever let others try them on you?”

“You’re very curious, today.”

“It’s my nature.” A silence follows. “Can I ask you something?” A beat. “A question you’ll answer?”

She smiles. “You can try.”

“Look, I know you and Detective Sawyer aren’t together anymore but you were there when John Corben attempted to assassinate me. And if you run in Supergirl's circles, I can only assume you know about Cadmus and what my mother has been involved in.”

“I'm not hearing a question.”

“Were you a part of the investigation that led to my arrest?”

“No, I wasn’t.”

Lena releases a breath. “Did you think I was guilty?”

Maggie told her Lena had been the only visitor. A look into the NCCJ logs revealed the same. She's a Luthor. The evidence didn't leave any room for doubt, but conflicted with what she knows of Lena. J'onn taught her to not let emotions cloud her judgment; science taught her to look at the evidence. Kara taught her that family is more than blood. “I didn't know what to think.”

A bittersweet smile. “At least you're honest.”

“That doesn't mean I thought you were guilty.”

“But you didn't think I was innocent.”

Not like Kara, she means. Alex leans back in the chair. “I wanted you to be. The important thing is that you're safe.”

“Were you worried?”

“Yes. Maybe it doesn't matter, but if I could have been there to help you, I would have.” Even if she told Kara not to go.

Lena looks at the cuffs. Alex sees the glint of her eyes in the metal. “I once vowed to myself that I would be the only Luthor to never wear these.”

“Your name has been cleared. There's nothing to be ashamed of.”

She scoffs lightly. “As if it were so simple. Sometimes I worry I'll always be in Lex's shadow. That my name, his memory, will prevent others from embracing everything I can contribute.” Alex smiles faintly. “I was never so charismatic as he is but I'm ambitious. Father liked that about me. Despite that, Lex and I never competed against each other. Not in that way. He had his pet projects. I had mine. I wanted to cure cancer.”

Listening to Lena speak is like hearing tales of her own family dysfunction. She imagines a life where she became a doctor, conducted cutting edge research. Maybe she and Lena could have worked on some medical breakthrough. Maybe they could have changed the world. But it's pointless to think that way. “Cancer. That's a tall order.”
“I was close.”

She hasn't told Lena much about her own scientific background. She considers their relationship, unsure whether they spend the majority of their time addressing or ignoring the elephant in the room. “I believe you.”

A smile. Lena moves around the desk, sitting at the edge. She folds her arms and looks at her. “What's going on? You're more stoic than usual. Was it seeing Kara? That was a surprise visit, too.” She takes the drink from her and sets it behind her on the desk.

Alex looks from the glass and to Lena, feeling a pang for the loss. “What you said about Maggie earlier. What did you mean?”

“She's still under your skin.”

“That's not what I asked.”

“A correctional officer refused to do her job at the jail. I had to strip to my underthings in front of your detective.”

Alex breathes slowly. She can’t imagine it. It’ll make her crazy. “She's not my detective.”

“She didn't look. Not how she might have.” Lena puts her hands on the armrest of the chair, hovering over her. She draws close, lips to her ears. “Not how you've looked at me. Not how she looked at you.”

“You don't know how she looked at me.” No one will ever know. How it set her afire, how every touch nearly overwhelmed her. Different from the numbness and vacancy of previous touches. Does Maggie look at Kara the same way? She tells herself that she dumped Maggie, but wonders if she only ended it before Maggie devastated her and chose Kara.

“I know what she saw,” Lena says. Alex clamps her jaw, fingers digging into the armrest. Lena meets her eyes. “Do you think of her when you're with me?”

“Do you think of Kara?”

“No. I fill her office with flowers but make love to her sister instead.” She moves around the chair. Alex lifts her face. Lena trails the cuffs down, the cold metal touching briefly to her neck. “You've never allowed anyone to use these on you.”

“I've managed to avoid being arrested.” She doesn't tell her how Cadmus strung her up, how her own mother would know better than anyone.

“I've made you angry.” Alex turns her eyes from the scotch back to Lena. “I think you can't stomach the idea of not having everything under control.”

Alex folds her arms behind her head. “I hear a challenge.”

“Are you sure it's not a proposition?”

“I don't like to speculate.”

“Neither do I.” Cold metal snaps around her wrist, squeezing tighter. Alex fights to unclench her jaw. The other cuff clicks into place. “Better to try than to speculate.” She holds Alex's arms back, leans down, lips hovering over her neck. Alex’s phone vibrates. Lena reaches down, fingers
searching, slipping into her pocket.

Alex doesn’t know how to get to it without whipping Lena in the face. All she has is her voice. “Don’t.”

Lena retrieves the phone. She looks at it. Alex stares ahead. Was it Maggie? Kara? J’onn? Her chest is tight. The skies have gone cloudy. Lena types a response, sends it and stows the phone back into her pocket. “I never got my kiss.”

Alex says nothing, does nothing, until Lena dips her face, lips grazing along her own. She kisses her until the warmth stirs in her body, until finally her mouth parts and she submits.
Maggie stops abruptly and nearly trips. The lights are dim in Kara’s loft but candles burn gently. Roses fill the space. Kara stands in an elegant wedding dress, her back to her. Maggie goes lightheaded. Sweat springs to her forehead. She’d bolt if she could move.

Kara turns and Maggie is left to look at her profile in the glow of candles. She’s radiant. Kara notices her and her expression shifts from puzzled to irritated. What if she was expecting Lena? That’d be insane. Right? “Um,” Maggie says. Her mouth feels like it’s stuffed with socks. “Hi.” She sounds unhinged, or as if she were talking to an unhinged person. She’s done that before and felt less nervous than this. “What’s going on? This is fast. This is fast right?”

“What?” Kara looks around, frowns and goes to her. “I’m not getting married.”

“Well. I didn’t ask.”

Kara sighs and throws her arms around her. Maggie wonders how she wandered into the twilight zone. The fragrance she wears makes her feel even more lightheaded. Maggie hugs her back and finally Kara releases her. “So, I have a new stalker,” she complains, going to take a seat on the couch. She tells her about Mr. Mxyzptlk and his marriage demands.

Maggie smiles wryly. “You sure he’s not a lesbian?” She wonders what his version of a U-Haul would be.

“It’s not funny! He’s a creep. Obviously he’s been watching me. What if he comes back?”

“Tell him I need a new jacket.” Kara scowls. “And that you’re taken. I’ll flash my piece at him. He’ll be terrified.” Bullets work against guys who can create and destroy with a snap of their fingers, right?

“You are pretty intimidating,” she leans over to kiss her and Maggie returns it, her heart beating much too fast. Kara’s fingers graze along her chest. “You okay?”

“Uh. Yeah.” She bites her lip thoughtfully. “Mind taking off the dress?”

“You’re in a hurry.” She looks down at it. “Oh. Oh!” She laughs. “You thought—that seemed. Okay. Yes. That’s weird. That is weird. I get it.” She stands and tugs Maggie to her feet, taking her arms to wrap them around her waist. “Maybe you want to help me?”

She smirks. “How could I refuse the lady on her special day?” She reaches back, finding the small tab of the dress and pulling down slowly. Kara looks at her, smiling somewhat impishly. Maggie wants to tell her how beautiful she looks but doesn’t want to give her the wrong idea, doesn’t want to one day think of this as a sad and painful memory. “You can forget about me carrying you anywhere,” she says instead.

The dress falls to the floor.
It’s raining but she pounds pavement, swinging her arms, sprinting as fast as she can. She and Kara still haven’t discussed their argument on the cliff, the business with the kryptonite. She’s kept her mouth shut to Lena buying out National City’s flower shops to flood Kara’s office with flowers. More irritating is Kara’s inability to understand why anyone might think Lena has feelings for her.

The investigation into Lena is over but there’s plenty of work to go around, especially given National City’s latest stream of news articles surrounding NCPD: Does National City Need the NCPD When We Have Supergirl?Fuck. You. She runs past a honking goose, dodging it’s creepy long neck and beak as it attempts to nip at her and stops at the edge of the park, hands on her knees, breathing hard.

When she’s regained her breath she walks to where she’s parked the car—stops when she notices Alex’s five over. She swallows dryly and forsakes the water for the meantime, goes closer. She’s inside. Maggie waffles before moving over, tapping on the window. Alex, who’s opening a stack of letters looks up at her with surprise. Her brow knots but she smiles and lowers the window. “Maggie. It’s raining too hard to be jogging.”

“You’re here.”

“In my car.” She flips the locks and cocks her head for Maggie to join her.

“I’m soaking wet.”

“Please. A little rain isn’t the worst thing I’ve had to get off my car seats.”

Maggie smiles and moves around, hopping inside against her better judgment. Alex is wearing her jogging gear. She closes the window. There’s a flask on the floor. Maggie pretends not to see it and Alex reaches to the backseat to grab a bottle of water. “Thanks.” She uncaps it and has a drink. “So, what, you melt in the rain now?”

“Ha, ha. I was waiting for it to die down but looks like I’m going to have to dive in at this rate.” She tosses three of the letters in the backseat and opens a red envelope. “So how are things? Better than last time we talked?”

Maggie doesn’t know if she means ‘talk talked’ or text talked. Her nostrils flare slightly thinking of Alex’s last text message. Let’s talk later. I’m a little tied up. “No complaints; outside of your sister’s imp stalker guy.” Alex looks over the card. “Is that from Lena?” She snatches it, surprised she’d send something so crass.

“Rude much?”

Maggie laughs. “God, Valentine’s Day is so corny.” Stupid manufactured so-called-holiday.

“What is it with you and Lena?”

“I’m not stupid, Danvers.” She looks at the card. Love, Mom. Oh. She returns it to her. She clears her throat. “I got your text.” Alex shifts in her seat, slipping the Valentine’s Day card back in the envelope. Is she blushing?

“Right. You never responded.”

“Sounds like you’re having fun.”

“And if I am?”
“Then I’m happy for you.” She realizes that she’s frowning. “Does Kara know?” Alex draws a slow breath. “She should probably know.”

“Funny advice coming from you. Are you worried?”

“That your girlfriend is filling my girlfriend’s office with flowers? Yeah, a little.”

“She’s not my…” She stops.

“Am I being out of line?” Alex throws the Valentine’s Day card in the back. “I feel crazy. Lena, Lena, Lena. Sprunging up everywhere like a weed.”

“A very pretty weed.”

Maggie scowls. “Kara has to know how Lena feels about her. She’s not stupid. Neither are you.” Alex looks back at her with such patience that Maggie’s throat clamps shut. She wipes the rain from her face, shakes her head. “Forget it. I shouldn’t be talking about this. Especially with you. It’s shitty.”

Alex exhales. “Obviously it’s on your mind. Have you talked to Kara about it?”

“It’s hard to talk to her about Lena. We always ends up arguing.” A beat. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be here. I shouldn’t be saying this. You have something going on with her— and she’d be an idiot not to appreciate it.” She feels her stare. “I hope you’re happy. I’m jealous. I’m just…” jealous. And crazy. It’s this time of year. She glares out the rain soaked window. “I should get going. Get ready for work.”

“Yeah. Perfect timing. I have to go on my run.” Maggie fumbles with the door until Alex unlocks it. “Hey,” she touches her shoulder gently and Maggie stops, looks back at her. “I hope it gets better.”

“Yeah, I’m sure it will,” she lies and leaves.

xxx

Mr. Mxzyptlk has flooded her loft with flowers for the fourth time this week. Lena walks in, eyebrows lifting. “And I thought I was excessive.” Kara looks around in dismay. “I suppose it is that time of the year. Do you have a special admirer?”

“No. No. Only a crazy person does this.” There’s a glimmer of a smile on Lena’s face. Kara takes a breath. “Not like that. What you did was wonderful. Look,” she points to the kitchen, to the living room, other areas. “I brought some of them home.”

“That’s sweet,” Lena says, hands in her overcoat, moving closer to smell the roses, even as Kara frantically collects them. “I’m glad you enjoy them. I hope it wasn’t embarrassing to get something like that at work—”

“Are you kidding? Everyone was asking about my special gentleman suitor.”

“And do you have a special gentleman suitor?”

Kara laughs, bowing her head and blushing. “Um, have a seat,” she ushers her to the couch, dumping as many of the roses as she can into the garbage. She’ll have to fly the rest out later. She’s
so over that imp, and admittedly a little upset that the Vera Wang dress later disappeared into the ether. Once she’s cleared what she can, she sits beside Lena. “Sorry the place is such a mess.”

“You’re really going to leave me in the dark about what secret admirer is filling your place with flowers?”

“Trust me, you don’t want to know.”

Lena bows her head and smiles. “I’ll take you at your word.” Kara sits up straighter, looking at her. “Are you a big Valentine’s Day fan?”

She hasn’t given it a lot of thought given Mxyzptlk’s antics, even if it’s in a few days. Is Maggie planning something? She’s suddenly unsure if it does or doesn’t seem like something she’d do. She should get her a present. But what? She doesn’t know. Would Alex know? Why doesn’t she know? *Because you spend most of the time talking about you.* Just like with Alex. “I tend to be alone on Valentine’s Day. But actually… I am seeing someone. For once.” Lena’s heart beats faster, so does her own. She touches her glasses. “Sorry, is this boring you?” She isn’t sure whether she wants to give herself or Lena an out.

“Bore me? Never.” She gives her her undivided attention. “So, tell me about the special person who’s landed you.”

Kara’s throat dries. “I will. If you promise not to hate me.”

“Not possible, Kara Danvers.” Kara smiles with relief before going anxious again. Lena reaches out, touches her fingers. The touch stills her. “You don’t have to tell me.”

“No. I want to.” And then, unexpectedly she sees a mingling of pain and relief on Lena’s face. She wants to understand it but doesn’t. “I’m… actually seeing Maggie Sawyer. Detective Sawyer,” she says blushing, “of the NCPD. I think you’re acquainted.”

“Oh, quite well,” Lena says lightly, a shine in her eyes, gone before her smile brightens.

“I know how that sounds. I know she’s been… hard on you. Believe it or not we got into a big argument over your arrest.” They fight about her more than anything else, it seems.

“Don’t get me wrong, I wish I hadn’t been arrested but she was doing her job. I can’t hate her for it.” There’s a momentary narrowing of her eyes. “Does she make you happy?”

“Yeah.” She smiles thinking of her, breathing easier now. “She’s… she isn’t like anyone I’ve ever met before. She pushes me. And she makes me question things I never thought of questioning. It’s exciting being with her.” Lena’s smile tightens. “I know you two don’t have a great history. She was rude to you at that dinner we went to. With Alex.”

“I haven’t forgotten.”

“We should do that again. Only not with…” she bites her tongue, smiles. “I know you’ll like her. We can all… just get along.”

“I can’t say ‘no’ to you.” Lena’s brow creases. “Life’s funny, isn’t it?”

“How do you mean?”

She hesitates but her hands tangle again, heart racing anew. “I suppose I haven’t been as forthcoming as I could have been with you.” Kara waits. She waits for a confession. Hopes she
won’t confess. Doesn’t know what she’d do with it. “I’ve been seeing someone, too. And you’re also well-acquainted.”


“I hope it won’t be a problem,” she says quickly. “We became friends and... well, she’s quite lovely.” Kara nods. “Do you hate me?”

“No. No. No.” She shakes her head. “Never.” Why didn’t Alex tell her? Why didn’t Lena tell her? How long? Did Maggie know? It’s hard to breathe. Is that why she was with her at the courthouse? Alex didn’t tell her. “I’m so happy for you. And for Alex. My God.” She laughs, pulls her into a hug. That’s great news. Wonderful news.

She’s numb.

xxx

Maggie notices the bruises on her thighs and hips before pulling her clothes on. She’s had rough sex before and she can’t say that night with Kara was it. But she can’t argue how strong she is. What must it be like to always be so careful around her? Will she get bored? Can she ever let loose? It must be hard.

She goes out into the living room, taken aback to see her sitting on the couch. Kara turns to look at her, hands on the back, looking a little like a lost puppy. “I let myself in. Through the window,” she says more quietly.

“I didn’t know you were coming by,” she gives her a kiss and sits on the couch beside her. Kara leans forward, wiping water drops from her face. Maggie studies her expression. There’s something anxious and withdrawn about it. “Everything okay?” She cocks her head. “You look sad.”

“Everything’s great,” she tells her. Maggie doesn’t believe her. Kara kicks her shoes off and lies down, setting her head on her lap. Maggie’s irritated that the couch is smaller than it should be, that the lighting is dingy rather than dark, that it isn’t better. She frowns lightly as Kara draws little patterns on her thighs. “How was your day?”

“You imp asked me to step aside so your love with him could prevail,” she says flatly. Then he sent a herd of geese to chase her around the park before she was able to get to her car. Vowel opposed prick. It’s possible the geese went on their own rampage.

“Did you agree?”

“Believe it or not, I passed. I kind of like having you around,” she strokes her hair, fingers trailing along her ear. Kara snuggles closer to her. She hasn’t told her about her run-in with Alex days ago. “How are we going to get rid of him?”

“Mon-El said they used to kill them on Daxam.” She sighs tiredly and Maggie wonders if it’s only the imp that troubles her. “I don’t want to kill him. I just want him to go away. He’s dangerous. And annoying.”

“Not willing to marry him?”
“What’s the point, he already took the dress.” Maggie smiles. “Hey. Did you know…” she slows. Maggie continues to trail her fingers through her hair. “Have you talked to Alex?”

Maggie’s fingers slow. “The other day. Why?”

Kara sits up and looks at her. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Do I have to tell you every time I talk to her?”

Kara touches her glasses, shakes her head. She looks at her thoughtfully. “Did you know about…” Maggie waits to hear her say it. “Well. Did she tell you about her and Lena?”

“Not in so many words.” Kara frowns. She lies down again. She considers her fingers, grazing along Kara’s face, how conscious she has to be now to not touch too hard, press too hard. The control Kara must constantly subject herself to is incredible. How hasn’t she killed her? “Are you okay?”

“Okay?”

“Yeah. Hey.” She touches her chin, turns her face so Kara looks up at her. Kara pulls her glasses off and sets them on the table. Maggie looks for words. “I know what they mean to you. It must be a surprise.”

“Weren’t you surprised?” Maggie purses her lips, doesn’t answer. “I’m used to them being open with me.” She frowns deeper. “When Alex and I were fighting… when everything fell apart between us… with you… she told me how much I’d hurt her. That I hadn’t relied on her. I didn’t understand it. I just… I didn’t know how to tell her. I didn’t want to share what we had.” She finds Maggie’s hand, takes it. “But I ended up hurting her.”

“Did Alex tell you?”

“Lena.” She shifts, turning on her back and looking up at her. “After I told her about you.”

“You told her?”

“Why do you sound so surprised?”

Maggie flounders. They’ve known each other nearly a year but dating only a few weeks. As far as she knew Kara hadn’t told anyone. “I don’t know. Maybe I thought you wanted to keep it under wraps.” A beat. “Is she okay?”

“I think so,” she sounds almost dazed. “I can’t get my head around it.” Maggie continues to stroke her hair, not knowing what else to say. “Do you think Alex makes her happy?”

“I try not to dwell on Alex and Lena. But I can’t imagine anyone who wouldn’t want to be with your sister. I want her to be happy.”

Kara considers the words. “Is that because—” she stops herself. “I don’t want to talk about them,” she says more quietly.

“Okay.” A few seconds pass. “Did you come here because you were upset?”

“I’m not upset.” She burrows her face into her leg. “I didn’t think about it. I just came here. Is that bad?”

“No. It’s not bad.” She settles her hand on Kara’s chest and Kara covers her hand with her own.
“Hey. I’m glad you told Lena.” Kara looks at her curiously. “I thought maybe you didn’t want to tell her about us.”

“Why wouldn’t I? You know what, I don’t want to talk about her. I don’t want to talk about Lena or Alex or Mxyzptlk.” Kara’s face transforms, from frowning to cheery and eager, as if having locked away the troubling thoughts. Maggie can’t say she wants to spend all night talking about them either. She lets it go. Kara lifts, touching a hand to her face, bringing her lips to her own before resting her head on her lap again. “So, what are we doing for Valentine’s Day?” Kara takes her hand, tracing a heart on her palm. “I know a good twenty restaurants we can make reservations at. I know it’s late but I can cheat using Miss Grant’s authority.”

Her bitchy ex-boss? Maggie grimaces. She shifts. “You’re not one of those girls who loses her shit over Valentine’s day are you?”

“I love romance. Granted, Mr. Mxyzptlk has been a nightmare, but it’s got me thinking that I like all those things.”

“The stalking?”

“No. The gestures and flowers and getting dressed up and being in love.” Maggie stops. “Um. You know. The idea of being in love. Not being in love ‘love’. Not that there’s anything wrong with that. Love is out there. All around us.” She fidgets.

Once again she finds herself without words. “I hate Valentine’s Day,” she confesses tiredly. But the clouds have swept back into Kara’s face and she doesn’t seem to hear her.

xxx

Alex walks tentatively into Kara’s loft and Kara realizes, with some horror, that she’s no longer accustomed to walking there, that whatever was between them has deteriorated to the point that she no longer feels welcome. The air burns in her lungs, her head hot and light. It was never supposed to be this way. Something came between them. She allowed something to come between them.

Alex looks around as if it’s a place she’s only seeing for the first time, as if it were a museum. Kara follows her every move and finally Alex moves to the kitchen, folding her arms on the island to look at her. Kara mirrors her. She doesn’t know how long they look at each other. Alex turns away first.

Kara takes a breath. “I hear congratulations are in order,” she says.

Alex smiles somewhat grimly and bows her head. “Lena told you.” There’s something more to her words. “I didn’t know she was going to do that.”

“Are you mad at her?”

A slight frown. “No. We weren’t hiding it.”

“You were, Alex.” A small sigh. “I’m not angry. I’m surprised. I thought you hated her.” Alex taps her fingers on island. “But I’m happy if you’ve moved on. Lena’s awesome.”

She leaves the kitchen, moving around the loft. “How are things with Maggie?”

“Good. They’re really good.” Alex looks back at her. “Is it okay to talk about her?” She moves
closer, touching the cuff of her sleeve, the button, the loops at the waist of her jeans. “I don’t know who to talk to about things.”

“Why not Lena?”

*Why not you?* She knows why. Kara goes to stand beside her and crosses her arms. “I did tell her about Maggie,” she says, biting tentatively on her thumbnail before bringing her arms back to her side and crossing them again.

“How’d she take it?”

“I don’t know why you and Maggie keep asking me that.” She frowns. “She took it just fine.” On the surface. She heard her heart, saw it beat frantically. “I like what I have with Lena. It’s... calm. I don’t want to disrupt things between us.”

“And bringing up Maggie would disrupt things?”

“It disrupted things with us.”

“I was dating her.”

Kara bites her tongue. “I don’t think I’m explaining this right.” She doesn’t know how to explain it. Maybe she’ll never know how to explain it. “And I don’t want to fight because we’re talking again and I just want things to go back to the way they were.” It might be too much to ask. She takes a breath. “Are you and Lena doing anything special for Valentine’s Day?”

“I doubt it. We’re not exactly romantic.”

“What does that mean? It’s your first Valentine’s Day together. You deserve something big and romantic.”

“I mean that this has all been unexpected. I’m not planning anything.”

“Well, if I know Lena, she’s going to blow your mind with whatever she comes up with. I mean, she filled my office with flowers for writing an article.” Alex smiles. “I’m sure whatever she comes up with will be so much—so much more elaborate—”

She clears her throat. “What are you and Maggie doing?”

“I don’t know. But I’m thinking I should get a nice dress. And flowers? Does she like flowers? She’s never gotten me flowers but that doesn’t mean anything, right? I hope she gets me flowers.” And to think she thought she’d be sick of them after Mxyzptlk. A beat. “Did she get you flowers?”

“On second thought, maybe this conversation is a bad idea.”

Kara shifts her weight, looks at her profile. “I know you spend time with her.”

“Barely.”

She squirms, bites her lip. “I don’t know how to have you both in my life without hurting you.” Alex looks at her. “I have eyes. I can see what happens when I mention your names to each other.” Alex narrows her eyes gently. “*I hate* feeling like I can’t mention the people most important to me to anyone else.”

She hesitates. “You can talk to me about her. But Kara... I can’t tell you everything about Maggie or Lena. Some of that belongs to me.”
“But we’ve always told each other everything.”

Alex cups her face, thumb grazing her cheek. “Not anymore.”

xxx

Maggie leaves the station and hits the alien bar. It’s 8:47 pm and the bar is oddly vacant, not too unlike what it looked like after the Medusa attacks.

She takes a seat at the bar and Darla moves over with a mean look on her face. “Alone on Valentine’s Day? Color me surprised.”

“Spare me the lecture and just get me a beer.”

Darla does, fixing her with another dirty glare before she goes to flirt with one of the alien women.

Maggie massages her forehead and momentarily covers her face with her hands. She’s worn down.

She should go home but nothing feels like home. This dive bar filled with stragglers and outsiders comes closest. She didn’t buy Kara a card. She didn’t buy her flowers. Alex texted to at the very least get flowers. She meant to and now it’s too late.

Her phone goes off. Kara. Where are you?

She waits a few minutes before typing out several responses. She sends none of them. She has another three beers. She doesn’t look up when the seat next to hers is taken. Her stomach is churning. She hasn’t eaten but she doubts that’s it.

“So this is where you are.”

Maggie turns her head. Kara in a beautiful blue dress. Her hair is loosely tied. She smells magnificent. Her lips are pale and glistening, her cheeks flushed with anger. Maggie holds her beer and says nothing.

“I don’t understand,” Kara says quietly.

“We never made plans.”

“You said you’d come by. I made dinner.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Then why won’t you look at me? What’s going on?” Maggie doesn’t answer, half closing her eyes, not sure if the beer is making her want to cry, or the day, or letting Kara down, or having fucked yet another thing up. She has another drink of beer. How did Kara know to find her? She sees Mon-El in the corner, catches her looking and quickly looks away. Did he tell her? Fucker. “Did something happen?”

“No. Not really.”

“So you blew me off for nothing.”

“I didn’t blow you off.”

Kara frowns. She grabs her purse, turns and leaves. Maggie sits another minute before she slams money on the counter and goes after her, stumbling the first few steps. She’s not going to catch her. There’s no way she’ll catch her. She catches her. She’s walking the back alley, looking smaller than she should. “Kara, wait.”
“Why? I made you dinner. I got you flowers and you hit a bar?”

“I never asked you to do that.”

“I wanted to! It’s Valentine’s Day. We’re together. That matters to me. Doesn’t that matter to you?”

“It matters to me, Kara. It matters all the days leading up to this stupid holiday, and all the days after. I told you I hate Valentine’s Day. Did that not register with you? Do you ever listen?”

“Do I listen? You have got to be kidding me. Your default response to being angry at me is to shut me out. And half the time I don’t even know why you’re mad. You don’t talk to me!”

“I don’t talk to you? When do you ask me about myself? You ask about my exes, you ask about sex.” Is that all she is to her? “The night Lena was kidnapped you asked me to risk my job and when I wouldn’t, when you wouldn’t just trust me, you took off.”

“If I’d trusted you Lena would be dead. I’m sorry I hurt your feelings, but I don’t regret what I did.”

Maggie sways, her jaw too tight. “I’m glad you saved Lena. Do you know you nearly pulled me off the cliff when you shot off to find her?” Kara's eyes widen, lips parting. “You had no idea. Jesus.” She blinks. She will not fucking cry. “I haven’t suffered like you have, Kara. When I think of what you’ve lost and what you’ve endured… and what kind of person you still are despite of it, I can’t help but —” she stops. Takes a breath, feels the cold come again. “I’ve lost things, too. It will never be as great as your loss or as shiny as Lena’s but it hurts just the same.” She walks past her, moving to her car.


“I don’t want to talk about it!” She yanks her arm away. “I’m sorry I messed today up, but please, just leave me alone right now.”

“No. Not when you’re like this. You say I don’t want to get to know you, but every time I try, you push me away. I’ve asked you questions, Maggie. I’ve asked about your family and you’ve shrugged it off every time.” Maggie walks faster. “I am so sorry about what I said on that cliff. I’m sorry for nearly killing you. Why didn’t you say anything?”

Maggie stops, flexes her jaw. “Because I know you didn’t mean it. I didn’t want to make you feel bad. You had a lot going on.”

“So did you.”

“I didn’t want to be a nuisance.”

“A nuisance?” She stops, takes a breath, wipes her eyes. “God, Maggie. Who do you think I am?” Maggie stands, scowling a little longer before she finishes the walk to her car. Kara stands beside her. She sighs shakily. “No matter what I do, people keep drifting away from me.” Maggie looks at her. “I’m weird. And different. It doesn’t matter that I look like a ‘blonde cheerleader’ because that never helps. When I do something the wrong way, people notice it more.”

Maggie closes her eyes, trying to fill her lungs with air.

“I didn’t know how to let anyone in before Supergirl. I’d been taught to hide that part of myself. I was told people wouldn’t understand. That people might hate and fear me.” Maggie’s eyes burn.
Kara licks her lips. “For a while I was really close to James Olsen.”

She blinks. “I didn’t know that.”

Kara smiles faintly. “I’d just come out as Supergirl and he was there for me. I thought I was in love with him. I thought I knew what something like that meant. But all I know of love is what I have with Alex and what I’ve seen in movies or read in books. There was a time with him… it felt like we were on this wavelength. He tasked me to be better.” Her eyes are faraway and wistful. “I thought that he was… so… beautiful. Eventually everything seemed to line up and we decided to give it a try.” She crosses her arms, bows her head. “I couldn’t even make it to one date with him. All those feelings I had—it’s like… something turned off in me. And I kept searching for it. I stalled trying to find it. I want to say that I was thinking of you but I’m not sure if that’s it. All I know is that I hurt him and we haven’t been the same since. Maybe there’s something wrong with me.”

“Feelings change. Sometimes there’s no explanation.”

“But why? It’s just cruel.”

She has no answers.

“Alex was always the person that understood me. I could count on her for anything. But ever since I met you there’s been this fracture between us. And I don’t understand it because love isn’t finite. It’s… confusing and… different but everyone acts like it’s meant to be spent in a certain way. But love is for giving… and accepting.” She frowns, shaking her head. “Miss Grant is gone. James might as well be. Alex is keeping me at a distance and there’s something far in Lena’s eyes. Everything is changing.”

“Relationships shift, Kara. You just have to decide if those shifts are worthwhile.” Her stomach hurts. It’s the beer. Or the conversation. “But even if we weren’t together—there’s no guarantee that things would ever go back to the way they used to be.”

“I want to be with you. It feels like I’m always saying that,” tears shine in her eyes, “but I never seem to say it the right way. Why does it feel like you don’t believe me?”

She doesn't know how to say how impossible a thing like that can be to believe, not without sounding like she’s begging for reassurances. Why did Eliza do that to her? How had she gotten everything she thought she knew so wrong? You were a dumb kid. That’s all. Yeah. But it killed her. Aren’t kids supposed to recover from those kinds of things? Her throat hurts. She parts her lips but doesn’t say anything. It’s this day, this stupid, awful day.

Kara’s gaze burn into her, waiting for her to speak. Maggie’s eyes sting. She has to bite her tongue before she says something terrible. She’s never liked who she is today. “Say something,” Kara’s voice is strained. “Say anything.”

“I’m in love with you.” A cold grips her. She said that. She said it out loud. She hazards a look at Kara but is afraid to see her face. Kara is still. “I didn’t plan on telling you that. Not today.” Jesus. Not today.

Kara is silent.

Maggie drops her arms to her side, realizes the badge is still clipped to her waist and yanks it off, shoving it into her jacket pocket. Seconds spiral into what feels like eternity, until the vacuum in her stomach grows all consuming. She clears her throat. “I’m going to go.”
Her ears feel like they’re stuffed with cotton. Kara’s words come muffled. “You’ve been drinking. Let me drive you.”

“I’ll walk. Um. I’ll make today up to you,” she walks on, somewhat disoriented. Thinking of this day, so many years ago when her father grabbed her roughly by the shoulder and threw her out into the rain. It was night. She remembers the kitchen light shining on her mother, standing in quiet support behind him. The shadows. The chill of the rain. The worst night of her life one big fucking cliche.

“Maggie,” Kara catches up to her. “Let’s not leave it like this.” She smiles, bright as the sun but Maggie sees that quiet panic, sees her thumb flicking along the clasp of the purse, how tightly her fingers tug. She’s fucking beautiful in spite of it. “I don’t know what to say. I’m sorry. I don’t know what to say.”

It takes everything to smile and when she speaks her voice wavers. “Don’t say anything.” She leans up, kisses her cheek. “Goodnight, Kara.”

a/n: happy valentine's day!
Lena’s office is filled with roses. Alex looks at her. “Don’t tell me you have an imp, too.”

“An imp?” She arches an eyebrow. “Am I supposed to understand what you’re talking about?”

Alex has forgotten what it is to have normal friends. Or what passes as normal in her life. She realizes now that there’s nobody she knows not privy to the life she leads. Kara didn’t tell her about Mxyzptlk. Why would she know about him? Alex smiles at her. “If not an imp, an admirer.” She looks at the flowers, wonders if they’re from Kara. Did she fly them over? “They’re beautiful.”

“I’m glad you like them. They’re for you.”

“For me?”

“It’s Valentine's Day. Indulge me. You know, I had planned to send them to your workplace. Imagine my surprise to discover there is no agent Danvers at our local FBI office.”

Alex touches the rose petals. “You’re right. I’m a secret agent for a black ops government agency.”

“As I suspected,” she narrows her eyes before smiling. “I can’t say I’m opposed to a girl with a little mystery.”

I’m sure you’re not. “Well, I hate to ruin your fun, but it’s likely they didn’t trust a Luthor with my location.”

She tsks. “I’m devastated.” She comes closer to Alex, gazes at the flowers with her. “I hope the flowers aren’t crossing the line. I thought it’d be fun, since we are dating.”

They’ve had the conversation, Lena responding almost indifferently to Alex’s worries. She knows now. It’ll be better. Alex isn’t sure for whom but can’t disagree Kara would be more hurt if they’d kept it ‘hidden’ longer. “What people think about us isn’t the truth.”

“People will form their own opinions regardless of what we tell them.” By people they mean Kara and Maggie. “Don’t be a sourpuss today; I wanted us to have a good time.” She takes a seat on the couch and Alex follows her. “Want to get a love room?”

“One of those sleazy one hour sex hotels?”

“Believe it or not, they have upscale ones. They’re clean and sophisticated, although the idea of one with the heart shaped bed and Jacuzzi does have its own charm.”

“If by charm you mean its own brand of tackiness.”

“Your problem is that I’ve spoiled you rotten with all the magnificent places I’ve taken you. I think we should do it.” She settles an elbow on her knee, places her chin on her hand and looks at her. “If you hate it, we’ll go, but if you like it we can stay and have a good time. Not everything has to be so serious. What do you say?”

Alex shifts. She wasn’t even expecting flowers.

“Whatever plans you have, break them for me.”
Alex smiles sardonically. “Shouldn’t I put on something pretty?”

Lena leans forward, lips close to hers. “If you’d like.”

xxx

The lobby is set amidst the pyramids of Egypt and the Sphinx of Giza. The receptionists are dressed like pharaohs, others like Cleopatra. Alex lifts her eyebrows. Where have you brought me? the look says but Lena ignores her, seemingly delighted at the tawdriness. She signs in under the name Tess Thorul and is given a card key with a picture of a green Martian inside a heart shape. “Classy,” Alex says. They head to the elevator.

“Snob.”

“Nice name, by the way. Thorul,” Alex rolls her eyes. “They’ll never figure you out.”

“Not everyone’s as clever as you are, Agent Danvers. Anyway, it’s fun. Haven’t you ever wanted to be someone else?”

She has, many times but doesn’t say so. Lena’s good mood can’t be contained. It’s infectious. The elevator doors ding open and they step out to a long stretch of hallway, lined with roman columns and various statues. “I guess cramming as many themes into one hallway is as good of an approach as any.”

“Stop complaining.” Lena takes her hand and pulls her along. They walk past a pair in lab coats and goggles, drinking out of test tubes. Lena grins.

“What’s our theme?”

“You’ll see.” They walk past another couple. The woman is dressed in blue spandex, an S on her chest. Alex frowns, looking at the man in black agent that follows after her. They stare back at her and Lena and Alex wonders if it’s more than curiosity, if they’re judging two women being together. She pulls her hand back and Lena stops, looks at her. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Let’s just get to the room.”

“Are you ashamed to be seen with me?” She looks ready to pout. Alex takes her hand again and Lena smirks. They make it to their room after walking the seemingly endless hall. Lena flashes the card key. “Ready?” She swipes the key and the door hisses open, sliding into the wall, Lena enters boldly as if entering another universe.

Alex walks in and looks around. “Wow.”

The room looks like a spaceship. Alex walks inside, the cold of the metal offset by the warm glow of overhead and floor lights. There are several lockers and Alex pulls them open. There are a few astronaut suits, other outfits that look frighteningly close to standard DEO issue.

“What do you think of my guns?” Lena asks.

Alex looks over. She’s standing at a drawer full of weapons. Alex cheers and moves over, picking one up. Fake. “Not as nice as mine.”

Lena runs her fingers over her arm and smiles. She opens the next drawer. “Hello.” Alex peeks. Sex toys. Lots and lots of sex toys, all boxed. There’s an assortment of lubes, some flavored. Lena opens a box and pulls a dildo out, black, ribbed and glistening. “Look, an Alien variant.”
Coming near you. Not the kind she’s used to tackling. She bites her tongue. “And people think you’re a xenophobe.”

Lena taps her chest with it. “Does that mean you’re more welcoming?” Alex takes it from her and drops it back into the drawer. She looks to the side, spots the bed, large and white in the shape of a pod. A pod for two. Or more. She and Lena move over to it, searching for a way to get the pod lid to come down. It doesn’t. “Well, that’s disappointing. I wonder if it was the expense or lack of engineering know how…” Lena muses. “No, that couldn’t be it. That’s nothing…”

“I’ll admit it, ‘Tess’, hearing you geek out is kind of hot.”

Lena looks at her, finally tearing her gaze from the pod. “You don’t know the half of it. Should we play a game? Alien and secret agent? Mechanical engineering physicist genius astronaut and…”

“Secret agent?”

Lena laughs, pushing her onto the bed.

xxx

They lie in the pod bed, eating strawberries and drinking champagne. It still feels like a practical joke they’re playing but they’re the only ones in on it.

“Is that a smile I see on your face?” Lena asks incredulously.

She tries to dampen the smile, fails. “This place is nuts.” It isn’t the craziest place she’s been, but no one’s shooting at her. She isn’t in a panic about Supergirl. “I hadn’t planned on doing anything. You’re wily.”

“Wily?” She feigns offense.

“Wily.” Alex leans over to kiss her. She tastes like strawberries. Alex feels Lena's smile in the kiss before she presses a hand to her chest, pressing her back. “I didn’t get you anything.” She wasn’t expecting Lena to be excited about the day. She hadn’t even expected her to acknowledge it.

“Don’t be silly, your company is gift enough.”

Alex nearly smirks but stops, realizing she’s sincere. “What if I hadn’t joined you?”

“That would imply that you can resist me. And anyway, I’ve learned by now I have to rope you into things. In the end you’re always left satisfied,” she teases. Alex thinks of the text message Lena sent Maggie, focuses on the sensation of her lips against her ear. “I’m happy you joined me. You could stand to have a little fun.”

“How would you know?”

“Because I’ve seen your face. I’ve seen you. And you’re so serious.”

Alex turns to look at her. Lena moves the plates of strawberries from the bed onto the floor. Alex sits up, pulling her legs to her chest. “I’ll have you know I used to be the life of the party.”

Lena moves a hand through her hair. “What happened?”

Sometimes even she doesn't know. Blaming Kara is oversimplifying things. Something in her withdrew. “What were you like when you were younger?”
“Everyone knew I was a Luthor.”

“Did they know you were the one with exquisite taste?” She looks up at mast of the alien rocketship ‘bursting’ through the wall, an attractive, busty alien woman clinging from it. A UFO Jacuzzi bubbles and glows in the corner.

Lena chuckles softly. “I did.” Her hand slides along Alex's thigh. A moan comes from the other room, followed by a rhythmic pounding against the wall. Lena scowls. “Soundproof, they said.”

They listen in, chortling. Alex remembers faking it. She remembers wanting to get it done with. She wonders if it’s the same next door. Lena looks at her, cocks an eyebrow. “If you’re expecting me to offer to outdo them, you’re out of luck.”

She gives her a peck on the lips. “Sourpuss.”

Lena stands, dropping the blanket and walking to the jacuzzi. Every inch of her is stunning, her mind, her beauty, and still, she knows her mother would be disappointed. The Danvers family is weird so it’s natural for her to be gay. *That isn’t what she said.* She might as well have. She hasn’t told her that things ended with Maggie. She doesn’t know how to say it, how to explain it. It’d be different if she wasn’t with Kara.

“You’re pouting,” Lena calls. Her hand drips with water as she beckons her closer. “Come on, don’t you want to make first contact?”

Alex laughs in spite of herself. “It’s a little late for that.”

xxx

She’s pouring herself a drink when Kara drops onto her balcony. She stands there a moment, no doubt scanning the apartment before entering. Alex looks her over bringing the drink with her to the couch. Kara sweeps in, having a seat beside her. “What’s wrong with you?” Alex asks.

“Wrong? Nothing’s *wrong.* Maybe I wanted to see my amazing sister.”

Except it’s past midnight and Alex can’t remember the last time she visited. Kara smells like atmosphere and rain. Her cape is wet. Alex touches it absently, how smooth and slippery it is against her fingers. “If you say so.” She has a drink of the scotch and pulls her legs up onto the couch. “There’s leftover pizza in the fridge.” Kara gets up, retrieving the box, zapping it with her eyes and chewing absently on a slice. “Who was giving you trouble tonight?” There was nothing going on at the DEO. Nothing that J’onn told her about.

“No one. I was just… flying.” She sets the pizza on the coffee table, eyebrows narrowed.

Alex touches a hand to her hair and Kara turns, smiles in that heartbreaking way of hers. “I’m sure you weren’t thinking at all.”

“Maybe a little.” She drops her head, delving her fingers in her hair. “Every time I think I’ve got the hang of things… it turns out I don’t. Everything’s complicated.”

“Are you planning on giving me context or should I carefully pry?”

Kara sits up, another smile this time, pulling a hand back through her hair. She leans back into the couch, head tilted back. Alex studies her. It doesn’t surprise her that Maggie and Lena are in love with her. That she’s so beautiful doesn’t hurt. That she doesn’t know *how* beautiful she is helps. The last time Kara zipped onto her balcony, she held her while she sobbed about Maggie. How
Maggie hadn’t wanted her. What was she thinking then…? Kara told her she was proud of her. That seems like years ago. “Can I crash here?” Kara asks. Then, more tentatively. “Are you expecting company?”

Lena doesn’t drop by unannounced. Maggie sometimes did. “I’m not. And of course you can stay. But you have to talk to me.”

“I thought you said we couldn’t talk anymore.”

“That’s not what I said, Kara. And I didn’t fly onto your balcony when I said that.”

“Want to go flying?”

Yes. “You’re changing the subject. Is something going on with Maggie?” Kara gives a light shake of her head. Alex doesn’t know whether to believe her, doesn’t know whether she’s disappointed. “Did she get you flowers?” She nods and smiles, fingers curled over her mouth. “That’s good. That’s what you wanted.” But she suspects she’s lying. “Can I ask you something?”

“Yes. Anything.”

“Have you told Mom that you’re attracted to women? Have you told her about Maggie?” Kara doesn’t answer. “Have you told her anything?” She might know if she didn't make an effort to not be up to date with Kara and her mother’s relationship. It’s too exhausting and frustrating to be in the know.

“I haven’t. Look, I know some people think that it's not… normal or… they’re weird about it but it’s not a big deal.”

Not a big deal. It’s only her life. It was only the hardest thing she’s ever had to do. It was only taking her disguise off. “Didn’t Maggie ever tell you you needed to come out?” She made her come out.

Kara squares her jaw. “Before you were with Maggie… She asked me—if you knew. She said … she thought it would have been easier for you if you’d known about me. But I didn't know how to tell you. Not without explaining Maggie. Or hurting you. Not without making it about me. Maybe I just didn’t want you to know.” Alex forces herself to breathe. “I don’t know what’s normal or what’s supposed to feel normal… But Eliza’s always been great about everything. Understanding. Accepting. She won’t care. She’ll love Maggie. She did before.”

Eliza never spent much time with Maggie and when she did she looked at her as more of a curiosity, treating her like the odd foreign exchange student. Alex remembers Maggie smiling a lot. But they weren't real smiles, more nervous than anything. “‘Love’ is excessive.” She tolerated her. Maybe she tolerated them both.

“But Maggie’s great.” A beat. “You told her you’re not with Maggie anymore.”

“No, I didn’t,” she goes to refill her glass.

Kara joins her. “Why not?”

“You’re not going to give me shit about this, are you?”

“I just don’t understand why you wouldn’t tell her.”

“I don’t know, Kara. Maybe because I don’t know how to tell her that the woman I came out for
has moved on to my sister.” Maybe because it’s fucking humiliating.

Kara flicks her eyes away, frowns a little before looking back at her. “Eliza would understand.”

“Yeah, I know,” she snaps. She always understands when it comes to Kara. She downs her glass. “I’m going to bed. You know where everything is.” She leaves her there, climbing into bed, tired and irritated, wishing Kara hadn’t stopped by. She lies on the cool sheets, hot and anxious.

Kara moves around the apartment. Alex listens until she can no longer hear her, can only guess that she’s floating instead of walking. The shower runs and some time later Kara joins her in bed, having slipped into one of her oversized shirts and a pair of shorts. They face each other.

“Are you still mad at me?” Kara asks. “I can’t help but think things aren’t as good as they used to be.” Alex frowns. “I can see your face.”

“Maybe we’re not back at one hundred percent but we’ll get there. This isn’t our first fight.”

“Just our worst.” She waits, scooting closer. “I thought that you would be happy now. You’re with Lena… I thought that would fix it.” Fix it. As if it were so simple. “Did you have a good Valentine’s Day?”

Alex smiles faintly. “Yeah. We had a lot of fun. I like her a lot.”

She waits for a follow up question but there isn’t one. Silence passes. Then Kara speaks again. “We should all go to dinner together. A double date.” She plays with the blanket. “We’ve always wanted to do that but we never lined up… It would be fun.” She sounds like she’s reading a script.

“I don’t know. I’m busy and Lena has a lot of work…”

“She'll make it. It’ll be good for everyone to spend time together. You know, clear the air. Everything’s out in the open now and we should… take that time to adjust to each other. What do you say?”

The idea of going on a double date with Maggie and Kara makes her want to puke. She knows they’re dating. She doesn’t want to see it. She tries to slow her heartbeat. Kara’s gaze is honed on it before her eyes drift to her own. She knows. Alex keeps her voice neutral. “Yeah. Okay.”

xxx

“You look incredible,” Lena takes her hands, moving her one way and then another. A hand lights at the small of her back until she’s done a full turn. “You’ll make a delightful arm ornament.”

“Oh, thank God. I was worried.”

“Always the smart ass.” Lena smiles, takes her face in her hands. “Just breathe.” Alex takes her wrists, unsure if she means to pull them away or tell her she’s overreacting. The touch calms her. She leaves them, draws a slow breath, closes her eyes. “We’re not obligated to stay all night so if either one of us wants to go and grab a meal or a movie somewhere else, we’ll go. Should we come up with a code word?”

“Why did we agree to this?”

“No, no, no. I had no part in this. You came to me and told me my presence was requested, with bells on.”
“I never made mention of bells—” Alex looks past the entrance to Kara and Maggie seated in the distance, near the back. A candle glows on the table.

“And we both know how hard it is to say ‘no’ to Kara.”

She doesn’t know anyone who can. She knows if Kara told her to stop seeing Lena, she would. The host tells them they are free to join their party and they go ahead. Everything seems to move in slow motion. Kara and Maggie rising from their chairs, Lena leaning over to remind her to breathe, her fingers once again touching on the small of her back as if to guide her.

Soon they’re at the table and time collides, returning to normal. She’s frozen but sees herself move. Kara hugs her I’m so glad you came, her voice suggesting she thought she wouldn’t. Kara follows the hug with one for Lena and Alex looks at them, the careful way they hold one another. The way Lena allows the briefest moment to close her eyes.

Alex's eyes drift to Maggie, who stands with a faltering smile that flowers into something real. “I guess we’re hugging?” Maggie asks anxiously.

“I guess so,” the words bubble from her mouth when she meant to protest, unsure if she wants to. Maggie moves around the table; she’s wearing heels. Alex remembers the night with the alien fight club, the way her dress clung to her, how she led her by the hand, the cold that filled her when they parted. They hug and for a moment it’s as if the past few months hadn’t happened and nothing has changed. She feels the same, smells the same. Her embrace is tight. Alex doesn't know who lets go first.

Lena and Kara have already gotten into some conversation about the available desserts, the difficulty in choosing just one, do they have to? Should they share?

Lena and Maggie glance at one another, their gazes flickering. “Detective Sawyer,” Lena says. Alex hears the slivers of cold, “we seem to keep finding each other. I’m so happy for Kara.”

“And I’m happy for the both of us,” Kara quickly says. She secures an arm around Maggie's waist. Maggie allows it before disentangling herself. “Let’s sit, sit.” They do, Lena opposite of Kara and Alex reluctantly across Maggie. Their eyes lock only briefly before turning their attention elsewhere. “It’s so nice to be able to do this.”

Maggie smiles bittersweetly at her. “I think Kara was worried we’d be stood up.”

Kara touches her glasses, brushes a lock of blonde behind her ear. “I wasn’t worried. If anything I thought some cop thing might come up and you wouldn’t make it.”

“Let’s hope National City can keep its shit together without its stalwart detective tonight,” Maggie smiles nervously in their general direction while Kara gazes at her, a faint smile on her lips. You’re missing it, Alex thinks. You’re missing that smile.

“Well, true to form Kara has picked an excellent restaurant to host us,” Lena picks up the menu, “I’ve been meaning to get here for months. Didn’t I invite you once?” She says to Kara. “You blew me off.”

A grimace. Maggie rolls her eyes, notices that Alex has noticed and clears her throat, touching a fork on the table. “I had a thing that came up,” Kara says. “Being a CatCo journalist is very demanding but it does have its perks.”

Alex looks at her. “You used your Cat magic to get in, didn’t you?”
“Busted.”

Lena looks between the two of them. “Well, whatever that is, I’m happy to have you use that cat magic more often,” Lena waves the waiter over and orders a bottle of wine, imperious and commanding. He moves off to fetch it.

“I would have liked to chime in,” Alex says.

“Oh, shush. You know,” she says conspiratorially to the table, “she makes a fuss but she always likes it,” she looks at her, “isn’t that right, Agent Danvers?”

Alex’s throat tightens, cheeks warming. She feels Kara and Maggie’s stare. She clears her throat. “Don’t let Lena fool you. She puts on a big show but she’s actually very accommodating.”

Lena laughs softly and turns her attention back to the table. Kara fidgets. Maggie glances at her cell phone on the table. “Um. So… how did you two meet?” Alex flinches and Lena tenses. “Sorry— that’s …” she bows her head, laughs, “I’ve really put my foot in my mouth—” Alex places a hand on her knee beneath the table, squeezes lightly. It’s fine.

“Actually,” Maggie says, stiffly, “Kara was the first Danvers sister I met.” She doesn’t look at Lena. She doesn’t look at her. She’s embarrassed. When Maggie told her the truth that night at her apartment, Alex called her a liar.

Lena lifts her eyebrows in surprise. “I didn’t know.”

“Oh, it’s not…” Kara touches her glasses, “It’s not a big deal. At all.” Kara and Maggie glance at one another. There’s a friction there and Alex doesn’t know why. “I was walking and – it was some… crazy thing in National City. Maggie was worried and offered me a ride. It was before you were in National City.”

It isn’t the first time Alex has heard it, but it’s the first time it registers. She thinks back to the night when she confronted Kara about Maggie. She cried. Kara cried. She forced herself to forget so much of that night. It strikes her as odd that Maggie would offer a random stranger a ride, that Kara would take it. What kind of headspace was Kara in after the red kryptonite? Even now they don’t know its full effects. She’d begged her to stay at the DEO but Kara took off, agitated, loathing herself.

“National City doesn’t have its share of dull nights,” Lena says. “I’m glad the detective was there to take care of you.”

“Me too,” Kara says. Alex laces her fingers beneath the table, unlaces them, places her hands on her knees. The wine comes and she practically lunges at it. Lena watches her carefully, waits after she’s had a drink. “Well? Did the lady protest too much?”

The wine is amazing. “I think I protested an appropriate amount.”

“You like it,” she announces.

“It’s a little dry,” Maggie says.

Lena looks at her, as does Kara, who smiles more brightly at the perceived transgression. “It is meant to be a little dry. But I’m happy to let you pick up the next bottle,” Lena smiles. “Are you going to watch what I drink tonight? Find another excuse to take me down to the station?”
“That’s not what she meant,” Kara says. “She wouldn’t do that. Not about…” Maggie eyes Lena, smiles tightly. “Can we please all have fun tonight?”

“We are having fun,” Maggie’s phone buzzes and she picks it up without looking at it. “I have to take this.”

She goes, Kara watches, subdued panic in her eyes before she bows her head. When she lifts it, she’s all smiles. She picks up the menu, going on about all the dishes she wants to try.

Alex remembers their first dinner, how antagonistic Maggie was towards Lena, how antagonistic Lena was in return, though flirtatious and kind to her, while Kara insisted that she and Lena were only on a regular friend date. Maybe she and Lena are only confusing things by pretending to be in a relationship. But she doesn’t know how to tell Kara the truth, doesn’t know what she’d think. Anyway, it’s hard to explain. It’s not a relationship. But it’s more than just sex.

She considers it as minutes pass, listens to their plans for restaurants, coffee shops, movies at the cinema, talk of their respective jobs. She watches, on the outskirts. Lena glows. Kara glows. If she didn’t know better she’d think they were together. She smiles sadly, lamenting how complicated things are. Eventually Lena goes to powder her nose. Alex fills her glass of wine, while Kara’s eyes narrow, searching.

“Where is she?” Alex asks.

“Outside. In the back.”

“You should probably check on her.”

Kara shakes her head. “Every time she gets like this all I can do is give her some space.” A beat. “Whenever I try to be closer, I screw it up and push her away.”

“Did she say that?” Kara shakes her head. “Did something happen?”

“You and Lena look so beautiful tonight.” She smiles, a hand touching her neck delicately. “I hope you’re good to each other.”

“We are.” She shifts. “Is there something more to talk about?”

“Could you check on her? I’d send Lena but… I hate the way they get around each other.”

“You’re important to them.”

“So are you.”

Not in the same way. She crosses her arms delicately on the table. “I know I don’t understand the dynamic that you have with Maggie, but I think it’s really important, especially tonight, that you’re the one to go to her.” Kara seems puzzled. “Listen to your big sister on this one. Lena and I will be here.”

Kara stands, nods. She starts to move towards the exit and stops. Alex recognizes that look on her face: momentary alarm followed by steely determination. Alex nods. “Go.”

And she does, disappearing in the blink of an eye. She’s forgotten how fast she is. Lena comes back, her makeup fresh. She blinks. “Where did Kara go?”

“Oh. CatCo called her in on some emergency thing. I guess Snapper threatened to fire her—”
“He can’t do that without cause—” the anger is charming, surprising. “That bastard.”

“She said she'd try to get back here as soon as she can. In the meantime we can wait?” Lena nods and sits. Alex wraps her arms around her neck and looks at her. “Are you pouting?”

“Don’t be an ass.”

“I have to check on Maggie.”

Lena scoffs. “Bring her some boxed wine. And a tiny violin.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it; I couldn’t pick one out half as lovely as you could.” Lena’s likely only being catty because Maggie didn't like her wine selection. Couldn’t have anything to do with the arrest and being with the woman she loves.

Lena laughs. “Fine. I’ll sit here and order an appetizer while you go cheer up your ex.” She looks at her. “You know she doesn’t deserve you. Either of you.”

Alex strokes her face. “I won’t be long.”

xxx

The waiter spots Alex and throws his cigarette to the ground, crushing it and heading back inside. Maggie reclines against the brick wall, taking a slow drag off the cigarette, massaging her forehead with the palm of her hand.

It’s dark except for a streetlight a few feet off, casting pale gold over her.

The smoke pushes past her lips in whirls. Alex watches, heart wrenching before she steps closer. “I thought you quit.”

Maggie glances at her, a wry smile on her lips. “I did quit.” She exhales again, turning her head away. Alex looks at her ear, the lines of her neck, the collarbone peeking out beneath her dress. “The waiter hooked me up. I’ve collared him a few times.”

“Sure it’s not laced with anything weird?”

She flicks her wrist, an offering. Alex nearly reaches for it before shaking her head. “Kara was coming to find you but National City called.” Maggie doesn’t react. “Was it actually work?”

“No. An old friend.”

“They must have been important enough for you to walk out of dinner.” She didn't know Maggie had anyone like that in her life. She told her once that she has precious few. Smoke pours out of her nostrils before she drops the cigarette. She lets it glow, the ashes burning hot.

“Yeah. I was planning on going back in. I just needed a minute.” She smiles. “You know, the last thing I wanted to do was to come to this fucking dinner.”

“I wasn’t chomping at the bits to get to it either.”

Seconds pass by. “You two look good together.” But she doesn’t look at her as she says it.

She doesn’t know what to say. “Yeah. You too.” She and Kara, she means. Maggie crosses her arms, leaning into the brick. “Your phone call is over. Want to head back in until Kara returns?”
Maggie laughs. “Not really?”

“Kara wants us all to get along. It'd make her happy.”

“Maybe for a night. I have twisted myself into knots trying to figure out what makes that girl happy. I'm not crazy enough to think it could be me.” Why not? “And I’m not crazy enough to think I’ll ever fully understand her. I'd settle for…”

“For?”

She shakes her head. “I’ve never been good at this. All the social obligations.” She looks at her. “We've done this dance before. We had different dates.”

“I'd forgotten,” she says sharply.

Maggie flinches, smiles helplessly. “Yeah. Guess it’s no secret I’m not exactly girlfriend material. I get scared. I get bored.” Alex frowns. “Is this the part where you chew me out, promise to put me in a grave if I hurt her?”

“Kara is the strongest person I know. She survived the death of her planet. She can survive you. I did.”

Maggie tests her jaw, blinks once, nods.

Kara drops down beside them. “Sorry, sorry, I'm back.” She exhales, takes Maggie’s shoulders. “There you are,” she looks to Alex. “I can take over now. We'll be in soon.”

Alex smiles, glaringly bright. “Yeah. Meet you in there,” she goes, legs unsteady. She’s close when Lena turns and looks at her. She shifts, stretching her hand out. Alex takes it, able to breathe again.
SuperCop

Chapter by the_diversionist

A/N: This chapter is so long you're going to miss Wonder Woman while it's in theaters. JK, that shit will be there forever. Won-der Wo-man! *cue music* Anyway, there are some Alex sections in this chapter and bear with me as I attempt (but cannot undo the entire fuckery) to rectify some of the bizarre stuff that was done with Homecoming. Picks up from the last Alena chapter.

xxx

Alex heads back inside. Kara focuses on Maggie. The way her perfume mingles with cigarette smoke. Inside the kitchen staff bickers, blenders grind, pots and pans slam. Her senses were honed too sharply. It’s too loud, too much.

“Everything okay?”

Maggie grounds her, pulls her to this space and time. “Car accident,” she explains. “Everyone is fine.”

“Thanks to Supergirl.”

Kara smiles nervously. “I might not have heard if I wasn’t headed to you.” If she hadn’t heard the flick of the lighter, the murmuring of their voices, burning paper as Maggie took a drag. “Is tonight okay?” It’s a question that comes out as a plea.

Maggie nods and smiles up at her.

“Have I told you how amazing you look?” She hasn't and is overcome by urge to hold her, feels her body tingling with nervous energy. “I didn’t mean to leave you here alone.”

“I was with Alex. And Lena.”

Yes. Still, Kara brings their faces close, kisses her, smoky ash, with a bitter sweetness grazing along her tongue. It isn’t a taste she recognizes but she explores it, fingers trailing along her arm before she pulls away.

I'm in love with you. Maggie said those words to her but Kara still doesn’t know how to respond. Maggie hasn't acknowledged it since that night. Kara worries she agreed to this dinner to make up for saying it. “What's gotten into you?”

“I wanted to kiss my girlfriend so I kissed my girlfriend.” Maggie looks back at her, quizzical patience. “I know this isn’t your idea of a good time. It's awkward and everyone is sticking their foot in their mouth. It means a lot to me that you came and that we're here together. Did I interrupt you and Alex?”

She laughs quietly. “Um. No. I think we can put that conversation firmly in the over zone.”

“You seem a little...” She doesn’t know. Doesn’t understand the small subtleties of expression, feels completely rudderless. She smiles, at a loss. “I wish I understood you better.”

“What don’t you understand?”

“Why I keep hurting you.” She considers her words. “I think it’s because …” she falters. “But I
don't know. I don't know. I only have guesses and suspicions. I've always asked Alex about this stuff. Alex and Cat. And they're not here.”

“So ask me.”

“I have before. And I'm so afraid of you shutting me out if I do.” She takes a breath. “I just want to be better about this. I feel like I should be learning already without needing a walk-through or relationships for dummies book.” She smiles, touching her glasses, wondering if such a book exists. Maggie touches her hand as it’s to her glasses. Kara looks back at her.

“It's confusing at first. It gets easier.”

“Yeah.” She hesitates, her mouth dry. “I know that you're jealous of Lena. I'm jealous of Alex. I don't… I don't like to speak to … on … for other people but I think she’s still in love with you.”

Maggie’s eyes narrow, gaze shifting. “And I can't speak for Lena. I can't and I won't. She has… never said anything to me. Nothing intimate. Nothing more than … a dear friend.” A beat. “But… I understand why you might think… that she has feelings for me.” Her face is hot.

“Do you want to be with her?”

“I want her in my life.”

“Do you want to be with her, Kara?”

“I don't think of it that way,” she says, frustrated. “If I'd met her earlier maybe it would be different.”

“You can’t chain yourself to the first girl you meet.”

“I don't want to lose you. I'm not willing to lose you.”

Maggie straightens her back, contemplating. “Maybe you should date her. Figure out what you want.” She smiles, shaking her head. “Look… you're new to this. Fresh off the boat. We don't have to be exclusive.” Kara looks at her smile and feels some piece of her drifting away. “I just want you to be happy.”

“I am happy.”

“It just… seems like you're drifting. And that’s okay. It’s normal… when we don’t know what we want.”

“But I don't understand,” she bubbles again, “It’s not like I'm thinking of her when I'm with you, like I imagine her when I'm with you. I don't! When I'm with you, I’m with you.”

“And how do you feel about Alex being with her?” Kara hears her heart spiraling out of control. “Do you think of me when you’re with Lena? Does some … part of you ache when you leave her?” She nearly growls the last, but not in anger.

Kara tries to breathe. “I don’t know,” she says, numb. “Why do I have to know?” She lifts her hands. “Whatever you're trying to get at—it doesn't change things between us.” Please don’t let it change things between them.

“Okay.” She rubs her forehead and Kara is irritated she can’t do it for her, can’t soothe her headache.
Brian walks by at the end of the alley, slows and grins. “He-llo, ladies.”

“Get out of here,” Maggie snaps. He startles. “Wait—do you have a cigarette?” He pulls a box out coyly from his jacket pocket before trotting over. Maggie puts it to her lips and he lights it, nods at Kara. “Thanks,” Maggie says. “Now scram.”

“Looking lovely tonight!” He says with a wave, a bounce in his step.

Kara stands helpless. “Is the night over?”

“No. We said dinner. We'll do dinner.”

She wonders how many more hours of crackling tension they can withstand. “I don’t want us to fight.”

“Yeah, I know. We’ll have fun.” She looks off ahead, eyes much further.

Kara stands next to her. “Would things be better if I'd said those words back to you?”

“I don’t know, Kara. You'd have to mean them, for one.” She smiles, exhaling smoke. “You know, I’ve never met someone like you. You must be tired of hearing me say it. You're filled with so much love. Not a scrap of hate, of maliciousness. You're… above so much of this pettiness and insecurity. I can’t hate you. I can’t even be angry.” She touches her palm to her eye, leaves it there for seconds, sighs shakily.

Kara's vision swims. The space tilts. She remains stills, for moments unable to handle the quiet. The dead space. She lets it all in. The sounds of the kitchen, the restaurant, the people of the city, tires screeching, shouting, animals barking and singing. Lets the noise stab and sweep over her like a tidal wave before pulling it away, piece by piece, until she’s something resembling steady.

“I want you to stay with me tonight.” Her words are insufficient. It’s almost as if she hasn’t learned the language, misses particular nuances. Touch is different. Touch is an easier language, even if it’s one that she can only flirt with, without destroying everything. “Please. I need you to stay with me tonight.”

She wants to touch her, doesn’t touch her. Thinks it wouldn’t be fair.

Maggie lowers her head and Kara takes it for what it is, a silent agreement.

xxx

They get through the evening. Nothing is gleaned but it’s survived. It’s nothing and everything. Maybe that’s all that she needed to know. That they can survive.

Kara takes her hand as they make their way up to her apartment. She isn’t sure whether she’s leading or tugging. Sometimes it’s hard to tell. The world is an eggshell to her and even now when she wants to hold Maggie, so tight, to let her know what she means to her, she knows she can’t without killing her. Even physical language has its limits.

Kara kisses her as soon as the door clicks shut. This is their first language. The second language, words, expressions, that more common communication is still difficult for them. Words get stuck, lost in translation. They always seem to be just slightly off.
It’s not long before Kara removes her dress, and Maggie kicks off her heels. Normally they might laugh at the sudden drop in height but their urgency leaves them little time. Soon Kara’s carried her to the bed and she isn’t sure if she’s walked or flown her.

Time melts and Maggie’s touch sets her on fire. It doesn’t feel wrong. Here, in this realm, it never does. Maggie yanks her dress off and not long after they’re pressed together, skin to skin. Kara finds her lips and doesn’t relinquish them, keeps Maggie’s arms pinned above her head, crossed at the wrists. There’s no thought, only sensation, lightheadedness, panic. Don’t go, don’t go, don’t go.

xxx

Maggie’s wrists are bruised. Kara takes one, sees the greens and purple dotting her skin. Presses her lips to them. Even without wanting, she hurts her. They lie beneath the bed sheet, on their sides, facing one another.

Kara trails her fingers along Maggie’s shoulder, down her arms before taking them back. She stares at her, calming, watching her go bleary in her vision. Suddenly she’s crying.

“Kara, what’s wrong?”

Kara shakes her head.

“It has to be something. Was it that bad?”

She’s joking to make her feel better. Kara laughs. She’s laughing. She’s crying. Maggie’s closer, hand palming her face, tears trailing between the gaps. “I don’t know. I don’t know.” She smiles and the tears subside almost as swiftly at they came. “I think…” her voice quakes, “I think… I… bottle a lot of things inside. And sometimes I get overwhelmed. And sometimes it comes out like this.” This is the most embarrassing way it could have come out so there is that.

“Do a lot of crying while in bed with your girlfriends, do you?”

She sniffs, wipes the tears away. “Yes, it’s my secret weapon.” She closes her eyes and sighs again before looking back at her. “I’m sorry.” Maggie shakes her head. “This is weird, right? As if I wasn’t weird enough.”

“Everyone gets overwhelmed. Everyone. Talk to me. Talk to Alex. Or…whoever. But don’t bottle it up.” Maggie presses a kiss to her forehead and Kara exhales.

She looks to Maggie’s face, cautious and a little sad. She loves her, maybe. She’s sure or thinks she is. But she thought that with James, too. What is love, anyway? How do you quantify it?

Nothing’s certain. Why isn’t anything certain? Words are like promises. She broke up with her once before over Myriad. Then over Alex. She’s left her physically bruised.

She once thrived on living dangerously with her. But she can’t do that anymore. She has to be careful. She always has to be careful.
Maggie’s having a beer at the alien bar when Alex returns her call. She turns her gaze from the alien woman making eyes at her and moves away from the jukebox and pool table to the outside.

It’s cooler and quieter here. A stray cat yowls somewhere nearby. She takes the call. “Danvers.” She’s no longer sure which name is more impersonal and has been switching between the first and the surname. Impersonal is better. But Kara called her and told her about Jeremiah. After everything Alex told her about him—it only seemed right to call. That was hours ago.

“Hey. Sorry. I’ve had a crazy day.” There’s a pause. “I got your voicemail.” Another silence follows. “Um. I was really rude at that dinner—”

“That isn’t why I called,” she says quickly.

“It’s not?”

“No. Look, I know you have a lot going on but Kara told me about your dad.” There’s a long silence on the other end of the line. “And I know we’re not close anymore and I know you must have a million things going on but I just…” What? Wanted to make it about herself? She shifts. “It’s just we used to talk about him a lot. And I’m happy for you,” she says. “That’s what I wanted to say, that I’m happy for you. You must be… over the moon.”

Her voice warms. “Yeah, I am. It’s crazy. After all this time. I—I never said it to Kara but I was starting to give up hope. So this… it all feels like a crazy dream. I actually pinched myself.”

She smiles. “Yeah, I bet.” She rubs her forehead and pushes what Kara said about her out of her mind. “Anyway, that’s all I wanted to say. Go spend time with your dad.”

“I will,” she says. “It’s strange to think about it. I’d resigned myself to having these… pivotal life moments without him. He’s already missed so much… but now he’s back and. I don’t have to imagine it anymore or tell myself I can’t want it.” Maggie sobers, sad for her. “So moving forward I’ll have to let go of those negative thoughts. I can just have him here.”

“Yeah, you can.” She takes a breath. She hears someone on the other end of the line calling out to her. A man’s voice that she doesn’t recognize, maybe that’s him.

“I have to go.”

“Yes. Go, go.”

“I’m coming,” she calls back. “We’ll talk later.” Maggie nods. Then: “Thanks for calling. It means a lot.”

The call ends and she slips the phone back into her back pocket. She finishes her beer and returns to the bar. Her phone buzzes and she takes her phone out. A picture message from Kara.

She looks at it. It’s a selfie of her grinning wildly with a man she vaguely recognizes as Jeremiah, older than in the photographs Alex showed her. In the background, Alex talks on the phone, glancing at the camera. So excited! Little emoji hearts.

Maggie smiles faintly.
Maggie sits on the hood of her car but stares to the edge of the bluff where Supergirl hovers, her cape crimson in the glow of the headlights. She glides closer before touching ground. Her brow is crinkled in deep thought.

Maggie scoots over and Kara sits beside her. Her shoulders are slumped, hands laced together. Maggie’s taken aback. “I didn’t expect to see you here.” She says. Kara says nothing. “I thought you’d be with your dad.”

“Yes. I was.” She still doesn’t look at her. Her lower lip quakes.

Maggie waits until she can’t any longer. “Did something happen?”

She tests her jaw, lifts her head, blinks slowly, licks her lips. “No. I mean, I don’t know.” A huff. “All I want… is for things to go smoothly and for everything to be normal.” Maggie’s stomach starts to tighten. “You saw that picture of my dad.”

“The selfie.” She smiles. “It was cute.”

She shakes her head. “Before that picture… I don’t know. He just looked bad. Beat up. Old.”

“It’s been ten years.”

“I know. I know. But there was… something… different. Winn and J’onn thought it was weird that we were suddenly able to pick up on some Cadmus signal. And Alex thought it was weird too until we found Jeremiah.” She’s still. “I scanned him.” Kara looks at her sees her puzzlement. “Scanned. With my weird alien vision.” Another dismayed sigh. “I don’t like doing that. It’s intrusive for the other person. It’s intrusive for me. Sometimes it happens without my meaning to but this time I did it. On purpose.”

“Okay. Is having done it what’s getting you down or… did you see something weird?” That’s it. She goes back to her laced hands. “What was it?”

“His right arm is… it’s fake. Not fake,” she shakes her head, “cybernetic. And he’s been acting like he can’t use it. It doesn’t make any sense.” She gets off the car and paces, sometimes on the ground, other times gliding. “I know he’s been with Cadmus for ten years and I… I can only imagine the terrible things they’ve done to him. Having a cybernetic arm doesn’t mean anything. But—I mean, what has Cadmus touched that it hasn’t turned to crap? Metallo, Cyborg Superman —”

“Lena.” She forces the words. “They haven’t ruined Lena.”

“They didn’t have her for over a decade.” Kara puts her hands on her waist and looks up at the stars. “I’m worried,” she confesses quietly.

“Have you talked to J’onn or Alex?” She shakes her head. “Have you asked him?”

“No,” she says exasperated. “I feel like a crazy person. Everyone is so happy. I’m so happy. Eliza never thought she’d get her husband back. And Alex,” her eyes shimmer, “the last time I saw her that happy…” she stops and shakes her head, takes a breath. “Tell me I’m being crazy. Tell me I’m… jumping at shadows, please.”
Maggie looks at her sympathetically. “Kara, I don’t know him. I don’t know.” Kara looks at the ground. “Does he seem normal?”

“Yes! Just as… sweet and loving and warm.” Another bitter shake of her head.

“If they had him for that long maybe they hurt him. Maybe they just needed to keep him alive, somehow when they went too far.” Or maybe he’s working for Cadmus. Maybe they turned him. It could be either. It could easily be either.

Kara nods at the explanation. “That’s probably it.”

“Yeah, maybe. Talk to J’onn or Alex. Or talk to him. But don’t make yourself crazy about it, yet. And don’t beat yourself up over scanning him. I mean… it’s Cadmus. And it’s been a while. People do crazy things when they’ve been captured for that long. Not that he is,” she adds.

Kara nods again. “Yes. That’s it. You’re right. You’re probably right. And he mentioned some bomb Cadmus might have. He wouldn’t do that if he were… Well, I don’t know why he’d give us a head’s up if he was working for them.” Maggie nods. She takes a breath, smiles, genuine this time. “Rao, I feel so much better now.” Another breath. “Thank you.”

“Anytime.”

She takes her hands. “By the way,” she tugs her to her feet, “we are having a Danvers family dinner tomorrow night and I would really love it if you could be there. It’ll just be a few of us and I want you to be one of them.”

“Are you sure? I mean… you just got him back—” She’s already met Eliza. Doesn’t know whether Kara’s told her about their relationship. “I don’t want to be in the way of this… very intimate dinner.”

“You won’t, you won’t, I promise.” She blinks, startled but at what, Maggie doesn’t know. “I want you to meet him. Please say you’ll come?”

She can’t think of a way to get out of it. She can’t think of a way to tell her that any evening with her family and friends has more often than not turned out to be hellish. But she smiles. “I wouldn’t miss it.”

xxx

Kara calls Eliza before the dinner to tell her the news about Maggie. She takes it in stride. Kara suspects it’s more the timing than the actual news. If Jeremiah weren’t back she no doubt would hear about it.

Why didn’t your sister tell me? She never tells me anything. Did she push you to this? Kara doesn’t know what ‘this’ means and doesn’t ask, not ready to get into a conversation about it.

But at least it’s done with. She spends the afternoon with Alex, readying the apartment for guests, singing loudly to the radio, laughing. It’s as if Jeremiah’s return has mended what was broken between them. Kara hasn’t seen Alex smile like this in months and before then, not since he left.

“I invited Maggie tonight,” Kara tells her and she’s not sure whether it’s further incentive or a warning.
Alex breaks into a smile. “That's great. She should totally be here. God, I wouldn’t shut up about Dad when we were together. And she called me after we found him, which was great.”

“She did?”

“Yeah, real quick,” when she looks up at her it’s with the face of someone who realizes they misspoke. “Just to tell me she was happy for me.”

“That’s sweet.”

“Yeah. I didn't expect it.” She looks at her. “And before you ask, I did not and will not be inviting Lena.”

“Why not?”

“Maybe because her sociopath of a mother kept our dad prisoner for years and it might be upsetting to have his captor's daughter here as a reminder?” Her expression is hard. “Why is that even a question?”

“But Lena isn’t Cadmus. Or Lillian.”

“Kara, I love you, but drop it. I don’t want her here, neither will Mom, neither will Dad. I know you get these ideas in your head where you think everyone will hold hands and sing kumbaya and everything will work out because the power of love, but that is not what ever happens. And it ends up sucking for everyone.”

Kara frowns, pausing in the sweeping. “Okay, fine.”

“Then we're agreed.”

“I don’t agree but it’s fine. Tonight is important and I thought Lena was important to you and you'd want her here…”

Alex rolls her eyes and doesn’t answer.

They continue cleaning in silence until Kara goes over to the cabinet. “Wine to celebrate?”

“Yes!”

Alex props the broom against a table and heads cheerfully into the kitchen, pulling glasses from the cabinet as Kara opens the wine. They can’t have too much too early but a little won’t hurt and she can’t have Alex at her angry now. “This is so exciting. Isn’t it exciting? So exciting.”

“I’m so excited I’m about to verge right into scared,” Alex agrees. She lifts her glass to Kara, who cheers at the prospect of a toast. “To my sister and my best friend in the entire galaxy,” Kara shifts, smiling. “You said you'd get him back and you did.” She clears her throat. “I’m used to losing things—and never getting them back but…” she stops, laughs, scrunches her eyes. “I’m not going to cry.”

“No. No crying. Only happiness allowed.” She looks back at her. “And I raise my cup to you—”

“This isn’t Bridesmaids, you don’t have to try to out toast me—”

“And I raise my glass to the best woman I know. You’re strong and selfless and kind. And you inspire me to be better every day. No matter how I get lost—you’ll always guide me home. You're my lighthouse, Alex. I love you. And I’m so happy everyone gets to be together tonight. Just like
old times.”

“Okay. Now I'm going to cry.”

They hug. Sunlight streams through the balcony doors and windows but Kara sees further, to the violet hues settling in the skies. Her fingers tighten on Alex’s shoulders. She tells herself there’s nothing to worry about. She repeats it over and over in her mind like a mantra.

xxx

Eliza hugs her too tightly, whispers how lucky she is, which is pretty weird in itself, but other than that, Maggie suspects she’ll survive the evening. Jeremiah is a handsome and affable man with a sort of ‘aw shucks’ charm to him. Alex looks at him like he’s the stars but Kara is more reserved. Her smiles are tinged with that familiar sadness and not even J’onn or Winn can do anything to lift her spirits.

“This is my girlfriend Maggie,” Kara says. J’onn’s eyebrows shoot up. Jeremiah looks at them with only mild surprise. Maggie feels herself flush, not having expected to be introduced that way.

He starts to extend his right hand, grimaces and then extends the left. Maggie gives it a firm shake. “Alex told me so much about you,” she says. Maybe she shouldn’t have said it. She chances a look to Alex who nods and smiles quietly. “It’s great to finally meet the man behind the legend.”

Jeremiah laughs. “So you come back from the grave and return home and you’re a legend?” He smiles. “If you’re here tonight you must be special. I’m happy Alex and Kara have you in their lives.”

Maggie doesn’t know what to say.

Kara hurries on. “And this is Winn.” Winn straightens up as if he were a cadet being addressed by a commander. “He was able to track your Cadmus outing. He’s our resident computer genius at the DEO.”

He grins. “Now, now, I only designed the system to track the darn thing. It’s these two,” he points at Kara and J’onn, “who flexed the muscle to take care of the business.”

“Mr. Schott is one of our newest recruits but has proven himself to be very capable,” J’onn says. “I can assure you we’d have had a hell of a harder time finding you if not for him.”

Jeremiah takes Winn’s hand firmly. “Then you’re part of the reason I’m here. Thank you. It’s good to know the DEO still employs the best of the best.”

“Am I blushing?” Winn looks to the group. “I’m blushing.”

“Ham it up,” Alex says.

They continue their night of drinks, their laughter growing by the hour. Maggie sits back, watching Kara and Alex, how easy they seem, how happy they look.

Winn comes beside her and offers her a beer. Maggie takes it. “Kara told me once that she wasn’t a lesbian but I didn’t believe her.”
“Maybe she just didn’t want to date you.”

He mimes being shot. “Go for the kill, why don't you?” He keeps a hand over his heart before eventually dropping it. Maggie smiles and Winn returns it. Frankly, she’s surprised to see him here. “Kara keeps inviting me to these family functions. It’s sweet and I appreciate it but there’s one part of the night that’s always like super awkward?”

“Yes, I know the feeling.”

“So, being with Kara. That must be like super great.”

She has a drink of beer. “Yeah. It is.”

“I’m just happy her reunion is going better than the one I had with my dad.” She looks at him. “I really appreciate you pretending not to know but it’s okay. You can let the cat out of the bag. Yes, the Toyman is my dad, no, I don’t collect nefarious explosive toys. Just action figures. Really awesome action figures.”

That lunatic’s his dad? Did he treat him well? “I didn’t know.” Though she remembers reading the case files about how it all went down. Supergirl saved the day and the Toyman is back behind bars.

Winn falters, his smile shaky. “Yeah, well. That’s me. Not Toyman. His son. He wasn’t always crazy.”

“Hey.” She looks at him. “Family’s complicated. Even when they do terrible things… sometimes we can’t help but to love them anyway.” She hears a whistle and looks to Kara waving them over. “Looks like they’re not going to let us stay in our little outsider corner all night.”

“The Danvers sisters? Hell no.”

They mosey back and Maggie has a seat beside Kara on the floor. Kara rubs her back absently, giving her a peck on the cheek. Eliza shoots daggers at her and Maggie wishes she’d sat by someone else. She glances at Alex but she’s still looking up to Jeremiah as if he were everything. Maggie finds herself smiling. She hopes Kara’s wrong.

“So, Mr. Thing,” Winn says cheerfully. Clears his throat. “Er. Mr. Danvers, Sir. Are you going to be returning to the DEO with us full time?” Kara glances at him. Alex brightens at the idea. “You know, the Danvers could just be… one big ass kicking family in black. And blue and red and gold. Did Kara tell you that I—”

“Actually,” he says, “I was thinking about returning to the DEO. It’d be good to be with my girls again,” he looks at them. Maggie looks at his bruised face, the cuts. Not terrible injuries, but injuries none-the-less. “I know a lot of time has passed. And I know I’m not… the same man I used to be.”

“Cadmus had you so long,” Alex says, “not changing would be impossible.”

“I appreciate that,” he tells her, smiling. “And I know Kara was there when I helped her and Mon-El escape. But I’m afraid those moments were few and far between. I’ve done some things I’m not very proud of—”

“But that wasn’t your fault,” Alex says.

He gives her a look and she stills, sitting tensely. “This is going to be a period of transition as we
all adjust… to everything. But I’d like to be back with the DEO and contributing in whatever capacity I can. Cadmus may have tried to break me but they didn’t. And they’re going to regret it. They have no idea what damage we can do to them. Especially with everything I’ve learned about them over the years.”

Alex’s phone buzzes. Maggie glances over. Lena. She ends the call without answering and pushes the phone aside. “Can he?” she asks J’onn. “I can’t imagine what he’s had access to. We could track Cadmus down and shut them down for good.”

J’onn considers, his face serious. “We’ll have to do the customary checks—”

Winn bounces. “Hey, but can’t you just like—” he puts his hand to his forehead. Maggie remembers seeing something like that in an X-Men movie once. “You know, do your mind juju and skip the HR stuff? Wham bam thank you ma’am?” He flinches. “Not that any of you are ma’ams.. or… wham bamming…” he looks at Eliza and clears his throat.

Jeremiah shifts in his seat and looks at J’onn. “If that’s what you think we need…” he says. “Of course, I’d be willing to subject myself to a full psych eval. It won’t be any worse than what they’ve done to me at Cadmus—”

“I don’t like using that unless I have to,” J’onn says. “We’ll go through our standard process. The way we would any other agent. After that… I see no reason why you couldn’t come back.”

Jeremiah and Alex smile with relief. Kara fidgets next to her. She clears her throat. Touches her glasses. Scratches her neck. “Do you think you’ll be able to go out on the field with your arm like that?” she asks. “I mean… Alex, you said the damage was extensive, right?”

Maggie tenses. Alex sits up. “There’s more to the DEO than being out in the field. Look at Winn.” Winn makes a face but keeps his mouth shut. “He wants to help. He can help.”

Jeremiah flexes his hand but not very much. It remains gnarled and curled. “I’m hoping in time…” He grimaces shakes his head. “I want to help in whatever way I can. No matter how limited.”

“We’ll find a place for you,” J’onn says.


Alex looks between Kara to Jeremiah. Jeremiah sits up, takes a breath. Lowers his head. Alex hones in on him. “Dad?”

“You’re right. You’re right,” he nods. “I’m sorry. I should have been up front with you from the beginning. I see your face,” he tells Kara, smiling. “It’s okay.” Maggie looks at her, the way her cheeks are flushed, her eyes glistening with tears. “It’s true.” He looks to Alex. “You weren’t wrong when you said the damage was extensive.” A beat. “When I helped Mon-El and Kara escape… well. They weren’t very happy. I … didn’t want to make you feel bad,” he looks at Kara. “But they did… some very terrible things to me. They ended up going too far. The bones in my arm were shattered … completely and. In order to keep me alive they gave me this arm.” He helps lift it slightly with his other arm. “It’s somewhat functional. It looks real enough… but it doesn’t work very well.”
“But that doesn’t sound like Cadmus,” Kara says. “Why would they give you a pointless arm? So you didn’t feel out of place? It doesn’t sound like them.”

“Kara,” Alex warns.

“No—” she says. “I don’t understand. Why didn’t you just tell us? Why let us worry about telling you the news about your arm?”

“I didn’t know how,” he says. “I know the missions Cadmus has undertaken against you. I know who you’ve faced. God. I’ve even worked on some of their experiments. I was ashamed. I didn’t want you to blame yourself for what happened to me—”

“They won’t,” Maggie says, “It wasn’t their fault.” He looks at her, it seems for the first time. She doesn’t like how he keeps repeating something she isn’t meant to feel, when all it’ll likely do is make her feel needlessly guilty.

“You’re right,” Jeremiah nods. “I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t apologize,” Alex says. “It’s Kara who should be apologizing.” Kara says nothing. Alex’s face is white. “How dare you?” Kara still says nothing, staring into her lap. “Dad tells you he lost an arm helping you escape. He goes through a decade of abuse and you have the nerve to attack him the second he comes back? During our first family dinner?”

“She wasn’t attacking him,” Maggie says. “Look, it was just a question.”

“Stay out of it, Maggie,” Alex says. Maggie rubs her forehead. Says nothing. Yes. She should stay out of it. She sees Winn inching backwards, his eyes darting around the room. “What was all that stuff you said earlier about being family? And then you go and pull this crap? It wasn’t just a question. If it was, you wouldn’t wait until he talked about returning to the DEO to ambush him. You would have mentioned it to me, to any of us, earlier.”

“Girls, don’t fight,” Eliza says. “Kara asked a question and your father answered it. Everything’s fine.”

“What the hell were you doing scanning him anyway?” Alex asks. “You can control your powers. Did you think he was a plant?”

Kara looks back at her, features hardening. “I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t have to. I know you, Kara.” She scoffs, stands. “You’re fucking unbelievable.” Kara grits her jaw. Jeremiah looks between them, saying nothing, looking sad. “You know, maybe it means nothing to the girl of steel. What would you know about physical torture? What would you know about breaking?”Kara looks back at her, chin quivering. “Maybe a ‘pointless’ arm doesn’t mean anything to you but I assure you, if it were any other one of us humans it’d mean a hell of a lot to us.”

“Alex, that’s enough,” Eliza says.

Alex laughs shortly. “I’m out of here.” She reaches down, hugs Jeremiah. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Dad.” She kisses his cheek and takes off, slamming the door.

Kara gets to her feet. Her legs wobble. Jeremiah looks at her. “It’s okay, sweetie. I understand. She’ll understand, too.” He looks around the room, takes a breath. “I think it might be time to call it a night. I’m exhausted.”
They all gather their items and filter out. Kara stays, rolling her fingers, air pacing, taking deep breaths. Maggie watches her. Finally her feet touch the ground and she turns to her. “Am I being a jerk?”

“No, you’re not.”

“Rao, the way Alex looked at me. And the way Jeremiah looked at me.” She takes a shaking unsteady breath. “I had to bring it up, right? I mean… I’m Supergirl. I have to… do the hard, awful things even when it hurts.” Maggie looks back at her. “Maybe I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“No. You were right to.” Maggie takes her hands and Kara, who started air pacing again lowers to the ground. “Maybe it’s nothing. But if it is? And you hadn’t said anything? You would have hated yourself. And others would have questioned you. You did the right thing.”

“Alex hates me.”

“Alex will never, ever, hate you.”

Kara lifts her eyes, closes them to blink the tears away. “What if I had been able to find him sooner?”

That fucker. “You can’t start thinking like that. You’ll go crazy. You’ve looked. Everyone has looked.” She cups her face. “You’ve done everything you could.”

“And what if I’m right? If I’m right—if I’m not being paranoid— this will… devastate her.”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we get there. In the meantime… you have to keep doing what you think is right. Okay?” Kara nods. “Okay.” Maggie wraps her arms around her. Kara trembles.

xxx

Winn moseys over to her, doing a dance. Kara waits until he’s close enough before she snatches his wrist and drags him to one of the offices, closing the door. “Ow.” He rubs his wrist and looks at her. “Look, I’m really flattered, but I have a girlfriend. And you have a girlfriend—”

“What?” She blinks. “No, shut up.” He startles. Mimes zipping his mouth shut. She brings her hands over her face. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” She paces. These past few days she can’t help but pace. She’s swung from one vacuum existence to another that is far too piercing. “I know that dinner was awkward.” Maybe she should stop having dinners.

He laughs. “Just another Danvers family tradition. Don’t worry, I’m used to it. And still way less awkward than reunions with my dad.” He smiles weakly. “What’s going on, Kara?” He walks closer with his tablet, looking at it, looking back at her. “This is about what you said at the dinner, isn’t it?”

She pulls the air into her lungs but it doesn’t seem to be enough. “Yes.”

“All right. Lay it on me.”

“I can’t talk to Alex about this. And… I’m afraid that if I talk to J’onn he’ll…” A beat. “He won’t let us do what needs to be done.”

“Which is…?”
She feels herself starting to pace and stops herself. “I am trying to keep my eyes on him but I … can’t. Not always. This isn’t about Jeremiah. It’s about Cadmus…” She presses her hands together. “Can you just… keep an eye on him? And let me know if he does anything that’s weird or off or…” she rubs her hands, trying to get warmth in them. “I just want us to be careful. I know he’s my dad—”

“Hey. I get it.”

“We need to be objective.” Yes. Objective. Snapper would say that. Alex would say that. “And I’m afraid you’re the only one among us who can be.” She brushes a hand over her mouth. “If… we have to bring it up—for whatever reason—and I’m hoping we won’t— I’ll take full responsibility. You can tell them I forced you into it.”

“Hey, we’re a team. I trust you. If you want me to keep an eye out… I’ll keep an eye out.” She nods, gratefully. “Um. Are you going to tell Alex?”

Kara shakes her head. “She’ll tell him. And then he’ll be better about hiding whatever he’s up to. If he’s up to anything. He’s probably not. But just in case.”

“Okay. Will she kill me if nothing turns up and she finds out?”

Kara smiles weakly. She’ll try. “It’s me she’ll be after.”

He nods slowly. “Well. If this is a possibility I’ll get right on it,” he says heading out.

“Winn.” He looks back at her. “Thank you.”

He smiles and moves on.

Alex watches him walk out and joins her in the room. She looks between them and back to her. “What was that about?” she asks.

“I don’t know. Some comic book thing,” she looks off, touches her glasses. “Um. Are we going to be okay?” She leans into the desk. Alex touches her fingers along the metal table, walking slowly. They’ve had more conflict in the past year than they’ve had since they’ve known each other. “I think—I just think things got out of hand last night. I just want everyone to be safe.”

“Kara, I get all of that. But he’s my dad.”

It’s a warning, as much as she doesn’t want it to be. “Our dad.” Alex crinkles her nose, eyes narrowing and Kara knows she’s fighting to keep herself from blowing up at her. “I meant everything I said to you at my apartment. I know I keep finding new ways to make you angry but … please trust me when I say I’m not out to hurt you.”

“Are you going to drop this crap about Dad and Cadmus?”

Kara leans back into the table and flicks her eyes to her. It’s always been easy to lie to the world. It’s always been close to impossible with Alex. “Yes. Yes. If that’s what you want.”

“It’s what I want.” Alex looks at her steadily, the anger there waning away to vulnerability. “Please. If you care about me. If you care about our family, you’ll drop it.”

Kara looks at the floor, looks back at her. Nods. If Alex were like her she’d know she was lying. What would she do then? Throw her against the wall? Yell? This is another betrayal. She can’t breathe. Even when Alex presses a kiss to her cheek, thanking her.
Alex batters the punching bag, feeling the force move through her arm in ripples. She growls and hits it again and again. Sweat runs down her face. A kick and the punching bag goes swinging, she dodges it as it comes back and kicks again, pummeling it until the rage drains out of her.

The door to the room comes open and Jeremiah comes in. He stands at the end of the room. His smile is as kind as she remembers. She tries to shake the anger but feels it coursing through her like a sickness. “I’m not going to talk to her,” she says.

“I remember when she first came to stay with us. You used to fight all the time.” Alex goes to pick up her water bottle, drinks, wishes desperately that she had something stronger. She takes a hand towel and wipes her face. “But that’s changed. Talking with your mom, to J’onn.” A beat. “Those case files I read. It’s obvious what a great team you make.”

_You lied to me, Kara!_ She thinks of how she shoved her into the lockers and her stomach sinks. What’s worse is she knows Kara let her push her. Otherwise she might have broken her wrists in the attempt. Kara would have remained immovable, leaving her frustrated. Alex left her, ashamed, unable to look at her, thinking that a physical attack was actually kinder than what she might have said in the moment. Sometimes she feels like she’s going crazy. Why can’t she rid herself of this anger? “They shouldn’t have been spying on you.”

_Why didn’t he just ask us, Alex? Have you stopped to think of that? It’s weird._

“When your sister was captured by Cadmus she thought she was going to die,” he shakes his head. “It was more than Hank Henshaw and Lillian Luthor draining her of her power. They made threats. I watched a video… of the things she told Mon-El to pass on to you if she didn’t make it back. Kara loves you more than anything in this world.” Alex’s eyes burn. Kara never told her about that. “I’ve been with Cadmus for ten years. You know what they can do. If I was Kara, I’d be paranoid, too.”

“I just don’t—” She collects herself. He’s missed ten years. He has to see how far she’s come. She can’t get emotional. She can’t cry. “I don’t want to think of that. I know it’s not true,” she adds quickly. “But the thought alone…” she shakes her head. “We just got you back.”

He smiles. “I promise, I’m not going anywhere. Come here.” She does, wrapping her arms around him. He’s warm. He returns the embrace with his one good arm, presses a kiss to her hair. “Now go make up with your sister.”

“I’m still mad at her.”

He chuckles. “I know.”

“I shoved her.”

“I know that, too. Kara will forgive you. Kara will always forgive you. You’re sisters.” He lets her go. “Remember when I said there would be a period of adjustment? That’s all this is.” He smiles. “Everything you’ve done throughout the years… all those moments I’ve missed. I’m not going to miss another one. But I want you to know that I could not be prouder to be your father.”

Alex lowers her head, nods. “Thanks, Dad.”
He nods at the door, encouragement to go find Kara. Some of the DEO agents look at her as she walks past, some of them turning their head quickly. J’onn already wants to see her. She’s probably going to get sanctioned. She lost it. She just lost it. Her legs feel like jelly. She heads to the showers, opens her locker door, finds the flask. She touches it when she hears a noise behind her. She slams the locker door shut and turns to see Kara in the plumes of steam. Alex wasn’t ready for her yet. Kara’s hands are in her pants’ pockets, head down.

She has to apologize. She doesn’t know how. She hunts for words. She waits for the calm. When she apologizes she wants to be sincere. Maybe she can’t apologize yet. “Are you okay?” she asks gruffly.

“Yeah, yeah,” she touches her glasses, leaves them on despite how they’ve misted over. Kara comes closer and leans into the locker beside her own. Alex looks back at her uncertainly, wanting to be closer, further. “I’m sorry I lied to you.”

Alex looks away, tears stinging her eyes again. She occupies herself with the locker but there’s nothing except the flask, bottled heat, the extra set of clothes, her sneakers. There’s no forgiveness, no steel, no words.

“I am so good at hurting everyone I love.”

Alex doesn’t say anything.

“I can’t say that I trust everything… his explanation… But I wish I hadn’t lied to you. That was wrong. And it felt awful.” She pulls her glasses off, looks at her. Alex can only barely glance at her. Her gaze burns. “All I wanted… more than protecting the DEO… was to keep you safe.”

“He would never hurt me.”

“Not that kind of hurt.” Her mouth moves wordlessly. “I didn’t want him to betray you.”

“He didn’t betray me, Kara. You did. You looked me in the eye and you lied to me.” She slams the locker door shut. “Dad wanted me to make up with you. I’m sorry I pushed you. I shouldn’t have done that. I wasn’t thinking.” Kara watches her, with puppy dog eyes. If she only knew the things she could get away with… “It was wrong. And for what it’s worth, I forgive you. I’ll always forgive you. But it doesn’t mean that I don’t have all of this anger,” she seethes. “I just wish you had half as much faith in our father as you do in Lena Luthor.” Kara stares back at her resolutely. “I can’t stand the idea,” her voice is tight, “of you taking one more thing away from me.”

Kara’s expression slacks before she turns away. Alex stares at her back. Wants to touch her, apologize but nothing comes. It’s as if all the compassion she has has been depleted, pushed away by anger and fear.

“I wish I could be stronger,” Alex tells her. “I wish I could be as strong as you think I am. I am not as strong as you. I will never be as strong as you.”

Kara half turns her face. Alex can only see a glimpse. Kara turns and leaves without another word.

xxx

It’s cold.

The train continues on, hurtling further into the night. The air whips. Kara listens. She hears them
in the distance. Alex and Jeremiah.

You betrayed everyone at the DEO, your friends, our family. Everyone that I love. You did that for me?

Family’s complicated, honey.

Kara races. She’s never heard Alex like this. Never. The anguish in her voice makes her unsteady. For moments she’s disoriented and loses her way. She hovers in the wilderness, darkness all around her. She hears the animals of the forest, the rushing of the river. She searches for Alex’s voice. Her voice will guide her.

I’m bringing you in. She's regained a sense of her determination and despite their disagreements, Kara's proud.

No, you’re not.

Kara arrives. Waits. Keeps her distance. Alex has the gun on him. He has his arms in the air.

“If you’re going to bring me in. You’re going to have to shoot me. If you do it, I’ll understand.” Alex inches closer but doesn’t shoot. But her heart races. Her breath is shrapnel, blasting into her. “You were always the best part of me.”

Alex lowers the gun. Jeremiah looks to Alex, up at her, turns and goes. She watches his figure, running through the forest, getting smaller. Maybe he thinks she’ll give chase, drag him in. Alex let him go. So he goes.

She floats to the surface, touches a hand to Alex’s back. Alex looks up, tears streaming down her face, she lowers her head. There’s a gasp, a hitch in breath before she breaks. Kara kneels with her in the mud and the dirt, wraps her arms around her. “I couldn’t do it,” her words are fragmented. “I couldn’t do it. I’m sorry. After all those horrible things I said to you.”

The breeze of before dies away. The very forest seems to have gone silent. Even the smell of the pine trees and the dirt have disappeared. Or maybe it’s only the sensation of black holes returning. Alex’s tears are hot against her shoulder. She can’t get her to stop shaking.

“I can’t believe this is happening. I can’t believe he could do this.”

Kara strokes her hair, takes an unsteady breath. She can’t think of the right thing to say. Her inability strikes again. She holds her, not knowing what else she can do.

xxx

Kara meets her in the hall, flings her arms around her so tightly that Maggie nearly drops the beer and bag of food she’s brought. Her grip is strong, breath warm and trembling against her neck. Maggie returns the embrace as well as she can, which isn’t very, until she pulls away long enough to set the items down and hold her close. “What happened?” All she told her was to bring food, lots of food and beer.

“Everything. Every worst possible thing. He hurt J’onn and Winn. He hurt Alex.”

“What?” She asks breathlessly.
“Just by… betraying us.”

Oh. Jeremiah. “I’m so sorry,” she tells her, pulls back to look at her face. “I know how you wanted
to things to work out.”

Kara nods, wipes hastily at her eyes. “Alex is crushed. And I don’t know how to make her feel
better,” she smiles helplessly, as another tear streaks down her cheek. She wipes it away. “Alex
thinks I’m strong,” her voice is choked, “so I have to be strong.” She takes a breath, takes a breath.
“It’s … only that it’s so exhausting sometimes.”

“Alex would want for you to take what you need. Even when you’re fighting; she wants the best
for you.” Don’t you know how much she loves you? More than the world. She keeps it to herself. 
Maybe the weight is more than Kara can bear right now. Kara continues to wipe at the dampness
on her face. Maggie smiles up at her. “Should we go in? Or do you want me to run out and get
some dinner trays?”

“Let’s go in,” she walks and then stops shortly at the door. “Um. Alex is here. I just— couldn’t let
her be on her own after tonight. And I’m not sure what Lillian and Jeremiah are up to… so—”

“You don’t have to explain.”

Kara smiles and kisses her. She tastes like tears. “You’re the best.”

She walks in, sees Alex's boots by the door, her figure, like a shadow on the couch. Maggie slows.
“Are you sure it’s okay that I’m here?” she whispers to Kara.

“Yes, I’m sure. Go sit with her and I’ll divvy up the food.” She gives her a gentle nudge and heads
to the kitchen with the food.

Maggie moves forward. The tv lights Alex's face. She's pale, like rice paper, almost translucent.
Maggie isn’t sure she’s heard her entrance so she keeps some nominal distance. “Hey.” Alex looks
at her. No surprise registers. Maybe she’s in shock. She opens her mouth as if to speak but shuts it
again, thinning her lips. “I brought some food.”

“I’m not hungry.” Her voice sounds like its gone through a wood chipper.

Maggie glances to the kitchen where Kara spoons some of the Chinese onto a plate. “Tough shit,
Danvers. You have to eat.” She takes a seat beside her, laces her hands across her knees. “Tough
day, huh?”

A breath, parting of her lips, then her mouth closes again. Maggie knows she’ll cry if she speaks so
she watches her go through the channels, never staying longer than a few seconds on any particular
one.

“Have I told you I think the geese at the park are obsessed with me?”

Alex glances at her. “What?” Kara calls out. “You never told me that.” Then takes a sharp breath.
“That’s why you were such a b word to that one in the park!”

“I wasn’t a—” she lets it go. Kara comes over with plates of food for them before retrieving drinks.
“Anyway, I’m half convinced they're possessed.”

“Maybe they just think you’re cute,” Kara says.

“They chase me.”
“What? You’re not used to being chased?” Alex asks.

She smiles. “Not for very long.” They settle on a shamwow commercial, the three sharing a blanket on the couch, making their way through the meal. Maggie tells them about her small personal tragedies of the day: the geese, the call about a baby in the dumpster that turned out to be a burrito, the very real baby that threw up on her when she arrived at the domestic. The irritants of the day, pale and inconsequential compared to their horrors, but enough to get glimmers of smiles out of them. All things considered worth the throw up.

Kara’s phone goes off. It’s Winn. Just like that, the mood loses its luster, dreary and grey again. Kara takes the call some feet away. “What is it?” Alex stands, but sways. Maggie grabs her arm to steady her.

Kara gets off the phone. “I have to head in,” she tells them. Alex starts to make her way to her boots. Kara takes her shoulders and eases her back onto the couch. “You are not going anywhere. You will stay here.” Alex is shaking her head but Kara flicks her forehead with her finger. “I’ll report back everything I find out. Stay.” Kara looks at her. “You’ll watch over her?”

“That’s not –” Alex says.

“I’ll stay,” Maggie looks at her. “Go.” Kara kisses Alex's forehead, palms Maggie's face. The best, she mouths and then with a gust of wind she’s gone, the curtains of the balcony doors rustling before coming to a stand still.

The shamwow commercial comes to an end. Another one starts with people bungling bread. Alex pulls her legs onto the couch and stares at it. Maggie sits beside her in silence.

“Before this little stunt he told me he was never going to miss another moment.” Her voice lacks inflection. “And I believed him. I’m such an idiot. Over and over again the writing is on the wall but I refuse to see it.”

Maggie says nothing.

“It’s like every time I allow myself to feel a little happiness, something happens. And I think— God. Is there something wrong with me? Do I not deserve it?”

“Of course you do.” This isn’t the first time she’s talked this way. When Kara disappeared off to the slaver planet she said similarly. “Life’s not fair, Alex. There are cons that make off like bandits while people like you and Kara suffer. It’s not right but you keep trying. You continue to put good out into the world. And you make the world a better place because of it.” She wonders at the words coming out of her mouth. She never talked like this. Not until Kara.

“But I let him go tonight. And he made off with… God knows what. For all I know, I’ve risked lives. What I did tonight goes against… everything the DEO stands for. I let my personal feelings get in the way of doing my job.” She has another drink of wine, wipes the sheen of red from her lips. “I once told Kara that she had to be prepared to kill her aunt. That that’s what it meant to be in our line of work. She was always hesitating.”

“I can’t imagine Kara killing anyone.” A beat. “Did she kill her aunt?”

Alex has a drink. “No. I did. To save J’onn. She forgave me. Because that’s who she is. But I know that she was angry. Maybe she still is. She’s never taken it out on me.” Her face is expressionless. When they met Kara was struggling over her death. Kara said she knew her aunt’s killer. She never said who. All of that anger and helplessness she felt makes sense now. “But I let Dad go. And she
saw it. Saw that’s how I left it and she let that decision stand when she could have very well dragged him back to headquarters. Now she's at the DEO and I’m here, drinking.”

“You need some time to get your bearings.” She shifts to face her. “You're grieving.”

“And Kara isn’t? I’m supposed to watch over her. Me. It’s always been that way. But lately… it feels like things are shifting. Like I’m on quicksand… I can’t … find my footing. And every time I think I’ve found it I slip again. But Kara… even when things are at their worst she doesn’t hesitate. She does what’s right even when it hurts. I always thought I would know everything about her. But I can’t.” She massages her forehead. “What is it like to be with her?”

Maggie looks at her hesitantly. “Um… I … that’s a weird question, Danvers.”

“I know.”

She exhales. “Exhilarating. Heartbreaking?”

“Yeah. That sounds right.” A beat. Another drink of wine. Her eyes shine, focused and unfocused in one. “And me? What was that like?”

Maggie purses her lips. She’s had too much to drink. “I don’t think we should talk about this.”

Alex stands, wobbles. “I’m going to bed.” Maggie gets to her feet, too, takes hold of her arm. “I’m fine.” She tries to brush her away but loses her balance further. Maggie grabs her shoulders. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have asked. That was… wrong.”

“It’s okay.” She keeps hold of her arm, maneuvering her over to Kara’s bed. She pulls the covers back and Alex falls in. “You have to turn, Danvers.” Alex slowly shifts from horizontal to vertical on the bed. Maggie helps shift her legs and drags the blankets over her. “Turn on your side. You’ve had a lot of wine.” Alex does, clutching the pillow and turning to face her. Maggie squats on the floor, looks at her face. “I’m sorry today was so awful. Tomorrow’s another day.”

Alex nods bleakly. “I feel like I could cry forever.” She sighs. “Maybe one day I’ll stop vacillating. People always tell me I have a very old soul. Uptight.” Maggie smiles. “But sometimes... I stopped having a childhood at fourteen. I had… responsibilities.”

“Well, you did a hell of a job.” She lifts a hand, fingers feathering over her hair. The touch is like lightning. She withdraws the contact before the electricity ripples through her. “Old soul, young soul. You’re still one of my favorite people, Danvers.” Alex closes her eyes, frowns. “Get some rest. I’ll be here if you need anything.”

She goes to the kitchen, retrieves a water bottle and sets it beside the bed, finds a bowl for any emergency puke situations. Sits on the couch, flicking through the channels until she finds a horror movie. She picks up one of Kara’s CatCo magazines and flips through it before looking over to Alex. Her eyes are still closed. Her shoulders tremble, fingers digging into the pillow.

She thinks of Kara’s saline kisses and sighs inwardly. The Danvers sisters will be the death of her.
A/N: This is quasi late? This is what happens when I get distracted with other stories. Did some shifting of Exodus... Thanks for the encouraging reviews! Put down the pitchforks?

X

“I would have stopped at your office but I can’t say I know where that is.” Lena strolls into the apartment, looks to the clothes strewn on the floor, the glasses that line the coffee table and kitchen island, the empty bottles. She looks back at Alex who makes no effort to tidy things up. “Why are you avoiding me?”

Alex considers lying but doesn’t want to spend the energy. “I needed some alone time.”

“With a bottle?”

The accusation shouldn’t sting. It’s too easy. So… expected. But she goes warm with anger just the same. Yes, she’s had a drink or two. Cadmus has the list of all the aliens in National City. They’re going out in squads to round them up like the gestapo. She did this. Cadmus did this. Don’t you get that I just have to keep it together? “I won’t hurt the bottle’s feelings when I’m in a bad mood.”

“Ah, but unlike the bottle I’m not made of glass.” She comes closer, cocks her head. “What’s going on? A drink’s a drink. But this?” She looks around. “I’ve seen you under pressure. It takes a lot to make you crack.” Alex stares back at her. “Talk to me.” Alex shakes her head. “I won’t force you. But you can trust me.” Alex is silent. “Or not.” A smile. “I thought we’d moved past this.”

“I’m… dealing with something right now. I need some time.”

“I’ll give you all the time you need but we’re friends. Has something happened with my mother?” Alex flicks her eyes away. “Alex. I’m not her. You do know that, don’t you?”

“Yes. Yes.” Lena reaches a hand out to touch her face. She doesn’t mean to recoil from it. She sees that flinch, turn to hurt, turn to ice and then gone. She turns away. “Lena—”

“It’s fine.” She stalls at the door. “Whatever you’re dealing with—” She shrugs. “You’re strong enough to overcome it without the bottle.”

She can’t argue. Not without explaining. Not without becoming defensive. “I don’t have a problem.”

“Of course not,” she leaves, slipping the door shut behind her.

X

Her fists are battered, raw and red, purple in places. Where’s Cadmus? She should feel guilty. She doesn’t. She sits on the stiff metal chair. J’onn left. Supergirl looks at the footage. Listens.

Alex rubs her knuckles gingerly. They’re throbbing. She sees nothing. When she sees again, it’s Supergirl before her, arms crossed, eyes narrowed. Now she feels something. Shame. How can Kara make her feel ashamed? She grits her teeth. “Are you going to lecture me, too?”
“You could have killed him.”

“I didn’t.”

“Because J’onn stopped you.”

Alex stands. “I wasn’t going to kill him. God, Kara. Don’t you want to know where Dad is?” It doesn’t seem like it. Does family to her come down to blood? Is Jeremiah not a father? Are they not sisters? “Doesn’t that matter to you?”

“It matters. But what we need is to find Cadmus and get those civilians back. How does turning some guy’s head to pulp help us do that?”

“Sometimes you have to push a little harder to get what you need.”

“I’ve never had to.”

“Because others have done it for you.”

Her eyes darken. She puts her hands on her hips, bows her head. “You’re out of control.” Alex looks at her disbelievingly. “You should take a break from this. Alex, come on,” Kara takes her shoulders. “You haven’t slept in days. You’re a mess.”

“A mess?”

She smiles. Alex recognizes that smile. Exasperated and about to snap. “You’re not seeing clearly.”

“And you are?”

“You chose to let Jeremiah go.”

Alex pulls away. So. She’ll hold it against her. “I’ll find him.”

“Not like this. I won’t let you.”

Alex stares back at her, her voice calm no matter how she wants to shout. “You can’t stop me, Kara. You won’t. You don’t have it in you.”

X

The alien bar is still trashed from the latest Cadmus attack but the old faces, the ones that haven’t been taken, remain. Maggie walks the space, taking in the damage. Darla’s okay, which is a relief. She must feel the same; sends a smile in her direction and a beer on the house.

Maggie drinks. It’s last call and she only just left the station an hour ago. Cadmus is wrecking havoc on National City and most people have no idea. It’s only the alien community that is terrified, afraid to leave their homes. Their phone lines have been bombarded but there’s been close to nothing they can do outside of taking statements from those who’ve had their families disappear, cars found careened off the sides of the road, others never coming home. It’s hard seeing families cry but reassuring in its own way. Who in her family ever cried for her? Nobody wanted her found. At least those families love each other.

Her phone buzzes and she takes it out. Kara. She has a drink of beer and picks up. “Hey. Home yet?”
“Still at the office. Snapper’s not taking the bait. He won’t let me print the Cadmus story. He talked to ‘Supergirl’ but doesn’t think she’s a good enough source to take it to the presses.”

“The bastard.”

“I know,” Kara says, missing the sarcasm. “I don’t know what to do, Maggie. People are going to keep disappearing and I should be warning them. This is where I can do some real good. I feel so helpless.”

“We’re going to stop them.”

“But how? We have no idea where they are and no idea where they’re taking these people.”
Maggie doesn’t know what to say. “Has the NCPD seen anything? Any clues? Are they alerting anyone or… sending out extra patrols?”

“Sorry, no.” A beat, she gets up, moving away from the bar. “I tried to talk to the Captain. Without any evidence he’s not willing to send our people out. I can’t just tell them about my friends at the black ops agency.” Maggie can practically hear her frustration on the other end of the line. She won’t mention how too many at the NCPD don’t seem to care about the abductions, some plain cheering their disappearances on. “I’m doing what I can.”

“Yeah.” There’s a long silence. “I have to go.”

“Should I stop by?”

“No. I’m going to keep digging to see what I can find. Talk later?”

“You got it.” She ends the call, turns at the bang of the metal door to see Alex walking in. The hair on the back of her neck stands on end. There’s something quiet and desperate about her. Dangerous. Alex scans the bar, eyes settling on her and immediately dismissing her.

Alex moves over to a table. Maggie sees the alarm on the faces of the patrons she’s talking to. They shake their head. Alex’s face is hidden. The aliens shake their head again before Alex grabs one of their arms. Jesus.

Maggie heads over, sets her attention on her. “What’s going on?”

“Stay out of it.”

Boy is she getting tired of hearing that one. She looks at Alex, her face is white with something akin to rage or despair. “Is she bothering you?” Maggie asks the aliens. They quickly shift their gaze and Maggie takes Alex’s arm, dragging her several feet off before Alex yanks her arm back.

“Don’t touch me.”

“I shouldn’t have done that.” Maggie lifts her hands. “But whatever you’re doing, stop it. You’re scaring them.” Alex’s eyes are glossy, for moments Maggie sees nothing in them and feels a chill down her back. “Cadmus just came in here and took people—”

“Did they? I had no idea.”

“You’re a human and it’s obvious. So maybe tone it down.”

“I need to track down where they are.”

“And if I knew, I’d tell you. But I don’t. And neither do they.”
Alex flicks her eyes to her and Maggie feels as if she’s been flung. “Have you talked to Kara?”
Maggie can barely hear her. “Yeah.” She waits. Alex’s face is a cloud. “And?”
“She didn’t tell you?”
“Tell me what?”
“We’re fighting, that’s all.”

Oh, is that all? They’re crazy about each other. For all she knows, Alex is half in love with Kara. Maybe it should disgust her. But who wouldn’t be? Who could know her and not be? Maggie waits for Alex to elaborate and is again disappointed. “What about?” Alex shakes her head. “What’s going on with you? You look…” she looks for a word but can’t find one that fits. She studies her face, looks down to see her bruised knuckles, frowns. Alex runs a hand through her hair, turns and goes.

Maggie follows after her. They’re in the back alley again. Alex kissed her here once. She shouldn’t have kissed her back or maybe she shouldn’t have pursued Kara. She doesn’t know. When it comes to them she doesn’t know what’s wrong and what’s right. “Wait,” Maggie says.

“Why?” She practically growls. “You can’t help me. Kara won’t help me. No one will help me.”

“Just tell me what’s going on.”

“What’s going on? My father is missing, taken by Cadmus.” Well, that’s one interpretation. “Families are being torn apart because… because I couldn’t do my job,” her jaw is clenched so tightly she can barely get the words out. “I’m lashing out at Lena and I can’t tell her why. I can’t make things work with Kara—no matter how I try, I can’t make things work at work.”

“What?”

“I’ve been suspended from the DEO. Yeah,” she laughs caustically, “J’onn thinks I’m emotionally compromised. Came into my apartment pretending to be Dad and I—” She stops. “I can’t believe this is where things are. I wish somebody would just trust me.”

Maggie draws a breath. “What happened to your fists?” Alex looks at her as if she’s been slapped in the face. “They’re bruised. You’ve been fighting someone. Who?”

“No one that matters.” She walks again. “Cadmus garbage.”

“Out on the streets?”

Alex sighs, smiles in that mean way again. “First Kara, now you. Do you know they took Lyra?” Who? “They’ve taken families to do God knows what to them. People like that shouldn’t get any rights. Not if it comes at the expense of innocent lives.”

Maggie arches her eyebrows, speechless for several moments. “That’s a really dangerous thing to say, Alex.”

“Oh, shove it, I’m not NCPD. Save your speeches for your fellow police officers. How many stories were there in the past month about them beating an alien for no reason?”

“It wasn’t right then and it isn’t right now.”

“The people at Cadmus are terrorists.”
“You’re better than this.”

“I don’t get to be ‘better than this’. I don’t get to hide behind a moral imperative. I’m the DEO. The things I’ve had to do for Kara, to keep her safe—” she laughs again, her eyes shining. “But I’m sure that’s okay, isn’t it?”

Maggie doesn’t say anything.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought.” She stalks off.

Maggie kicks herself and once again, follows. “Alex—”

“I don’t want to talk, Maggie.” She rears when she’s close enough. “You don’t know what it’s like to have a father who would betray you like this. They’ve … done something to him. They’ve… He wouldn’t do this. He’s been classified as an enemy combatant. If the DEO gets to him first… I have to save him. I have to.”

Maggie parts her lips, nearly tells her about her father. Doesn’t. Stuffs her hands into the back pockets of her jeans. “I wish I could help you.” Alex’s face opens, for a moment, hopeful. “But I can’t. I’m sorry.” The shadows return. She starts walking again. Maggie catches her. “Alex—I want you to get everything you want. I want you to find your dad, I want everything to work out with you and Kara and with work but… I can’t. I can’t… support what you’re doing. Not as an NCPD officer. I can’t use my badge and my gun to help you.” Maggie sees her shutting down. “But if you need anything. If you need to talk or …”

“Yeah, I got it.”

She leaves. Maggie doesn’t follow, only feels the hollow of her heart, the hot heat of shame crawl over her before she turns, kicks the trash can over. Bottles go clinking and rolling down the alley. She thinks of chasing after them but has grown tired of chasing. She leaves the mess and walks away.

X

“You’re still stressed. I can hear it in your voice.”

Kara smiles, rubbing her forehead. “You’ve got me.” She stares at the blog. Previously she used it for blogging recipes. She’d spend too long arranging the kitchen utensils and plates, making sure the light was just right for the picture, wording and rewording the lead up to the recipe or why she felt like cooking that particular dish that day, why it was special to her. It was nothing but it felt important to her at the time. Alex always left a comment. She grimaces, thinking of her. “If I publish this I could get fired.”

“I know how much you love what you do. And you’re good at it. You’ve got your share of fans.”

“I have fans?”

Lena laughs. “At least one. I know how important it is for you to keep the people informed. If Snapper won’t publish your story this is one venue available to you.”

Kara touches her glasses. “So I should go for it. Put it out there. Right?”

“What does Maggie think?”
“I haven’t talked to her about it.” Maybe she should. But what would Maggie say? Maggie who is steady and by the book. The opposite of Alex in many ways. Recently, anyway. Would she tell her she could cause a panic? Would she tell her she would terrify the citizens of National City, perhaps needlessly? Would they fight about it? “I don’t know what she’d say and I don’t want to…” she lets it go. She frowns, finger skimming over the touch pad.

“So I’m safe?”

Kara shifts the phone. “You sound disappointed.”

“Far from it. You were ready to stand up to me and my family when we met. And outside of that, your faith in me has been…” she hesitates, “nothing short of rewarding. You’re brave. Kind. Whatever you decide… let it be something you won’t regret. I’ll support you either way.”

Kara publishes the article.

The air goes out of her. She did it. That’s it. She’s elated. Terrified. She’s helping people. This is how she can help people right now, ensure they’re vigilant, make them aware of the danger out there. Maybe they can band together until she can find where Cadmus is.

“I just got the alert,” Lena tells her cheerfully. Kara stands, paces, looks at the screen, makes sure it is published. Yes. It’s out there. She exhales. “Are you breathing?”

“Barely.”

“I know it was a hard decision but um…I did want to let you know that… um…” she sounds further away.

Kara stops, listens. Hears a crackling like electricity. “Lena?”

A scream.

Kara drops the phone and tears through the sky. She flies faster than she can recall, the earth around her a blur of color, honing in on the voice on the other end of the line, finding her before the phone touches the floor. She sees Lena, falling. But she’s safe. She’ll make her safe.

She bolts to her side. Lena’s terrified. Kara touches a hand to her back, letting her hand press firmly, “I’ve got you,” she says with a relieved smile and for a moment they only look at one another, before Kara takes Lena’s arm, wrapping it delicately around her neck, scoops her up into her arms. The transition is seamless and soon they’re floating, arms locked around one another. “You’re safe.”

Lena is dazed. “I thought I was going to die,” she says hoarsely. Her heart is beating so fast.

“I wasn’t going to let that happen.”

“How did you know—”

She’s blank. Can’t think of a reason. “I was with Kara Danvers—”

“I didn’t know she was with you—”

“I’d just… popped in.” She smiles anxiously.

That surprises her. “Well… lucky me.”
They stare at one another. Does Lena see her, the way Kara sees her? Kara thinks of Alex’s anger. Is she wrong to place her faith in Lena and not Jeremiah? But they’re the same. They’ve been lied to and betrayed by their parents. They’ve worked together to stop their terrible legacy. That means something.

A gentle breeze blows and Kara lifts her to her office, neutralizing Lena’s attackers before calling Maggie at the NCPD. Maggie arrives with some uniforms, takes Lena’s statement: she was on the phone with Kara Danvers when the Cadmus agents shoved her off the balcony. Supergirl saved her. Kara listens, trying not to flush as Maggie writes her words down. The cops drag the Cadmus agents away.

Maggie waits until they’re gone. “We’re bringing your assistant in for questioning.”

Lena looks up in surprise. “Alana? No. There’s a mistake. I’ve worked with her for years. I specifically brought her in because she’d had no part of Lex Corp before.”

“We’re bringing her in,” Maggie says. “And if I were you, I’d seriously consider letting her go.”

Lena swallows, nods stiffly. Maggie looks between the two of them. “Goodnight, Supergirl. Ms. Luthor.”

She moves off. Kara waits until she’s reached her car to drop down and talk to her. “Hey,” she’s anxious but doesn’t know why. Maggie leans against the car, her arms crossed and looking up at her. “I was on the phone with her when they attacked. We were talking about my piece on the alien registry.”

“Is Snapper publishing it?”

“Um. No.” She crosses her arms, looks down. “I put it up on my blog.”

“I didn’t know you had a blog.”

Kara can’t read her. “I just thought I had to put it out there no matter what. And if I get fired, I get fired. People need to know. No one’s safe right now.”

She nods slowly. “That must have been a hard decision.”

“Maybe. But it’s the right thing to do.” She shifts. “I know we haven’t seen a lot of each other. Everything’s crazy right now. I’m worried about Alex and the city… I think Cadmus came after Lena because she was looking into where Cadmus might be housing these people for me. ‘Kara’ me,” she says more quietly. “I just hope they’re housed and not… dead somewhere.”

“You’ll find them.” She bows her head, thumbs hooking on the pockets of her jeans. “I should go.”

She frowns. “There’s… something I need to do.”

“At the station?” She can’t catch her eyes until she looks back at her. “Can I get a kiss?”

“Better not. Someone might see.” She moves around to the driver’s door. “I’ll see you later.”

There’s no ceremony. She gets into the car and drives off, taking some piece of Kara with her. Kara watches until she’s gone before returning to Lena’s balcony. She stands there, brow furrowed in thought, unsure if she should have pushed Maggie harder. Lena notices and joins her. “I can’t seem to get rid of Detective Sawyer. Maybe I should date her,” she jokes, winces. “Ah. Please don’t tell Kara I said that.” Kara smiles. “I only meant that I see her far more often than is reasonable.”
Kara wonders if Lena would laugh to think Maggie shares the sentiment. “As much as me?”

“No, mercifully not as much as you.”

Kara thinks back to Maggie’s words. Should she date Lena? She doesn’t see the point. Dating her would change everything and she doesn’t want things to change between them. Especially not the one stable piece in her life right now. All she knows is that she always wants Lena to be accessible, safe. All she knows is that she doesn’t want to keep hurting Maggie. It’s pointless to think about it, anyway. Alex and Lena are dating. She needs to focus. “Kara Danvers mentioned that you were going to look into where your mother might be operating out of. What can you tell me about where Cadmus might have their hideout?”

The conversation quickly sobers while Lena tells her what she knows. Kara thanks her, steps on the balcony railing when Lena takes her hand. “You’ll be careful, won’t you?” Kara looks back at her. “I can’t stand the idea of my mother doing something awful to you.”

“I’m not the one that matters.”

Her fingers tighten slightly. “You are to me.”

Kara’s lips part. “I have to go.” She realizes they’re still holding hands, lets her go and flies.

X

Her hands shake.

She hasn’t slept since Jeremiah betrayed them. Since she was suspended. But she hasn’t been idle. She’s been searching. Tracking down Cadmus agents attempting to kidnap aliens. Beating answers out of them. No one will help her so she’ll do it herself. She’s found the GPS. She knows where she has to go.

She picks up the duffle bags, checks the holsters at her side and takes the steps to her apartment building down swiftly. She knows the DEO and Kara wouldn’t approve. Maggie wouldn’t approve. Would Lena approve? She hasn’t spoken to her in days. She can’t bear to look at her face, to think of her mother torturing her father, changing him into… what he’s become.

She knows it isn’t Lena’s fault. She knows it’s her own inability to see past it. She isn’t Kara. She isn’t perfect. She gets to the front steps of her apartment, out into the chilly night. She slows then stops when she sees Maggie leaning against her car.

Alex stiffens, forces herself to keep moving. She glances at Maggie and for the moment wonders if she’ll make it out of this alive, whether she should call Kara and say… She doesn’t know. There’s so much to say. So much to be sorry for. Alex unlocks the car, throws the duffle bag into the front seat, shuts the door, looks at Maggie. She doesn’t know what to say to her. She can’t ask why she’s here. She’s afraid of how Maggie will respond.

Alex looks to the moon, takes a breath. “I know it’s wrong,” she says, “but before Kara, it always felt like my dad was the only one on my side.” That life before Kara is quickly receding into the background. Her father is all she really has left of it. “Mom pushed me to be what Kara needed. And that’s fine,” she says, guiltily. “Mom and I… I don’t know. There was always something there that never clicked. And to this day I still think she’s… disappointed with what I’ve become. With who I am. There was a time in my life that I was a mess. You wouldn’t recognize me. Kara doesn’t need me anymore. The DEO is all I have. It’s what I’m good at. But J’onn’s unhappy with me. I’ve
let everyone down. Kara thinks I’m out of control,” she smiles, her eyes burning, “maybe I am. He said that I have always been the best part of him. I can’t just let him go. I can’t… not even try.”

Maggie reaches up, brushes the tear away from her face. Alex’s breath hitches, swallowing the emotion, afraid of what she’ll say. Maggie takes her face in her hands, looks up at her. Maggie’s expression is almost unreadable but Alex sees it—the anxious worry. She’s afraid for her. “I’ll help you.” She doesn’t breathe. “For the record, I don’t agree with what you’ve been doing. I do think you’re emotionally compromised when it comes to your father. But you shouldn’t be alone. I don’t ever want you to feel like you’re alone. I put in for some personal time. Left my badge at the station. I’m off duty, same as you. So, I’ll help you, if you want it. If you need it.”

Alex takes her hands, tightly. Keeps her mouth shut. She can only nod.

X

Alex’s apartment is flat and cold. Kara sees the empty alcohol bottles and frowns. Alex enters behind her. The smile of before vanished when she realized Jeremiah was nowhere to be found.

What matters is that we stopped them, Kara said. And for a moment it seemed like they’d repaired what was fractured. They stopped Cadmus from forcefully deporting the aliens. She was able to because Alex believed in her. It was true hours ago but now Kara questions it again.

She sits on the couch while Alex dumps the duffle bags on the floor. Kara realizes she’ll have to fly them back to the DEO. Alex is still suspended, despite stopping Cadmus. You disobeyed a direct order and interfered with operations. I’m sorry, Alex, but the decision stands.

Alex pulls a hand through her hair and walks around the apartment, picking the bottles up quickly. “Want a drink?”

“No, thanks,” Kara says. She listens to the clink of the bottles dropping into the recycling bin. Soon Alex joins her on the couch. Things are tense between them. She doesn’t know why Maggie was there, but can still see her smoke stained face clearly, the gash across her forehead, the blood dripping over her eye. Why didn’t she know she’d be joining Alex in her quest for madness? Why doesn’t she know where she’s at now? She’s so far away.

“So, are we talking again?” Alex asks.

“We never stopped talking.”

“Really? I was suspended at the DEO and it was like I fell off the face of the Earth for you.”

She doesn’t know how to tell her she was busy. That what needed her vigilance in that moment was worth more than seeing to her. Even if it's true it doesn't seem right. “You were suspended, Alex. I was following orders.”

“When have orders ever mattered to you? You put that article on your blog. That’s why Cadmus got the jump on us. They got a head’s up.”

“I posted the article because it felt like that's what I needed to do.” She can't hide her frustration. “And is it so hard to believe that I felt the same?”

“It’s not that it's hard to believe.” She bows her head, frowns. She looks back at her. “Alex. You
beat up a guy we had in custody and then you said that you would do whatever you wanted and I couldn’t stop you. I was trying to keep you safe. I didn’t think you were in the right state of mind to know what was going on at the DEO. And I hoped that you would take that time to clear your head. But you were reckless. You dragged Maggie into it? You could have gotten her killed. You could have gotten yourself killed…!” She doesn’t realize until now how angry she is. At Alex, at herself. She kept her at a distance when the only sure way of protecting her was keeping her close. What if she’d died? And the last memory she had of her was an argument, angry words?

“I’m fine. And she offered to go with me.”

“You shouldn’t have gone. You should have shot her down.”

“You would have preferred that I was on my own?”

“That’s not what I said, Alex.”

“You didn’t have to say it. She was the only one who would help me.”

“And she got hurt. I’ve read the reports on what you’ve been doing.” Alex grits her jaw. “And if you keep that up they are never going to let you return to the DEO. I know you don’t like what I’m telling you but please. This isn’t you. You’re calm and smart and kind. I don’t want you getting yourself killed. Not over Cadmus. Not over Jeremiah.”

“He told me tonight that the reason he helped Cadmus was to keep us safe. That he convinced them to deport the aliens instead of killing them.”

“It’s still wrong.”

“I know.” A long silence follows. “Do you even care about him? Do you even care about our family?” Kara freezes. Her eyes sting briefly. She says nothing, blinking the tears away. Alex gives a small sigh. “Sorry. I didn’t mean that.”

Yes, you did.

“I can’t believe I didn’t see through J’onn. I wanted so badly to believe Dad hadn’t turned. That he needed me. That he was back.”

“I understand.”

“No. You don’t.”

Kara wants to scream at her about the black mercy. Instead she counts the empty bottles, around the apartment, in the recycling bin, the ones that are hidden in cupboards, in the bookshelf. Some part of her goes cold.

“I don’t know how I got here.” Alex reclines into the couch. “I haven’t been able to hold on to my relationships. When I realized I was gay I thought ‘wow, this is it. This has been the problem all along’. But maybe it’s me.” She turns her eyes from her, looking around, her gaze unfocused. “Things keep slipping out of my control. I don’t respond in the right ways. It’s a lot. I’m supposed to be the one who keeps it together. These past few months I’ve been… in survival mode. Coming out, being with Maggie, losing Maggie, being with Lena, fighting with Lena, losing you.”

“You never lost me.”

Alex grimaces, smile bittersweet. She doesn’t believe her. “I’ve been… spiraling.” She massages
her forehead. “I've lost my equilibrium. I keep thinking I’ll get it back. So I keep pushing. Always
in the wrong ways.”

Kara takes her hand. “Whatever you need, I'll help you. I know now isn't when you wanted it. I
should have been there for you.” Was she wrong about everything? “I thought if I could keep you
away from this I could save you. You you.”

Alex laughs, wipes the tears from her eyes. “But that's the thing. I’m supposed to take care of you.
Now everyone’s going out of their way to take care of me. I hate it.”

“We love you.”

She’s not convinced. “I need to get back to who I used to be. Seeing Dad again brought out … all
the ugliness I felt when he was gone. Before J’onn got to me. You never saw how bad I let things
get. I never wanted you to see.” Kara holds her hand tighter. “Sometimes I think I’ll never get that
piece of me back. Sometimes I think I don’t get to be happy. Now Dad’s gone… and I feel like a
crazy person. Mom’s so matter-of-fact about it. She got used to him being gone. And you’re so…”
her lips move, searching for a word, maybe one that won’t hurt. She shakes her head. “Stoic,” she
says.

A cool numbness moves over Kara. She exhales unsteadily. “I want to save him. I want to save
Dad, Alex.” She swallows the lump in her throat, takes Alex’s face in her hands. “But if I can’t
save you both, I’d rather save you. If it means saving you and who you are, I’ll save you every
time. You’re more than family to me, Alex. You’re…” her fingers shake. “I’m sorry.”

They hug tightly, Kara feeling unsteady. Everything she says, she thinks, feels, is a contradiction to
how she acts. Is she a hypocrite? If it were Alex who was classified as an enemy of the DEO,
wouldn’t she do anything to save her?

Yes. Anything. She would fight the DEO. She would fight anyone. They pull away. Kara looks at
her. “Everything is going to be okay. I know it seems hard… is hard right now, but we'll make it.
All of us. You'll… clear your head and talk to Lena and I know she’ll forgive you and…”

Alex laughs softly, pushes the hair back from her face. Her smile turns bittersweet. “Yeah. Um. I
didn’t want to tell you, Kara. I wanted you to think that there was one thing in my life that was…
on the right track but. Lena and I. We’re never going to work. I didn’t lie when I said I liked her. I
do like her. So much. She’s beautiful and crazy smart and sexy and warm. She was there for me…
We were lonely.” Kara ignores the spike of pain burrowing into her heart. She imagines them
together and wants to unimagine it. She looks away from her, realizes, forces herself to look back.
“Being friends… a very strange kind of friends, has been easy. I like being with her. But lately I
can’t look at her. I know she’s not Lillian, but when I see her all I can think of is how Lillian’s hurt
you and Dad and—”

“And Lena. She’s a victim, too.” She takes her hand again. “You shouldn’t punish her because of
her mother.”

“It’s not a punishment. She’s nice. I don't want to keep hurting her.”

“You won't.”

“Yeah, maybe not.” Alex looks at her. She’s seen this look before, soft, understanding but as if
seeing something sad Kara hasn't, something she doesn’t understand. “Kara. You’re not stupid.
Lena and I are never going to end in happily ever after. We know what we are and we…accept it
for what it is.” She smiles faintly. “She’s in love with you. I can't fault anyone for being in love
with you.”

Alex stands, moving to grab a beer.

Kara is still, gradually losing sensation and breath. Her fingers are tingling. She curls them, staring, fighting to regain feeling.

X

Hours walking around only to end up at the alien bar.

It’s after hours and she sits on the stool, sipping a beer. She sees her reflection in the mirror behind the bar. Her face is coated in dirt and dried blood.

She tries to process what she saw tonight. Considers a world where Cadmus exists and she’s near powerless to stop them. A world where a woman like Alex Danvers can lose herself and fall over the edge. A world where it only takes the right woman to stop an unspeakable act.

Her body throbs from the punches she took, the kicks. She’ll have another day before it’s back to the station. Jeremiah was nowhere to be found after the dust settled. Was it worth it?

Darla finishes wiping down the last table and returns behind the bar, washing her hands and leaving only the neon lights casting colors in the space. The juke box is off. Everyone's gone.

“That’s going to leave a mark,” Darla soaks a towel in water, brings it to Maggie’s forehead. It’s cold and soothing. Maggie sighs softly, eyes closing. “You’ve been coming around with more cuts and bruises than I’ve seen in a while.”

“Yeah, I’ve taken to hanging out with a rough crowd.” A crowd she’s in love with but rough none the less.

“Did you have anything to do with tracking down those Cadmus assholes tonight?”

“Not officially.”

“Maybe you’re not a complete creep after all.” She dabs at the blood, wringing the towel out and applying it again. Maggie looks at her. “You still with that nerd?” Darla asks. “Or have you hooked up with the sister?”

Maggie smirks faintly. “You going to warn them about the perils of dating me?”

“It’s too late. They probably already know.”

Maggie laughs softly. “Yeah, right. They don’t have a clue.” They think they do but have no idea. Darla sets down the towel and Maggie pulls her wallet out. “What do I owe you?”

“I’ve already closed the till out.” Darla touches her hand and Maggie feels herself lock up. “I can't remember the last time I saw you look this miserable.”

“I’m not miserable.”

“Don’t get me wrong; I suspect it’s just your default state. When you’re not out being a detective, doing a job well done. You've always been a walking, talking disaster. And if the Danvers sisters haven’t picked up on it yet it’s because they’ve got their own shit going on.”
“Do you have a point?”

“Aren’t you bored with the domestic routine? You always find a way to screw it up.”

“I guess the nice bartender act was just that. Should have known.” She gets up, fishes a few dollar bills out of her wallet and throws them on the counter.

“And now you’re sensitive, too. Have you forgotten the screaming matches we used to get into?”

“Back when I still cared? I have.”

Darla laughs. “Are you kidding? You never cared. I was just a way to pass the time. You’d come here for a drink and a fuck. I didn’t even speak your language and it didn’t matter. We fucked before we kissed. You never wanted to get to know me.”

“I was –”

“Different then? Yeah, right. I know that look on your face, I’ve seen it in the mirror and all those girls you leave in your wake.” Darla’s moved around the bar, pressed her to it. “Face it. Some people aren’t meant for relationships and you’re one of them.” She presses her knee between her leg, lifts.

Maggie squares her jaw, thinks of Kara and Alex. No, she shouldn't think of them. Should think of Lena, no, not Lena. Mon-El. “I'm not interested.”

“In me?”

“That’s right.”

“When has that ever stopped you?” She presses her hands to the bar on either side of her and leans close. Maggie turns her head. “You’re good at exactly one thing, Maggie Sawyer. I know what you are now. So you won’t kill me again. But it’s been a while. When was the last time you had a hate fuck?” Maggie glowers. “That’s what you told Linda it was, isn’t it? We dated for half a year, you asshole.”

How is the gay community always so fucking claustrophobic? *We fought all the time. Where's the lie?* “I'm sorry.”

“No, you're not.”

No, she's not. She exhales. “I had a long, shitty day. What’s your master plan, to keep me pinned here and make me reflect on the error of my ways? You’re not the first to try and you won’t be the last. Like it or not, it doesn’t fucking take. It never does.” She feels her eyes watering. “Are you happy?”

Darla responds with something she doesn’t understand in her alien tongue. It occurs to Maggie that Kara hasn’t spoken kryptonian around her, outside of the rare calling to Rao. She realizes then how desperately she aches to hear it, the frighteningly low likelihood of actually hearing it, not without asking, and it makes her sad. When will Kara realize she isn't invested in her? When will Kara let her go?

She thinks of Jeremiah, a screw up of a father if there ever was one and still his children love him, still he turned against a terrorist organization for them, at the risk of his own life. *You don’t understand how much I need to find him*, Alex said and she couldn’t say how right she was, that she couldn’t understand.
The alien tongue shifts from words to tangible, against her lips, against her tongue. The heat of shame, disgust, carnal desire wash over her. This is easy. There are rules. It ends badly, but you can brace for badly. Maggie kisses her roughly, trying to burn them from her mind.

They’re there. They won’t go. She thinks of them. Darla’s tongue is like a slug in her mouth. Her body is a corpse. She feels nothing but the cold. Darla comes but she doesn’t. She wants to retch but she doesn’t do that, either. This old familiar, newly familiar, shit state of being is like coming home. She wipes her hand on her pant leg and stumbles out, her legs weak.

She’s not drunk. She’s dizzy with hate, for herself. She gets home, hearing Darla's laughter in her mind. *I knew you wouldn't be able to help yourself.*

She throws up, throws the pants out, showers, the cut on her brow burning. Later she'll be surprised at how quickly she falls asleep, the betrayal, her old habits, the familiar, the best kind of soporific.
The skies are grey. The waters are grey. The clouds.

Maggie tries to outrun the cliché, flinging herself through the heavy mist. She runs until her lungs ache and it tastes like she’s drowning in blood. She wheezes when she stops, huddled over, a hand to the damp, metal railing. She looks for the geese but they’re not there either. She looks for the cars but can’t see them, shrouded in the fog.

She returns to her apartment building with the peeling paint and the sagging steps, the flickering lights. It’s colder than it should be. It’s been cold since the alien bar. She takes the stairs up to her apartment, stops at the top to see Kara there, sitting on the doormat. She shouldn’t sit on that doormat.

Maggie holds to the banister for support and Kara slowly stands, coming to her. She studies her face and Maggie wonders if she sees her, sees through her, what good are her powers for if they can’t detect who she is. Her thumb grazes along the cut on her forehead. *You shouldn’t touch me.* But she can’t say it.

She’s motionless as Kara puts her arms around her, lifting one tentatively to Kara’s back, not wanting to touch her, hold her, without telling her the truth, not wanting her to think of this moment as a betrayal.

“Snapper fired me.” She hears it then, a small well of emotion.

X

She wants to shower. Instead she listens to Kara describe how unceremoniously her things were packed, talk about what the office Cat Grant bestowed upon her meant, what writing means to her. “That job has been the closest to a normal identity that I have. It’s not a secret identity. It means—it meant… everything to me.”

Maggie sits beside her on the couch wanting to reach for her but keeping her hands to herself. *That’s a new one for you.* She wants to throw up. She wants to throw up. *Don’t throw up.* Cold sweat runs down her back. She’s a block of ice. Kara looks at her. “What’s the matter?”

She looks back at her, momentarily panicked. “I know how much you loved working there.” Kara bows her head, sad and contemplative and Maggie feels her heart ache, feels the self hatred flare, the words she uses to tear herself down springing to mind. All those things her father said.

“You’re pale. You look grey.”

Maggie exhales. “I need to take a shower,” she stands wringing her hands, her legs wobbly from the run, from guilt.

“Want company?”

They haven’t done that yet. They’ll likely never get to do that. “No,” she says. She parts her lips.
“What is it?” Kara looks up at her cautiously. “You’re scaring me.”

“I need…” she’s lightheaded. Her chest feels like a balloon, ready to burst. She clears her throat but when she speaks her voice is broken. “Kara. I need to tell you something.” Kara looks back at her and Maggie sees her pupils dilate, as if to let in the light. Her stomach drops. “I know you’ve had an awful day.” She smiles. “I’m so sorry to have to add to your awful day.”

Kara stands. Takes her hand. Maggie pulls it away. “What is it?”

She scratches at her forehead, inadvertently pulling at the lacerated skin, flushing through the pain, eyes watering. She stares down at her wet, muddied sneakers. Why didn’t she take them off. She’s tracked splotches into the apartment. She looks up at Kara. Opens her mouth. Nothing comes out. Kara fidgets with the red belt around the grey dress she wears. “I slept with someone.”

Kara stares back. It doesn’t register. It hasn’t registered. Maybe she doesn’t care. And then it registers. Her brow knots, she lowers her head, looks back at her, furtively. Cautiously. Her words are water. “Was it Alex?”

“No.”

Kara turns away from her, hand to her forehead before she sits. “Who was it?”

“No one.” Her chest aches. “Darla.”

A moment. Another registry. “Your ex? I thought you hated her.” Maggie’s face burns. “I don’t understand.” She says it again, looking at the floor, up to her. “Why would you do this? We have sex.”

“It’s not about sex.”

“It’s not?” She seems so much younger. “Then why? I don’t get it. Are you bored?”

“No.”

“Why her?”

“She doesn’t matter.”

“Of course she matters.”

“Not to me.” For the first time, Kara looks disgusted. Maggie doesn’t know how to explain, not without stripping away some of the artifice, the little shine that remains to reveal the rot beneath. “I understand if you don’t want to be with me anymore.”

“You ‘understand’?” There’s a spark in her voice. She takes a breath. “Is that why you did it? You don’t want to be with me?”

Maggie squints her eyes to keep the tears in. “Of course I want to be with you. I’m in love with you.”

“Is this what people in love do?” Maggie can’t speak. “Did you want to hurt me?”

“No. No. I swear.”

“Have you been seeing her behind my back?” Maggie shakes her head. “When?”
“Hours ago. After…”

Kara sighs, the air going out of her. “Darla. Not Alex. Alex I could understand. But this… I don’t understand. I don’t understand any of it.” She sits, miserable. Maggie fights vertigo. “Go take your shower.”

“Are you breaking up with me? I’d rather know. I don’t… I want… to know if you’ll be here when I get out. I know I fucked up. I know I’m a fuck up. I’ve always been a fuck up.” Kara’s eyes glisten. “And I know I don’t deserve it … but if you’re going to leave—then leave—” she hears the anger in her voice, “but don’t leave me thinking that you’ll be here when I get out when you won’t. Because I don’t think I could take the disappointment.”

“Then we’d both be disappointed,” Kara says blankly. She wipes at the corner of her eye. “I’ll be here,” she crosses her arms, leans forward as if huddling to keep herself warm. “I need to think.”

Maggie lingers, looking at her face, memorizing it, committing it to memory, just in case.

They have breakfast, apologizing for their navigation in the small kitchen. Every plate and pan shifted is ear splitting. Kara doesn't want to talk about work. They sit at the small table, holding utensils but not eating. Kara's face is pinched and far.

“Thank you for not leaving.” Yet.

Kara nods, head tucked down, scratching the nape of her neck. “I feel like I’ve been scooped. Not like a news story.” She sighs. “I just feel…” her lips move but she says nothing. She sets down her fork. Maggie sits with her hands tightly laced in her lap. Minutes pass in silence, neighbors grumbling and laughing pass in the hallways. “Did you like being with her?”

“No.” It was only once. It was only minutes. Months undone by minutes. She hated every second. She doesn't say it, knows how hollow it sounds.

“You're going to have to try better than that.” The anger is creeping into her voice and Maggie is relieved. She'll take that to the sadness and hurt, she prefers for it to be pointed outward at her instead of inward. “Talk to me.”

Maggie hears it for the demand that it is. She sits, paralyzed, wanting to stay that way, unfeeling, rather than scrounge, rather than brush something that will hurt. Kara looks at her. Maggie wants to look away, wants to unsee what she did. “I don’t know,” she hears the tremor in her voice. “I don't know why I always screw up. I told you I was scared. I told you girls like you should stay away from girls like me.” The last words fade with her voice. “I'm a fuck up. I was scared. I felt… cornered. Like I didn't deserve it. Like I would lose it.” Her stomach knots. Her eyes water and she looks to the ceiling, to the still fan, remembering when Kara put her on the table, the fear that started after. “I didn't… feel safe.” She exhales.

“With Darla?” Maggie shakes her head. Confused. “With me?”

“It doesn't matter. It was all me. There’s no good enough reason. I wanted to be better. Braver. I
wasn't.”

“You don't feel safe with me.” She's dazed. “I'm Supergirl.” Maggie's ready to respond when Kara looks at her. “Did you feel safe with Alex?” Maggie doesn't know how to answer truthfully, isn't sure what a 'yes' means. Kara stands, moving around the apartment with her hands on her hips, arms back, head ducked.

“Kara… not everything is either or. Things are just different. Being with you… I've never had anything like this.” Not even with Kate.

“And Alex?”

She touches a hand to her forehead and bites back a scream. She needs stitches. “I've never had anything like that, either.”

“Do you love her?”

“I love you.”

“Do you love her?”

Maggie stands unsteadily. “I don’t know. Maybe I do.” She holds to the table for strength.

“Then why didn't you go to her?”

“I …” Didn't want to hurt either of you. It makes no sense. She won’t say it. Kara looks at her anxiously. Maggie forces herself to move from the table. She feels as if she’s staggering. She wants to question about Lena and Alex but it all feels like beside the point. “I am so sorry if I've hurt you.”

“If?”

She feels as if she's breathing through a strainer. “What happens now…?” Kara keeps her arms crossed. “You probably don’t want to see me.” She smiles through blurry vision. “Take whatever you need. Time or… anything,” her voice is raspy. “Whatever will make you feel better. Whatever will make us… even.”

Kara goes to her. “You're talking about it like it’s a war. Love isn’t war. It's not about revenge.” The words sound far away. “All I ever asked is that you not lie to me. And you didn't. It still hurts.” Her eyes are wet. “I'm sorry you've been unhappy. I'm sorry I didn't notice… in the way I should have.” She struggles. “I should have loved you better.”

Loved? Maggie shakes her head. She’s misunderstanding. “It's not your fault.” She tries to smile but can't. “I'm hard to love.” She takes a breath. “Kara.” She drags the words out. “If you want to leave… if you want it to end—”

Kara puts her arms around her. Her breath is warm against her neck and ear. It’s the first warmth she’s felt since the alien bar. “You idiot.”

X

Kara lies on the couch. Unemployed. Maggie cheated on her. She's in love with her. She’s maybe in love with Alex.
The books don’t talk about this. The movies don’t talk about this. Not without blacks and whites. She has no script. If there can be multiple hatreds, why can't there be multiple loves? That makes more sense. The world needs love. To give. To receive. Maybe the problem is that everyone is trying too hard to be what society says they need to be. Or maybe there’s something wrong with you. Maybe you’re too alien.

She’s overwhelmed. She’s hurting everyone around her. Alex, Lena, Maggie. She loves all of them. They all love her. She sees a shelter commercial for abused animals and starts crying.

She lies huddled and whimpering. She stops when she hears a knock, wipes the tears from her face. She squints her eyes at the door. Lena. She zooms to kitchen washes her face, realizes she’s wearing sweats. She opens the door, somewhat bashfully and looks at her. Lena lifts a greasy bag for her.

“I gave your office a call.” She pouts, looks at her quizzically. “You look…different.”

Kara looks at her clothes, touches a hand to her glasses. They aren’t there. She almost blasts to go get them. “I was asleep,” she says, going to the coffee table and picking them up. They're stained with tears. She wipes them on her sweatshirt and slips them back on. “I must look awful.”

“You don't look like you've been sleeping,” Lena says sympathetically. “I'm sorry about CatCo.”

Kara smiles, she hopes bravely. “Yeah, me too.” She puts her hands on her waist before they fall to her sides. “I knew what the risks were. I just hoped… I don’t know. That it would have worked out differently.”

“You got the truth out to the masses. Who knows how many lives you and Supergirl saved? I'm proud of you.” A beat. “Actually, do you know if she’s okay? I was worried when she took off but didn’t have the chance to see her again after the fact.”

Kara nods soberly. “She’s fine and wanted me to tell you how much your help meant to her. And to me. So thank you.”

“I’m just glad I could help. Anything to stop my lunatic of a mother,” she laughs nervously and gives her the bag of food. “Comfort food. Company is optional.”

“Not when you're involved,” she sits on the couch. Lena unbuckles her jacket and sits beside her. Kara's gaze lingers before she pulls out the donuts, handing one to Lena. “This is amazing. Thank you.”

Lena’s eyes are bright, despite how sympathetic they are. “I thought you could use a little pick me up. I'm sorry I can't do more. I’m convinced this is only temporary. You are the best reporter in National City.”

“I think my one fan is biased.”

“You have more than one. But maybe I am,” she ducks her head and smiles. There’s a beat. She looks back to Kara’s face. “You sure you’re okay? We can talk or take a walk in the park. Or I could leave you alone and let you get back to your nap.” She tells the last to the donut before looking back at her.

Kara wants to kiss her. Lose her way in sensation. The longing cuts into her. She’s taken aback at how visceral it is. It’s as if the desire, long submerged only sprung to the surface with Maggie’s revelation. She could kiss her and Maggie couldn’t say a word. But she can’t. Not without being unfair to all of them. Why can't it be black and white? Why is her heart so willing? Take whatever
you need. Take whatever will make you feel better.

“Kara?” She looks at her, blinking. “You look lost in thought.”

She can't tell her about Maggie. They dislike each other so much. She can't add to their conflict. It would paint Maggie in a bad light. It would be a misrepresentation of all the goodness Maggie has in her. She reflects, unsure when she will see Maggie next, hoping Lena will kiss her. Wishing it were out of her hands.

Lena's phone goes off and she makes a face. “It's a client I've been trying to get a hold of for months. Their timing is impeccable.”

“You should take it.” Lena is skeptical. “Please take it.”

Lena smiles apologetically. “Let's do something. All of us. Girls night on the town. Whatever you want.” The idea stresses her out but she nods meekly. “You'll call me if you need to talk?” Kara nods again. “Great.” She leans over, presses a soft kiss to her cheek and goes.

Kara remains, feverish, anguished.

X

“Kara told me you needed medical attention.” And from the looks of it, she does. Why didn't she go to the hospital? Maybe because it'd turn up in NCPD reviews. They’d wonder what she was doing on her off time. Maggie risked her career to help her. The knowledge is sobering, despite how anxiously she stands at the door.

She’s never been to this building, frankly expected better. And of the two of you, who's gainfully employed? Alex holds the medical kit. Maggie meets her eyes without looking into them. Why?

“She gave me your address,” Alex adds.

Maggie shifts her weight. “I’m fine.”

“You look like humpty dumpty.” The cut is worse than she remembered. That wasn’t even twelve hours ago. It’s swollen and bruised. “It’s going to get infected,” she brushes past her into the apartment, taking it in. It’s plain. A dead bonsai tree sits on a relatively empty bookshelf. Maggie notices her notice and picks it up, dumping it into the trash. “Nice place.”

“Not really.”

Alex takes in the small kitchen, the plates sitting on the table, the oversized, too old microwave. The couch is a dingy color. The overhead fan in the kitchen looks wobbly. She can’t imagine Kara here. She can barely imagine Maggie in it. “I know things got crazy last night. I never thanked you. It was the last thing I was expecting and it meant a lot to me.”

Maggie sticks her hands in the back pockets of her jeans. “I didn’t want you to get hurt.”

“I didn’t.” Maggie still looks tense. Maybe she’s angry about the injuries. Maybe about all the explosions. “I know I was reckless. Kara chewed my head off about it.” She nods over at kitchen chair. Maggie moves grudgingly. Sits.

“Back at the DEO yet?”

“Still suspended.” Alex opens the med kit, gets out the disinfectants, applying it to a cloth to wipe
at the injury. Maggie grimaces, glaring at a far off wall. “Something wrong?” Maggie doesn’t look
at her. “You seem off.” Maggie squirms in the chair, taking short breaths while Alex threads the
wire through the needle. “You know, Kara didn’t tell me much before sending me on my way
here. It’d be nice if we could all recharge in the sun.” She smiles, feeling painfully awkward.

“It’s cloudy today.”

“Won’t matter to her.”

Maggie flicks her eyes to her. She reaches for the needle. “I can do that.” Alex doesn’t give it to
her. “I’ve had my share of rough nights. I’ve learned to patch myself up when need be.”

“When I’m done you won’t be able to tell it ever happened.”

“I don’t know why she would send you here.”

“You’re hurt.”

“She didn’t tell you? Anything?”

“She called me and told me you were hurt.”

“Then she forgot to mention the part where I cheated on her.”

Alex feels as if some part has slipped away from her, fallen to the floor. But she remains, needle
poised, still as a landmine, pale as a ghost. Cheated on Kara. With who? She hears her thoughts,
buries them as soon as they rise to the surface. They’re awful. Petty. Jealous. They don’t matter. It
was wrong. It was wrong in every way. She sets the needle down.

“So keep your gratitude.”

The room spins. “Damn it, Maggie. I thought you cared about her.” And still Kara sent her over
here to help her. She wonders if she’ll ever be able to shake sense into her, if her selflessness will
one day kill her. “What’s wrong with you? How could you do that to her?”

“Because I’m everything you accused me of being.” She stuffs the medical supplies into Alex’s
bag, pricking her hand on the needle in the process. A bright dot of blood springs to her palm. “Just
get out, Alex. Kara shouldn’t have sent you here. I don’t need you to play nurse maid.” She shoves
the bag at her and Alex stumbles back. She takes the bag, makes her way to the door before she
stops. “What’s the matter? Change your mind about putting me in a grave?”

Don’t tempt me. “Kara wanted me to patch you up, so I’ll patch you up. Sit down.” Maggie
glowers. “Sit.” Maggie sits. Alex returns to her, prepares another needle. Her eyes water. She
threads the needle through her skin, pulls too tightly at times. Maggie’s fingers wrap around the
bottom of the chair, eyes glistening. “I wish I could pretend you’re a horrible person,” Alex tells
her. “Everything would be so much simpler if I could just hate you.”

She finishes, cutting the wire. Maggie wipes at the corner of her eyes and Alex realizes she forgot
to use the numbing agent. She thinks to apologize but doesn’t. Some part of her is glad it hurt. She
snatches Maggie’s wrist, looks at the blood pooling in her palm. The needle must have stabbed
deeper than she thought. She wants to kiss it, wipe the blood away. She lets go, disgusted at the
both of them.
Darla's eyes skim over her. Kara sits at a booth, arms crossed, fingers digging into her forearms. Her imagination calls her to violence. But she's still, drinking zerikannean ale, grateful that the world has lost focus.

Her phone rings and she picks it up mid ring. “James. Hi. Yes.” She listens. Snapper has final say on reporter hires and firings, human resources be damned. James talked to the committee but they're standing by their decision. Kara scratches the booth table, shaving a piece of it off in the process. “No. I understand. Thank you for trying.”

She nearly slams the phone down. Lets it drop instead. She looks at Darla and feels something resembling hatred. She touches a hand to the table to stand when Alex slides in across from her. Kara sits again.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Alex asks.

She feels herself grow tired again. “Because then you might not have helped her.”

“Maybe she doesn’t deserve it.”

“How can you say that?”

“She's a screw up, Kara.”

“Yes, she said.”

Alex is flabbergasted. “Are you breaking up with her?”

Kara considers. That's what happens in the movies, in books. It’s what she'd tell a friend, maybe if she didn't understand. “I don't think so.”

“Why not? She doesn't deserve you.”

“She said that too.”

Alex looks at her. “Are you okay?”

“I'm not sure. I will be.” She frowns, drinks. “I've been thinking. About work and Maggie and…” she exhales shakily. “I've…” she tries to summon the right word. “And now I've lost my job.” Alex makes a cry of surprise. Kara waves it away. “And in some ways I've lost Maggie. Maybe it was always going to happen… or maybe I took it for granted that she would understand. That she would always understand the way you have or Lena has. But my relationships with you are so different.”

Alex says nothing.

“I was angry when I met her. She was an escape. And she was new. And… she was tough. She made me feel things I'd never felt. She didn't talk to me like I was a little girl. Because of that…” she sighs. “I think … I haven't communicated with her in the way I have with you or Lena. We have our moments but we're… mostly… physical,” she says more quietly. “And that's been our language. I guess I almost killed her when I went to find Lena? I do all these things and she just… keeps them inside so I don't feel bad—”

“You cannot blame yourself for what happened. Not allowed. She made that decision.”

“I know.” Her voice is fractured. “I'm not blaming myself. I just think I could have done better. I
could have been more giving. Or honest. I just hate change… and tension…” She sighs. “I've
refused to answer questions about Lena. I’ve … let her think that I don't care because I'm trying so
hard to be careful. But I've put her last. Behind you, behind Lena. I hid her for months. I've never
made her a priority.” She tightens her fingers on the table. “I have feelings for her. I have feelings
for Lena.” A sigh. “I wish I didn't. I wish it was clearer. I wish I could stop hurting everyone.”

Alex still says nothing.

“When she told me it happened, I was just so glad it wasn't you. I know that’s wrong.” If she’d
gone behind her back to Alex, that would mean something. “I know how you feel about her. I'm not stupid. I've always been afraid I haven't measured up in the way she needs.” She looks at Alex.
“I don’t even know if I should be saying this to you. I don't want to hurt you but I don’t know who
else I can talk to. It's always been you.”

Alex moves around the booth, slides the alcohol away and puts her arms around her. “Hey. You
can talk to me about anything. I'm sorry if I made you doubt it for even a second. We'll get through
this. We can get through anything.”

Kara leans into her, some of her anxiety abating. It was so much easier when they were the only
ones who existed. She wonders absently how different things would have been if Alex had never
killed her aunt, if she'd never left, if only Alex had met Maggie first.

X

Kara touches down on the edge of the cliff. Dusk is falling. Maggie sits on the hood of her car
looking out. She wears one of her leather jackets, a pair or mean looking boots. Her forehead is
stitched together with wire. There’s a bandaid on her palm.

Kara walks to her, wishing she wasn’t wearing her cape. Maggie looks at her for seconds before
dropping her gaze. Kara stands in front of her, heart pumping quickly. “Can I join you?”

“Yes. Of course.” She scoots over on the hood of the car and Kara sits next to her. “I saw the fire
from here. It was bright and blazing and then you put it out.” She smiles faintly at her hands.
“When I was a kid… I started a few. Dumpster fires around town. You'd think I would have
outgrown that by now.”

Kara nearly asks if she's started fires recently. “That's a weird thing to do.”

“Nothing ever came of them. I'm lucky. I could have been charged with felony arson and bye bye
police career. I don't know what I would have done with my life then.”

Kara can’t imagine her doing anything else. “Did your parents find out and ground you?”

“No. They didn't care.”

“That's not true.”

“It is.” She smiles again. “They tossed me out when I was a kid. On Valentine's Day. Because I
was gay.” Kara's heart drops. “It's not a big deal. It’s just something that happened.”

She doesn’t know what to say. She lost her world. She lost her family. But she has never
questioned that she is loved. That those in her life want the best for her. “Where did you go?”
“With my aunt and uncle. I acted out. I got into trouble. I was pissed. I was convinced that the whole world was against me. For no good reason, really. When I turned eighteen I bailed. I'd already put them through the wringer.” She laces her hands and then shoves them into her pockets. “I know it sounds weird but I've never known how to be normal. I find kindness suspect. I know that's wrong.” Her jaw twitches.

She wishes she’d shared these shards earlier. Doesn’t have a perfect response up her sleeve. She rarely does. “I’m sorry.”

Maggie shakes her head. “Um. How was your day?”

She takes a breath. “Strange. It felt like I was… in a bubble. Seeing. I don't think everything has hit yet.” Maggie nods. “I wish you hadn't told Alex.”

“I thought she should know.”

“Why?”

“Because she was being nice to me and I didn't deserve it.” The breeze hasn’t picked up but Kara feels a piece of her chill. What’s happened in her life to make her think that way? How much of Maggie Sawyer does she really know? “Alex loves you. She's your guard dog. Seems like a nice thing to have given the circumstances.”

“I don’t need an attack dog. Especially if it’s going to be directed at you.” Maggie shrugs. “I make my own decisions. On how to think and how to feel.”

“Yeah. Yeah. I know.”

“For the record, I hate what you did. I wish you had just talked to me instead of pretending everything was okay and I wasn’t hurting you. I know how awful it is to be vulnerable. I wish we were braver at talking to each other. I wish we would without letting sex distract us.”

“Yeah, me too.”

She sighs, tired. “This is all so… complicated. I’m not good at talking.” Maggie breathes, staring out. Kara struggles, unsure of how to say what she wants to say. “Did you know…” her mouth feels thick. “Lena told me that I’m one of the best reporters in National City. I don’t think that’s true. I still have a lot to learn. I’m not a natural. Snapper makes me rewrite things over and over again. And I get so mad about it but he makes me better. Words are hard for me. Feeling and acting is easier. And I’ve been lucky enough to… be able to slide because I’ve had a really supportive family on Earth. But there are things I could stand to improve on.”

She doesn’t know what she expects Maggie to say but Maggie doesn’t say anything for minutes. “I can’t think of anything I’d change about you.”

“I can think of plenty,” she grouses. “About me, that is. Why did you become a police officer?”

Maggie blinks. “No reason, really. It seemed exciting. It seemed like the best way to be a hero without wearing a cape.” She laughs, joylessly. “That sounds so lame.” Kara shakes her head. “One of those dumpster fires I mentioned? There was a cop who saw me. He could have taken me to the station, he could have dragged me to my aunt and uncle’s place. Maybe they would have tossed me out, maybe not. I had other friends. They were punks like me. Their interactions with the police weren’t…” A sigh. “I thought, maybe the right person, at the right place, at the right time… I thought it could make a difference to a person in need. To the nobodies, like me. I thought maybe it could make a difference to a city.” Another careless shrug. “But I’m not a hero. And I’ve given
up on being one. I just want to do my job to the best of my ability. If I help people, that’s a bonus.”

“That’s what being a hero is.”

She smiles wryly. “You’re trying to cheer me up. You really don’t have to.” She lowers her head. “Fuck. How do I keep doing this?” Kara stares at her profile, at the metal threads sticking out of her. It’s ugly but it’ll help her. She’s jealous, suddenly. Every time Maggie has needed medical help, Alex has been the one there for her. What has she done for her? How has she healed her? Has she done anything but hurt her? “Remember one of the first times we came here? You said you weren’t meant for relationships and I trotted out some line about needing to try before deciding. But maybe we had it all wrong. Maybe I’m the one who can’t manage. I’ve never been able to be what people want.”

Kara tightens her jaw. “All this time I’ve been trying to understand you. I still can’t. Maybe I was naïve to think I could. But I can’t help but think that you want me to hate you. That you want me and Alex to hate you.” She tries to understand it but can’t. The last thing she’d want is for someone to love to hate her. “You want me to yell and tell you you’re worthless and we shouldn’t be together. Maybe that way you can keep pulling away but I can’t do that. I won’t do that. Maybe it would be easier for the both of us if I could. But I don’t want to.”

Maggie frowns at her hands.

“I wanted to kiss Lena today.” Kara waits for the shock. It doesn’t come.

“Did you?” She shakes her head. “Just desserts. You don’t have to explain.”

“I need to.” She tenses. “Maybe there is…” A beat. “There is some truth to what you’ve said. My feelings aren’t as simple as I wanted. I thought if I didn’t talk about them they wouldn’t become real. I thought if I could just… bury them it wouldn’t mess everything up. But I can’t change how I feel. I have feelings for you. I have feelings for Lena.” Saying it aloud makes her unsteady and afraid. Will Maggie gloat? Will she accuse her of being a liar?

Maggie’s quiet for moments. “So you haven’t dumped me yet, so you can what? Get even?”

“I’m trying to tell you that it’s not about getting even,” she erupts. “This isn’t a game. There isn’t a tally.” She gets to her feet, bristling. “There’s only love. And quantifying it is completely pointless. That’s why I’m not angry about what you feel for Alex. How could I be?” She stares breathlessly at Maggie, how the sunset colors in her pink and purple hues. “I know that’s not what you wanted to hear. I don’t know if there’s something wrong with me. I don’t know if it’s because I’m an alien. I don’t know if it’s because I happened to meet the most extraordinary women of this world. But I cannot think of myself as unlucky to have met them.” Maggie looks at her, brow furrowed. “Well?”

“You love who you love, Kara. If any of us seem unsure… it’s not because we question you could love unconditionally. It’s because we don’t want to lose it.” Kara moves closer. “You’re always trying to protect everyone. To your detriment. You don’t have to worry about hurting me. I fucked up. You could cut all ties and go to her. She would welcome you with open arms.”

“She’s with Alex.”

Maggie smiles sadly. “She doesn’t care about Alex, Kara.”

She doesn’t believe that. Not fully. “There’s you.” Maggie looks at her. “Haven’t you heard a thing I’ve said? I want to be with you.” She takes her hands. “I’m not ready to give up on you. Or us.”
She’s not ready for Maggie to believe she’s worthless. “If you don’t want to be with me, if that’s why you did it, if that’s why you keep pushing me to Lena, please just tell me now.”

“I want to be with you.”

“But?”

“But everything, Kara. These past… not even twenty-four hours have been crazy. This isn’t our first rodeo. We’ve taken things fast, we’ve taken things slow. We’ve said a lot of things today. I just don’t know what else we can try to fix what I’ve broken.”

“We’re not broken. I’ve pushed you away. I’ve made mistakes, too.” Maggie shakes her head. “All we can do is try. All we can do is keep trying. It matters to me. Does it matter to you?” Maggie nods. Kara takes a breath. She sits beside Maggie, threading her fingers with hers. “Okay.” Another breath. “Okay.”
Maggie flips through the folder of alien photographs. There are a few races she doesn't recognize, others she's been aware of but never seen in Gotham or National City. Some of them are quite young, all vulnerable, all abused. She starts reading some of the statements detailing their captivity and feels sick to her stomach.

She closes the folder, a hand to her forehead, letting out a shaky breath. This is usually where gallows humor comes to the rescue but she's got nothing. There's a rap at her office door and Maggie looks up. The universe, if nothing else, still seems to have a sense of humor.

Maggie rises. “Ms. Luthor. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

She enters, pale as alabaster, lips a vivid red, eyes the color of glaciers. She wonders if looking that way shapes you. “Is that what we’re calling it these days?” her eyes cast about the office and back at her. She always seems dressed for a photo shoot. Maggie feels at odds in her jeans and t-shirt. “You look hard at work.” A beat. A nod to her forehead. “That looks terrible. Are you all right?”

“Just another day in National City.” She doubts Kara told her about Darla but she can't be sure. She steels herself, acknowledging that this woman will likely always be a romantic rival. “Alex patched me up.”

“Oh. She's certainly versatile, isn’t she?” Lena says. Maggie smiles tightly and Lena looks to the framed photograph on the wall of her in her uniform. She looks too serious in it. “I was called to the station to make a statement on Alana. I asked for you, but they said you were pressed on another case.”

All things considered she'd rather have been taking Lena’s statement. “You asked for me?”

“I can't say I fancy spending time at the station. A friendly face can ease the mind.” She looks at her, glance becoming studious.

“I didn't know you found my face to be friendly.”

“Friendlier than others. I know there's been tension between us but I've always found you to be professional and fair. That goes a long way with me.”

“If you’re looking for any discovery on Alana's case—”

“No. I’m here for personal reasons. To see you, specifically. I've been thinking of Kara and her situation at CatCo. I think it'd cheer her up if we all did something together. I was hoping you could help me create something special… and to put a kabosh on our rivalry. I’m willing if you are.”

“Our ‘rivalry’?”

“I think Kara would appreciate it if we could get through a dinner without shooting daggers at one another. I can’t say I disagree.” Lena twines her hands nervously. “So what do you say?”
“I say this is… unexpected.” She starts to clear some of the files on her desk. “Why not go to Alex?”

“The conflict is between the two of us. Alex and I have no issues.” A beat. “But,” she saunters closer, “I can’t say we’ve been at our best recently.” The Cadmus thing. Maggie wonders if Alex will ever admit to Lena that it’s shaken her up. Lena smiles and Maggie recognizes that this was likely a last resort for her. “I thought it might be nice to get Kara out of the house. And out of grief baking mode. Frankly, there are only so many pies my refrigerator can store.”

Maggie smiles wryly. “I’m not exactly sure what you’re suggesting.”

“Kara’s overly fond of group events. They’re not my cup of tea and I doubt they’re yours but if it makes her happy, I’m willing to try if you are.”

Maggie sighs inwardly. She isn’t sure she and Kara are in the place to do couple things with other couples. Especially when they have complicated feelings towards the members of said other couples. How is this her life. She thought things were tense with Kate. “Um. All right,” she’s fazed, takes a card from her desk, writes her number and extends it to her. “Whenever you come up with your great idea.”

Lena takes the card, looks at the careful handwriting. “It is meant to be a team effort.” She slaps the card against the palm of her hand. “I never liked being paired on school projects with kids who refused to participate.”

_It was one of those kids._ “Fine. Whenever you want us to come up with this great idea.”

“Sooner, rather than later. Thank you, Detective. I think this will mean a lot to her.”

Maggie sighs inwardly once more and forces a smile. Isn’t this what she should be plotting? A team effort, then. Her desk phone rings and she picks it up. “Sawyer.” She listens, reaches back, grabbing the jacket from her chair. “Where?” Her stomach grumbles. She’s had nothing but coffee for the past seven hours and tells herself she shouldn’t have deluded herself into thinking she’d be leaving at a normal hour. She holsters the guns at her sides, slips into the jacket. “I’m headed there now. Have a CSI unit meet me.” She hangs up, looks at Lena. “Sorry to cut our conversation short but duty calls.”

“Sounds serious. I’ll walk out with you. The station is a bit labyrinthian.”

Maggie strides out quickly, not in the mood for any more chit-chat. Lena keeps pace with her, despite the heels. “We’ll talk later,” she says, taking the steps to the station down swiftly, not looking back. She sees a limousine parked out front, sniggers and moves to her beat up cruiser. Some things never change.

X

Alex jogs toward her, skin glistening with sweat. She takes a seat beside her and Kara offers her a water bottle. Alex takes it gratefully, panting before having a drink. “I beat my record,” she tells her the time. It means nothing to Kara. Fast for a human, she thinks. “What, I don’t get a high five?” Kara lifts a hand but Alex ignores it, bowing her head and taking a gulping breath. “Why don’t you run?”

“It’s boring. It’s… too slow.” It’s exhausting pretending to be that slow.
Alex grins finishing the water bottle in another few gulps. “Tell me all about how hard it is to be super.”

“I don’t feel very super. I hate not having a job.”

“You do have a job.”

“No. That’s a responsibility. An oath. CatCo was a career.” She sighs, leaning back into the bench. It’s wet. Alex leans back too, not seeming to mind. “This can’t be the rest of my life. And I can’t just get a job at another paper. Snapper would tell them about what I did. No one would find me credible.”

“You’re the most trustworthy person I know.”

“I love you, Alex, but that’s not going to get me another job.” She slumps against Alex’s shoulder, sighs at the weight of the world. “I’m tired of making pies.” Alex laughs softly, ruffles her hair. “I know you’re upset about the suspension but that’s going to end. And I don’t want to work at just any paper. I want to work at CatCo. What if Cat knows I was fired? She must be so disappointed.”

“Do you really think Cat Grant is keeping tabs on you from wherever she is?”

“Probably not.” The thought makes her sadder than it should. “I can’t be just Supergirl, Alex. I can’t… there has to be more.”

“There is more. You’re Kara Danvers. And guess what? People lose their jobs all the time. This isn’t forever.” She pulls back to look at her. “So no more moping.” It’s easier said than done. Lena’s proud and Maggie is… supportive. But it doesn’t change anything. She still feels rotten about it. “How are things with Maggie?”

Kara doesn’t answer right away, reclining against her for some time instead. They’ve been careful and polite. They’re afraid, she thinks. “She’s been working a lot. Maybe it only seems that way because I haven’t been doing anything.” She huffs, frustrated again. “Her work is so dirty. It’s not flashy. And no one really talks about it. The media, I mean.”

“The media would rather focus on Supergirl.”

“I think a lot of what she does is sad work but she doesn’t say much about it.” A beat. “Did she talk to you about it?”

Alex’s fingers continue stroking along her hair. “A little.”

“Why doesn’t she talk to me about it?”

“Maybe you’re a respite. You know, shelter from the storm? It’s nice to get away from it when you can. It’s nice to be that shelter, Kara.”

Kara nods, unsure if she’s convinced. Or maybe Maggie thinks Alex can help her weather the storm without having to hide from it all. Maybe she doesn’t think she provides any shelter at all. She doesn’t feel safe with her, she said. She bites her tongue but can’t tell Alex she’s wrong. Not aloud. “How are you doing?”

“I’m getting through.” Her hand trembles lightly across her knee. Kara covers her hand, steadying it.
It’s nearly one in the morning when Maggie knocks on her door. Kara opens it, reclines against the doorsill, gazing at her. “I know it’s late,” Maggie says. “I took a chance.” She waits, words bubbling inside of her. “I came from the station. I didn’t stop anywhere.” Not at the alien bar. Nowhere else. Straight from the station.

Kara steps aside and lets her in. Maggie stands, tips of her fingers, all she can get into her jean pockets, buried. Kara shuts the door behind her and she breathes a little easier. “Are you hungry?” She’s off to the fridge before Maggie can respond, taking out a pie and carving into it. She digs out two mammoth slices, on two different plates, scooping a vanilla ice cream on top of them and bringing them to the table. Maggie takes her shoes off and follows her to where she stands. “I’m glad you came by.” She kisses her cheek.

Maggie smiles tiredly. “Me too.” She would have rather gone home and to bed. Kara doesn’t need sleep but she’s not fully functional right now. Truthfully she’s happy to not have to think. She sits beside Kara on the table, digging into the pie and ice cream and having a bite. “This is incredible.”

“Really?”

“Really.” She wants to give her a peck on the lips but restrains herself. She has another few bites of ice cream and Kara watches her, taking only the occasional bite herself. Maggie wonders what she’s looking for. Traces of infidelity? She bears another few bites. “Something on your mind?”

“I’ve never been able to save you.”

Maggie looks back at her.

Kara scoots her chair closer. Her hand lifts tentatively but not daring to touch her forehead. “I’ve saved Lena but I haven’t saved you. It’s not intentional, I swear.” Kara’s eyes shine. She tries to say another few words and can’t manage. “Do you think about that?”

Maggie parts her lips, hesitates. Truth is best. Truth is damning. “My work is dangerous. Lena’s a civilian. I can take care of myself.” Kara bows her head, shakes it. “This isn’t your fault.” She reaches out, fingers beneath her chin, lifting, meeting her eyes again. “This isn’t your fault,” she repeats. “What’s the matter, girls with scars don’t do it for you?”

“Alex has scars,” Kara returns and Maggie wonders if there’s any more behind the words. “I’m Supergirl. I should be able to protect my girlfriend. Especially since this is my only job now.” She holds Maggie’s wrist briefly. “I hate not being at CatCo. All I do is think. And you work so hard; I don’t know how you do it.”

“You know exactly how I do it. Better. You juggle more than anyone I know.”

Kara eats her ice cream morosely. “Tell me about your day.”

Maggie blanches. “I’d rather forget it. I have to get some kind of sleep tonight.”

“Are you staying over?”

“I wasn’t planning on it.” They haven’t done that since the night of the dinner with Alex and Lena. She’s apprehensive. “Do you want me to stay over?” A nod. “Then I’ll stay.” They exchange a hesitant, almost chaste kiss. Kara’s mouth is cold and tastes of vanilla. “But I’m not great company. I need to shower and sleep and to wash this day away.”
“What happened?”

“A lot. A lot of bad things happen in this city, Kara.”


“Other things. Worse things.” She puts an elbow on the table to look at her, realizing she hasn’t even taken her jacket off.

“Like what?”

“Like sex trafficking. Human trafficking.” Kara looks at her, stunned. “With aliens. With kids. With alien kids,” she shakes her head, “and it’s bad and it’s hard to nail people on it. There are … so many living victims out in this world. Some still held captive. Some who escape and who are taken again. And I can’t protect them all.”

“I thought I’d never have to think of that since Slaver’s Moon. We have to help.”

“We’re doing what we can—”

“But people are getting away. These… monsters are getting away with it.”

She starts to stand and Maggie takes her arm before she can zip off to get into her outfit. “There’s nothing you can do. The traffickers are humans. Not all of them, but most of them. You and the DEO need to stay out of it.”

“But people are suffering. Children?”

“I know.”

“And that’s okay? That’s worth it… so the NCPD can build a case?”

“Is that what you think?” She hears herself getting angry. “What would you do, Kara? Lock them up forever? Kill them? Torture them until they confessed? You think I don’t want to shoot these bastards? If you saw the things I see and heard the things I hear—I am more tempted than I am comfortable admitting, but two wrongs don’t make a right. I am asking—no, I am telling you, to stay out of it.”

Kara glowers. Sits. The ice cream has melted on her plate. Kara picks up the dishes and dumps them in the sink. Maggie waits to be asked to leave. She isn’t. She stands. She showers. She crawls into bed with Kara after. Kara presses against her back but Maggie can’t let go of her tension. “I wish you didn’t have to see that ugliness all the time,” she says.

“Yeah. Me too.”

“Thank you for staying.” She wraps an arm around her waist, chin on her shoulder. Maggie tries to sleep, but her thoughts race, darting to case notes, connections she might have missed, possible leads, what to hunt down next. She waits for it to quiet but it doesn’t quiet. An hour passes and Maggie’s horror that she won’t be able to sleep before the sun rises, mounts. “Are you still awake?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m sorry if I was out of line earlier.” Maggie turns, giving up on sleep and looking at her in the dark. “About your work. I lost my job. I feel as if I should be patrolling constantly. I have the time now. I have the energy, sort of. There’s no reason I shouldn’t be Supergirl all the time. But the idea
that I could be and all of these terrible things would be happening…”

“You are so much more than Supergirl, Kara.” Kara seems doubtful. “You are.” She tries to swallow a yawn but can't manage. “You can't stop everything. You can't be exposed to everything.” She smiles. “We can't afford to have Supergirl burn out.”

What would they do if Supergirl gave up on humanity? If she saw enough cruelty to not deem them worth saving? She can’t lose her light. She needs to keep her light.

X

It’s almost midnight and as suspected, Lena’s still at the office. She sees Alex and pulls her glasses off. It’s the first time Alex has seen her wear them. Lena sets them on the desk and keeps her arms on the rests of the chair, leaning back imperiously. She’s gone from bookish to coldly regal with just a few movements. She smiles, though her eyes are absent of any warmth. “As I live and breathe, if it isn’t Agent Danvers.”

Alex bites back a bitter laugh. “Do you have a minute?”

“If I don’t?”

Alex moves closer, looks to the balcony doors. They’re closed. The curtains drawn. Supergirl hasn’t been by and she isn’t expected. Has Kara spoken to Lena about how she feels about her? Will she ever? “Then I’ll come back at a time that’s better for you.” Lena only cocks her head up slightly to watch her approach. “I like your glasses.”

“I don’t. And don’t change the subject.”

“Do you have a minute?” Will she answer without playing coy?

“One.”

Alex nods. She considers sitting but hasn’t been invited to, doesn’t want to imply she intends on staying longer. “I’ll be quick. You’ve been a good friend to me. I don’t have many friends. I’m not going to pretend I’ve hurt you in any romantic sense. I know better.” Some of the hard edges around Lena’s mouth and eyes soften. “You tried to be there for me and I pushed you away. I’ve always been… proud. And I was raised a certain way. It’s hard for me to ask for help or accept it. Not without feeling like I’ve failed in some way.” She takes a breath. “I’m not happy with how I’ve behaved and I’m sorry.”

Lena stands. She moves closer, hand on the desk, near hers. “Why did you behave like that?” Alex is ready to respond—“Outside of being proud. I’m not asking you to give me your soul. I know better, too. But something happened.”

Alex nods stiffly. “My father and I were always close.” She sees her frown. “I’ve never mentioned him because it’s hard to talk about. He was a scientist. For nearly a decade I thought he was dead. But he wasn’t. Cadmus had him.” A beat. “He … came back into my life.” She looks at the ceiling, willing the tears to dry in her eyes. After a few moments the heat passes. “Things didn’t go how I wanted them to.” She sighs. Lena’s fingers slide over her own. “I wasn’t able to be professional at my work because of it. I got suspended.” She laughs, looks down. “I was frustrated and angry. I took it out on you because of your mother and I am sorry about that. It wasn’t right. It wasn’t fair.” A breath.
“I didn’t know.”

“I didn’t tell you.”

“Neither did Kara.” Lena frowns gently.

“Kara’s protective of my privacy.”

“I see.” Moments pass, her fingers still absently stroking along her hand. “Let’s have a seat. I could use a break.” They move to the couch and sit. Alex hopes she’ll offer her a drink but she doesn’t. Alex tries not to fidget; slips her hands into her pocket. Maybe she shouldn’t have apologized. Does it put Kara in a bad light if she hasn’t mentioned Jeremiah? She wonders if she’ll ever find the right balance. Maybe she should give up on having relationships. Managing what she says, trying to align it with what Kara might be saying is becoming increasingly difficult to juggle. Maybe she’s a great liar. She wishes she didn’t have to do it so often. Lena looks at her, down at her own hands briefly. “My mother has caused so much pain to this city. Just when I think I know its bounds, she exceeds them. I’m sorry about your father. Is he all right?”

Alex smiles weakly. “I don’t know.” Lena touches her face and Alex closes her eyes, relishing the contact.

“Are you all right?”

Kara asked and now Lena. She hasn’t seen or heard from Maggie in days. She’s keeping her distance. “To be honest I feel like an absolute wreck.” She smiles. “But I’ll push through this. It’s just another thing in a long line of things.” Lena looks at her with understanding. Alex looks back at her. “Anyway, that’s what I wanted to say.”

“I appreciate it. I do have a spot open in the mailroom, if you’re interested. L-Corp could use a little eye-candy.” Alex smirks and gets to her feet. “But you’ll have to submit a resume, cover letter and three references. The interview process is quite rigorous.”

She plays along. “How’s the pay?”

Lena crosses one leg over the other, leans back into the couch, arms folded behind her back. “Non-negotiable.”

Alex laughs. “Think I’ll leave it for the kid fresh out of college. You’ll have to find your eye-candy elsewhere.”

“Will I?” Alex doesn’t answer, long enough for Lena’s fingertips to hook into the front of her jeans and tug her close. Alex lets herself be pulled and debates what Kara told her, what she hasn’t told Lena, and wonders if anything has changed. Lena meets her eyes. She unbuttons her jeans and eases the zipper down.

Alex exhales softly.

X

Maggie bangs the door open to Noonan’s but slows once she’s inside. They made a ‘plan’ to meet at eight but a late lead and a short but relatively successful operation later and it’s near midnight. The restaurant is deserted. Maybe everyone realized it was a shitty place to hit if they want to avoid exes.
She moves in. There’s a bored hostess playing on her cell phone. She sets the phone down. “Are you with Lena Luthor?”

“I’m not with—”

“Right this way.”

Maggie sighs and follows after her. This is a terrible idea. There’s enough friction between them without creating more. There’s been more than enough, even before Kara admitted to having feelings for her. At least she admitted it. At least you don’t feel like a jealous sociopath anymore. At least.

Lena is sitting at the lone table in the restaurant that isn’t stacked with chairs. She’s typing away on a tablet, stops when she sees her. The hostess says something but Maggie doesn’t hear it. Lena gets to her feet; she’s wearing a black dress, her hair is swept up. She’s irritatingly attractive. Maggie thinks back to the night she took her into custody. She grips the chair in front of her. “Hey.” Say more. “I thought I’d miss you. Something came up at work. We can reschedule.”

Lena smiles at her like she’s a fucking idiot. “We’re both busy women and we’re both here now.” She nods at the tablet. “I thought something might come up. I came prepared.”

Maggie nods slowly but remains standing, gripping the chair. “I didn’t know this was a dressy thing.”

“Oh, I didn’t dress up.”

It only looks like she walked out of a Vogue spread, but sure, she’s not dressed up. “Right.” She pulls her chair back and sits. “You run everyone else out of the restaurant?”

Lena smiles and sits. “This is a weeknight. They closed. I asked them to stay open a little longer for our sake.”

“Did you say pretty please?”

“With money, yes.”

She thinks back to when she first met Kate. Spoiled brat. Buying out restaurants on a whim was a go to of hers. “That’s cool.” She smiles tightly and a waiter comes to pour them wine. She’d protest but isn’t sure how she can get through their meeting without it. Anyway, she’s had a long day. She tries the wine. It’s good.

“Is it too dry for you?” she asks, a sparkle in her eye.

Ha ha. “I had an ex like you. Loved to go on about wine.”

“Have we reached the stage where you’re comparing me to an ex?”

She wants to strangle her. “Why are we here? You wanted to brainstorm but frankly I don’t see why you can’t just do this on your own and take the credit.”

“It’s not about ‘taking the credit’. It’s about doing something nice for Kara. You’re special to her. And it seems to mean something to her that you and I get along.” She folds her arms on the table to look at her. “So let’s get along.”

“All right.”
“Do you mind if I ask why you were running late? Collaring innocent CEOs?”

“There’s no such thing. What are you working on? Tech to make hunting down innocent aliens easier?”

Lena smiles in marvel. It is marvelous. “You think I’m the devil.”

“Kara wouldn’t care about you if you were the devil.”

Her smiles dance as she leans back into her chair. “Thank God for Kara. If you must know, I was getting the proper paperwork in place for the children’s hospital.” She puts a finger over her lips, “but you mustn’t tell anyone. That’s a secret.” Maggie frowns lightly. “Have I shocked you into silence?”

Lena isn’t lying. Maggie is momentarily shocked into silence. But she can’t say she’s surprised. Kate could be a flake, came across as a spoiled idiot more often than not, but she bled for Gotham, she fought for it with everything she had. Lena doesn’t seem particularly vapid. Is she only trying to buy goodwill for the company or does she genuinely care? “No,” she says finally. “That’s decent of you.”

“You’re not going to accuse me of money laundering?”

“Should I?”

“You never told me why you were running late.”

“I have to give it to you, Luthor. A lot of people hate your guts. You’re an attractive woman to pin everyone’s hatred on.” Lena smiles as if tickled at being complimented. “You have the name and the family. You sell papers and airtime, so they focus on you instead of looking at the seedy underbelly of the city and its power players.”

“This sounds like the beginning of a Vice documentary.”

“I’ll wrap it up. I’ve got a number of cases going on but tonight was about the alien kids and teens being trafficked in and out of the city. There are people with a lot of money willing to pay to get their kicks. So, if you want to know what I was out doing, that’s what it was.”

“What do they do to these children?”

“What don’t they do to them?”

She exhales. “I shouldn’t have asked.” Maggie shrugs. “That’s awful.” She tangles her hands anxiously. “And I insisted on this meeting. I thought you were eager to get away because it was me.”

“What makes you think I wasn’t?”

“Ah, you’re still spirited enough to be a smart ass, I think you can survive another small while in my presence.” Maggie smirks faintly. “I’m glad you’re there for them. And all those sorry sacks of humanity—I hope you nail them all.”

“I plan to.”

“Good. Now, that we’ve gotten all the ‘pleasantries’ out of the way, what were you thinking we could do for Kara?” Maybe you could take her on a date. “Whatever it is, Alex has to be there. All
of us.” She considers. “Alex has been having a hard time of it, too. So maybe we could make it a joint effort for them.” Maggie squirms in the chair. “What do you think?”

“That sounds great.”

Lena props her hand on her chin and looks at her. “Has anyone ever told you you’re a lousy liar?” People keep saying that. They’re wrong. “Maybe the best thing we could give them is space.”

“They’re jobless and depressed. The last thing they need is space. Kara needs to stop baking pies and Alex…” she waves it away. “Alex would love to see you.” I wouldn’t be so sure. “And you know how crazy she is about Kara. Not that I blame her.” She touches the stem of her wine glass. “What about opera tickets?”

“Too expensive; too boring.”

“I think Kara would love it. And I could pick up the tickets.”

“Alex would hate it, and they would both be self-conscious about you picking up the tab.”

“Are you sure you’re not projecting? I didn’t say I’d buy your ticket.”

“Think of something else.”

“What about a concert? Kara likes N’Sync.”

“Are they doing a reunion tour? Concerts are too loud.” Lena cocks an eyebrow. “And Kara’s ears are… sensitive.”

“Are they?” Maggie isn’t sure if she’s imagining a smirk. She must be. “So, what you’re telling me is that I can reinvent a company hellbent on annihilating aliens from the world into a prosperous company with a favorable reputation but I can’t get an NCPD detective to go along with any of my ideas.”

“If you wanted your own party you could have planned it like I initially suggested.”

“Then let’s hear your great idea. I’m waiting.”

Maggie bites her tongue. “Kara loves Noonan’s. I personally hate Noonan’s but she loves it. We could do something here.”

“You hate it?” Her smile grows brighter. “Very well. Alex likes dancing. We could go to Club Apocalypse. Drinks and dancing after dinner.” She frowns a little at the last, before shaking her head. “What do you think?”

She imagines Lena dancing with either of them, holding them closely and promptly stops imagining it. “I think we could have done this on the phone. We spent too much time to settle on ‘dinner and dancing’.”

“Don’t be that way. You’re a detective. I’m a CEO. You know as much as I do that much of what we do is relationship building in the community. You do that, everything else falls into place.” She sighs. “But it is a little drab, isn’t it? It’s difficult to find something to accommodate everyone. With Kara it’s easy. A restaurant, a museum, the cinema. Not that Alex doesn’t appreciate those things, but she craves a little more excitement and—”

Her jaw is tight. She has a drink of wine and works to unclench it. “And?” Lena shakes her head.
“Look, I know it’s not my place to ask—and maybe it’s weird—but are things okay with you and Alex?” Alex mentioned she'd been snapping at Lena. Lena’s nodding before she finishes the question. Maggie doesn’t know whether to be relieved. “Good. It’s just, she can be intense but she’s also earnest and real and…” she falters. “What you see is what you get. And that’s… That’s rare.”

“Mh. Are you saying Kara isn’t that way?”

“I’m not talking about Kara.”

Lena folds her arms on the table anew and looks at her. “I care about Alex and Kara very much. I’m sure the feeling is mutual.” Maggie says nothing. “But there’s something about them, you know?” She murmurs. “I always feel as if I’m looking at them through foggy glass. And I’m not sure if that’s because there’s something fundamental that I’m missing or if they’re hiding some part of themselves.” Because I'm a Luthor. She doesn't say it. Doesn’t need to. And it's partly true. Maggie feels a pang of pity for her. “Do you ever feel that way?”

“Sometimes, yeah. It can be hard to get a read on them. But they both care about you.” She’s embarrassed to have said it, frowns at the untouched menu in the corner. “So whatever doubt or hurt you’re feeling… I understand it but it isn’t meant that way.”

“That’s kind of you to say, Detective.”

“Yeah? Don’t get used to it.”

Kara changes the second she flies in. Maggie sets the phone down on the kitchen table and looks at her. No matter how many times she sees that she’ll never get used to it.

“I got your text,” she says.

“Were you out fighting crime?”

She smiles. “I was helping a kid put together his Lego set. I forgot how fun those are.” She crosses her arms gingerly and comes closer. “You wanted to talk so here I am.”

“Yeah. Thanks for coming by.” She’s off at a normal time for once. The sun is still out. She sets the beer aside without uncapping it. It’s the first time Kara’s come by since she confessed to cheating. They’re working through it but they’re not where they were. Maybe they’re further. “Um. So no big deal. I just wanted to talk to you about something.” She looks worried. Maggie takes her hands and leads her to the couch. “Lena asked to meet me the other day. She wanted all of us to get together and do something special for you.”

“Oh, that’s— sweet.”

“Yeah. She really cares about you. Maybe I shouldn’t have told you and let it be a surprise. But I still feel like there’s a lot hanging in the air between us. And I thought… that maybe going out, all four of us… wouldn’t exactly be relaxing for you.”

Kara smiles, rests her elbows on her knees and looks at her. “Not exactly.”

A long silence passes. “I guess I don’t know where we’re at.”
“Because of what we said.”

Maggie manages a small nod. “I know you want to be with me. I believe you.” Kara relaxes. “And you know I want to be with you. And I accept that you have feelings for Lena…”

“And…” Maggie looks back at her. “Alex?”

Maggie laces her fingers, unlaces them, wipes her hands on her jeans. “Yeah. I know what I said.” She takes a breath. “I’m just not sure how…” A beat. “We care about each other.” Kara nods. “And… it’s been hard. Relationships are hard. I’m not looking to start something up with Alex. That’s not what this is about.”

“But why not?” Kara shakes her head. “I mean…” she looks up, considers. “And I want—to preface what I’m about to say by saying—I’m not looking to start something with Lena. I don’t want things to change between us. Between any of us. But maybe that’s fear talking. What if we’re wasting… all this time… trying to be polite to one another… all the while feeling like something is missing?”

“I don’t feel like something is missing.” She looks at her. “Do you feel like something is missing?”

“I said that wrong.” She stands, paces. “What I mean to say is…” She looks down at her helplessly. “I don’t question what we feel for one another.” Her brow furrows. “And I don’t question what you and Alex have.” She takes a breath. “It makes me jealous. And it scares me… but I don’t question it. What if…” her eyes well with tears. “What if something happens to one of you and … you weren’t together when you could have been all so… we could keep appearances?”

Maggie stands. “Do you want to break up with me?” She knows she’s beginning to sound like a broken record.

“No. No. No.” She takes her face in her hands. “I love you. I want us to be together.” She says it so casually that Maggie almost doesn’t hear it. It takes the air out of her. “I love Alex. But sometimes I feel selfish. Why should I get to have you? Why when you love each other?”

“That’s a big assumption.”

“I know my sister.”

She’s a little unsteady. She can’t quite believe it. Alex has been polite but often angry or cold. “Fine. Let’s pretend you do. We’re together, Kara. And let’s – let’s just pretend that Alex and Lena aren’t together or they are. What makes you think they’d be interested in a polyamorous relationship? What makes you think I would be? One relationship is hard enough—and time management wise? You know how much we work. Some weeks I barely see you. Neither one of them are exactly sitting on their ass.”

“I know. I don’t know how if they’d be interested. I don’t know if it would work. Some days I don’t think I know anything.”

She sits down. “Do you want to date Lena?” She doesn’t know why it makes a difference. She’s known how she felt. Did she expect her to not want to act on it? Did she expect her to contain her affection forever? What a cruel thing to ask. “I understand if you do.” She understands it, even as she feels her face and fingers go numb at the thought of it.

“I know that I like spending time with her. I know that,” her words are pinched now, “I’m attracted to her. And I’m not trying to push you towards Alex so I can go to Lena… And I’m not trying to tell you that you’re not enough, because you are. If you were with Alex and I couldn’t be with
Lena, I would be happy for you. I… just feel… like things are so calm between her and I. I don’t want that to change. It’s like…” She falters, flexing her jaw and saying nothing further.

Maggie takes her fingertips and pulls her closer. Kara straddles her, wrapping her arms around her neck. “Like?”

“Restful? I don’t want to disturb that. I don’t think she does either.”

“I think we’re probably overthinking this.”

“But what if you’re hanging out sometime and this … moment happens and you want to kiss her and you don’t when you could.” Maggie shakes her head, unsure whether Kara's talking about Alex or Lena. “What if?”

“What if I do? What if you do? What if once we do something changes? What if once we do—we realize we don’t want it? Or we realize we don’t want to share ourselves or each other, or realize we don’t want to be shared?” She takes Kara’s face in her hands. “Kara, there are a lot of ‘what ifs’. It is so easy to hurt someone, no matter how we try not to.” Kara looks back at her soberly. “If you want to have that conversation with Lena, go ahead. But I’m still trying to settle into what it’s like to be with you. I’m not… ready to think about going there with Alex.”

Kara frowns gently. “I’m afraid that one day you’ll look back… and you’ll resent me for not being able to be with her.”

“That’s not going to happen.”

“I know you hate ‘what if’. But don’t you ever think ‘what if?’ What if you’d stayed with Alex? What if you’d met her first? I just want you to be happy.” Maggie looks back at her. Kara kisses her palm, the cut on her forehead. “Sometimes I think I make things harder for everyone, just by existing.”

“That’s crazy. Yeah, you’re not typical. But you’re worth navigating every thing that gets thrown our way. Whether it’s crazy alien attacks, Cadmus or… incredible women, all right?” Kara nods, leans down to kiss her, lifts Maggie’s hands to the buttons of her shirt. It’s their first real kiss since Darla. She’s so sorry about Darla. The buttons come open. Her fingers trail over her skin, soft as satin and for the time being, there’s no one else. She could be happy if there was no one else.
A/N: These chapter titles might just become ‘amalgam’ in the future. Thanks for all the comments, everyone! Especially those who leave such thoughtful feedback. You keep me young.

x

Alex unbuttons her suit jacket as she steps out of the car. Maggie’s already in the cordoned off crime-scene, stooped over the charred corpse. Alex fights the sour taste in her mouth, unsure if it’s the stench coming from the body or resentment and regret. Maggie wears blue latex gloves, scribbles notes on her notepad. After a few seconds of determined writing she looks up at her.

There’s something like fear in her eyes. She stands. “Agent Danvers. They let you back out on the field?”

“Seems that way,” she means to sound aloof but comes off as cold instead. Yes. They let her back out on the field. They made her watch HR videos on appropriate agent behavior. J’onn had to go over the most basic of protocol with her. It was humiliating for both of them. “I’m going to need you and your boys to clear out of here. This crime-scene is under my jurisdiction.”

“That hasn’t been established yet. As usual, you’re late to the party.” She smiles, steps closer. “I get that you have the fancy job with the fancy gadgets but us locals are capable of holding our own.” Alex keeps her hands on her hips, eyes flicking to the corpse and back to Maggie who arches her eyebrows. “Well?”

“The FBI needs to do their own investigation.”

Maggie’s smile tightens; her voice lowers. “Do you know how frustrating it is to know that you’re full of shit and that you still have the backing to pull this kind of thing?” Alex doesn’t budge. “Fine. You want to go to my captain and complain, go to my captain. I’ll let you have the scene as soon as we’re done with it.”

She turns away from her, stooping back down beside the body, collecting samples with tweezers and placing them in small baggies. Alex glares, looking at the DEO agents in the background awaiting further orders. “You get five minutes,” Alex says.

“How gracious of you.” Five minutes pass and then ten, fifteen. Eventually Maggie stands, faces her. “Look, I know you’re eager to get back into it but this isn’t a case for you and your buddies.” She nods at the ground, the swirls of colorful liquid. Some kind of flammable.

“I’ll make that determination.”

“Suit yourself,” she nods at the corpse, “I think he’d just had enough.” She bows her head, a slight frown.

Alex stares at her face, at the thread sticking out of her forehead. “Those stitches are ready to come out.” Maggie lifts her head, looks through her. Alex tries to dampen how it lances through, tries to steady when for the briefest moment, she meets her eyes.

Science is easy. There are formulas, equations. If you study it long enough understanding will come. This is something else. Why is she drawn to her? She’s chosen someone else. It seems like over and over again she’ll choose someone else. But she’s been there for her. Put her to bed when
she’s been too drunk to walk straight, helped her against Cadmus when her family wouldn’t, hasn’t judged her when she’s said… weird things about Kara. She wishes she were all one thing. It’d be easier to understand, to come up with a plan to get over her.

“Why don’t we keep it professional, Danvers?”

She wants to shout that things will never be one hundred percent professional between them. Maggie should know it. Why does it sting? “What exactly do you think I’ll try to do when I’m removing stitches? Get over yourself.”

Maggie bows her head, looks back up at her and smiles. “I’ll let you do what you need to do here but you’re not taking the body. We’ll need to get him to the coroner.” She looks at the corpse, “We’ll go through dental records. Once we identify him I get the privilege of notifying his family.”

It sounds awful. She thinks back to Kara at the alien bar, confessing to feelings for Lena and Maggie, confessing she’s aware of her feelings for Maggie. Alex buries it. What should she do? Say? Kara hasn’t asked her to stop seeing Lena. She won’t stop seeing Lena. What does Maggie think about it? She hopes Kara hasn’t put any ideas in her head. Real ideas about how you feel about her? It doesn’t matter. What she feels doesn’t matter. What gives her the right to be so bitter? Why is she so bitter? Is it that Maggie cheated on Kara? Is it that she cheated on Kara with someone else? “No promises that you get to keep the body. I’ll let you know as soon as we’re done.”

Maggie gives a small, frustrated shake of her head before she walks off to her car. Alex watches her go, a pang in her heart.

Mon-El is the prince of Daxam.

Supergirl tries to get her bearings. She flies the city aimlessly before settling down into a bench at the park. She sits there, wondering what responsibility Mon-El bears. All this time she was chewing Maggie’s head off about not doing more to trap slavers and there was one under her nose the entire time. Whatever he says, he benefited from it. And he lied to her.

She should have known better than to trust a Daxamite.

A breath. She massages her head. The thought isn’t… a very Supergirl thought. It’s her old bias. She needs to let it go. Mon-El is not the same. So why lie? Why not turn himself in when his parents were threatening to blow up National City? Isn’t that the right thing to do? Maybe she is as sanctimonious as he’s accused her of being. Is she so different? Is Lena?

We didn’t hide what our family is. We fought against it.

A small crowd has gathered, unbeknownst to her and she notices them, smiling, recording her on their phones, snapping pictures. She stands up. “Hi.” She winces. “Just taking in the National City view.” She spots a cluster of children watching her curiously. “And eating my fruits and vegetables.” She can hear Cat Grant in her head telling her she’s embarrassing and shouldn’t open her mouth. Ever.

She shoots into the sky, hoping she won’t end up on the news later. The last thing she needs is Alex or Maggie teasing her about it. She’s still unemployed. She’s tired of spending all her time at the DEO. It makes her feel like somebody else. A living weapon. One that must always be harnessed.
She’s restless.

She ignores Mon-El’s calls, afraid she’ll say something terrible if she speaks to him. She can’t ruin things at the DEO. The DEO is her only purpose these days. She misses CatCo. She misses human routine. Without CatCo it feels as if her brain is atrophying. What will happen to her if all of her life is spent being a government weapon?

She soars through the skies, thinking about Alex’s return to agent status at the DEO.

She left in good spirits to some field operation and returned unexpectedly sullen, nearly biting her head off. *What’s up?* Alex shook her head. *The NCPD is a real pain in the ass.*

Kara hopes she didn’t mean Maggie. Who’s at work and she shouldn’t bother. Though she wants to, bring her a surprise lunch or a surprise coffee. Wants to do anything to not be bored and restless. It’s selfish to interrupt her. Maggie’s always busy and no matter how she reassures her, that it’s okay for her to drop by, she does so while checking her phone or emails for updates, while combing through her notes, looking up only long enough to give her an encouraging smile.

She lands at L-Corp, pushes the glasses up the bridge of her nose. She shouldn’t be here, either. Lena is just as busy as Maggie is. Her stomach knots. *It’s not a big deal. Lena is your friend. Yes.* Lena is her friend. Just a friend. She thinks back to Maggie kissing her, telling her it’s okay. But is it okay? Is any of it okay? Suddenly she doesn’t know why she’s come, but finds herself moving somewhat unsteadily to Lena’s office. The receptionist spots her and waves her in.

She hasn’t gotten in the habit of barging in. Not through the front door, anyway. She clasps her hands together and knocks tentatively. She tugs her glasses down, sees Lena lift her head, look at her phone and computer, type a few more moments before making her way to the door. It opens and the irritation falls away. Her eyes light up. She smiles. Kara smiles back, relaxing and tensing in one. “Hi. I know I should have called.”

“Stop that. You know I always welcome your visits. Come in, come in,” she takes her arm gently and guides her inside before shutting the door. “I was just watching a news stream on my computer. Supergirl was at the park telling the kids to eat vegetables,” she laughs. “It was adorable.”

“Oh.” Don’t blush. “She’s a kidder.”

“We know I’m a fan. But enough about her,” they take a seat on the couch. “How are you? I know we’ve been meaning to get together but we haven’t been able to make it work.”

She laughs too loudly at something that isn’t funny. Lena humors her and smiles. “I have a little more flexibility than anyone.” Lena’s eyes are soft on her. “But. But! Since I do have that flexibility, here I am.” She hesitates. “I know what you tried to do for me. With Maggie.” She frowns gingerly. “And it was so sweet.”

“It was meant to be a surprise…” She taps her fingers on the back of the couch.

“Yes. Maggie told me that, too. And I really appreciate it. Um. Things have been crazy so… so Maggie was just trying to watch out for me. In her own way. And you were trying to watch out for me in your own way. Just like Alex is.” She laughs again, touching her glasses. “I feel like such a baby.” She waits. “Have you ever lost a job?” Lena hesitates. “So it’s just me.”

“You lost your job by standing up for the right thing. That’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

She lifts, her back a little straighter. “You always know what to say.”
Lena bows her head, smiles. “I don’t think that’s true.” She looks back at her and they stare at one another, Kara’s mouth going dry, Lena’s fingers twining. “Um. But, surprise or no surprise, I think we should all have a little get together. You’ll bring your detective.” She smiles then and Kara doesn’t know why. “I’ll bring Alex and we can all…”

“Have a good time.”

“Exactly.” Lena says. “I know Detective Sawyer and I have had our differences but you’re important to us. I think I’ve talked her into being polite for an evening. I don’t know what’s going on with you. I suspect it’s more than the job.” Kara tenses. “But that’s for you to say. And we don’t have to say everything.”

“Not everything has to be said… so.” She knots her hands in her lap. “What if there are things that should be said? Or you think they should but maybe they don’t?” Lena cocks an eyebrow gently. “I’ve… been doing a lot of thinking.”

“What about?” Say it. Just say it. Kara bites her tongue. She can’t. She shakes her head and stands. Lena looks up at her before standing. “Are you all right? I know what I just said but if you need to talk, you know I’m here.”

“I don’t need to talk.” Lena nods with some disappointment. “But I do know you’re here,” she adds quickly. “Um. How are things with you and Alex?” Something ripples through her expression. “I know we haven’t talked much about you two.” She didn’t want to. “And I don’t know if that’s because she’s my sister… or… or something else.” She looks at her anxiously. “Alex is really great.”

“That seems to be the common consensus.”

Kara bites her tongue and nods again. “Okay. We’ll plan something. All of us,” Lena walks with her to the door. “Thank you for seeing me. I promise, I’ll be better about… you know, just dropping by.”

“It’s never stopped Supergirl. I hope it won’t stop you.” She smiles. “Can anything stop you?”

“Snapper Pecard.”

Lena laughs. “It seems like you just got here but you’re already leaving. Did you come by for something?”

“No. No reason. I wanted to see you.” A breath. “I just wanted to see you.” She wanted to talk about Mon-El, about the prince of Daxam, about the slavery his family endorsed. About their families. But she can’t talk about those things with Lena. Will she ever be able to? Will she always have to lie to her? She doesn’t know you’re Supergirl. That’s everything. Even if she’s grateful Maggie does know. She wishes she were more sensible, that she didn’t always think such contradictory things. She wishes she could just tell her what she wanted to say.

“I always want to see you, too.” Lena bows her head, cheeks reddening. “That is not what you said. So let’s pretend I didn’t say it.” But she doesn’t want to. “Kara.” She appears to have some inner struggle before continuing. “I don’t mean to overstep but has everything been okay with your family?”

With Alex? With who her parents are? With Jeremiah? No. No. “Everything’s been great.” It’s easy to smile with her, even when it isn’t the truth. But Lena’s eyes narrow. Her heart plummets, her heart rate slowing abruptly, her temperature going cold. What did I say? What did I say?
“I shouldn’t have asked.”

“But I don’t mind.”

Lena smiles but Kara knows she’s hurt her. She sees it in her face, in her smile. Lena knows she’s lied. How does she know? But she can’t tell her about Jeremiah. She can’t tell her about her family. She can’t tell her about her day. She can’t tell her about how she knows Lillian. “We’ll have that girl’s night.”

The talk shifts and they move with it, pretending there wasn’t a split in their conversation, that they haven’t pushed further than intended, that they haven’t stepped out of their normal. They stay at the door, leaning into it for nearly an hour, until Lena’s phone rings and work beckons her.

Kara watches Lena pick up the phone, smile her way, sees her heart slowing further and wonders if she’s grateful to have some distance between them.

X

Maggie is still thinking of the sobbing mother on the doorstep when she sees the text.

Get together with everyone tonight at 8:00. My place.

It’s 7:51pm. The text was sent hours ago. Maggie sighs, looks at her reflection in the rearview mirror, oddly pale and tired looking. She texts back. Who’s ‘everyone’? A few minutes pass, the phone still in her lap. No response. What should I bring? No response.

She starts the car and drives to the gas station, picking up a six-pack of beer. What get-together? Is it her wholesome circle of friends? Is it Alex? Is it Lena and Alex? She cringes. It’s 8:17pm when she arrives. Still no text from Kara and she wonders if it was canceled. Maybe something came up at the DEO. She trudges up the stairs and knocks on the door. Kara hasn’t given her a key and even if she had, she doesn’t think she could use it. Not yet. Maybe Kara will never offer her a key.

The door opens. Oh, you’ve got to be fucking kidding me. “Detective Sawyer.” Lena looks at her, then past her down the hallway. “Come in.”

She does. “Thanks? Where’s Kara?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. Actually, given your line of work I’d hope it’s better,” she makes her way to the kitchen, the white dress she wears slinking as she moves. Maggie reluctantly shuts the door behind her and carries the beer to the kitchen before pulling one free and setting the pack in the fridge. “Not going to offer me one?”

Maggie grits her teeth, forces a smile. “Would you like a beer?”

Lena takes the beer Maggie’s set on the counter, digs in the drawers to pull out a bottle opener and uncaps it. Look, she knows how to use one. She’s over enough to know where that is. Maggie tries to decide if it surprises her. Yes. It surprises her. Lena lifts the bottle to her lips, has a drink. She considers the taste before sliding the bottle back to her. “It’s all yours.”

What a surprise. “Why are you here?”

“For the same reason you are, I imagine. Kara has decided to arrange our get-together. I’m not happy that you spoiled our little surprise.”
“Maybe Kara wasn't in a good space for ‘our little surprise.’”

She considers that, her eyes far off, before she returns to the moment. “Not quite the dinner and dancing we imagined, is it?”

“Yeah, we’re a bit short.”

“To be fair, you were the one running late. Kara and Alex were here when I arrived but only for minutes,” she goes to the stove, to the pot. Maggie peeks over. Spaghetti sauce. Her stomach growls. “Then Agent Danvers realized she forgot something at her work and Kara realized that Alex had something in her car that was critical to this evening and here it is half an hour later.”

Maggie crosses her arms. “I’m sure it was important.” Lena nods half-heartedly and Maggie knows she must be wondering what the hell Kara is up to. What mental gymnastics does she have to do to keep from seeing who Kara really is? “Don’t tell me they left you in charge of dinner.”

“Why the snark? I’ll have you know I’m quite the cook.”

“Did Mommy Dearest teach you?” Lena glances over at her. Maggie shifts her stance, mumbles an apology.

“Mother did not teach me, but our cook tolerated me when I was buzzing around in the kitchen. Mh, tolerated is a strong word. She was quite kind, actually. She treated me very well. I think she felt a little sorry for me. She would stay past hours sometimes to read me stories in bed. But only when my father was gone on business.” She lifts the wooden spoon to her lips, has a taste, contemplating it. “Do you cook? I can’t imagine it with your schedule.”

“Do you?”

“Aren’t I?”

“You strike me as the personal chef type.”

“Because I’m rich?”

“And busy.”

She shrugs. The pot of spaghetti sauce bubbles and Maggie gently pushes Lena to the side. The pot spits, splashing her white shirt with flecks of red. Maggie looks down at it and sighs. “Looks like you had a rough day at work,” Lena says with a gleam in her eye. You don’t know the half of it. “But I’m grateful. I do like this dress and I’d hate to ruin it.”

Maggie runs the water, grabs a paper towel, tries to wipe the sauce from the shirt and only succeeds in making it more transparent. She bites her tongue and wonders when the fuck Kara will return. She gives up, turns the burner down and looks at the pasta bubbling happily in the next pot over, looks at the salad sitting on the counter. “Kara has aprons.” Lena wrinkles her nose lightly. Maggie has a drink of beer and leaves the kitchen, going to one of Kara’s bureaus and searching for a shirt.

“Do you two share clothes?”

“No,” she says through grated teeth, “but given the circumstances. I’d hate to be underdressed.”

“I can only imagine how mortifying it’d be to strip down to almost nothing in front of someone who’s practically a complete stranger.”
Maggie stops digging through the drawer and looks back at her. Lena looks far away in the kitchen, the white light making her dress gleam. Eventually Lena turns her head to the side. Maggie studies the curve of her jaw and goes back to the drawer, her fingers padding absently, as if trying to squeeze out time, hasten it until Kara and Alex return. Maybe once they return she can focus on them and not Lena Luthor, not on the sobbing woman earlier in the evening, telling her there’s been a mistake, her son can’t be dead. She pulls out a shirt at random, a print of a caged bird. She holds it closer than she means to, smells Kara’s perfume and hopes she’s okay, hopes whatever the DEO is dealing with isn’t too menacing.

She excuses herself to change, considers making a joke, or maybe a genuine offer, of allowing Lena to watch but it’s too weird. It’s too everything and her head is already screwed up enough. The last thing she needs is to take a joke (or an act of contrition) too far. She doesn’t know how to apologize for doing her job. Should she apologize for doing her job? She won’t. Anyway, Lena asked.

She mulls it over as she shrugs the jacket off, pulls the wet, stained shirt away, frowns at her scarred torso in the mirror, the bruises on her hips and beneath her ribs, the line cut into her forehead, before slipping into Kara’s shirt, soft against her skin.

She returns to the living room, settling her jacket over the back of the couch and moving tentatively to the kitchen. Maggie looks at the clock on the wall. It’s nearly nine.

“Looks like it’s going to be a late dinner,” Lena says.

Maggie smiles faintly, relieved it’s not another retelling of the night of the arrest. She plucks a tomato wedge from the salad and eats it, following it with a drink of beer. “There’s wine,” she nods at the cabinet. “Kara wouldn’t mind.”

Lena turns, finds the right cabinet, pulls out a bottle of wine, appraising it before wiggling the cork free. She takes out two glasses and pours. “Join me.”

“I have beer.”

“This is better.” Maggie scowls but takes the glass. “I was thinking about something you said the other day,” she goes on. “Your alien trafficking victims.” Maggie has a drink of wine, feeling it burn a path down to her empty stomach. “What if L-Corp put together an exploratory committee to… you know, track how prevalent that kind of thing is and offer assistance to victims and their families?”

She folds her arms on the kitchen counter and looks at her. “All right. I’m interested. What kind of assistance?”

She considers. “It’d be more than financial. Rehousing. Therapy. Healthcare. Maybe some alien legal advocacy groups,” she talks faster, more excited. “Obviously we’d have to work in conjunction with someone at the NCPD. I could draft up the paperwork, a mission statement.” She scoffs. “Though how likely are aliens and the NCPD to accept help from me?”

After her mother’s recent attempt at a forced exodus, she means. “I don’t know what you could possibly be referring to.”

“What was I thinking?”

“I don’t know, Luthor. Doesn’t sound like too bad of an idea to me.”

The door to the apartment opens and Alex and Kara enter, the chill of the night stuck to them. “I
am so sorry. We are so sorry,” Kara says, peeling off her jacket and throwing it on the coat hanger.

They look over and Lena frowns, seeing the knot on Alex’s forehead. Maggie cranes her head to get a better look. “What happened to you?” Lena goes closer, taking Alex’s face in her hands. Maggie tenses. Kara looks swiftly away.

“It’s nothing,” Alex says. “I fell—”

“The door—” Kara says.

Lena looks between the two of them. Alex takes a breath. “I fell and hit my head on the door,” she says steadily. “Not my finest moment.”

“I wouldn’t take you for a klutz. Let’s get some ice on it,” Lena says, walking her to the refrigerator. They get into some quiet conversation.

Maggie looks to Kara who’s fidgeting with her glasses before she comes to her. “You’re wearing my shirt,” Kara says.

“Yeah. ‘Fraid I had an accident tonight. I’m not trying to sweet talk you when I say it looks better on you than it does on me.” Kara smiles and drapes her arms over her shoulders. Maggie relaxes, finds her eyes. “You okay?” she asks more quietly.

“Yeah. Little alien menace thing. We took care of it,” she gives her a swift kiss on the lips and Maggie warms. She sees past Kara to Alex and Lena turning away. “I’m sorry I left you two together. I couldn’t answer your text. I hope you weren’t too surprised.”

“We survived in your absence.”

Kara smiles tensely.

X

“That must have been one hell of a door.”

Alex looks to Maggie, leaning against the kitchen counter, staring off to where Kara and Lena sit on the couch talking. Alex plunges the sponge back into the water before scrubbing the plate. “If you’re just going to stand there you might as well dry.”

Maggie rolls her eyes, grabs a towel, takes the dish that Alex hands to her. It seems so natural to her that she wonders if she does this with Kara, how often she’s done it with her. Alex frowns at the soapy suds. “So?”

“It was a door. An alien threw it. Nailed me square in the temple.”

“Who’s Humpty Dumpty now?”

She laughs dryly and holds out another plate. Maggie sets the one she has aside and takes the new one. “So, you and Lena got through without us. Kara thought you might shoot her.”

“Really?”

“Probably not anything that drastic. But she is a Luthor,” she teases, passes her a glass. “Kara cares a lot about you two.” She sees Maggie’s jaw tighten. Nearly asks if she wants to talk about it but doesn’t. She doesn’t want to talk about it. Is tired of feeling like the third wheel. “You were right earlier. About the body.”
“Figured that when you left it behind, Danvers.”

She still hasn’t decided whether that’s more impersonal or not. “After everything that happened at work I’m … more sensitive than I should be about being called on to be professional.” Maggie looks at her, sets the glass aside, takes another. “Fuck. Sometimes it feels like I’m never going to get my act together.” Maggie laughs. Alex flinches. “What?”

“Come on. It’s not exactly hidden knowledge that I’m the screw up of this crowd,” she smiles tiredly. “You’re doing fine. You’re getting by. Sometimes all you can do is suck it up and get by.”

“So you’re fine with everything?”

“Everything?”

“Yeah. You know.” She looks over to Kara and Lena. “Everything?”

“Oh.” Her lips form the letter. Alex looks away. “Yeah.”

Alex nods quickly. “That’s good. I don’t forgive you for what you did. I know that’s not my place. It’s Kara’s and she has. I just wish.” Maggie waits. “I don’t know.” She searches the sink for other dishes, there aren’t any and for moments she leaves her hands in the hot water, wishing it could cleanse her. She gives up and takes her hands out, wiping them down on the paper towel. “You should really let me take care of those stitches. Kara has a kit in the bathroom.” Maggie’s lips thin slightly. “I was out of my head last time. I forgot the analgesic. I feel… bad.” It’s the truest thing she’s said in a while.

“You shouldn’t. About anything.”

Alex bites her tongue. “Can we just… please put our history behind us? And all the animosity and… and all the complicated stuff just for a few minutes? Just enough for me to get them out?”

Maggie lifts her face to say something and then just nods. “Yeah. Yeah. Sure.”

They return to the living room. “I’m going to take care of her stitches,” Alex announces to Lena and Kara.

Kara claps.

“The doctor is in,” Lena says. A beat. “Versatile, as promised.” Alex shifts her stance and Maggie stuffs her hands in the back pockets of her jeans.

Kara watches them walk down the hall, to the shadows until the light to the bathroom comes on. Alex enters and soon Maggie’s shape disappears after her. “It must be handy to have a medical expert around. I’m surprised she’s an FBI agent.”

Kara turns to the shadows, seeing the small glow of the light shine out into the hallway. “I’m not. Alex is the bravest person I know.”

“How partial?” She considers that. “Well, she did save my life. I am partial to her.”

Not Supergirl or Maggie?" She considers that. “Well, she did save my life. I am partial to her.”
“Ah, yes. I have been known to put my foot in my mouth,” she smiles bashfully. Her lips move, forming words, Kara looks at them, trying to predict what will come but Lena only gives a shake of her head. “It would appear that things have worked themselves out, despite any of my foolish notions.”

They have? She doesn’t know. She can’t respond without giving herself away, can’t respond without saying too much. So much about them is left unsaid. She grimaces. “I’m sorry Alex and I were gone so long.”

“Did you find what you were looking for?” Kara stares back at her, unsure of what she’s talking about. Once again Lena shakes her head. “What matters is that you’re here now. You know, when Maggie and I schemed this up, we had grand designs of taking you out on the town and showing you a good time.”

“I am having a good time. Dinner was delicious. Sorry I left you with the cooking.”

“As if I could mind cooking for you.” A cock of her head, she looks elsewhere. “And, Detective Sawyer did save my dress from the rogue sauce. Ruined her shirt in the process, I’m afraid.” Her fingers thread in her lap and she looks at her. “Just another one of her heroic deeds for National City.”

Kara frowns gingerly, turns her head to the bathroom, sees Alex and Maggie’s outlines through the walls.

*Have a seat.* Kara squints.

Alex looks around, doesn’t see a second toothbrush, does see different bottles of shower gel.

She digs out the medical kit, thanks herself for having the foresight to keep a spare in case of emergencies. Maggie’s surprised to see it. She washes her hand thoroughly, slips the latex gloves on and taps the sink again. Maggie’s dubious before lifting herself onto it. Her feet don’t touch the ground and Alex smiles at how small she is.

“What’s funny?”

“Everything about this situation is funny. We have to laugh, don’t we?” She pulls out the tiny pair of scissors and tweezers. “Turn your head to the side.” Maggie doesn’t turn it far enough. Alex cups her face, feels a jolt go through her, despite the gloves. Her fingers tighten without meaning to. Maggie’s eyes flick to her. Alex loosens her grip, turns Maggie’s face. “All right. Leave it there.”

She cuts the stitches and pulls on them carefully, removing each one at a time. Maggie’s brow remains thoughtfully furrowed and Alex feels like a pervert, lamenting that she wears gloves while she does this, that she can only feel her warmth through latex. “I don’t think I ever thanked you for what you did that night.” Maggie tries to shake her head but Alex grabs her chin, keeps her still while she can. “Thank you.”

“You did. And… anytime.”

“Almost done,” she tells her. Maggie glances at her, their eyes locking for only a moment before Maggie turns them elsewhere. Alex remembers how she used to keep them on her, how her gaze made her more feverish than what her hand was doing. She feels her face heat, warmer than alcohol, more filling. “Okay. All done. Painless, as promised.”

Maggie slides down from the sink and looks into the mirror as Alex takes the gloves off. “The skin
will even out, don’t worry. In a few weeks no one will ever know it was there.”

“Thanks, Danvers.” She turns, so close that Alex steps back, slamming into the towel rod on the wall. Maggie winces sympathetically. “Household goods are really after you today.” Alex squeezes her eyes shut, forcing herself to ignore the awkward pain. “Sorry if I startled you.”

“No. It’s. No. You didn’t.”

Maggie looks up at her for a long time and Alex holds on to the medical bag like a safety line. Kara, calling after their progress startles them out of their reverie. They return to the living room, Kara cheering at the successful operation, a hand to her glasses. Maggie points to her as if she’d just pulled off some magic trick.

“Alex can do anything,” Kara proclaims.

Maggie scratches her forehead gently, smiles at the floor. “Yeah. She’s not bad.”

Maggie and I are dating other people,” Kara says. The words burst like a dam and she freezes, undone by the way Lena stops to look at her—not with interest—with concern. Kara realizes it’s wrong. She’s said it all wrong.

Maggie’s gone to retrieve a bottle of wine. Kara sent Alex after her, thinking it necessary, despite the irritated smile Maggie sent in her direction. Alex knows better than Maggie what Lena would like to drink. It’s only that they should spend time together… further away. Where it’s not as easy for her to see. To hear. To meddle.

“Oh my God,” Lena says. “Is everything okay?”

Her tongue is stuck to her mouth and she looks to the hardwood floor, sees a black, gleaming NCPD pen in one of the grooves on the floor. She looks back to Lena and doesn’t know how to say it was meant to be an invitation, not a cry for alarm. “Yes. Things are fine.” But Lena’s eyes only narrow again and Kara stirs nervously under her gaze. What did she think would happen? That Lena would proclaim her love, they would hold one another and then what? “Actually, I think it’s a sign of maturity.”

Lena lifts a hand, smiles quizzically, “Kara, you don’t have to explain.” No, she has to explain. Please let her explain. She stands, anxiously twining her fingers until Lena carefully continues. “I guess I don’t understand. Did you break up—?”

Kara shakes her head. “No. No. We're stronger than ever.” More honest than ever.

And still, she’s puzzled. She wonders if it’s weird. “Was this her idea?”

“No. It was mine. But she's… okay with it.”

“That’s…”

The door to the apartment opens and Maggie enters with a bottle of wine. She gestures to the label with a grand sweep before stopping to look at them. “You two look like the cats that ate the canary.” She smiles, a flash of her dimples, before averting her eyes and turning her attention to the kitchen drawers to look for a corkscrew. Kara looks at the bird on her shirt and bites her lip.
“Where’s Alex?” Lena asks. “Forget something else at the office?”

Kara panics. Maggie smiles wryly, “Her mother called. She’s been pacing a path outside the building for the past twenty minutes. Turns out I can make it to the liquor store on my own like a good girl.”

Kara goes to her, settles a hand on her shoulder, looks at the bottle. It’s the same one Lena and Maggie finished after she and Alex returned from the DEO. A leftover from one of Lena’s previous visits. She pales to think what Maggie must have paid for it. “Thank you for going.” Their glasses are still on the table, she notes Lena’s with the red lipstick and Maggie’s. She pulls one other from the cabinet and then another, picks up the wine bottle, fingers to the cork before Maggie lightly taps her arm with the corkscrew. She looks at her gratefully and Maggie smiles back. A moment passes, her heart fluttering wildly and she wonders if she’s made a mistake, if she should have kept her mouth shut, if somehow, she’s implied to Lena, that Maggie isn’t good enough, Maggie isn’t enough.

Lena’s eyes skim between the two of them, observing, but not too close. Kara glances to the beer bottle sitting on the kitchen island, the touch of bright red lipstick on the lip, the same color marking Lena’s glass.

X

“I told Lena we’re seeing other people,” Kara tells her.

Oh. That was fast. They’re on the couch, Kara resting her head on her shoulder. Maggie wants to point out that they’re not technically seeing other people but doesn’t know if that’s actually the case. “What did she say?”

“Not much of anything. She was worried, I think.” She pulls her glasses off and massages her eyes. “Maybe I misread everything.” Maggie crosses one ankle over the other on the coffee table. “What about you and Alex?”

Maggie doesn’t like the conversation. It sounds too much like a strategy meeting, a plan to craft action. “What about us?”

“Did you talk tonight?”

“Yeah. She’s still pissed about what I did.” Kara sighs. Maggie looks at her. “I don’t blame her.”

“This doesn't make sense. You know, I told Lena and you told Alex.”

“I didn't tell Alex.” Kara lifts her head to look at her. “Look… I meant it when I said I’m not looking to pick up another relationship.”

“But you—”

“I know. But I don’t need everything at once. And that doesn’t change anything between you and Lena. Or us. I need to take things at my own pace.” She smiles. “How’s my face look?”

“Beautiful. It’s always beautiful.”

“For Frankenstein’s monster?” Kara digs a finger into her side and Maggie winces. “How was your day?”

“I’m still unemployed so that’s not great.” She lifts her eyes to look at her. “Mon-El is the prince of
Daxam.”


“His family is bad. His parents are bad people. They’re slavers.” Of course they are. “Do you think you can't escape your childhood? Does it shape you?”

“I think you if you run far enough you can escape it.”

“I don’t want to run. I'd rather face things head on. You made me like this, you know. Brave. Not in a hero way. In a person way. It’s not as scary to force myself to do uncomfortable things. I just know this is all going to work out. Things always have a way of working out.”

Maggie nods, thinking of the mother of the dead boy. He had just returned to school. He had just reconnected with his girlfriend. He had left ‘that life’ behind. Everything was going so well.

Maggie thinks of how the mother’s fingers buried into her jacket. The way she fell to her knees as if the life had gone out of her. The will to live. Her tears were warm against her legs. She could feel them through her jeans, as she clung to her, a stranger, the messenger, the bearer of bad news. The one she will always associate with that moment.

She rests her forehead on her hand, looking at nothing in particular.

Kara’s still. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Long day.”

“At least you got a break from the alien menace tonight. Don’t I get a thank-you kiss?”

Maggie kisses her.
Maggie notices the gift box on the desk when she turns the light on. The paper is thick white, glistening like a pearl. A crimson bow and ribbon adorn it.

She frowns, setting her coffee on the edge of the desk. The box is light. She turns it over, sets it down and goes to the door. "Morris, who dropped this off?"

"I just signed the gadget for the messenger." She lowers her glasses. "I assumed it was one of your girlfriends."

"Very funny, but I just have the one." She mutters a ‘thanks’ and returns to the office. Maybe Kara sent it. Maybe Kara sent it because…

She can't think of a reason. She pulls a pair of latex gloves from her desk drawer and slips them on. The red is startling against the white. Pretty. Under other circumstances she might call the bomb detonation squad in. It wouldn’t be the first time some joker sent a gag gift meant to kill. She pulls on the ribbon and it comes open like a dress.

There's red tissue paper. She draws it back and sees a plain white tee-shirt. She frowns, spots the red envelope sitting in the middle and pulls it open, removing a note on thick white cardstock.

*I'm sorry your shirt was ruined. I've fired my personal chef in order to afford a replacement. Let's get together sometime to discuss the collaborative. I think we could do great things together.*

  * Lena

Maggie touches the shirt. It’s soft. Softer and nicer than the shirt she ruined. The material is strong, springing back into place when tugged. She touches her hand to it before returning everything to the way it was and closing the box. She pulls the cell from her pocket, scrolls to ‘Luthor’. *Sorry you had to let the personal chef go. I know where you can get some frozen dinners. Perfect for a woman on the run.*

She sits at her desk, pulls out a stack of files. Her phone goes off. Luthor. *Was that your attempt at a jailbird joke?*
Someone’s sensitive.

The icy CEO of L-Corp? Perish the thought. Maggie smirks faintly. Another one comes through. Have you considered my proposition? I think the collaborative could be good for National City and its more vulnerable populations. Your insight would be invaluable. I’ll be the money, you be the brains. What do you say?

Maggie sets the phone facedown on the desk. Kara told Lena about the open relationship. Is Lena preparing her move? Is Kara? She thinks of them touching one another, kissing, forces herself to look, forcing herself to go numb to prepare herself for the reality of having to see it.

Will Kara be with Lena in a different way she is with her? You need to focus. She puts them out of her mind. She works for a few hours, looking through case notes and photographs, wondering if there are angles she hasn’t uncovered yet. Her phone rings and she ignores it. It rings until it nearly falls off the table. She picks it up without looking at the caller ID. “Sawyer.”

“Hey! It's your unemployed girlfriend.”

Maggie smiles. “Hi, Kara.”

“Hey. Supergirl needs a night off. I was thinking you should come over tonight. I picked up some human beer, and musicals.” Musicals? Ugh. “And I think we can spend the entire night eating and making out. More if you’re open to it. What do you say?”

Open to it. She bites back the comment. “Um. I think that sounds like a great idea,” she says. “Just let me get showered and changed and I’ll head over after work?”

“I hope you don’t get stuck tonight. Maybe Supergirl shouldn't take the night off.”

“Take the night off. I’ll let you know when I’m stopping by.”

“Bye.”

She ends the call and looks at her screen, seeing Lena’s message displayed. Maggie's thumb hovers over the text before dismissing it.

X

It’s 8:47pm and Maggie still hasn’t texted to tell her she’s on her way.

It must be some awful police thing. Kara turns the news on in the background but there’s nothing worth concerning herself with. Maggie must be dealing with some ordinary thing. Kara paces the kitchen before having a fourth dumpling. She sets the container in the microwave, looks at her phone.

Lena texted her at 3:03pm about seeing a show tonight. A surprise from some company hoping to do business with her. She considered asking for details but didn’t, afraid she’d be tempted to cancel with Maggie. Her days remain dull. *Can we go out some other time?* She wrote Lena.

*Count on it.*

Kara waited for something more but didn’t receive it. She’s certain Lena’s buried in work. She wonders whether Lena asked her out as a friend or as a date. Has Lena thought about what she said? That she and Maggie are seeing other people? Did she consider what it might mean for them? She goes to sit by the window, chewing nervously on her thumb, wondering if she should have another conversation about it. Maybe get Maggie to have the conversation. With everyone. Maggie’s better with words than she is.

Her text notification goes off. Maggie. *Shit. My phone is down to one percent battery. I’ll be there soon.* Kara takes a breath, relieved. Calls Alex. She picks up on the second ring. “*Hey, can’t really talk right now. What’s up?*”

“Waiting for Maggie to come over.”

“That’s just great.”
Kara stands nervously, a hand at her back. “Why can’t you talk? Do I need to put on my other suit?”

“No. Lena invited me to some opera show. Said you couldn’t make it but she’d hate for the tickets to go to waste.” Kara bites her tongue. She hears the chatter of others in the background and shifts her weight from one leg to the other. “I figured what the hell. I mean, she’s always fun, right?”

“What are you wearing?”

“What?”

“I mean. To the opera thing.”


“Ah. Yes.” She touches her glasses. “I’m not sure that really took off. She seemed confused.” She scrambles. “Um. Could you not bring it up to her?” What if Lena mentions that they’re seeing other people? What if Alex talks to Maggie about it and Maggie panics? She wonders if that would be better.

“I don’t get it. How did you explain it? We all know she’s crazy about you.”

*Yes. I know.* “What are you guys doing later?” Are they going to Lena’s place. Alex’s? She imagines them at Alex’s place. She imagines watching them. Forces herself to release the thoughts. “Any plans?”

“Not sure yet. Is that something I have to tell you about?”

Kara flushes. Hears a knock at the door. She goes to it. Maggie comes in. Kara kisses her cheek. “Maggie just got here.” She lowers the phone, *Alex* she mouths. She expects Maggie to send off a greeting but she only arches her eyebrows and works on taking her boots off.

“Oh. Tell her ‘hi’.”
“Alex says ‘hi’.”

“Hi, Alex,” she doesn’t stop moving, going to the wall to plug in her phone instead.

Kara watches her. Wants to get off the phone. “I have to go. Don’t forget to send a picture.”

“Will do.”

Kara doesn’t know if she means she won’t or will forget but she’s off the phone before Kara can ask. She throws the phone on the couch and resumes her seat at the window bench again. “You’re late.”

“Yeah, sorry. We got a call about a kidnapping. Several hours later and most of our units out on the lookout, we discover it was just a bored teen looking to impress her buddies.” She takes a seat opposite of her on the bench and Kara moves her legs to make room. “Shit. I wasn’t supposed to bring food, was I?” Kara shakes her head, hopping to her feet, going to the microwave and fridge. “I completely blanked and I haven’t eaten since this morning,” her stomach growls in support.

“I got us Chinese,” she throws it into the microwave, along with the dumplings she desperately wants to eat. “Alex is at the opera with Lena. How crazy is that?”

She looks back to see Maggie’s face but she doesn’t seem all that surprised. “Not with you?”

“She did invite me earlier but I told her I had plans.”

“With me?”

Kara tries to remember. “I think so?” She taps on the kitchen island. “Does it bother you that she’s out with Alex?”

“No. Does it bother you?” Maggie stands, goes closer. The microwave beeps but Kara ignores it, looks at Maggie. The cut on her head is beginning to smooth over, just like Alex said. But it’s
going to leave a scar.

“No. They’re dating. I’m happy for them.” She pulls the dish from the microwave, sets it in front of Maggie, gets a beer from the fridge. She uncaps it and hands it to her. “I bet Lena takes her to all these awesome places. And Alex. Well, you know Alex.”

“Yeah. I know Alex.” She takes a fork, folds her arms on the counter. “Hey. What do you say we spend the rest of the night not talking about them?” Kara looks at her. Maggie stares back, her eyes unreadable despite her smile. “I know I don’t get all your nights but can I get this one?”


X

The rain has stopped but the ground still glistens, reflecting the reds and blues of police lights. A squadron of NCPD officers are lined up like toy soldiers, facing city hall. Maggie leans into her cruiser, arms crossed, wondering what else in the city is being neglected for the sake of keeping Lena Luthor safe.

She thinks of Alex and wonders if Jeremiah will ever appear again. What if he’s working with Lillian and waiting to strike? What would it do to Kara and Alex? Lillian just left her there to die, Kara told her after Metallo kidnapped Lena. Can you imagine what she must have felt like? Not exactly. But knows what it is to not be wanted.

The event begins to wrap up, the attendees starting to filter out. The uniforms gradually losing the stiffness in their spines, smiling easier, eager to get home after their twelve hour shifts. One by one the cruisers begin to disperse. The lights to City Hall dim and darken until only the spotlights shining on the building are left. She remains, her cruiser remains, and soon she sees a shadow in the distance, hears footsteps. Lena Luthor takes the steps down. Maggie taps her thumb against the badge clipped to her belt.

Lena, pale in the moonlight, looks over. Reds and blues wash over her face, making her eyes electric. She smiles and walks over. Maggie remains where she stands, leaning against the car, cocking her head to look up at her.
“I understand the entire NCPD force was sent here,” Lena tells her quizzically. “I appreciate the sentiment but it was entirely unnecessary. You’d think there was some vigilante out for a prized jewel.”

“What if you’re the prized jewel?” Lena rolls her eyes. Maggie smirks. “Just trying to get the jump on any Cadmus attacks, Luthor.”

“Did you?”

Maggie straightens her back. “The boys inside said they were well fed.”

“It’s the least they deserve, putting their life on the line for National City. Not one of them took the champagne they were offered. They were remarkably well behaved.”

“You think the NCPD has some vendetta against you?”

“They wouldn’t be the first.” The lights spin hazily, over wet pavement, over her face. “But I hope I don’t sound ungrateful for what you’ve done.” Maggie looks back at her, the dark red of her lipstick, wonders if Kara’s gotten any further with her, tries to dampen any resentment she feels. “I didn’t know you’d be here tonight. We can’t seem to stop running into one another.”

“Seems that way.” She meets her eyes, nearly asks about Kara and then doesn’t. “I hope tonight went well for you.”

“It did. And thanks to the NCPD, I didn’t have to keep looking over my shoulder for my mother.”

“Glad we could be of service,” she uncrosses her arms, pushes off the car.

Lena tilts her head. “Is that my shirt?”

“I thought it was my shirt.” She’s embarrassed. She’s glad for the lights, despite how they make her head spin. “Um, yeah.” She touches her fingers to the fabric, down her sides and smiles up at her. “Have to admit, it’s the nicest one I’ve ever owned.”
“I had to take a stab at the size. It’s a good fit.” Maggie clears her throat gently, crossing her arms again. “I am devastated over the chef, though.”

“How will you ever eat now?”

“I was hoping you would indulge me. You never responded to my text.” Maggie’s back stiffens. “But I can imagine how busy you are. I won’t take it personally. But I might if you don’t join me tonight so we can discuss that collaborative.” Maggie settles her hands on her hips. “Look. I know Kara wants for us to get along. I’m her friend. You’re her girlfriend. We might as well get used to one another. But this is about the greater good. This goes beyond Kara and our past. You’re truly dedicated to serving National City. I just want to give back, too. In a way that’s more meaningful than having hospital wings named after me. I promise I won’t keep you out too late.”

Maggie fights the tension in her jaw. “Yeah. Okay.”

X

The lights to the conference room rise like the morning sun. Maggie tries to find the light source but can’t. It isn’t the awful of overhead office lights. They’re warm and natural. The city sprawls below past the glass wall windows. Maggie watches the dots of traffic, the small squares of lights in apartment buildings. Lena steps into the room beside her, spreading a number of trays on the table. “I had Jonathan pick up a few dishes at Kostas. Their Greek cuisine is superb. I thought we could use a meal after our evening.”


She laughs. “My driver.”

“So, he’s like a henchman on the payroll?” She smiles, thinking of a hunched over Igor.

“No, he’s my driver, and on occasion I’ll tip him exceptionally well to do me a favor like this,” she glances at her curiously. Maggie wonders if she’s insulted her with the joke. “Do you want to eat or not?”
The words are playful rather than angry and Maggie relaxes, looking around the conference room. “This space is huge.”

“L-Corp hosts international conferences. The preparation is almost enough to break me out into hives. We invite the sharpest people from every background. We set up translators and multiple video conferences, webinars. I have no interest in being surrounded by ‘yes’ men.”

“What about ‘yes’ women?”

A roll of her eyes. “There’s nothing like an echo chamber to stall growth and creativity. Some of L-Corp’s best ideas have started in this very room. And so here we are.” Maggie looks at her and Lena hands her a plate. A real plate. Not a paper one. She manages not to snort. “Help yourself to anything. I’ll round up the materials I’ve been working on.”

“You’ve started? What happened to the group project thing?”

“Everything requires a foundation. I’ve put together a few drafts of what I was thinking. We’ll pick something out together, work on it and go from there. Does that sound fair?”

“Yeah,” she says defeated.

“Great.” She smiles, unexpectedly bright, a hint of surprise. “I won’t be long.”

Maggie watches her go, looks at the spread of Greek food. She doesn’t know where to start, cuts a gyro in half, slides some kind of cannelloni onto her plate. There are other things she doesn’t recognize, all that make her salivate. She’s eyeing the baklava when Lena returns with several folders. She sets them on the table, placing a different mission statement on top of each one.

“You weren’t kidding when you said you’d been thinking about this,” Maggie says, leaning over the table, skimming the words.

“Don’t tell me I’ve scared you off already.”

Maggie chuckles. “Not yet.”
“All right. Why don’t I load up my plate and we can discuss where we want to take this?”

“Yeah.” She sits tentatively and Lena sits opposite of her once she’s gathered what she wants to eat. Maggie has a bite of the food and closes her eyes, the flavors bursting in her mouth. “This is fucking amazing.” A beat. Sorry.

Her eyes dance. “And you were thinking of shooting me down.” She leans forward on the table, pushing a file to her. “So this was my first thought. The NCPD must keep track of all these incidents, right? There’s some database. We’ll need those numbers…”

Maggie eats and listens, interjecting when an assumption is off base, grudgingly agreeing when Lena’s hit some point she’d never considered. She takes one of the folders, steals one of Lena’s pens and takes notes. Lena does similarly on her laptop. They work until Maggie feels her head grow heavy, her eyes heavier still. She slams a hand on the table to keep from falling over.

“I’m sorry. I promised I wouldn’t keep you out too late.” Lena looks at her cell phone. “It’s nearly two in the morning.”

“It’s not you.” She rubs her eyes, gets to her feet. “But I should get going,” she gathers all her papers—stops, begins to gather all the food, not wanting to leave a mess.

“Should I pack that up for you?”

Maggie shakes her head. “Keep it. It’ll tide you over until you can get that personal chef,” she yawns lightly, sees Lena touch her eyes, the unexpected smudge of shadow along her face, making her seem tired, realer, somehow. “This wasn’t bad.” Try again. “The food was great. And we have a good start.”

“Tell me I won’t have to kidnap you again.”

“No promises.” She gathers her papers again, making sure to get her notes in order. She’s at the door when she stops to look at her. “I won’t ignore you next time.”

Another smile. She gets to her feet. “I told you this room was powerful. See? Progress.”
Kara and Alex walk the park arm in arm. It’s sunny though cooler than Alex was expecting. Kara is always warm, despite how her eyes are distant. She’s been uncharacteristically quiet.

“Something on your mind?” Alex asks. Kara smiles at the ground, her usual far away smile before looking at her, shaking her head. “You're full of it. But I hope you'll talk to me when you're ready.”

“Yes. Of course. You never sent me a picture. From the other night.”

“Oh. Sorry. I forgot.” She and Lena went out to dinner after the opera, had some wine. Lena looked like she had a question on the tip of her tongue but it went unasked. “Hey. Can we talk about something?”

“We can talk about anything,” she’s affronted.

“I know you're figuring Lena out.”

“Did she talk about me?”

“No. She didn't.” Kara looks thoughtful again. “What exactly did you say to her?” Kara looks at her. Why, her expression asks. “Have you guys gone out?” Another shake of her head. “Do you have plans to go out?”

“On a friend date, maybe?” she touches her glasses. “We don’t have plans. We've always… just found a way to each other.”

“So what I’m hearing is, you didn’t tell her you like her.”

“She knows I like her.”
“I don’t think she does. Not like that.” Kara sighs. “I don’t get it. What’s stopping you?” They walk a few steps further in silence. “Is it me?” Kara’s face shifts to her own, her brow crinkling before giving a dismissive nod. Alex doesn’t know whether to be relieved. “How does Maggie feel about you talking to Lena about it?”

“Why are you asking?” She seems to consider. “Maggie says you’re still mad at her. I don’t get it. Why? Don’t be angry for me. It’s… pointless.” Alex studies her face, the red to her cheeks. “All of us could be getting along if…” she stumbles. “I just think… we need to stop getting so hung up on histories and… focus on moving forward.”

“What are you talking about?” Kara’s quiet. “Fine. Don’t talk about Maggie. Can we talk about Lena?” Kara looks at her again. “Kara. Look.” They stop. Kara takes in a lungful of air and Alex listens to the sad calls of birds in the distance, looks to the clouds rolling in. “Are you sure Maggie’s cool with you dating Lena?”

“She said. I trust her.”

Alex hardens her jaw. “You trust her after what she’s done?” Kara only stares back at her and Alex takes a shaking breath, lowers her face. “So… you’re going to date two people at once?” After never having dated anyone? “How are you going to have time for that? Do you even want to be with Maggie?”

“Yes. Of course,” there’s a flash of anger in her eyes, she looks away, as if she can’t believe her. “I love Maggie, Alex. I’m sorry if…” A beat. “I… just think… you should give things time. And… process things. How you feel. I think …everything will turn out better than you ever imagined if you… trust things to play out.”

“What the hell are you going on about?” Kara’s introspective again. “So you get to date Maggie and you get to date Lena, is that what you’re telling me?” Kara frowns. “If you date Lena, where does that leave me?”

“You said you didn’t even like her.”

“I do like her! We’re friends! We sleep together but we’re friends and Jesus, Kara.” A sigh. “It’s… it’s nice having company sometimes, okay? You must understand that.” Kara meets her eyes and then shifts her gaze. “Once you… proclaim your feelings for her… I mean is that it? You get Maggie and Lena and I can what, go to the animal shelter and pick up some cats? Settle into spinsterhood?”
“I thought you were more of a dog person.”

“Can you please focus on the point I’m trying to make? Am I going to have to give up… whatever thing I have with Lena if you two get involved? Is that what you’re asking?”

“That’s up to Lena.” Kara’s puzzled, stares at her. “I can’t decide that for her.”

Alex exhales slowly. What does that mean? Why wouldn’t Lena stick with Kara? She’s been in love with since the beginning. Will Maggie stick it out until Kara gets tired of her? Until she figures out what she really wants? She has no more answers than when the conversation began. Kara takes her arm gently, hooking it through hers, resting her head on her shoulder. Alex feels that hard thump of her heart. Who is she to question what normal is?

X

They hug at the entrance to Noonan’s. Kara breathes in her perfume. Feels her shape. Thinks of the women she’s held in her arms. Alex is what she’s always known. In a way, it’s impossible to compare her to the others. Cat Grant, is frail. Like birds bones. Maggie, wiry and small, toned. Lena is somewhat taller. Fuller. Kara’s fingers start to press and she draws back to look at her.

“It’s so good to see you,” she says. “I thought you couldn’t get away.”

Lena smiles. “I did a little juggling and I was able to make it work. I’ll always find time for you.”

Kara gives a tight nod, grateful. She’s always a little warm around her, as if having stepped out into the sun. They go to their table, sitting opposite of each other. Kara orders her usual, not wanting to be distracted, wanting, as soon as she is able to, to focus on her. She wonders if her recent struggle with words is an affliction caused by her unemployment, the guise that is Kara Danvers, or her realization of her feelings for Lena. She keeps her fingers lightly tangled on the table. “How’s work?”

“Better than usual, I must say. I’ve got a few projects in the pipeline and I am heartened by our progress.” She waves it away. “But that’s all business. I’d rather talk about you. We haven’t seen much of each other.”
“No. Definitely not as much as I would like,” she says, sees a gentle lift to Lena's eyebrow. “Um.” She touches her glasses, tries to make herself stop but can't get her nerves under control. “The last time we were together I said… something it came out… more awkwardly than I wanted it to.” Lena waits. She can hear Alex telling her she’s being ridiculous. *Just say the words, Kara.* “I want you to know that things aren't strained between Maggie and me. We're just in this place right now… where this… made more sense for us,” her face is hot. “And maybe it seems strange and maybe it is. I've never done anything like this before and…” she takes a breath. “I just wanted you to know.”

Lena looks back at her. “Thank you for your confidence, Kara. It means the world to me. And I'm sorry if I seemed—surprised last time. Sometimes my head is up in the clouds and … and I miss things I shouldn't. The things that are right in front of me.” She smiles, digging into her salad. “Then you're happy? You and Detective Sawyer?”

Kara nods, has a drink of water.

“Can you tell me a little about how it works? I can't say I’ve had any experience with polyamorous relationships.” There’s something more. She swallows it. “Or is it just open? You see who you like and… that’s that? As long as you and your partner have established the rules?”

The words are often thrown around interchangeably, but aren't exactly the same. The thought of explaining it is daunting. In any case it feels as if she has talked and talked. *I like you. Isn't that obvious? The rest doesn't matter.* “Yes. That's that.” It seems the truest and least convoluted way of saying things. She feels Lena's gaze but can't look at her. Has she thought this through past the initial excitement? There’s so much to consider. She's barely had one relationship. In some ways, she’s screwed things up with Maggie spectacularly. Maybe there’s no use in rushing. They’ve got time. She likes Lena's restful energy. Is it worth messing with because she's curious about what it’d be like to kiss her? Touch her? It all seems so trivial. So small. So human. Maybe it’s enough to love her from a distance. Maybe some things aren’t worth sacrificing. She can get sex from Maggie. It’s fun. Maggie can always make her feel good. As if she’s flying, even when she’s perfectly still.

“Kara?” Kara looks back at her. Lena smiles quizzically but she’s missed something. Perhaps something crucial. “You all right?”

Kara nods. This is all wrong. She’s been rushing things that shouldn’t be rushed. She pulls her fingers through her hair and thinks of Maggie. “I was just thinking of how lucky I am to have you as a friend.”

Lena smiles through the surprise, grows quiet.
Luthor 8:48:47pm: *Will you be talking to the captain soon?*

Maggie walks into the apartment building, letting the door shut behind her. She takes one step on the stairwell and then another. *I’ll need to get back into his good graces first.*

Luthor 8:50:11pm: *And back into them again once he hears my name mentioned?*

Maggie takes another step, smiles. *Probably.*

Luthor 8:50:55pm: *You don’t suppose he could be bought, do you?*

Luthor 8:51:05: *Only a Luthor would have to clarify that was a joke.*

Maggie makes it to the first landing. *Sure it was.*

Luthor 8:52:23pm: *Do you think this might work better if I were a silent partner?*

Maggie frowns. *No. You’ve put in the work. You deserve the credit.*

She gets to the top flight of stairs and stops. The phone buzzes in her hand but she slips it into her back pocket.

Kara’s at her apartment door. Maggie’s used to her late night visits. She isn’t used to having her wait. *And the one time she did you ruined it.* Maggie spins the keys in her hand, tucks them into her jacket pocket and moves closer. She leans into the other side of the doorway and looks at her. The luster of her golden hair, the blue of her eyes, the flush of her cheeks. “Hey,” Maggie says.

“Hi.” Her head’s bowed but then she lifts her eyes. “Can I come in?”
“Yeah.” She looks at her quizzically, gets the keys from her pocket and opens the apartment door. Kara wanders inside. Maggie follows after her, shutting the door. She shrugs out of her jacket, pulls the badge clip from her jeans, removes her shoulder holsters. “I didn’t know you were stopping by.” She never knows when she’ll stop by, but usually she’s home. Usually it’s later. Usually she knocks. But not always. “I didn’t forget we’d set something up, did I?”

“No. I wanted to see you.” Kara says. Maggie smiles, heads to the kitchen to look for a snack. Kara follows her. There’s old takeout she forgot to eat. She throws it out. “You’ve been so patient with me and I’ve been thoughtless and rude. Without meaning to. I’m sorry.”

Maggie closes the refrigerator door, goes to her. “What’s going on, Kara?”

“I’ve been talking to Alex and Lena. I didn’t tell Alex about… but she knows how I feel about Lena and you. And I told her that if… if anything ever happens with Lena and Lena wants to keep seeing her that’s fine. I realized that I’ve been pushing for a lot in a short period of time and it’s too much. I’ve been trying to rush everyone into being happy instead of letting things develop naturally, and I don’t like that. I don’t think it’s good for anyone. I really rushed into things with you… Maybe not everything needs to go fast. I need to accept that some things can only happen when they’re given room to breathe. So I’m going to allow that room for things to breathe.”

“I’m not sure what you’re getting at.”

Kara takes a breath, takes her hands. “It means that I’m sorry for being so pushy about Alex and not shutting up about Lena.” She lets go of her hands. “Everyone has questions. I’m getting tired of talking about it.”

“Talking about what?”


“If this is what you want, you’re going to have to talk about it. Everyone is. That’s the only way it works.”

Kara touches her forehead, as if the conversation has made her head hurt. “I know that,” she says steadily. “But it’s such a simple thing. Everyone makes it into this big deal. I’m with you. So let’s be together. Whatever happens with everyone else, it happens and we’ll know. If it’s important and we want to share it, we share it but otherwise… When we’re together it should be about us.” She
stops, takes a breath. “I don’t know if I’m saying any of this right.”

“I understand well enough.” Even if she doesn’t know what it means for Kara and Lena. She’s accepted their inevitability. It’s not a matter of ‘if’. It’s a matter of when. She wonders if they’ll ever officially tell her. If by agreeing to this, she’s given blanket consent. Lena doesn’t talk about Kara when they discuss the collaborative. She comes with charts and graphs, data, paperwork, proof. There’s security in that. It’s easier than trying to navigate hazy feelings. She’s smart. She’s so smart. And determined. She wonders what Lena texted.

“So it’s okay?”


Kara smiles, relieved. “Great.” She nods, steps closer, runs her hands down her bare arms. Maggie is still, tries to find her eyes but they’re following the path her hands make, narrowed in concentration. Maggie things of a sculptor. Maybe to someone like her she’s as solid as clay. But she’s never been as malleable as people hope. Maybe they’d stick around longer if she were. Kara exhales softly. Her attention shifts to her shirt, pulls it off. Maggie holds her breath, not moving as Kara continues her examination. The hunger she felt stymies. The air is cold but Kara’s fingers are warm. They drift to her ribs, to her hips, to the bruises dotting her. “Oh,” she breathes, lips parting as if pushing through the hurt.

“It’s fine. I didn’t even notice.” She never does. Not until later, out of the shower, seeing her reflection in the mirror. Kara swallows, looks back at her, breathes slowly. Maggie takes her face in her hands. “Please believe me? You’re not hurting me. You would never hurt me.” Not on purpose. Not with her hands. Kara nods hesitantly. “Now. What’s a girl gotta do to get a kiss around here?”

Kara smiles, sweeps her off her feet.

X

The storm isn’t winding down. Maggie listens to the rumble of thunder, how it shakes the car. She should start checking the weather before she leaves home but in National City it tends to be the last of her concerns. She looks at her text thread.

Just Kara 9:33:11pm Okay.
Luthor 10:21:44pm Nice try, Detective, but you don’t get to call me a workaholic because my office light is on while you’re headed to a crime scene.

Maggie didn’t text back hours later, worried a text notification might wake her. Another one comes through.

Luthor 6:02am How about we work on that proposal tonight? I’ve pinned down a few folks who might be good candidates to sit on the board. We can go over them and get your thoughts?

She’s gotten used to Lena’s texts at erratic hours. Her schedule seems as hectic, if not more so, than her own. What do I have to do with your money people?

She watches her text bubble go for several minutes, listening to the rumble of thunder, the slam of rain on the windshield.

Luthor 6:07:07am I thought you would like knowing the members that could help shape this organization moving forward. And I’d like to avoid that kind of comment.

Maggie hesitates. Sorry. Then. Yes, let’s look them over.

Luthor 6:10:59am Let’s try for 8? Bring some of that thai food from ‘the little hole in the wall’ you’re always going on about. But no peanuts; I’m allergic.

No peanuts in thai food? She sighs inwardly. She’ll have to tell them. It’s about time she picked up the meal. In her defense, she never expects for Lena to have one ready for them. If they keep this up she’ll get used to having regular meals. Not going to ask Igor to pick it up?

Luthor 6:12:12am: His name is Jonathan.

Maggie smirks. I’ll see you tonight.

She looks out, her forehead slick with sweat from her run, glad she missed the storm. There’s a figure in the parking lot. She turns the headlights on, the wipers. Alex. Her mouth goes dry. A ball knots in her stomach. She shouldn’t do anything. She should let her go. She flashes her lights at
her, rolls down her window. “Hey, Danvers! Some people don’t know enough to get out of the
rain.” Alex looks over. She’s soaked through. “Get in!”

Alex trots over. Opening the door lets in a flood of water despite how quickly she closes it. She
sits, shivering, dripping water. Maggie makes a face, digs a hoodie out from the back. “Jesus.
Here… um. Dry off.” Alex takes it, shaking and Maggie turns the heat on full blast. “Rainstorm
catched you, huh?"

“Yeah, no shit.” She wipes her face off and laughs. “Kind of a full circle thing here.” Maggie looks
at her, nervous again. “I mean… Last time you got caught in the rainstorm.”

Maggie smiles. “Yeah. That was a while back.” She almost reaches out to wipe the water from her
face. She shouldn’t have called out to her. Alex pulls a hand through her hair, rubs them for
warmth. Maggie licks her lips, forces her hands to stay on her lap. The car warms. The windows
fog. “How are you?”

“I’d be better if I hadn’t been caught in this,” she wipes her face again on the hoodie, smiles wanly.
“Just my luck, though.” She strips her own hoodie off, throws it on the floor. It falls with a splat.
Maggie listens to the tapping of the rain on the roof, tries not to look at her. “How about you?”
Alex asks. Her voice is low and soft. Maggie bites her tongue, touches her fingers to the steering
wheel. “You have a lot going on.”

Maggie looks at her. Did Kara say something? She doesn’t think she would. “Do I?” They look at
one another for seconds. Maggie realizes the windshield wipers are still on. The headlights. She
shuts them off. “Are you warming up?” Alex breaks her gaze, gives a stiff little nod. She wants to
kiss her. She thinks of Kara, telling her how she hates the thought of them together. Asking what
she would do if there came a moment when she just wanted to kiss her. She could. But Alex is too
close to her heart. She can’t risk it. “How are you?”

Alex chuckles softly. “You already asked.”

Did she? Shit. She tries to think of something else to say, something to distract her from pulling her
close. What’s the matter with you? What if Kara hadn’t told you to go to her? Would you still be
thinking like this? You screwup. “Sorry.”

Alex shakes her head, smiles in that way she used to. I just had an alien throw me down two stories
and all I could think was ‘I just hope I get to meet Maggie for dinner tonight’. Maggie laughed to
herself at the time, unsure what to do with the trust needed to make such a statement. A trust that
Alex would later consider to be unfounded. “You know, I’ve missed kicking your ass at pool.
Maybe we should go sometime?” she’s nervous, her eyes flicking away. “I know you’re with Kara and you guys are…” she hesitates, lips moving soundlessly. “But we can be friends, right? As long as you’re with Kara, you’re going to be around. And I’d rather we get along.” She struggles. “I know I’ve said things… I shouldn’t have said. Sometimes I say these things and then I go over them in my head, over and over again and…” she looks at her. “I think being proud has cost me so much. I’d rather have you in my life than not. So I apologize. Can we please be friends again?”

Maggie looks away from her, blinks her eyes. The car is too warm. She turns the air off and listens to the rhythmic swish of the wipers. Scratches her forehead. Alex takes her wrist, leans forward and Maggie can’t move. She waits for a kiss. She hopes and fears for a kiss. Alex lifts her fingers to her temple instead. “It scarred,” she says, shaken.

X

Maggie's paying for the Thai food when her phone buzzes. She takes the bag of food she’s been given, pulls the cell from her back pocket, heads out the door, nearly slamming into an elderly couple. She expected Lena but it’s Alex.

She slows, reading the text.

Danvers 8:08:43pm I never got an answer on pool. Tonight? It's on me. I shouldn't take all your money.

She stops at her car, stares at it. Fuck. She gets in. Another text.

Luthor 8:10:10pm : Out saving National City again?

She stares between their two text messages, running a hand over her face anxiously. She thinks of Alex, playing pool at the alien bar, getting familiar again… fooling herself into thinking that they could ever get back to what they were. What would Darla say? Do? Would she be spiteful enough to tell Alex what happened? Can she bear to see Alex’s heartbroken face again? Maybe someone like Kara is capable of holding that much love. She doesn’t know that she is. She’s barely ever had enough for one. And even then she’s hurt them.

She texts. Sorry, I can't make it tonight. Give em hell, Danvers.
She looks to the stack of binders beside her. More numbers from NCPD, the officers she thinks might be willing to go along with any of this. If Kara still worked at CatCo she could write an article.

Alex texts back. *Okay. I’ll school you another night.*

Maggie sighs inwardly. If someone told her she’d be blowing off Alex Danvers and beer for late night work sessions with Lena Luthor she would have told them they were crazy.

She starts to text back. *Definitely.* Deletes it. What’s Kara doing? Would she be angry at her for blowing Alex off? She starts the car, heads to L-Corp. Finds some off street parking that isn’t too far away. She’s getting out of the car when she gets a text.

*Just Kara 8:27:55pm* *I just went all the way to Chicago for donuts and my go-to shop has closed! I can’t even. I’m making pies instead. I’ll drop one off when it’s done and we can hang out?*

Maggie grabs the binders, sets the bag of food on the roof of the car. *No can do. I’m meeting with Luthor for the collaborative thing. Sorry they didn’t have your donuts. : (*

*Just Kara 8:34:13pm* *Again? Should I bring you both pies?*

Maggie fumbles with the binders, hooks her wrist through the bag of food, calls her. Kara picks up on the first ring. “Hey, you.”

“Hey! I didn’t know you two were still working on that.”

“To be honest, I wasn’t anticipating all the work that has to go into it. Luthor talks about it as if she were just setting up for a bake sale but a lot of the logistics are over my head.”

“I guess that’s why she’s the brains.” A beat. “You know what I mean. She’s a businesswoman.”

“Sure. Look—it’s irritating but it’s worth the work. This could help a lot of people. If we get, you know, the right people to go for it.” She walks into the L-Corp lobby, waves to Hector Hernandez, the security guy. He nods for her to go on ahead. She fumbles with the keycard to the elevator
before swiping it.

“You’re not going to be there all night, are you?”

“I don’t know. I hope not. I’d like to get sleep some time. Maybe you should see what Alex is up to?” The elevator doors close and she looks at the numbers, creeping higher. “You two haven’t done a sisters’ night in a while.” Maybe she should be with Alex. But this is more important. Less dangerous. Anyway, she told Lena she’d make it this morning and she’s already running late. She couldn’t have broken it off even if she wanted to. The elevator doors open, arriving at the conference floor.

“Should I drop by?”

Maggie smiles. “No? We love you and you’re beautiful. You’ll distract us.”

“That’s insane, you’re both gorgeous. How are you two not distracted?”

“Because we’re professionals. I have to go, talk later.” She ends the call and strolls into the conference room. Lena’s already there, several neat stacks of paperwork laid out where Maggie usually sets up her paperwork. There’s a pitcher of water, a tray with desserts. “Hi. Sorry I’m late.” She sets the binders down, they cascade down the table. She sighs inwardly, taking the containers out of the bag.

“Was it work?”

“I had to run home and break out the fine China. I know you’re allergic to paper.” Lena looks back at her and Maggie smiles, pulling out the paper plates. “Just kidding. I don’t have fine China.”

“Heathen.” She stretches out a hand for the paper plate.

Maggie hands it to her, a pair of chopsticks, sees the smile in Lena’s eyes and looks away. “I brought more numbers. Statewide. It’s not just a National City issue. It’s not even just a state issue. But one step at a time, right? And it’s not like I have sway over any of the other counties.” She waves it away. “So! I brought drunken noodles, pad thai, yellow curry and spring rolls. Peanut free. I checked. And triple asked. I’m pretty sure they hate me now.”
“You’ll find a way back into their good graces.” She hopes so. “How much do I owe you?” Maggie waves it away. “It all smells amazing.”

“I’ve had to extend my morning runs. I’m not used to eating as much as we have been for our collaborative planning.”

“What about when I’m not around?”

“I wasn’t kidding about the frozen dinners.” She doesn’t tell her she mostly subsists off coffee.

“And Kara?”

“We don’t really eat. We meet later on, you know?” Lena looks evenly at her, before turning her attention to the paper plate. “Oh, shit. Do you have a bowl somewhere for the curry?” She looks around the conference room. There isn’t one. She picks up one of the glasses. “Uh, we could use this?” Winces. Jesus, could you sound more low brow? Takes a breath. “I can go out and buy a bowl.”

“Or maybe smoke one and try to relax?”

“I don’t do that,” she says.

Lena smiles quizzically. “I have one. Don’t fret. The real kind,” she clarifies.

“Do you think you could find it before the food goes bad?”

“It’s not my fault you get lost,” she calls back, going to get one. Maggie watches her go. She pours them glasses of water and arranges the binders, skimming over the paperwork. Maggie turns her eyes up, the light of the room like the sun. Lena returns, two bowls in hand. “Bowls. Ask and you shall receive.” Maggie cocks a grin. “Has your food from the hole in the wall gone bad?”

“I think you might have made it back in the nick of time.” She takes the bowls, scooping rice into
them, following it with the yellow curry. She plunks a spoon into it and holds it out. Lena takes it and sits beside her. Maggie glances at her and has a seat. She looks at the stacks of papers and has a bite of the food. “Do you mind if I have a few bites before we start?”

“I could use a moment’s rest.” She eats, savoring the curry, smiles. “You know, it’s a bit sad but these collaborative meetings are the only human interaction I tend to get.”

“You hang out with aliens on your off time?” She thinks of Kara.

Lena laughs softly. “No. The usual meetings with the usual businessmen. It’s a bit like working with drones. Never any surprises.” She looks at her, back to the food, having another bite.

“So burning the midnight oil with the detective who took you into custody is your idea of a good time? You’re something else, Luthor. You should get out more.” Lena’s brow furrows softly, prodding at the food in the bowl. The silence continues, Maggie listening to the sounds of their spoons scraping the bowls. “And… I should work on getting my foot out of my mouth,” she adds when the silence becomes unbearable. She hazards a look at her. Lena looks back, returns her attention to the food. Maggie clears her throat. “Oh. When you were fetching bowls, I leafed through those people you thought up for the board of directors.”

“Recognize any of them?”

“Yeah.” A beat. She reaches to the clipped file, balancing the bowl on her lap. She finds the guy, skims over his credentials, shows the picture to her. “This guy.” She looks at his face, handsome and square jawed, temples greying. She tries to figure out how to say the words. “Are you two close?”

She looks at his picture. “No. He’s an acquaintance, at best. Lex Corp did business with him years ago but he appears reformed. I didn’t meet him until a few months back at a fundraiser for girls in science. He used to have a law practice in Metropolis but has since been spending his time heading a few non-profits in the area.” Lena looks her over. “Why?”

“He’s been picked up a few times. With some of the girls we’re trying to help.”

Lena pulls back. The slow growth of surprise on her face, the disgust. “Are you sure?” Her eyes flick, maybe to memory, searching for something that might have betrayed him, something that the revelation betrays. “I had no idea. I…”
Maggie puts a hand out, nearly touches Lena’s, catches herself. Places her hand on the armrest instead. “It’s not exactly public knowledge.” She sets the bowl of food on the table. “You know, most people with this kind of money tend to be pretty good at burying their scandals.”

She scoffs. “Most people.”

“Um.” She laces her fingers. “Look, Luthor. There are… lots of people out there who look great on paper. Real life… not so much. Some people fool us and that’s on them. You’ve had a lot of stories written on you. You’re the kind that… maybe doesn’t always look so good on paper. But in person.” She laughs a little. *I get what Kara sees in you. I get it.* Lena braces for what she’s going to say. “You’re good people.”

Lena breathes. Smiles. “Mh. I like you too, Detective.”

X

Alex lets herself into Kara's apartment. It was different when she lived here. She doesn’t remember it being this bright and airy. Her place is darker, greyer. Stone, not wood. Light spills in. Alex opens the balcony doors, letting in a cool breeze. She goes to the kitchen, pulls out the bottle of wine Maggie picked up last time for their awkward get-together. She pours herself a small glass.

What’s Maggie doing? She’s always wondering what Maggie’s doing.

*Probably Kara.*

Kara’s late. She doesn’t know what Kara’s doing but it doesn’t surprise her that she wants more. Gets more. Why shouldn’t she get it all? *Don’t think that way. Don’t make yourself crazy.* Not again. She has a healthy drink of wine. She would be satisfied to have Maggie. Kara wants them both. For all she knows, Lena’s okay with it. Lena hasn’t said a word to her. Maggie insists that it’s okay. Is she trying to convince herself? Why isn’t Maggie allowed to see other people? Would Kara care? Kara says she loves her. *Maybe you’re too jealous and hurt to see any of this clearly.*

She can’t remember the last time she saw things clearly. She doesn’t know what to do with a Kara who doesn’t need her. How could she possibly help Kara? She can barely help herself. *You spent decades thinking you were straight.* And then, she met a girl, she met two, but Kara met them first.
She takes the glass of wine and wanders the apartment. Stops at Kara’s stack of art supplies in the corner, unfinished canvasses. Art books. Plants. Well maintained. She looks for signs of Maggie but finds none. But Maggie’s like that. Neat. Self-sufficient. She never left anything at her place, either. Maybe she never needed a reason to come back.

Alex pulls her phone out. Scrolls through the camera roll. Smiles at the pictures of J’onn, serious faced. So many of Kara, her gaze always focused on something outside of the frame. The pictures where she looks at the camera are enough to fluster her. She finds the selfie she took with Maggie at the alien bar, pints in front of them. Her own grin is stupid and bright. Her arm is wrapped around Maggie’s shoulders. Maggie’s smile is smaller but real. She gave that up. Why? For pride? Because her feelings were hurt? What the fuck was she thinking?

She looks to her text messages.

Maggie 1:04am: A dog just threw up on my shoes. Thought you’d like to know.

What kind of dog? Did you get a picture?

Maggie 2:22am: Overwhelmed by your compassion, Danvers.

The dog’s sick, not you.

Maggie sent back a ‘grr’ emoji later in the morning. Alex considers responding, pockets the phone when the apartment door opens and Kara wanders in. She’s wearing a dress. Alex can’t remember the last time she saw her in a dress. Better yet, she’s got pizza. Alex moves over. “What have we here?”

“Only the finest pizza in New York.” Alex looks at her. “I know you don’t like me using my ‘powers’ for this kind of thing but it makes me happy and I did a ton of research and this is really the only kind of thing I can do for you, so just let me? Please?”

Alex gives her a look, pops the box open. The aroma of the pizza hits her, making her salivate. She smiles. “Okay.”
Kara claps. “Aww, did you start wine without me?”

“You can’t even get drunk on this.”

“It’s about sharing the experience with you,” Kara pulls a wine glass, pours herself less than Alex might. “I get drunk on your company. This pizza crust, by the way, is supposed to be the best pizza crust in all of New York. And if it’s not I’m going to go back and talk to the manager.”

“Don’t be that person,” she takes a slice and has a bite. Moans happily. “I love this. I’m going to send you to New York all the time.”

“Maybe I should be a delivery girl if CatCo won’t take me back.”

“You’re ready to move on from CatCo?” Kara pouts. “Maybe it’ll work out. In time.”

“Maybe,” but she doesn’t sound convinced. She takes a slice of pizza, decides against it and brings the whole box with her to the couch. Alex follows, bringing their wine. “I can’t imagine Snapper taking me back, though.”

“Were you involved with him, too?”

Kara pushes her. Alex nearly spills the wine, sets it down on the coffee table. “Um. How are you?” Kara turns her gaze, slowly honing on her. “Been seeing anyone?”

Alex chuckles darkly. “Yeah, right.” She hasn’t seen Lena since the opera and that was weeks ago. They text. It’s always easy to pick up again. Maggie’s been nearly impossible to catch a hold of. Maybe she doesn’t want to see you. “My dance card is full.”

“You should have so many stamps on that dance card that you’ve earned a free dance already. You’re smart and beautiful. And the most bad ass DEO agent ever. And you’re good with like every weapon known to man and alienkind.”

“I’ll put that on my tinder profile.”
“Do you have a tinder profile?”

She frowns. “No. And I couldn’t put any of that on there if I wanted to.” She plucks the glass of wine from the table, swallows another gulp of it, closes her eyes. It doesn’t make her as warm as it used to. “You know, maybe I was right when I thought… none of that was for me. Dating, you know? I have work. I have you.” She focuses on breathing. “You have…” Maggie and Lena.

Kara sets the pizza off to the side, faces her. Alex glances at her, sitting beside her with her hair loosed, glasses off. Kara crept into her bed when they were teens. She did that for years. She was terrified of loud noises. Back when she was still new. When it all felt… right and weird and Alex didn’t understand why. Of course Kara would have to be her sister. Of course she’d watch over her. Of course she’s weird, their family’s weird. Of course all of it.

“I have you,” Kara says. “You’re my favorite person in the universe. Literally, in the universe,” Kara settles her hand on the back of her neck. Alex looks at her. “You’re never alone, Alex.”

Alex meets her eyes for a heartbeat. Looks away to her wine glass. She’s always thirsty. “It’s different, Kara.”

“But why?”

She wants more wine. Kara stares at her, fingers gliding along the back of her neck. Alex feels her skin map a route, coming alive in response. There’s a lump in her throat.

“I’m not human. Sometimes it feels like you’re the only one who gets that. I just flew to New York for pizza.” She smiles but Alex can’t smile back. Kara’s fingers continue their movements, stroking along her ear. “Alex. Sometimes… it seems like you want something from me.” Alex pulls away. Stands. Kara looks up at her. “I’m not judging you.”

“I have to go.”

Kara sighs softly. “You don’t have to go.” Alex keeps her distance. “Alex. You’re the only person I can talk to. I don’t want Lena to know this part of me.” What part? “I don’t ever want her to know.”
“What about Maggie?”

Kara tangles her fingers, looks down at them. A frown. “It’s different with her, Alex. It’s different with Lena. It’s different with you. Can you sit? Please?” Alex takes one step forward, another. Sits tensely. Seconds pass. “I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.” She laces her hands in front of her. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No.” A beat. “I feel sick.”

“You’re not sick.”

Then why does she want to throw up? “Do you know…” she blinks her eyes, tries to clear them. Takes a breath. “Sometimes… I wonder if it would have all been different. If you hadn’t been who you are.”

“Kryptonian?”

“My sister. Maybe I would have realized sooner. I wouldn’t have wasted so much of my life… I can’t believe I’m saying this.” Kara takes her hand. Squeezes her fingers. “Something… always felt wrong to me. Good when it shouldn’t. Bad when it shouldn’t.” She touches a hand to her forehead. “Maybe if things had been normal… I wouldn’t have been… so fucking intense with Maggie. So eager.” A sigh. “Everything’s passing me by.”

“Alex, you’re still young. I hope you don’t think I’ve taken Lena and Maggie from you. I haven’t. They’re still there.”

“Give me a break.”

“I’m still here. And I promise, I am not leaving you. Never.”

“I want you to know that… I’ve only ever wanted to watch out for you.”

“I know.”
“And I’ve only ever wanted the best for you.”

“Yes. I know. I know you’ve given me everything. Given up everything.”

“Kara, that isn’t...” She exhales. “I haven’t … I haven’t wanted…” She can’t say it. She can’t say the words. Can’t look at her. Doesn’t know how her face can burn when she feels so cold. “I don’t want you to think that all came from some… perverted place. That I expected anything. I wanted to protect you. Because I love you.” Every part of her is trembling. She looks at her. Finally looks at her.

Kara looks back. “I know you love me. I hear you. And I accept you.”

X

It’s been hours of sitting in the conference room.

The captain and the sheriff have moved on, along with the board members Lena gathered. They sat through one insipid question after another, Lena nudging Maggie beneath the table to pay attention when one of the more monotonous bankers was speaking.

“The captain was drawing a map of this place,” Lena tells her. Maggie smiles, lifts an eyebrow. “No, don’t smile at me like that. I saw him! He drew the conference room and the two adjacent hallways on the back of the agenda. And the hall off to the side that you need a keycard to get through. I think he’s taking notes for his next raid.”

“He’s not planning a raid.”

“Not now. Not that you know of.”

Maggie plants an elbow on the table, looks over at her, unable to help her smile. “Believe it or not he was remarkably well-behaved. He spared you the f-bombs and the more colorful language he usually reserves for me.”

“More colorful than f-bombs?”
“You would be horrified.”

Lena rests her arms on the table, lacing her hands, tucking them beneath her chin before she looks over at her. The setting sun streams through the glass wall. The room and skies are painted in pinks and purples. It’s been the two of them for nearly half an hour and they’re still only inches apart. “And what makes you think I can’t handle horrifying?” Lena folds her arms on the table, bows her head. “You know, we did something incredible here today.”

“Did we?”

“You don’t agree? Nearly two months ago at Noonan’s you told me about your no good, terrible day and you inspired me to think of a way to provide for National City. And then we worked on it together. I got the snotty, tight fisted moneybags to get invested in the idea, and you got your stubborn, Luthor loathing colleagues to agree to a meeting. Worlds collided. You don’t think that’s remarkable?”

“When you put it that way…”

“The work isn’t finished. Not by a long shot. But we’re going to help people. We’ve got a committee committed to helping a marginalized, ignored population of National City.” Maggie smiles, rests her arms on the table, pulling back some when their elbows touch. Lena doesn’t react. “Thanks to you, I can help the people of National City, too.”

“You were helping National City before all of this. Look… I know what you did during the Medusa attacks. You saved more lives that night than you know. And those cops here today know it, too. They wouldn’t have come if not for that. And it’s a damned shame more people don’t know about it. Maybe it’s time you start patting yourself on the back, Luthor.”

“You find me heroic?”

Maggie looks away, smiles. “You’re not going to get cocky now, are you?”

“You mean you didn’t already find me arrogant?”
“Why? Because you buy wine bottles worth more than my car?” Lena shifts in the chair. “Actually, I checked the blue book value the other day. It’s not worth much.” She chances a look at her. “I don’t think you’re arrogant.”

“What do you find me?”

“Um. Brilliant?” That one’s obvious. She hesitates. “Funny. Thoughtful. Kind.” Lena bows her head in thought. Silence settles, stretches with the shadows filling the room. “Sorry, should I have said ‘arrogant’?”

“No. Sorry. I think I expected a joke.”

“I’ll think of one next time.” She fights her lips, shifting into a smile. Looks at her. Lena looks back. Maggie studies the shadows curving along her face. The startling blue of her eyes. She looks at Lena’s hands, fingers long and elegant, thinks of how often she uses them to communicate. Maggie’s fingers twitch. She curls them before they touch Lena’s.

She thinks of Kara. She thinks of Alex. Lena’s fingertips skim her knuckles and they go. She’ll think of that later. Lena focuses on the path she traces on her knuckles. Maggie watches with her, feels more than sees her fingers circle lightly at her wrist. She steadies her breathing. She should leave. Say something. Her mouth won’t come open. It’s stuck.

Lena looks up. They’re close. Their legs brush. Their knees. It’s quiet except for their breathing. The creak of leather. Lena leans closer. Maggie catches the scent of her perfume, her lipstick... it smells like berries. She sees the slope of her neck, the string of pearls she wears, dipping into her blouse. Close. Closer. Their cheeks graze, warm in the cool of the room. Maggie breathes out quietly. Lena withdraws. Far enough away for Maggie’s eyes to drift to her chin, her jaw, her lips, her eyes. Her throat is closing, the air leaving her.

Another brush along her face. Her breath is against her lips, tickling. Their eyes meet. Lena’s fingers slide along her hand. Their gaze holds. A standoff. Maggie grips the armrest with her left hand. Lena doesn’t move but she’s near again. Maggie inches forward, beckoned as if by a siren, the moment Lena drifts back.

There’s a calm. Stillness. Lena draws a breath. Maggie tests her jaw. It’s stone, made flesh again when Lena touches her lips to her own.
Maggie stills. A moment passes, a current. She closes her eyes. Their lips glance. Press together, part. She tastes her. She tastes like berries, unexpectedly sweet. Warmth pools in her, sinking to her stomach, spreading until she’s gone hot. She hears their shaking breath, lips coming together again. Maggie cradles a hand to Lena’s face. For an instant she kisses her deeper. Time loses shape and it spirals.

Until they separate. Look at one another, letting air fill their lungs. Lena’s hand remains on her wrist, stroking gently. Maggie blinks, awake again.
“I found it!” Kara stands, dropping the last button into Maggie’s open palm. She pockets them, grabbing her jacket from the floor and slipping it on, zipping it so it covers her buttonless shirt. “I’m sorry. That’s like the sixth shirt I’ve done that to. I just get… excited.” It’s been happening more frequently. Twice this week alone.

Maggie smiles. “It’s okay. I’ll sew it when I get back home. I’m going to head out, though. I’m a little hungry.”

“Off to eat a frozen dinner?”

“Think I’m in the mood for Greek. I’ll pick something up somewhere.” Her eyes are far off. Kara waits. Maggie’s been distracted but she doesn’t know why. “I’ll see you later, Kara.”


A puzzled smile touches her lips. She doesn’t say it often. Maybe it surprises her. “I love you, too.” She cocks her head. “You okay?”

Kara nods. She’s not sure what’s going on with Maggie. What’s going on with Lena. Alex has been avoiding her. She won’t look her way. Every word out of her mouth is said as if for someone else. “Um. Have you seen Alex?” Maggie’s expression darkens. “Um—not like that. In general. I’m worried about her.”

“Why? What’s going on?”

“We talked the other day. And… I think she’s lonely. I don’t know how to help her.”

“She has Lena. She has you.”
Kara bites her tongue and nods again. She can’t tell her about Alex. It’s not her place. Maybe it’ll slow things down between them. She contemplates it. Maggie rubs her arm, trying to reassure her, Kara thinks. Through touch. This is how they reassure each other. “You should go get that food. I hope… it’s the best food you can get.” Maggie smiles again. Kara hasn’t seen this smile. It’s too many things in one. She can’t read it, doesn’t know how to respond to it. “I’ll see you some other night you’re free?”

When she’s gone, Kara closes the door. Should she have invited herself to get Greek food? Maybe she should have offered to cook a meal with her. She could call her back but she doesn’t. She calls Alex instead, thinking of how fiercely her heart pumped in her chest, the way she responded to her touch, stronger than Lena or Maggie ever have. It’s not a big deal, except for how it makes Alex feel about herself.

Alex doesn’t pick up. Kara considers going to her place but maybe she’s busy with Lena, or maybe she wants to be alone. She doesn’t like it when people want to be away from her. She hates the crippling creep of loneliness. She doesn’t want Alex to experience it for even a minute. The beep comes and Kara regroups. “Alex, it’s me. Can we hang out soon? Please? I don’t want things to be weird between us. Nothing’s changed.” She paces, considering. “I miss you, okay? I hate when you give me the silent treatment. Call me. I love you.”

She sets the phone down, paces. Finds another button on the floor, picks it up, wonders how she missed it.

X

“Lena!” Alex leaves the bar, flings her arms over her shoulders, squeezing her close. Lena’s arms gently wrap around her before she pulls back, looks at her face. Alex stares back, ignoring Lena’s soft expression, looking for traces of imperfection in her makeup, in her face, some blemish, but she’s flawless.

Lena smiles. “I can’t remember the last time anyone greeted me that enthusiastically.”

“I was up at the bar but let’s grab a table. I know that’s more your speed.” She takes hold of Lena’s wrist, pulling her past the throngs of people laughing and drinking, and to a table nestled not too far from a darts board. There’s a pool table to the right but pool makes her think of Maggie, Maggie who weeks later still hasn’t agreed to a game and drinks. She picks up the small clipboard with the drinks menu and hands it to Lena. She’s already had a few beers. “I know it was short notice. Thanks for penciling me into your schedule.”
“What are friends for?” She sets her purse aside, shrugs out of her jacket and looks at her. “You
don’t usually ask me out on the town.”

“I know a lot of what we plan falls to the wayside because of work. I’m sorry.” She’s tired of lying
to her about what she does. Telling her the truth isn’t an option. It’s a fireable offense. “We haven’t
hung out in forever. That’s criminal.” She gets another smile from Lena. “Tell me what’s new.
Distract me.”

“Distract you? Is everything okay? Is something going on with…” her eyes cloud, “with anyone?”

Alex takes a breath. The waiter comes by and she orders another beer. Lena orders wine and a
glass of water. Alex exhales when the waiter goes. She can’t talk to Lena about what’s going on.
Some things shouldn’t be said aloud. It’s possible Maggie and Lena would understand. It’s Kara.
But they wouldn’t. She should have never admitted it. Kara can read her heartbeat but nothing
is?

“Hey, hey,” Lena reaches out, touches her wrist. “Breathe. Whatever it is, you’ve already survived
it. You’ll continue to survive it.” Alex looks at her gratefully, air squeezing into her lungs again.
Lena cocks a grin. “Don’t tell me you got suspended again.”

Alex laughs, leans over to flick her arm, feels bad. She’s pale and might bruise. “No, I did not get
suspended.” She’s been snapping at Kara. Hasn’t known how to look at her. Her face burns when
Kara looks her way. It’s as if her shame is bared for the world to see. “I don’t want to talk about it.
I know I called you here and I’m so grateful you came, but really, all I wanted was to see a friendly
face.”

“You’re a happy break from work.”

“How is L-Corp?” She taps her hand. “Bring me up to date.”

“I’ll do my best but I can’t imagine you’ll find it terribly interesting. I’ve got a few meetings
coming up. Businessmen from Texas, a few others from China. I’m counting on the ones from
China to not grab my ass but I’ve learned not to let my guard down.”

“Do the women ever try?”
Lena laughs. “Not yet.” The waiter returns with their drinks. Alex has a long drink of beer. Lena pushes her glass of water gently towards her. Alex looks from the glass to Lena. “For me?”

Her face is warmer than before. It’s the drink. The embarrassment. She touches the water glass, sweaty and cool. Forces an agreeable smile. You’re ridiculous smile. She has a drink, sees the small relief on Lena’s face. It bothers her that Lena worries. It bothers her that Lena will likely make her guzzle water for the rest of the evening. “What else is going on? Inventing new gadgets? Taking over other businesses?”

“I can’t decide whether I should be flattered or insulted. Actually,” she clears her throat, “Maggie and I— Detective Sawyer and I— have been working on a new initiative. A collaborative for National City. Multiple partners. Targeting assistance to alien victims of trafficking.”

Her buzz fades and she’s left with the cold of sobriety. She didn’t expect that name, those words, to come out of her lips. “You and Maggie are working together?”

“Yeah. Is that okay?”

“But you two hate each other.” Lena’s gaze reveals nothing. Alex has another drink of water. “Yes, it’s okay. Not that you need my permission. I didn’t know. Why didn’t you mention it?” Why didn’t Maggie mention it?

“It’s just another of my many projects. It’s been a while since we caught up. And I wasn’t sure how you…”

“How I…?”

Lena shrugs a little helplessly. “I know you’re close.”

She scoffs. Maggie’s avoiding her. More than usual. She offered friendship. Nothing more. Can Maggie not even stand the thought of friendship? “Not anymore. How long has that been going on?” She tries to imagine Maggie working on any collaborative. It’s not too far of a stretch. She’s generous in some ways, when it comes to others. Should she call her? Ask her about it? She shakes her head. No. No. No. She will not get lost in thoughts of Maggie tonight. “Forget it. Let’s move on, shall we?”
“What shall we move on to?”

“How about Kara?” She glances at Lena long enough to see her lift an eyebrow in question. Maybe Kara will back off and give her some space if she and Lena get together. She’ll stop leaving voicemails, stop trying to get her to look at her. “How are things between you?”

“The same.”

Jesus, Kara. So she’s still said nothing. She ought to shake her. “You two talk.”

“It seems like all we do is talk. When we’re able to get a hold of each other. You two are slippery,” Lena smiles, makes a face when she smirks. “Difficult to get a hold of.” A beat. “You know what I mean.”

Alex laughs. Lena’s irritated. Blushes. Alex laughs harder. “Oh God.” She wipes at her eyes.

“Grow up.” But she’s biting back her own laughter.

X

Luthor 11:30:02am: *I know it's a lot but there are a few things we should hammer out for the collaborative, if you're amenable. Is there a time that works for you?*

It’s 3pm. Maggie sets the phone down on the passenger seat of the car. Drinks coffee. It’s been nearly two weeks of silence. After the kiss she stood, gathered her items, whacked her hip into the conference room table in her hurry to leave. She said they’d talk but they haven’t talked. Her fault.

It’s odd. During the past months she’s become accustomed to the text messages, to the work, to meals. To laughing. She wonders what the formula is. When does something become routine? Something to be missed?

She’s thought of their kiss. More than she’s comfortable admitting. It was... She starts to lose herself in the memory of it. Stops. This wasn’t what Kara had in mind when she asked to open their relationship. It’s not cheating. It feels like cheating. But she knows it’s not cheating. She wishes it
hadn’t happened after Darla. She wishes everything wasn’t so complicated with Alex. Lena and Alex are together. Lena and Kara are in love. Kara wants her to be with Alex. She wants to be with Alex. But that’s different. Serious. Heavy. It isn’t light. Has Lena thought about the kiss? Fuck. She needs to stop thinking about it. But why did Lena do it?

Maggie responds. *Pick a time and I’ll find a way to make it work.*

She texts again. *Hi.*

She starts the car. Drives to the station. She’s taking the steps up when her phone buzzes.

Luthor 3:22:07pm *Hi. I wasn’t sure you’d respond.*

Maggie grimaces.

Luthor 3:24:56pm *Can we try for 9 tonight? Is that too late?*

Maggie walks into the building, dodging the figures around her, staring at her phone thoughtfully. She sits. She sets the phone down. Goes through her emails. Ten minutes later she looks at it again.

*Barring a National City crisis, that should work.*

*You can give your delivery boy Igor the night off. I’ll grab us something to eat. No peanuts.*

Maybe she shouldn’t have sent that. Maybe eating together is too familiar. Presumptuous. They haven’t spoken since the kiss. She’s readying to walk it back when Lena texts.

Luthor 3:55:32pm *Jonathan will appreciate being given a respite and I’ll appreciate staying alive. I’ll see you tonight.*

*See you then.*

She realizes she’s smiling. She stops smiling. Gets to work. She has to work. She massages her
forehead, wondering why it feels like the rug has been yanked out from under her.

X

Alex walks through her apartment door. “Jesus, Kara.” Her heart hammers. It’s the shock. It’s seeing Supergirl standing at her balcony, striding in. “You scared the shit out of me.”

“You haven’t been returning my calls. You won’t see me.”

“I saw you at the DEO an hour ago.”

Kara lifts her arms, exasperated. Alex closes the apartment door, trying to get her heart to slow. She carries the pack of beer with her to the counter and looks over at her dubiously. It’s rare to have company. She usually goes to Kara’s. Unless there’s trouble and Kara comes to her. Alex plucks a beer from the pack and opens it, relieved she picked up the usual. She needs to relax.

“Will you take that off?” Alex says. “You don’t need to be like that here.”

“This is who I am.”

“Supergirl isn’t who you are. You’re my sister.” Kara frowns gently. Alex has a swig of beer, not sure what she’s trying to say, unsure of how to say anything that will be completely accurate. Supergirl comes closer. Her cape rustles as she moves, her hair sways. She’s so beautiful. Alex has another long drink of beer, goes to her fridge ignoring her, pulls out some leftover pot roast. She dumps it into a pan and throws it into the oven.

“It’s not preheated,” Kara says.

“Why are you here?” Alex asks. Kara’s at the counter now, fingertips touching along the edges. Kara looks at her. “Do you want some dinner?” No response. “Is this payback for the past few days? Look, Kara—I… appreciate that you’re understanding. But it’s weird. And I’m not comfortable with it. I can’t look at myself. It just feels like I failed us. I failed you.” She licks her lips. “And I’m freaking out about J’onn picking up on anything.” Kara reaches for her. Alex pulls back. “Don’t, okay?”
“I don’t want you to be alone. I don’t want us to be alone.”

“We’re not alone. You have Maggie. I have J’onn. I have you. I just can’t have you. Not like that.”

Kara bows her head, sighs softly, she flicks her eyes to her. Alex tries to swallow. She has another drink of beer. Kara takes the bottle from her. Steps closer. Alex pulls air into her lungs, tries, but her chest is tight. She isn’t sure air is getting in. It feels as if she’s been hit by a truck. “I need for you to be able to look at me, Alex. And I don’t know if it’s easier for you to see Kara Zor-El or Kara Danvers.”

Alex looks at Kara’s hands, the smooth skin of her fingers. “Both. They’re both easier.”

“Then look at me.”

Alex focuses on the counter. Focuses on it until Kara’s hand comes to her face. It cups her cheek, strong and warm. And still, she cannot face her. They’re still. Eventually Kara’s hand slips away. Alex breathes out, closes her eyes for an instant.

“I could tell you I’m an alien. That we’re not sisters. I don’t know if that would help. The last time I said it, I broke your heart. Sometimes the truth can be both. Help and hurt.”

Alex looks at her. Kara’s chin quakes. It makes her feel like a monster. A bigger monster. The oven beeps at her, letting her know it’s finished precooking. She sets the timer for another few minutes, looks back to Kara. “Get changed, okay? We can split dinner.”

“Alex—”

“Let’s eat. I’m hungry.”

Kara nods. When Alex blinks again she’s wearing jeans. Toms. A belt cinched tightly at the waist. A blue checkered shirt. Her hair is tied back. She’s wearing glasses. She touches them. Both are easier. Both are harder.
Maggie arrives early. She went home. Showered. Threw on a fresh set of clothes and grabbed a pizza. Does Lena Luthor eat pizza? Alex and Kara eat pizza. *You’re being ridiculous. Go inside.* She waits until it’s ten minutes past nine to step out of the car, box of pizza in hand, paper plates and napkins.

She walks through the building doors. Hector looks up at her. “Long time, no see, Detective.”

“Yeah, I couldn’t stay away.” *Shut up.* She goes to the elevator, flashes the key card, takes the elevator up. Her stomach sinks. She can’t identify the feeling right away. The cold coming over her and her fingertips, despite the warmth of the pizza. Her stomach does flips. Maybe she should have picked up something Italian. More Italian than pizza. Does Lena like Italian?

She exhales. The elevator doors open. Everything moves in slow motion. It’s not a big deal. So what if they kissed? Lena and Kara… it’s been months since Kara told Lena about the open relationship. For all she knows, they’re already sleeping together. Why wouldn’t they? They’re in love. Kara said she didn’t want to talk about it, wouldn’t share unless she felt like sharing. Maybe she’ll walk into the conference room and smell Kara’s scent on her. Her perfume. She has to be ready for that kind of thing. She has to be prepared… to one day walk in on them kissing.

Maybe Kara’s stopped by with a pie. Or three. And they’re not expecting her because she’s late. And they’re kissing. Her thoughts buzz like bees. She walks into the conference room. There are a few pamphlets on the table. Lena’s back is to her. She turns and smiles.

Maggie stops in her tracks. She blinks. Shakes her head. Finds a smile. “Hey.”

“Hi. You made it.” She remains where she stands.

“I brought pizza.” She lifts it carefully, sets it on the table, sliding it in her direction. She doesn’t know what to do with her hands. She puts them in her jean pockets, jacket pockets, crosses her arms. Lena touches the back of one chair, then the other, closer but still far. “Sorry I’m late.”

“It’s all right. I know you’re busy.”

*I got here early, actually.* She bows her head, smiles. “Um. Thanks for waiting.” She looks back up at her. “Oh. The pizza’s from Giovanni’s. It’s not too far from my place. It’s this um—little shop. Family owned. Girls in the neighborhood love it. Giovanni’s boys are cute.” Lena looks at her,
smiling faintly. “Maybe you could drop by sometime. To Giovanni’s.” Shut up. “Do you like pizza?”

“Who doesn’t like pizza?” She sets the paper plates and napkins aside, opens the lid.

“It’s a Margherita.”

“So I see. It smells incredible. I was feeling a bit peckish earlier but held off.” Did she wait so she could eat with her? Maggie doesn’t ask. Lena grabs a slice, extends it to her. Maggie takes it. Lena takes another plate and sets a slice on it for herself.

Maggie pours them glasses of water, hands one to Lena. She has a seat. Lena has one two seats down. Maggie thinks of their elbows touching, Lena’s fingers on her knuckles, the taste of berries on her tongue. “It’s been a while.” Has it, though? “How’ve you been?”

Lena has a bite of pizza. Chews. Is she giving herself time to think of a response? Is she overthinking? Lena massages her neck thoughtfully, looks at her, smiles tiredly. “There’s been a lot of work. Half of it is prioritizing what projects to give my attention to at any given time. This one’s important.”

“Yeah.”

“I hope this wasn’t too short notice.” Maggie shakes her head. “I saw you on the news the other night.”

Maggie nods, smiling wryly. Yes. She streamed it on her phone from the local news. The video buffered until she caught sight of herself, eyes half open, paused mid word. She shut the window, irritated. “Then you saw more than I did.”

“You ran it. But it’s quite the sad story. These attacks on the homeless community.” She sighs. “And you said it was the fourth one in two weeks. Are there any leads? Can you talk about it?”

The questions are unexpected. “We’re going through eyewitness reports. We don’t have much. Young people. Well dressed. Maybe college students. Teens in private school. It happens sometimes with these rich assholes.” She bites her tongue, grimaces.
“How awful.” Maggie tries to think of how to explain her remark. Maybe she shouldn’t explain it. *Not all rich people.* “It seems like every day there’s a new tragedy happening, right before our eyes. And you see all of that, all the time and you keep at it. Astonishing.”

“I’m just doing my job.”

“And doing it well.”

Maggie realizes she hasn’t had any pizza. She has a bite. And then another. A drink of water. She never expected to be complimented by Lena Luthor on a job well done. “Remind me again when we’ve caught the bastards behind this.” They eat in silence. “It’s hard sometimes,” she admits. “And a lot of my job has changed since Supergirl came along. I’ve been kicked back to the streets. To smaller stuff.”

“It doesn’t make the work you do any less important. Do you want to talk about it?”

“Ah, no. Thank you. Um. Let’s focus on our other dilemma. The um—” she points at the pamphlets. Lena nods, wipes her fingers on the napkins and passes over a few leaflets. Maggie rakes them over with her eyes, finishes the rest of the slice quickly and picks them up.

“L-Corp has a few graphic designers on hand. This isn’t typically what we use them for, but I wanted a brochure that was eye-catching but appropriate. Conveys all the information that we need.” She reaches over, her finger skimming along the paper. “And here is a space holder. I thought we could put all the appropriate contact information here. Initially I thought it should be you, but you’re busy enough. You can supervise and take lead but maybe we should look at another point of contact for you at the NCPD. Someone you trust. I’ll trust you to make that decision.”

Maggie looks at her. Lena looks back. “Oh. Is that okay?”

“Of course.”

“I’ll think of a few people. Bring them by to meet you. We can decide together.”
“You don’t have to do that.”

“It’s fine.”

“They won’t think they’re some Luthor plant?”

Maggie smiles. “They believed in your vision well-enough when they left the last meeting.”


Maggie looks down. White shirt. She hasn’t worn it in weeks. She still remembers the buttons popping off, springing like popcorn kernels, clattering to the floor. Kara apologizing. It’s okay, it’s okay, it’s okay. Kisses. She sewed them back on. Did she miss one? Did it fall off? Is she a shitty seamstress? “Oh, shit.” She turns, her face burning, trying to find a button that isn’t there. She looks at the shirt, open far too wide, the white of her bra exposed, her chest. How did she not notice? When did it happen? When she reached for the pamphlets? Jeezus. She touches her jacket, zips it quickly. “Shit. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“God. You must think—” she faces her again, hoping her blush isn’t evident. “I thought the pizza at Giovanni’s tonight was cheaper than usual. Maybe they gave me a discount.” She grins before it falters.

Lena chuckles softly, not quite looking at her. “Maybe they wanted to reward their celebrity detective.”

Maggie laughs shortly. “Yeah. Maybe.” She pulls a hand back through her hair. Breathes. “Do you mind if I take some of these back to the station? Seeing is believing.”

“Take them all. I have extras. I’ll email you the text. If you think it warrants editing.”

She rolls her eyes. “Sure, Luthor.” A beat. The last time she was here, she touched Lena’s arm. I
have to go. We’ll talk later. She can’t talk today. She doesn’t know how. Has Lena told Kara about their kiss? “I should go.”

A crinkle touches Lena’s forehead. She nods and gets to her feet. Maggie stands, too. “Thank you for coming by to…” she looks at the pamphlets. “And the pizza. If you have any more ideas you know how to get a hold of me. I think we’re close to getting this thing up and running. We’ll host conferences… do a few presentations to get the word out, but that’s in the future. I know you’re busy.”

“I’m not the only one. We’ll come together. Find a way to make it work.” She takes a step back. Smiles. “I’ll leave the pizza for you. You can share it with Igor when he drives you home.”

“You’re intentionally being obstinate.”

Her smile grows. She slows, rubs her mouth with her thumb. “Yeah. Bad habit. I’ll see you later, Luthor.”

“Goodnight, Maggie.”

X

I’m sorry if I’ve been acting

Kara returns to the couch. Maggie deletes the text. Kara picks up the latest CatCo magazine, flipping through the pages. Maggie looks at her. Kara touches her glasses and focuses more intently on the page.

She starts another text.

I know we said we’d talk but you haven’t brought it up either

What are you, twelve? She deletes it. Pulls her legs up on the couch. Kara is on the opposite end, working on a crossword puzzle, leaning into the armrest. “How’s the job hunt going?”
“Hm?”

“You don’t want to be unemployed forever. The DEO’s intense. There’s more to you than Supergirl.”

“You mean Just Kara.” Maggie looks at her, sees the nape of her neck, the latch to that necklace she always wears. “What if being a reporter was never what I was meant to do? It’s what Cat wanted. What Clark does. What Lena suggested.” She sighs. “It’s harder when the story isn’t about Lena. When it’s … bigger. And my great source is Supergirl but Snapper said that’s not enough.”

“You’re not going to give up on being a reporter. You love it.”

“I don’t know if I do. Maybe I tricked myself into thinking that because it made me normal.” She looks at her. “You know?”

“Not really.”

Kara turns back to the crossword puzzle.

“Do you paint? You've got that great collection over there but I've never seen you work on anything.”

“I haven't felt like it.”

“Are you depressed?”

A light scoff. “No.”

“You’ve got all this stuff here.” The random crates that she’ll return to see have been sanded and stained. The tables. Old picture frames. She stares at her back. “Have you worked on anything? Is there… I mean, some new project?”
“No, not recently.”

“Maybe we could go for a walk. Get some fresh air.”

“I get more fresh air than anyone.” She sighs. “What’s a ten letter word for free?”

Maggie tries to think. Nothing she can think of is ten letters. She watches her scribble a few attempts, erase them. “We could go to a bookstore. Or the museum?”

“I’m going with Lena in a few days. There's a Baroque period exhibition that’s supposed to be incredible.” She scratches the pencil along her neck, looks at Maggie. “She said you two are still working on your thing. That project.”

“Yeah.”

“How's that? I bet she’s so… focused.”

“Yeah, she's great.” Kara looks at her a little longer, her lips twitching into a smile, turning back to the puzzle. “Are you even looking for another job?”

“Rao, Maggie. It’s not like I sit around all day. I’m at the DEO all the time. I’m busy. Just not with… a conventional job.”

“It’s just that you were really upset when you were let go.”

“And maybe some other upset made me forget it.” Kara says, not looking at her. Maggie thinks to finding her at the top of the stairs on that grey day. She gets to her feet. Kara looks at her. She takes a breath, looks down at her hands. “Don't go.”

“It's okay. It seems like you need some alone time.”

“All I have is alone time.” She stands. That doesn't make sense. Not if she’s with Lena. “Alex saw you on the news the other night. Something about homeless people getting beat up? Maybe I can
look into it. Or …Guardian.”

“That vigilante? Are you nuts? Forget it.”

“Someone should do something.”

Maggie smiles tightly. “I’m doing something. The NCPD is doing something.”

Kara sucks on her lower lip. “Yeah. Yeah. Okay.”

Maggie fights the heat in her chest. Is it anger? Some kind of sorrow? “I know you want to help. You want that more than anything but sometimes it’s best to take a step back and let the other players do their job.”

Kara massages her mouth and paces. “It’s hard for me to take a step back when I know there’s something I could be doing to make a situation better. That’s all I want. Better.”

Maggie stares back at her. “I know.”

Kara runs her hands over her face. Exhales. “I’m going to get a job. Just. Please get off my back about it.” Maggie breathes out. “And I know that you haven’t been. But I don’t have a thing. Not like you have a thing. That you breathe for. I thought it was reporting but I don’t even know that I miss it… so much as I miss… being with people and learning. And observing. When I got to be Supergirl I thought… this is who I am. But if I were on Krypton, I wouldn’t be. I’d… be a version of Kara Danvers. I’m not Supergirl. I’m not Kara Danvers. I’m Kara Zor-El but I never learned who she was or might have been. I’m some in between version I haven't figured out yet.” She breathes out again, unsteadily, fingers curling and uncurling. “I know I don’t always get it right with you. And you’re my first girlfriend. My first anything and I’m twenty-seven. In Earth Years. Is that like dog years? Or whatever the opposite is. I don’t know what I'm doing. I just know that I want to be with you and I'm trying. I want to be better. I don’t know… what makes me weird. Maybe I would have been weird on Krypton, too. I don't know.” She looks at her, puts her arms out, that's it or this is who I am. “I can't ever read your face.”

Maggie steps closer, pushes a lock of blonde behind her ear. “Ask me.”

“It feels so easy with everyone else. Or easier,” she says more quietly. “Sometimes… it seems …
like the more we get to know each other the less I understand. I don’t know why you’re keeping away from Alex. I don’t understand how you love me, sometimes.” Maggie cups her face. She knows that awful feeling well. “I say the wrong thing a lot. It’s not because of Supergirl.” Maggie shakes her head. “I just don’t know.”

“I’m not the only person who loves you.”

“But that doesn’t help.” Kara frowns, keeps her head bowed. Maggie lowers her hand. “I haven’t figured out who Just Kara is. She’s… ideas and. I forget a lot.” She pulls her glasses off, rubs her eyes, looks at her, the intensity of her gaze makes her weak in the knees. “Sometimes I’m confused.”

“About what?”

“About what I’m supposed to be. For myself. For others.”

“Are you confused about us?”

“Sometimes I want to spend all my nights with you.” Kara touches a hand to her shoulder, settling it feather light. “I’ve never touched anyone the way I get to touch you.” Maggie’s breathing slows. “It’s… the body has this world of… sensation. I wonder if we feel in the same way.” Her fingers trace along her neck before her hand drops to her side. “Does everyone feel the same way?”

She takes a deep breath. “They don’t. But some things are conditional. A person’s physiology. Their autonomy. Their past and experiences. Their connection to their partner. Their connection to themselves,” she smirks gently.

“Themselves?”

“Well, yeah.”

Kara thinks.

“The point is that no two people have sex in the same way. And there’s usually a reason for it.”
“Like when you slept with Darla.”

The words are unexpected. It takes seconds before she remembers she can breathe. Maggie frowns at her hands, looks back to Kara. “Right. Like that.”

“But I don’t understand why it’s different. If you touch the same. If … we have these bodies. We had ‘fun’ before we knew each other. It was new for me. It wasn’t new for you. But we liked it the same. I thought so, anyway.”

“It was new for me. It was with you.”

She gives a small smile. “And with Alex.” The air is gone again. Kara blinks. “Was that wrong? But … it’s different. I think I do want it to be different. You and Alex. You and me.”

“That was a while ago.” She touches Kara's arm. “Look. I don’t really want to get into what it's like… I don't want to get into comparisons.”

“Why not? It’s just… I can ask you about anything. And that’s so important to me. You never make me feel like I’m stupid. You're always so… understanding. And I feel like I can learn so much from you.” She laughs. “Maybe I don’t always mind when you baby me.”

Maggie smiles faintly.


“Um. Yeah.”

Kara takes a breath. “Sometimes…” she slips her glasses back on. “Sometimes it feels like I have too many questions. Like they're bursting out of me but I have to keep them inside. It’s like my feelings are super. But not in a good way.”
“Your feelings are real. Even if they’re not always what you think they are or should be. Even if they’re not perfect. What matters is how we behave. Supergirl isn't what makes you or your thoughts and questions super.” She cocks her head, finds her eyes. “All right?”

Kara smiles. “All right.” She leans over, kisses her. Looks at her with that same intense gaze. “Can you take your shirt off? I’ve had butter fingers recently.” She wiggles her fingers.

Maggie smiles, thinking of her ruined shirts, how she didn't notice and Lena saw too much. She brings her fingers to the buttons.

“Um. Can you look at me when you do it?”

Kara's eyes are electric. Maggie looks at her, unbuttons the shirt.

X

“What was your favorite?” Lena asks as they walk out of the museum.

“Are you kidding me? As if I could pick just one.” She looks at Lena who looks back and smiles. “But the reproduction of Las Meninas was amazing. I thought it was the real thing.” Almost, anyway. She looked closer and knew better. It didn’t look old. Not centuries old. It’s strange that she can peel through layers while standing still.

“If only. They don’t lend it out.”

“But it looked like the real thing. Maybe a simulation is close enough.” Maybe that can be said of a lot of things.

“What do you like about it?”

Kara smiles, flustered. “I like how far it goes. Um. It’s more than just surface. I went back to it a few times.”
“I noticed.”

“And each time it felt new. It changed depending on where I stood. It’s... a piece of art but you’re a part of it. Are they looking at the artist? Are they looking at you?” They take the steps down and Kara glances at her, wants to take her arm. She doesn’t. “Maybe when it’s hazy, you can be both. Witness and creator. Director and participant. I still can’t make out if Philip and Mariana are really there—if they ever were or if they’re just reflections of the canvas.”

“It’s been hotly contested for centuries.”

“Mh. Isn’t that worth something? There’s something to be said for clean things, simple, even things, but there’s something to complexity, too.” They stop at the bottom of the steps. “I like coming here. Every exhibition feels like a window into another world.” They walk, making their way to a nearby coffee shop. “I liked coming here with you.”

Lena smiles. “Me, too.”

They order tea, sit. “Maggie asked if I wanted to go but I told her I had plans to go with you.”

“Oh. Did she end up seeing the exhibition?”

“I don’t know. I told her there was a show but I’m not sure she knew that before she asked. I think she was just throwing things out there. I was in a bad mood.”

“Why?”

She doesn’t know why. People have bad moods. She knows this. But she’s not allowed bad days or bad moods. She understands that, too. “I think I just didn’t feel like talking.” That’s what it boiled down to, in the end. “But it’s fine now. We worked it out and I got to see this incredible exhibition with my best friend. Life is good.”

“It’s hard to imagine you in a bad mood.”

“I don’t think it’s possible when you’re around,” she has a drink of tea, sees Lena smiling down
into her own. Kara hopes Lena knows how beautiful she is. That Alex tells her enough. Maybe some day she can tell her. Maybe one day, while she’s thanking her for flowers, she can compare the two. She can tell her she’s as beautiful as the flowers. More beautiful. She can say a thing like that. But it's not enough. It’s not the cosmos. If only she could show her. “Oh. You wanted updates before we went into the museum.” Kara asked her to wait until after. “I’m still unemployed.” But that’s a given. Lena’s the first person she’d tell if she got a job. “Sometimes it makes me feel depressed. There has to be more to life than…” Supergirl. “Unemployment.”

“I know you’ll find something. You’re too talented to stay out of the field forever.”

Lena’s words are warmer than the tea. “You’re sweet,” she touches her glasses, smiling into the cup of tea. “Um. Other than that… Alex and I… haven’t been spending as much time together as I’d like. Maybe it’s normal to butt heads with family. I know we’ll work it out. Alex is… I don’t know how to explain it. No matter what she’ll always have this part of me. And my best interests at heart. So even when we’re apart I know it won’t be long until we work through everything.”

“But what’s the issue? She hasn’t mentioned anything to me.”

“Just family stuff.” Is it the family stuff? Is it the other stuff? Kara imagines kissing Alex. Holds on to the image, tries to analyze how it makes her feel. How would it make Alex feel? Like Maggie did? Better? Worse? Would she leave her there, eyes still closed and go puke somewhere? Haven’t they all kissed third hand, anyway? Except for Lena. Not that way. She hasn’t kissed Alex so maybe she’ll never know.

“I hope she's okay. I know work keeps her out at all hours.”

Kara nods. “And you two are okay?”

“I can't complain.” She pulls a lock of hair behind her ear. “It's easy to laugh when you're with her, you know? I'm happy to have met her. She saved my life and she's a good friend. I couldn't ask for more.”

Do you still sleep together? When Lena looks at her, her eyes always seem to dance. “Does she ever talk about Maggie?”

“Not particularly. Why?”
Kara wonders what the point was.

They've had another two collaborative meetings. They continue to tighten their message. Maggie has sent zero text messages. When the meetings end she gathers her items. She'll say ‘great work’ or ‘let’s continue to line our ducks up in a row’. Something generic. It leaves a sour taste in her mouth. Unlike the berries.

*Can we talk?*

She doesn’t send it.

*Let’s talk.*

She doesn’t send that either.

*Have you thought about that kiss?*

She deletes the words. Turns her phone off. She steps out of the car when the light in Lena's office goes off. It’s 10:47pm. Early, for people like them. It’s possible Lena will go out back. The Frankenstein that is Igor will hold the car door open for her and drive her home. Whatever home is for Lena Luthor.

She waits by the entrance, arms crossed, growing increasingly nervous. Why kiss at all? Lena exits, handbag on her arm, looking at her phone. She walks right past her without realizing.

Maggie pushes off the wall. “Hey, Luthor.” Lena turns at the movement, looks at her, swiftly shrouding her expression. She’s pristine. Every time she’s pristine. The colors she wears are rich and pure, never a line out of place. “Sorry if I scared you.”

She regains her composure swiftly. She draws in a deep breath. “Detective Sawyer.” Fuck. “Doing a stake out?”
“Ah. No. I waited until your light went out.” She grimaces. Lena tilts her head slightly, her reservation bared. “I sound like a creep. Maybe I’ve been acting like a creep.” Lena looks back at her, pockets her phone in her jacket, keeps her hands there. Maggie scratches her forehead. The skin is flat but she knows the scar remains. “Um. Truth is I wanted to see you. I’ve written … probably twenty texts. They all sucked. I thought it would be best to do this kind of thing in person.”

Lena waits.

Maggie hoped she’d say something. Give her something to go off. “I haven’t liked how things have been between us. Maybe the past few weeks I’ve been driving myself crazy over nothing. Maybe what happened is something you’d rather forget. And it’s okay if you do, but I wanted you to know that I haven’t forgotten.”

“That’s…” Lena huffs a breath. Her fingers touch along her belt. “You've been distant for weeks. Why come to me now?”

“I needed time to think. And… sorry. I had this realization tonight that all my angesting wasn't giving you any answers. You didn't do anything wrong and I'm sorry if my silence made you feel as if you did. You haven't pushed. You've been patient. And even if that's your way, I don't want to take advantage. I should have said something sooner. I hate the idea of you doubting yourself because I couldn't be a grown up and talk to you.” She dips her chin, smiling in embarrassment. “I think the texts were better than that, actually. I should have written this down. Edited it for clarity.”

“Like an Oscars speech?”

“Yeah, maybe.” She smiles up at her. Lena smiles back, looks away. “I won't ask you to forgive me.”

“But I do.”

Maggie bites back a smile. “I know you've probably had a long night but if I could take you out for a drink or some food… and try to make it up to you... Maybe we can exist outside a conference room. If not, I understand.”

“I'd love to. I’ve been locked up in the office all day and I could use a little company.”
“Yeah?”

“Yes.” She nods, her face bowed, lifting her eyes to meet hers. “Jonathan’s waiting but I could have him move on if you’d rather we ride together.”

“Is that okay?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?” She looks over to the car, glistening in the distance. “And I’d rather spare him any of your henchman commentary.”

Maggie grins. “All right, Luthor.” She squeezes the keys in her jacket pocket, feels the metal jagged edges dig into her palm. “Guess I’m your driver tonight.” They walk. Lena calls Igor. The sleek vehicle drives away. “I’m not too far off,” she explains, though she did park further than usual. She hadn’t thought things out this far ahead.

They arrive at the car and Maggie jams the key into the passenger’s side, turning it. “The auto lock’s busted,” she explains, opens the car door, is happy the inside is clean and neat. A pine tree air freshener hangs from the rearview. She should have grabbed it before letting Lena in. “After you.”

Lena steps into the car, slides further in, looks up at her. Maggie flashes back to the night she arrested her. Her eyes were different then. “Don’t forget to buckle up.”

X

It’s another hole in the wall, tucked in zig-zag slim alleyways. Maggie parks on an incline and runs around to the passenger door, pulling it open. There’s a glimmer in Lena’s eye, her lips hinting at a smile. Maggie worries she’s acting how she would on a date.

"There’s a little step here," she nods at the ground, "hard to see in the dark." She extends a hand and doesn’t think Lena will take it, but she does, allowing Maggie to help her out the car. "Been here before?"

"I haven’t."
Maggie holds to her hand a second longer, releasing her when she’s safely on the sidewalk. "I’m going to take a guess and say it’s not what you’re used to, but I know drinks and food and they’re pretty good."

"I trust your judgment."

Maggie smiles wryly and they walk, the darkness past abandoned alleys, bars, gossiping circles of friends, past smokers and Maggie regrets bringing her here. Lena looks about curiously, her eyes drinking before touching on her. Maggie looks back, nearly walks into a pole before avoiding it at the last second, hopping from the sidewalk onto the street and back beside her. She points at the restaurant, red brick exterior, the name laminated onto a window. "And here we are," she lifts a hand to her eyes, peers into the window. "Yeah, they’re still open," she pulls the door open and gestures. Lena smiles and goes in.

Maggie follows after. A few of the booths in the back have already been taken up. Marco walks up to her with two menus. “If it isn’t NCPD’s finest,” he says, “and with company for once,” he looks Lena over appreciatively. “Will it be just drinks or would you like a food menu?”

“Why not both?” Lena suggests.

“Very good,” he leads Maggie to her usual table in the corner and she sits on the red leather chair, her eyes scanning past the window as they usually do. “I’ll give you a few minutes to look things over.”

He goes and Lena looks around, the skeleton mariachi players painted on the wall, the sugar skulls lined across various counters, the candle, battery operated, on the table in a glass. The dim lighting casts red over them. Maggie flips the drinks menu around to face Lena. “They have tons of imported beers,” she smiles, not knowing why she’s telling her, “and they make a killer mojito. And right here,” she points, “is their wine selection, if you feel like getting fancy. You usually do.” Lena smiles at her and Maggie doesn’t know what to say. “I, uh—you know, I figured something more casual and less likely to remind you of the office you just left behind?” She finds herself smiling, “and a little more formal for me. I’d rather focus on this than go into a dive bar and deal with any of the perps I may have taken into custody before.”

“It’s charming,” she folds her arms on the table and looks at her, “how did you find it?”

“It’s a work story.”

“Indulge me.”
“All right,” she sits up straight, mirroring Lena. “A while back there was a guy I was tailing. One of the higher ups in this whole alien sex trafficking thing? I thought I’d lost him in the crowd—there was some concert spilling out onto the streets that night—but then he … materialized in front of me. I had to keep walking. So I walked for another five minutes and then I came here. It was random. But I liked this spot. I could look out and watch everyone. I could watch everything from here,” she points out the window. “He ended up going to that little place over there—” Lena looks, the windows are boxed up. “It was a ‘restaurant’ then. I stayed here way too long but long enough to be able to get backup. Long story short, front closed, girls rescued and scumbag locked away for a long, long time. After, I came back for a drink to celebrate.”

“With who?” Maggie doesn’t say anything. With no one. “That’s incredible. My heart would have exploded if he’d snuck up on me like that. Did you cuff him, too?” her voice is light.

Maggie smiles faintly. “Yeah.”

“I hope you weren’t as gentle with him.”

“I wasn’t.”

“Good.”

The waiter returns and Maggie orders a beer. Lena orders a glass of red. They bend their heads over the menus before settling on a few dishes. The patrons start to filter out and the flamenco music that had previously been drowned out becomes audible again. Maggie tells her the name of the piece, the artist before stopping. Lena waits, arching an eyebrow. “I’m rambling. And I’m sure you already know the wine and the music—”

“I’ve never had this particular wine, and it’s lovely by the way. I have heard this piece but didn’t know the artist and I’ve never had either with you.” Her fingers are close to Maggie’s on the table. “All right?”

Maggie bites her tongue, nods. She strokes the beer label, sets her fingers flat on the table, feels them tapping. Their small plates come. They eat. She asks about Lena’s day. Lena tells her about the electronics tech head from Texas who keeps trying to grab her ass. Lena rolls her eyes, shakes her head. “It’s everywhere. Monsters. And I’m not willing to play grab ass to seal a deal. But I am willing to flatter him and tell him just how amazing his product is—“
“Is it true?”

“Yes. But it doesn’t mean I revel in it or that he isn’t one of the most grating men I’ve ever met. Luckily for me, having his ego fluffed is about as satisfying to him as putting his paws on me. We signed a contract today that will be lucrative for L-Corp. Now he can stay in Texas and we can keep our in-person interactions to a bare minimum.”

“So this is a celebration night for you too. Sort of?”

Lena smiles. “I hadn’t thought of it that way to be honest. I don’t do much celebrating. My plan was to go home, drink wine and watch the Great British Bake Off.”

“Until a storm named Maggie came along?”

“Do you call yourself that?”

She laughs. “Um, no. I don’t call myself that.”

“Ah. A woman of mystery.” Maggie doesn’t agree. “You were the last thing I expected to find when I left L-Corp tonight.” Maggie tenses. “Kara was my only friend before Alex. And… you know, as we’ve worked together I’ve started thinking of you as the same. Can I…” she frowns gently. You can. You can ask. Maggie can’t say the words. “Can I ask what made you pull away?”

Maggie brings the beer to her lips but it’s empty. She sets it down on the table. She could ask what she means but has no interest in playing games. “Um. A few things.” She pushes the hair back from her face. “We had a rocky start. A lot of that is on me.” I was jealous. “We’re working together… I’ve… we’ve had law enforcement contact—”

“Is that all?”

“That’s usually a lot.” You’re in love with Kara. Kara’s in love with you. This was supposed to be about Alex. I wasn’t supposed to do this with you. “I’m sorry if I’m overstepping or… assuming. But you don’t strike me as the kind to mix business with pleasure.” Lena’s gaze flicks to her wine and back to her. Her jaw is a little tighter, lips thinned. “It took me by surprise.” She meets her
eyes. “You took me by surprise.”

They walk to the car, their arms brushing, fingers glancing. They say nothing, dodging the rare scattered beer bottle and clumps of people lingering on the sidewalks. Maggie gets to the passenger door and opens it, once again extending a hand, once again reminding her of the off step on the incline.

Lena takes a seat and Maggie looks at her for a long moment before she shuts the door and moves to the driver’s side. She slides the keys into the ignition.

“You’re good?” Lena asks.

“Yeah.” She looks at her. “Do you want to call your Igor?” Lena responds with the faintest of frowns. “If you’re not sure or if you’d rather he take you back.”

There’s stillness. Finally she looks at her. “I’d rather make the drive with you.”

Maggie turns the ignition, feels the rumbling, realizes it’s her heart.

Her breath grows shorter as the minutes pass, as they zoom past the highway, past streetlights. She listens to Lena, following the turns she has her make, unable to remember, perhaps unwilling to remember.

They arrive at her building. Maggie grips the steering wheel, looks at the stretch of distance from the car to the well-lit entrance. “Thanks for seeing me tonight.” Lena looks back at her. “And um. Congratulations on the deal with that Texas asshole.” Lena bows her head, smiles. Waits. Seconds. Then she lifts the lock on the door, pulls on the handle. “Wait.”

Lena waits.
Maggie shakes her head. “Sorry. Goodnight.” Lena flips the lock and exits the vehicle. Maggie stares after her. A minute passes. She gets out of the car, calls out to her, breathes when Lena stops. “Look, I know we have these things going on with... these other people but I’ve really enjoyed spending time with you. Maybe all you want is a work colleague but I’ve come to consider you a friend, too. I like working with you and eating meals with you. And I liked kissing you.” She smiles helplessly. “I’ve wanted to kiss you.” The air is gone again. “And maybe I’m a crazy person for telling you all of that but I thought you should have all the facts. It’s easier to think when things are clear. If it’s something you want to think about.”

Lena’s eyes skim over her. She clasps her own hands, massaging her fingers. She exhales softly. Maggie stands awkwardly, unsure of what’s happening. Why she’s saying this to the woman Kara loves. Why the woman in love with Kara would kiss her. Why she isn’t talking to Alex instead. It’s hard to talk to Alex. Painful because of the way her heart strains. This is Lena Luthor. It’s different. They’re both committed to Kara. This is a friendship. A curious and unexpected friendship. “I’ve thought about it.”

“Just now?”

A wisp of smoke trails past her lips, breath, manifest. “No.” She looks up to the moon and then back at her. “I hope you don’t think I put together this collaborative in some vain attempt to seduce you.”

“I’d be flattered if you had.” She smiles. People don’t usually put effort into landing her. “That’d be one hell of a ruse.”

“People get certain ideas about me. Maybe my surname tells them all they need to know. I’m a high-powered executive. You should see the crap the tabloids run about me.” She sighs, her eyes drifting. “I waited to hear from you when you left that day. I waited.” She furrows her brow. “And when I didn’t hear from you I thought I misread the situation. You behaved as if nothing had changed. I’ve done that before when I’ve been... blindsided. I felt terrible for putting you in that position. And I wondered whether you felt I’d betrayed your trust. Professionally. Personally. I never meant to overstep.”

“You didn’t.” She says quickly, wishes she could control her outbursts. “Why did you kiss me?”

“I like you and you’re beautiful. I wanted to kiss you and I did,” she smiles ruefully. “It’s rare for me, but that’s all there was to it. I’ve always had to explain even simple things.”

“I’m sorry.” Maggie steps forward. Their fingertips touch. She lifts Lena’s hand, cold in the night,
warms it with her hands, breathes against her palm, presses a kiss to it.

Lena doesn't pull away. Her voice is thick. “What are you sorry for?”

“That I can't kiss you properly tonight.” She eases her thumb along her palm, studies the lines, wishing it were that easy to read a person's path. “I can't have all my kisses in the moonlight. I’ll think there’s something wrong with me.” Lena breathes. Curls her fingers. Maggie feels her pulse. Brushes her lips along her knuckles. Catches her gaze. “Raincheck?”

There’s a flicker of hesitation. “If you're not interested you can say—”

“Raincheck. Please.”

A tight nod. “Will it be weeks again?”

She shakes her head. She doesn’t think she can do weeks again.

X

Kara pulls back, swallowing hard. Alex stares at her, lips parted, cheeks flushed. Her heart is beating out of control. Like a caged bird. Kara stares at her eyelashes. Her eyes are darker than Maggie’s. That doesn’t seem right.

Kara puts a hand to her chest. Alex's heartbeat slams into her palm. I did that. Kara considers. Smiles. Alex isn’t breathing. Not properly. Kara palms her face. There’s a knock on the door. Alex bolts to her feet.

Kara stands. Frowns at the door. “It’s Maggie,” she says. She looks at Alex who has a hand to her lips.

“Why didn’t you tell me she was coming over?”

She’s surprised at the flash of anger in her voice. “I didn’t know.” It’s only eight. She steadies
herself, goes to the door. Maggie stands, hands in the pockets of her leather jacket. She looks so pretty. Kara considers kissing her. Can’t. Not in front of Alex.

Maggie regards her with a puzzled smile. “Can I come in?”

“I didn't know you were coming over.”

“Yeah. Sorry. I know I usually text.” Kara looks at her. “I guess we're not really at that drop in on each other stage, are we?”

Kara shifts. “I drop in on you. Um. It's not a good—” Alex brushes past them. Maggie and Alex's gaze skims. Their hearts jump. Both of their hearts. Alex looks anxious. Maggie looks no different than seconds ago. How often does she do that? How often does her heart reveal while her face hides everything? “Alex, stay.”

“No, I have some things at the DEO to take care of. Later.”

“Alex—” But she’s raced off down the hallway. She and Maggie watch after her. Kara sighs inwardly. “I wish you'd called.”

“I didn't mean to interrupt. Everything okay?”

“Yes.” It will be. She ushers Maggie in. Maggie shuts the door. “What's up?” She wishes Alex hadn't left. It went okay, she thinks. It might have gone better if Maggie hadn't arrived. They could have talked. She'd reassure her. Alex would feel better and then she'd feel better.

This was never part of the plan when she said they should open up their relationship, but if she can see Maggie and Lena, why not this? It's unconventional, but so is having an open relationship. She'll call her after Maggie goes. Or fly to her place and talk. She hasn't decided how the kiss with Alex makes her feel. Alex always smells nice. They all do. Their lips are different shapes, different smoothness. But she knows it's not the same. Not how Alex would kiss Maggie or Lena.

She watches Maggie walk, her smile sweet and almost bashful. She paces. Talks. What would Maggie think if she knew? Maybe it helps to know she’s an alien. The same way it helps Alex. Do Alex and Maggie talk that way? Do they share intimate personal truths? Alex loves Maggie so much. They must share some deep, emotional bond. But if that's true, why is Maggie with her and
not Alex? Maybe Alex thinks it’s deeper than it is. Maggie stops pacing.

“Lena and I kissed. Is that okay?”

They’re the first words she hears, the only ones that penetrate.

She’s fallen. She’s falling. Sunken through the floor. Blinks. Looks down. Her feet are solidly planted. She hasn't fallen. Maggie looks back at her. Kara touches a hand to her glasses. They're not there. Her hand drops to her side, empty, tingling. Everything is weightless. She considers weightlessness. Humans talk about the crushing weight of the world but she’s never felt that on Earth. What is weight? It keeps you grounded. Keeps you from floating away. Ten letter word for freed: untethered. She thinks about telling Maggie. She obsessed over that clue for weeks but despite her curiosity couldn’t bring herself to look at the answer.

“No, Lena and I kissed.” That’s the wrong thing to say. A weird thing to say. Anyway, she isn't sure it's entirely true. “That's great.” Maggie blinks. Kara goes to the table, inhales, picks up her glasses, exhales, slips them back on, inhales. “I didn't know…” any of it. You were close. You’d want to kiss. You said you were professionals. “Um. So… when did this happen?” The kiss. She can’t say the last.
Maggie stands, a little line between her eyebrows, hands in her jacket pockets. “I already said.” Kara looks back at her. “A few weeks ago.”

A few weeks ago. Before the exhibit. And she didn't know. And Lena didn't tell her. What else are they hiding from her? “How was it…?”

“Um.” That smile. Sweet and embarrassed. She’s rarely seen it. “Don’t you know?” Know what? What it is to kiss? To kiss Maggie? To kiss Lena? “It was…” she shakes her head. “Look, I guess I’m not sure what’s a go in all of this and what isn’t. I know you’ve spoken to her about it and I know you said we wouldn’t need to share what we did. I just…” she sighs and looks at her. “I just wanted to be sure I was doing this the right way. Needed to be sure before…” Before? She hasn’t spoken. “I guess before … anything happened again?”

Before anything happened again. It will happen again. Another nod. Fire's nothing to her. It can take her clothes but it won't burn her. But this heat is on the inside. Maybe this is something close to fire. It burns. She has to contain it. “It's fine,” the words sound normal. Habit.

“I screwed up and I hurt you with the Darla stuff. The Alex situation is complicated. I know that. You know that. But this isn’t complicated.” How can she say that? “Lena's in love with you. You're in love with her. I'm in love with you.” A sigh. “I know neither of us had this in mind.”

“Stop talking.” She massages her forehead, fingers digging. Maggie stops talking, flicks her gaze down. “I said it’s fine,” she gets her voice to steady, stripping away the ragged edges, “and it's fine. You and Lena… can do whatever you want. This is what we agreed to. Maybe it's not exactly what we said but it doesn’t change anything.” Smile. Smile. She smiles.

“You sure?”

“Yes, I'm sure.” She has kissed Lena third hand. Now twice. Should she tell her she kissed Alex? No. She can’t. Not yet. Maybe never. She never imagined Lena and Maggie kissing. She always imagined Alex and Maggie. Played with that image. Now there’s another visual to touch and shift, to command. Do they kiss in the same way? How many kisses have there been? Would Lena kiss her in the same way? Is Lena a better kisser than she is? Does Maggie prefer her? She can’t breathe.

“Kara, you look—”
“I don’t care what you do, okay?” Oh. She’s hurt her. It’s there, it’s there, and then gone. Hidden from her. But her heart beats so wildly. It might burst. Kara licks her lips. “That came out…” Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out. “I only mean … that when we said we’d do this… we said we wouldn’t talk about it.”

“You said that.”

“Okay. Maybe I said it. But… it’s okay. It’s okay. I don’t like…” sharing. She closes her eyes a moment. No. She can’t think that. She can’t mind sharing as soon as Lena’s involved. It’s different. It’s no different than what Lena has going on with Alex. But why add on another insignificant thing? Why kiss Maggie when she can kiss her? Maybe Lena doesn’t like her. Maybe she got it wrong. No. She’s not wrong. She loves Lena. Lena loves her. Maggie loves her. Maybe this is what Maggie meant when she said Alex is more complicated and this less so. Yes, that’s all. It’s nothing. It’s kissing. And if it’s more one day… then… it’ll be more but mean nothing more. She and Maggie never meant anything in the beginning.

“You don’t like…?”

“Um. Snapping at you.” She smiles. She has to hold on to it. “I’m happy you came by and I’m sorry if I made you feel as if it’s not okay to drop in.” Maggie doesn’t say anything. Kara goes to her, settles her hands beneath Maggie’s, not ready to take her hands yet, isn’t sure she can without shattering every bone in them. Maggie shifts her hands, taking careful hold of her wrists, sliding her arms around her waist, pulling close.

An embrace. Yes. Maggie rests her head against her shoulder. Kara breathes, feels Maggie’s breath, shallower than it should be. Feels her heart. Kara wraps her arms around her shoulders, threading her fingers in her hair. Is sometimes afraid of how careful she has to be to do something so simple. It’s okay. It’s okay. Her breathing is steady. Maggie’s breathing is becoming steady. It’s okay.

“You’d tell me if this wasn’t okay, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes. Yes. Of course. If it’s okay for me, it’s okay for you.”

Maggie exhales softly. Kara feels the warmth of her breath against her shoulder. “It’s not what you have.”
Kara nods. What she has? “Yeah.” But how did it happen? When did it happen? *Weeks ago.* “But it’s none of my business. I know and it’s okay. We don’t have to talk about it.” Maggie breathes against her. “Okay?”

“Yeah. Okay.”
Amalgam

A/N: hi everyone, i’m the new writer listed as co-author on this chapter. i wanted to say hi and explain why i’m here. the_diversionist and i have been plotting a lot of the stuff you’ve seen these past few chapters together, and a lot of what's to come. i’ve written some things behind the scenes, but for the first time, the_diversionist kindly offered to let me write a proper section. and because she knows me well, she suggested i tackle the very first scene from Lena's point of view. so when you get to that huge section between Kara and Lena, please don't go after the_diversionist if you disliked it, it's all my handiwork and you should take it up with me. oh, and i also handled Lena's side of the conversation with Maggie in the car, so if you find it problematic, well, you know who to blame. other than that, buckle up, it's going to be a wild ride! enjoy.

Diversionist: Her shit’s great.

X

Maggie clips the badge onto her belt, studies her reflection in the mirror. Smooths the lines along the blue button up shirt she wears before slipping into the business jacket. She frowns at the scar on her forehead, touches it and leaves for the day.

It has been three days since she’s seen Lena Luthor. They stood in the moonlight before Lena walked into her building. Only then did Maggie return to her car. Unnecessary, given what she’s already survived without her. Unnecessary when she has Supergirl as a guardian.

They haven’t spoken, called or texted. It’s as if their connection is on stasis. Kara said it’s okay. Kara insisted on picking up Chinese. An hour passed, but when she returned her mood was improved. They watched Funny Face, Kara rapt at attention, laughing and singing along, as if nothing at all had changed between them.

Maybe Kara and Lena are already sleeping together and Kara doesn’t want to share it. Maybe when Kara insisted on silence it was an act kindness. Kara knows her relationship with Lena has made her feel insecure. They won’t share details. It’s what Kara wants. Maybe Kara knows best.

Maggie arrives at the station, listens to the voicemails on her machine, looks through the three cases she has to follow up on today, the interviews that need to be conducted, the questions she’ll ask. She heads to the designated unmarked car. The skies stretch blue and bright. The car is already hot. She makes it to the apartment building left on the voicemail, left to follow up on details of a potential suspect for a kidnapping. She waits until a tenant is exiting to squeeze past. They must see the badge. They take one look at her and high tail it. She looks at them as they go, picks up
details, the tattoo on their neck, the scar across their forearm, the way their left leg limps, and the direction they go.

Up the stairs to apartment 4B. She knocks but there’s no answer. Another knock and the door opens. There’s no one there except a kid. Five if even. He looks up at her with big eyes. “Hi. Are your parents here?” He shakes his head. “Are you sure?” A nod. She stoops, looks at him. Alien. His eyes flicker. She sighs inwardly. “My name’s Maggie. What’s your name?” Toby, he says. “When was the last time you saw your parents?”

“The day before yesterday.”

“Have you been here alone since then?” A nod. “Can I come in?” He lets her in. Her heart hurts. She looks around cautiously. The space is neat and lived in but unnaturally empty. “When are your parents coming back?” A shrug. “Is there anyone taking care of you?”

“Mommy and Daddy aren’t here.”

“Is there any way to get a hold of them?” He shakes his head. “I can’t leave you here alone.” And now his family might be in it for endangering of child welfare. “Are you hungry?” A nod. “Why don’t I pick up a kid’s meal for you somewhere and we can head back to the station and figure out where your parents are? Does that sound okay?” He’s unsure. “Hey, listen,” she says quietly, “I know you’re an alien and that’s okay. I’m a detective with NCPD. I don’t want to hurt you. I just want to make sure your parents are okay and that you’re okay. What do you say?” He agrees and they go.

She picks him up a kid’s meal. She takes him back to the station and gets a few more questions answered while he eats and plays with the toy that came with the food. Eventually she calls child protective services. A case manager comes by and asks more questions, figures out a potential family friend for him to stay with. She gives him a toy cop badge for him to take, waves as she watches him go. She’s no further in the kidnapping case and now she might have another one to deal with. She takes more notes, considers the guy who left the apartment when she arrived. It’s 10:40 am and she hasn’t had coffee.

She’s back out on the streets. She drives. Rolls down the windows. She heads into a coffee shop and spots Lena. No, wrong. Not Lena. Her eyes are green, hair brown. Taller. From a distance… Distance is supposed to give clarity.

She leaves, coffee in hand. It’s scalding, burning her palm through the cardboard. She wants to see Lena. She should see Lena. She promised her a rain check and the skies are clear. The sun is
blazing. Kara must be having such a nice day.

She arrives at L-Corp, steps into the elevator. It climbs. She wants to see her. It’s been three days. She’ll see her. She’ll kiss her. She’ll ask about her day. She’ll see her face. She steps out onto the floor and the receptionist looks at her warily. Maggie doesn’t know this one’s name. Her heart begins to thud. “I’m here to see Ms. Luthor.”

“I’m sorry, she’s not seeing anyone right now.”

Maggie stares at her.

“She’s very busy and said she’s not to be interrupted.”

“Let her know Maggie Sawyer is here.”

“Sorry,” she grimaces, sorry-not-sorry, “I can’t.”

“I’m a detective.” She pulls back her jacket, shows her the badge. “I’m here on official business. I’m going in.” She moves away from the desk, hears the sounds of her steps. Sees the receptionist stand up and move to follow her but she’s already gripped the door handle and opened the door, striding in. Lena’s at the desk, writing. She looks up at her. Maggie freezes.

She’s bathed in light. Her lips are coral, her eyes bluer and paler than the horizon she drove to get here. She cocks her head, studies her, a quizzical smile on her lips. “Hello, Maggie.”

“I am so sorry, Ms. Luthor,” the receptionist pants, coming in behind her. “She barged in here like —” Maggie looks at her and the receptionist quiets. “Would you like me to call security?” A beat. “I’ve already pressed the button for security.”

Lena laughs. “Thank you, Annie, but I can take it from here. If you could close the door on your way out and cancel the security alarm, I’d appreciate it.” A gulp, a nod and the woman is gone. Lena’s eyes drop to the badge at her belt, on full display. Maggie goes cold. Not the best way to make her appearance, given the last time she was in this office with her.
Lena stands and regards her, moving around the desk and coming closer. Light falls like the a curtain behind her. She’s radiant. “Is there a problem?”

Maggie bridges the distance between them, takes Lena’s face in her hands and kisses her. Lena pulls her breath in. She’s surprised her. But then her lips soften, moving against her own, melding. Lena’s fingers graze along her neck until there’s no air.

They separate, eyes meeting, gathering their breath with as much dignity as they can muster. Maggie smiles, fingertips sliding away from Lena’s face and back to her side. “I know you’re busy but I wanted to see you.”

“No moonlight.”

Maggie bows her face, smiles. Despite the ac, she’s warm. “Are you having a good day?” Lena blinks, nods. “I’ll let you go. I know I shouldn’t drop in like this—”

“Wait.” She takes her arm delicately. Maggie stalls. “Can’t you stay?” Pressure builds in Maggie’s chest. “Another ten minutes?”


“Were you in the neighborhood for some work thing?”

“No. I went out for a coffee but I wanted to see you. I forgot it in the car,” she says. “It must be cold by now.”

Lena kisses her. Maggie closes her eyes and kisses her back, soft and slow. Her heart thrums. She listens to their breathing. To the ring of Lena’s telephone, ignored. She focuses on the warmth of her lips, the electricity of her tongue, the sensation of Lena’s fingers trailing along her hair.

Five minutes pass. She’s beginning to feel more lightheaded. Lena’s pulse races beneath her fingertips, gliding along her neck. Seven minutes pass. They separate for seconds, make a quick assessment. Maggie’s thumb touches Lena’s lower lip briefly before their lips come together again.
Ten. They break. Breathe. Smile. Stand. Lena walks with her to the door. They linger. “Thank you for coming by to see me.”

“Thank you for the ten extra minutes.”

X

The moonlight washes over Kara, the amber glow of the streetlight painting vertical stripes on the opposite wall. Her eyebrows are narrowed in concentration. Her eyes are stars, beautiful and far. Maggie looks up at the glisten of her lips. Kara keeps her hand between Maggie’s legs. Exhales, lifts her eyes.

Maggie starts to sit up.

“Wait,” Kara says.

Maggie waits. Kara’s hand has been between her legs for the past ten minutes. Still. “Hey.” Kara doesn’t look at her. She seems to be concentrating on some far off future. “We don’t have to do this. It’s okay.”

“I want to.” Her voice is small.

“Okay.”

“I broke a mug today.” Kara looks down at her, hair spilling past her shoulders, covering her breasts. She looks like a mermaid. Some John Waterhouse painting. “Alex gave it to me our first Christmas together. I didn’t really know what it meant. Human holidays. Or… Earth religions. It was white. The Christmas. And the mug. With this… sun drawn on it with a smiley face.” Maggie knows the mug. It had a small chip in the corner. She always thought it was a smiling sunflower. “She made it in some pottery class. She was embarrassed about it. Something about the glaze, but I loved it. I love that she made something for me. I loved her so much in that moment.” Her eyes are watering. “She was the first thing I loved on this planet. The first thing that made me feel again.”

Maggie pulls her hand away, draws her down beside her, turns on her side to face her.
“I don’t know how I could have been so careless. It was there one minute and then—I heard it. And when I heard it, it was so loud. And then it wasn’t a mug anymore. It was… pieces. It took all morning just to find them.” She closes her eyes, takes a shaky breath.

“Can you fix it?” Kara shakes her head. Maggie rubs her arm. “Alex will understand.”

“That’s not the point.”

Maggie nods. “Yeah. You’re right.” She’s not sure what is the point. That she lost something so special to her? That she was careless? “Were you thinking about something upsetting?” Kara shakes her head. “Accidents happen.”

Kara shakes her head. “I can’t allow accidents to happen, Maggie. I can’t.”

“Okay.” She touches a hand to her hip, keeps it there. Kara wipes at her eyes, exhaling small earthquakes. Sliding closer. “Maybe we should rest tonight.” Kara frowns. “Or if you need to relax, I can do that too.”

Kara meets her eyes. “Do you want to?”

“Yeah. I always want to. If I’m not too tired, I want to.”

“Are you too tired?”

“No.” She props herself on her elbow to look at her. “Are you?”

Somebody parks their car outside. Car doors slam. “No.” Kara trails her hand down her chest, the curves of her breasts, sliding to her thighs, between her legs again.

Maggie feels her fingers. She covers Kara’s hand with her own. “I’m not ready yet.” She was before. Before Kara went still. Before the silence became suffocating. Before she knew about the mug.
“I know.” She moves, hovering over her, a steadying hand on her rib cage. Maggie closes her eyes, bites her tongue, imagining her ribs as something flexible, rubbery, for a moment imagining the newtons of power contained in Kara’s fingertips. She swallows, her face flushing with pain.

“Everything okay?” Maggie nods. This is nothing. She tells herself it’s nothing. “Should I go down on you? I’m going to go down on you.”

“You don’t have to.”

“I want to. I want to try again.”


“Are you bored?”

“No. No,” she forces herself to sit up, feels another flash of pain. “No. I’m not bored.” Is she bruised? Are her ribs bruised? Cracked? Kara looks like a kicked puppy. “I’m fine. I’m sorry. I would love for you to go down on me. You’ve been a pillow princess long enough.”

Kara laughs. “What?” Maggie explains. “Oh, it’s on. You’re going to be the pillow princess. At least tonight, because I can’t give you up forever.” Maggie smiles wryly, leans back as she trails kisses down her body. She delves her fingers into Kara’s hair. Kara stops, looks at her. “Do you mind letting me concentrate?” Maggie shakes her head, hiding her surprise. She sounds as if she’s only offered her a glass of lemonade.

“No. Sorry.” She folds her arms, crossing her wrists above her forehead. Kara works. Maggie shifts her focus. She shifts her focus until the pain is forgotten and pleasure is all that’s left.

Maggie 5:15am: Do you remember a sun mug you made for Kara?
Alex tries to wake up. She doesn't know what Maggie's going on about. Then she does but doesn't
know why's Maggie texting her about it. She's sure the mug is ugly enough to qualify for a
museum of oddities.

Her head is pounding. She needs a drink. She drinks some water instead, resting against the kitchen
counter, hands in her hair. She should call out. She can't call out. Not for this. Everything is okay.
If she can convince herself, she can convince the others. Except maybe J’onn.

What if he already knows and hasn't told her? She practices breathing and grabs a garbage bag.
She throws the bottles into it. Clink clink clink. She'll throw them out before she gets to work.
Maybe leave them out for the homeless guy who collects bottles. No, then he'll make jokes. Maybe
he'll tell someone else in the building. She'll throw them in the dumpster at the park. What if
Maggie sees?

_Calm down. You don't have a problem. You don't have a girlfriend, but you don't have a problem._
She hasn’t slept in days. Kara is giving her space. Kara who teasingly parted her lips with her
tongue. The waves come again. Arousal. Disgust. Disappointment. Why did it have to feel that
way?

She leaves the bag and goes to the fridge. There's one beer left and she opens it, has a swig. Closes
her eyes and breathes. It took everything not to push against Kara. To not act out the nightmares
that wake her in the night.

_She's not really your sister._ But how true is that? She showers and dresses. She overslept. She can't
run today. She lies on the couch and remembers when Maggie would sit beside her, reading the
paper, looking through the police blotter amongst other things. _What are you smiling at, Danvers?
Alex hadn't known how to tell her she was just happy._

Forty minutes pass before she gets up, taking the phone from the counter before she leaves. Alex
calls her. It’s easier than texting. And she can hear her voice. Maybe for Maggie, it’s more
effortless to call.

“Danvers! Getting a late start in the day?”

“No,” she puts a hand to the wall, a steadying herself. “What do you want?”

“You called me.”
“You texted. The mug?” she leans into the wall and breathes. She could call out sick. She could crawl back into bed.

“Oh, yeah. Kara broke that mug you gave her for her first Earth Christmas? She's super upset about it.”

“Okay. It was ugly anyway.”

“It meant a lot to her. I thought you could. I don’t know. Make a new one.”

“I don't have a kiln, Maggie. I don't have clay…” her head is splitting, “I made that almost fifteen years ago. I don't have any of that… I'll—I’ll buy her a new mug.”

“That’s not the same. Maybe you can go to one of those art nights or one of those pottery workshops. Look, I know it’s a lot and I know it wouldn't be the same, but … I don't know. Maybe it’ll make her feel better. Can you think about it?” Alex sighs, tiredly. “You okay?”

“Yeah.” She massages her forehead. “Rough start, that's all.”

“I hope you're taking care of yourself.”

“Since when do you care?”

“Since always, Danvers. All right. I gotta go. Feel better.”

She's hung up before Alex can respond. Alex rests against the wall another few minutes before she turns, climbing up the stairs. She calls J’onn.

“Is there a reason you’re not in headquarters?”

“I’m sick. Sorry. I can’t make it.” She needs to throw up, maybe. There’s a dull hollow in her
stomach. Everything feels heavy, as if she’s being ground into the floor. She steps through the door into her empty apartment. Lena would tell her to drink water, as if she were a fucking child.

She drinks water, capping the bottle when it makes her feel more nauseous than before. She holds it to her forehead, letting the cool soothe her. Funny how cold can soothe and bite. Kill sometimes.

She pulls her jacket away and throws it carelessly, kicks off her boots, pulls off her shirt, takes off her jeans and climbs into bed. She realizes she hung up on J’onn. How far away does he have to be to read her mind? Don’t read my mind, J’onn. Please.

Kara broke the mug. It was an ugly mug. It stuck out of the cabinet amongst her lovely things. It’s sweet of Maggie to worry. Does she ever worry about her? She helped you against Cadmus when no one else would. Why is it so hard to remember the good things? Once the uncertainty creeps in, it’s so much easier to focus on what she doesn’t have. Kara’s always been the opposite. She has a better attitude. Maybe when your planet is taken, your grateful for existence.

She calls Lena. It goes to voicemail. Is she in a meeting? She probably breathes meetings. Negotiation. “Lena. It’s Alex.” She swallows. Her voice sounds funny. “I need to make Kara a mug. You know, like hand made to replace another one. I don’t know where to do that and you know everything about… that kind of thing. Can you let me know? I could google it, too.” Maybe after a nap. “Maybe you can find.” She hangs up and googles it, calls back and leaves a second voicemail. “I found a place.” She gives her the time and address. “Want to come with me? I’m guessing from the pictures on the website that I would strangle half of the women that show up to these things. I wouldn’t bother if it wasn’t for Kara. I think if we went together I might not want to blow my brains out. I’m… available so call me or text me to let me know.”

She sets the phone to the side and stares at the wrinkles in her pillow. Her fingers touch the blankets. Everything is blank. Quiet. Her breathing is unsteady. She negotiates waves of dizziness. Maybe she had too much last night. Maybe she should go for a run. She wishes she had someone to take care of her. She doesn’t want anyone to have to take care of her. Kara would be here in a heartbeat. She won’t ask. This is her own stupid fault.

She thinks back to the first time she and Maggie made love. They burst through the doorway. They kissed so hard it bruised. After so much gusto, she froze when they made it to the bed. She stood shirtless before Maggie, anxiety crippling her.

“If I read this wrong, you need to tell me, Danvers.”

“Vous didn’t.”
“Do you want to wait?”

“No. I want this. I’ve wanted this. I’m nervous.”

“I bet. But have you ever met a situation you couldn’t handle? You’ve got this. We’ll go slow, okay?”

They took their clothes off and slipped under the covers. The lights were low because she wasn’t feeling brave. Maggie trailed her hands over her, made sure she was okay. There was an instant when she met her eyes and looked afraid. Maggie, afraid. Alex kissed her. It heated up from there.

Her body was alive. Responsive. It was effortless and for once it felt she was giving herself to someone, rather than surrendering, rather than accepting that it would never feel right, that maybe she couldn’t enjoy something like this. That she never would. And that was okay because she had a greater purpose: work and Kara.

She came quickly. Maybe too quickly. It was so much greater than waiting long enough to pretend it had happened. Tapping a lover’s shoulder ‘okay’, nodding enthusiastically when asked if it was good. She just wanted it done. To know she tried. To know that she was ‘normal’.

As time passed, her nerves waned. She became an active and enthusiastic participant. It was fun pushing Maggie onto the bed. She came to love her too quickly. She was the first person in her life who wasn’t Kara that she came to love. She never told her. Not when she thought it. Not when Maggie trailed a hand down her face and looked at her like…

Alex moans. Climaxes. Her face is flushed. Her fingers withdraw, slick. She rests the back of her hand on her forehead and breathes. She’s still nauseous. What the fuck is wrong with you? She’s Kara’s girlfriend. She was her girlfriend first. How could Kara hide her like that? For half a year. Sometimes she doesn’t understand her at all. She thinks of Kara’s kiss and her fingers tighten. Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

She washes her hands and returns to the bed, despondent and tired, wondering if guilt will ever become second nature to her. Her phone is blinking. She looks at the message.

Ms. Luthor 8:22am: I’d hate for you to blow your brains out. Count me in. Fair warning, if you even think of throwing clay at me, I’ll kill you myself.
Alex smiles faintly and responds. *Thanks. Meet you tonight.*

Alex wonders how she can want to throw up and still get off. It seems improbable. The body working against itself in a way. When was the last time before today? Months ago with Lena. She wonders what Maggie's doing. She’s falling asleep when the phone rings.

She picks it up but remains on her side. “Hi, Kara. I'm fine.”

“You're missing work. You never miss work.”

“I’m a little tired.” *I had a little too much last night.* “Humans get tired.”

“You don't. Can I come over?”

“No. It's okay. I want to sleep.” She briefly imagines pulling Kara closer to her on the bed. Squashes the thought. “I'm going to go.”

“Okay. Feel better.”

“Yeah.” Neither one of them hangs up. “Hey, Kara.”

“Yes?”

“Don't come by, okay?”

“Yeah. Yes. Okay. I love you.”

“Love you, too.”
She ends the call and tries to sleep. She doesn’t sleep.

X

Maggie takes a breath and feels the gentle stab of pain into her lungs. She pops open the glove compartment and takes out a bottle of aspirin. She looks at it and throws it back in, shutting the door.

She pulls out her phone. It's 12:17pm.

The last text she received was from Lena at 11:49pm. *I'd like that.*

Maggie takes a breath and grimaces, having forgotten to be cautious with her breathing. She's fairly sure it isn't broken. If it is, there's nothing to be done about it. She'll have to wait for it to heal on its own. She's iced it. Some of the swelling has subsided.

She texts Lena. *I picked coffee up for us. Is this a good time?*

She looks through her notes from the last interview she did. Are there any questions she missed? She shifts, winces again and undoes the seatbelt. Her text notification goes off.

*I've just wrapped up. Come visit.*

Maggie takes another minute with the notes, sets them aside and takes the coffee holder with her, exiting the car and heading into L-Corp. Businessmen and women move past her like streams.

She takes the elevator up, following protocol, neglecting to use the card key Lena provided for the collaborative meeting. She gets to the receptionist.

“Ms. Luthor said to wave you right in.”

Maggie nods, opens the door, moves inside. Lena sits at a distance, lifts her head to look at her. It's been four days, separated by small flurries of texts.
She goes closer, lifting the coffee. She tends to do this, an offering for her presence, maybe an offering to have it. Lena moves towards her. “I got this from one of the nearby corner shops. Their pastries are too dry but the coffee is solid.”

“How thoughtful of you.”

She smiles. “I was just looking for an excuse.”

Lena places a hand on her elbow, the other on the coffee tray to steady it. For a moment Maggie thinks she’ll take it from her. Lena’s lips are pressed to her own the next. Maggie kisses her back, the muscles in her forearm starting to burn before they separate. Maggie licks her lips, swallows.

“Let me take these,” Lena carries them to the coffee table, sits.

Maggie joins her. “You a risk taker? What if I'd spilled them?”

“I wasn’t going to let that happen.” She touches the cups. “They’re still scalding.”

“That’s okay.”

They turn to each other, uncertain now that coffee balancing is no longer a distraction. The last time she left Lena's office she was unsure how long she should wait to return. Whether it would be all right for her to return. She anxiously wondered if she shouldn't have come at all. Later that evening, Lena texted her. *It was lovely seeing you today.*

She could breathe again until she couldn't. “I was thinking,” she starts, forcing herself to keep away from her some moments longer, “I shouldn't have barged in the way I did last time.”

Lena smiles faintly. “I didn't mind.”

That's a relief. “I didn't think it through. Your receptionist wouldn't let me in and I waved my badge around. I never do that. I guess I want you to know that and that I'm sorry … if it was
“We've been working together for months. I'm used to seeing you and your badge. And I've nothing to hide. I'm not worried about you coming to arrest me.” She touches her shoulder. “Okay?”

“Yeah.” She inches closer. Flashes back to that night at county, the alabaster skin, the blue inmate uniform. She wishes she'd believed her then. She wishes she hadn't put her through the experience. “Thank you for seeing me.”

Lena's hand cradles her neck, bringing their lips together. They kiss in the same way as last time, exploratory and slow. Is this how Lena kisses Kara? She shouldn’t think about Kara now. Lena's fingers thread through her hair, Maggie skims her thumb along Lena's ear, her jawline. Minutes pass before they separate, but how many Maggie can't say.

Lena touches the coffees. “I think they're cool enough to drink now.” She hands a cup to Maggie. “What’s the rest of your afternoon look like?”

Maggie tells her about some of the men being brought in for questioning in the homeless attacks. She tells her of plans to follow up with Toby and child protective services. His parents are still missing. “Pretty light, all things considered. What about you?”

“We've been working on creating prosthetics for children who've lost limbs during terrorist attacks in National City. We need to find a balance between the necessary alloys that will be cost effective for patients and their caretakers but flexible and quality enough to bear the L-Corp name.” A beat. “Have you ever walked through the children's wing at a hospital? The children are remarkable. And … sometimes their parents are there doing everything they can to hold it together. I can't imagine that kind of…” she lowers her eyes, thoughtfully, “strength. The little ones are another thing altogether. To think of the things people mope about when they haven't experienced the fraction of hurt these children have. They're so brave.”

“They are.” She thinks of little Kara, surviving the loss of her world, stranded on a different planet, living her best life. It's easy to love her. That kind of strength and character shows. “It's great that you're trying to help them. Hard to believe it's not all over the press.”

“The Luthor name and disabled children aren't exactly hot ticket items. I don't mind. I'd rather focus on the work. It's easier to do that when there aren’t ten mics in my face.”
“I’d rather focus on the work, too.”

“I’ve noticed. As to your earlier question, for once, I’ve got social plans. Alex has invited me to a pottery studio. She wants to make a mug for Kara. Maybe I’ll make her something, too. A vase. Might as well if I’ll be there.”

“That’s great,” she says. Alex never told her one way or another. She’s happy she’ll make Kara the mug. It’ll make Kara happy. The mug will. The vase will. Alex and Lena. “She’ll love that.” She gets to her feet and walks to the door. Lena goes with her. “Careful with the glazes. They’re. Well, you probably know.”

“What do you know?”

“I’ve forgotten a lot, actually. Except the way clay dries out your hands.” She thinks of art night with Emily, looks at her hands as if the dry crust of clay were still there. She bows her head, smiles up at her. “Have fun tonight. Both of you.”

“I will. This is nice, too.” She reaches back, straightening the collar of her shirt. Maggie lets her, drawing in the fragrance of her perfume. “What are your plans when the work day is finished?”

“Wait for some work emergency to ruin any plans I might have made.” Maybe she’ll ice her ribs. She and Kara haven’t made plans. They rarely do. That happened more in the beginning. They’d meet at the park or at Noonan’s. Now they seem content to let the tide take them where it may. Kara comes over late at night. Kara texts her to come over. Their plans are only plans for hours at a time. “There’s a Diane Arbus exhibition a few towns over. It’s a bit of a drive. I’ll see if I’m feeling up to it. I should,” she says more to herself. “I’ll kick myself if I don’t.”

“Should I lend you Jonathan if you’re not willing to make the drive yourself?”

Maggie smirks. “And leave you stranded at L-Corp all night? I’ll manage.” She wonders when Lena drives. She didn’t see anything on her record about operating under the influence when she was brought in. She has no criminal record. Not so much as a parking ticket. Does she work while Igor drives? Maybe she’s overthinking it. Lena looks contemplative but whatever her thought is, she holds on to it. “Thanks for offering. I’ll see you later?” Lena nods. Maggie lifts, pressing a kiss to her cheek.

X
Kara’s waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs. Seeing her recently always feels as if she’s slipped into frozen waters. Kara cocks her head as she moves closer. “You look nice,” Kara tells her.

Alex holds on to the banister at the bottom of the steps. “Thanks.” You too. “I told you not to come over.”

“I was worried.”

“I’m fine.”

“Where are you going?”

“I’m meeting Lena.” She doesn’t want to tell her why, it would defeat the purpose and Kara would tell her not to make a fuss. Kara dips her face thoughtfully. “Speaking of, when are you seeing her?”

“Why?”

“Because you opened up your relationship to date her and you’re not?”

“It’s complicated.”

“Yeah, it’s complicated. Open relationships are complicated.” She can imagine, anyway. She goes closer. Kara has her hands tucked into her thin, tweed jacket. “How was the DEO?”

“No problems. J’onn’s worried.”

“I’ll be in tomorrow.”

“Okay.”
She steps aside for Alex to get through. They walk outside. The night is warmer than she anticipated. Her stomach still hasn’t settled but three shots prior to leaving the apartment have her feeling steadier. “Do you and Maggie have plans?”

She shakes her head. “I think I’m going to fly around tonight. Clear my head.” Alex nods. “Should I come by later? Or will you…” She smiles, shakes her head.

Alex takes her arm. Kara stops. “You okay?” Kara smiles wider than before, her nod more determined. “What is it?”

“It’s nothing. Really. Please, have a fantastic time with Lena tonight. I know you will. But… Alex,” she tenses, “can you stop avoiding me? I want to be able to talk to you. About everything like we used to.” She turns her face away, sighs, rubs her temple. “Maybe that’s naïve.”

“It’s not. But things aren’t as simple as you want them to be. I need time to figure everything out. Don’t you?” There’s a little knot on Kara’s brow. “I have to go. I’ll visit you soon, okay?” Kara nods. She’s sad about something. Maybe the mug. She’s always been sensitive about seemingly small things. Alex wraps her arms around her. Kara hugs her back. Alex winces, unable to breathe until Kara lets go. “Be safe tonight.”

Kara nods and she’s gone.

Alex makes the drive to the pottery studio. Lena’s waiting for her outside. Her hair is loose. Alex strolls up to her. “Are you wearing jeans and a shirt?”

“Keep gawking.”

“I’m not even sure it’s you.”

“Should I run home and throw some Chanel on to sling clay?”

“I know you’re joking but that’s an easier visual for me.” Alex smiles at her. “You’re still beautiful.”
“Not as beautiful as you.”

Alex rolls her eyes, holds the door for her and they walk inside. Wine moms have camped out in a corner, in another corner there’s a collection of women who look over at them appreciatively. “Are they checking us out?” Is pottery a lesbian thing?

“They’re checking you out, yes.” They speak to an employee about their plans and are sent to their own corner. Alex looks around at the dabs of clay scattered everywhere. Lena pulls out a small roll of cloth from her overpriced canvas bag and starts lining up tools. “Oh, don’t look at me like that, this isn’t like that awful Hostel you made me watch.”

“I’m not convinced.” Lena squeezes her side. Alex looks at her and wishes she was in love with her. Could be in love with her. But even if she were, Lena’s in love with Kara, just like everyone else. “You have your own equipment? Don’t tell me you’re some pottery whiz.”

“I won’t tell you. I’m not. Anyway, it’s been a while.”

Alex makes a face. One of the instructors comes by and sets them up with clay. Lena tells her she knows how to work the equipment. “So you’re going to tutor me?”

“You could always join that group of lovely young ladies over there. I’m sure they’re eager to take you out for a spin.” Alex blushes, laughs, looks at Lena who’s smiling back at her. “Tell me about this mug.” She has what looks like a garrote but uses it to slice into the clay.

Alex won’t tell her how she’s used those before. She wrinkles her nose. “What’s there to tell? It’s a mug.” Lena stares. Alex sighs. “It’s this awful thing I made for her one Christmas as a gift. She was newly adopted then.” Lena’s gaze softens. “I didn’t know what to get her. I had pottery class as an elective and I thought ‘what the hell?’ It was a mug. A misshapen mug with a sun on it. The corner was cracked because I let it get too dry. I guess she broke it and is upset. Maggie asked me to make her another one.”

“Do you always do everything she tells you?”

“No. Jesus.”
“Sorry. That came out…” she looks away, eyes narrowed. Alex forces herself to let go of the bitterness, reaches out, closes her fingers around her arm, giving it a gentle squeeze and letting go. Some of the tension slips away from Lena. “I take it Kara doesn’t know you’re doing this.”

“I think it’s meant to be a pick-me-up. Speaking of.” She goes to get them drinks. “Those women are hammered,” she nods to one in the corner, practically falling off the stool.

“Maybe you should look to that other group. They keep watching you.”

“Do they?” She glances over. Some look away, others smile. She looks away, flustered. “I can’t imagine going to bed with someone new right now.” She thinks of Kara. They spent a lot of nights in bed when they were younger. It always felt scary and exhilarating. They’ve kissed once. And what did she do besides shake in response, her lips barely moving. She’s afraid to give in to that touch, afraid of what she might initiate, of what could be undone.

“Am I still considered new…?”

Alex smiles, taking the clay Lena hands her, making a face at how cold and sticky it is. Lena turns on the pottery wheel for her and Alex watches it spin. “If that’s your way of asking me to bed, not tonight.” Her fingers dig into the clay. “What the hell am I supposed to do with this?”

“Throw it on. And don’t forget to dip your hands in the water.” Alex does her best. The clay lands off center before it slides off entirely. “You’re awful at this.”

“It’s been like fourteen years.”

“Excuses, excuses.” She moves around her, pressing a hand to her back. “Scoot closer.” Alex does. “Closer. You want to almost have your legs wrapped around it.”

“Lena Luthor, what are you suggesting I do to this pottery wheel?”

Lena brings her lips to her ears. “You tell me.” She slides her arms under Alex and presses to her back. “Here, I’ll do it with you.” Alex feels her face heating. “You be Demi Moore and I’ll be Patrick Swayze. Though in this instance, I’ll be the one who actually knows what they’re doing.”
“Shouldn’t your shirt be off?”

Lena smiles. “Pay attention. Get your hands wet. And if you make a joke…”

“More threats of violence. Tsk. Tsk.”

“Here, I’ll throw the clay on. Let me guide your hands, all right?”

She reluctantly agrees. Their fingers slide together in the wet clay, steadying it and transforming it from a pile of nothing, until it begins to take shape. Eventually Alex pulls her hands back, feeling Lena against her back, breath on her neck, using her collection of pottery tools until what was a lump has transformed into a beautiful mug.

“See?” Lena smiles, “nothing to it.”

“Now it just needs a handle.”

Lena smashes her fist into it, reducing it to a lumpy U. Grins. “Your turn.”

“You monster.”

“Do you think she would have believed that one was from you? From the heart?”

“No,” she grumbles. Watches Lena sit beside her, smiles again. She has a long drink of wine, looks at the clay spinning sadly. “All right, you fucker.” They work, Alex fighting with her clay, watching it spiral into unnatural shapes and looking over to Lena turn her lump of clay into a vase, as if by magic. She has another few glasses of wine while Lena reduces what seem like perfect sculptures into nothing, over and over again, starting over. “Not good enough,” Alex asks. Lena only smiles over sheepishly. Sometimes Lena Luthor is adorable.

Another ten minutes pass. Lena glances at her. “I can’t tell if you’re being pensive over there or you’re ready to burn this place to the ground.”
“Why can’t it be both?” Alex mashes the clay again, wets her hands, but thinks this pile is ruined. She grabs a fresh stack of clay. “I miss Maggie.” Lena looks at her, fingers buried and molding the clay. She looks sad for her. Alex shakes her head. “Oh, God. Not like that. Not in a…” she laughs. Yes. In a real way. Coming home with her. Dinner together. “I mean the sex. Mostly the sex. The sex was awesome.” Lena looks behind her, checking whether others are listening before focusing on the clay. “And don’t get me wrong, with you it’s… good and fun and… I like it a lot. It’s comfortable and you’re beautiful. But with her it was…” Lena focuses on the clay. “It… was like an awakening.”

Nearly a minute passes in silence. “How so?”

“You know Maggie was…” Lena uses one of the tools to trim clay from the vase. “My first,” she says more quietly. “And yeah, I… came into all of this too late. Spent too much time with guys, just figuring it was never going to happen. And here comes Maggie Sawyer. I didn’t even know a person could come like that. I didn’t know I could come at all. Not… if it wasn’t just me.” Lena narrows her eyes gently on the wheel. Alex wonders if she’s imagining it. “Everything before then—and not just because I’m gay…but it was flat. I didn’t understand it. She touched me in ways… that I didn’t even know about myself. That I haven’t been able to find again. How do you get so good at something like that without going to school for it? Maybe she’s had a lot of girlfriends,” she muses. “And now she’s got another one.”

Lena says nothing.

“There was this one time. You just made me think of it. I’d hopped in the shower and then she was there. I was pressed to the wall, face first, you know? She was to my back, warm against me. And I was half in the shower stream and half out and I remember… the hot and the cold and her lips on my back, and her fingers just…” her eyes glaze over. “Fuck. I really miss that.” She looks over at Lena. The vase she’d been working on has wilted. “You screwed your vase up.”

X

It shouldn’t surprise her that Maggie picks up. Kara holds the phone lightly and walks the apartment. The day is gloomy, the skies stretching out in some smog blanket. She wonders what Maggie’s up to. The cheer in her voice is a sharp contrast against the day. “What are you doing?” Maggie asks.

“I was thinking about you.”
“You were?”

Is it an unexpected thing to hear? “I haven’t seen you in a few days and I wondered if everything was okay.” She waits for a response, some quick reassurance that doesn’t come. “Is everything okay?”

“Everything’s great.” She hears the slam of a car door, the key sliding into the ignition. Where is she? They don’t go to that cliff anymore. Maybe they should. “Are you okay?”

“I wanted to make sure things weren’t weird the other night. Maybe they were. But I wanted to be sure that it was okay that they were.”

“Yeah. You don’t have anything to worry about.”

That’s not true. Kara pulls a hand back through her hair and goes to stand on the balcony. “Can I come by later?”

Maggie turns the keys in the ignition. Kara hears the ac kick on. “Um. I was planning on going over some notes tonight. I have a guy to talk to in the morning. How about dinner? We can meet somewhere? Is there something you’re in the mood for?”

Kara massages her head. “I haven’t had much of an appetite.”

“Oh. Okay.” Surprise again. “Is there something going on?” Kara shakes her head. “I can stop by if I get some time tonight.”

“Yeah. Okay. I hope you can. I want to see you.”

“Me too.”

The call ends. Kara folds her arms on the balcony, staring out. She heads to the door when there’s a knock. Alex stands before her, a paper sack in hand. Kara doesn’t know if there’s alcohol in it. She won’t look. She’s just happy she’s here. She pulls her inside and wraps her arms around her, feeling the familiar tension. It still hasn’t gone away. They smile when they separate but Alex doesn’t
quite look at her. She goes to the kitchen island, paper bag in hand.

“I’m glad you came by,” Kara tells her.

“We saw each other this morning at the DEO.”

“But you came here.”

Alex nods tightly. “I have something for you.” She reaches into the bag and pulls out the mug. Kara stares at her, wanders closer, looks at it. The rim is uneven, folded inwards in some sections and outwards in others. It’s glazed in the same white and yellow of before. It’s the sun. When Alex gave it to her years ago, Eliza asked if the design was a fried egg. She thinks of that other mug exploding in her hand and doesn’t know what to say. “I know it’s ugly.”

“I love it.”

“I’m still awful at that stuff—”

“I love it.” Kara takes it from her gingerly, holds it, turns it over, her fingers skimming over the smooth and harder ripples of the glaze, where chunks of clay weren’t smoothed down.

“Maggie said you broke the other one.”

“You’re talking to her?”

“Not really.”

Kara sets the mug on the counter, looks at her. “Thank you.” For the past few days she’s been crying over that mug. She’ll be better with this one. More careful. “It was my favorite Earth thing. I know to you it was just an ugly mug but to me… it was…” She considers. “It was the first time I really felt I might be welcomed on Earth. That I could have someone. That I could belong.” Alex palms her face. Kara lifts her eyes and Alex lets the hand drop. “Don’t run away again.” Alex’s breathing is slow. “If you tell me you never want me to kiss you again, I promise I won’t.”
“Do you even want to kiss me, Kara? Isn’t this all too much? Maggie, Lena, me?”

“You're deflecting.”

Alex flexes her jaw, looking at the floor and back at her. “For the past few days I've been grappling with what to do with myself. You're my sister—”

“You're not. That's what Eliza said but we're not. You're family to me, Alex, but you are not my sister.”

Alex's chin quivers. “I don’t know if any of that makes me feel better.”

Kara steps closer. Kisses her. It isn’t the same as with Maggie. There’s a hungriness with her. With them. A mild desperation. Alex's lips barely flicker. She’s always wanted to be like Alex. Strong, beautiful, fashionable, sure. Alex who is brave enough to kiss Lena. Alex who is determined even when things seem impossible. Alex, who despite all the obstacles, all the unfairness that are thrown her way, is still kind.

Alex doesn’t touch her or bring her close. Was she this shy with Maggie? Is Alex a shy lover? Alex never spoke to her about those things. She was unhappy for years and somehow Kara never noticed.

Kara’s hands settle on her hips, pulling Alex to her, until their stomach’s touch. She feels a small charge, like a hum, but not electric, not like with Maggie, not like how she imagines it’d be with Lena.

The kiss winds down. She breathes. Alex breathes. Their eyes meet. “Kiss me back,” Kara says. Alex thins her lips, eyebrows narrowing. “You have always given up everything you’ve wanted for my sake. It’s not fair.”

“So you’re trying to make it up to me?”

She doesn’t know. “Kiss me back. Kiss me the way you want to kiss me. Kiss me the way you kiss Maggie.” Not how she kisses Lena. That isn’t as good. Not as earnest, she suspects, not if her heart
isn't in it. It’s important to be truthful.

“I’m afraid.”

“I’m not.”

Alex takes her face in her hands. Kisses her. A frail kiss, barely there at all. Heat gathers, Alex’s fingers tighten in her hair, as she is emboldened and their lips part. Kara follows her path, her tempo, but she can't match her pressure; it would kill her if she did and she already has to be so mindful. But she tries. She isn’t sure which one of them has let out a soft moan. Kara feels a spark inside, flinting to life, beginning to burn, however small and dim, for her. Maybe it’s curiosity. Maybe she's happy if Alex is happy.

And then there is air and Alex is away from her. Kara opens her eyes. Blinks. Alex has a hand over her mouth, breathes irregularly. Closes her eyes and swallows. Don’t pull away from me. But she sees it in her eyes. “Don’t ever kiss me again, Kara.”

She wants to argue but she promised. She flexes her jaw, fighting to keep quiet. Maybe it was wrong to do this. Maybe she hurt her instead of helped. “Yeah. Okay,” she says.

Later Maggie comes by. She has a postcard from some art show. Kara sets it aside on the kitchen island and hugs her. She wonders if this is the kind of thing she can say to Maggie. Maggie who seems to understand just about anything but also tenses when Kara’s arms are around her. “Can we sit tonight?” she asks and Kara thinks that if she were someone else, someone human, she wouldn’t have heard. Her voice is funny but she can’t pick out why.

They sit, Kara with her head on Maggie’s shoulder. “Do you want to talk about it?” Maggie asks.

“Every time I try to make things better I only make them worse.”

“I know the feeling.”

“I feel so powerless.” Maybe you should go to CatCo and try to get your job back, Alex said. Maybe being unemployed is... I don’t know. Affecting you. Maggie shifts carefully, wincing, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. She holds her and says nothing. Kara's grateful. What could she possibly say? “Did you ask Alex to make me another mug? You told her I broke it.”
“Sorry. Was that not okay?”

“It was sweet.” She turns, kisses her. Thinks it’s odd she’s kissed two women in the span of hours. Is that normal? Probably not. She touches a hand to Maggie’s thigh, to her hip, sliding up over her waist, ribs. Maggie bites into her lower lip, harder than she ever has before. Kara blinks, smiles. Maggie smiles too, her face flushed and intense. “Can we just sit tonight?” she asks again.

Is she thinking of Lena? Would she rather be doing this with Lena? Kara nods, disappointed.

X

Lena enters the long archway. Garlands of roses hang from the trellis, stretching as far as the eye can see. It’s too early, too cold for them to be in full bloom. Their fragrance isn’t overpowering yet and rays of light still filter through. She walks past a couple kissing under a flurry of yellow roses, taking a selfie as they do. It doesn’t turn out well. They do it again. She averts her eyes. The tunnel of roses is the shortest way to their happy place, as Kara calls it. It’s the first time she isn’t walking through it with her. It's different alone.

She finds her on their stone bench, hands tucked in her pockets, contemplating the dark waters. She looks up, smiles. Lena breathes more easily. She knew things were fine between them, and yet...

She takes a seat next to her, notices the two cups by her side. She gives Kara a questioning smile.

“I figured you might want a warm drink if we were going to sit there. It’s a bit chilly today.”

Lena nods. “Thank you. Which one is yours?”

“You decide.” Kara points at one cup. “This one is your usual, and this one is… something else. In case you want to shake things up.”

Lena grabs the second cup, earning herself an appreciative glance. Kara picks up the other cup. Jasmine tea most likely. Lena takes a sip from hers. Oh, heaven. She licks her lips.
“Italian?” she asks.

Kara shakes her head. “Turkish. Freshly ground. From a tiny café near my place. They don’t normally sell it on the go, but…”

“But for you, they do,” Lena smiles. “It’s really good.”

“I wrote a little something about their shop in for the magazine back when I was... gainfully employed.”

“Do you… what are your days like, now?”

“Maggie and Alex think it would be good for me to look for a job. You know, to keep busy, have structure? They’re right. But I’m— oh, see? One poked its nose out.”

Lena leans towards the surface of the pond, just in time to catch the outline of a golden koi swimming back into the depths. “Isn’t that a bit early?”

“No, they just... stretch their fins and go back to hibernate in the mud at the bottom. I’ve been researching their habits, and... well, you know, my blog? Nobody reads it, it’s just for me. But I’ve been writing little entries about them. Not fish in general, just our friends here. I recognize them, now. And about the birds in the greenhouse, and about... I guess, how living things are growing and changing around here. Like a photojournal with a few observations. I’ve been coming here a lot. Instead of looking for a job.” She shrugs, giving Lena an apologetic glance. “That must sound irresponsible to you. You work so hard. Everybody works so hard. Meanwhile, I’m unemployed and just… looking at tiny creatures and flowers.”

Lena studies her profile, her downcast eyes. She seems absent. “Observing nature is hardly a childish pursuit. But perhaps… childlike? Being able to stop and smell the roses, so to speak. If I wasn’t stuck in my office all day, you bet I’d be looking at rocks and chemicals reacting off of each other more often, and not to experiment. Just for my own enjoyment.” She takes a sip of coffee, suppresses a shiver when the liquid burns its way down even as the cold air around her is starting to redden her fingers. “If coming here or working on projects like this is what’s meaningful to you at the moment, maybe that’s what you need to find your bearings. As long as it’s a transition, not an escape.” Lena furrows her brow. “You know what, I take that back. Even if it’s an escape, so what? Not everything needs to be a step towards something else. Maybe you’ll end up writing the modern De Natura Rerum.” Kara smiles, still not looking at her, but Lena returns it anyway. “Or you won’t. And that’s fine. Why would looking at beautiful things and blogging about it not be enough? I’d love to follow this botanical journal of yours, if that’s okay.”
Kara nods. “It’s more than okay.”

She tilts her head backwards. Lena watches her take a deep breath and drink it all in, her cup of tea forgotten besides her. Lena doesn’t quite know what she’s done to earn the right to see that, to see Kara silent, Kara with her eyes closed, just breathing. She lets her eyes fall upon the still surface of the pond.

“So,” Kara says a while later. “What’s on your mind?”

*You are. Maggie is.* “I feel like we should talk about…” Lena swallows. “Maggie told you that we kissed.”

“Yes. Is that okay?”

“I’m sorry, is what okay?”

“That she told me. I mean, maybe you didn’t want me to know?”

“Why not?”

“Well,” Kara says tentatively, “It’s your privacy, you know? Her privacy, too.”

“Maybe,” Lena concedes. “And yes, you two are in a… an open relationship, is that right?” Kara nods. Lena wraps her hands around her cup, trying to ward off the chill. “But still, she’s your girlfriend, and I’m your friend. So, if you have something to say about it, the least I can do is listen.”

Kara looks at the water, playing with the lid of her untouched tea. “I’m not sure it’s fair, though. For me to say anything.”

“So you do have something to say?”
“I have thoughts about it. Feelings, even.” Kara looks over at her. “But there’s no need to worry. I promise. We’re good.”

“Oh, I know we are. But are you? That’s what I’m interested in.”

“And you know what I am interested in?” Kara asks her with a smile. There’s something light-hearted to it. Lena decides it’s genuine. It’s always genuine. “I’m interested in making sure you know that you can do whatever you want, with whoever you want. And that you shouldn’t, not for a second, think I would have a problem with that. With you doing what makes you…” She pauses. “What gives you joy.”

*Whatever you want, with whoever you want.* “Even if that involves two people who are close to you?”

Kara nods. “Yes, even then. They lucked out,” she adds with a hint of mischief. “You’re quite a catch.”

*What gives you joy.* Lena thinks of Maggie warming her hands in hers. Her eyes fall to the cup warming them now. The coffee that Kara got her. Not just any coffee. And the cups Maggie brought. Offerings and excuses. Warmth. How peculiar. She lets out an audible sigh, has to fight the urge to slap a hand over her mouth when it comes off as abysmally defeated. Glances at Kara. Her eyes are on her, attentive, not even curious. Just… there.

“Lena, you really are a catch, you know. They can tell, and so can I. Don’t let anyone tell you different, even yourself, okay?”

Lena tries to smile. “I guess my little hero will be here to remind me either way. Thanks, Kara.”

Kara straightens up. “I take my job very seriously. My real job as your hero, that is, not that other one I was fired from for gross incompetence.”

“Right,” Lena laughs, “because you followed my bad advice.”

“Well, I almost got you killed because I suggested you might want to visit your mom in jail. I think I win.”
Lena shakes her head, Kara’s playful smile softens.

“Come on,” Kara says, standing up. “Let’s walk around. You’re cold, I think. Oh, do you want to go to the greenhouse in the Conservatory? It’s warm there. They have a new carnivorous plant. It’s very underwhelming if you’re expecting some kind of monster, but I think it looks sweet. It has this big round head. I wanted to pet it. Gently, of course. I’m sure it could feel it, when someone cares, you know? But alas, it is forbidden.”

Kara’s earnestness is infectious. Lena picks up Kara’s tea, hands it to her. “Let’s go see it, then. You can introduce me.”

“Lena Luthor, queen of networking.”

Kara’s teasing has so little bite that Lena finds it difficult to even raise an eyebrow at her, nowadays. Her defense mechanisms have shut down around her, one after the other. There was nothing to defend herself from. She pulls her coat tighter. She should have brought a scarf. It was supposed to be warmer, today.

“You’re quiet,” Kara remarks as they make their way around the pond.

“A little,” Lena begins. She can’t find the words. “I wasn’t aware that I’d been bracing myself for… something.”

“With me?”

Lena nods. “Not for anger, but… disappointment. Hurt.”

“Come on,” Kara says, stopping to watch a snail make its way across a large leaf. “We’ve never disappointed or hurt each other so far. We’re not starting today.”

Lena smiles, leans down to observe the snail more closely. “I guess you wouldn’t have picked our happy place, otherwise.”
“Reading me like an open book.” Kara crouches. “Oh look, can you see its little antenna-eyes? I wonder how it sees us. Blurry giants? Something we can’t even imagine?”

“Probably the latter,” Lena surmises, looking at Kara carefully bridging the gap between two leaves with a third one to help the snail cross over safely. Once Kara seems satisfied with the snail’s progress, Lena holds out her hand to help her up. Kara’s eyes dart between her hand and her face. She stands on her own.

“Sorry,” she says sheepishly. “My hands are all dirty from the…”

Lena slips her own hand in her coat pocket. Clutches her phone. Shakes her head with a smile. “Clearly you didn’t need help, anyway.”

Kara lowers her eyes, seems to make a split-second decision and offers her arm to Lena. Lena isn’t sure. Is this a peace offering? For what? Why is she thinking this, why isn’t she saying it? It’s Kara. They talk.

“It’s been a while since we did that, and you just made it clear you didn’t want… I’m confused.”

Kara lets her arm fall to her side. “I know. I… My hands aren’t dirty, I’m just awkward and you surprised me. I should have told you right away. I apologize.”

“Apology accepted,” Lena says, letting her smile reach her eyes. “Can I ask what you mean, though? Why do you feel awkward?”

“I feel...” Kara pauses, deep in thought. She starts walking again, slowly. Lena follows. They step into the tunnel of roses. “I feel clumsy. I can’t explain it. I know it sounds strange, that’s why I was self-conscious about it. But it has nothing to do with you, I promise.”

Lena nods. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Kara smiles warmly. “Not right now. But thank you.”

“You’re welcome. You know what else was awkward?”
Kara shoots her a curious glance. “What?”

“On my way to our happy place? I walked past this couple, right here, trying to take a selfie of themselves kissing passionately under the roses. They were on their fifth attempt by the time they were out of earshot.”

“Why was it awkward?” Kara smiles. “They wanted a nice memory. In a few years, if they’re still together, they won’t remember all the failed attempts. Or they will, and it’ll make them laugh.”

Lena looks at her. “Your lack of cynicism is incredibly restful.”

Kara scrunches up her nose. “I’m no stranger to cynicism. It’s just… not worth it. Anyway, we could take our own selfie, if you want? Right here. One shot, no do-overs.” She shrugs. “We don’t have many pictures together.”

Lena’s heart slams against her ribcage. “You’re right, we don’t. Should we use my phone?”

Kara beams. “No, I’ll use mine.” She takes their cups and puts them on a flat stone. “Let’s see, can you stand… right there, under the white roses? Yes, like that. It’s just, the shafts of light are so lovely. Late afternoon, when the sun is low? That’s my favorite light. Not because of the golden hour or anything like that. It just reminds me of home. You know, before… anyway. Just a bit to the left… perfect. Don’t move. Where do you want me?”

Lena blinks. “Where do I… well, with me.”

“Oh, I meant, should I be standing next to you? Or behind? Or… I don’t know. I feel awkward again. I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t be, it’s fine. Just… you know what? Let’s go for simple. Do you need both hands to take the picture?” Kara shakes her head. “Then, come here. You do this,” she takes Kara’s arm and wraps it around her own shoulders, “and I’ll do that,” she slides her arm around Kara’s waist, pulling her a little closer and taking Kara’s free hand in hers. “Good?”

Kara doesn’t answer. “Ready? Remember, no do-overs, so make it count. Three…”
Lena looks at the screen.

“Two...”

No.

“One...”

Lena turns her head to look at Kara instead.

“Aaaand, that’s a wrap.”

Lena lets go, shivers in the sudden absence of Kara’s warmth.

“Oh, it’s lovely,” Kara murmurs, looking at her phone. “I’ll send it to you after I’ve edited it.”

“Doesn’t editing count as a do-over?

Kara gives it some thought. “I don’t think so. I mean, it’s a reproduction of the real thing, either way. So what’s more artificial? Leaving it as it is even though it didn’t really capture how soft the colors were, or the way the light fell on the flowers around you and framed your face? Or tweaking it until it comes closer to what I saw?”

“You’re the artist. I’ll take seeing what you saw over pretty much anything. Edit away.”

“I will honor your trust,” Kara says solemnly, a hand over her heart, before breaking into a smile. She pockets her phone and picks up their cups, then offers her arm again. “Shall we?”

Lena takes it. They walk in silence, exiting the tunnel and taking a turn towards the iconic glass Conservatory, almost translucent in the distance.
“Speaking of trust,” Lena says, her eyes skimming the endless carpets of tulips and daisies. “Do you think I should have told you? About the kiss. It felt strange seeing you afterward, knowing you didn’t know.”

“No, I don’t think you should have told me,” Kara answers immediately. “And I don’t think you could have, either,” she adds, anticipating Lena’s next question with a fond glance.

“Why not?”

“Because you can only tell me things that, one, you think I should know. Two, things you think Maggie would be comfortable with me knowing, since she’s involved. And three, things you think you should be the one telling me, not Maggie. I’m guessing what happened didn’t meet one of those criteria. And I trust your judgment, so.”

Lena scratches her nose. “You’ve given it a lot of thought, haven’t you?”

“Yes. So have you.”

“Touché.”

They walk for a while. Kara steers them away from the main alley. “A little detour,” she says with a faint smile. “The Kitchen Garden is so pretty this time of year.”

Lena sighs inwardly, shifting her cup from one hand to the other so she can cradle Kara’s arm with both of hers. She can’t take this for granted. That Kara wants to share all the beautiful things she comes across with her. She can’t fuck this up. She won’t fuck this up. Not with Kara, not with Kara’s girlfriend, not with Kara’s sister.

“I need your help with something.”

Kara turns away from the patch of yellow flowers she was examining. The wooden sign planted at their feet reads Jerusalem Artichokes. “Anything.”
“It’s about Alex,” Lena says hesitantly. She tries to find comfort in the sensation of Kara’s arm against hers. “She doesn't know. What do you think we should do? Maggie and I.”

“You want my advice?” Kara sounds genuinely surprised.

“What do you mean? I always want your advice, you know that.”

Kara shakes her head with a smile, pushing her glasses up her nose even though they’re already there. “I can’t get used to it. Nobody else asks me what I think about… anything important, really. Unless it affects me directly. And it’s fine, I mean… so, uh, the Alex situation. I’ve thought about that too.”

Lena squeezes her arm. “I know.”

“Well,” Kara says with renewed energy, “I applied the same method. You know, the criteria for when you should or shouldn’t tell others?” She holds up one finger. “Do I think she should know? Yes. She likes you and she likes-likes Maggie and has a history with her and she prefers things to be clear. Most things.” She holds up a second finger. “What you and Maggie are comfortable with her knowing, well, you tell me. Or, rather, you ask her. You ask Maggie.” A third finger. “Who should tell her? Debatable. She has a history with Maggie but she's currently seeing you more, and besides… if you tell her, you'll know what words to use so she doesn't feel too blindsided, and maybe that should be the priority. Making sure she is told in the least hurtful way. Because she'll be hurt. That it happened and that you didn't tell her sooner. Even though she's not dating either of you, not really. But if you're the one telling her, things might go over relatively well with you, because you know how to talk to her, but she’ll go off on Maggie later. It’ll be rough.” A fourth finger. “And maybe that should be your priority, instead? Making sure Alex doesn’t go off on her with a vengeance? Because she doesn’t deserve that. Maggie doesn’t. So if Maggie is the one telling her instead, I think... even if she did find the words, Alex wouldn't hear them. But at least she wouldn’t have time to calm down and then go off on Maggie in a cool rage. Those are worse. She’s like a bull in a china shop when she's angry. It's funny, she's the figurative bull in a china shop in our family, but I’m the literal one. I mean, just this morning? I tore my shower curtain in two when I stepped out of the tub and slipped—“

“Were you hurt?”

“Oh, no, I’m fine. My curtain, though.” Kara grimaces. “I need to get another one.”

“We could go get one later, if you want. I know just the store.”
Kara looks at her like she can’t believe she’s real. Lena doesn’t feel real. “You've got it down to a science, now. Turning my minor inconveniences into fun little moments.”

“Isn’t that what I do all day? Turn problems into… opportunities.”

“So, I'm your latest project?” Kara smiles. “I'm an interesting problem?”

“You’re my interesting solution.”

“Well done, Lena. Very smooth. How can anyone resist you? Oh wait, even my girlfriend can’t.”

“Aside from you three, I assure you pretty much everyone is impervious to my wiles. Especially my mother, so I’ll take what I can get.”

“Is she, though?” Kara remarks. “Sure, she wants something every time, but she does show up an awful lot.”

“Awful being the operative word. You have a point though, she's relentless when it comes to... trying to convert me. She cares. In the worst way.”

“Well,” Kara says lightly, “because I care in the best way, I should finish what I was saying before the elephant in a china shop derailed me.”

“Bull.”


“I'm guessing because, bull in a china shop, elephant in the room?”

“Makes sense.” Kara bites her lip thoughtfully. “Why would a bull in a china shop do more damage than an elephant, though? It's smaller. It wouldn't have any reason to be angry or scared. I
mean, it's a nice image, that saying, but I don't believe it.”

“I think it would have good reasons to be scared,” Lena objects. She loves going with Kara’s flow, her tangents. When they visit a museum together, Lena’s mind loosens its iron grip on itself, content to just follow Kara’s for a while. “It would think, why am I locked up in this strange place full of fragile things? It would be nervous, then start moving around worriedly, looking for an exit, and in the process it would knock things off, which would make some terrifying noises, and it would get scared and... chain reaction.”

“You're right. Poor bull. Poor shop, too.”

Lena gently bumps their shoulders together. “Let's return to our initial bull. Firecracker Alex.”

“Right. Where was I?”

“The part where no matter how delicately Maggie puts it, it might not go down well.”

“Yes. So, the only remaining option is, you tell her together. Which I do not recommend. Don’t corner an angry bull.”

They exit the Kitchen Garden and walk past the large fountain before the Conservatory. The water whispers in Lena’s ears. “Thank you. I mean it. You’ve given me a lot to think about.”

Kara looks at her. “Anytime. I’m glad you asked me. Now, let’s go inside before you catch a cold.”

“Let me throw that out,” Lena says, letting go of Kara’s arm to dump her empty cup into the recycle bin at the entrance.

Kara holds the heavy glass door open for her, follows her inside. “A little better?” she asks with a smile.

Lena closes her eyes with a nod, breathes in the slightly warmer, humid air. It smells like a forest. She remembers the nearby woods she could see from her window, back in boarding school. And
the lake beyond, the small hill she would climb to look at the surface from above, how light-headed she would get looking at this inverted sky. She opens her eyes, chuckles when she sees Kara has let her space out in peace and wandered towards the information board instead. She joins her. Kara points at something.

“They just reopened Waterlily House. It’s even warmer in there, and it’s so beautiful. There’s a little gazebo in the center of the pond with a few benches overlooking the water lilies. It would be nice to go and sit there for a while. You could warm up.”

“Lead the way.”

Kara takes them further into the Conservatory. Lena no longer recognizes the trees or the flowers. She looks up. The old glass dome allows the weak sunlight to inundate the place. Lena can’t help herself, she plays her little game. Perspective shifts and…

“Oh god, are you okay? Do you need to sit down?”

She looks down. Kara is very lightly holding her in place. “I’m all right. Sorry.”

Concern still dances in Kara’s eyes. “What happened?”

Lena bites the tip of her thumb, looks at an enormous flower, probably the size of a small car, to keep part of her brain busy. “Look up. At the dome.” She sees Kara comply in her peripheral vision. She hasn’t let go of her. “Now, focus on the center, and just… imagine it’s not up, it’s down.”

Half a minute passes. “Okay, I see it.”

“What do you feel?”

“Like…” Kara muses. “Like I’m in space. No gravity. Or underwater, and the bottom is very bright.” Lena carefully extricates herself from her weak grasp. Kara studies the dome for a few more seconds, then looks at her curiously. “Why? What do you feel?”
“Like I’m going to fall into it. Crash through it.”

Kara nods slowly. “So that’s why you tripped on nothing. Did you do it on purpose?”

“Yeah,” Lena says pensively. “Tempting the devil, you know?”

“It’s not just a fear of heights, then. Vertigo, too?”

“The whole package. I know it’s stupid to play with it, but…”

“Maybe,” Kara shrugs. “Not surprising, though. You’re a risk taker. And I know from experience that trying to dissuade you is a lost cause. But… from now on, you may only tempt the devil when I’m around to catch you. Just to even the odds. Deal?”

“Where’s the fun in that, if the devil doesn’t stand a chance? But all right. Deal.” They exchange a pointed look. “And I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to worry you. I just looked up and… felt the pull.”

Kara narrows her eyes, regards her. “Interesting.” It’s not often that Kara looks at her that way. Analytical. Lena remembers every single time. “You really aren’t getting your driver’s license any time soon, are you?”

“Not in this life. I’m not bitter, though,” Lena quips, “if that means I get to take the bus and walk everywhere with you. Come on. Let’s go see those water lilies.”

“Sure. It’s right around the corner if I remember correctly. Hey, do you want this?” Kara offers, handing Lena her cup.

Lena takes it. “But you haven’t touched it. Please don’t tell me that every time I’ve made us jasmine tea, you were just drinking it to be polite.”

“No, I love it. Alex says it tastes like hot water but that’s not true.”

“Well, what do you expect from a heathen?”
“Right? So, it’s not the tea, I’m just feeling a bit…” She pats her stomach, smiles bashfully. “I can’t drink anything right now. I was really nervous about today, too.”

They get to the stone steps leading to Waterlily House. Lena opens the door, lets Kara walk in and follows her into the greenhouse. Warmth engulfs her and she feels her muscles relax instantly. “Can I do anything to alleviate that? Maybe put your mind at rest when it comes to some of those... thoughts and feelings you opted not to share earlier?”

Kara nods, sticks her hands in her pockets. They make their way around the basin. There are only a couple of other people wandering the greenhouse, and no one in the gazebo. Kara dusts a few leaves off one end of the small bench and sits on the other, her eyes going straight to the water, the white and purple flowers, the lily pads floating on the still surface. Lena stands a while longer, looking at her. It’s strange. Kara’s strange. Lena likes strange. Lena feels strange. She takes a seat next to her.

“Aside from our happy place, Waterlily House is my favorite spot in the gardens,” Kara says, her tone almost monotonous, but her eyes very much alive when she turns towards Lena. “It’s calm. Small. Human-sized.”

“Did your parents have a garden?”

“In Midvale?”

Lena shakes her head. “Before.”

“No, we didn’t. What about you? Before the mansion, I mean.”

Lena sighs. “I don’t remember. I wish I could.”

“It’s both a blessing and a curse, though. To remember.”

Lena wants to take Kara’s hand, but it’s still tucked in her pocket. No. That’s the wrong but. The right one is, but she’s never taken Kara’s hand before. She realizes she’s never touched Kara’s skin, not really. Maybe her cheek against hers back when they used to hug more often. But she’s
kissed Kara’s girlfriend. She knows Maggie’s lips, now. She knows her hands, cupping her face. How odd.

“So. Thoughts and feelings?”

“Yes,” Kara hums. “Actually, it’s more like questions. But they sound intrusive even in my head, so…”

“Why don’t you let me decide for myself?”

“You’re right. I’ve been wondering… when you kissed, did you... Was it on the spur of the moment, or did you talk about it before?”

Lena leans against the back of the bench, takes a sip of tea. It’s lukewarm now, but good. “No, we didn’t talk about it before. I’d been thinking about it for a while, though. I tried to make sure she knew what was coming and had time to pull away if she didn’t want this. She didn’t pull away.”

Kara nods, eyes on the water again. “You kissed her.”

“Yes. And not because she made it clear she wanted to. She was very professional from the beginning. She didn’t pull away, and she doesn’t regret it, from what I can tell, but I initiated it.”

“Okay.”

Lena’s hands, after starting to warm up, are cold again. “Do you feel like I betrayed your trust?”

“No. Can I ask why you kissed her? Why you’d been thinking about it?”

Lena drinks some tea. “Because, she is… we started working together, and I came to see… maybe some of what you see in her. What you love about her. What made you want to have her in your life and be in hers. She works hard, she’s smart, she’s made a real effort to start over with me despite our rocky beginnings. And that means a lot. I don’t get many second chances. And that night, she was… I don’t know, I looked at her, and I wanted to be closer. Not just because she’s beautiful and attractive, I mean…” Lena licks her lips, runs a hand through her hair. She’s grateful
and worried Kara isn’t looking at her. “I wanted to kiss her, but I thought about you… then about what you said, that you were seeing other people. And I… well, I did it. I kissed her.”

Kara blinks, takes a long breath. She doesn’t seem upset. “All right. That’s all I wanted to know.” She gives Lena a small smile. “Thank you for answering. I know it’s really personal.”

“It’s personal for you, too.”

“No, Lena, you don’t owe me an explanation. And I wasn’t trying to get you to justify yourself. I was just trying to understand what kind of moment it was because I’m a little… when she told me, I felt… and really, it’s just an initial reaction that has nothing to do with how allowed… gosh, let me rephrase this: you two did nothing wrong, and Maggie told me even though she didn’t have to, but I still had kind of a… I felt blindsided. Not your fault, not her fault, and of course I didn’t tell her that because… well, that might have given her the wrong idea, you know? That I wasn’t okay with it. That I was just putting on a brave face, or something.”

“You didn’t tell her you felt blindsided, but you’re telling me? Why? I’m not blaming you, just… trying to understand, too.”

Kara shifts on the bench. “Because you’re my friend? And I hadn’t realized that maybe I needed to talk to someone about it. Someone who listens, who stays calm. Who makes me feel calm. But this time, you weren’t a neutral party, it was about your life, too, so… I’m sorry. Maybe I shouldn’t have told you either. Because I really am okay with it, it’s just… that’s how I reacted. Inside. But I promise, I’m not upset now, and I’m not worried about whatever comes next.”

“You’re not?”

Kara shakes her head. “I trust you. No matter what happens, I know you won’t hurt her. And you won’t hurt me.” There’s so much unbridled affection in those blue eyes of hers that Lena has to down half of her remaining tea. She almost spits it out when she feels Kara’s hand on hers. Her eyes flicker down, Kara withdraws her hand. “Sorry,” Kara says, “that was supposed to be comforting. I didn’t mean to startle you. Or weird you out.”

Lena thinks of Alex’s hands. Maggie’s hands. On her. They’re both used to handling guns, to punching sandbags, they spar, they fight for their life. They have calluses to show for it. Kara types, Kara takes notes, Kara paints and cooks. Kara has glasses and blogs about gardens. Her hands must be…
“You didn’t. I’m just not used to it.” She laughs helplessly. “I guess you’re not the only one feeling awkward. And my hands are cold and clammy so you really wouldn’t want to hold them right now.” She wipes them on her coat. “Because to tell you the truth…” She tells herself to get a grip. Ignores her own advice. “I’m kind of overwhelmed, and I don’t know what it is about you, but I can’t… you’re disarming.”

Lena can tell Kara is trying not to smile. “That’s sweet, Lena, but… relax. It’s just me.”

“Just you, right. Just Kara Danvers, my closest friend who’s done more for me than my family ever did. Whose sister I sleep with, whose girlfriend I’ve kissed. No big deal.”

This time, Kara breaks into a smile. “Come on, give me your hand. Let’s just be awkward together.”

Lena complies, lets out a disbelieving chuckle when Kara slips their hands inside her pocket with a mischievous glance. The lining is warm, silky soft. So is Kara’s skin. Lena feels young. In fact, she wishes she could tell her younger self, you will have this. A friend. Kind people in your life. One day. Right now.

“Kara.”

“Hm?”

“Please, never feel like you can’t tell me about something if you need to, or want to. Even if I’m not a neutral party. I’m always here for you. Friends first.”

“How does it go… bros before hoes?”

Lena snorts. “Sisters before misters, maybe?”

“Sure, but. Maggie’s not a guy, and you’re not my sister.”

“Fine, be like that. What do you propose?”
Kara touches her glasses with her free hand. “It’s kind of hard to find one when everyone involved is gay, or seeing women exclusively, or actual sisters for some of us.” She puffs her cheeks. “Even chicks before dicks doesn’t apply here. Alex taught me that one.”

Lena doesn’t realize her grip on her cup is loosening until its contents spill over her hand.

“Oh, careful! Did you burn your hand?”

“Room temperature tea is no match even for that infernally pale skin of mine.”

Kara blinks, looks down at the cup, then around. “It’s hot in here, right?”

“I’m not sure I follow,” Lena answers tentatively. “But yes, I’d say it’s pleasantly warm.

“Good. No burn. Nevermind. Here.”

Kara hands her a blue handkerchief. Lena takes it and wipes her hand. “Thank you. I’ll wash it and return it to you.”

“Oh, it’s fine,” Kara says with a dismissive wave of her hand. “It’s my favorite one. Keep it.”

Lena considers refusing, slips it in her own pocket instead. “So. Before I made a mess, you were saying?

“Chicks before dicks?”

“Accurate, but before that.”

Kara gives her a soft smile. “I’m just messing with you.”
“I never know.”

“Part of my charm? And I wasn’t saying anything interesting. Just, thank you. For being here.”

Lena almost asks if she means here in general, or right now, or… but it doesn’t matter. She nods, gently squeezes Kara’s hand. Kara smiles but doesn’t squeeze back, and Lena realizes there’s something unusual about the way Kara holds her hand. There’s no pressure. It’s so delicate. She wonders how Kara touches Maggie. Considers pushing the thought out of her mind. Decides not to. Kara must be so careful. So tender. Lena can’t fathom why Maggie would have any interest in kissing her when she has Kara to come home to. To make love to. Lena feels inadequate. Awkward. Let’s just be awkward together.

“Can you believe that…” Kara’s voice trails off. She seems lost in thought.

Lena waits. “That what?”

“As nice as this place is, can you believe that… we’ll never get to see the Hanging Gardens of Babylon?”

“That was… it sounded like the last line of a poem,” Lena smiles. Kara returns it briefly. “No, I’m serious. It could be the refrain. At the beginning or at the end of every stanza, We’ll never get to see the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. You should write it. Don’t give me that look, I’m not making fun of you.”

“I know. That’s what puzzles me.” Kara seems to be on the verge of saying something, closes her mouth. Seconds pass. “You know what? I might, actually. We could do it together? Classical poetry is tricky… and your bookshelves are full of it.”

“Kara Danvers and Lena Luthor writing poetry together. Alex will find it… endlessly entertaining.”

“Oh. We don’t have to if you think it’s… sappy. Or childish.”

Lena raises an eyebrow. “Oh no, we’re doing it. We’ll give her ten minutes to laugh to her heart’s content, then we’ll show her our elegiac masterpiece, and she’ll never make fun of this again.”
Kara shakes her head. “Can we keep it to ourselves? Something that’s just ours?”

Lena silently asks her heart to please, please calm down. She nods. “Just ours, then. So, what about the Gardens of Babylon?”

“I was just thinking… We don’t know their location. We don’t even know if they existed. The legend says— do you know it? The version about king Nebuchadnezzar II?”

Lena searches her memory. “He built the Hanging Gardens for his wife, right?”

“Yes,” Kara says softly. “Because she missed the green valleys and the rolling hills of her homeland.”

Lena hesitates, strokes the back of Kara’s hand. “It’s only one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The other six are still standing. Waiting for you.”

Kara smiles. “And other gardens. Have you ever been to Lahore?”

“In Pakistan? I haven’t.”

“I want to go, one day. See the Shalimar Gardens. I dream of it.”

“What are you waiting for? You don’t have a job, right now. Do something crazy, go. Nothing like the present.”

“Right,” Kara laughs. “Come with me? Let’s grab our passports, catch a flight tonight, and in twenty-four hours, we’ll be standing in the Shalimar Gardens, by the Aramgah, the Resting Place. Sounds like a plan?”

It occurs to Lena that if Kara wasn’t joking, if Kara didn’t have a wonderful girlfriend she should some day share this experience with instead of her, she would make it happen then and there.
“But,” Kara goes on with an exaggerated sigh, “You have a company to run. Besides, I’m not ready.”

“Not ready?”

“I want to prepare myself. I want to read about these places, learn everything I can. So when I finally see them, it feels like coming home, not somewhere new. And you know,” she adds, her enthusiasm so sincere Lena almost looks away, “if I could be there like this,” she snaps her fingers, ”I wouldn’t do it. I really wouldn’t. I want to take the long way, feel everything. See everything. I want to take my time. Or, learn to take my time.”

Lena nods. She thinks of Kara, so meticulous in the kitchen. “Is that why you’re cooking more and more these days?”

“I think so. Traveling, painting, cooking… If I could, I don’t know, magically speed through it? I wouldn’t. I love that it takes time.”

“Are you doing anything tonight?” Lena blurts out. Kara shakes her head. “Do you want to come over, after this? We can cook something together. Something way out of our league.”

Kara’s face lights up. Lena feels herself smile.

(Alex: You just got a text.
Lena: I didn’t hear. Oh, it’s Kara.
Alex: Oh, it’s Kara. And what does Kara want now?
Lena: Let’s see. She asks if I’d like to come over for dinner.
Alex: Dinner? As in, she’ll be cooking?
Lena: I think so, yes.
Alex: It was nice knowing you.
Lena: What do you mean?
Alex: Let’s say there’s a reason I have a strict takeout policy for movie night.
Lena: She must have improved, then, because I can vouch for her cooking.
Alex: No offense, but I’m pretty sure she could be serving you burned toast and you’d find it exquisite. Kara can do no wrong.

Lena: That’s unfair to your sister’s skills and my ability to occasionally remove my rose-tinted glasses.

Alex: They’re not rose-tinted glasses, Luthor. They’re horse blinders, at this point. Anyway, text her back. Make her day.

Lena: But you and I had plans.

Alex: Not anymore. My sister is anxiously waiting by her phone with an apron on and you can’t wait to try whatever bland thing she’s come up with. I swear, you’re already an old married couple.

“Are you with me?” Kara asks. She looks amused.

“Actually, I was with Alex.”

Kara cocks her head. “Oh? I’m sure she’s free today, do you want to—”

“No, just… cooking something together?”

“Cooking something together,” Kara repeats slowly, “reminded you of Alex? You and Alex cook? Or… I’m lost.”

“Sorry,” Lena laughs lightly. “I’m not making sense. One day, you invited me over for dinner, and she said we were like an old married couple. I don’t know why I just thought of that.”

She expects Kara to smile, but she frowns instead.

“She said that? To you?”

“Yes?”

Kara shakes her head. “Jesus,” she mutters. “She needs to cut it out.”
“She was only teasing. It’s fine.”

“I know you can handle her snark. But it bothers me, when it’s about us.”

Lena gathers her thoughts. “Because it’s unfair to Maggie? That Alex would compare us to a couple?”

“More like,” Kara pauses, looking for the right words. “Why does she always go there, you know? If we have lunch somewhere, she doesn’t care. But when you come over, suddenly it’s… I mean, so what if I like cooking for you? And doing things at your place or mine? We have a good time. Right?”

Lena suppresses a smile. “So what’s the problem? Don’t be mad at her. Our friendship keeps taking people by surprise. Let her make fun of us. She’s lonely.”

Kara nods. “Next time we cook dinner at mine, let’s invite her, okay?”

“Let’s. And Maggie?”

Kara makes a face. “I’d love to, but… I think Alex is going to be so mad at her. About what happened between you two. She shouldn’t, but… that’s how she is. I hope she calms down quickly, but with her, you never know.”

Lena nods. “If Maggie talks to her first? I’ll try to… smooth things over, later.”

“You would do that?”

“Of course.”

“You’re the best, you know that? You get her, you know what to say and how to say it… she doesn’t have many friends. I’m glad she has you. I’m glad we have you. All of us.”
Lena swallows. She can’t speak.

X

It’s another late night collaborative meeting. The conference room is once again stacked with binders, piles of notes, as they plot out their next steps. They sit next to one another, surprisingly focused. An hour passes until there’s nothing left to discuss. They set a date for their next meeting, what stakeholders might be in attendance.

Outside of Lena’s initial kiss to her cheek they’ve done nothing outside of the ordinary. Maggie’s fingers creep tentatively along her ribs. The swelling is going down. Maybe they were only bruised. They’re less tender today. “You okay?” Lena asks. Maggie nods. “Would it be terrible if we walked out together?”

She pretends to consider it. “I think I could let it slide this once.”

They gather their supplies. Maggie walks with Lena to her office to help put some of the files away. They avoid looking at each other until they’re out. They step into the elevator and the doors close. There’s no one else in the building. No music. Maggie listens to the whoosh of the floors passed. Work’s over now. Neither one has anywhere pressing to go. Maggie bites her tongue, breathes again when the elevator lets them out on the ground floor.

They exit. The moon is bright. She really wants to kiss her. She won’t kiss her. She spots Lena’s car in the distance. “Don’t you think it’d be more fun to take the steering wheel yourself?” Lena looks off to the car with her. “You can get into more trouble that way. Give Igor the night off.”

She scoffs. “I’d like my name to stay out of the papers. You’re never going to let that name go, are you?”

Maggie smirks. “Doubt it. We got a lot done tonight,” the smirk shifts into a smile. “And it went more smoothly than I was anticipating. Maybe that shouldn’t surprise me. We’ve gotten along for a few months now.”

“I’d say that’s putting it mildly.” There’s a teasing smile on her lips but no more commentary.

They stand another few minutes. Maggie shakes her head. “I’ll let you get to bed.” She kisses her
cheek, the corner of her mouth and they freeze, regaining themselves and breathing again.
“Goodnight.” Lena goes. She’s halfway to the car when Maggie calls out to her. “Hey, Luthor!”
She trots the steps to her, sees something sharp in her eyes, cutting, cut. Maggie studies it, the line
in her brow, how it smooths, how the eyes grow soft again. She’s briefly distracted. “Um.
Quickly.” She isn’t sure how quick, truthfully. “I wanted to talk to you about Danvers.” Her brow
furrows, she looks down at her hands, picks at her thumbnail. “Alex.” The name is foreign on her
tongue.

“What about her?”

Maggie doesn’t know how to start. “Okay. Quick version. So… Kara opened this thing up. I
agreed. It’s fine… You’re with Kara and I support that,” she says quickly, unable to fully look at
her, “but Kara had other ideas for me and for Danvers and…” She’s saying too much. Stops.
Regroups. “Alex is the only one who doesn’t know about this. She knows about you and Kara
but… she doesn’t know about me and. I asked Kara not to tell her because…” she draws a
breath. This all sounds insane when it’s said out loud. “Fuck. I really don’t want to hurt her.”

Lena looks away pensively. “Hm. There's a lot here. Do you mind if we go somewhere... No,
I guess everything's closed around here at this hour. Can we at least get in the car? I won't abduct
you and there's a privacy partition, so Jonathan will be safe from your... devastating wit.”

She’d smile if she weren’t so tense. "Yeah. Okay." They walk to the car. Lena opens the door for
her and Maggie gets in, slides further down. She’s never been inside this car. A luxury vehicle. Her
fingers trail over the soft seats. She looks to the glass divide. "Hey, Igor." She can't see what he
looks like. She looks at Lena. "He really can't hear?"

Lena gets in, shuts the door. “No. There's a camera for security reasons, and he can listen in if need
be but he's extremely professional, and I trust him personally. You have nothing to worry about.
And there are bottles of water in this compartment. Sorry, no champagne.”

"I don't want champagne." It seems a stupid thing to say. She's anxious again. "Should I start...?
Or..."

“No, it's fine. I wanted to get somewhere more... well, warmer, for a start. So.” She clears her
throat. “First things first, yes, I do spend a lot of time with Kara, we're close, and we have talked
about this. Recently. And she made it clear she had no problem with us doing, I quote, ‘whatever
we wanted.’ And on my end, I made sure she knew that I respect your relationship, and I'm in no
way trying to come between you two. And... what else...” She massages the back of her neck.
“Well, my friendship with Kara is safe, and so is your relationship with her, so... I don't know what
else to tell you. When it comes to Kara.”
Can Lena come between them? She’s been with them from the start. Lena and Kara have a friendship. Much like she and Lena have a friendship. Is that the word they default to when they’re not the main relationship? Friendship? She can’t get lost in it now. "Okay. Great. I need to talk about Alex.” Her muscles tighten. She looks at the glass partition and back to Lena. “I think she should know about us. Not that there's an 'us' 'us'. I mean... no more than there's a you and Alex...” Breathe. "I'm rambling. I just mean that I don't want her to find out about the two of us accidentally or too far down the line. She deserves more than that. I want her to know. I would... I would rather avoid hurting her as much as I can. Because Alex feels so strongly and deeply..." She stares at her helplessly. "And I'm sorry... I need to tell her and I hope that's okay with you. Or maybe it's not okay and you'd rather we not continue but. I can't see you and hide it from her. " She's hidden enough. "I can't pretend you're not in my life the way that you are. I don't want to pretend.”

Lena smiles, puts a hand on her shoulder, squeezes, pulls back. “Maggie, relax. I know what you want to talk about. You said as much outside the car, and I'm just trying to... address everything in order. Trust me?”

Maggie nods. Trust her, she says. As if it were easy. As if it were an easy thing for her. But she does, somehow.

“All right. So you said that Kara had other ideas about you and Alex? I can't call her Danvers, I'm sorry. Anyway, are you implying that Kara opened this... ‘this thing up,’ right? That she did that so that you and Alex could... I mean, was it part of it? Or the whole point?”

She draws a breath. Air stabs into her ribs. Her hand touches to them experimentally. She needs to get it together. “Part of it. But I didn't...” she stops, rubs her lips, licks them. Her mouth is dry. “You know why,” she says quietly, irritation creeping into her voice. “I wasn't ready for that. Maybe I've been distant with Danvers.” This isn't the point. Talking about this part isn't the point. She wipes her hands on her jeans. “Does that part matter?”They're past this, aren't they?

Lena leans back into her seat and looks out the window for a while. “You know... I feel like I'm missing something. Kara tells me you're in an open relationship, you and I start working together, I realize what a wonderful person you are, and I... I kiss you, because surely that's allowed in an open relationship? But you're caught by surprise, put some distance between us, then tell me you didn't mean to and you do want to see me, you come to my office, and we have... well, we have what, for me, were beautiful moments that brightened my day. Then tonight you say you want to talk about telling Alex, and I get that, but then you also tell me Kara had other ideas about you two? What am I supposed to think? I'm... going in blind, here. It's not like anyone told me what the rules were. I just know Kara is okay with us doing ‘whatever we want.’ So I'm just asking what you meant.”
This is more complicated than she intended. She’s quiet for too long, not knowing how to continue. This was meant to be about asking for permission to tell Alex. How has it spiraled this way? “I just want all the cards out on the table. Kara had ideas...” A beat. “The point is, I haven't felt comfortable pursuing them. And then you and I started working together and I'm sorry. I'm still not sure I know how this happened. I know I like you and...” I look forward to seeing you. “I don't want Alex to feel like...” She smiles nervously. “There are no rules. I only want to be honest. It never works when I'm not. And honesty is what you deserve. And what Alex deserves. Kara.” She looks down at her hands. “Is this too much?”

“Too much? No? Look, I'm not familiar with that kind of... arrangement. But from what I understand, the way an open relationship works is, people talk, right? We figure it out, we get to ask questions. There are no rules seems like... honestly, a recipe for disaster. Kara and I talked about it. We talked about, whether she was okay with me kissing you, whether that changed anything between us... and I walked out of that conversation feeling so much better about everything. So, why do I get the sense that you're upset, right now? I do want to talk about Alex. In fact, Kara was really helpful when I asked her about this. What she would do in my position. So why are things... so tense, right now? We're just talking. I like that we're talking. That's how it should be, isn't it?”

“And if I said to you that Kara has asked me not to talk about it?” A shake of her head. “Yes, the normal thing is to talk about it.” A hand to her mouth again. “Maybe it's different for you two. I just want to be fair.”

"Just to be clear, Kara has asked you not to talk about it to whom?"

Her jaw is tight. "With her." She says quietly. "She knows about the two of us and she doesn't want me to tell her anything else. I just think that... relationships— any kind,” she adds quickly, "are delicate. And I haven't always known that. But she doesn't want to talk about it. So I'm...” a sigh. She rubs her forehead, runs a hand through her hair. “I should have shut up and let you get into the car.”

“I don't think I'm betraying her trust by saying this, but when I saw her, I don't believe she intended to talk about it. She just wanted to tell me that she was all right with it. You and I. And I just... I felt relieved. I hadn't realized I was that concerned about what she might think, but I was. And I told her as much, and maybe this is what made her realize she also had... I mean, someone she cares about just kissed her girlfriend, and yes that was technically allowed, but she still... she was taken aback. And she really is fine with it, from what I can tell. But she wasn't fully aware that maybe she did need to talk about it, a little. And we did. So, you can talk as much or as little as you want with her, but with me? It's always an option, and one that I... prefer, actually. Because this is all pretty new. And I don't want... I wouldn't want you to disappear from my life because of a misunderstanding that could have been cleared up, or... I don't know.”
“You want to talk?” The smirk falters, becoming genuine. Lena doesn’t want her to disappear from her life because of a misunderstanding. Maybe she misspoke. But can breathe easier. “I like talking to you, too. About...” my day. Your day. “It's nice to be able to catch up.” She fiddles with her fingers. “People usually prefer me in the backseat but I can do both. Talk,” she says hurriedly. Grimaces. “That wasn't a come on.” It wasn't not a... she stops before she says something dumber. “Is it time Igor kicked me out?”

Lena shakes her head, smiles, grabs herself a bottle of water. She cracks it open, drinks. “Igor is too busy to worry about us.” Maggie smiles at the shared joke. “He's probably listening to... well, we share our playlists, so, I don't know. Could be anything from obscure trip hop to... anyway. I don't give an elevator pass to someone I don't want to talk to. I don't offer my car to someone I don't want to talk to. So, yes, I do want to catch up, and know what riveting cases you're currently on, and talk about anything we might feel... unsure about, when it comes to our current situation. And don't get me wrong, it's not the easiest thing for me either, but I think it's better, in the long run. So. Next item on the list was... Alex, I believe.”

Alex’s name brings the nerves back. “Right. I've said my piece.” A beat. “I know you and Alex are — not too different between what's going on with you and me. I want to tell her but I don't want to create problems between the two of you. I wanted to talk to you first and get your thoughts.”

“I appreciate that. Believe me. But...” She laughs faintly, “I was thinking the exact same thing. That it wasn't my place to tell Alex because, even though we care about each other, you're special to her in a different way. But I wasn't sure what to do, so I asked the person who knows her best. Kara. Considering what you told me, I'm guessing you didn't talk about it with her?”

Maggie shakes her head. No, she hasn’t talked to Kara. Kara who doesn’t want to talk.Kara who’s so insistent about Alex. Her eyes see nothing, focusing on the dark of the partition.

“So, we both agree that Alex should be told. I'm not leaving her in the dark and neither are you. But Kara had something interesting to say about how it might go when either of us does tell her. Do you want to know? Kara wouldn't mind me telling you.”

“Okay.” She can see their hazy reflection in the glass.

“Are you all right?”

She nods, unsure how Lena has advice about Alex, from Kara. Why doesn’t Kara ever talk to her?
“Maggie, look at me. If talking about that is upsetting, we can... postpone this. And yes, you brought it up, but it's fine to change your mind, all right? This is complicated, being upset is understandable. Or we can go somewhere else, if my car is too... I don't know. What I do know is, I'm not having this conversation unless I'm sure you're okay.”

She looks at her. Forces her gaze to stay. “I'm okay.” She smiles faintly. “What does Kara think?”

It’s strange to ask her girlfriend’s girlfriend for her girlfriend’s opinion.

“She thinks that... we have four options. Yes, she was that specific. Option one, we don't tell Alex. She was strongly against it. Option two, we tell her together. She seemed to think this would be the worst idea. Option three, I tell Alex. Alex is upset, but I'm just a good friend, and a Luthor, so obviously she can't afford too spectacular an outburst.” She smirks. “I give as good as I get, and she knows that. So it would go... relatively smoothly. But then, according to Kara, she wouldn't necessarily show the same restraint when it comes to you later on, because you two have a different history. Option four, you tell her, and no matter how diplomatic you are about it, things don't go well, but at least, somewhere at the back of her mind, she's grateful you came clean. That's it. Kara would make a decent consultant, I think.”

Kara and Lena are different together than they are. Kara giving advice. It always seems to be the other way when it’s the two of them. She thinks it over. “That was the plan. I tell her. She's going to be angry at Kara. This is my fault.” A breath, a hand to her ribs. “I'll talk to her. If you're okay with it. Ready for it. Maybe she won't think it's a big deal.” Maybe Kara’s wrong and Alex doesn’t feel anything for her.

“She'll be angry at all of us. Don't worry about Kara. Don't worry about me. Worry about yourself, what you want to tell her.”

“You're probably right.” She laughs. “I didn't think she'd break up with me last time.” A careless shrug. “Thanks for talking with me. I feel better.” At least she has consent and a plan, now.

“You do? I'm glad. Seeing you upset isn't... let's just talk more, all right? About all this. Whenever we need to. What you tell me stays between us, and I do think it helps to be able to work things out. And for what it's worth, I think Alex will be upset, but... you know what Kara called her? A bull in a china shop. She'll calm down. And she'll appreciate your honesty, deep down. Anyway, do you need a lift? You seem tired, I wouldn't want you to drive if... well, my car's at your disposal.”

The offer is surprising. The conversation. The evening. Lena Luthor. She isn't sure what to do with it. It feels a little overwhelming. It leaves her warm. “I don't know what to say. Thank you.” She
inclines her head at the door. “But I should get going. As much as I’d like to spend more time with you, leaving my car would make for an extra early morning.” She palms her face, feels her warmth, look at her for a few moments before letting her go. “I’ve kept you long enough.”

“You haven’t. I’m glad we talked.” She leans across the armrest, kisses her cheek. “See you soon? Or text me, or...” She shrugs. “Be careful, okay? It’s late and you’re exhausted.”

Maggie smiles. “I’ll text you when I fall into bed. Hopefully you’ll be sleeping by then.” She taps on the glass. “She’s all yours, Igor.” She looks at her for another few seconds before she gets out. “I’ll see you soon. On our coffee break.” She taps the hood of the car. “Goodnight.”

x

Alex has never been to this distillery or any distillery. She’s familiar with bars, pool halls and clubs. Edison lightbulbs hang from the ceiling, coils aglow, spilling gold over the antique, stained wooden tables. Barrels of whiskey and ale are stacked against brick walls. She spots Maggie sitting in the distance in a plush, leather chair. Kara’s not with her. Maggie looks anxious, fingers twined.

Their eyes meet and Maggie smiles, getting to her feet.

Alex’s heart tugs nervously. Maggie texted, suggesting they meet here. It took her too long to pick an outfit. She curled her hair, wore perfume. It’s stupid, it’s wrong, but she did it. What does it matter if Maggie thinks she’s attractive?

“Danvers!” Maggie moves around the table in front of her, a massive aged barrel with a tablecloth on it, a candle in the middle. “Hey. I’m glad you made it,” she looks around and Alex looks with her, exposed brick, thin brass pipes running along the ceilings and walls, give the space a steampunk vibe. “This place didn’t look as dark in the pictures.”

“First time here?”

“Yeah.” Maggie shuffles and Alex wonders if she wants to hug her, shake her hand. They hug quickly. Alex thinks of Kara, who’s able to hold Maggie in her arms as long as she likes. Does she appreciate it? Maggie smells nice, looks at her when they separate. “Thought we could do with a new place that might be more along our scene. Instead of the usual, you know?”

“It’s great.”
“That’s good. I’ll get us drinks. They have small plates if you want to split something?” Alex nods and she watches her go, feeling herself grow more nervous. If she can make it through this evening without having a mental breakdown it’ll be an accomplishment. Getting off to Maggie, kissing Kara, rambling about sex with Maggie to Lena. What the hell has she been doing? And now she’s closed the door on whatever it was Kara was trying to give her. Out of what? Pity? Obligation? It felt good kissing her. Too bad the guilt dampens it. Too bad, she’s fairly sure, Kara never wanted it. Too bad she’s with Maggie. Too bad everything.

Maggie returns with drinks, a menu tucked between her fingers. She sets the whiskey in front of her before sitting. The candlelight loves her face. Alex loves her face. Maggie adjusts the candle, pushing it away from the center, to the side, frowning before returning it to where it was. She looks back at her and smiles. “Here, tell me what sounds good. We can order a few plates.”

They order wings, beer braised pork belly bites, baja fish tacos. Maggie passes the menu to the waiter when he comes to take their order. Alex stares at her profile. Wants to kiss her. Would Kara be angry if she kissed her? Would Maggie? Maggie turns her attention back to her. She picks up the glass of whiskey, meets Alex’s eyes, drinks.

Alex drinks too fast. The whiskey burns a path down her stomach. She bites the inside of her lip, savoring the taste. “That’s good.” She’ll be having another.

“She frowns, sets her glass down and looks back at her. People fawn over blue eyes, green eyes, but Alex likes Maggie’s. Brown, warm, grounding. “So, give me the scoop. How’s the DEO treating you? All the rest of it.”

Alex tells her about work. She doesn’t tell her about the day she called out. How she misses her. How she’s touched herself. How she’s afraid J’onn will see into her mind. She doesn’t tell her she had two glasses of wine before coming here. “I did make Kara that coffee mug like you suggested. Lena came with me.” Maggie smiles faintly. “Did Kara show you? One of the ugliest things I’ve ever seen.”

“It looks great. Best of all, Kara loves it.” She scratches her forehead and Alex sees the scar again. Jesus, how did she let it happen? How did she let it scar? Kara was right. She shouldn’t have let her come with her to fight Cadmus, to get her dad back. What if she hadn’t been angry? What if she’d been calm when she’d stitched her up? What if she hadn’t forgotten the analgesic? Would things be different? “I know asking you to make the mug came out of the blue but thanks for indulging me.”

“I can’t say no to Kara.” She finishes her drink. Maggie holds hers, nursing it. “How are things between you?”
“Good.”

Maggie smiles and Alex wonders if she imagines the melancholy in it. “I was surprised to hear from you.” Maggie’s shoulders straighten. “I thought you were going out of your way to avoid me. I thought… I don’t know. I’d done something or…” Maggie shakes her head, eyes narrowed in consideration. “I’m surprised you didn’t invite Kara. Did you invite Kara?”

“No. I wanted to speak to you on my own. Does she have to be here?”

“No,” she says quickly. Her heart beats faster.

“And for the record…” she stops, twines her fingers. The server comes by with their plates. They thank him. Maggie orders waters, another glass of whiskey for Alex.

“For the record?”

“Let’s eat first,” Maggie says. They eat. Drink. Talk about the more recent alien scandals in National City. They laugh. Maggie wipes her fingers on the cloth napkins. Her movements are surprisingly delicate. “What’d you think?” She asks about the food.

“Um, like an explosion in my mouth? I’m going to come back here. Maybe I’ll bring Lena. Think she’s ever had a chicken wing in her life? I can’t even imagine her holding one.”

Maggie laughs. “Um. I don’t know if she has. Wouldn’t be the craziest thing in the world, right?” Her eyes are light, off in memory. Alex looks at the scar on her forehead, back at her face. Maggie soars.


“Um.” Her brow furrows, fingers to her lips. Alex’s stomach knots. It’s something big. Good or bad but it’s big. She looked this way before she kissed her. She looked this way before she told her about Kara. Alex picks up the whiskey glass and has another drink, letting herself go warm. “Sort of.” She laces her fingers, unlaces them again. “I know we haven’t spoken in a while. I’ve had a lot on my mind and I guess—I’ve been doing my best to keep you removed from… all the
“Complications?” She thinks of open heart surgery.

“Kara told you what’s going on with us, hasn’t she? About our relationship?”

“That she wants to see Lena? Sure. You’re really okay with that?”

Maggie massages her forehead, purses her lips. “Um. Yes. I am. Really.”

Alex doesn’t believe her. “You’re tense.”

Eventually Maggie sets her glass down. “I don’t know how to say this so I’m just going to say it.” She takes a breath. Stops.

“Whatever it is, it’s okay.”

She wipes her hands on her jeans. “Okay. Um.” A nod. “So… Kara … Kara’s with Lena.” What? “And…”

Alex reaches out. Is she upset because she thinks Kara’s with Lena? She takes Maggie’s hand. It’s like ice. Maggie looks at her, panicked. “It’s okay.”

“No. Stop.” She pulls her hand back. “Don’t be nice to me right now, okay?”

She’s dazed. “Okay.”

“I need to say this and I need to say it before I chicken out.” Alex stays quiet. “So… Kara … wanted to be with Lena. And…” she stops. Breathes out again. “You and I have a history. And things are complicated between us. And… you’re so important to me, Alex. I want you to know that.”
Her breath is short. “Okay. You’re important to me, too.”

Her smile is a grimace. “It’s been months since Kara opened things. I… asked her not to tell you that when she did that, it also meant me. That things are open for me.”

All this time Maggie has been able to see other people? She’s been driving herself crazy with guilt. “You didn’t want her to tell me?”

“I asked her not to. Over and over again I asked her not to. I didn’t want you to know.” Alex tries to control her breathing. “Because… things didn’t end well between us. And… there’s been this… tension… this… intensity and. I’m sorry, I couldn’t handle it. There’s Kara. I’m with Kara. She’s my girlfriend. And that’s so big. And sometimes consuming.”

“I’m not sure why you’re telling me this.”

She puts a hand out, maybe to reach out to her—to stop her words. “I’m getting to that.” Another bout of silence. “I’ve been working a lot. And. Lena and I have been working on this collaborative for National City. It’s for… it doesn’t matter what it’s for. Not right now. Anyway… we’ve been working together…”

“Why are you talking about Lena?” The words are no sooner out of her mouth than the heat drains from her. She looks at Maggie. Tense. Pale. Her stomach sinks. “Oh, you’re kidding me.” Maggie is quiet. “You have got to be fucking kidding me.” Alex stares at the glass of water. She wants to hurl it into Maggie’s face. She wants to puke. Her face is burning. She wants to cry. “Is that why you brought me here?”

“I needed to tell you.”

“You fucking asshole…!” She stands quickly, her knee slamming into the barrel table, spilling the drinks. The glasses roll off, to the floor. She goes, moving in a fugue. The patrons turn to look at them. She hears Maggie calling out to her but keeps going. She can’t breathe. How is this happening? How does this keep happening? She’s paralyzed outside, unsure of what direction to go in. She moves. She doesn’t know how long passes. She keeps walking. She hears her but doesn’t stop.

Maggie catches up. “Alex, wait. Wait, please—”
“Fuck you.”

“It’s not—” she picks up her pace, moving to stand in front of her, putting her hands up, Alex glares, moves around her. Maggie clutches her side, lets her arm drop. “Please, can you please—just slow down?” Maggie’s shirt is wet, her pants. Did the drinks fall on her? Good. “Can I please explain?”

“What’s there to explain, Maggie? That you’d rather date the woman you thought was a criminal than be with me? That you’d rather date the woman your girlfriend is in love with?”

“It’s not like that. We’re not dating.”

“You’re just fucking.”

“No. No, we’re not doing that either.”

“Give me a break!”

“I swear—”

“Why should I believe you?” She explodes. “How can I believe you? For months you’ve been in an open relationship and you’ve avoided me to spend all your time with Lena?” Lena who she told about what Maggie was like in bed? Is that why she was so quiet? Everything’s spinning. “Do you have any idea how shitty that makes me feel?”

“That wasn’t my intention. I’m sorry.”

“No, you’re not.”

“I am.”

“No, you’re not! If you were really sorry you wouldn’t have done this. You would have broken it off with her. If you were—you would have told me about this long ago, you would have—you
would have told me about your open relationship…! You wouldn’t have kept me away. You wouldn’t have picked the woman you hate, the woman Kara’s in love with, the woman I’m sleeping with to get involved with! Do you go out of your way to choose the people that will hurt me the most?” There’s no air in her lungs; her voice is wispy. “First Kara, whoever the hell you cheated on Kara with, and now Lena? How could you? How are you this cruel? Do you hate me that much?”

“I don’t hate you.” Her words are strained. “I never wanted to hurt you. I didn’t tell you because…”

“You’re a coward.”

She blinks her eyes. “Maybe. But that’s not all of it. Lena and Kara are in love, Alex. It’s not…it’s…” she stammers. “It’s not like that. It… just happened. It’s…it’s kisses—”

“Oh, fuck off! Don’t lie to me! ‘It just happened’? Things don’t ‘just’ happen! Kisses? I slept with Lena the first time we went out together. And it didn’t take you long to get me into bed. Kara into bed.” Maggie’s eyes cloud over. “How stupid do you think I am?”

“I don’t think you’re stupid, Alex, but you’re wrong.” Alex glares, looks away, wipes her eyes. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. It wasn’t… this is new. Lena and I are new. It’s no different than what you have with her… It’s…” she flounders. “Alex, listen to me. Look at me.” She doesn’t. She stares out at the lights in the distance, blinking into darkness. “I know the kind of woman you are. I know the kind of relationship you deserve.”

“Is that a joke? Have you forgotten how we ended things last time? What do you know about relationships? You’re letting Kara go off with someone else because you don’t want to lose her. You’re in an ‘open relationship’. That’s healthy to you?”

Her profile is stark, eyes watery. “I know you’re angry. You’re right, I didn’t tell you about the open relationship because you don’t strike me as a woman who is willing to share. And you deserve more than half measures. You deserve everything. I’m with Kara. I can’t give you everything. Lena’s a friend and I thought we should get along because she’s going to be in my life whether I like it or not.”

“So that’s getting along to you.”
“She’s in love with Kara. It’s simple.”

“Then why do you need it?”

“I don’t need it.”

“Then end it.” Maggie says nothing. Alex laughs bitterly. “And in all of this… the fact that I… that Lena and I… did that factor for you? Did you even care?” Maggie doesn’t say anything. “Don’t pretend you’ve done this for me. Does Kara know?”

Maggie looks to the stars, to the traffic, to her. “She knows. It’s fine.”

“It’s ‘fine’? What’s wrong with you? With the both of you?” She walks away from her, unsteady. “Stay away from me, Maggie.”

“Alex—”

She turns around. “You know what I don’t get? Why of all people in National City, I had to fall in love with someone like you.”

X

Kara picks up the phone. “Maggie.” Her voice is off. “What’s wrong?”

“I just talked to Alex. About everything.”

Oh. Kara closes the refrigerator door. “Are you okay?” She doesn’t sound okay. “Should I come over? Where are you?”

“Walking.” She takes a breath. “Kara, she’s so upset.”
“It will be okay.”

“I don’t know.” Her voice shakes. “I just wanted you to know in case she talks to you.” Kara hears stomping on the stairs. She looks past the door, to the floor below and sees her, recognizes her heartbeat, rampaging. “Maybe I didn’t say it in the right way.” The words run like a brook. Kara doesn’t know if there was a right way. Alex is getting closer. “She hates me.”

“No, she doesn’t.” She hears Maggie’s watery sigh. There’s a pounding on her door.

“What’s that?”

“Nothing. Alex, I think.” The pounding comes again. “I’ll talk to her. Thank you for telling me.”

“I’m sorry.”

Kara shakes her head. “Don’t be. I’ll see you soon, okay? I love you.”

That heaving breath. “Love you, too.”

Kara ends the call when Alex comes in. Alex’s pain is palpable. Her eyes glisten. Through the hurt she’s beautiful. She made the extra effort tonight. Did Maggie tell her she was beautiful? Alex shuts the door. “I just spoke with Maggie,” Kara says, setting down the phone delicately. Alex comes closer. Her knuckles are white. “Are you okay?”

“Outside of being humiliated?”

Kara wants to tell her no one set out to humiliate her. She doesn’t say anything. Alex can’t hear her right now. “Talk to me.”

“You know how I feel about her.” Kara touches her brow, nods. “And I know it’s wrong, Kara, but I can’t just turn off my feelings because you’re with her. When you told me about the two of you…” she looks down. “I got used to it. I accepted it. I did.” Kara nods again. “And for a while things seemed better between all of us. Between you and me. Between me and her. And then you told me you were in this...open relationship and to me it seemed so selfish. As if you couldn’t be
satisfied with having Maggie, you had to have Lena too. It felt like you were intent on taking things from me.”

But they’re people, not things. “I’m not, Alex.” She sighs. “But I understand how you might feel that way.”

“All this time you’ve been telling me that you miss the way we talk, the way we would tell each other everything—and for months, you hid from me that she was free to see other people? To do whatever she wanted?” Alex’s voice is growing sharper. “How could you not tell me?”

“Maggie didn’t—”

“I feel like such an idiot! Did you not want me to see her?” Kara is silent. “Talk to me!”

“I can’t make that decision for her—”

“And now she’s seeing Lena. Lena! They hate each other. I thought they hated each other. They’ve been lying to me for months—”

“I don’t think—” Kara quiets at her glare.

“Are you happy now?”

“I’m not unhappy.” She shifts her weight by the kitchen island, looks at her. “I wish you felt better.” Alex is dangerously close to crying. Her fingers tremble. Kara can’t step closer. She’ll explode. “I don’t think they were trying to hurt you. None of us were trying to hurt you, Alex.”

“Well, you have.”

“Tell me what she said to you.” Alex scoffs. “Tell me.”

“The usual Maggie bullshit. Things are complicated and essentially she respects me too much to not be able to fully commit to me. What a joke.”
“What if she meant it?”

“She didn’t mean it. She’s getting it from you, she’s getting it from Lena.” Kara frowns. “What does she need from me? Why did she even want an open relationship? Why did she agree to it? How can you let her do that? How can you do that?”

“We’re not doing anything wrong. None of us. The world needs more love, not less.”

“And you think what’s between them is love?” Not exactly. “She says they only kiss. Bullshit. Even if it were true,” she scoffs, “do you think either one of them will be satisfied with that?”

Kara tests her jaw. “That’s their business, not ours. Why does this bother you so much?” Alex looks at her as if she were crazy. “You and I kissed and we haven’t told anyone.”

“That’s different.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s weird and it’s wrong, Kara! Because it should stay hidden. And it’s never happening again!”

“Fine. Maybe it should stay hidden. But Maggie told you about Lena. By your logic, it isn’t wrong, you shouldn’t be upset.” Alex puts her hands over her face, runs her fingers through her hair. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about it but it wasn’t my place to tell. It was Maggie’s.”

“And now Maggie’s gotten further with Lena than you have. Doesn’t that bother you?”

“So have you. It doesn’t mean anything.” She bites her tongue. Alex has gone white as sheet. “I didn’t…” She exhales. “That came out wrong. We’re not talking about me. You’re upset. We’re talking about you.”

“No, we’re talking about why you didn’t tell me this. You choose Maggie over me, again and
again.”

“That’s not true.”

“Isn’t it?”

“No, it isn’t!” She wants to tell her about the countless times she kept Maggie at a distance for her benefit, how she opened the relationship for her benefit. “I don’t know what you want.”

“Isn’t it obvious? I want the truth.”

Kara clenches her jaw. “The truth isn’t always kind, Alex.” Alex stares back at her, her eyes are a wasteland. “Okay. It was my idea to open our relationship. Because of what I feel for Lena. But also because of what Maggie feels for you.” Alex blinks. “It just seemed like a waste to allow love to go rotten on the vine. To let it waste. She was supposed to date you. I wanted her to date you, even if that felt... But I think she was afraid. Of what you would think… of what I would think.”

“And it didn’t occur to you that maybe in the grand scheme of all of this, you should have told me that part of the reason you opened your relationship was so I could be with Maggie?”

“Why does it matter? It’s a mess now.”

“Because I could have done something differently, Kara! I could have talked to her, reassured her. I don’t know!”

Kara considers. “I don’t really like talking about it. Maybe it wouldn’t have changed anything. I pushed her over and over and over again to... move forward with you and... I think it felt like a lot to her. I don’t know how anything happened with Lena. I don’t care,” she says more quietly. “All I know is that Maggie sounded like a wreck just now when I talked to her. I’ve never heard her sound that way. I haven’t made any of this easy for her. Maybe you haven’t either. But she’s in love with you. She’s in love with you and she’s trying. So what did you say to her, Alex?”

Alex puts her hands over her mouth, closes her eyes.
An hour has passed by the time Maggie wanders into the corner store.

The bell chimes to announce her presence. An old man with a velvet track suit sits behind the register. He glances up from the scratch lottery ticket he's using a nickel on before turning to the next one. Maggie walks the thin, checkered aisles, past chips and dips, sticks of beef jerky, a display of sunglasses. She turns the display, touching a pair of aviators. She sees her distorted reflection in them but doesn't try them on.

The Daily Tribune has a shot of Supergirl using ice breath on burning building Supergirl Putting Out Fires. Beneath there’s a different headline: Lingering Questions on Lena Luthor’s Role In Cadmus. There’s a small photograph, Lena’s expression cool. Maggie picks the paper up, sighs, takes it with her to the register, setting it down. “This,” she takes a shuddering breath. “Oh. And can I get a pack of Luckies?”

He turns in the chair and grabs the Lucky Strikes from the wall. She pays cash and throws down another five when she realizes she forgot a lighter. She’s walking out when he stops her. “Be careful out there. You smell like a distillery and the pigs have nothing better to do since Supergirl came around.”
“I’ll keep that in mind,” she says, exiting. She tucks the newspaper under her arm and unwraps the band from the cigarette pack, holding on to the plastic until she finds a trash can to dump it. It’s still hard to breathe. Cigarettes were a bad idea. She opens the pack and shakes one out, bringing it to her lips, pocketing the rest. She flicks on the lighter. She thought it was black but there’s a Playboy Bunny on the side. Normally she’d laugh.

Alex is with Kara now. Has Kara calmed her down? Is she okay? Are they okay? Was there a better way to say it? Maybe she shouldn’t have told her. Did Alex really need to know? Yes.

She lights the cigarette, takes a breath. Her ribs squeeze into her lungs and she coughs. She looks at her phone. Somehow an hour and a half has passed. Nothing from Kara yet.

She smokes morosely, wondering what happened to Eliza, the first girl she disappointed. What would have happened if Eliza had never taken that card to her parents? If Eliza’s hadn’t called her parents? Could she have stayed at home, maybe had a normal childhood? Foregone the awkward parent / teacher conferences? She remembers hating herself, hating Eliza. Teach her to be a romantic. These days she rarely puts anything in writing. She gets to her car, leaning against it as she finishes the cigarette. A few couples walk by with their dogs, others move along, faces buried in their cell phones. Brave given all the terrorist attacks in National City. Maybe that’s what happens when you have Supergirl on your side.

She finishes the cigarette and gets into the car, the taste of smoke in her mouth. Alex loves her. Alex fell in love with ‘someone’ like her. She wishes she didn't understand her meaning. Alex knows who she is. More than Kara. More than Lena. More than those who treat her with kindness. She looks at her phone again. Maybe she can call Alex. Maybe she can find the right words. *You’ve done enough damage. Leave her alone.*

She drives. She can't go home. Everything feels unfinished. Will Kara come by later? Kara with the fleeting touch still buried in her ribs? Does she know she did it? Did she hear it? No. She has no idea. Better that way. It was an accident.

She thinks about Lena. Maybe Alex will calm down and she’ll spare Lena her wrath. It’s not Lena’s fault. *What if it’s no one’s fault?* It feels like it’s hers.

Soft jazz billows on the radio. Maggie listens, unable to remember the last time she went to a jazz club. Alex never liked the music. *You can't predict it, it just goes where it goes. It makes no sense.* Maggie argued, unsuccessfully, about the patterns, the rhythms, there if you know where to look, how to listen. They never went to the jazz club.
She considers stopping off at Kara's but the last time she visited when Alex was there, she felt like an intruder. She doesn’t want to be intrusive. She’s always felt a little intrusive. Her feelings can be that way. With Eliza, her parents, her aunt, her disagreements with Kate and Emily. Better to keep to herself. It’s easier to minimize damage that way.

She drives past the park, past the bluff, her foot pressing down on the pedal. She drives until landscapes blur, clouds becoming wisps, stars turning into trails of light. The windows are rolled down, wind whipping her hair. She shifts gears. She likes keeping her mind engaged. It’s easier when there’s something to focus on. When she can keep it contained. What would happen if she flipped the car taking a turn too quickly? You’d die.

She arrives at the beach, the car rolling close to the water. Off in the distance she spots a small bonfire, teens laughing and shouting, throwing frisbees, drinking.

Maggie turns the overhead light on and takes the newspaper from the passenger seat. The Supergirl story is the usual fluff coverage she tends to get. Maggie reads the article. It includes statistics on alien crime dropping in National City since her arrival, but doesn’t touch on how non-alien crime has skyrocketed. Figures.

She’ll keep the article. Save it for the archives. You did that with Kate. Don’t do it again. But she can’t help it. The next article on Lena is a hatchet job. All anecdotes are circumstantial. Maggie knows there is no ongoing investigation into her. Has Lena seen this? Would it rattle her? Or maybe she’s accustomed to the negative press, to the negativity. What a sad thing to become accustomed to. But at least Lena has Kara. Her love must be a balm against the storm. Kara’s probably different with her. She won’t save Lena’s article.

She exits the car and sits on the hood, taking a deep breath of ocean air. The water is black save for the ripples of moonlight highlighting the waves. The moon hangs full over the water. The aperture of the night.

She looks at her phone and to Alex’s last text message. Great. I’ll see you then. A smiley face emoji. She taps the phone against her forehead. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. She tries to imagine a life without Alex. She doesn’t want to imagine a life without her. Was it wrong to get involved with her? Was it wrong to pine after Kara? To let her guard down around Lena? Fuck. How is she so bad at this? She’s too old to be this bad at it. How does she keep doing this to Alex? Ever since Kara happened they can’t see eye to eye on anything. Maybe she’s only frustrated that Alex can see more clearly.

She doubts she’ll see Kara tonight. She lights another cigarette. Kara won’t taste her. This is okay. She spends an hour listening to the waves, watching the teens in the distance pitching tents. Neither is allowed. The tents, the underaged drinking. But there are some things worth turning a blind eye
to. She was a stupid teen, too. There are enough suffering teens in the world. If they're not driving it’s not a big deal.

When does Lena drive? Her fingers ease over the phone screen. Luthor. Luthor who welcomes her into her office. Who invests so much in the good of National City. Her lips are so soft. Funny how she once imagined her as marble.

She’s ready to text her when two of the kids from the bonfire come over. They look like babies, ruddy cheeks, eyes bright and glazed, smiles brighter. “Hey, dude,” one of them says. Jesus. “We have some beers if you want to come hang out.”

“Do you have a smoke?” the girl asks.

“How old are you?” Maggie asks.

“Eighteen.”

“Not old enough,” Maggie exhales smoke. She smiles at her kicked puppy face. “You brought beer but no cigarettes?”

“We brought weed,” the guy says, “but we smoked it all.”

No shit. Their pupils are wide as saucers. “Can’t help you there.”

“Why are you here by yourself?” He asks. “You smell wasted.”

“My ex dumped some drinks on me.”

“What an asshole,” he says. “Fuck that guy.”

Maggie smiles. “What if I’m the bad one?”
“You seem okay.”

“You don’t know me.” She finishes the cigarette. “Look, the invite’s sweet but I’m looking for some alone time. You’re not driving anywhere tonight, are you?”

“Beach party. We’re crashing here.”

“Be careful you’re not served with trespass paperwork. Overnight camping isn’t allowed.”

“There’s no cops here,” the girl says. “Don’t they have better shit to do?” Maggie shrugs. “Are you sure you won’t come hang out? You don’t have to be alone.” Maggie cocks an eyebrow. “We just read *The Awakening*, about that woman who drowns herself when her boyfriend leaves her and she has to go back to her boring life.”

“Sounds tragic.” She didn’t read it that way. “I’m fine on my own, but thanks.”

They move off, forgetting her almost immediately. She went to a few beach parties as a kid. Almost always found herself making out with much older women. It seemed normal at the time. It’s just past eleven. She texts Lena.

*Are you still at the office?*

Luthor 11:02pm: *I got home half an hour ago. Everything okay?*

*I didn’t know texting was cause for alarm.*

Luthor 11:04pm: *We don’t usually text at this hour. And you haven’t answered the question.*

Maggie sighs. She takes another cigarette out before pushing it back into the pack, lying down on the hood of the car. *I talked to Alex.*

Luthor 11:06pm: *Should I call you? Are you all right?*
Maggie types for several minutes. *It was fucking awful. I really fucked this up. FUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCK*. She deletes it. *Yes. I'm all right.*

Luthor 11:15pm: *You’ll pardon me if I’m not convinced.*

*It could have gone better. How’s your evening?*

Luthor 11:17: *I’m enjoying a glass of wine and working through a backlog of scientific papers. A night in the life of National City’s archnemesis.*

*You’re a poor archnemesis. But pretty. She leaves the last out.*

Luthor 11:20pm: *I'm not letting you off the hook. Things with Alex didn’t go well. Could they have gone worse?*

Maggie considers. *She didn’t hit me. I thought you should have a head’s up. In case she comes after you.*

Luthor 11:24pm: *Oh, Maggie.*

*Maybe I didn’t say it in the right way. I feel like an asshole.*

Luthor 11:26pm: *You’re not. This isn’t your fault. Whatever she said to you in anger, I bet she regrets it already.*

*I wish I could believe that, Luthor.*

Luthor 11:30pm: *You can and you should. (And call me Lena, please.)*

Lena Luthor 11:30pm: *Where are you?*
Maggie slides off the car, moves closer to the water, taking an audio clip of the waves. She sends it to her. She calls, relieved when Lena picks up. “Is this a bad time?”

“I’m glad you called. I can pry myself away from my glass of wine to talk to you.”

“You can do both. Drink and talk.”

“What a splendid idea. Are you all right?”

She sighs inwardly. She thinks of interrogating suspects. Good cop. Bad cop. Ask the same question, ask it over and over and over again until they snap, until they reveal the truth. “You already asked.”

“But now I can hear your voice. You’re not going to hurl yourself into the sweet, melodic ocean are you?”

“It was an awful night.”

“Don’t joke.”

“You joked first.”

“I shouldn’t have. Things will smooth themselves over with Alex. Bull in a China shop, remember?” Maggie sits on the sandy terrain, pulling her boots off to bury her toes in the sand, watching the waves crash over them, closing her eyes slightly as the cold brushes over her skin. “I know I haven’t convinced you.” Not yet. “Why the beach? Going skinny dipping?”

Maggie smiles. “I just ended up here. I needed to clear my head. But no skinny dipping. There are kids here camping out. Last thing I need is an indecent conduct charge. I’m just happy my clothes are dry.”

“Did you go into the water with your clothing? How barbaric.”
“Very funny. No… let’s just say Danvers didn’t let me escape unscathed. I think it was an accident.”

“You’re saying I should stick to sweats when I meet her?”

“Won’t you have to go out and buy them?”

“Do you think I sit around in cocktail dresses when I get home?”


“Lucky me.”

Maggie can hear her smile. “Maybe a tidal wave will take me.”

“And then what would Igor and I do with ourselves? He thinks you're funny, by the way. I told him about your little joke. Mh. I suppose it’s our little joke now.”

Maggie looks at the water rushing to her feet. “Do we share jokes?”

“I suppose we do. Is that too much?”

Does she have any jokes with Kara? She thinks. She thinks until it becomes uncomfortable and the silence has gone too long. “No.” She runs a hand through her hair. “How’s the wine?” A tiny crab waddles past her and Maggie lifts her foot to let it pass.

“It's sweet. Like that transition of yours. I hope I haven’t made you uncomfortable.”

“No. I was thinking we could pick up wine. Something nice you'd like. Sometime.” She holds her
breath, wincing.

“I’d like that,” Lena says. Maggie breathes again. “We can experiment. Find something that works for the both of us. It’ll be an adventure. Can you stand a little adventure?”

“I’ll try to keep pace with you.” A beat “I’ll wear something nice. Something less barbaric and more human?”

“Joke's on you; I’m showing up in sweats.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it.”

“Only if you deign to wear something nice for me. I imagine you dress up quite a bit for Kara. But if you ever have some NCPD thing and you need a date, hit me up. If Kara's unavailable, of course.”

“We don’t go out much.” Would Kara ever go to one of her police galas? She lets out a shaky breath. “I know you’ve survived a string of assassination attempts when you’ve hosted press conferences but are you sure you can handle an NCPD gathering?”

“Why? Is the food abysmal?”

“No, but my colleagues can be assholes.” And she’s among them, if she takes Alex at her word.

“In general or to you?”

“A little of both.”

“How charming.”

“Changed your mind, then?”
“Not at all. I’m a Luthor. We don’t back down.”

“When the next gala rolls around I’ll send you a ‘save the date’.”

“And that would be you, in that instance?”

Maggie smiles. “You know, I’ve had a terrible night. I hurt someone I really care about. Can’t you let me stew in my misery? I shouldn’t feel okay. Not for a while.”

“That’s absurd. Kara wouldn’t want that for you. Neither would Alex, neither do I. We care about you, all right? No martyr sulking.”

Maggie stares out at the ocean. “I wish you could see the reflection of the moon on the water.”

“What do you like about it?”

“The light in the dark.”

“Show me sometime.”

X

Lena wants to stay asleep and afloat. She struggles against the force dragging her consciousness away from… the surface? She can’t even tell anymore, it’s useless, she’s awake. Back to the world. She doesn’t open her eyes. For a moment, she’s safe. On Kara’s couch. Wrapped up in a blanket that wasn’t there when she fell asleep. Kara is around somewhere. Lena hears low, familiar voices coming from the television. Oh. Kara put on an episode of The Great British Bakeoff for her. Everything is fine. Maybe she’ll stay like this for a while and— shit. Shit. Alex.

Lena opens her eyes, somehow convinced that she must have missed Alex’s text, that she managed to avoid this dreaded encounter by sleeping through it, making things worse in the process. But then, she remembers. Take a nap, you’re tired. Put your phone on silent, I’ll keep an eye on it and I’ll wake you up when she texts you. Her eyes fly to the nearest window. Daylight. Barely, but still. Where’s Kara? Close. Sitting cross-legged on the floor between the couch and the coffee table.
Lena’s phone on one side, their plate of homemade Jaffa cakes on the other, a book in the middle, in front in her. Lena wonders if that’s what it would have felt like, as a child, had someone stayed close by as she slept. Watching over her.

“Hey.”

Kara looks up from her book. Returns her smile. “Hi.”

“What are you reading?” Kara shows her the cover. Lena’s smile widens. “So, what do you think?”

“You know,” Kara says, putting the book down and grabbing a Jaffa cake instead. “I thought it would be heavy reading,” she carefully sets the cake on the couch right in front of Lena’s face, takes one for herself, “and in a sense, it is, because it’s deceptively simple, but the writing is... vibrant. And this edition is so beautiful. I read that no other edition so far includes Khalil Gibran’s own paintings.”

Lena pushes the blanket away to take the offered cake.

“I only came across it as a teenager, exploring the mansion’s library,” Lena explains, nibbling at the cake. “I had no idea who he was. Only the third best-selling poet in the world, I would now tell my younger self. But the title intrigued me. *The Prophet*. I don’t even know who got us a copy. Probably some ancestor I never met.”

Kara nods. “Not too distant an ancestor, though. The first edition was published in 1923, and that’s the one you have, right? You could probably track down who got it. Do you have a family tree in the mansion? I bet you do. A big ancient one hanging above the fireplace, going all the way back to the Luthors’ Viking forebears or something.” They’re at eye level, Lena lying on the couch, Kara sitting on the floor next to her. “What?” Kara asks, chewing on the last of her cake.

“I don’t know. It’s just nice. And a little surreal. That I can take a nap on my friend’s couch and wake up to her shoving a Jaffa cake in my face. Talking about my family tree with *GBBO* in the background.”

Kara chuckles. “You’ve let me claim your own couch as my domain when I come over. The only reason you can sit on it as well is because it’s bigger than mine. So, it’s only fair. But honestly, I’m just happy you’re comfortable here.”
“I am. Your place is so welcoming. You are. Do you…”

“Do I…?”

“Are you really comfortable at mine?”

Kara frowns. “You don’t know?”

“You’re my only visitor. I know my place isn’t what people expect.”

Kara fiddles with the corner of the blanket. “You mean… it’s spacious, but not huge? It’s personal, warm, and every item, every piece of furniture has a story? And Hugo the plush tiger sits on your nightstand, next to a family picture taken at Lex’s graduation ceremony? Is that what people don’t expect?” Lena nods. Kara crosses her arms on the couch, rests her chin on her forearms, their faces two inches apart. “If they don’t expect it,” Kara says, lowering her voice and holding Lena’s gaze, a smile in her eyes, “they don’t deserve to be invited in.”

Lena suppresses a shiver, laughs quietly. “You silver-tongued devil.”

Kara scoffs, going from beguiling to flustered in a second. “Right? I wish Alex could hear that. Kara, I love you but please, when my friends are around? Be quiet, was pretty much her mantra throughout high school. And she was right. I drove a few of her friends away with my weirdness.” She shakes her head wistfully. “She was really popular, you know? Or… I think she was. Seemed that way to me.”

“Maybe the people who saw her adopted little sister as an inconvenience weren’t really her friends in the first place.”

“Maybe.” Kara gives her a troubled look. “But I think some of them were. Decent friends, I mean. And they drifted apart, not because of what I did or said, but because she insisted on putting me first. Because Eliza always told her: take care of Kara, be here for your sister… and she was.” She sighs. “What a waste.”

Lena props herself up on her elbow. “A waste of what?”
Kara shrugs, looks up at her apologetically. “Youth? Carefreeness? I’m not sure. I didn’t have either, not after what happened to my family. My real—you know. My biological family. And neither did you. Neither did Maggie, I think. But, Alex? She could have had that.”

“What a merry bunch we make,” Lena jokes, tucking a strand of hair behind Kara’s ear. “No wonder we all get along. As best we can,” she adds, glancing at her phone on the coffee table.

Kara follows her gaze. “If she said she’d text you, she will. Even if it’s just to tell you she can’t make it. She’s probably at work. Ruined weekend plans come with the territory. Do you want me to check up on her?”

“No, but thank you. It’s just that I’m used to getting ready for a fight in the boardroom, or with pretty much any reporter who isn’t you, not with a friend. But I feel better than I did earlier. Thanks for letting me hang out here all afternoon.”

“I’m always happy to have you over. Why a fight, though?”

“She didn’t exactly go easy on Maggie, from what I can tell,” Lena sighs. “And Maggie wasn’t in a position to… I think she went in feeling like she had no right to minimize Alex’s hurt in any way. But me? I’m not sorry. I don’t owe Alex an explanation. So I have no idea how this is going to go.”

“Okay,” Kara says slowly, her brow furrowed in concentration. “Why even agree to meet with her, then?”

“Because I’m her friend and I want her to know that she can count on me to show up, you know? That she’s worth arguing with, if that’s what ends up happening. But even if I didn’t care about Alex, I’d have to do my part. After you and I talked about it, in the gardens? Maggie asked me… well, she told me she wanted to tell Alex about the kiss, and that if I didn’t agree, we had to stop seeing each other.”

“Right,” Kara nods. “And obviously, you didn’t want that. Neither did Maggie, I imagine. And you both wanted to tell Alex, and agreed Maggie should be the one telling her?”

“Yes. So, even though I’m pretty sure Maggie would disagree, I’m not letting her bite the bullet for the two of us.”
Kara rubs the back of her neck. “That’s kind of you, but I’m not sure that’s how it works with Alex. Her… ire doesn’t lessen just because she has more people to be angry with. She came to see me after Maggie told her. Right away. Maggie barely had time to warn me before Alex was banging on my door, ready to bite my head off.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

Kara sighs. “And stress you out even more? I don’t think so. Besides, I know her. I can handle it. My point is, I don’t think she felt any better afterwards. Who knows what state of mind she’s in now? I don’t want her to… cross a line, with you, and lose a friend in the process. Because she can be… when Maggie called me? She was so upset. She just wanted to give me a heads up, not complain or anything. She never complains. But I could tell that it was rough, you know? What Alex said to her. And I’m sure I don’t know the half of it.”

“What a mess.” Lena shakes her head. She thinks of Maggie in her car, how tense she was as they talked. And Lena didn’t know why. Still doesn’t. “I feel like I don’t know the half of it. Not about what Alex said, just… this whole thing.”

“I’m sorry. I thought it would be simpler, too.” Kara uncrosses her arms, sits a little straighter. “Can I… I don’t know, clear anything up for you?”

Again, that face. Open. Like Lena could ask her anything. “Actually, you can. You were the one who opened up this relationship, right?”

“Yes.”

No hesitation. Lena swallows. “Was it… primarily because you thought Maggie and Alex should get back together?”

“Partly. How do you know?”

“Because Maggie wasn’t sure how to ask me how I felt about telling Alex, and it just came out. I don’t think she meant to tell me, or realized I didn’t know. *Kara had other ideas for me and for Danvers.* That’s what she said.”

Kara flinches. “Um,” she says hesitantly, “*for me and for Danvers*… shouldn’t it be *for Danvers*
“and for me? Grammatically? You can’t put yourself first, it’s just not… you can’t do that.”

Lena blinks. Okay. “That’s right. It’s not proper, grammatically. But Maggie wasn’t writing a book or giving a speech. We were on the sidewalk after spending a couple of hours working on our project.”

“Sorry,” Kara says, rubbing her eyes. “I don’t know why I said that… I was taken off guard and I blurted out the first thing that crossed my mind. Okay, so, she said that. She wasn’t wrong.”

Lena tries her luck. “How so?”

The look Kara gives her makes her realize that it has nothing to do with luck. That she should be more careful. Because Kara will tell her the truth, no matter what, and sometimes—

“Well,” Kara begins, licking her lips, “I felt like maybe, a more open kind of relationship would be better for us. For me, because I… I have more love to give. And for her, because I thought she still had feelings for Alex and I didn’t want to be the reason she didn’t act on them. And maybe I’m wrong. But she didn’t say no. She asked me not to tell Alex about it, but she didn’t say no. So we opened it up. That way, if she ever wants to try something with Alex again, she—or with anyone, of course,” she adds, smiling briefly, “well, she can.”

Lena feels cold. “So I just… why didn’t you tell me? I kissed Maggie because I thought it was okay. Allowed. But if the point of this whole thing was to make her feel like she could get back with Alex, then… seriously, Kara? Why did you even tell me? If she gets back together with Alex she’ll just—”

Kara surprises her by pulling the blanket higher over her, almost tucking her in. “She won’t. If she felt like kissing you was an obstacle to getting back with Alex, and getting back with Alex was her priority? She would have stopped this. What you’re doing together. But she hasn’t. What she does or doesn’t do with Alex from now on is none of our business, but right now, she’s comfortable with you. There’s a reason for that. Beyond the fact that you’re wonderful and anyone who isn’t comfortable around you deserves to step on a Lego, that is. She’s a good person. She wouldn’t kiss you if she didn’t think you were, too. As for why I told you about the open relationship, well… I want you to know me. Really know me. And that includes this part of my life. And to prove it to you, but also to set your mind at ease about seeing Alex tonight, let me read you,” she reaches for the book behind her, flips through the pages and touches her glasses, “Chapter 14, Friendship.”

She clears her throat. Lena’s chest feels too tight for her heart. “Your friend is your needs answered. He is your field which you sow with love and reap with thanksgiving. And he is your board and your fireside. For you come to him with your hunger, and you seek him for peace. When your friend speaks his mind you fear not the “nay” in your own mind, nor do you withhold the “ay.” And when he is silent your heart ceases not to listen to his heart; For without words, in friendship, all
thoughts, all desires, all expectations are born and shared, with joy that is unacclaimed. When you part from your friend, you grieve not; For that which you love most in him may be clearer in his absence, as the mountain to the climber is clearer from the plain. And let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the spirit. For love that seeks aught but the disclosure of its own mystery is not love but a net cast forth: and only the unprofitable is caught. And let your best be for your friend. If he must know the ebb of your tide, let him know its flood also. For what is your friend that you should seek him with hours to kill? Seek him always with hours to live. For it is his to fill your need, but not your emptiness. And in the sweetness of friendship let there be laughter, and sharing of pleasures. For in the dew of little things the heart finds its morning and is refreshed.”

Lena rolls on her back, forearm slung across her eyes. Takes a few breaths. “Kara, I’ve found your next career.”

“Oh? What am I doing next?”

“Counselor. In a school, a hospital, a private practice, wherever. I’d hire you full-time as my personal one, but I can’t rob the world of your inexplicable talent to make me feel better about everything.”

She hears Kara chuckle. “But that would mean going back to university for a few years to get my degree. I’d rather not. It’s expensive and I’m not going back to waitressing to pay off a student loan. And no, you’re not paying for my education.”

Lena lifts her arm a little to mock glare at her. “Damn it.”

“Cheer up. My magic only works on you, anyway. And Alex, sometimes.”

“Aren’t you forgetting someone?” Lena asks, letting her arm fall on the cushion behind her head. She briefly thinks that if her mother walked in on them right now, seeing Lena lazily stretched across the entire couch as Kara diligently sits cross-legged on the floor right next to her, it would either send her into a hysterical laughing fit, or into cardiac arrest. But her mother doesn’t laugh, not really. And whether she even has a heart is debatable. No, she would simply raise an eyebrow and walk out without a word, leaving a trail of perfume and indifference in her wake.

Kara shakes her head no. “I don’t think I’m making Maggie feel better about anything. Remember when I told you I was in a funk and she was the one trying to cheer me up, asking if I wanted to go to a bookstore, to the museum... I was no fun.”
“That happens. I’m sure she understood. Besides,” Lena gestures towards the kitchen, “you made it up to her by going with her to the exhibit.”

Kara cocks her head. “Our Baroque period exhibition?”

“No, Diane Arbus? I saw the postcard of her 1945 self-portrait on the kitchen island. How was it?” Kara just looks at her, at a loss. Oh. Lena wonders whether she just made a terrible blunder. “It was… It’s just an exhibit she was interested in seeing. She mentioned it offhandedly when we were talking about our respective plans for the day. When I saw the postcard, I just assumed you’d gone with her. Sorry.”

“I didn’t know,” Kara says, almost to herself, looking in the direction of the kitchen. “She didn’t ask me to join her. Probably because I said no to everything the last time she tried to… spend time with me. Other than, you know. The usual.”

“Maybe,” Lena concedes. “But she also wasn’t sure she’d be able to make it to that show after work, and it was a long drive. Perhaps she made a last minute decision to go.”

Kara nods absently, gets up and comes back with the postcard. Lena sits up to make room for her on the couch, spreads the other half of the blanket over Kara’s legs. Kara snuggles under it, studying the picture. Lena studies her instead.

“Do you like it?” she asks after a while.

“I don’t know. It’s interesting.”

“Why do you think she picked this one?”

Kara tears her eyes away from the picture. “I’m… not sure. Because she liked it? She thought I would like it? She… I don’t know.” She touches her lips. Shoots Lena an anxious glance. “Would you have picked it for me? No, wait. If you had, why would you have picked this one?”

Lena plays with her wristwatch pensively. So. Maggie and Kara’s relationship is very different from what she herself shares with Kara, then. The first thing Kara does when Lena gets her
something is to figure out “why this?” But Maggie offers to go to a museum, Kara says no. Maggie brings her a souvenir from an exhibit, Kara has no idea why, hasn’t asked herself why. What do they share? Maybe they don’t need all that, the books and the art and the long conversations. Maybe their intimacy is on a different level. What level?

Lena looks at Kara, opts for a different approach. “What do you find interesting about it?”

Kara seems to relax slightly, looks at the picture again. “I like that… there’s a gradient. Because her hair is dark but the upper third of the picture is bright. The middle third is a little darker, and the last one is almost black. And she has pale skin so the gradient is almost… printed on her. You follow the length of her body with your eyes, and if you go up, it’s a fade to white, if you go down, fade to black. And I like that her leg is parallel to the tripod, and her head is tilted in the same direction, to the left, so even though she angled the camera so that the entire picture, well, the mirror that is, would appear tilted to the right, the composition is still balanced. And the way she looks at herself? Because it’s not just herself, it’s us, through her. She’s almost puzzled. And everything is… echoed. It’s not just her eyes, the reflected camera is the third one, and the mirror is a frame within a frame. And she’s not the only subject, she’s pregnant, so whose portrait is it? All in all, I find it oddly reminiscent of Las Meninas. So that’s why,” Kara says, “if it came from you, I would know why you picked it. Because you know I like… games of mirrors and perspective and who’s looking at whom, and… do you think I should have gotten Maggie a postcard from the exhibition we went to? Not Las Meninas, but something I think she would have liked? Do people do that? Couples, I mean.”

Lena keeps forgetting that before Maggie, Kara had never been in a relationship. She keeps forgetting because when she’s with Kara, everything is just right. Thoughtful. Insightful. Loving. She assumed Kara found it easy to be like that with everyone. To give so much. But perhaps it’s different with Maggie. With someone she’s in love with. Relationships must be trickier than friendships, in many ways. Lena wouldn’t know. Not really. Her only partner was more of a friend than a lover.

She reclines against the back of the couch. Kara carefully sets the picture aside and turns towards her, drawing her legs under the blanket.

“I’m not an expert,” Lena muses, “but I don’t think there’s anything you should do. You could have bought her a card, yes. But maybe that’s something Maggie does. Getting postcards from the museums or galleries she goes to, and giving them to the people she loves. Just… find out what you want to do. What your thing is, when it comes to showing her that you care. It could be all sorts of things.”

Kara nods, grabbing a cushion and hugging it. She always does that. “Do you think she’d like it if I displayed it somewhere in the apartment? And I hear you, it’s not about what you would do, it’s about what I would do, but… you’re better at this. At knowing how to be considerate.”
“Kara, you’re the most considerate person I’ve ever met. You don’t need my advice on this.”

“Please.”

Kara’s voice is so earnest that the sound of it skips Lena’s ears and goes straight to her heart. She wants to take her in her arms.

“Fine. If it were me, on the receiving end? I would tell the person who gave it to me, well… pretty much what you said when you described what you found interesting about it. Like when I give you a book or when we watch a film, you know? You always tell me what you thought, and it’s nice because I know you’ve engaged with it, and then I can tell you why I thought you’d enjoy it… those things aren’t just gifts to show someone that you love them and you think about them, they can also be the start of a conversation. Which leads to sharing even more, and… that’s what I would want. But all relationships are different. I think.”

Kara nods, hugging the cushion closer. “Sometimes, it’s like… I know what to give you, and like I said earlier, I know I do have a lot of love to give, but with Maggie, and even with Alex now, I seem to give the wrong things. Or to run out of things to give.”

“Do you think,” Lena ventures, “that it’s because you and Alex are very close, she’s family, and Maggie is your partner, and those are… maybe, heightened dynamics? Emotionally. But with a friend, it’s easier? Less pressure to get it right, so as a result you do get it right, because you’re more spontaneous and relaxed, and… I have no idea. You know what?” she leans forwards to grab the copy of *The Prophet* she gifted Kara the previous week. “My turn to let someone else’s much more beautiful words do the talking. Let’s see… ah, there it is.”

Kara smiles, rests her head on the back of the couch, her eyes gentle.

“Chapter 6, *Giving,*” Lena begins. “*There are those who give little of the much which they have – and they give it for recognition and their hidden desire makes their gifts unwholesome. And there are those who have little and give it all. These are the believers in life and the bounty of life, and their coffer is never empty. There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward. And there are those who give with pain, and that pain is their baptism. And there are those who give and know not pain in giving, nor do they seek joy, nor give with mindfulness of virtue; They give as in yonder valley the myrtle breathes its fragrance into space. Through the hands of such as these God speaks, and from behind their eyes He smiles upon the earth. It is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unmasked, through understanding. And to the open-handed the search for one who shall receive is joy greater than giving. And is there aught you would withhold? All you have shall some day be given.*”
Kara looks at her for a while. “What would I do without you?”

Lena shakes her head. “You’d keep making others thankful to have you in their life, probably. But I’m not going anywhere, so that’s kind of a moot point. And I’ll never run out of books to give you.”

“Good,” Kara smiles faintly. “So, who are the other two poets? The all time best-sellers before Gibran.”

“So far, Shakespeare and Lao-Tzu.”

“Not too shabby,” Kara whispers.

Lena nods, puts the book back on the table and grabs the plate instead, placing it between them. They both take a Jaffa cake.

“There’s one more thing I want to know, if that’s okay,” Lena asks after swallowing her first bite. “About the open relationship situation.”

“Shoot.”

“So you’re not seeing anyone, right now? Besides Maggie.”

“No. I mean, I’m not… involved with anybody else, no.”

Lena finishes the small cake. “You said you partly opened it up because you felt you had more love to give, but you don’t seem to be looking for anything else. Actively, I mean.”

“I know it sounds contradictory,” Kara admits. “It’s only after we decided to open it up that I realized… I mean, I have my girlfriend, my sister, you. You give me so much. Maybe that’s the right balance, you know? Maybe I shouldn’t upset it by… because sometimes, less is more, right? I don’t regret opening up this relationship if it means Maggie gets to… you know. But me, maybe
“As long as you don’t—” Lena’s phone lights up. They both look at it, then at each other. “Moment of truth,” Lena singsongs, picking up her phone. “Yeah, so, we’re still meeting up. In… less than an hour.”

“Oh. Short notice. Do you have to get going now?”

“Probably,” Lena sighs. “I wish I could stay.”

Kara’s smile is bright. “And we’d cook something, and watch whatever you want, and talk, and bicker over who should sleep on the couch?”

“Sounds like heaven to me.”

“Well, the good news is, we can do this any other night. So, off with you. I’ll walk you to your car,” Kara offers, pulling the blanket away to get up. “No but,” she adds firmly when Lena opens her mouth.

Lena closes it, rolls her eyes good-naturedly. She brings the plate back to the kitchen, drinks a glass of water and joins Kara by the door, slips her phone inside her handbag and puts on her shoes.

“Thanks,” she says when Kara, already dressed, holds out her coat for her.

Kara pockets her keys, grabs an envelope, probably to post it on her way back, and opens the door. “Ready?”

“No.” Lena runs a hand through her hair. “How do I look? Like someone who just took a long nap?”

Kara looks her up and down. “Yeah. Like an actress in a classic pretending to wake up but really, she’s just glowing and her hair is perfect and so is her light makeup and she smells nice.”
“Isn’t that your shtick?” Lena mumbles as they make their way to the staircase.

“Lena Luthor, is that pettiness I hear?”

“Quiet, you.”

Kara laughs, skipping ahead. Lena wisely stands aside when they get to her car, letting Kara open the door for her. Lena gets in, looks up from her seat. “Thank you. Wish me luck?”

“You don’t need it. But good luck, anyway. And…” Kara leans forward. She seems unsure. “Remember what I said about, how it can be worse when Alex has had time to calm down?”

“Sadly, I do. My stomach is in knots right now. Any advice?”

“Maybe… don’t be too diplomatic? I know she’s hurt, but she needs someone who isn’t me to push back a little. Be the friend she needs, not the punching bag she wants.”

Lena wants to reach up and stroke her cheek. Her hand stays where is it. “I’ll try. I wish I could take you with me. In my pocket. You’d whisper my lines to me.”

Kara shakes her head. “You’ll find the words. You always do. But,” she adds with a little smile, handing Lena the envelope, “you may take me with you nonetheless.”

Oh, so the envelope was for her. “Should I open it now?”

Kara looks at her sheepishly. “I’d planned to mail it to you because I felt a little self-conscious. But you’re nervous about tonight so if this can help and keep you company, it’s worth the embarrassment.”

Lena eyes the envelope, runs her fingers along the edge. “Is that… a certain picture?”

Kara nods. Lena swallows and scoots over, patting the leather seat. Kara seems surprised but goes along with it and sits next to her, leaving the door open. Lena opens the envelope and pulls out the
picture, lifts the protective tissue paper delicately. And here they are. Under white roses and the softest light. An angel and a Luthor in the Garden of Eden. A joke without a punch line.

“James gave me tips to get it just right. He lets me use his account for all his professional software and… anyway. I hope you like it. I considered texting it to you, but I figured, maybe you didn’t have many pictures with friends and you’d like a real one? Not digital.”

Lena knows she won’t cry. The tears won’t fall. But Kara looks at her and sees, and doesn’t mind. Lena puts her arm around Kara’s shoulders. “The only pictures I have are with Jack,” she says when she’s certain she can speak. “Fun pictures. He goofed around a lot, made faces. Not like this one.”

Kara shifts a little closer, doesn’t return Lena’s gesture but the kindness in her smile more than makes up for it. “I framed mine. I put it in the middle of my little photo wall. You know, above my desk? But it didn’t work. All I have up there are pictures of flowers and stones and landscapes and strangers who said it was okay to take a picture. So I’m going to hang it on the wall by the easel instead.”

Lena blinks. “You are?”

Kara nods. “The way you’re looking at me on that picture? Instant confidence boost. I haven’t been painting much lately, so this should help.”

Lena almost asks if she’s feeling listless because she has too much time on her hands, but she said confidence boost, so the problem isn’t listlessness, or not entirely, and… oh. “Still feeling clumsy?”

“Yes,” Kara replies, a hint of surprise in her voice. She starts saying something, thinks better of it. Lena waits. “It’s like having to relearn,” Kara says slowly, as if tasting the words for the first time, “everything. Not the techniques, just… the feel of it. It feels wrong. So, I’ve been avoiding it.”

“And,” Lena hesitates. “Avoiding other things?”

Kara narrows her eyes. “You’ll soon know all my secrets if you keep this up. Lena, sleuth extraordinaire.”

Lena lets out a soft chuckle. “Oh, I doubt that. What you choose to say, the words you use… it’s all
deliberate. I’m not drawing any conclusion you hadn’t anticipated.”

“See?” Kara smiles. “Another secret, unveiled.”

“More like… shared. You haven’t answered.”

“I know… so, avoiding other things.” Kara pointedly glances at Lena’s hand on her shoulder. “I am, yes. Working on it, though.”

Lena nods. “Any progress?”

“Adjustments.”

“Can I help?”

Kara shakes her head. “You already do. Anyway, I should let you go. You’re going to be late.”

“I don’t care. If you need me now, Alex can wait.”

“She can’t. But,” Kara places the lightest kiss on Lena’s cheek, “thank you. Call me later? Tell me how it went?”

“I will,” Lena murmurs.

She withdraws her arm. Kara slips away. Kara is leaving. Kara turns around. “Your seatbelt.” Lena complies in a daze. Kara gives her a thumbs-up. Kara gently shuts the door. Kara waves at Jonathan. Kara gives her one last smile even though she can’t see her through the smoked window. Kara has disappeared into her building and Lena wants to go home. And listen to— She sighs and taps the partition. Jonathan lowers it. She shows him her phone.

“So, this is where we’re going, but do you mind sticking around for a couple more hours? I might have to give someone a lift home and I don’t want to put her in a taxi. You can take tomorrow morning off, instead? Or whenever works for you.”
“No problem. Maybe Thursday afternoon?”

Lena nods. “Done. Thanks, Jonathan.”

“Call me Igor.”

“Never.”

He smiles, rolls the partition back up. Lena leans back into her seat. Glances up to get one last look at Kara’s window. Pulls her headphones out of her handbag, plugs them in and scrolls through her playlists, settles on Lex. All the vinyls he ever gave her. For her birthday, for Christmas, for no reason. Operas, mostly. She puts on Amin Maalouf and Kaija Saariaho’s Love from Afar.

Night is falling. Streetlights start twinkling. The car is gliding. Lena closes her eyes. She pushes the upcoming exchange out of her mind and tries to recall the opera’s libretto instead, but all that comes to mind is Swinburne’s summary of the legend in The Triumph of Time. How does it go again? She used to know it by heart. Weaving other people’s words into the tapestry of long and lonely nights, long and lonely days, back in boarding school, back in the mansion, in her apartment, right now. So. There lived a poet… no. A troubadour in twelfth century— no, wrong. The music washes over her. Ah. There it is.

There lived a singer in France of old

By the tideless dolorous midland sea.

In a land of sand and ruin and gold

There shone one woman, and none but she.

And finding life for her love’s sake fail,

Being fain to see her, he bade set sail,

Touched land, and saw her as life grew cold,

And praised God, seeing; and so died he.

Died, praising God for his gift and grace:

For she bowed down to him weeping, and said

“Live”; and her tears were shed on his face
The car is no longer gliding, the engine no longer humming. Lena opens her eyes. She must have drifted off. They’re here. Why is she here? To explain what? To comfort? To confront?

She exits her car. It’s a distillery. She checks her watch. She’s a little early. Is Alex in there already? How many drinks has she had? Will she be more relaxed that way, or the opposite? It doesn’t matter. Lena forces her mind to course-correct, to hope that Alex hasn’t had anything yet. She goes in.

It’s lovely. Brick, brass, barrels. A restful glow bathing the place. It’s crowded, but not too loud. Lena wonders how Alex found this place. A waitress glances her way and does a double take. Lena wishes she’d put on her glasses instead of contacts. Nobody ever recognizes her with her glasses on. She looks around. Oh, there she is. She makes her way to the table. Alex looks up when Lena rounds the table, shrugging off her coat before sitting across from her. Alex has a drink in front of her. There’s one served for Lena, as well. Both untouched.

“Why aren’t you ever fashionably late?”

“A wizard is never late, nor is he early,” Lena retorts, regretting it immediately. She doesn’t want to joke. It’s like playing Russian roulette. It’s exhausting. Joking is exhausting. It wasn’t even funny. Well, with Kara, it would have been. A harmless Lord of the Rings joke, and Kara’s face lighting up, and we should watch it sometime, and— Alex is giving her an odd look. Alex. She’s with Alex now. The jokes are going to be sharper. Get it together, Luthor.

“You look out of it. Is it the pleasure of my company or did something happen?”

Lena looks at her. She’s dressed simply. Elegantly. Lena wishes she could see her dressed like this more often. Black looks good on her. Clean lines, a loose cut, something like… yes. Alex would look stunning in some of Issey Miyake’s more refined collections.

“Are you high?”

Lena shakes her head. She thinks of complimenting Alex on her outfit, but under those circumstances, that would only lead to a well-aimed barb about… something. “Sorry, I’m just tired. I was at Kara’s and I took a nap, then I fell asleep again in the car. I’m having a hard time waking up.”
Alex grabs her drink, uses it to push Lena’s closer. “You were napping at Kara’s? You are high, then.” There’s no warmth in her voice.

“Low blow.” Lena sighs. She lifts her glass. She has no idea what’s in it. It’s golden and smells like pure ethanol. Neat, of course. There’s a pretty candle that’s been burning for a while on the tablecloth, and a bowl of peanuts and pretzels. Lena Luthor, CEO of L-Corp, murdered by peanut slipped in drink by friend’s jealous ex. Better than the usual headlines. “What are we drinking to?” Shit. She shouldn’t have asked that. Not now. Habit.

Alex considers it. “To you banging my ex? How’s that for a low blow?”

Jesus. Lena mentally fastens her seatbelt. “How about… to Maggie and me, for caring enough about you to let you blow this out of proportions?”

Alex actually laughs. “Oh, I see you’re appropriately contrite. So, that’s how it’s going to go? You, condescending to indulge a friend throwing a distasteful fit about you getting it on with someone you damn well know I still care about, and not telling me for weeks?” She takes a long drink, doesn’t flinch.

Lena does the same, feels her eyes water. She could tell Alex that they’re not getting it on. That they don’t owe her an explanation. That they waited weeks because this is how long it took to get from their first kiss to the mere possibility of a second one. She doesn’t.

She takes a second sip. “You’re making a lot of assumptions.”

“Enlighten me.”

“No. People assume things about me all the time. I’ve learned that if they’re not willing to check those assumptions in the first place, correcting them is a waste of time.”

“Poor you. The misunderstood billionaire.”

“Poor you. The angry ex fuming that Maggie didn’t come running to you the second she opened up her relationship. Or perhaps fuming that you broke up with her in the first place?”
“Go to hell.”

“I’m in it,” Lena scoffs. “This is hell. This conversation is hell.”

Alex finishes her drink in one long gulp, exhales. Smiles at her. “I agree, actually. The conversation I had the first time I was here was hell, too. The person in front of me was different, but yeah. This is hell. I just wanted you to get a little taste of it. You know, to help you out with that empathy deficiency of yours.”

Lena looks at the table. Her own seat. Where Maggie sat. She looks up. Alex’s face says nothing. But Lena, oh, Lena could say so many things. Things that would make Alex understand who she’s dealing with. Oh? Maggie picked the place, then. She has good taste. I’ll have to ask her out on a date here. Or Alex, sweetheart, nice try, but why don’t we instead go to that lovely little restaurant Maggie took me to before kissing my hands? Or Were you on your fifth or seventh drink when the brilliant idea of taking me here crossed your mind? Things like that. Worse than that. Lena looks at Alex and thinks of Kara. I’m no stranger to cynicism, but it’s not worth it. That’s what Kara said. That’s who Kara is. So.

“Point taken. And I do like the place,” Lena shrugs, “but if being here again is upsetting for you, we can always go somewhere else. Your call.”

Alex reclines against the back of her chair, elbow on the armrest and chin on her palm. Her gaze is almost appreciative, but her smile is cold. She’s so beautiful.

“Silly me,” she says softly. “To think this would get a rise out of you when clearly you don’t give a fuck.”

Lena blinks. All right. “Clearly. Maggie and I came here because we don’t give a fuck. We came here to try to explain something that is, in fact, none of your business, to make sure you were okay and in the loop, because we don’t give a fuck. I was stressing out all day at Kara’s about potentially losing a friend, because I don’t give a fuck.” She takes her handbag, slings her coat over her arm and gets up. “I’ll get the check. Goodnight, Alex.”

Alex takes her wrist. “Wait.”

Lena shakes her head. “It’s brutal, isn’t it? When someone walks out on you. Maybe I should throw
my drink in your face, too, so you can get the full Maggie experience? A little something to help you out with your empathy deficiency? Feel what she felt when you went off on her, when she had to walk out of here with her clothes wet and drive somewhere a little more peaceful and call me to apologize for how poorly she handled it? But Alex, she didn’t. You handled it poorly. You went too far. As your friend, I’m telling you: get a grip. And please let go of me.”

Alex looks at her hand around Lena’s wrist like she didn’t know it was still there. She lets go. “I’m sorry. Just… sit down. Please.”

“Why?”

Alex brings a hand to her eyes, takes a few deep breaths. “We don’t have to talk about Maggie. Just… stay.”

Lena sighs inwardly. Puts a hand on Alex’s shoulder and signals a waiter before sitting down again. He gets to their table, glances at Alex, still covering her eyes with her hand, and politely averts his eyes. Lena makes a mental note to tip him handsomely.

“What can I get you?”

“She’ll have another one,” Lena tells him. “And,” she points at the menu, “What’s that? The… Modern Prometheus?”

“Oh, It’s heavy pot-distilled rum, photocatalytically matured and sucked through a machine to recreate the Angel’s Share. Charred virgin American, toasted in France.”

“Photocatalytically matured,” Lena repeats with a smile. Sees Alex smirk. Even the waiter is trying to keep a straight face. “Why not. And we’ll have something to eat, let’s see… I’ll leave it to your expertise.”

“Sure,” he says. “Any dietary restrictions I should keep in mind?”

A bigger tip. Lena points at the bowl. “Nothing that includes peanuts for me. Alex?”
Alex finally removes her hand from her face. “Anything’s fine.”

“Anything else I can get you?”

“No, thank— oh, actually, a glass of water for me,” Lena says. Looks at Alex. “You want one?”

Alex regards her for a few seconds, lets out a mirthless chuckle. “Sure.”

The waiter takes his leave.

“For what it’s worth, I’m glad I didn’t have to walk through that door.”

“That would have sucked,” Alex says, looking at nothing.

They remain silent for a long time, Alex lost in thought, Lena nursing her drink. Their waiter comes back, balancing a tray and a few plates.

“Here’s your Modern Prometheus,” he announces, setting their glasses on the table. “A small charcuterie and cheese board, a couple of soft pretzels to go with it, and our Devil’s Island chicken wings.” Alex raises an eyebrow. “You’ve got house made sriracha sauce here, traditional hot sauce there and, last but not least, the Devil’s Island Whiskey BBQ sauce. Enjoy.”

Lena thanks him with a smile. Alex seems in no hurry to eat or talk, so Lena picks up a chicken wing. Considers putting it on her plate first, but… it’s Alex, not a business dinner. Not that there would be chicken wings at a business dinner. She dips it in the whiskey sauce. Alex is smirking again.

“Am I missing something? Is that not how you’re supposed to eat those in polite company?”

“I’m not polite company. But no, you’re doing fine. Just… another thing I got wrong.” Alex shakes her head with a tinge of bitterness.

“I’m confused.”
“Just something I said when we had those with Maggie.” She takes a drink. “It doesn’t matter.”

Lena feels obligated to finish her first drink. She doesn’t want to make Alex feel like she’s the only one drinking. She doesn’t know if Alex gives a damn whether she drinks too. But, well. Manners first. God, that stuff is strong. Lena isn’t used to drinking hard liquor that fast. She’s relieved when Alex breaks off a piece of pretzel and dips it in some kind of cream cheese. They eat in silence, again. Lena isn’t anxious, not exactly, but she has to fight the urge to bite her nails. She’s been pretty good at not doing it these past few we—

“So,” Alex says. “How did this happen? You started working together and just… realized you didn’t actually hate each other’s guts? Or that you really did but that you should fuck it out instead?”

Lena takes a few seconds to figure out whether Alex is again being a twat, or just drunk enough to be past caring what kind of language she’s using. She isn’t glaring at her, at least. So, maybe the latter? Besides, if someone knows how invaluable being given the benefit of the doubt is, it’s Lena. So, the latter it is.

She shifts on her seat, feeling like a broken record. “First, we’ve never hated each other’s guts. We’re adults who started off on the wrong foot and found common ground. Second, I kissed her, Alex. I initiated it. And not because she’d been sending me signals.”

Alex shrugs. “Well, obviously she didn’t object. Why did you do it?”

“I’m done answering that question. I told Maggie when she asked, because obviously she had a right to know. I told Kara because so did she, being Maggie’s girlfriend, and because she didn’t act like she was owed an answer. But you? I’m sorry, I’m not sharing something that private if there’s a chance you’ll throw it back in my face and turn it into something it wasn’t.”

“What was it?”

Lena takes a sip of her second drink. Oh, much better than whatever Alex had ordered for her. She wonders if the difference lies in the angel’s share. “It was something that is and will stay between Maggie and I. So, instead of telling you why, I’ll tell you why not.”

Alex takes a chicken wing. “Apparently, you’re the one asking the questions and answering them,
so knock yourself out.”

“Good. Why not, then? Well, because I’m available. And so was Maggie, as she’s in an open relationship. You left her, and as far as I know, you’re not trying to rekindle things between the two of you. Working with her is a pleasure, she’s beautiful, I’m reasonably attractive, she didn’t push me away when I made it clear I wanted to kiss her. Those are the only factors I took into consideration. I don’t regret it. It doesn’t mean I didn’t worry about what Kara would think, what you would think, but those weren’t factors.”

Alex rubs her forehead, looking at her empty glass. “Listen. I don’t know how to say this tactfully, but I’m just wondering… did you make a move on Maggie to feel closer to my sister? Because for some unfathomable reason, you’re not with Kara that way?”

*Make a move.* It sounds so aggressive. It didn’t feel that way when she kissed Maggie. It felt hesitant. Brave. Agreed upon. Lena licks her lips, glances at her handbag. Sees the edge of the envelope. Kissing Maggie to feel closer to Kara. She’s thought about it. Gets why Alex would think about it. Those things happen. But…

“The thing is,” she says slowly, “I feel close to Kara already. We’re together in other ways. It’s not… I mean, obviously, I’m very much aware that Maggie is Kara’s girlfriend, but it’s not about Kara. Just like you and I weren’t about Kara.”

“Sure, but… come on.” Alex turns around, catches a waitress’ eye, points at her empty drink. Lena looks at her own, mostly full glass. Takes a sip. She gives up on pretending to keep up. “They’re in an open relationship,” Alex continues, “and Maggie’s the one you go for? I mean, why not both?”

Lena flinches. “Please, don’t make me sound like some kind of predator. I get enough awful headlines about being a shark as it is.”

“No, I mean it. Why not? Why Maggie and not Kara?”

Lena plays with the edge of the tablecloth, tracing its pattern. It’s nice. Maggie picked that place. Did she know it before? Or did she find out about it when trying to find a suitable place to talk to Alex? Does she know a lot of nice places like this, that they would both like? That they could go to? She said she wanted to get wine sometime. If she mentions it again, if she wasn’t just saying that, Lena would love to take her to— she’s startled when their waiter sets Alex’s drink on the table. He gives her an apologetic glance, even though it was his sudden presence, rather than the noise, that surprised her. He takes away their empty plates. Lena drinks some water.
“The silent treatment. I’m guessing this is another taboo question, then,” Alex says lightly, grabbing her glass.

“No, I was just... thinking.” Lena tries to keep the weariness from her voice. “So, why Maggie and not Kara. Not that I thought about it that way when I kissed one and not the other, but I suppose… I’m not sure what to tell you, actually. I’m not... when I’m with Kara, I feel fine. There’s no friction, no tension. We just... it works, you know? It just works.”

“Jesus, listen to yourself.”

Lena looks up. “What do you mean?”

“Lena, I feel fine, no friction, it just works? That’s what in love sounds like.”

“No.” Lena takes a long drink of whiskey, even though she shouldn’t. She’s already tipsy from whatever Alex ordered before she even got here. “That’s what things are okay and I don’t feel frustrated sounds like, if you can believe it.”

Alex looks at her with something akin to pity. Strange. Lena wonders what Alex is projecting onto her right now.

“Lena, I can’t fathom how you can be so... lucid, about so much, while being in denial about the obvious. Just tell her you’re in love with her and get it over with. You two are driving me crazy.”

Can we keep it to ourselves? Something that’s just ours. Lena sees Kara looking at her above the water lilies, asking for something that is just theirs. For privacy.

“Alex, just… leave us be, all right? And what am I in denial about? That she makes me happy? And a better person? That she enjoys spending time with me? That, yes, if there was more it would probably be... meaningful, but what we have now isn’t lacking in anything? I’m not some schoolgirl with a crush, pining instead of confessing. Maybe you should be the one asking yourself why you can’t conceive of a relationship that doesn’t fit your neat little boxes.” Lena frowns when Alex laughs like she finds this supremely ironic. “Is there a joke I’m not getting? Maybe something about how people refusing labels just prove your point?”
“No, no. Whatever.” Alex drinks. “None of my fucking business anyway. Enjoy your label-free tea dates with my sister, enjoy whatever label-free things you do with my ex. Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy.”

Lena massages her wrist. “All I’m hearing is my sister, my ex. It’s not about you, Alex. And it probably hurts that it isn’t, but it’s the truth. Besides, nothing’s stopping you from telling Maggie how you feel.”

“And nothing’s stopping you from telling Kara how you feel, yet here we are.”

“You’re not even trying to understand, are you?” Lena shakes her head. “Haven’t listened to a word I said.”

“Oh, I have. And I don’t think you’re bullshitting me, I think you mean every word and that’s even sadder, because… like I said, denial of epic proportions.”

Lena tries to recall that feeling, earlier, of waking up to Kara’s smile. Safe. Of holding her close in the car. And the sensation of Maggie’s face between her hands the last time they kissed in her office. When Maggie almost kissed her on the sidewalk, grazing the corner of her lips. Her voice on the phone. The sound of waves.

“I think,” she says, “that it’s easier for you to believe I’m deluding myself than to accept that I love people in my own way, and my way isn’t yours.”

Alex cocks her head, a hint of a smirk on her lips. “Oh, and what is your way, wise one, to whom crude concepts like being in love and wanting to take someone to bed are reserved for the unenlightened?”

Lena bites her tongue. If she never sees Alex again after this, so be it, but she won’t be the one giving this friendship the killing blow. “I know you’re pissed off, and I usually appreciate your snark, but that’s actually mean. And hurtful.”

“Oh my god, you even sound like Kara, now. Don’t be mean, Alex, the disgusting, ugly ass cockroach crawling on your desk didn’t deserve to be squashed. You can tell which part were edited by yours truly.”

Lena feels sick, at a loss. Maybe Alex is in too much pain. Maybe she’s too drunk. Lena can’t tell.
Lena can’t do anything. Has no idea how to be a friend, not a punching bag. She wishes Kara were here.

“Alex, if that’s the only way you can talk to me at this point because you’re too upset, I get it, but I don’t have to take it. I’ll give you a lift home and you can call me whenever you actually want to talk.”

“I don’t need a ride home.”

“Yes, you do.” Lena points at her own glass. “I would too, if I drove my own car.”

“I’ll just get an Uber.”

“You’re sad, angry and drunk, and I care about you. I’m not letting you drive, I’m not putting you in some stranger’s car in the state you’re in, I’m taking you home. Come on, get your things. I’ll go get the check.”

She doesn’t wait for Alex’s reaction, takes her coat and her bag. She texts Jonathan Alex’s address while she pays, tells him they’ll be waiting outside. She isn’t sure what an appropriate tip would be. Normally, she’d ask Alex, but… she’ll have to ask Kara later. As a former waitress, she must know these things. Lena isn’t completely oblivious, she knows about the twenty percent rule, but… if she can give more, shouldn’t she? She has no idea. That’s not how it works in the restaurants she has to drag herself to for work. She takes her credit card back, almost bumps into Alex when she turns around. She was half-expecting her to storm off and wait for her outside. Or not at all.

“Sorry.”

Alex shrugs, waits for her to slip her coat on before they make their way to the exit. Jonathan has already brought the car in front of the entrance. Alex rolls her eyes when Lena opens the door for her. Lena looks away, her eyes settling on the neon signs nearby. What is she supposed to do? Forget manners, courtesy, open the door and get in first? She doesn’t understand why these gestures would be undesirable, why people feel the need to pretend that they are. It’s not excessive sophistication, it’s basic civility. Sometimes, it’s everything. All she has to give. The last line of defense and the farewell to arms. She remembers Kara’s charming smile the first time she opened a door for her, the first time she got her flowers. Like it was welcome. And Maggie, getting splashed with spaghetti sauce so that Lena’s dress wouldn’t, helping her out of her car the night they went out for drinks. Why wouldn’t people do that for one another? She sighs inwardly, closes the door after making sure Alex’s jacket isn’t sticking out, and walks around the car to get in from the other
side. She puts on her seatbelt. Alex glances at her, does the same. Only then does Jonathan start the car.

They drive. Lena feels nothing. It’s too complicated, too raw. But, well. She looks at Alex. Holds out her hand on the armrest between them. Alex doesn’t take it. Okay. Lena leaves it there, turns away to look out the window. All you have shall some day be given. She closes her eyes. A minute later, Alex laces their fingers together.

“Sorry I was such a jerk.”

“It’s all right. I’ve had to deal with much worse,” Lena replies automatically, stroking Alex’s thumb. The rest of the drive is spent in silence, until the car glides to a stop in front of Alex’s building.

“Thanks for the ride.”

“Sure. And, Alex?”

“Yeah?”

“You can always come to me. If you need anything, if you just want to catch up, get dinner. Just... you’re not the only one dealing with complicated feelings. Don’t forget that.”

Alex nods. “I’ll try. See you, Luthor.”

Lena doesn’t have the heart to fire back. She watches her vanish inside the building. Pulls out her phone. There’s a text from Kara. Is it too late to call Maggie? Probably not. If she’s at work, she won’t pick up. If she’s asleep, her phone will hopefully be on silent and Lena won’t wake her up. She calls. Straight to voicemail.

“Hey, Maggie, it’s Lena. I just had dinner with Alex and I wanted to let you know how it went, but I guess you’re busy, or asleep. If you want to talk about it, we can do that whenever you feel like dropping by for a coffee break. But, long story short, it ended on... an encouraging note. She let me give her a ride home and I don’t think she’s angry. That’s something. Anyway, see you soon, I hope. Have a good night. Bye.”
She exhales slowly. Opens Kara’s text. I was sent over an hour ago.

From Kara Danvers [Today 09:06PM]: I hope things are going swimmingly. If they are, ignore this and enjoy the evening. And come over later so I can congratulate you on taming the dragon. If they’re not, soldier on and come over anyway so I can make you hot chocolate. (On one condition: I’m taking the couch tonight. No arguing.)

Lena touches her cheek. Her fingers are cold. The warmth of the whiskey is fading. Maybe she needs to be alone with her thoughts for a while. Maybe she needs the exact opposite. Maybe she needs to be with someone who will let her be alone with her thoughts. And when your friend is silent your heart ceases not to listen to her heart.

To Kara Danvers [Today 10:12PM]: I could use some hot chocolate.

From Kara Danvers [Today 10:14PM]: Coming right up.

X

She falls out of the sky to land behind her. The force pushes Maggie into the car, her wrist turning awkwardly around the key, twinging. She winces, withdraws the key, folding it into her palm and pocketing it. She finds her breath. Supergirl’s reflection is in the driver’s side window, smiling and bright. Why does her heart hurt? Kara’s there when she turns.

Maggie looks up at the sky. Billows of grey with cracks of light at the edges. The sun is falling but the bright colors that typically accompany it aren’t to be found. Kara touches her glasses. Her hair is tied up. Maggie crosses her arms and leans back into the car.

“Sorry,” Kara winces. “That was a hard landing. I didn’t think it’d be strong enough to push you. Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Nothing I can’t handle.”

“I’ll try to… you know. Remember to adjust when you’re so close. Anyway, I saw you,” Kara says. She lifts an index finger, makes a circular motion.
Maggie wonders idly how far Kara can see. A bald eagle can see almost two miles. Much further than a human. How did she see her? Is it rude to ask? Kara steps closer. Maggie lowers her head but she can still smell her scent. Clean. Mildly sweet. The fragrance triggers something in her. She hadn’t known until this moment that she’s been waiting. I’ll see you soon, okay? Kara said. It’s been four days. Kara texted.

_I think Alex is going to be okay._

_I saw a packet of ramen noodles today and it made me think of JT during his N'Sync days. Thought you’d like to know._

_There’s a little bird on my balcony and he’s been hopping around trying to impress a lady bird. She just flew off with another bird with brighter plumage. Poor bird. Better luck next time._

What’s four days to a Kryptonian?

“What’s the matter?” Kara asks. Maggie nods. “I’m done with patrolling for today. I hope. So… do you want to come over? Unless you’re working.”

“I’m done for today.”

“I’m going home, so we can… I mean, if you want.”

Maggie’s jaw tightens. She shouldn’t be upset. She doesn’t need to be taken care of or checked on. Kara’s Supergirl. She doesn’t have time for everything or everyone. So what if she said she’d see her soon. Four days can be soon. Four days has been soon for Maggie and Lena. She forces her jaw to relax. “Maybe.”

“Okay…” She’s thoughtful. “I’m going to catch the nearest bus, then. See you later, maybe?” She kisses her briefly.

Kara considers. “Okay. Thanks.” Maggie hadn’t expected her to agree. She walks to the passenger door, pulls it open. The last time she did this it was for Lena. Kara gets in. “How gallant.”

She smirks. “That’s me. Gallant.” She makes sure she’s tucked inside before shutting the door. It doesn’t matter. She could slam it on her hands and break the door. The thought of it makes her ill. Kara may not be human but she’s flesh and blood. What must it be like to be so powerful? To look the way she does and be unstoppable? She gets into the driver’s side.

“You don’t consider yourself gallant? I guess the word is a bit outdated. Thoughtful, maybe?”

Maggie waits for her to put the seatbelt on before starting the car. It’s silly maybe. “I haven’t given it any thought.”

“Well, I think it’s sweet. Opening the door for someone.” She shifts, finally propping her elbow on the window sill, looking out.

“I think you’re sweet.” It makes things hard sometimes.

“You think so? I know I suck, sometimes.” Maggie glances at her. “That last time you were trying to cheer me up.”

“Don’t worry about it,” she murmurs. Kara wiggles in the seat. “You comfortable over there?”

“I’m good. It’s nice, you know. I don’t like cars, exactly. Any ride is a bumpy ride for me. But! I was telling Lena, the other day, how I’m trying to… take my time. With things. Flying and superspeed, that should be for Supergirl. When it’s needed. Not for Kara. I didn’t tell her that exactly, but. The gist of it.”

“It’s hard to believe she doesn’t know. Are you ever going to tell her that part?”

She shakes her head, looking out the window. Maggie sees faint outlines of their reflections. Traffic zooming by. “No. Never. It’s too special. When she makes us tea? She always warns me about how hot it is when we have it in mugs, not cups. And when we watch a movie at hers, she always asks if I’m cold, if I need a blanket. It’s just too special. It helps so much.”
Helps what? “Yeah. Okay.” Is she not thoughtful? She’s never considered how Kara reacts to heat, to cold. She frowns, looking away from her, to the road, swerving left to avoid roadkill. “I know you were disappointed when I figured it out. Sorry. Guess I’m too good of a detective, huh?”

Kara chuckles. Looks at her. “You sure are. I don’t think she’s oblivious, though. I think it’s as important to her as it is to me. Not knowing. And with a brain like hers… you can do all sorts of things. Not even realize you’re preventing yourself from putting two and two together. Who knows?”

“A person can delude themselves into believing anything.” She shrugs. “If it works for you two.”

“It does. It is what it is.”

Maggie runs a hand through her hair, stares at the grey of the highways and skies. They drive in silence. She doesn’t know how long passes that way. She feels Kara’s eyes on her. Maggie looks to her.

“I didn’t even ask about your day,” Kara says. “How was your day?”

She takes a breath. “Long. Tomorrow I have to follow up with a few other leads after the morning meeting. It’s never done, you know?” Kara nods. “How about you? Sorry. Are you comfortable? Should we pull over so you can stretch your legs?”

“Oh, no. You’re a very smooth driver. Alex, though? No thanks.” Maggie considers that. She never thought of Alex as a particularly aggressive driver. She thinks of her own driving the other night. What would Kara think of it? “And Jonathan, Lena’s driver? That works, too. Or maybe that’s because the car he’s driving must have an epic suspension system that costs more than our rents combined.” She’s never ridden in Lena’s car but it doesn’t surprise her. “Anyway, my day was boring. The patrolling was. DEO, blah, blah. I was home when they called. I was busy. But as you well know, a hero’s work is never done.”

I’m not a hero. “You never quit, though. There’s something to be said for that. It’s inspiring.” The asphalt blurs and stretches out. “I don’t know where National City would be without you.”

“Probably where every other major city in the world is, you know? They don’t all have a Super to take care of things, and they manage. Sometimes… Obviously, I can’t regret all the times Supergirl
saved someone or prevented a building from collapsing, or dealt with a Fort Rozz situation, which was kind of my fault. But sometimes, I wonder. It was easier before. When I was sticking to my decision not to use my powers. Eliza and Alex really wanted that too. For me to stay hidden. But it was my choice.”

“Mh. There’s nothing stopping you from hanging up your cape. You know, everyone in Gotham runs around with pointy animal ears. Beating the crap out of thugs and villains.”

“That’s not okay.”

She thinks of Kate. “Not always. Not usually. It’s complicated. My point is there aren’t Supers. Not really. Alex was in the DEO before you were out on the streets. There’s a black ops agency dedicated to the stuff you deal with. You could leave it to them.”

Kara smiles over at her. “Yeah. But if you can help, you must help, right? Isn’t that what you do all day?” But this is what she wanted to do. What she trained for. Kara taps her chest. “The S means something. Superman is an inspiration. Humanity’s better angel. I have to be, too. That’s what our house stands for.”

“But shouldn’t you set some guidelines for yourself? It’s one thing to be moonlighting. Is being Supergirl all the time what you want? You’re always on call. Especially since you’re not at CatCo anymore. I don’t know. It sounds hard. The world isn’t your responsibility, Kara.”

“That’s true. I do take time off. Sometimes I tell them, unless it’s a world ending emergency, get off my back for the next five hours or so… But, I mean, Alex works there, too. If she’s out in the field, I’d rather be around just in case. And I do set guidelines for myself, just… It’s hard to explain.”

“So, you fret as much as Danvers, does,” she chuckles. Surprise. Her smile fades, thinking of Alex. “Look, you don’t have to explain, but I’m not a bad listener. If you ever do want to talk about it. I know I’ll never really understand.”

“It’s not that complicated, just… what it means to me. Maybe that’s what’s hard to describe… It’s… I see stuff online about Supergirl, who she must be when she’s not in costume, and it’s… it’s ridiculous.”

“What, they don’t describe her as a dorky reporter who dresses like a grandpa every now and
“Haha. They act like I superspeed through chores, heat up my food with my eyes, refreeze my melting ice cream with my breath.”

“Who needs a kitchen when you’ve got Supergirl?” would be handy for a studio, maybe. Tight quarters.

“I’m serious. Even just superspeeding out of my supersuit… even the words are ridiculous. I’m never doing that again, you know? I shouldn’t have earlier when I landed near you. Unless time is of the essence, I’m never doing that again.”

“What’s the big deal? Everyone has shortcuts.”

“I don’t need them. I don’t want them. And that’s not a shortcut just anyone has. It’s not normal.”

“Yeah, okay.”

“It’s like a cheap magic trick. Laughable or frightening, even, for a person. I mean, a human. Or a Kryptonian back home. If I’d seen someone pull that little trick on Krypton? I would have laughed. Well no, you don’t laugh at people when you’re a member of the House of El. Or anyone else, for that matter. Krypton was civilized.”

“So civilized people don’t laugh?”

“That’s not what I meant. It was… just. It was dying and beautiful. It was normal. My normal.”

Her fingers tighten on the steering wheel. “I see the appeal of being with Lena. For you, I mean,” she adds quickly. “I’m sorry I can’t un-know. Is there anything I can do? It must be strange to be here.”

“Here?”
“On Earth. I don’t know what Krypton was like. You don’t really talk about it. And that’s okay. It must be hard to talk about. But it must different here. Not just because of Supergirl.”

Kara stares out at the sky. Eventually she looks at her. “Aside from being… normal there, I guess it was just… perpetual sunset. There was a stillness there. Or maybe I made that up later, I’m not sure what I remember, what I made up. It was beautiful. A world at its end, but at its peak, too. We all…” she swallows. “We were all royalty. Not literally, but we were… aware of our place. Refined. Earth is… I don’t even know. It’s fine.”

“I’m sorry you lost that. I know you have your memories and that’s enough for some people but memories can be hazy. It’s hard when you can’t go home. Or don’t have the option to. I hope it feels better for you here someday. On Earth. I love you here. We love you here. You, Kara Danvers. But that’s… of course that’s not enough and it doesn’t replace anything. Some things can’t be replaced.”

“Same goes for people here. You lose things, can’t get them back. Lena, you, Alex… My cherry on top is that I have all these powers, but I wasn’t meant to have them, you know? Back on Krypton, the world couldn’t turn to glass before my eyes. People couldn’t. It’s beautiful, but it’s too much. Anyway. I’m glad I have you all. You and Alex, you know what’s up. Lena, she doesn’t, but… it helps that she doesn’t. That when we talk about our families, she doesn’t think, oh Kara lost her planet. She thinks, I hear you, I’ve been through the same thing. And maybe it’s closer to the truth. Anyway, sorry for being such a kill joy. But thanks for listening. That’s sweet.” Maggie pulls to Kara’s curbside. “You’re a great driver. Thanks for the ride.”

“I’ll make sure to tell I… Jonathan—he’s got some competition.” A beat. “But I’m glad I could get you here in one piece.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to come in?”

They stare at one another for a few moments. Sometimes Kara's eyes go into forever. Other times they're present, so present, a wall. Maggie scratches the scar on her forehead. “I’ve come this far. Yeah. I’ll come up.”

Kara smiles. “Great.” They get out of the car, walking alongside one another but their hands don’t touch. Kara opens the door to the building and Maggie tries to remember the last time they entered together, climbed up together. Soon Kara's unlocking the door and they wander in. It’s colder than she remembers but Kara takes off her jacket so Maggie does the same, hanging it up. It’s chilly. “I’m pouring myself a fresh glass of mango juice. Home made. Want one?”
“Mango juice, huh?” She smiles. “Sounds refreshing.”

“It’s going to knock your socks off.”

Maggie looks around. Sees what’s shifted since the last time she visited. Over a week ago, she thinks. Two weeks ago, maybe? She can’t remember. She joins Kara in the kitchen, looking at the bright golden orange in the glass. She picks it up and smells it. Mango all right. She has a drink. It’s sweet and rich. Quenching. “It’s good.”

She smiles. “Oh. I wanted to show you something.” She extends a hand. Maggie looks at it. Is this a joke? She lifts an eyebrow, wraps her fingers around hers. Kara tugs. Maggie starts, following. Not a handshake, then. Kara takes her towards the bedroom area, past the curtain until they’re at the full-length mirror. Maggie stares at their reflections before she sees it. The postcard she got her is tucked in the upper left corner between the glass and the frame.

So Kara has seen it. She brought it weeks ago. A month ago? She assumed Kara hadn’t liked it. Why here? Why there? Seconds pass without her knowing what to say. “You found it, then.” A beat. “Do you like it?”

“No.”

Oh. She blinks. That’s unexpected. Why she finds it to be unexpected she can’t say. She goes to the mirror and tugs it free. “If you don’t like it, don’t put it up. Especially not here.” She doesn’t like it. Did she drag her here to tell her she doesn’t like? *What the hell, Kara?* She tries to hand it back to her. “Just… put it away somewhere. Or throw it out.”

“Please put it back up. Who cares if I like it or hate it? And I don’t hate it, by the way. But the point is, it’s interesting. That’s what matters. It makes me think. I want to look at it. Mirror to mirror, you know?”

Maggie returns it to where it was in a daze. “What does it make you think about?” *How much you don’t like it? (But she doesn’t hate it.)*

“Do you remember a while back when Lena took me to that Baroque exhibition?”

*How could I forget, you shot me down to go with her. “You mentioned it.”*
“Okay. Go sit on the couch. I want to show you something.” She hurries to the living room.

Maggie looks at the postcard tucked into the mirror and heads to the couch. There are stacks of books on the coffee table. Maggie cocks her head, looking at the spines when Kara returns with a closed laptop, sitting next to her. “Is there a book you want to borrow? More than one. You can borrow more than one.”

Maggie tears her gaze away from *The Prophet* to look at her. “Maybe. What did you want to show me?”

“Don’t be shy if you see one you like. I love books. And sharing books. Lena and I do it all the time. Anyway,” she opens the screen. It’s a painting. One she recognizes. A royal court. Girls, handmaidens, a dog, a painter. “Do you know this painting?”

Maggie stares at it. “Oh. That’s, um. Um.” She frowns. Her face burns. She can hear Emily in her mind. *You never listen to me.* “No, I know it. This is. Emily told me about this.”

“What’s Emily?”


“Las Meninas. I only knew it under its more common title, *Philip IV’s Family*. What do you see?”

Maggie glances at her. Is this a new game they’re playing? She looks back at the painting. “There’s a lot going on. Lots of people in the room. Lots of paintings. Canvasses. Is that a window in the back? No. Maybe a mirror? Maybe a mirror. Everyone’s looking everywhere. At us, each other, the painter. I think Emily did a paper on this. Shit. I should have paid more attention. Everyone’s gaze is shifted. Wow.” She looks closer. “I could stare at this for hours.”

“Right? It’s so fascinating. That was one of the paintings we saw at the Baroque period exhibition. I kept coming back to it. And afterwards, Lena asked me what I found so interesting about it. And… again, I suck, but I hadn’t looked closely enough at the postcard you got me, Diane Arbus’ self-portrait. And Lena asked me, what do you find interesting about this postcard, because that’s how she is, you know? She pays attention. And when I told her, I realized how similar it was to the painting, the themes and motifs, I mean. And you picked it for me without even knowing that’s
exactly what I find interesting. So I thought… where should I put it? I tried the fridge, I tried the photowall… but really, it should be near the mirror, right? Anyway, I’m sorry I didn’t pay attention. Lena saved the day, as always. No wonder you like her, too. It’s a great postcard.” Her lips are soft, brushing against her cheek.

Maggie’s still, dares a glance at her. “That’s…” she clears her throat. “I’m glad you like it.” She doesn’t like it. She doesn’t like it. But it’s a great postcard. Maybe she’ll never understand how Kara’s mind works. “Or… that it attracts you. In some way.”

“We could go see the Baroque exhibit together? I think it’s still happening. I don’t mind seeing it for the second time, not one bit. Lena was like, my personal audio guide. That way, I can sound smart when we go. If you want.”

Maggie looks at her. I asked if you wanted to go. You didn’t want to go. “I’m… Um. Sorry. I guess I’m confused.” She shifts on the couch to look at her.

“What about?”

“Isn’t this what you do with Lena? You know. You go out. Do these… cultural things. I’d love to go with you if you’re really interested but sometimes…” she scratches the scar. “I don’t know. I just miss you.”

“I’m still here. I haven’t gone anywhere.” Maggie’s silent. “Lena… She’s my best friend, you know? And I told her that, sometimes, I feel like I’m not giving you the right thing. And we talked about it. I thought about it. She helped me. She even… she read me this… anyway, basically, she said that I should find what my thing is, my own way to show you that I care. So. Since you got me this postcard, and it’s so close to what I love about the painting… maybe we could go to a museum? Not the Baroque exhibition, if you don’t want to… just, any museum. Or gallery.”

Maggie furrows her brow. “Look… Kara. That’s a nice…” She bites her tongue. “It’s not that I don’t appreciate it. But is it hard for you to talk to me? If you feel like you’re not giving me the right thing, why not go to the source?” Her chest tightens. “Is it hard for you to show that you care about me?” Everything she’s said about the postcard is in context to the painting she saw with Lena. “What if you hadn’t seen the painting? What if Lena hadn’t seen the postcard?” What would you have said to me then?

“I’m sorry.”
“I don’t want you to be sorry. I want you to talk to me.”

Kara draws a breath. “I’ve been here since… I’ve spent half my life here, but back home? On Krypton? Courtship wasn’t a thing, not the way it is here. I don’t know how to… Lena, she’s… she knows these things, she grew up in an environment that’s closer to what I knew, you know?” Maggie doesn’t know. “So I don’t… I mean, there’s a reason you’re my first partner, right?” Maggie blinks. Kara’s said similarly before. She thought she meant the first woman she’d been with, not. Oh. Shit. Is that why she’s dating Lena, too? Did she feel like she was limiting herself? Not that she can blame her for dating Lena. “I don’t know how to… what the steps are. What can I do? Is there anything I should be doing differently? To show you that I love you?”

Maggie’s mouth is dry. She shouldn’t have left the mango juice on the island. She looks at Kara, her face open and vulnerable. Does she have these problems with Lena? With Alex? Is it strange that she doesn’t know? The more seconds that pass, the more vulnerable Kara looks. Maggie shakes her head. “No, it’s fine. You’re doing fine. I’m sorry. It’s…” She smiles sadly at her. “You’re doing great. You’re talking to me. But. You’re with Lena.” The words go. She flounders helplessly. “Is this too hard for you sometimes? Being with me? Lena seems to just get you. Is there something I can do better to make you more comfortable? I don’t want this to be…”

“No. You’re… you’re fine. I don’t… I tell Lena all the time. How understanding you are. How accommodating.” Accommodating. “She’s my… well. Best friend sounds childish. She’s my confidante. Old-fashioned, but that’s what it is. I tell her everything. Except the obvious. And she’s so supportive. The things I don’t get? About relationships? She tries to help. And she doesn’t have a ton of experience either, but she helps.” What? “It’s amazing. You two… I’m not surprised you get along, you know? I don’t want this to be…”

“Yeah. Lena’s…” She shakes her head. Lena’s great. “I’m glad you have her to talk to. As long as you know you can talk to me, too.” She touches Kara’s face. It’s warm.

Kara takes her hand lightly. “Can I kiss you?”

Maggie smiles. That intensity. “I would love it if you kissed me.”

Kara’s lips brush against hers, arms sliding around her waist and pulling her close. Maggie hisses, bites down. Kara pulls away. “Oh, no. Sorry. Are you okay? I heard—did I hurt you?” Waves of heat move through her. She’s on the mend. This could be worse. This could hurt more. She tells herself it surprised her. It surprised her more than anything. Kara’s face is pure worry.

Supergirl is for truth, justice and the American way. Honesty is best. But she can’t tell her the
truth. “I. Um. I got into a little scrape at work a few weeks ago. I think I’m just a little bit tender.” The purples and blues of her ribs are fading. It’s an improvement.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes. I’m okay. Cross my heart."

“You should have told me. I’ll be more careful.”

Maggie wraps her arms gingerly around her neck. “Okay. So where were we?”

They kiss for several minutes, Kara keeping her hand on the back of the couch, beside her leg, not touching. She’s so strong. She could shatter her if she wanted to. Maybe if she didn’t want to. Does she have to think about it? But she’s careful now, careful enough. Her kisses always leave her lips throbbing. In a good way. It’s easy to forget she was ever irritated or hurt. Maggie draws away when it’s getting heated. “Maybe we can get a raincheck? Until I get the spring back in my step?” Kara nods, smiles. She moves the computer and Maggie retrieves the mango juice from the kitchen. It’s warmed but still good. She ambles around the apartment, looking at the small paintings on the wall, the photos on her photograph wall.

She looks over the crates in the corner. Works in progress. Canvass’ that have been stripped, others in the process of being mounted. She looks at the easel and stops. There’s a picture hanging on the wall. New. She steps closer without meaning to, bumping into the easel, seeing it fall from the corner of her eye and catching it. She sets it right, apologizes to Kara.

“I’ve done that at least five hundred times,” Kara says.

Maggie returns her attention to the photograph. It’s beautiful. It’s a garden. One she doesn’t recognize. White roses. Streams of light touching Lena’s face. Kara with her arm around Lena’s shoulder, holding her close. Lena’s arm around Kara’s waist. Lena looks at Kara as if she were the sun. She is in a way. And Kara looks… Maggie exhales and all the air seems to go with the breath until all that’s left is a fire in her breast. Certainty one moment, uncertainty the next. Is there anything I should be doing differently? To show you that I love you? Why here, by the easel? Will she paint it? Will it inspire her? Is Lena her muse?

Kara touches her shoulder. Maggie looks back at her, startled. She smiles. “That’s a nice picture. Did you take it?” Kara nods. Kara’s never taken a picture with her. We should take a picture
She can’t say it. It’s dangerous. Far more risqué than merely asking a complete stranger if she can go down on her. She crosses her arms. Unhooks them, knowing how body language reads. She looks back at the picture, feels Kara’s arms wrap around her waist carefully, chin resting on her shoulder. Maggie rests her fingers on Kara’s hands. “You’re both so beautiful.”

Kara’s eyes are on her, watching. Watching for what, Maggie wonders.

X

A knock on the door. Lena smiles.

“Come in.”

She saves her draft and looks up as Maggie steps in. Empty-handed, as promised. Her hair is down. “Hey, Maggie.”

Maggie gives her a warm look as she closes the door behind her. Lena stands, doesn’t have time to make it around her desk before Maggie’s lips meet hers. The contact is fleeting. Or, it feels that way.

Lena leans against her desk, watches Maggie stick her hands in her pockets, look out the window, squinting into the sun. She’s beautiful. Lena should tell her. But what if it sounds too… oh, well.

“You look lovely.”

Maggie’s eyes fall on her. “Turning on the charm, already?”

Lena doesn’t know if she somehow did manage to come off as sleazy, or too earnest, whether Maggie’s reply is a sign of discomfort, self-consciousness, if she even means anything by it. When in doubt, as Kara taught her by example, go for the truth.

“No,” she smiles. “I just thought you looked beautiful, right here in the light.” Your hair. Your style. The way you move and the way you stand still. “And I wanted to let you know.”
Maggie considers her. Lena holds her gaze easily. It’s simple, when there’s no hostility on either side. “That’s nice, but why?”

Nice. Lena glances at the flowers on her desk. “I guess, because… some things are for free. But evidently, it came out wrong.”

“It didn’t. I’m sorry, I just have a lot on my mind.” Maggie leans against the desk next to her. “And thank you. For saying it. My first thought when I came in was, Oh, she’s gorgeous. In general, but in that dress in particular. And I didn’t say it. It feels cheap to say it now.”

“Not to me. Honesty is… a precious commodity.”

Maggie nods slowly. “How are you?” she asks after a while.

“I am… well, I’m glad you came by, for a start. I’m wondering if whatever’s on your mind should be left at the door or whether we should talk about it. What else… I’m trying to figure out if we should stay here, if I should offer to make us some coffee and move to the couch. I’m getting the sense this visit is less… light-hearted than the previous ones, but I don’t know if I’m reading too much into everything. That’s how I am. Unsure, but,” she says playfully, “ready to go with the flow.”

That gets a soft laugh out of Maggie, who shakes her head, something like fondness in her eyes. “Coffee sounds great. And…” her smile dims, doesn’t disappear. “Normally, I’d say whatever’s on my mind should stay out of here, and let’s just have a good time, but a while ago… in the car, you offered… you told me I could ask you questions. About this situation. And I have one.”

Lena nods. “Of course. Questions over misunderstandings. What do you want to know?” Maggie touches her lips, opens her mouth, closes it. “You know what?” Lena adds, “why don’t you go make yourself comfortable on the couch, think it over, and I’ll make us come coffee in the meantime.”

“Yeah. Thanks.”

Lena goes to slide a panel open, revealing her small coffee machine. She turns around as Maggie is halfway to the couch “You’re not lactose intolerant, are you?”
“I’m not,” Maggie answers, the perplexity in her voice replaced with a curious frown when she spots the machine. “Fancy.”

Lena is about to comment on how the miniature brew and steam boilers hidden under the stainless steel and wenge wood panels remind her of the distillery’s décor, but catches herself at the last second. She smiles at Maggie. “Do you want to try it?”

“Sorry, try what?”

“Pulling shots. It’s fun. And easier than it looks.” She shrugs. “I’m easily amused.”

Maggie chuckles and comes stand by her. “I’ll just watch. With rapt attention.”

Lena gets to work. “It lets you tinker with so many parameters. You can create the perfect shots for you, happy accidents happen… this bit here lets you adjust the brew temperature, and you can do the same for the steam boiler, to control the maximum steam power that goes into making the shot, you know? It’s a pump-driven model, so you do in fact have to fiddle quite a bit to get somewhere, which I like.”

She wants to add: So does Kara, actually, and the first time she tried it? She broke the lever over there. She seemed distressed for half a minute before vowing to fix it, spent the entire afternoon on the couch disassembling everything, to the point that by the time the sun started setting, I’d made peace with the fact my trusty Lucca A53 would never happily gurgle again. Until Kara reassembled it in less than an hour, and, in less than a month, learned how to tweak it to perfection and pull shots like a seasoned barista. But Lena doesn’t say that. Because Kara doesn’t want Maggie to tell her about whatever she does with Lena. So, maybe Maggie would rather not hear about Kara either, when it’s just the two of them. Who knows? Certainly not Lena.

“It does seem fun,” Maggie says quietly, watching Lena switch the portafilters. She traces the black gloss _La Spaziale_ badge on the bottom panel, pulls her hand away like she just touched a forbidden artwork in a museum. Lena promises herself that if those visits are to continue, she’ll find a way to make Maggie comfortable with the idea of using it herself. “Where did you get it? Italy?” Maggie asks. “Please don’t tell me how much it costs.”

Lena laughs. “I couldn’t even if I wanted to. It was a gift.”
“Oh?”

“Yes. From the designer who helped with the move from Metropolis. You know, new headquarters, rebranding… this office, actually.”

Maggie leans against the shelves with a playful smile. “A gift from a trusted designer. What’s the story, here?”

Lena glances at her. No smirking, just teasing and curiosity. This is nice.

“He’s…” she pauses to make sure the milk is steamed just so. “An Italian gentleman who’s been working with my family for a very long time. He was a friend of my father’s. He retired ten years ago, but as a courtesy, he offered to help me with the transition after my brother pretty much ran our name and the company into the ground.” She pours the milk, tracing a simple spiral with it. “This beauty was his parting gift.”

Maggie nods, eyeing her attentively. Lena mentally thanks Kara for teaching her to lower her defenses. It’s worth it, if it means getting to witness the change in the way someone like Maggie looks at her, speaks to her… it’s worth the risk. Lena sprinkles cinnamon over the two cups, pours them two small glasses of water, sets everything on a tray and gestures towards the couch with her free hand. Maggie’s eyes linger on her before she makes her way to the couch, pushing the chessboard aside to make room for the tray on the coffee table. Lena thanks her with a smile.

They take a seat and Maggie’s eyes dart from the tray to Lena’s. “So. I’ve been wondering…” her voice trails off. “I like coming here. And I didn’t get to say it back in the car, but those are really nice moments for me, too.”

“Oh,” Lena says. Is this the We need to talk moment? Is it something else? What is it? When it doubt… “I love having you here. You’re always welcome.”

“Jesus.” Maggie touches her forehead. She does that often. Is it a stress thing? “You’re not making it easy to ask the hard questions.”

Lena looks out the window. The sun. The sky. “The hard questions? Nothing’s changed since we last talked, and I thought we’d…” She shakes herself out of this daze. “What can I help you with?” Damn it. It sounded so formal. Impersonal.
Maggie grabs her cup of coffee, takes a sip. “Oh. That’s really good.”

“Thank you,” Lena replies. It’s all she can say. She fights the urge to cross her arms defensively, can’t tear her eyes away from Maggie’s face, from what might be heading her way. The hard questions. Another deal breaker? She doesn’t understand. She hasn’t kept anything hidden, from anyone. What left is there to ask? What else can she say? She’s out of answers.

Maggie looks at her. She seems hesitant, almost apologetic. She sets down the cup and shifts closer. Her eyes flicker to Lena’s lips. Asking for permission? Lena gives up on trying to figure out what’s going on, kisses Maggie’s cheek instead. Maggie turns her head and captures her lips.

Lena’s hand finds her shoulder, the other cups Maggie’s face. She feels Maggie’s arms around her. She feels so many things. She’s wearing a short-sleeved dress, so she knows Maggie’s hands won’t touch her bare arms. It seems to be one of their unspoken boundaries. But warmth felt through thin fabric is special, and Maggie is running a very warm hand down her back right now. Lena sighs into their kiss, feels Maggie’s embrace tighten in response. Lena’s fingers go from stroking her cheek to running through her hair. She couldn’t do that with Alex. Silk running through her fingers. Somehow, Maggie’s hand ends up settling on her knee, lingers for a second. It’s gone.

“Sorry,” Maggie whispers between kisses.

It occurs to Lena that the reason Maggie is kissing her instead of asking the hard questions is that depending on Lena’s answer, it might be the last time they do this. And, just in case, Maggie is giving them a last one for the road. Oh well. People come and go. They ebb and they flow. She’ll be depressed about it later. For now, might as well make it count, might as well enjoy, enjoy, enjoy. She takes Maggie’s hand, puts it back on her knee, and instead of finding Maggie’s shoulder again, her own slides between her jacket and her lovely blue shirt, to rest against Maggie’s side, to feel a little closer. She’s so warm. Her fingers tighten slightly when Maggie pulls her closer with her free arm, when her tongue brushes her lips, when her thumb strokes the inside of Lena’s knee, not going any higher.

Lena gently bites her lower lip. Maggie pulls away. Was it a mistake? Maggie shrugs her jacket off. “Sorry,” she says again, “it’s just… really warm in here and it was cold outside and… come on,” she hisses at her reluctant jacket. Glances at Lena. “I mean, if that’s okay.” Lena blinks, nods. As soon as Maggie has pulled herself free of the infernal garment, her arms are back around her, her lips on hers. Lena finds the back of her neck, leaves her hand there for a while, threads her fingers in her hair again. She wonders if Maggie’s kisses are so soft and slow because that’s what she likes, or if she’s letting Lena set the pace. Either way… as much as Lena tries to stay in the present, she knows she’s committing every touch, every sensation to memory despite herself. In case that’s all she gets. There’s no pushing the sadness away, no saving it for later. This is the first time Maggie has held her so close as they kissed. It must mean something. Goodbye, perhaps. It was nice while it lasted. I like you. Maybe we can be friends.
It seems unfair, somehow. Lena tried to play by rules she barely understands, was truthful to everyone involved. But it wasn’t enough. She’s not going to pass whatever test the hard questions will subject her to. She keeps thinking about that line, the one she read Kara, to help her. But it’s helping Lena, now. *All you have shall some day be given.* So, instead of pulling away as they usually do when their kissing time comes to an end, she breaks one of their boundaries and pulls Maggie into a hug.

Maggie goes still for a couple of seconds, then returns the embrace and surprises Lena by kissing her cheek. Lena hears a shaky intake of breath. She swallows, closes her eyes and runs a hand up and down Maggie’s back. They stay like this for a while, relaxing into each other’s arms.

When they separate, Lena’s hand lingers on Maggie forearm. She wants to tell her how beautiful she is again, because it’s true. Her dark hair, a waterfall over the light blue of her shirt. But she’s said it already. Time for less pleasant truths, she supposes. She has a sip of coffee. It’s mildly calming.

“So,” she begins, not expecting her own smile, small as it is, to grace her lips effortlessly. Genuinely. “I’m listening.”

Maggie nods. Clasps her hands. “I’ve been wondering… because you and Kara have… must have… wonderful times together, right?”

What? Lena takes another sip of coffee. Makes sure to keep her face open. “Yes, I very much enjoy spending time with her.”

“Right. So…” Maggie runs a hand through her hair, looks away. “Why… why this? Here, with me? When you could be doing the same thing with Kara?”

Jesus. Is this a conspiracy? At this point, the only person who hasn’t asked her why she’s kissing Maggie instead of Kara is, well, Kara herself. Lena studies Maggie’s face. There’s none of the bitterness or exasperation plain as day when Alex asked her the same thing. There’s helplessness. All right. A different approach, then.

“Maggie, I hope it doesn’t sound like I’m deflecting, but… how could the time I spend with Kara, and what I share with her, possibly be in contradiction with wanting to get to know you, and finding you attractive, and enjoying our moments here?”
Maggie rubs her palms on her thighs. “Look, I’m not blaming you for anything. But you two have
something special, and that’s fine, but I don’t understand why you’d be interested in spending time
with me when you could be with Kara, right now. I’m just trying to figure out where I fit in all this.
She… she talks about you a lot. When she’s with me. Just little things that remind her of you, and
again, that’s fine, just…” She shrugs.

“But,” Lena replies, as kindly as she can, “I’m in the same position, I think. Kara and I talk about
many things and that includes you. You’re on her mind, she thinks about you. And sometimes, I
wonder why you’re interested in coming to see me, when you could be with her, right now. Doing
the same thing. Because, Maggie, you are her girlfriend. I’m not. And it feels… absurd, that I even
have to say this, because isn’t it obvious? Or do you feel like I… Excuse me,” Lena pauses to take
her glass of water, downing half of it. She clears her throat. “So, do you feel like I… monopolize
her, somehow, and that it impacts your relationship?”

Maggie just stares at her, blinks once. Lena mentally replays everything she just said to try to find
what could have caused Maggie to look at her like she suddenly starting speaking Kryptonese, but
she finds nothing.

“Uh,” Maggie ends up replying, scratching her forehead. “No… of course not. You can spend as
much time as you want together. Not that you need my permission.”

“Then… again, I feel like I’m missing something, because I don’t see what the problem is. Or what
else I can do to help.” Lena plays with her watch. “I can tell you’re concerned, so of course you
should ask, but I don’t… understand the question. And perhaps I shouldn’t say this, but Alex asked
me the exact same thing, when I saw her to talk about us. And I was at a loss then, too.”

Maggie frowns. “She asked you this?”

“Oh, yes. Not as tactfully. She just…” Lena thinks she should stop speaking. But, well. If she’s
ready to listen to Maggie when she needs to talk, surely it goes both ways.

“She just what?”

Lena gives her an apologetic smile. “It was awful. It didn’t end on an awful note, but,” she shakes
her head, “she made a lot of hurtful assumptions. Talking about us like I was treating you as a…
some kind of placeholder until Kara and I ride into the sunset. Which was beyond inappropriate.
And wrong.”
Maggie puts her face in her hands, elbows on her knees. “Fuck. Lena, I am so sorry.” Her voice comes out muffled.

Lena puts a hand on her shoulder. “Maggie, you have nothing to be sorry for, and neither do I. I told her as much. All these things she said? That’s on her. And she apologized, in the end. So. No more worrying about Alex, okay?” Maggie doesn’t react. Lena keeps her hand on her shoulder. “Come on. Look at me.” Maggie interlocks her hands and turns her head, but stays in the same position. “As for Kara and I,” Lena goes on, sighing inwardly, “I know that we can be… insular. We get lost in our own… moments, I suppose. I’ve never had that with anyone. And I’m not going to pretend that she isn’t very dear to me. But I hadn’t realized that from the outside, perhaps it looks like there’s no room for anyone else, and that it might be concerning to the person she’s dating. So, I apologize if we gave you that impression, and I hope you know that I won’t come between you. Really. Because this,” Lena gestures between the two of them, “has nothing to do with her. So,” she smiles, “no more worrying about Kara. All right?”

Maggie looks at her for a long time, briefly returns her smile and nods. “Maybe.”

Lena lets go of her. “Good enough, I guess,” she chuckles, picking up her cup to finish her coffee. Maggie follows with hers. The phone rings.

Lena lets out an exasperated sigh, closes her eyes. “I’m sorry, I have to take this one.”

“It’s fine, I’ll leave you to it.”

Lena stands, shaking her head. “Oh, I’m not done.” She goes to her desk. “It will only take a minute.” She picks up the phone. “Cassius.” She lets him babble. “Yes, this is my direct line. Please, you know I wouldn’t make you go through my secreta—” She rolls her eyes at the interruption, sees Maggie watching with interest. “Third one this month, yes. Anyway, how are you? How is…” she blanks on his wife’s name. Mouths shit to Maggie. “Your delightful wife?” Maggie smirks, gets up from the couch and joins her by the desk after putting the empty cups by the coffee machine. Lena touches an index finger to her lips and puts him on speaker.

“—a terrible bother. You just can’t find a decent gardener these days. Wallis was beside herself when we arrived at the villa and the flowers weren’t in full bloom. This is Tuscany, not bloody Siberia. How hard can it be?”

“Oh my. Poor Wallis can’t catch a break, can she? What was it, last month? The private jet that
wouldn’t take off?”

“Yes! I still can’t believe she had to fly coach. Animals, those Americans. Not your esteemed family, of course.”

Lena has never seen Maggie look so entertained.

“I couldn’t agree more. Would you believe that just recently, a little NCPD detective waved her badge at my secretary and forced her way into my office.” And into my heart, Lena mouths dramatically, a hand over her chest. Maggie crosses her arms, grinning.

“Good Lord! This is unacceptable. Sue them. It’s not like they have the funding to fight back and Yankees do love their trials. The way they hounded your poor mother. Dreadful. Positively dreadful. Lena, darling, I keep telling you, your company would fare so much better back here. Where we don’t toss tea into harbours, we drink it at five o’clock like civilised people. I would, of course, facilitate the move.”

“Oh Cassius,” Lena says softly, miming a gagging reflex at Maggie, “I know you’ll always be here for me and my family. For the company. We stick together, don’t we?”

“Absolutely.”

“Cassius, would it be terribly rude of me to call you back in a few minutes? I need to wrap up a rather decisive meeting.”

“Oh, not at all. Business first, Lena, and let it never be said you don’t have your priorities straight.”

“I certainly do. I’ll call you back as soon as possible so we can start drafting the proposals. Give Wallis my best.” She hangs up. “And tell her to shove her damn flowers where they belong,” she mutters.

Maggie raises an eyebrow. She looks so charming, leaning against the desk like this, with that lazy smile of hers. “So. That’s what Lena Luthor does all day?”
“Only when I have a captive audience. And unfortunately, I do have to call him back soon, but there’s one more thing I’d like to say.”

Maggie’s smile falters but she nods. “Go ahead.”

Lena plays with her necklace instead of biting her nails. “So… we both wonder why the other isn’t with Kara, right now. And I think… to an extent, no matter what we say to each other, to ourselves, that won’t go away. But.” She licks her lips, forces herself to look at Maggie, whose eyes are lowered. “I trust you. I trust that you sincerely want to be here. That no matter what happens, we’ll respect each other. Isn’t that enough? Can’t we leave Kara and Alex out of it and just… see where this goes? Because I’m done answering questions about Kara, I’m done with Alex’s tantrums. When I’m with you, I want to be with you. If that’s not possible, if they’re always going to come between us for one reason or another, then we need to stop. And if this ends now, I’ll walk you to the door, no hard feelings, we can keep working together and, who knows, maybe become good friends. God knows I could use a second one. Or a third, if Alex is still on the list after all this. But, given a choice? I’d rather… see where it goes. Where we go. And,” she swallows, “normally, I’d tell you to take all the time you need to think about it, but the truth is, for my own peace of mind, before you go, I’d like to know… if I’m going to see you again. Not for work, I mean.”

She lets her hand fall to her side. Maggie regards her for a while. And then her hands are on Lena’s hips and she’s pulling her close, gently. Lena goes with it. She cups Maggie’s face, presses their lips together, barely kissing her. Letting herself feel their softness, their mingling breaths. They part slightly, their foreheads touching.

“Yeah. You’re going to see me again.”

X

She’s been awake for two hours when the alarm goes off.

Alex stares at the texture of the ceiling. Miniature landscapes. She stares long enough until she sees topography, valleys, oceans. She turns her head to the side. The pillow beside her own is untouched, the sheet on that side of the bed flat. When did Lena stay last? She sighs. Throws the sheets off.

Changes into her workout clothes, grabs her keys and heads out the door, taking the steps down swiftly. It’s still dark out. She gets to the car, pulls out, drives. She turns on the radio, changing stations until eighties pop bops out of the speakers. She taps her finger to the beat before shutting it off, driving in relative silence, save for the sound of tires on pavement, the engine, the tick of the
Her life has been lived in a vacuum. Whatever path was laid out for her was obliterated the second Kara entered her life. Then she met Maggie, met Lena, didn’t like either very much, until she did and now they like each other better and Kara most of all. When will the universe get tired of making her the butt of its jokes? Is this her penance for thinking even for a moment that someone other than Kara could be the center of her universe?

Everything’s unsteady lately. She gets to the park and shuts the engine off. Pulls out the flask from beneath the seat. She only needs a nip. She has it and the headache she has dissipates, a hot trailing down to her stomach. It's the only heat she gets these days.

She steps out of the car. The fog is dense. It seems to have crept in from nowhere. Is Maggie here somewhere? Running? She can't bear the thought of facing Maggie. Not after what she said to her. Maybe Lena was right and she’s been acting like some immature asshole. Why can’t she be like them? Too enlightened to be hurt by common things like jealousy and rejection? When have Kara or Lena ever been rejected? And Maggie. Does Kara have a point? What would Kara know about what Maggie feels for her? Talk to Maggie. No. She can't.

She starts to jog. The air is brisk and wet, penetrating her clothes. She breathes, cold water. Birds fly hazy in the distance. She hopes one doesn’t shit on her. A bird taking a shit on her is just that. Not some omen of good luck to come. They had better not fucking shit on her. She’s had enough of being shit on.

Maggie used to run with her. Does she run with Kara? With Lena? She can't imagine it. Lena doesn’t strike her as a runner and Kara’s bored by it. It doesn’t make sense that they’re not together when it makes so much sense when they were. Or perhaps fuming that you broke up with her in the first place? Fuck Lena. Fuck her for being right. She hates it when others are right and she’s wrong. Hates herself most of all. Hates it when she lashes out in anger. Like some out of control animal. She should call Maggie. She will call her.

She practices what she could say. No, she should see her in person. No. Not after the awful things she said. She could slowly transition back into her life. First with a phone call. She doesn’t know how to apologize. She’s never been good at it, especially when she doesn’t think she’s done anything wrong. When she thinks they did more wrong.

Maggie and Kara should have told her. It’s fucked up for Lena to get involved with her ex. Why do they even like each other? They’re gorgeous. What do they do together? Not fuck, Maggie says.
She imagines them together. Tearing each other’s clothes off. Making each other pant. She runs faster. So, she’s not enlightened. She feels things. Gets frustrated. Jealous. Resentful. Angry. So fucking angry. And then there’s perfect Kara. Kara who doesn’t sweat and always looks as if she’s just returned from vacation.

Kara who pity kissed her. She wants to throw up. Does everyone think she’s pathetic? She slows by a garbage can and holds a hand to her stomach, catching her breath, willing the cramp to go away. It passes. She's fine. She takes a few steps and throws up. Water. Acid. Alcohol.

She remains hunched over, breathing slowly, stands, trying to spit the acidic taste from her mouth. Her face is damp with sweat, the moisture in the air. Everything spins. When was the last time she ate? She thinks back but can’t remember. Early lunch yesterday. A handful of twizzlers stolen over Winn's objections. Hey, you hate those. A few beers when she got home. A few swigs from the bottle of scotch. She sees chunks of red sugar twine. Heaves for air.

She walks, forces her hands to swing, feels as if her stomach were on a ship, up, down, side to side. Her pulse pounds dully, it tries to beat out of her. She runs through the fog. This is the closest she’ll get to flying through clouds. Heaven isn’t a place on Earth. It’s a dump. She stops, wiping her face, leaning against her car. She can’t see anyone else. Even if Maggie is here, she can’t see her. Fucking poetic.

She gets into the car, sits there with her head against the steering wheel. Everything’s spinning. She can’t make everything stop spinning. Her fingers are numb, tingling. She takes a breath but can’t. It catches, as if there were only a pinhole there to breathe through. She finds her phone, calls Kara.

“Alex.” Bright like a newly minted penny. Alex freezes. “Everything okay?” She can’t talk. Can’t breathe. “Alex.”

The panic in Kara’s voice gets some air into her lungs. “Hey. Sorry.”

“You scared me.”

“Sorry.”

“You sound funny.” Alex looks out. Everything’s topsy turvy, hazy. Everything’s foggy. What if she’s no longer on Earth? She hates what her job does to her brain sometimes. “What’s going on?
It’s six in the morning.”

“Did I wake you?”

“No. I didn’t feel like sleeping.”

“Oh.”

“You know you never need a reason but did you have a reason?”

“I felt…” dizzy. I couldn’t breathe. She swallows, somehow. Exhales shakily. Progress. Progress. How is it that she sometimes feels like Kara is squeezing the life out of her, other times like she’s the only thing that lets her breathe, live. “A little…” she sighs. “I think I’m just hungry.”

“Do you want to go to breakfast together? There’s a new bakery that opened up a few blocks away. Apparently their croissants are to die for. All butter. And air. We could meet there?”

“I have to work.”

“You don’t sound okay.”

“I threw up a few minutes ago. It’s nothing.”

“Where are you?”

“I’m going home to get showered and then I’m heading into the DEO.”

“I’m worried.”

“I’m okay.” A beat. “Um. Can we meet tonight? We haven’t had a Danvers’ sisters night in a while and. Damn it, Kara. I just need… I don’t know. I just need something to hold on to.” She takes a
breath. “Some days…”

“Yes?”

*I feel like I’m cracking.* “Some days I need a reminder of what’s important. Let’s hang out tonight. We can watch whatever stupid movie you want. And I’ll pick up the pot stickers or the pizza or both, okay? I just. I really miss you. Everything’s been off between us. I don’t care about the rest of it.” Not as much, never as much as things with Kara. “I just need things to be okay between us.”

Silence. Then: “Me too.” A breath. “I’m canceling all plans!”

“Did you have plans?”

“No, but if I did I would have canceled them. The DEO can babysit itself tonight. Danvers’ sisters night it is. I’m bringing Chicago—”

“No, don’t bring…” a musical.

“You said I could pick what I liked!”

“Okay. Fine. Chicago.”

“Want me to bring whiskey?” Alex perks. “Just kidding. See you tonight.”

“Okay.” She’s breathing. She doesn’t know when she started breathing.

“Alex.”

“Hm?”

“I love you.”
“I know.”

“I wanted you to hear it.” Alex doesn’t say anything. “Everything’s going to be okay.”

“I’ll see you tonight.” She hangs up.

X

Maggie’s just out her apartment door when her cell buzzes. It’s 10:17pm. She groans, pulling the phone from her jacket pocket, hoping it’s not another National City emergency. All she wants is ice cream and maybe a six-pack to close the evening out. She brings the phone to her ear, remembering her hair is still wet from the shower, switching to her other ear. “Sawyer.”

“Sawyer.” Ah, there’s that Irish accent she’s come to recognize, creeping out in her words. “How very professional. This is Luthor. But don’t call me that.” Maggie smiles, slowing down the apartment steps. “I know it’s late but I took a gamble.”

“What’s the gamble?”

“That you’re a night owl like me.”

“That’s not much of a gamble at all.” People like them only sleep in patches of time. What does Lena sleep like…? “But maybe I shouldn’t have said. Not that you strike me as an easy mark.”

“You wouldn’t be the first to try.”

Maggie takes the steps out into the night, shivers. “I haven’t missed a meeting, have I?”

“No, not at all. But, I did call you with a collaborative question. Is that okay?”

“Naturally.”
“‘Naturally’, she says. Why can’t the rest of my teams be this laid back?”

“Maybe they haven’t realized you’re a pussycat.”

“I have claws.”

She grins, digging the keys out of her pocket and heading to the car. “What’s the collaborative question?”

“Right. Well, the board of directors are looking to ramp the campaign up. To get the name out there. They want a face attached to the project,” Maggie frowns, “and I’ve tried to explain to them the sensitive nature of this work, of these issues.”

“It should be fucking obvious why we can’t just slap a face on this campaign.” A beat. “I’m not snapping at you.” She gets into the car, starts it, turning on the heat. “Sorry.”

“No, I get it. If I could have strangled Thompson over the phone I would have. What I suggested is that instead of exploiting some young alien thing, we could do a search in National City—or statewide, if need be, and find an academic or some front line worker who really understands the nature of the work to speak out on the issues. If someone we help wants to tell their story, that’s fine—but I’m not about to ask a trafficking survivor to relive their trauma so some bored banker has an edgy story to tell at a dinner party.”

Maggie leans back into the seat, breathing. She thinks of Lena in the office, wrapping her arms around her. Holding her. That was days ago but it keeps coming back to her at unexpected times. She thinks of the line of cars honking at her earlier at a green light while she contemplated her embrace. She shivers. Turns the heat up. “I couldn’t agree more. There’s an intern coming in to NCPD next week. I could have her start a search.”

“Delegating already?”

“You’re damn right.” Lena laughs. Maggie likes her laugh. “I was thinking of you today.”

“Were you?”
Maggie warms, trailing her fingers over the vents of the heat in the car. Her mouth is dry. “But I really shouldn’t derail us from our collaborative talk.”

“You’ve answered my question.”

“You didn't ask a question.”

“You've addressed my concern,” she tells her lightly, “Now you can stop deflecting.”

“There are the claws.” Maggie laughs quietly. “I was thinking…” she clears her throat. “That I wanted to stop by for a coffee break. Maybe give that fancy machine of yours a try.”

“You wanted to come by and work my fancy coffee machine?”

It’s an easy out. “I wanted to come by and see you.” Her face is warm. She isn’t sure if it’s the heat or the blood rising in her face. “But I controlled myself.” Silence. She forces the words out, surprised at how natural they sound. “The day’s not over yet. I could come around.” She bites her lip. Thinks of Lena biting her lip. Turns the heat down. She considers taking it back. Telling her it was a joke. Apologizing. She’s thinking it over when Lena speaks.

“If your offer was genuine, I’d love to see you. I’m still at the office. I’ll wait for you, if you’d like.”

X

Maggie uses the elevator key to go up.

She’s never visited the office at night. Not for a coffee break. She’ll play with Lena’s fancy Italian coffee machine. Even if it’s too late for coffee. She pulls a hand through her damp hair, a current running through her. L-Corp is cool. The night is cool. She doesn’t feel cool. She’s hot. Anxious. Her heart is fluttering. She walks toward Lena’s office. No receptionist. But the door has been propped open, a warm glow radiates out.
Maggie grips the door handle. Stops. She texted Lena when she arrived. So much for ice cream. So much for beer. Who cares about ice cream. Who cares about beer. She raps lightly on the door. Hears her footsteps and then Lena’s pulled the door open. She’s luminescent in the light. Maggie smiles, hands stuffed in the pockets of her jeans. “Hey.”

Lena returns the smile. “Hi.”

Maggie reaches for her, hand settling lightly on her neck, guiding their lips together. Her eyes close. It feels… she feels… warm. The door shuts soundlessly. Seconds pass. Minutes. Lena’s supposed to be cold. Why does she feel like sunlight? Her cheek, her lips, her mouth. They separate, remain close. Lena blinks, smiles. Takes her fingertips and pulls her. Maggie isn’t sure where, doesn’t care where. “Were you serious about the coffee machine?” Lena asks.

Maggie chuckles. “Not really.” She tenses. “It’s late. Um, but I could—try it out if you want something decaffeinated?” She makes a face at her awkwardness, at the notion of decaffeinated coffee. Lena’s shaking her head. “Or tea? I can run out and get tea. You probably have some.” Lena opens another cabinet and Maggie smiles at the various decorative tin containers, other glass vials with loose leafs, all meticulously labeled. “Or I could stop by here in the future instead of the local grocery store.”

“Would you like some?”

Maggie shakes her head softly. “No.”

Lena closes the cabinet, stands, comes close. Takes a breath, bites her lip. “Let’s sit.” Maggie follows her, lightheaded again. Light around her. Even now, the light, pale and golden, makes Lena soft, makes her more beautiful than she knows. There’s no coffee on the coffee table, all they have is one another. The air is tight in her chest. Lena twines her fingers nervously. “I’m glad you came by. I was…” Maggie waits. “Concerned after our last talk?” Maggie grazes the back of her fingers along Lena’s face. Lena stills before shifting, cherry red lips brushing over her fingers.

Maggie takes a slow breath. “Didn’t I tell you you’d see me again?” Lena nods slowly. “Believe me.” She brushes a kiss onto the curve of her jaw, finds her eyes. “Okay?” Another nod. Maggie kisses her, thumb grazing her ear, her jaw, her neck. Lena’s lips part. This is deeper. They’re close. Closer. Her lungs burn. They breathe. Lena’s lips graze her ear and Maggie lowers her eyes, focusing on the sensation, the warmth of her breath, the texture of her lips. She lifts her face and their eyes meet. She’s so beautiful. How the fuck is she so beautiful?

“What is it?” Lena asks. Maggie palms her face. Whispers the words in her ear. These are easy
things to say, even if truthful things aren’t always easy. The way her heart raced when Lena hugged her, the odd sense of calm she felt when Lena told her she trusted her, wanted her to be here. Calm things that put her in a panic if she thinks on them too long. Her eyes are different than Kara’s. Oceans. She thinks of the beach. She thinks of those kids. She thinks of The Awakening. Water. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace. “What are you thinking of?” she murmurs. Maggie only looks back at her. “You smell so good.”


“Is it?” Their lips are joined again, heart galloping. Her fingers clench, unclench, unsure where to put her hand, resting it on Lena’s knee like before, letting the heat spread over her fingers, not drawing them away like before. They inch upward before she catches herself, stopping. Lena seems to withdraw before returning, the languid not so languid, the kiss soft and penetrating. Lena’s fingers settle on the shoulders of her jacket, on the lapels, drawing her closer. Maggie feels the weight and pressure of her fingers, hears the creak of the couch as they readjust, their breath growing shorter, their sighs. The zipper of her jacket coming undone one tooth at a time.

They breathe again, and Maggie looks at the jacket, half unzipped. Lena looks at her intensely, fingers holding to that small tab. Maggie nods. They kiss, hotter than before. Knows it, somehow, how every tooth is separated one at a time at Lena's urging. The jacket’s open and Maggie’s grateful there’s another barrier gone. But she’s wearing the shirt Lena got her. Shit. She was going for ice cream. She was going for beer. This is better. This is so much better. The panic flares briefly but the teasing doesn’t come, a knowing grin doesn’t come, only her quiet intensity. Lena’s hands slip onto her shoulders, pushes the jacket back. Maggie shrugs out of it, letting it fall to the floor.

The cool air rushes in but Lena’s arms slide around her waist, pulling her even closer. Yes. This is what she wants. She wants to be close. Closer. Maggie wraps an arm around the back of the couch to steady herself, to not push Lena down and press against her. She’s tugged until she’s nearly kneeling on the couch, until she’s looking down at Lena, whose back is pressed against it. “Is this okay?” Maggie asks. Her voice is not her voice, it’s barely a whisper. Lena nods. Maggie gathers her breath, pulls a hand through her damp hair, cups Lena’s face, bows down and kisses her.

Her mouth is so pliant. More than Kara’s. The thought startles her into breaking the kiss. Why did she think that? She can’t think that. Lena looks up at her, big blue eyes wanting. “Everything okay?” Maggie nods. Lena’s fingers tighten on her shirt, draw her down. She loses herself in her mouth, the silk of her tongue. Her body is burning. She sighs. Closes her eyes when she feels Lena’s lips move, tracing a path, settling on her pulse, applying a small bit of pressure. Lena's hand is over her heart. Brazen there. Can she feel it throbbing?
A soft moan pushes its way past Maggie’s lips. How is this happening? Why hasn’t this happened sooner? They can’t. Not here. She wants to be closer, closer than she has allowed herself to imagine but she has to stop. They have to stop. Maggie swallows, getting her breath, for a moment crushing their lips together, sliding back down beside her on the couch, hands gliding along her back, settling on the nape of her neck, kissing her until she’s a pyre, until her lips are hot and tender, until only a sliver of willpower remains.

Maggie pulls away, cups her face in her hands. They watch each other. How long has passed? She looks at the clock on the wall. Nearly an hour. That can't be right. “I should go.”

Lena blinks, licks her lips. “You’re sure?” No. “I mean… of course. Yes. Of course.” Maggie stands on unsteady legs, extends a hand to her. Lena takes it, lets Maggie tug her to her feet. They stand for seconds, afraid to move. Maybe self-conscious. “Thank you for coming.”

“Thanks for seeing me.” Lena leans across and kisses her, soft, sweet. Maggie returns it. Another few minutes trickle by. She walks backward, Lena follows. It’s a waltz. A waltz with their lips joined, with Lena’s arms wrapped around her neck, Maggie’s hands on Lena’s hips, until Maggie’s back hits the door. Maggie untangles Lena’s arms, smiles. “You’re a hard woman to leave.”


The tension falls away. It was… ungenerous to think Lena could have meant it that way. Maggie rubs her lips, pulsing beneath her fingertips. They’ve crossed a line. They’ve crossed another line. “You make a good partner.” She stares at the floor, lifts her eyes to hers, smiles a little. She presses a kiss to her cheek. “See you around, Lena.”

She turns, goes. Takes the elevator down. Her legs are jelly. She makes it to the car and blasts the AC. She’s burning. The windows fog. Her throat is dry. She left her jacket. She can't go back for it. She doesn’t trust herself to go back for it.
Chapter Notes

Ladies, gentlemen and others, i, Sparklefox, am delighted to bring you this chapter's Who Wrote What (please contain your excitement), as well as a couple of very important notes. It's a bit of a special one! Twenty-four hours in the lives of two of our favourite girls. So, first of all:

- I wrote the scenes from Lena's point of view, as well as all of her dialogue/body language whether the scene is from her perspective or not.
- the_diversionist did the exact same thing for Maggie.

Secondly, this chapter contains a little bit of... *clutches pearls* breathplay! So, friends. Breathplay can be very hot, very enjoyable, but it can also be very dangerous if not done properly and safely. If you and your partner want to explore that, you shall find no kinkshaming here, but you must do your research beforehand and communicate at all times during it. Consent, trust and safety first, always.

Lastly, the_diversionist asked me to tell you that if you're skipping to this chapter just because there's more sexy times in it, then dishonor on you, dishonor on your cow! Read the whole thing. (My words, not hers. Hers were a tad more colourful. Feel free to edit my prudish prose and excellent placement of a Mulan quote, partner in crime).

And more seriously, it's imperative that you do not read Maggie's thoughts about the bruises etc. Kara accidentally gives her during sex, as an endorsement or romanticisation of problematic domestic violence behaviours. She is not a victim of domestic violence in her relationship with Kara. A huge part of this story is and will be to explore the realistic consequences of having super strength. Great for humanity in general, pretty rough on Kara's personal life and relationships. She would *never* intentionally harm any of her partners. And if you, or someone you know, is in an abusive relationship and a victim of domestic violence, stay safe and seek help. You deserve better.

The_diversionist: My actual words were "you motherfuckers better not skip to this chapter." Context, people! This chapter is pointless without it.

X

"—Coronation of Charles VII was the peak of Joan’s achievement. This moment of her greatest glory was another favourite subject for nineteenth century painters. First of all, the king had to take an oath to govern his people well. That oath was always taken, and always, to some extent, broken.”

Lena’s eyes drift away from the 1989 BBC Two documentary. She has a spoonful of muesli. The
sun is up, technically, but it’s still dark outside. She chews thoughtfully, taps the spoon against her lips. What does Maggie have for breakfast?

She gets up from the couch, taking her bowl with her, and goes to stand by the window. She doesn’t dislike bleary mornings. She takes a peek at the foggy, vertiginous drop below, until there’s a ringing in her ears. She turns away, takes a few deep breaths. Better.

That was a nice moment, the previous night. A different moment. It’s just soap, Maggie said. Just soap. Lena pulls the collar of her hoodie, lowers her head. She smells like soap all right. Not the same soap. She rubs her nose, trying to wipe away her own scent to remember Maggie’s. It doesn’t work. How long until she can trigger the memory at will? How many more kisses?

She’s reasonably sure there will be more kisses. Maybe more than kisses. More than whispers. She turns up the volume. Background noise helps her think, sometimes. She stays up to finish her bowl, washes it down with the last of her green tea before bringing everything to the kitchen. Spoon in the dishwasher, bowl and mug in the sink. She rolls up her sleeves. The sound of water is like music.

So, the previous night was different. Why? Because, first of all, it was dark outside. Maggie once said, as they stood outside her building, that she couldn’t have all her kisses in the moonlight. But yesterday, she did. What changed? Secondly, there was no time limit to put an end to anything, to make it safe, contained. Perhaps those two factors combined pushed them a little further.

She realizes she’s not doing the dishes, just letting water run over her hands. Wasting water. She turns off the tap, grabs a sponge, squirts some dish soap onto it and starts scrubbing whatever she can get her hands on. It was starting to get interesting. It was starting to get… new. And then, it stopped. Maggie wanted to stop. Because it was going to turn into sex. Presumably. And sex isn’t something either of them wanted to have in Lena’s office. Why not?

Well, because they work together in this building and Maggie has always been respectful of that symbolic space. Does it mean she wouldn’t be opposed to having sex with Lena somewhere else? Alex did mention that when she was dating Maggie, the sex was great. Special. Perhaps sex is something Maggie isn’t willing to share with someone she’s not seriously involved with. The line she isn’t willing to cross.

She did seem to want to cross it, though. Lena dries the dishes with a towel. Either way, she wouldn’t have minded staying a little longer in that in-between zone, between attraction and consummation, the previous night. They never did spend much time in that zone, with Alex. Lena isn’t sure she would have wanted to, anyway. And with Jack? They did explore it more. It wasn’t unpleasant. It wasn’t much of anything. It wasn’t a very large zone. The hugs were good. Sleeping in his arms was good.
She likes holding Maggie better. Their bodies fit better. Maggie’s a better kisser. Her touch is gentler, more confident.

Oh. So that’s part of it, then. Part of why this is different. Lena hasn’t felt she was in good hands before, with her previous partners. Not bad hands, necessarily, just… hands. But Maggie’s hands? On her? Lena felt like she was starting to be able to let go of something.

She goes to her bedroom and takes off her hoodie, dropping it on the nearby armchair. She shivers in her underwear, opens her closet. A wave of weariness washes over her and she briefly entertains the thought of showing up at work in jeans and Converse shoes.

So, yes. That’s what was getting interesting, the previous night, in their in-between zone. She didn’t need to keep track of what Maggie was doing. How odd, to not only trust the person, the way she trusted Jack and Alex, but the quality of her touch as well. To let its effects unfold, and focus on exploring all sorts of sensations. Maggie’s hair, her skin, her scent, her lips. The shirt Lena gave her. She smiles as she slips into a long-sleeved dress. Forest green. She thinks of the dark woods near boarding school. And the park around the mansion. The gardens she explores with Kara. She picks a dark red belt to complement her dress and goes to the bathroom to brush her teeth, put on a dash of perfume and just enough makeup to look like she isn’t exhausted. Should she let Maggie know she enjoyed their time the previous night? Make sure she knows she didn’t overstep? Maggie seems to worry about these things. Lena pulls her hair up into a loose bun. Sometimes, she has a hard time figuring out if Maggie is holding back on her behalf, on Kara’s behalf, on her own behalf, for some other reason, for all these reasons. She seems to respond well to clarity, though. So.

Lena grabs her phone and sits on her bed. What does she want to convey? She bites the tip of her thumb. Right. The gist of it should be:

- I enjoyed it.
- I don’t regret it.
- I want to see you again.
- I’ll respect your boundaries.

She starts typing.

To Maggie Sawyer [Today 06:49AM]: Thank you for yesterday. I’m really glad you came by. If you have a moment today, or whenever next week, I’d love to see you. Even if it’s just coffee and conversation for a little while. Have a good day, and thanks again.
She presses send. It’s out of her hands, now, and into Maggie’s capable ones. Lena thinks of the Taoist parable about the old man falling into river rapids leading to an immense waterfall. *How did you survive,* onlookers ask as he emerges, unharmed, from the pool at the bottom of the fall. *I accommodated myself to the water, not the water to me. Without thinking, I allowed myself to be shaped by it. Plunging into the swirl, I came out with the swirl. This is how I survived.* Lena does not, in fact, like having control over things, over people, over time. And it is, undeniably, time to go to work. Lena stands up, casts a lingering look at the new picture on her nightstand. *One shot, no do-overs.*

X

The text notification goes off with the slam of the car door. Maggie pulls the cell phone from her back pocket.

Lena Luthor 6:49am: *Thank you for yesterday. I’m really glad you came by. If you have a moment today, or whenever next week, I’d love to see you. Even if it’s just coffee and conversation for a little while. Have a good day, and thanks again.*

She takes the steps up to the station, brushing the cold air from her arms. She makes her way to the coffee vending machine and reads the text again, letting a stream of watered down coffee filter into a cardboard cup. She exchanges greetings with other detectives and heads to her office.

Minutes later the text is memorized. She doesn’t respond. She taps her fingers on her work desk and tries to process the words.

She checks email. Looks back at the text.

*I’d love to see you. Even if it’s just coffee and conversation for a little while.*

They’ve never met two days in a row, much less than twelve hours apart. It still feels like too long.

*Thank you for yesterday, I’m really glad you came by.*

She tossed and turned all night, feverish from their encounter. She wanted to stay. They’re friends. They’re friendly. This is the exact same thing Lena does with Alex. Less than what Lena does with Kara. This is what friends do. What friends with benefits do.
I'd love to see you. Even if it’s just coffee and conversation for a little while.

She doesn’t know Lena the way the others do. If only she could ask Alex or Kara. She can’t. And she doesn’t have any friends. Fuck. She stares at the text. She wanted to stay last night. If Lena had asked her somewhere…

The rapping on the door knocks her from the thoughts. Detective Murphy, tall, ginger, younger looking than he is. He has vending machine coffee too. Maggie imagines handing one to Lena. Would she be horrified? She smiles thinking about it. Murphy stirs the coffee with a little straw. “I didn’t recognize you without your lesbian jacket.”

Maggie rolls her eyes. “It’s a jacket. It’s not my fault I can pull leather off and you can’t.”

“Leave it at your girlfriend’s place? You still seeing that cute blonde with the glasses?” Maggie stares at him. He pulls the chair back in front of her desk and sits. “I haven't seen her in a while.” Maggie tries and fails to remember the last time Kara stopped by. “If you’ve moved on can I take her out for a spin?”

“One, you’re disgusting. Two, Kara and I are together and we're fine.” He doesn't look convinced. “And three, I would never subject her to a playboy like you.”

“Seriously? You get more pussy than I do. Wait, does she go for men? Maybe I can bring her back to the light side.”

Now he’s just trying to get under her skin. “Kara doesn't need a man.”

“When you’re satisfying her at home?”

Is she? “When she’s strong enough to tackle anything on her own.” That strength has fuck all to do with Kara being Supergirl.

“What about you?”
She bites her lip and picks up her phone. "Question." He tries his coffee, pulls two sugar packets from his pocket and adds them to his cup, staring at her. "I got this text."

"A sext?"

"A regular text." She reads it to him. He looks back at her. "What do you think?"

"I don’t get it."

"What don’t you get?"

"This is your girlfriend? What, you try some freaky shit last night?" He lifts a hand to his mouth but doesn’t whisper, "bust out the strap on?"

"Jesus, Murphy. No, I did not…" she lowers her voice, "bust out… Fuck. Forget I asked."

"It’s a boring text. Is there a nude?" He cranes his head around the desk to try to look. She presses a hand to his forehead, shoving him back, not wanting him to see the name on the text message. "Why so uptight?"

"I’m not uptight. What do you think it means? She says ‘I’d love to see you. Even if it’s just coffee and conversation for a little while’ so… do you think that she wants to maybe… make out?"

Murphy laughs. "Jesus, Sawyer, I thought you were the lesbian whisperer." She scowls. Sure I am, ask Danvers. "You’ve been with your nerd girlfriend for how long and you’re wondering about makeouts? Is ‘makeout’ code for head?"

"Is that what it means to you?"

"Sometimes."

"You’re useless, get out of here. And if you breathe a word of any of this to Morris, I swear, I will gut you."
He grins, standing up with his coffee and moving to the door. “Some advice for you, Margaret, and I can’t believe I have to say this? If a woman you’re into is asking you to come by and you can,” He uses air quotes “‘talk or have coffee too’? You go by and you fingerblast her.”

She finds a box of Kleenex on the desk and hurls it at him. It connects solidly with his side and he skips out of the office. She sighs. Looks at the text. She will ignore everything Murphy said. She should make some friends. Some… less crude friends. She could have had that with Alex. She should have waited to be with her. So what if she liked her, was attracted to her? She’s good at screwing up things that are hard to screw up. She massages her temple, looks at Lena’s text and thinks about the previous night. Her face warms. You’re being ridiculous.

It’s been nearly two hours since Lena sent the text when Maggie writes back. It's good to hear from you. I had a really nice time last night. I'll stop by later today if that's all right with you. And I’ve just realized I forgot my lesbian jacket. Sorry about that.

Lena Luthor 8:48am: Don't worry about it. I figured that if you hadn't called me by the time I left, you probably had your keys and ID on you, so I left it at the office. I'm happy you have some time to stop by today. Just let me know when so I can clear my schedule.

Maggie looks at her notes. She has to write up a search warrant for a crime scene from a few days ago, hopes a judge will sign off on it. There are interviews to conduct, photographs to go through. It’ll be easier to get to any witnesses in the afternoon rather than early morning. She looks at her watch. Texts Lena again: I can do a little rearranging on my end. Does 10 work?

Lena Luthor 8:55am: Absolutely. See you soon, Maggie.

Looking forward to it.

She grimaces. Ah, fuck. That was aggressive. She doesn’t know how Lena Luthor has managed to reduce her to some high school idiot talking to a crush. Ten o’clock is soon. She’ll work another half hour and then go. She’s nervous about seeing her again.

Lesbian whisperer my ass.
10:02 AM. Punctual, as always. Lena goes to the door and opens it with a smile. Maggie isn’t wearing a jacket, probably because she’s expecting to retrieve hers. Lena steps aside, Maggie walks in and leans in for a short kiss. It’s very soft. Lena doesn’t have time to close her eyes for more than a second, but it’s enough for her to catch a whiff of Maggie’s scent. It all comes back to her. Good. She wonders if she still has that book, Frances Yates’ *The Art of Memory*— oh. Maggie is talking to her.

Lena lets the door fall shut behind them. “I’m sorry, I was… what did you say?”

Maggie cocks her head. Lena can’t tell whether she’s perplexed or amused. “I was apologizing for not bringing anything. It didn’t even occur to me, I just… I just came here.”

“That’s all right,” Lena laughs. “If you’d brought something, I might have concluded my coffee brewing skills were a disappointment. Do you want anything?”

“My Jacket.” Maggie breaks into a smile. “I may have been distracted the last time I was here.”

Lena goes to the coat rack to get Maggie’s jacket. She considers holding it open to help Maggie slip into it, but that might read as a tacit request to leave. “Here.”

Maggie takes it, puts on. Oh. Is she leaving already? “Thanks. Anyway, your company’s a nice break in what I’m sure will be a very long day.”

…Or not? Maybe? “Longer than usual?”

“Don’t think so. Some days drag, you know.” Maggie shrugs. “Maybe I should have waited to see you. I might have had something to look forward to.”

Something to look forward to. Like what they had the previous night, after work? Is that what they’re going to do now? But nothing more? Or just, nothing more *here*? Oh, Jesus. Lena’s tired of thinking.

“Well…” she trails off. She wonders if she should springboard off Maggie’s joke and offer to take this somewhere else in the future. But. Too many variables. “You have me now. You have your
jacket. All I have left to offer is coffee, or tea, and conversation. Or other things. I have…” she already knows what time it is, so she resists checking her watch to give herself something to look at besides Maggie’s dark, lovely eyes. “About fifteen minutes. Up to you.”

She sees Maggie hesitate now that the ball is in her court. So, she doesn’t know what she’s doing, either. Lena finds that comforting. She gives her a small smile. Seconds pass before Maggie finally guides her to the couch. They sit, not too far apart. Maggie doesn’t let go of her hand right away and stays turned towards her.

“Let’s just sit. Tell me about your day. Tell me about anything.”

Lena sighs inwardly. Does that literally mean, let’s just sit and talk and nothing else? Fine. She’ll stay seated, she’ll talk, and she’ll take Maggie up on her offer to tackle any subject.

“About how much I want to kiss you, right now?”

Maggie meets her eyes. A little too steadily. “If you’d like.”

Oh no, Lena is not letting that ball roll back into her own court. “I would,” she says quietly. “So, you know where I’m at. Again, up to you.”

To Lena’s relief, Maggie pulls her into a kiss. The sensations of the previous night rush back in when Maggie’s tongue skims her lips, when her hand slides to the back of her neck to deepen the kiss. Her thigh against hers is so warm. Lena is about to let her hand rest there lightly when Maggie pulls away.

“I’ve been wanting to do that since I walked through the door,” Maggie confesses. “Before I walked through the door.”

“That makes two of us.” Lena wants to lean in for another kiss, readjusts Maggie’s collar instead. “I think… Do you want to talk about last night? It was different.”

Maggie nods, lowers her head. “I hope I didn’t cross the line.”
Lena wonders why Maggie often makes it sound like whatever happened, or didn’t happen, is on her. Is it because she feels she’s betraying Kara, somehow? But Kara’s fine with this, Kara is… Kara. Lena touches her chin, lets her fingers linger there until Maggie looks up at her. “We both crossed it. I don’t regret it. Do you?”

“No.” Maggie almost kisses her again. Lena’s sure of it. “I like spending time with you.”

It sounds like an apology. Lena wants to ask what’s wrong, to reassure her somehow. But… words might not be the best way to do that. She leans in for the kiss she’d previously shied away from and Maggie’s hands come up to palm her face. Lena wraps her arms around her, holds her close. The sound of their mingling breaths in the silence of her office makes her shiver. Maggie’s scent surrounds her. She breaks the kiss to nuzzle her neck, kiss her pulse, the soft skin behind her ear. She feels Maggie’s breath catch in her throat, feels her fingers tighten slightly in her hair. Okay, too far, maybe. Lena find Maggie’s lips again, slows it down. One of Maggie’s hands settles at her side, the other on her knee. When they part, Maggie doesn’t let go. Lena is briefly overwhelmed by the idea that someone would want to keep her physically close. She loosely hooks her arms around Maggie’s neck.

“I love spending time with you, too,” she whispers. Maggie nods, strokes her side, not quite meeting her eyes. Maybe that’s the moment. “Are you…”

Maggie looks at her. Oh god, she’s so close. Lena swallows. The words are stuck in her throat.

“Am I what?” Maggie asks quietly.

Lena takes a mental breath. “Would you like to join me for a drink tonight?”


“Really? I mean, great. I’ll think of a place and text you the address.”

Maggie nods and kisses the curve of her jaw. Lena’s eyes flutter shut. She didn’t misread the situation. She didn’t. She— Maggie’s lips are on hers, briefly. Everything is going so fast.

“Uh, one last thing. You sounded surprised,” Lena says tentatively. “When I asked.”
“I’m not used to going out. Recently. I mean…” Maggie winces. That makes sense. She’s been with Kara for a while, going out as a couple must be different. “Sorry. I’m happy to meet you. Let me know where.”

“Okay. I’m not used to going out either,” Lena admits with a half-smile. “And I won’t be offended if you tell me that it’s too much, too soon. Or too much, period.”

“I want to see you.” Maggie hesitates. “More.” She swallows. “I wasn’t sure if this was enough for you. If this was already… too much.”

*More, enough, too much.* The semantics of balance. How to make sure Maggie knows balance isn’t something she could ever hit, or miss? That balance is just… movement. Circulation.

“Whatever you’re ready to offer is more than adequate,” Lena says, stroking her cheek before loosening her embrace. Maggie doesn’t move away. “I’ll see you tonight, then? Maybe around eight?”

Maggie nods, looks at her for a while and pulls her into a long kiss, the kind of kiss that slightly slows Lena’s racing mind, the kind of kiss she loves and doesn’t get very often. She wishes it could last longer, but it doesn’t, and Maggie stands up, and Lena walks her to the door.

“Wait,” she says when Maggie’s hand settles on the handle.

Maggie stops and Lena gently turns her face to steal one last kiss. She’s pleasantly surprised when Maggie turns it into more than the goodbye peck it was meant to be, letting her fingers trail along Lena’s face.

“I’ll see you tonight.” There’s a husky quality to Maggie’s voice that Lena isn’t sure she’s heard before.

Maggie opens the door and takes a few steps backwards, looking at her, before finally turning away.
“I’m sure we can accommodate that, Ms. Luthor. Any other request?”

“No, thank you.”

“Perfect. We’ll see you tonight, then. Have a pleasant evening, Ms. Luthor.”

“Likewise.”

Lena hangs up. She feels… agitated. She’s about to take a considerable leap of faith. If the evening proves to be a disaster, she doesn’t have to tell Maggie she’d hoped they could move from the hotel bar to the room she just booked. But she’s spent enough time with Maggie to know it won’t be a disaster, which means Lena will go through with it, with asking her to spend the night with her. How will it be perceived? What if Maggie thinks she does this all the time? It’s only happened twice. With the same person. The first time because Alex was tipsy, lonely and wanted to go somewhere, and Lena wasn’t about to take her to her place just for sex. She remembers kissing her forehead after Alex came so quickly. The second time, on Valentine’s day. As a joke. They had fun. That was a weird hotel. Not like this one. Not like, perhaps, this night.

Lena catches her reflection in the full-length mirror on the inside of her open closet door. Her hair is almost dry by now, but she’s still sitting on her bed, wrapped up in a towel. She heaves a sigh. She looks okay. Why would someone want to sleep with her when they can sleep with Kara? She knows Maggie is attracted to her, likes kissing her, but sex? Sex is different. It’s a shared offering. Or, it should be. She recalls Alex pulling her glistening fingers out of her, rubbing them, her eyes far off, on their first night. Lena flinches, trying to push the unpleasant visual away. If she ever sleeps with another woman again, she promises herself never to wipe her own fingers like that. Never to look away like that. She doesn’t think Maggie is the kind of person who does that, anyway. Kara wouldn’t be with someone who does that. She would be with someone who looks at her the way Maggie looked at Lena the previous night in her office, someone who whispers beautiful words in her ear, the way Maggie did.

But this is a lot. Trying to figure out how wanted she is. How unwanted. Lena turns to look at the family picture on her nightstand. Her mother, her hand on Lex’s shoulder and her arm around her father’s waist. Lena smiling in the middle, wearing Lex’s graduation cap, her father holding her close. She feels a measure of calm return to her. Her eyes drift from one picture to the next, to Kara. Don’t seek your friend with hours to kill. Seek her always with hours to live.

She smiles, grabs her phone and calls Kara. If it goes to voicemail, she’ll just… tell her the truth. That she’s the one needing a confidence boost, this time.
“What could a busy CEO want from an unemployed reporter at, uh... 06:22 PM on a Friday night?”

Lena chuckles. “A disheveled scientist thought she’d call her best friend at 06:22 PM on a Friday night, because hearing her voice puts her in high spirits.”

“Ah. The disheveled scientist was not in high spirits before she called, then?”

“Not really. She was… apprehensive. What about you?”

“I’m reading articles about Cassini.”

“The space probe?”

“Yeah. It makes me sad. Out of rocket propellant after such a long journey, operators plunging it into Saturn’s atmosphere to make sure the planet’s moons remain intact for future exploration... Doesn’t it make you sad?”

Lena thinks about it. “No, it doesn’t.”

“You talk to your computer and little inventions all the time, so I know the reason you’re not sad isn’t that scientists don’t form emotional attachment to inanimate objects.”

“True. There’s a reason the Curiosity rover on Mars was programmed to sing itself happy birthday every year.”

“Why aren’t you sad about Cassini, then? It dived into the atmosphere, it sent us information as long as its little antenna could stay pointed at Earth, and then it... it burned up, it disintegrated like a meteor.”

“I guess I don’t find it sad because…” Lena pauses, thinks of a fun way to put it for Kara. “Because *Omnia mutantur, nihil interit.*”
“A riddle!” Kara exclaims. “Let me look this up. Hurry up, Google… ha! Found it. Ovid’s Metamorphoses, book XV.”

Lena smiles. “Go on.”

Kara clears her throat. “Everything changes, nothing perishes. So… Cassini is still around? As particles, atoms. Diluted radioisotope fuel drifting along Saturn’s winds.”

“No drifting, settling. It’s been drifting away from its home planet for twenty years. It deserves a new planet. And a rest.”

“Okay,” Kara says wistfully. “Welcome to your new home, Cassini.”

“No longer sad about it?”

Kara lets out a soft laugh. “Nope. Thanks, Lena. Hey, you like Soulages’ work, right?”

Lena is pretty sure it’s not a random tangent, but she can’t figure out the connection between the two topics. It’s restful. “As in, ‘the painter of black’?”

“Yes. I read the art book in your guest room the last time I was there.”

“I love his work. His Beyond Black research, the stained glass windows… I hear seeing it in person is quite the experience, so I wanted to go to his museum in Rodez the last time I was overseas for work, but I couldn’t squeeze it into my schedule. Don’t tell me there’s an exhibition coming up nearby.”

“Sadly, no. Just… asking for reasons.”

“Questions welcome, reasons optional.”
“One of my favorite things about you. Are you still at work?”

“No, I’m home. I left early.”

“What are you up to? Enjoying some much needed me time?”


There’s a moment of silence. “You asked my girlfriend out on a date?”

Lena can hear the smile in her voice. She lets herself fall back onto the bed. It’s almost unbearable, how accepting Kara is. “I don’t know if it’s a date.”

“Okay. Do you want it to be a date?”

“I’m not sure.”

“That’s fine, too. But I hope you called me because you needed advice on what to wear, not my permission. Because if it’s the latter, I’m hanging up, you know.”

Lena laughs, tension seeping out of her. “Let’s never hang up on each other. I hate that. Anyway, yes, what should I wear?”

“Oh,” Kara muses. “I didn’t think you’d actually ask. Let’s see. Well, you look good in anything, and I don’t know where you’re meeting up, but… how about your MIT hoodie?”

Lena frowns, glances at the burgundy bundle on the armchair. Feels the urge to slip it on. She suspects Kara isn’t joking. “Why?”

“Because you look lovely in it, and it’s your comfort hoodie. I imagine dates must be nerve-wracking, and maybe that’s why you said you felt apprehensive, so that way you’ll be cute and comfortable. Comforted. Unless it’s not appropriate for wherever you’re going.”
Lena scoffs. “I could show up in my pajamas and they wouldn’t care. Not to my face. Or they’d think it’s some bold fashion statement. All they care about is my credit card. But don’t you think Maggie will interpret it as…” She pauses, looking for the right word, but Kara beats her to the punch.

“Oh! That because you didn’t dress up, you don’t care?”

“Right.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. I thought it would be the opposite.”

“What do you mean?”

“That if you showed up as… the way you are in private, you know? It would be a sign of trust. To let her see that side of you. And it might even make her more comfortable, too? I’m not sure.”

Lena absently twirls a strand of hair around her finger. “That’s a really good point, actually. Maybe I can find some middle ground.”

“Yes. Simple, beautiful, comfortable. Best of both worlds. But,” Kara snorts, “Maybe don’t take my word for it. Maggie told me I dress like a grandpa sometimes, so I think my fashion sense is a bit off.”

Lena winces. “It’s not.”

“She was joking. Half-joking. Maybe she finds it cute?”

“I know, sorry. And yes, your style is very endearing. Anyway, you said you imagine dates must be nerve-wracking. Does it mean you haven’t… been on one?”

Kara hums pensively. “I’ve been on a couple of bad first dates with guys I met online. They didn’t feel like real dates. Oh, and Ms. Grant’s son tried to ask me out and she bullied me into going on a
date with him, but it wasn’t… he was nice, but that was weird. Then I got together with James, and I tried to have a proper one, but I failed spectacularly at making it happen. And this past Valentine’s Day, I thought I could have a romantic one with Maggie, but she never showed up because once again, I didn’t pay attention. Like with the postcard. She’d told me she didn’t like Valentine’s Day, but I went ahead and set up a date anyway. Nothing fancy, but… probably more for my benefit than hers. So, it didn’t happen because I’m a wrecking ball who doesn’t listen. And that’s it, really. But I’m sure she’ll have a wonderful time with you. It’s different. You’re different.”

Lena touches her fingers to her lips. Kara has never been on a romantic date. Not with Maggie, not with anyone. She would love to, but it hasn’t happened. And Lena just went ahead and asked Kara’s girlfriend to join her for drinks in an elegant hotel bar, and maybe more. Oh god. “Don’t hang up,” she says. “I’m thinking.”

“Sure.”


“Still there?”

“Of course.”

“Kara… what’s a date? Give me your definition.”

“Well, now I’m the one who needs a minute.” Kara pauses. “I think it’s a… a romantic three-factor multiplication.”

Lena considers. “So, in my case… factor one would be Maggie?”

“Yes. Factor two is you.”

“And factor three is what we’re doing?”

“Right. The date isn’t how you all add up, it’s how you affect one another, how it all combines.
Lena scratches her nose. “I haven’t had many dates before either, then. I’ve had three-factor multiplications but few romantic ones.”

“Well,” Kara chirps, “You’re great company. And Maggie? She puts people at ease, too. And you two like kissing each other. Wait, that sounded weird. But you do. And you’re going to have fancy drinks somewhere nice, I’m sure. So. Multiply all that, and you’ve got a great date in the making.”

Lena clears her throat. “Kara, I don’t… I’m not sure how to say this, but you deserve to be taken on the loveliest date one day. And it won’t just be drinks somewhere nice—”

“Hey, hey,” Kara interrupts, her voice so calming, even though it should be the opposite, even though it should be Lena promising her that she’s not going to— “First of all, I think drinks somewhere nice can be the most romantic, wonderful date ever. It’s simple, but with the right people involved? Perfect. Second, it’s not like I haven’t had a taste of what a proper date feels like, I mean… I happen to have a best friend who likes flowers as much as I do, takes me to all these exquisite places and lets me make her breakfast in bed when she stays over… or I guess, breakfast on couch, when she’s feeling pig-headed and won’t let me decide who sleeps where in my own home.”

Lena lets out a helpless chuckle. “Your best friend sounds like a piece of work.”

“She’s one of a kind. You’d love her. So, no pity party for me, okay? I have it better than most. Now, quit griping and get dressed. Don’t make my girlfriend wait.”

“Perish the thought.” Lena licks her lips. “One last thing, though.”

“Yes?”

“Have you seen Alex since I last spoke with her?”

“We had a Danvers sisters movie night yesterday, actually. She suffered through Chicago for my sake.”
“She doesn’t like musicals?”

“No. But she loves me, so.”

“Next time, pick Dancer in the Dark. If Lars von Trier and Björk don’t change her mind, I don’t know what will.”

Kara laughs. “Gosh, I should, shouldn’t I? Hey, let’s do it together, the three of us. No, the four of us! When things are okay between them again, you and I can cook that dinner we talked about and invite them. And watch it together at my place. I don’t know if they’ll like it but they’ll find it interesting for sure.”

Lena tries to imagine that. Cooking something nice with Kara, welcoming the other two. Having dinner. Getting comfortable on the couch or the armchairs, blankets and ice cream at the ready, watching the film, talking about it afterwards. No tension. “I’d love that. Really. I hope we manage to get there. To a point where we can do this together, after what happened.”

“I hope so, too. And when we do get there? Don’t tell Alex what the movie is. Tell her it’s one of my excruciating musicals again. That way, we can make fun of her when she starts crying. Or just, you know… give her a big hug. And tissues.”

“Our secret is safe with me. I don’t even know how things are between us, anyway. Alex and I.”

“Why don’t you ask her?”

Lena shakes her head, remembers Kara can’t see her. “Because I no longer… care. About how things are between us, I mean. I care about her, of course, but our friendship? I don’t know. What’s it worth? I’ve made it clear the door was open, but after what she said the other night, if she doesn’t reach out… well, that’s that.”

“I don’t know if she’ll reach out. She’ll do what she thinks is best. But if she understands that it’s up to her and you won’t salvage your friendship for her sake after what she said? I think she’ll know what’s in her best interest.”

“How is she?”
“Tired. Things have been tense for a while,” Kara sighs, “but last night? We had a good time. I don’t know if it helped, but what matters is that she was the one asking if we could have a movie night. She knew she needed it. So in time, maybe she’ll take the first step towards you, too. I hope she does. Because I think she… I think she knows her life is richer for having you in it. In whatever capacity. It just takes her a while to get from knowing these things, to acting on them. Don’t write her out just yet, okay?”

“Kara, my mother left me out to die and I still haven’t written her out. I’m afraid Alex is going to have to do a lot more than throw a fit because I kissed her ex for me to slam the door in her face.”

Kara laughs. “You know me. I fidget about everything. But as much as I worry about her… she’s not the only one I’m looking out for, here.”

“Believe me, I know. You’re the first person trying to make sure I don’t… burn the wrong bridges. I’m not taking that for granted.” Lena takes a deep breath. “Okay, I really should go. I have a three-factor multiplication with your girlfriend at eight o’clock.”

“That, you do. Go get’em, tiger.”

Kara hangs up before Lena can wish her a lovely evening, a good night, anything. Probably to give Lena the little push she needs. Lena runs a hand over her eyes, keeps them closed for several minutes.

Okay. Simple, beautiful, comfortable. A sign of trust. Lena leaves her towel on the bed and goes to get dressed. A dot print silk blouse, tight pants, flat ankle boots. No hairdo, minimal makeup. She takes out her contacts and puts on her glasses instead, looks at the bottles of perfume lined up on the windowsill in her bathroom. She can’t go for Kara’s favorite one tonight, Shalimar, Guerlain’s flagship fragrance. Instead, she picks the perfumer’s 1912 creation, The Blue Hour. Not too much, just a drop dabbed on her pulse points, on her wrists and behind her ears.

She pulls a light woven coat from her closet, pointedly avoids looking at herself in the mirror and makes sure all the lights in the apartment are off before closing the door behind her. She texts Jonathan the address as she steps inside the elevator. It starts gliding down. She checks her watch out of habit. But… that’s not how time should be measured. Not tonight. She removes her watch and places it in her bag.
They’re meeting for drinks at a hotel bar. It’s perfectly normal. It’s what friends do. Friends who kiss do. What friends like Alex and Lena do. It’s not a date. Maggie breathes out, stares into the foggy mirror glass until it clears and her reflection materializes. She thins her lips. Combs her hair. Touches moisturizer to her face. Skims her fingers along the scar on her forehead. She wonders if it means anything. She thinks of Cain. Thinks of her family, only vaguely religious, but religious enough to cast her out. Now she wanders.

She smooths lotion onto her body. The olive greens and purples have nearly faded out of her ribs. Breathing is no longer painful. An x-ray might give her away but she can look at herself and pretend it never happened. That’s kinder, given that it was an accident. That helps her breathe easiest of all. She wraps a towel around herself and leaves the bathroom, going to her closet, sorting through her clothes. Lena texted the address hours ago and Maggie immediately looked it up on her work computer, not wanting to risk the spotty cell network at her apartment. The address showed some flashy hotel she’s never stepped foot in. The kind of place she might have met Kate at long ago. But Kate and Lena aren’t anything alike. National City isn’t Gotham. It isn’t buried beneath soot and grime. It’s brighter. She didn’t look at room availability or prices. She closed the browser window before she could. She touches perfume to the back of her ears, to her wrists, licks her lips and looks away from her reflection.

She’s meeting Lena Luthor for drinks tonight. This is fine. Last night was fine. This morning, fine. Lena Luthor, fine. Breathing becomes difficult again. She thumbs through the clothing on the rack. What will Lena wear? What should she wear? It isn’t a date. She shouldn’t overdress. They’re going out as friends. They’re not like Lena and Kara. It’d be embarrassing to show up overdressed. But what if she’s underdressed and she embarrasses Lena? Jeans and t-shirts are out of the question. She takes out a white dress, frowns at it, bites her thumb and puts it back. She takes out several more dresses, light blue, black, red, tries them on, returns them to the closet. She wore the blue one with Kara once when they met Lena and Alex for dinner. Kara liked it. Later that night, Kara pulled the dress away from her. It didn’t rip. Kara seemed intent on keeping her. Being close. The night was sad… but rewarding. For hours, at least, she didn’t doubt Kara cared. When she looked at her wrists later, marked with Kara’s affections, she didn’t doubt it.

Focus.

If she had a friend she could text them, send pictures, get advice. You have a friend. Yes. Lena Luthor, whom she’s meeting at the hotel bar. There’s no point in overthinking it. They’ve been friends and work colleagues for months. They’ve been kissing for weeks. Last night was different. This morning, different. How does Kara do it? Maybe they have a different relationship.

If only she could ask about it.
Kara doesn’t want to talk about it. Alex wants her to drop dead, so, not an option. She contemplates her wardrobe, disappointed and overwhelmed. Get your shit together, Maggie Sawyer. You’ve arrested her and came out on the other side intact. You can handle drinks.

As if it were that easy. Nor is she sure how intact she came out of that arrest. She fought with Kara, was nearly pulled off a cliff, had to force Lena to strip in front of her. Fuckfuckfuck. Lena acts like it’s okay. Maybe it will never be okay.

But this is okay. This is fine. They’ve had drinks on the town before. Just one other night. Maggie kissed Lena’s hand in the moonlight and that’s all that came of it. Nothing more needs to come of it.

Now that her ribs have healed, she can be close to Kara again. She can do that without hissing, without scaring or worrying the Girl of Steel. It’s hard being apart from Kara in that way. It makes the silences scream. She looks at a few shirts in the closet, takes them out, inspects them closely. Too many have loose buttons from her shitty sewing jobs or are missing buttons altogether. They pop off like kernels when Kara touches her shirts. She’s taken to wearing tees around her. It isn’t always that way between them. Who cares about her shirts? What about your bones? It was a one-time accident. What about the mug? A one-time accident. It’s better when they kiss, slow and bruising.

Stop thinking about Kara. Kara says this is okay. It’s all okay. She can do whatever she wants. Maybe she doesn’t care. Even if it’s hard to imagine Kara not caring about anything.

Maggie removes a pair of black dress pants from the closet, a white blouse. She looks through her jackets. No lesbian leather jacket. She sifts through her collection, pulling out a formal jacket and setting it beside the other pieces she’s set aside. Maybe that. Would Kara like it? Would Alex? She thinks Lena would like Kara in a paper bag. She thinks of their picture in the garden, set up by Kara’s easel. They’re in the garden and Maggie’s nowhere to be seen.

She returns to the bathroom, dries her hair, applies makeup. She’ll enjoy going out on the town with someone who asks her out on the town. Someone she can have a conversation with. Someone she can have long conversations with. Lena listens. She remembers. Even the little things. She’s probably that way with everyone. She’s funny. Never boring. She’s nice. Of course Kara’s in love with her.

She returns to the bedroom, dresses, slips into her ankle boots, into the dress jacket. Studies her reflection in the long mirror. She finds a pin, ties her hair up loosely. Sighs softly. She refuses to worry about this anymore. It’s fine. This will do.
There’s a valet. Maggie hands the car keys to him, grateful that the inside is clean, embarrassed that it isn’t like the other cars being taken. She imagines her Chevy parked next to a Maserati and smirks. “The ignition can be tricky,” she tells him, watching him get into the car. He looks up at her from the inside, tries to roll down the window when he sees her smiling anxiously at him. “You have to do it manually,” she says. He doesn’t hear her and opens the door. “You—you have to do it manually,” she repeats. “I’m going to get it to the shop and taken care of.” She’s been saying that for a few months now.

“You know you don’t have to tell me any of that,” he gives her the ticket, slams the door shut and drives off.

Maggie looks after him and up at the hotel. It hardly looks like a hotel, at least not the ones she’s used to frequenting, often while walking a crime scene. This hotel is majestic stone, architectural sculptures adorn the outside and Maggie considers staying longer, looking, walking around the building to study. She walks inside instead. The website indicated the bar was shy of the hotel lounge, off to the left. She looks at the immaculately dressed hotel staff checking guests in for the night. Maggie turns away, goes to the bar. It’s dimly lit. The furniture is simple, refined. She hears the quiet murmur of voices and glasses clinking but little more.

She doesn’t see Lena. She’s a few minutes early. Maybe she hasn’t arrived yet. Then she sees her. Off in the corner, looking out the window. Her hair is loose, wavy. She’s wearing glasses. Maggie didn’t know she wore glasses. That tight feeling in her chest again. She takes a breath and goes past the hostess, taking in Lena’s clothing, the marble of her profile. She’s at the table and still Lena hasn’t noticed her. Her eyes are far off.

Maggie clears her throat lightly. “You look lost in thought.” Lena turns, looks up, smiles. Maggie returns it. Lena gets to her feet. They stare at each other for awkward moments until Maggie leans forward, a hand tentatively to Lena’s elbow, brushing a kiss onto her cheek. “You look nice.”

“So do you.” They sit. A heavy silence follows. Maggie isn’t sure whether to force conversation. They’ve never had to before. Maybe this was a bad idea. Maybe they only work in an office, during office hours. Lena rests her chin in the palm of her hand, nods to the bar. “What are you in the mood for?”

Maggie leans forward, nearly folds her arms on the table. Doesn’t. Keeps her hands on her lap, her back pressed to the chair. “We could get experimental with wine.” They discussed that the night Maggie called her from the beach. “Or we can save that for another night.” The words have
escaped before she can snatch them back. It’s pointless to plot things out. Maybe it’s okay in hazy, impermanent ways. Things you say but don’t ever expect to happen. *I’ll go to Italy someday. We’ll save the wine for another night.* That kind of thing. A sweet nothing. Pretty. Meaningless. Lena looks at her patiently. “We can have something else if you’d like. I’m open to anything.”

Lena smiles. “I was hoping you’d mention your previous offer.” She remembers. What else does she remember? “I had a business dinner here once, and found out they have a wonderful wine cellar.”

Maggie studies her eyes. Lena’s lashes are long. She wonders if they brush against the lenses. She doesn’t see any markings. “Wine it is. You’re the professional of the two of us, so why don’t I let the master decide?”

“I agree, let the master decide what would suit you best… Well, the sommelier, I guess.” She turns, scanning the bar. Maggie notices she’s looking at Lena and turns her attention to the décor instead. Lena spots the sommelier, signals him. He moves over. “You *did* want to get experimental.” Maggie smiles ruefully.

“Good evening,” he clasps his hands. “How can I help you?”

“We’d like two glasses of wine,” Lena says, “and have no idea what to pick.”

The sommelier sets his sights on Maggie. She stiffens. “Do you have a preference between red and white?” he asks.

She thinks of the crest on Kate’s chest, the red of Kara’s cape, the pale lipstick Lena wears. “Red.”

“Very well. Would you like something light, or perhaps a little richer?”

Maggie smirks, glances at Lena. “Richer.”

Lena smiles back at her. No smirk. Maggie wonders if she should apologize but the sommelier has moved on to Lena. She already knows what she wants. “White. Not too sweet or fruity,” she tells him.
“I have just the thing,” he takes his leave.

Maggie looks after him. Clever trick. She wonders if he’s any good at it. “Let’s see what he surprises us with,” Lena says.

“Let’s.” Maggie shifts in the chair, looks at her. The dotted blouse she wears looks soft. She’s set her woven coat behind her. She’s not sure of the brand. It looks expensive. “Glasses, huh? That’s new.”

Lena crosses her arms on the table, leaning forward. “Well, this is new. I figured it was a good opportunity to show you… who I am, when I’m not at work.”

“I hope I didn’t sound like I was criticizing. It’s a good look.” How Kara and Lena manage to pull off glasses or no glasses eludes her. What’s Kara doing tonight? Does she know they’re here? Maggie glances at the tablecloth and back to Lena. “So. Here we are.”

Lena nods. “It’s nice, seeing you somewhere different.” Maggie smiles. “A place with no… prior associations.” She wonders what she would have done had Lena suggested fucking Noonan’s. Lena narrows her eyes thoughtfully. “I was, uh.” Maggie waits. Lena licks her lips. “I was quite nervous about asking you out.”

“Oh. Is this a date?” It’s not a date. The tone comes out airy, teasing. She studies the crease on Lena’s brow, wishes she could remove her glasses, the better to see her eyes. “Whatever it is—I’m glad you did.”

“It’s whatever you want it to be, but…” she looks off pensively and Maggie thinks of the women in Emily’s art books, gazing out a window or bent over paperwork, lost in heavy thought. Lena looks back at her. “As for me, yes, I’d like it to be a date.”

Oh. Maggie doesn’t understand how she can say things so cleanly. How her thoughts and desires can be bared as if they were no consequence. How can she can willingly abandon her armor. Maggie keeps her gaze on Lena, drops it only a moment before looking back at her. She realizes she isn’t breathing. Exhales softly, folds her arms on the table, leaning in. Her head is light. She’s in an open relationship. She can go out on a date without dating. She can date without dating Lena Luthor. She can live on technicalities. She should say something. She smiles anxiously. “Okay. A date it is, then.”
“Oh, good. I was afraid this would be out of line, considering the fact that… maybe someone else should come first when it comes to asking you out on a date?”

Who does she mean? Alex? “Someone else?”

Lena smiles briefly. “Your girlfriend?” Oh. Kara. “I don’t know what the boundaries are, so when I asked you out, I… I didn’t know if there was an unspoken one I’d just crossed.”

Maggie blinks. Why are they talking about Kara? Every time she thinks they’ve settled this it always rears its head. “But you haven’t crossed any. This is… fine, Lena. Kara said…” I can do what I want. “Kara doesn’t get permission from me; I don’t get permission from her. We’ve had those conversations.” She sits back in her chair, her body tight. Her eyes dart around the bar. Her fingers tap on the table. Kara never wants to go out. “This is allowed.”

“It is. I suppose I didn’t see this as part of a conversation we’d previously had, because… well, just because something is allowed doesn’t mean everyone is comfortable with it. I only wanted to make sure you were.” Lena looks to the side. Maybe looking for the sommelier. “We can talk about something else.”

“No. This is fine.” She finds her eyes, leans in close again, speaking quietly. “I meant that Kara and I have had those conversations before.”

“It’s more about… I don’t… I haven’t gone on many, uh, proper dates. I tend not to be…” Lena looks away from her. Maggie leans in again. “Overly casual about these things.” Maggie thinks back to Alex in a rage. I slept with Lena the first night we went out together. She thinks of Kara. She doesn’t have a ton of experience, either. So, what is the truth? “And I know that Kara isn’t, either.”

The first time Maggie went down on Kara, Kara punched holes into the wall. They were strangers then. Sometimes it still feels that way. None of this makes sense. It feels as if she only has access to fragments of reflections. The whole picture is missing. What if they’re all puzzles, only possible to put together when they all bring their pieces to the table.

“I was afraid you’d find it too forward,” Lena finishes.

Too forward for the lesbian whisperer? Too forward with her? Lena’s missed the obvious. No other woman has. The ‘forward’ is what they count on. They provide their bodies. She provides the
adventure. Good for a limited time only before they take their leave or she’s asked to take hers. “I wouldn’t call it forward.” Their makeouts up until last night would only give nuns a run for their money. “I guess when I think about this—” It’s taken ages. In other ways, it’s gone at breakneck speed. Where are the breaks? Are there breaks? Are they needed? What’s there to stop? She has a girlfriend, who doesn’t care, who’s in love with the woman she’s on a date with. The woman she’s on a date with is in love with her girlfriend. This is safe. This isn’t Alex. They don’t need breaks because they're not going anywhere. But that doesn't mean they can't enjoy each other's company. It doesn't mean they can't be friends. “The timing—. I don’t know. The timing feels okay to me. How about you?”

“I don’t know. Timing is—”

Lena stops, the sommelier having made his reappearance, balancing a tray. Speaking of (shitty) timing. He sets down a glass in front of Maggie, deep purple red. “For you, Bandol’s signature wine, a Mourvedre from Domaine Tempier. 2009 vintage, hefty tanning, strong gamey and hints of terragon and dried herbs. And for you,” he settles a glass of clear white wine in front of Lena, “A Sancerre—” Lena gives a subtle shake of her head and he sets down a small ramekin—olives, peanuts. “Have a good evening.”

“Thank you,” Lena says.

That was… efficient. Maggie smiles, pulling the peanuts back. “I’d prefer if you made it through our evening alive.”

“Do you want to hear about how we—my family and I, found out about my allergy?”

“Please.” Though she’s more curious about what Lena meant to say about the timing.

Lena chuckles, eyes flicking off to memory. “One day, I was… seven, I think. I couldn’t sleep. I think I had a nightmare. I’m not sure. Either way, I slipped out of my bedroom. It felt like the middle of the night but it was probably just… nine o’clock. Hoping to find my father. And sure enough, there was light under the door of his office. I knocked, he opened the door. He was there with my mother, enjoying some late night brandy. Surprisingly, she didn’t ask him to take me back to bed instantly, so he… he let me in, let me sit in his lap, plucked a peanut for the bowl on the table, and… well, you can guess what happened next.”

“They hauled ass to take you to the emergency room? Poor little you. That must be awful. And you can't properly enjoy a good deal of Thai food.” Not to mention the other countless products with peanuts in them. “You must have to be careful all the time. Do you go running for cover when you
see Mr. Peanut?"

“Mr. Peanut?"

She smiles. *What are you, Amish?* “The peanut with the cane and the top hat. And a monocle. He dresses well enough to get into your parties.”

“Oh. I'm not going to pretend to be one of the cool kids. I'll have to Wikipedia this. But, I don't know. I don't host that many parties. Boring charity galas, mostly.”

She laughs. “All right. I'm a cool kid. Maybe you've mentally blocked him. He is a sentient peanut in a top hat. That’d give anyone nightmares. Your charity galas aren't always boring though. I've attended a few in a bulletproof vest.”

Lena smiles, a roll of her eyes. “I haven’t ‘blocked’ him. I guess it’s more like… a case of me not being exposed to pop culture for a long time. I was home-schooled and then shipped off to boarding school, overseas. And then, it was just... work, work, work. And it’s true, my galas tend to be unbearably uneventful, or life threatening. I could do without either, to be honest.”

But without the most recent boring gala would Lena have asked her again to work on the collaborative? She smiles apologetically. “What was boarding school like?” She’d been curious as a kid, eager to get away from home. *You got your wish, what's there to complain about?* “Is that where you picked up the accent? It’s delightful, by the way.”

She laughs. “I suppose so. Boarding school was... nice, actually. I missed my dad and my brother, but I didn't really miss home, you know? I can't say I made friends easily but I liked the, uh... the environment. Classical education, lots of field trips... everything was close by, a two-hour bus ride away. Not like here.” She raises her glass. “So, to... to what?”

Maggie lifts her glass. “To wine. And future adventures.” Future adventures. She keeps the grimace at bay.

Lena clinks her glass, meets her eyes. “To future adventures.” Maggie wonders if Lena considers words or if she throws them out like confetti. They drink. Lena savors it. “So, verdict?”
Maggie wrinkles her nose. “A bit dry.” She smiles, not sure if Lena remembers that dinner with Kara and Alex. She knows. She must.

Lena laughs. “A bit dry again, huh?” She switches their glasses. “Try mine. Now that is a dry wine.”

Maggie tries it. Dry. Crisp. She glances at Lena. Her mouth is dry. Is it the drink? “It’s really good.” She holds the glass too tightly. Maggie sets the glass down, finger teasing along the rim. A nervous gesture. She stops, looks at the couples in the bar and feels hot. Lena cocks an eyebrow gently. “Sorry. I’m having a nice time. I think ...” *I’m just nervous.* She scratches her scar. “I hoped you’d forgotten that night. The night of the dinner. I could have been better behaved. Is it too much to hope it’s in the past?” Not all of it. Never all of it. But some things. Is it possible to weather the edges?

“It *is* in the past. I told Alex as much. Rocky beginnings are one thing, two adults finding common ground later, another.”

What’s their common ground? Kara. In the beginning, maybe. They agreed to get along for her sake. “I knew next to nothing about you.” She knew about her family. What she read in the papers. Most questionable. There’s still a considerable amount that continues to elude her. “Can anyone ever know a person? Sometimes...” it seems pointless to try. She shakes her head. “But we’re getting there.”

Lena takes Maggie’s glass of wine, smiling softly. “Can anyone ever know a person... that’s a question for the ages, and perhaps the answer changes throughout one’s life, but at this point in mine, I’d say no, we don’t ever really know anyone. And I find that... infinitely reassuring, and restful. The idea that we don’t need to truly know someone to be able to share something meaningful with them. Nothing’s certain, Maggie. There’s no... *there* there.” Maggie considers her words. Lena has a sip of the wine. “Oh, good choice. I’ll have to let him know.” She glances at the bar, then pushes Maggie's glass back to its initial position.

Maggie returns Lena’s wine, folds her arms on the table again. Lena looks back. “If I can ask... what changed for you?” This isn’t the usual for them. She never imagined she’d be in a place like this having wine adventures. “I didn’t know if you’d ever want to meet outside the office. Don't get me wrong, the coffee breaks are really nice. Sometimes the highlight of my day.” Is it wrong to say it? Think it? Why meet here when Lena has Kara? Isn’t Maggie just the little extra? The dessert after the main course? Decadent maybe, but ultimately unnecessary.

“What changed? I'm sorry, I'm not sure... changed from what to what?”
“From meeting in the office to meeting in the evening outside of the office?” She worries she’s talking too much, asking too many questions, killing whatever ‘mood’ there may have been. “Sorry, is it too forward to ask?”

“No, of course not. You have every right to ask. I guess... I like our coffee breaks in the office, but I... last night was different, we both went a little further so I thought it might be time to... See, I don't think of my own office as some kind of sanctuary. It's just my office. My place of work. I like you, and last night was... I took it as a sign you liked me too, so why not take it somewhere else.”

“I do like you.” She’s worried she’s made it painfully obvious.

“It's just hard to...” Maggie waits. “You're a very accomplished woman.”

“Accomplished?”

“You're experienced, in many ways.” Oh. Oh. “And I feel... I'm not sure what I have to offer, to be honest.” Maggie doesn’t know what to say. Lena continues and she still doesn’t know what to say. “But like I said, I trust that you're where you want to be, right now.” She takes an olive and Maggie looks at the peanuts safely beside her. “Can I ask you something personal?”

Where is this going? Is she going to ask how many lovers she’s had? How many girlfriends? She tries to think of the number. She doesn’t know the number. She’s cold. “Go ahead.”

“Do you take pictures? Or do you just like photography in general?”

Maggie smiles with relief. “Um. A little of both. But I haven't taken the camera out for a while. I'm not any good, but I try to make it out to an exhibit when I can. Whenever National City lets me have a rest.” She’s been feeling phantom phone vibrations throughout the evening. Paranoia, maybe.

“I'd love to take a look at your pictures. If that's not too personal.”

“You would?” Maggie smiles faintly. If that’s not too personal, she says. Maggie thinks of Morris. Murphy. Kara. Alex. “It’s not too personal.” She doesn’t know whether she’s embarrassed or flustered. What is ‘personal’? Is it the same as ‘private’? It varies given the circumstances. “I don't
have a portfolio or anything. Just... um. A box where I throw pictures I've developed.” She has a lot of boxes, neatly organized. No overlap. Memories to look at when the scars have healed.

“What kind of camera do you use? How come you're into photography in the first place?”

She’s used to questions. To questioning. Interrogations. Inquisitions. This is different. Ice breakers, maybe. Interest. “I have this ... old Nikon. I took it when I left home. Stole it. From my dad.” Her eyes scan along the table, over the wine glasses. “Um. And it’s hard to say why I’m into it. It’s a neat trick, isn’t it? Before there was digital. All you had was a box, paper, shadows, light. Do you know that’s what photography means? Drawing with light?” Lena nods. “When I was younger I thought that was neat. Romantic. It was like science-magic. I grew up in Nebraska. Even when I was a kid it seemed like a nothing town. For someone like me.” Her family was conservative. Nebraska, conservative. She bites her tongue. She’s getting off topic. “But there’s a lot, you know, to photography. It’s more than techniques. The subjects are more personal. Less abstract, usually. They're moments. Memories. And if you have them you can keep them forever. That moment. That time. No matter what else happens. They're clear. I'm not talking about what you see in the papers, with the headlines or misleading text. I mean, doesn’t it make you think? What happened before this photograph? What happened after? You can lose yourself in possibilities.” She shrugs lightly. “But sometimes a photograph is... the truest thing you can see. I'm not a fan of haziness.” Not often. “Maybe that's boring.

Lena nods. “Oh, it does make me think. What comes before, after... Have you heard of those experiments, where they’ll put two or more pictures in front of a few test subjects, tell them nothing, and ask them to say whatever comes to mind? And no matter what order the pictures are in, no matter whether they’re even from the same source, the mind binds them narratively. And there it is, the art of... montage. Cinema. Interesting etymology, too. Kinema, movement. Cinema is just a succession of pictures, right? Our eyes, our brains stringing pictures together into some kind of continuity.”

“I guess that’s just what people do. Try to make sense of things. Give them purpose, maybe.”

Lena’s quiet for some seconds, thoughtful. “I had this... she was my Latin teacher, in boarding school. I don't even remember how it happened but one day, after class, we started talking about Italy, and travelling... I remember her saying I never take pictures, whatever is worth remembering is in there, pointing at her own head, you know? I'm not sure I agree, but I think about it, sometimes.”

Maggie nods absently, unsure of her response, unsure if photography has just been dismissed, everything she likes about it, dismissed. She thinks of the homes she’s walked into, later photographed, pinned to bulletin boards and mapped out, but not so fresh, so bright, so rotting as the memories, inaccurate and enhanced that linger in her head. Lena has a drink of wine. Maggie
clears her throat. “Does photography interest you at all? Or are you more interested in paintings?” Lena teaches Kara things. She’s Kara’s tour guide. Passing on knowledge and insights that Kara then wants to pass on to her, like hand-me-downs. “You seem very cultured.”

“Oh, I don't have an extensive culture of... when it comes to photography, that is. I know the big names. Arbus, Frank, Atget... but you're right, paintings are more my thing. But composition, colours? It applies across the board, right? I have an old... Lex had a Leica. He gave it to me. I don't use it much, but,” she smiles, “from one family member to another, right?”

A Leica. She nearly asks about that instead, wonders what make it is. “I take it you and Lex were close?”

Another nod. “He was... we didn't know we were actually related. A four-year old suddenly popped up in his life, I suddenly had an adoptive brother... we made do. He was my first friend.” She shrugs.

“Why shrug?”

Lena looks at her glass. “Because he's no longer my friend?”

How close were they, she wonders. He’s tried to kill her. Her mother has nearly killed her, with indifference maybe. Maggie’s never had easy landings. Things with her parents ended poorly. Things with Kate. Things with Emily. You don’t deserve to be happy. But it’s different with friends. What does she know about friends? She knows Lena. Maybe that’s enough. “It's hard to disagree with someone you love. Hardest when it's with someone you love. When they do things you...” she trails off. “It's a lonely feeling.”

“It is. I don't mean to pry, but... are you speaking from experience?”

She laughs, caught. “Maybe I am. I can't pretend it's the same as with Lex,” or your mother, “but. Maybe similar enough.”

“I'm sorry, I'm not sure... if that's your way of telling me to back off, I will, and that's fine. But if you're willing to say more, I'm curious.”

Her throat is dry. She has a drink of wine, scratches her forehead, nods. “When I was in Gotham I
was with someone. God. That feels like so long ago now.” Kate was so pale. As pale as Lena. Paler, even. Kate would come home to her, bruised, bloody. Maggie remembers the anger, the fear, the anguish, the overwhelming helplessness. “Things were confusing for a while. There were things I couldn't get to add up. Eventually I found out...” she flexes her jaw. “I mean, you've heard of the vigilantes in Gotham. She was one of them. What she believed in and what I believed in... it was so similar... but the means. I couldn't agree with the means.” She smiles bittersweetly. “And sometimes I think... You know, whether it's Batwoman or Supergirl... Maybe that's what's needed sometimes. Maybe they can go places I can’t. Do things I can’t. But I don't know. Sometimes I still don't know. There are laws in place for a reason. Order. And there are some things I can't budge on.”

“Is that why it ended? With your... partner, in Gotham?”

“Yeah.” She exhales. Alex has a similar hotheadedness. Why has she only realized that now? You can’t go around busting people’s skulls, Maggie shouted at Kate one night. That won’t solve anything. Kate wiped blood from her mouth, smiled. It'll solve it for now. “Sometimes I wonder if it could have been different. I think we were waiting for the other one to come around and.” She shrugs, tired thinking about it. Jesus, where is Kate? Still alive. She can’t stop herself from reading the newspapers. She always reads the newspapers. The thoughts scatter, contact on her hand. Lena holding her hand. In public.

“Is that okay?”

She’s turned to stone. That’s what happens when you don’t breathe. Lena’s warmth seeps into her hand, stirring life back into it. She turns it slightly, looking at their contrasting skin tones. She and Kara held hands once at Noonan’s. Alex walked in and Maggie pulled her hand away. Kara hasn’t tried to take her hand in public since. Is that okay? Lena asks. You can do whatever you want, Kara says. This is a date but they’re not dating. They’re friends, not girlfriends. She’s in an open relationship. Lena is a free agent. Lena and Kara are together. Maggie and Lena like each other. They’re adults. “Yeah. It's okay.” She tries to shut her mind off. She needs to focus on the present. She needs to focus on Lena. She looks at Lena. Feels her hand, her eyes, both warm.

“Obviously, it doesn't compare, but the reason I broke up with my ex was that... staying together would have meant putting my work on the back burner, and I wasn't ready to do that.”

“I can't imagine you giving up your work.” Her phone is buzzing on the inside of her jacket pocket. Phantom vibration? “Or anyone asking you to give your work up.” No, it’s still buzzing. “Stupid girl.”

“Stupid guy. My second friend.”
Maggie parts her lips. The phone vibrates against her ribs. Lena lifts her eyebrows. “I am so sorry,” she keeps her hand with Lena’s, reaches into the pocket with the other hand, looks at the display. Danvers Calling. Her stomach drops. Why is she calling? Does she know she’s here? Is she willing to talk to her again? Is she still angry? What does she want to say to her? She silences the phone. Turns it off. She can’t. Not right now. She pockets it.

“Work?”

“No, I’m still free.” She forces a smile. “Um. You were saying… Not stupid girl. Stupid guy. Sorry. Is he still a friend?”

“I don’t know. We broke up when I decided to move to National City. I wish him the best, and I hope he’s able to build on our research. We haven’t talked much. Sorry, I didn’t mean to turn this into a conversation about exes.”

She wonders what Lena would think if she knew Alex just called. How are Lena and Alex doing? Has she screwed things up between them? Is that what she does, torpedo her way through people’s lives, destroying relationships? “I don’t mind so long as you don’t cancel our evening to give him a call.” They’re still holding hands. “So what should we talk about? I’m afraid ‘exes’ conversations don’t paint me in the best light.” Her hand twitches. She starts to pull it back, stops when she feels Lena’s thumb grazing the back of her hand.

“She’s my only ex, and it was complicated enough. I’m not going to run away just because you had you own messes to deal with.”

That’s a relief. That’s a start. “Your only ex?” Maybe Lena doesn’t date. She’s dating Kara. She’s on a date with you. No. That doesn’t make sense. “You must be very selective.”

“Not really. We worked together for a few years, then started dating.” She shrugs. “It wasn’t particularly romantic, but we made a good team.”

She understands the words but only individually, not in the sentence Lena has spoken. “Were you in love with him, or…?”

Lena massages the back of her neck, has a drink of wine. Maggie watches her closely. “I don’t think so. He’s very handsome, and we worked well together. Managed our own startup. And he wanted
more, and I thought... why not? Maybe that's the best I can hope for.”

“Oh. You know, sometimes it takes time to... find our way...” she stops. She does enough bullshit. She doesn’t want to bullshit. “Listen. Don't take this... I have a hard time imagining you not getting exactly what you're looking for. I mean, I can run through all your great qualities. Again.” Her thoughts race. “You keep surprising me. You just don’t strike me as a settling type.”

She smiles. “Oh, I guess I didn’t see it as settling, at the time. I’d never been with anyone, he was a good friend, someone who valued my work, whose work I valued... he was kind, funny, brilliant, didn’t care about my name or my inheritance. I thought all of this would matter more than fireworks in the long run. I still think that. But then, we broke up, and I haven’t... I guess I'm not looking for anything. I mean, as a CEO, I am, but as a scientist, as a woman? Who knows. I’m not... unavailable, but. If something good happens, great, if not... like I said, I’m not overly casual about these things.”

She officially has no idea what’s going on. Lena's not looking for anything. So tonight is a date and nothing more. She manages a smile. “So drinks tonight are... an adventure?”

Lena has a long drink of water. “I don't know. I just wanted to... I'm not good at this. I wanted to spend time with you, outside of L-Corp. It's an adventure all right.”

Not good at what? “I'm glad we're here.” She glances at their hands again, confirming it isn’t a figment of her imagination. “Can I tell you something embarrassing?”

Lena strokes her knuckles. “Sure.”

She laughs quietly. “Um. I read your text the minute you sent it this morning but I didn't know how to respond. And I don't have any friends...” her smile fades, comes back, “So I asked one of the detectives to... help me decipher it. He was... enlightening.”

“How so?”

“I'll spare you the colorful commentary. He was a pig. But disappointed that I wasn't the lesbian whisperer he imagines I am,” she rolls her eyes.

Lena chuckles. “A lesbian whisperer? What does that even mean?”
Maggie can’t think of a way to say it that won’t make her blush. “I think it means I’m a female Casanova. It's stupid.”

Lena skims Maggie's fingers. “Casanova... I wonder if the people who say these things to you even know what the original film is about. Fellini’s.”

“Probably not. And neither do I.” Kara probably knows. She has a long drink of wine. “Does it end badly for him?” Maybe that's fitting.

“Casanova ended his days peacefully, writing his memoirs... but, if National City Opera & Ballet ever plays Don Giovanni, we can find out.” Ballet? Yeah, n— “In the meantime... I'd like to ask you something.”

Maggie looks at the glass of water sitting beside her wine. It’s sweating. Her eyes drift back to Lena. “All right.”

Lena squeezes her hand, lets go. Maggie curls her fingers slightly, rubbing her palm. It was nice while it lasted. Maybe Lena— “Would you... Would you like to spend the night with me? Here, I mean.”

“Yes.” Yes before the world crashes down around them. Yes before she changes her mind. Yes because she's allowed. She panics. Maybe it wasn’t an offer. Maybe it was just a question. Shit. Shit. Shit. She looks at Lena, who looks back at her. Everything else, everyone else has been cropped out, the vignette closing in around Lena. Maggie reaches out, takes her hand. Yes, if you meant it. “If you’re sure.”

“I’m sure.” She reaches into her coat pocket, takes a key card out, slides it towards her.

Maggie looks at it as if it were an alien relic. Did Lena plan for this? Hope for this? She looks back to Lena. “We’ll pay for the wine and we can go.”

“No need. It’s all on my tab.” Oh. She thought of everything. So why does she look so nervous? “Do you want to go now?”
The evening keeps surprising her. Maggie squeezes her hand, smiles. “Let's go now.”

“Okay,” Lena says. Maggie releases her hand. They stand. Maggie moves around, holding the coat for her to slip into. They share a glance. “I’ll join you by the elevator?”

Maggie nods, watches her go speak to the sommelier. Maggie exits the bar, moving to the elevator in a trance. Her hands are tingling. Her face. Nerves. She looks at the elevator with the golden trim, sees all the men and women trickling by. She exhales shakily, sticks her hands in her pants pockets. She doesn’t have pants pockets. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. This is okay. This is all okay. This is what Alex and Lena do. No big deal. Moments later Lena’s beside her.

Maggie smiles, hits the button for the elevator, focuses on breathing. “Any problems? With the sommelier or...?” She chances a look at her.

Lena’s smile makes her weak-kneed. “Just making sure he got appropriately rewarded for a job well done. He chose well.” The elevator doors open. Lena lets her step in first.

Maggie steps in. “I liked your wine. Did I say that before? We should try it again sometime.” Lena steps inside. The elevator doors slide shut. They stand side by side. They don’t touch but she feels her. “Fancy elevator.” Lena has fancy everything. A fancy life, maybe.

Lena presses the floor button, takes her hand. For a moment Maggie closes her eyes. “To all our future adventures, right?”

She swallows, gives Lena’s hand a light squeeze. She speaks, somehow. “Yes.” She doesn’t know how this is happening. Up until yesterday night they’d only shared chaste kisses. No, that’s not right. They’d shared work. Meals. Conversation. Encouragement. Maggie refused to think of this place as a hotel. They weren’t meeting at a hotel. They were meeting at a bar in a hotel. Different. She hadn’t allowed herself to look at the rooms, to look at the prices, to think of more. Lena got them a room at a hotel. Lena wants more.

The elevator doors open. They step out. Lena looks around, discovers the direction and tugs Maggie after her. Maggie looks at her. The way her coat rustles when she walks, her boots lifting and falling on the carpet, stretching into the beyond like a theater, behind the scenes, past a stage into reality. She sees her profile, her jaw cut like stone, she looks a sculpture, a work of art.

Lena stops at a door. Maggie forces her breath out slowly. Lena’s hands are shaking. Maggie looks
at the door, back to Lena, takes her hands. “Hey.” Maggie cocks her head, looks at her. “We don’t have to go in.”

Lena smiles. “Open the door. I never know how these things work. I’ve locked myself out of my own apartment at least three times.”

“The genius behind L-Corp can’t manage doors? How charming.”

“Yeah. Closed doors aren’t my thing.”

*They’re mine, usually.* Maggie reaches into the jacket pocket. The key is warm. It’s plastic. It shouldn’t be warm. She pulls it out, slides it into the card reader. The light flashes green. Maggie takes the door handle, turns it, pushes the door open. “After you.”

Lena steps inside.

Maggie stands at the door, seeing the light fold its way into the room. She reaches in, finds the lights, turns them on and enters. She shuts the door. The room is smaller than she was anticipating. There’s a couch. A television. A bed. A bathroom off to the side. It’s quiet. They’re close. There’s no cover. There’s no room for misinterpretation. “This is really nice. You have lovely taste.”

X

Maggie must have slid the card into the indoor slot, because lights spring to life as the door shuts quietly behind them. Lena takes in the room. They’ve honored her one special request, a bouquet of bright tulips placed in a vase on the commode.

“This is really nice. You have lovely taste.”

She turns, smiles at Maggie. “I’m glad you like it, but I can’t take credit for this one. Apparently, every room here has its own vibe, so I just… asked them to pick the one closest to what I thought we might both like.”

“And what would that be?”
Lena wanders further in. “Something… cozy. Not a suite.”

“Why not? Not that I’m complaining.”

“I don’t like suites. I mean,” Lena adds, frowning, “The small ones in some old European hotels I’ve been to on business trips were warm and homey, so those are fine, just a couple of rooms, but… I don’t know, between the Luthor mansion and the L-Corp building, I’ve had my fill of big, ominous or impersonal spaces for a lifetime.” She sets her handbag on the desk chair. “Especially when,” she hesitates, looks at Maggie, “what we’re about to do is meant to be the opposite of impersonal.”

Maggie nods thoughtfully. Her eyes fall on the tulips. “They put those in every room?”

Lena shakes her head. Maggie gives her a small smile, leans forward to smell the flowers as Lena opens one of the closets, takes off her coat and slips it around a hanger.

“They’re beautiful.”

“Well… the room should reflect what happens in it.” Lena smiles helplessly. Her mouth is dry. She goes to the mini-fridge, takes out a bottle of S.Pellegrino. “Do you want anything?”

Maggie is taking a peek at the bathroom. She looks over at Lena. “Some water would be nice.”

“Is sparkling water okay?” Lena points at the bottle she’s holding. Maggie nods and Lena goes to pour them two glasses while Maggie takes her jacket off, puts it around the back of the chair. Lena’s hands are still shaking, almost imperceptibly. But, well. Maggie was holding them earlier so she already knows, no use hiding it. She hands Maggie her glass.

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”
She drinks. She has no conversation left in her. She’s not sure she can go through with what she had in mind. Reality hits hard, doesn’t bend as easily as flights of fancy.

“Are you okay? You seem a bit… distracted.”

Lena puts her glass down. “I’m all right. But there’s, uh…” she smiles briefly. “I’m just going to say it. We both know I’ve had to take my clothes off in front of you under very different circumstances. And again, I’m thankful for your professionalism back then, but I suspect we both found it… quite unpleasant.”

Maggie closes her eyes for a few seconds. “I know. I’m so sorry, I know that this, right now, must be… For me too, actually, it brings those memories back. I mean, not that it makes the idea of… of spending the night with you off-putting in any way, I just hate that…” she sighs, scratches her forehead. “That you had to go through this, that I had to make you go through this, and that the memory of it is now this grotesque parody of… look, if you still want to do this, is there anything I can do to make it easier? Anything at all.”

Lena tilts her head, catches her eyes. “No, there’s nothing you can do. But there’s something I can do. For us.”

Maggie opens her mouth, but a flash of understanding passes through her eyes and she says nothing. Lena strokes her cheek, feels warm when Maggie leans into her touch. She walks to the sofa to put some distance between them. She won’t be able to do it if they’re too close.

Maggie’s eyes are on her. Lena can’t look back. She takes off her boots, makes sure they’re properly aligned on the floor, giving herself a few seconds before she has to stand straight again. She exhales slowly as she unbuttons her trousers, slips out of them. She folds them across the armrest. She chances a glance at Maggie. She’s leaning against the desk. Her face is, thankfully, unreadable. Lena pulls her blouse over her head. Folds it. Puts in on the sofa. Her heart is trying to beat its way out of her chest. Should she take everything off? Maggie is still as a statue, one hand clutching the edge of the desk. Lena swallows. She’s never felt particularly desirable. But… she will never see herself as others see her. So. No more masks, no more armor, no more control. She takes off her underwear, meets Maggie’s eyes. Maybe she should go to her. She can’t. She’s frozen in place. Frozen and relieved.

X

Maggie watches in a trance. Lena’s doing this. She’s doing this for her. For them. Removing those barriers between them and that night. The night that has filled her with shame and guilt the closer
they’ve grown. The night that might have ended them. Maggie hasn’t forgotten. She never will. The way Lena seemed smaller with the clothes removed. How she had to leave her there and move on. But she hasn’t been able to move on.

She tries to swallow, can’t. There’s a pain in her stomach. Something taking her breath away. Maggie looks at her. Her outlines, her curves, the porcelain of her skin. Unblemished. No bruises. No bruises. She blinks, takes a breath. Her heart thumps hard. No bruises. On skin like that. How? Kara must be careful with her. Kara must be so careful with her. She thinks of where Kara has marked her. The heat in her stomach twists like a knife. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about her. Don’t think about them. Don’t think about what it means.

She thinks of what a gesture like this means, tries and fails to come up with one that’s remotely similar. The trust that’s been bestowed upon her makes her unsteady. No one has ever given her something like this. She breathes out slowly, her hands at her side. Lena dares a glance to her. Maggie holds her gaze. All that’s left comes away. Her bra, her underwear. They stand, immobilized. Lena remains by the couch. Doesn’t hide herself. Doesn’t come closer. She is a goddess, come alive. She is Venus. Maggie has no words. Doesn’t know what to do with what’s been given, is washed away in the unfamiliar emotion of it.

She doesn’t know how long they remain that way, still, maybe overwhelmed. Maggie goes to her, cups her face, meets her eyes. She’s not a religious person. She doesn’t believe in miracles, but Lena’s lips are a blessing. Lena wraps her arms around her neck, pulls close. Maggie flushes. Every piece of her rousing. Her hands settle on Lena’s hips, the small of her back, tracing up her spine, to her shoulders. Her skin is so soft. Slow down. She has to slow down. Lena’s hands travel over her. Over fabric. Separated still but Maggie feels the digits of her fingers, the shape of her belly and her breasts.

They kiss in the silence, broken only by their breath. They kiss for ages. Maggie’s hands come to her shirt, undoing one button, stops, their lips separating. She takes Lena’s hands, trembling still, presses her lips to them, brings them to her shirt. She doesn’t want to unbutton her shirt for Lena. Not the way she does for Kara. This shirt is one of the rare survivors. Lena meets her eyes, undoes one button, joins their lips. Maggie’s fingers delve into her hair, focusing on her breathing as Lena kisses her neck, undoes another button. And so it goes, kisses to mark each undoing. Her touch is so light. So delicate. It’s barely there. Lena pulls the shirt from her pants.

Then her hands are at her side, warm against her bare skin. They stop, Maggie drawing Lena close so their stomachs touch. A current runs through her at the contact. They kiss again. For seconds, hours, eternities. No time at all. Lena pulls the pin from her hair, sets it aside, her fingers running through the waves, up the flanks of her body. Maggie keeps their mouths joined, shrugs out of the shirt.

Lena continues her explorations. Maggie's grateful the colors in her ribs have faded, that she has air
in her lungs to give. Maggie drops her hands to her pants, undoes the button. Lena's arms circle around her, fingers toying along the back of her bra clasp. “Can I take this off?”

Maggie nods, lets her slide it from her arms, set it aside on the couch. Her arms are around her and Maggie isn’t sure of what’s happening. Is she upset? Trying to hold her down? Seconds pass before she understands. An embrace. Her heart shouldn’t pound this fast. She’s dizzy. Kisses to her neck and the tension that flared is taken, swallowed, transferred in some second-hand way and then gone.

Maggie presses closer to her, stops to press her lips to her neck, shoulders, chest. Their kisses are growing heated. Maggie unzips her pants, pushes them down, but she’s unable to relinquish Lena’s mouth. She guides them towards the bed. Lena goes with her.

Maggie stops when they reach the edge, she looks at Lena, easing the hair back from her face. She’s still wearing her glasses. Maggie smiles, reaches up to pull them gingerly from her face. She folds them closed. Thinks to say something. Doesn’t. Sets them beside the nightstand. They’ll be there for her, safe, when they’re done.

She takes Lena’s hand, sits on the bed. Lena sits beside her. They kiss. Shift. Maggie’s back touches the bed. It’s comfortable but all she knows are Lena’s fingers, long and elegant traversing her body. Her lips are never far behind.

Her touch isn’t like Kara’s heavy hand. It’s whispers. Smiles. She takes her time. Don’t compare them. Lena’s breath on her skin is making her weak. Her kisses, touches. Maggie lifts her hips, letting Lena pull her underwear off. Lena’s close but she doesn’t touch her there. What if this is a test? No. That's crazy. Maggie adjusts, pressing Lena down to the bed. What is this they’re doing? Some version of what she does with Alex or Kara?

It’s a little easier to breathe now. This is familiar territory. Her lips and hands trace a path. These must be regions Kara has explored. Mapped. Alex too, maybe. But it’s okay. They’re close now. She wants, in some ways, to lie beside her. Look at her. But that’s unconventional. Anyway, no one has ever seemed to think it’s what she was made for. Anyway, it’s so much.

Maggie’s lips on Lena’s breasts and belly. More like that. On her thighs. Her fingers pressing carefully. She doesn’t want to leave a mark. Kara hasn’t left a mark. Not physically. She starts a path, looks up at Lena once she’s settled between her legs. Lena gives a barely perceptible smile. Maggie wonders if her heart will come out of her chest. This is normal. Nothing she hasn’t done before.
She tastes her. Feels her response. Trails a hand over her body. Different from Kara’s. She has to be gentler. Lena’s hand is on her hair. On her shoulder. On her arms. Over her hand. So much contact. She’s not used to so much contact. Not recently. To reassurance. It makes it hard to breathe. Maggie looks at her. Lena looks back. The thrumming of her heart makes her feel like she’s having a panic attack. She returns to her ministrations. Focuses on how Lena breathes and sighs, how her hands tighten on her—still so light, normal. She glances at her again. Her eyes have closed, her head tilted back, lips parted, breasts heaving. No bruises. She’s glad there aren’t any. She’s happy Kara’s careful. She’ll have to be careful, too. She wraps an arm around Lena’s thigh, presses closer. Lena’s breath quickens. She’s so quiet. But she’s found Maggie’s hand, laced their fingers, squeezing it. This is close. This is so close. Closer than Lena is. And then Lena trembles, her body tightening before she gathers her breath, settles. Lena doesn’t let go, her fingers continuing to ease along her hand.

Maggie lifts, touching a few other kisses along her thighs, to her knee, looking at her. She licks her lips. Rests her chin on Lena’s knee, fingers drifting along her thigh. Maggie looks at her. She’s gorgeous. Kara’s so lucky. “Was that okay?” Being here with her, okay. Doing this, okay. This room, this evening, them, okay.

Lena finds her hand again, takes it, finger tracing over her palm, looking at it and then at her. “That felt really lovely, but come here,” she pulls her hand and Maggie stretches out beside her. Their faces are only inches apart. Lena pushes a lock of hair behind her ear, kisses her, long, warm and deep. Her heart gallops again and Maggie can’t remember the last time it beat this hard. There’s adrenaline. Intensity. Intimacy. Maybe this is a combination of all three. This is why Lena chose this room. Does she want intimacy, too? No. She wanted the opposite of impersonal. It’s not exactly the same. Maggie settles a hand on Lena’s back, lets it drift, focusing on the softness of her skin. This is a lucid dream. What if it’s a lucid dream? And she awakes… in her cold apartment. No. It’s real. Light. Intoxicating. The wine has gone to her head. That’s all.

They separate. Maggie breathes as Lena kisses her neck and shoulder, her mouth, while her hands explore. Maggie bites her lips to keep quiet. They rest on a shared pillow, facing one another. Heat radiates from Lena. She’s a small furnace. She smiles thinking of it and Lena kisses the corner of her lips, her chin. Her ribs are healed so why is it so hard to get the air into her lungs? Air comes easier when Lena’s hand travels down her stomach, over her thighs, her knee, sliding inward, crawling up and finding her. Maggie swallows, exhales.

They look at one another. It’s bold. Dangerous. They’re thrill seekers, lying perfectly still, diving off cliffs, soaring again. Lena strokes her. Leans forward, kisses to her temple, to her cheek, to her mouth, gone dry, quenching her. Lena is a lagoon in the desert. Maggie closes her eyes, only a moment, savoring her taste, wanting to keep the warmth of her tongue. Maggie adjusts, whispers into her ear. Lena responds, fingers shifting, slipping inside her. Closer. Closer.

Her eyes send shots of heat into her, sinking. Maggie moves with her, meeting her fingers. She takes Lena’s face in her hands. Lena doesn’t look away. Maggie’s breath is unspooled, drawn out of her and everything races, building before it comes crashing around her in waves and she slows,
swallows. Their foreheads are touched together, both of them breathing in short bursts. Maggie palms her face, thumb stroking Lena’s ears.

She doesn’t know what to say. Language has failed her. This is… unusual. They share, small, soft kisses. Breathe. Lie there, looking at one another. This is closest of all. It’s… nice. Comfortable. She could drift off to sleep here. No. No. Not allowed. Even if it were, it’s not for her. This is never for her.

She feels her body tense, something in her screaming. She should go. Lena probably wants her to go. She wants to go. This is… so much. This is maybe too much. She closes her eyes, searching for distance. She needs distance. To escape the radius of detonation. She wanted close. Her chest is too tight. Lena’s fingers are through her hair, along her face. Maggie opens her eyes. Will Lena kick her out? It’s happened before. Many times. It’s better to just rip the band-aid off. It’s easier to ask. “Do you want me to go?”

Lena’s fingers still. Maggie forces herself to not look away. It’s hard when she’s not used to looking back. When it’s so much easier to burn bridges. Maggie feels her body growing stiffer by the second. Lena’s fingers start their machinations again after several seconds. “No. I want you to stay.”

Maggie licks her lips, closes her eyes. Okay. Okay. Lena wants her to stay. The tension slips away, her limbs loose again. The air returning to her lungs. She opens her eyes, smiles. “Okay.”

“Do you want me to go?”

Go where? Leave? Why would Maggie want to leave? Why would she ask Lena is she wants her to leave? Lena mentally presses pause on everything that isn’t her brain to run through all potential scenarios.

One: Lena wasn’t expressive enough or appreciative enough or loud enough or something enough, Maggie thinks she had a terrible time and no longer feels welcome. It’s possible. She knows Alex wonders if she gets anything out of their times together. So did Jack. It keeps happening.

(One second has passed. Lena starts counting.)
Two: Maggie feels that if Lena didn’t go down on her in return, it means she didn’t want to and was mostly interested in getting off, not in getting Maggie off. That Lena only reciprocated with the bare minimum and now she wants her out of the room. Lena doesn’t much care for this arbitrary you do me, I’ll do you modus operandi that’s so prevalent once foreplay goes on past the accepted time limit. She didn’t even want Maggie to go down on her. It was… more than pleasant. And new. Better than what she’s had before. But she wasn’t ready for it. Neither was she ready to tell Maggie she wasn’t ready for it. Still, maybe she should have trusted herself. Maybe she should have told her, let’s wait, let me kiss you, let me explore you for a little while longer, let me know what you like. But those things are hard to say, especially the first time. And Maggie seemed to want a way out of… the in-between zone Lena often finds herself yanked out of too soon.

(Three seconds of stillness. Maggie is tensing up.)

Three: It’s the opposite. Maggie expected Lena to be more aggressive. Or proactive. More interested in physical closeness than emotional closeness. Many people assume that about her, and that’s fine, but surely… surely Maggie already knew, surely she could tell, from their coffee breaks, from Lena undressing for her, from Lena’s hands shaking earlier, that she wanted to connect with a person, not a body. Maybe that’s too close to what should be reserved for Maggie’s girlfriend, for Kara?

(Five seconds.)

Four: it’s something that has nothing to do with Lena, something she has no control over, no knowledge of. She remembers certain things Maggie said, hints that she’s been with people who weren’t interested in her as a person. People usually prefer me in the backseat, things like that. But she’s been with Alex. Alex who thinks sex with Maggie was incredible, Alex who misses intimacy with her. And Maggie is with Kara. Kara who opens her door and her heart so completely, even to Lena, to someone she doesn’t make love to. Isn’t this sort of disarming kindness the best antidote to feeling unwanted?

(Six seconds.)

Well. Perhaps that’s Lena’s answer, right there. Besides, when in doubt… She pulls her hand out of Maggie’s hair to cup her cheek instead. “No. I want you to stay.”

Maggie licks her lips and closes her eyes for a moment. Lena feels her relax. Jesus. She really was expecting to be asked to leave. When Maggie opens her eyes again, it’s with a smile. “Okay.”

Lena returns it. Expecting to be kicked out of a hotel room after sleeping with someone you’ve
become friends with over the past few months is… unusual. Lena shifts closer and takes her in her arms. Remembers how her earlier embrace only seemed to register as such for Maggie after a few seconds. And that moment of hesitation when she hugged her in her office. So, Lena will tread lightly. But not too lightly, not like it can be brushed aside. Maggie looks at her as Lena’s fingertips trace little patterns along her spine. “Are you all right?”

Maggie nods. “Everything’s fine. You?”

“No,” Lena smiles, “everything’s not fine. I haven’t eaten anything since lunch and I’m starving. Room service to the rescue?”

Something a little lighter dances in Maggie’s eyes. “That sounds great. I think the wine went to my head. I’m famished.”

“That’s the spirit.” Lena kisses her, feels Maggie’s arm come around her. “I’ll call them. Do you want anything in particular?”

“Let's continue our wine adventures. You're not adventured out yet, are you? Was I overzealous in suggesting we come up right away?”

Lena props herself up on one elbow, runs a lazy hand through Maggie’s hair. It’s a caress across her palm, a whisper along her fingers. She thinks of Kara holding her hand in the greenhouse, her touch so light. Her lips brushing her cheek. “Wine adventures never end. And now that our loyal sommelier is no longer available, you’ll have to trust me.” Is her own touch heavier than Kara’s, her own kisses more forceful? Is Maggie contrasting them, consciously or not? Probably. It’s all right. “And no, you weren't overzealous.” Lena is used to coming up short, and it might hurt when she reads it in her mother’s eyes, because it’s unfair, because Lex is the one who came up short, but here? No. There’s nothing of the sort in Maggie's eyes. “Asking you if you wanted to spend the night with me took everything I had.” You can’t come up short against someone beyond compare. Whatever Maggie sees in her that she doesn’t already get with Kara, Lena will be grateful for. “We'd probably still be in the bar if it weren't for you.” Whatever room she makes for her even though she can go home to Kara, Lena will be grateful for.

Maggie’s smile softens. “For the record, I think you're very brave. If you hadn't asked, I might have had to summon up the nerve.”

Don’t think, not for a second, that I would have a problem with you doing what gives you joy, Kara said on their stone bench. So, Lena will give Maggie all she can. Because she’s one of those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward, she recites mentally, but one day she—
“You... I've never done this before,” Lena confesses, easily switching from her inner conversation to the one she’s having with Maggie. “Book a room without asking first. I was afraid you'd find it distasteful, or feel like I was only enjoying your company in the hope that it would lead up to this. So... you would have asked?”

―but one day, she will get past that, and be one of those who do not seek joy in giving, they give as in yonder valley the myrtle breathes its fragrance into space. That’s something to aspire to, at least.

Maggie is silent, thinking of her answer, probably, so Lena looks at the tulips for a few seconds. “Well, to be honest,” Maggie says slowly, “I didn't let myself look at the rooms. I didn’t... want to get ahead of myself. Of ourselves. But... when you said it was a date? Maybe the idea wasn't so crazy after all. And I have a really nice time with you. So depending on where the evening had gone, I might have found the courage to ask.”

“That's a relief,” Lena admits with a small chuckle. “It's difficult to ask, isn’t it? To figure out whether you're misreading things, especially when the situation isn't the most conventional to begin with. And for the record, having dinner at the bar and spending the evening trying out wines and talking would have been perfectly fine, too. Not quite as lovely as this, but a beautiful memory in its own right.”

Maggie smiles and pulls her into a kiss. “I think so, too. I'm glad you asked. Both times. Maybe you should be a National City cop. You're braver than I am.”

Lena hums, palms her cheek, steals a second kiss. “The other day, I was negotiating a potential contract and this woman was trying to squeeze everything she could out of it. As she should, but still. Don’t push it, you know?” She toys with the hem of the sheet covering Maggie. “Anyway, it was a game of cat and mouse and I caught myself thinking, I wonder if that's what Maggie does when interrogating people. I don't know if I'd make a good cop but in the interrogation room... who knows?”

“I think you've got what it takes. You know, some people think it's all about intimidation. It can be. But sometimes it's just about appealing to a person's better nature. Knowing when to pry. Waiting. Listening. Listening’s underrated. Letting them fill the silence. So, you going to quit your day job?”

*Listening’s underrated. Letting them fill the silence.* Lena suppresses a smile, thinking of Kara’s tendency to alternate between being a veritable fountain of words, and letting silences stretch way past the point of comfort, straight to the heart of Lena’s particular comfort zone.
“What's my day job?” She asks, her fingertips skimming along Maggie's forearm.

“Being the genius CEO of L-Corp?” Maggie laughs. “That's a day and night job. Are you sure you have time for me tonight?”

“So… I'm a CEO, day and night? Well, I'll have you know I sometimes moonlight as a tinkerer. With actual vials and beakers and explosive chemical reactions. And no, I don't have time for you. Or anyone else. But I take it anyway.”

She thinks of this book, *Reads Like a Novel*. There was something in there about... how there are two things nobody ever has time for: reading and loving. The time for those things must be stolen from the world’s ceaseless spinning.

“You're always working. You start early and go until late. But you should let me watch you tinker away some time. You can teach me a thing or two.”

Lena nods. “I'm working even when I'm not working. You can't switch off your brain, you know? But I could dazzle you with some high school level chemistry tricks.” She frowns. “Although, I suppose you see quite a bit of that on the job already. Forensics and all that.”

“I see all kinds of things on the job. I'll take high school chemistry to a lot of it.”

“For now, let's...” Lena trails off, reaching for the phone on the nightstand. “Let's go for a more natural sort of alchemical reaction. Did you know there's a vineyard in Italy that makes bonsai wine? Alex mentioned you liked bonsai trees a few months ago.”

“Alex did?” Maggie looks surprised. “But I didn't know that. About the wine. Have you ever had it?

“No, it's a tiny vineyard in Montalcino, and to be honest, I'm not sure it has anything to do with actual, Japanese bonsai trees, but the... eccentric heir of some important Italian family decided to try his hand at wine-making, was told it would take thirty-five years for his vines to yield anything worthwhile, and decided he didn't want to wait that long and would find a way around it. He called his signature vintage *bonsai wine*. I'm guessing his vines are very small? I have no idea. Do you have bonsai trees?
“Probably a wine we won’t get to experience then, hm?” Maggie laments, playing with the ends of Lena’s hair. Lena watches her hand, wants to press a kiss to her wrist. “I need another bonsai tree. I’m afraid I neglected my last one.”

Maggie glances off. Is there more to this than a neglected tree? Lena opts not to press. “Never say never,” she says instead. “About the wine. I’ll be your guinea pig and have a go at it the next time I’m in Italy for a business trip. Have a few bottles sent your way if it’s worth it. And I have faith in your ability to nurture a tiny tree. Although, I hear bonsai trees are quite delicate. Send me pictures if you do end up getting a new one.” This time, she does kiss Maggie’s wrist. “So, what do you want to eat? I’m pretty sure the kitchens are still in full swing so, anything goes.”

“It’s a deal. I get wine and you get snapshots of my little bonsai. I think I win.” Maggie looks at her, then away. Lena narrows her eyes. “Is there something you’re in the mood for? I’ve never had room service. Should we be extravagant?”

Never had room service, got it. Lena promises herself to pay more attention. There are unspoken rules everywhere, and in that hotel, she’s the one who knows how to play. Hopefully, they can switch places some day, some place, and Maggie can take the lead.

“You can be as extravagant as you like. I’m having fries, that’s my go to, but aside from that, all bets are off.” She smiles, coming up with as diverse a menu as she can think of on the fly to put Maggie at ease. “Burger, pizza, fancy beef bourguignon, a sandwich, sushi, vegetarian whatever... I just need to know so I can pick the best wine to complement it, really. Like good old Cassius said the other day, I have my priorities straight.”

“Cassius?” A beat. “I'll have sushi. Do they have vegan ice cream?”

“Cassius is the snob I put on speaker for your entertainment. I’m glad you forgot about him. He’s not worth remembering. And vegan ice cream is it. What are your flavors of choice?”

“Ah, Cassius,” Maggie laughs. “I stormed into your office. And into your heart, hm?” She pauses. “Vanilla.” She leans over and kisses her.

Vanilla. Lena feels herself smile slightly into the kiss. “Into my office, into my heart, into... well, not technically my bed, but close enough. And like I said, I want you to stay, so I'm afraid you'll hear me complain about Cassius a lot more in the future. Him and his demonic wife.” Bloody hell, what’s her name again? Philomena? “Admittedly, she cracks me up.”
She dials the room service number, lets in ring in her ear as she leans down to kiss Maggie. She’s about to pull back but Maggie gently holds her in place, her lips leaving her mouth and alighting on her neck. Oh. Heat surge. Lena closes her eyes.

“Not your bed, no. But this will do,” Maggie murmurs. “I’ll happily listen to your complaints about Cassius and his harpy wife. I'll tell you stories about Murphy.”

“And Lady Morris, please—” Lena replies just as someone picks up the phone. Oops. “No, I’m sorry, I wasn't taking to you.” She contains an undignified snort when she feels Maggie smile against her neck. “Yes, that's the room. We'd like to order...” she runs a hand over Maggie’s shoulder, then lower. Her breasts, her stomach. “Sushi. Yes, for two, please. Oh, can you make mozuku? Great, we’ll have that too. And a plate of fries. And vanilla and chocolate ice cream, vegan. Oh, sure, we'll have... one moment, please.” She covers the phone. "White, red or rosé?"

Maggie grabs the phone. “Rosé. Thank you!” Hangs it up. Looks at Lena intently, smiles, looks off. Lena raises an eyebrow. “They’ll bring it up, right? I didn't screw that up?” Maggie asks before kissing her. “I just really wanted to do that.”

Lena shakes her head and pushes her into the pillows. “Oh, they’ll bring it up, all right. You just made sure they'll get us the most expensive vintage of rosé wine available in their cellar, is all.”

“Oh.” Maggie smiles up at her. “I'll pick up some extra shifts. In a year or two I should be able to pay you back. You might not see me in the meantime. Unless it's for collaborative meetings of course.”

Lena makes a face. Decides to seize the moment. “I don't know. Money is such a crude currency. Maybe you can pay me back right now by...” She licks her lips, traces Maggie’s pulse with her index finger. Kisses her slowly. “Answering one question.”

Maggie cocks her head. “Mh. Answers are priceless but after that kiss how can I refuse?” She strokes her hair. “What is it?”

Lena turns her head to press a kiss to her palm. “Did I, in any way, make you feel like I wanted you to leave earlier?”

Maggie stays quiet for a long time. “No. I guess not.”
Oh, that won’t do. “No guessing, okay?” And as a show of good faith… “To tell you the truth, it hadn't even crossed my mind this could just be... When I asked you if you'd like to spend the night with me, I really meant the night. Otherwise, why even bother, you know? We could have done that in my office. That's not what this is, for me. You know that, right?”

“People don't always say what they mean. Sorry. People don't always mean what they say.”

Maggie pauses. “I think you do. I'm learning you do.” She takes a breath and glances off.

Lena feels a pang in her chest. What is it like, to live like this? To take so little at face value? Did something happen to Maggie? Something big, or a lifetime of little things? No matter what happens, I know you won’t hurt her, Kara’s voice whispers at the back of her mind. Lena wonders why she, herself, didn’t turn out that way. Why, time and again, she’s chosen to risk disappointment over might-have-beens. And she’s been disappointed many times.

She kisses Maggie’s cheek. “I'll grant you this: when I feel I can't say what I mean, I keep quiet. But whatever I say? I don't say it lightly. I wouldn't have asked you to go. Not a chance. I wouldn't have spent hours agonizing over whether booking a room was appropriate if I didn't want to spend time with you here, okay?”

Maggie exhales slowly, palms her face. “Okay.” She’s about to add something, doesn’t. “I'll take you at your word. And...” she says with a small smile. “You agonized over this? I'm flattered I'm worth agonizing over.”

People usually prefer me in the backseat. Not worth spending the night with in a nice hotel, then. Not worth keeping around after the deed’s been done. Not worth agonizing over. God. Lena laces their fingers. “Oh, you are. If you knew the ridiculous thoughts that crossed my mind when I dialed the hotel's number, when I booked the room, when I asked them to get a bouquet from— it doesn't matter, some fancy florist. When I texted you the address, even. Every step of the way.”

“That's sweet. I'm not used to that kind of thing so if... I'm quiet or... I don't know. I'm just... processing. Okay? This has all been... Thank you. For the effort.”

Lena watches Maggie kiss her fingers. “It’s not an effort.” It’s basic decency. “Anyway, I guess one of us should be presentable when room service comes knocking. Or we could wait until the last second and scramble for a bathrobe when they do knock.” Lena kisses her neck, nibbles tenderly. “What will it be?”

“I'm a fan of the second option.”
Lena nods wordlessly, goes back to kissing her neck. She studies Maggie’s reactions. Cross-references them with her mental notes from their coffee breaks. Interesting. She uses the fact they’re still holding hands to lift Maggie’s arm above her head on the pillow. Disentangles their fingers to hold her wrist instead. Too gently to pin it, but… Maggie’s breath hitches ever so slightly under her lips. Very interesting. For later, maybe. She lets her fingers trail down Maggie’s arm, her side, until she’s cupping her breast. She maps its curve, focuses on the warm tension ebbing through her body. On the electrifying feel of the sheets tangled between their legs. But then, Maggie flips their positions, kisses her, and the space Lena’s mind and sensations were starting to float in dissipates. She settles into the kiss well enough. There’s time. She wraps her arms around Maggie’s waist, briefly opens her eyes to glance at her right wrist, reveling in the unfamiliar absence of her watch.

There’s a knock on the door. They still.

“I’ll get it,” Maggie says, pushing herself off of her.

“Thanks. Robes are on the other side of the bathroom door,” Lena indicates.

“Got it.”

Maggie disappears into the bathroom for a couple of seconds and Lena reaches out blindly for her glasses on the nightstand. When she slips them on, a robe-clad Maggie is pulling her wallet out of her jacket. Oh, good. Lena wasn’t sure whether she’s have to hurriedly reach out for her own purse, whether it was all right handing Maggie the usual tip for room service, whether Maggie knows how much it is… Lena sits up, runs a hand through her hair. Of all the things to get flustered about. She closes her eyes as Maggie opens the door, exchanges a few words with whoever brought their order up.

As soon as the door closes, Lena slips out of bed and goes to the bathroom to put on a robe as well. When she comes out, Maggie has wheeled the tray further in.

“I just gave that guy like two hundred dollars,” she says, sitting on the edge of the bed, “so I hope that’s enough to cover the wine tax.”

Lena blinks. Is that a joke? She can’t tell. She doesn’t want to embarrass Maggie. “That… That’s very generous of you,” she replies, as smoothly as she can, as she goes to stand besides the tray. “I’m sure they’ll remember that and make sure tomorrow’s breakfast is appropriately memorable.”
Maggie scratches her forehead. “I would have felt bad undertipping. And I don't know how much that wine bottle runs for. You take in a good twenty percent tip... Better safe than sorry.”

She wasn’t joking. Did she use the valet service to park her car? Did she give him two hundreds dollars as well? Oh god. Lena swallows, schools her face. “Absolutely.” She lifts the bottle out of the ice bucket, glances at the label. A hundred dollars, tops. “Oh, see? A Bandol again. Like what you had in the bar, only, rosé this time.” She picks up the corkscrew, hands it to her. “You want to do the honors?”

“Sure.” Maggie takes it, eyes the tiny knife that’s been placed by the bucket, picks it up. Glances at Lena. “This is here for a reason.”

Lena nods, placing two glasses on the top tray and pushing one towards Maggie. “Yeah, it’s just… if you want to remove the foil before pulling out the cork. That way, the wine never comes into contact with metal, which… frankly, probably makes no difference.”

Maggie considers the knife for a moment, puts in under the lip of the bottle and slices off the top of the foil in one circular motion. “You know, I think I did that once and Kate gave me this look.” She twists the corkscrew and the cork comes out with a pop. “But what would she know. New money and all,” she adds, a flush to her cheeks. “I’ll let you pour it.”

Lena takes the bottle, sets it back into the bucket to let the wine breathe for a few minutes. She’s mortified. Did she make Maggie feel like… Lena’s been called a rich bitch so many times. She thinks of that day, ages ago, when Alex met her at this café. Their first encounter as… friends. Alex joking about how overpriced everything was. Lena wanted to sink into the floor and disappear then, too. She wonders what kind of twat would give their girlfriend a look for opening a bottle the wrong way. Or, technically, the right way. She wonders why people are, for the most part, so thoughtless.

“Truth be told,” she says good-naturedly as she takes a seat on the bed, “I only started doing it—cutting out the top of the foil before pulling out the cork, that is, because when I didn’t, I'd tear it off by hand and inevitably cut myself on the jagged edges.” She looks at her hands. “Sometimes, I'm amazed I don't have more scars. Between my poor bottle-opening skills, all the burns and cuts from the lab back in the day, and now, in the kitchen, sometimes... Oh, and this Kate? If I'd somehow been present when that happened? I wouldn’t have concluded she was a boor because she thought she knew how to open a bottle. I would have concluded she was a boor because of that look she gave you.”

Maggie shrugs. “She's not bad, really. And now I'm the boor for bringing up an ex when I have
such lovely company.”

And now, Lena’s managed to insult Maggie’s ex. Wonderful. She’s just as much of a wrecking ball as Kara. One more thing in common. It seems the only people they manage not to be a well-intentioned catastrophe around lately are, well, each other. She thinks of Maggie telling her about the meaning of the word *photography*. Lena imagines herself ruining things even further by telling her, right now, since Ancient Greek etymology seems to be your thing, did you know that *katá*: ‘down’ and *stréphō*: ‘I overturn’, gave us the word ‘catastrophe’? A reversal, a sudden end, especially in a drama. That’s me. Bye. Lena manages to keep a straight face. She cannot also be the nerd who laughs at her own jokes. That would truly be hitting rock bottom.

She clears her throat. “Sorry, rudeness is my pet peeve. Well, one of them. I’m sure she had many qualities. I mean, you did date her. That’s quite the endorsement.”

Maggie smiles faintly, reaches across to take Lena’s wrist. She looks at her palm, then at her. “Anyway, poor bottle-opening skills or not, you have beautiful hands, you know. You must hear that a lot.”

Lena swallows. “Not really. I mean, speaking of exes,” oh god, stop talking, “Jack did say a couple of things, but I think he just meant I was dexterous in the lab. But thank you. I almost blew up this one, once.” She raises her right hand.

Maggie presses a kiss to it. “Not just in the lab. I’m glad you got to hold on to it.”

Oh. Maggie wouldn’t just say that, would she? Sure, she’s had much more experienced lovers, she has a great girlfriend, but she seems to mean what she says. Or maybe it was just a funny quip? Lena looks at her own hand, still in Maggie’s. Jack found her dexterous in the lab, Maggie finds her dexterous in bed. Maybe. And Kara... Kara asked her to play something a couple of weeks ago when they walked past a street piano, a small crowd gathered around it. Her hands where shaking when her fingertips touched the keys. She played Debussy’s *Rêverie*, stumbled through it. Kara watched, didn’t say much. Bought her a small bunch of lilies of the valley afterwards.

“Well, losing a hand would certainly have been... traumatic. Especially since I still don't know, to this day, what caused this ridiculous explosion. Well, I caused it, I just don't know why. Anyway, I guess I would have steered the company into designing high-end prosthetics sooner, is all. Besides, I'm ambidextrous, so no big.” She’s rambling. “I'm rambling.” She lifts the bottle, wipes the bottom on a cloth napkin and pours a small amount into Maggie’s glass.

“You don't *sound* like you're rambling. Are you the kind to dwell on things?”
Dwell on things? Because she mentioned an experiment gone wrong? “What kinds of things?”

“Anything, I guess,” Maggie says. “I’m thinking about your mysterious explosion. Is that the kind of thing you think about or do you just put it away?”

Lena considers the question. What a strange way to word it. Can memories only be dwelt on or put away? They’re living things, they come and go. “Both, I think. I put things away, but... I know where everything is. I can retrieve anything. And sometimes, it’s the other way around. Something retrieves me, and... all I can do is figure out why it came to mind. What about you?”

“Things happen. You just move on and get on with your life, you know? No point in sulking about it.”

What? Sulking? Are they still talking about her mysterious explosion? About something that could have gone very wrong but, in retrospect, brings a smile to her face and tickles her scientific curiosity? Lena wonders why someone would reduce past events to such a dichotomy. Sulk or move on. There is… a world in between.

She tilts her head with a smile. “Dwelling means sulking?”

“Doesn’t it? Usually, anyway.”

Well, that’s certainly a radical take on... what it takes to move forward. Lena can’t imagine not aspiring to feel at home in her own memory palace. “So you...” She hesitates. She’d like to understand, though. “Things happen, and you move on. And more things happen, and you move on, and you move, and move and move? But sometimes you stop to take a picture, because some moments you shouldn't totally move on from? Do you ever...” She licks her lips. “Stop moving?”

Maggie laughs softly. “Um. Maybe we should have some wine.”

Lena glances at their glasses, her empty one, Maggie’s untouched one. “Sure. Let me know what you think.”

Did she make Maggie uncomfortable? Confused? But why ask her something so personal, are you
the kind to dwell on things, only to change the subject? It’s so different from Lena’s conversations with Kara, how free they are, how trust neutralizes discomfort between them. Maybe Lena took that for granted. What does she know about friendship? About choosing to make room for someone else in her life, choosing to be in theirs. Kara is the first person she’s ever wanted to prioritize. Perhaps she’s been acting as if it were the way a close friendship was meant to develop. But maybe it’s not. Maybe it’s unique. Maybe it’s Kara. Maybe Maggie is different. How do their conversations go? Kara said she didn’t listen to Maggie enough, that she didn’t know how to be considerate, that—

“You know,” Maggie says after sampling the small amount of wine Lena had poured her earlier, “the only questions I’m used to are where’s your warrant and who the fuck do you think you are.” A grim smile graces her lips. “I don't, for the record. Stop moving.”

Well. Lena feels like she’s in some old noir film, one of Kara’s classics. She imagines Maggie wearing a fedora, a cigarette between her lips. Leaning against a wall, delivering this dramatic line with her bleak smile and the appropriate, dashing intensity: I don’t stop moving. Lena wishes she had something in her glass so she could hide behind it. Because she has a hard time not laughing, because she’s nervous, because Maggie just implied she doesn’t get asked anything by anyone outside work, which means Kara doesn’t ask her much, and that, Lena can’t dwell on, so she takes the bottle instead and pours them both a glass before Maggie has had a chance to give her the go ahead after tasting it. Uncouth, yes, but. She has a long drink of wine. The chill grounds her.

All right. So. The questions Maggie doesn’t get asked. “Well, if I ever ask something you’re not comfortable answering, or just something you don't know to answer, that's fine.” Now, Maggie’s wanderlust. “And I hope you get to catch your breath, now and then. There are... places worth resting in for a little while, I think.”

Maggie smiles. “Yeah, maybe that's true.” She gives her a brief kiss. Her lips tastes like wine, gone too soon. “This wine is killer, by the way. Do you like it?”

Lena shrugs bashfully. “To be honest, I've never had a rosé wine I thought was bad. I think I just don't know how to tell the difference. I do like that this one's not fruity, though.”

“I can't say I have as sophisticated a taste palate as you but it's sweet enough for me,” Maggie says, swinging her leg gently. “So, tell me about yourself, Lena Luthor. What do you do for fun?” She glances at the tray. “Should we eat?”

“Sure. Let’s move all this somewhere.” Lena looks at the sofa, the table. “I vote... bed.”
“Bed it is.”

Maggie helps her transfer the tray onto the bed. “So, what does Lena Luthor do for fun,” Lena echoes thoughtfully as she places the ice bucket on the nightstand, sets her glass next to it and hands Maggie hers. She climbs onto the bed after stacking a couple of pillows against the headboard. “To tell you the truth, there's a pre and post National City answer, and they're quite different. Well, not in terms of what I enjoy doing, but...” She settles comfortably, looks at Maggie, unsure whether she should elaborate and gush about Maggie’s girlfriend in front of her.

“So tell me about it. If that’s okay,” Maggie adds with a small smile. Ah, she knows, then.

“Before National City,” Lena begins, “nothing. For fun, that is. I mean, lab work is fun in its own right, but hobbies... everything I used to love doing became difficult to enjoy after my father died, when Lex slowly lost his mind, and as a result, so did my mother, in a way. The things I loved doing were so closely associated with that part of my life. And besides, there was just so much to take care of, so little time, even before the company officially fell into my lap. But then, I came here and... I started being able to associate all these things I loved with something brighter than my sinister family. Or rather, someone brighter. Simple things. Books, museums, films... and then, new things. Things I'd never done with anyone else, like cooking together, talking for ages... That's what I do for fun. Spend time by myself, hang out with Kara. And Alex, sometimes. Like I said,” she smiles sheepishly, “I’m not exactly a party animal.” She has some wine. “What about you? Besides galleries and exhibits.”

“Besides galleries and exhibits, huh? Mh.” Maggie returns her smile. She’s so pretty. “Well, believe it or not, I'm a bit of a bar rat? I like pool and darts and beer tastings. And I'm always trying to find the newest hole in the wall to go eat at. Photography. I'm not great but I like it. Movies. All kinds. I like to ride my bike. I like going fast. Bonsai trees. Running. Working out. Work. Old things. Wow. I didn't realize how boring all of that sounds until I said it out loud.” She laughs. “Um. I like coffee breaks. I like strangers. I don't have many friends.” She pauses. “Your family must mean a lot to you. Even with... everything.”

Lena quickly comes up with a couple of mnemonics so she won’t forget that list. “They do. Something in me just won't...” she thinks of Maggie’s words. “Move on, I guess.”

Maggie shrugs. “Everyone has that one thing they can't move on from.”

Lena said won’t, Maggie heard can’t. Lena looks over at her, fondness warming her up. “I don't want to move on. For now, that is. Or, I guess... I'm fine with moving on, but there was some good in all this and I want to hold on to that.”
“You'll decide when it's time to move on. If you move on,” Maggie adds after a beat. “But you're the only one who gets to decide that.”

Lena wants to kiss her. It moves her, that someone would care enough to think that she needs to hear those words. She may not need them, they may miss the mark, but the intent behind them doesn’t, and it is… precious. “Thank you.” She sets the sushi assortment between them. “But I like to think not everything is in our hands, you know? I find that heartening.” She hands Maggie her pair of chopsticks and examines hers, runs her fingers along the lacquered wood.

“Thanks.” Maggie picks up a piece of inari sushi.

“So, about your boring hobbies and interests,” Lena says, pouring some soy sauce in their respective saucers and adding a dash of wasabi to each. “I like making my own tea blends and baking with my friend and being an utter couch potato in general. Sorry, I win. Beer tastings, though? As you know, beer isn't my go-to, but I did spend over a decade in Ireland, so... I’d be willing to get experimental with beer, as you so graciously were with wine, if you fancy a drinking buddy for your next adventure.”

Maggie’s chopsticks go still. “You'll come to a beer tasting with me? Really? Don't try me. I'll hold you to it.”

Lena wonders if Maggie is surprised that she asked to go to a beer tasting, which would be funny, as many a pint was had whenever she tagged along her classmates as they took the bus to the nearest town on weekends; or if she’s surprised Lena asked to go to a beer tasting with her. Or perhaps, that Lena is curious enough about what Maggie enjoys to want to try it out with her? She nods. “Yes, I’d love to go to a beer tasting with you. A good one, though, not some hipster trap. Learn what I'm missing out on. Alex loves beer, but I always thought it was just what she defaulted to. But you? If you enjoy it... shall we say, as a connoisseur? Sign me up.”

“Alex likes simple things. I like that about her,” Maggie says thoughtfully. “But we'll go some time.”

Lena thinks of Alex’s outfit the last time they saw each other, at the distillery. A perfect, studied fit. “Alex confounds me. I find her simplicity... deceptive. In a good way.” She picks up a veggie roll and dips it in soy sauce. “What did you mean when you said you liked strangers?”

“Strangers are interesting. You can be free with them. And who knows who they are. Whatever they present to you, is that who they really are? There's no expectations. They're hard to disappoint. You learn from them, enjoy whatever experience you shared, and then you move on.”
And then you move on. Lena wonders if Maggie feels at home anywhere. With anyone. With Kara. She picks up a little bowl of mozuku, sprinkles chives into it and mixes it all with the egg yolk in the middle, then pushes it towards Maggie before having another drink of wine. “I wish I knew what that's like. All the strangers I meet are potential opponents, now. Business partners, reporters... Do you go out of way to meet strangers? Or did you mean, on the job?”


Oh, Lena gets plenty of those. “I'm not sure... perhaps the idea of harmlessly coming in and out of someone's life. Finding them genuinely interesting, but not missing them when they're gone.”

Maggie seems to consider it. “You want to miss people, or you want to be missed?”

“Neither, really.” Lena picks up a fry. “More like, sharing a moment that I would truly enjoy, and then going our separate ways and feeling like nothing was lost.” She thinks of her favorite poem. Nothing evil was lost, nothing good was in vain. “That is... an interesting, and very rare combination, in my experience.”

Maggie smiles. “I don't know that everyone is capable of it.”

“If most people aren’t capable of it, then you do feel like something was lost when you part ways with your strangers? Or weren't you enjoying the encounter in the first place?”

“You feel like something was lost.” Maggie has some wine. “So, I went home the other night and realized I was out of my frozen dinners. I blame you.”

Ah. Wanderlust has its cost, then. Lena toys with her own bowl of mozuku. Sometimes she has frozen dinners, too. Home-cooked leftovers, mostly. “What kind of frozen dinners do you like?”

Maggie lifts an eyebrow. “I'm not picky. It's always the same crap anyway. Asian fusion or Mexican fiesta. Italian delight. If I can heat it up before I pass out, that's all I need.”
Lena nods. Nothing home-cooked, then. “I can certainly relate to not having time or energy to cook for myself every day.” No time, no energy, and in Maggie’s case, it seems, no Kara to cook with. She knows Kara doesn’t cook with Alex, either. Maybe that’s just their thing, as friends. Another thing she thought Kara shared with everyone, but it turns out it’s only with her. Lena wonders what Kara shares with Maggie and Alex that she doesn’t share with her. “As long as you enjoy them... I hope you are picky, though. The list of carcinogens they put in the non organic frozen stuff is frightening.” Jesus, stop it, you tree hugger. Don’t be that person. “Do you work a lot? I mean, I know you do, but... sometimes, after our collaborative meetings, you seem so tired I feel irresponsible for letting you drive home.”

“I’ve been going out more lately,” Maggie shrugs. “I’ve been eating more than ever, actually, thanks to you. I've had to go on longer runs.” She smiles. “I work a lot, sure. I'd hate to not be called a workaholic. I get home okay after our meetings, though. It's good work. And important. Anyway, I always have a bit of an energy buzz after we meet.”

Lena has some wine, looks at her. Dark hair, white robe. Lena leans over, palms the nape of her neck and kisses her for a few seconds. Wine is like perfume. It reacts to the skin. “It tastes different on your lips,” she says after they part, licking hers. “What kind of energy buzz?”

“I don’t know,” Maggie smiles softly. “I think I’m just happy. About work. And moving towards something. And...” she trails off to drink some wine, has a another piece of inari.

Lena picks up whatever is closest to her chopsticks. “And?”

Maggie clears her throat. “I'm not great with words and I don't know how to say it. Maybe later?”

Lena goes still for a second, glass halfway to her mouth. That’s new. That’s simple. Earnest. She feels some tension she wasn’t quite aware of ease away. “Of course. Whenever you want. Do you want to put on a movie? You said your taste was eclectic, so I'm curious.”

Maggie nods, gives her a peck on the lips. “Let's watch something.” She turns on the television and scrolls through the guide. “Hey look, Slutty Housewives 17 is available for our viewing pleasure.”

Lena puffs her cheeks. “Seventeen. Phew... I wonder if Slutty Husbands 43 is a thing or if the adjective only applies to women.”
“Maybe some Stepdad Seduces Stepdaughter? Gross.” Maggie flicks through channels. *Blackfish?* No, that's sad.”

Lena leans back into the pillows after refilling their glasses, hers in one hand and a couple of fries in the other. “Alex makes me watch disgusting horror movies.”


Oh, hell no. Lena is positive she wouldn’t survive the awkwardness if she took Maggie up on her suggestion. She raises an eyebrow. “I hope you're not implying *Black Swan* is disgusting.”

“I'm asking if you want to watch it.” Maggie pauses. “The nail thing is kind of gross.”

The… oh, that scene. Maybe. Lena’s never thought of *Black Swan* as a horror film. She remembers Kara pointing at it with a questioning look when she spotted it amidst Lena’s Blu-Ray collection. *It’s one of my comfort movies.* Kara gave her the softest smile in response, and they watched it together for the first time.

“Sure, put it on. But no talking during the intro, it's one of my favorite scenes.” Lena shoves the fries in to her mouth. It’s strange. The overlap. Watching this with Kara’s girlfriend. Did Maggie pick it because she watches it with Kara, too? Does she love it for different reasons? Lena feels a little tipsy. She glances at her glass. Swallows her fries. “Barbara Hershey reminds me of my mom. Dragging me to ballet classes.”

Maggie presses plays. “Yes, ma'am. What if I put the food aside and just kiss you during the intro —“ she stops. Looks at her. “That's terrifying.”

Lena tears her eyes away from the screen. Terrifying? Comparing one unhinged mother figure to another? She didn’t mean it like that. She supposes the pressure was unhealthy, but… it was a presence, somewhere between looming and protective. Lillian Luthor standing among doting parents watching their tiny children flail around in tutus for two excruciating hours, because Lena was one of them. She never congratulated her. Never said anything. Never missed a performance. It doesn’t matter. Not now. “Sorry. I ruined the mood.”

“You absolutely did,” Maggie says, stealing one of her fries. “Did you like ballet? Do you relate to
Lena pushes the plate of fries closer to Maggie so she doesn’t have to reach out for it. She swallows uneasily. “I didn't mean to. Ruin the mood, I mean. Kara got me used to talking about…” She watches the screen for a few seconds. Pure grace slicing absolute darkness. They’re talking during the prologue. Oh, well. “Anyway, yes, I do like ballet. As a spectator. I didn’t dislike the classes, exactly, but I wasn't good at it. Or, didn't feel good at it. It was something I was expected to master, not to enjoy. I guess I do relate to Nina, not the dancing, but... striving for perfection. The cost of perfection. Do you? Relate to her at all?”

Maggie thinks about it. “No. She’s so uptight and needy.” She smiles. “I just want to be good enough. To get it done. Whatever it takes. Mh. Well, not that. I want to do things the right way and I'll bleed to do it, but perfection?” She shrugs. “That's not for me. You've done really great things.”

Great things? Oh. Work. Maggie’s talking about work. Telling her that great is more than good enough, no need for perfect. Lena shakes herself out of the more personal space she thought they were in. “So have you. It doesn't make the headlines, but the number of lives you've changed for the better? It should make the headlines. And…” She has a sip of wine. “Uptight and needy, huh? I guess I don't see the character that way. It makes Kara cry, you know? The first half of the movie.”

She watches Nina wake up on the screen, bask in the aftermath of her dream for a while until the door opens, and she smiles. She watches her warm up with her morning exercises in front of the mirror, beautiful and serene. Telling her off-screen mother about her dream, receiving no answer, not seeming to mind. That’s when Lena realizes Maggie hasn’t said a word since she mentioned Kara. She’s watching the movie, picking up a piece of sushi, now and then.

Lena sighs inwardly. Maybe it’s the wine, but she feels sadder than she should. Is this how it’s going to be? Is she going to have to keep it to herself every time something reminds her of the person they both care about, who’s a big part of their lives? So what if Kara talks to her a little more, so what if she confides in her… Maggie sees plenty of sides of Kara that Lena has no access to. No one is entitled to another’s everything. She doesn’t understand.

She tries to eat a fry but her throat is too tight, so she washes it down with wine and focuses on the screen. Nina is looking at her faint reflection in the train’s window. Sees another ballerina in the next car, mirroring her movements. She looks like her. She isn't her. Lena feels herself relaxing into the pillows. That’s when she noticed Kara was wiping her eyes quietly. It always gets me. When you start hearing birds in flight woven into the sound design, and for Nina... Every surface, every face, a looking glass. Who she wants to be, is afraid to be, will be. On screen, Vincent Cassel delivers his monologue to the soloists: But which of you can embody both swans? The white and the black.
Maggie reaches for her cup of vanilla ice cream. Lena glances at the tray to make sure there are spoons on it. What of the silence between them? She could say something. She could make Maggie comfortable again, bridge the distance, just like that. But that would be a lie. Lena likes her too much to sweep her own uneasiness under the rug, to drag them both into a lovely, frictionless fantasy. She looks at her chocolate ice cream. Soon enough, her eyes drift away from it, glued to the screen again.

The surprise audition. *It was fine*, Nina tells her mom, before breaking into tears and engulfing her into a hug. *Just fine?* Her mom says, returning the embrace. *Oh, sweetheart. You tell me about it.* Putting her to bed, taking care of her. *Either way, you'll shine.*

“Do you have something against vegan ice cream?” Maggie wonders, pulling her out of the film. Lena looks at her in a daze. “Alex hates it.”

She blinks as she watches Maggie scoop some ice cream and offer her a bite. Lena takes it. “It's good,” she says instinctively, before she’s even made up her mind about how it actually tastes. Manners, Lena. “I don't know what Alex has against it, it tastes pretty much the same,” she adds when it does in fact turn out to taste great.

“It’s good,” Maggie echoes, looking at her.

Lena waits, but Maggie says nothing, so she smiles and takes a spoonful of chocolate ice cream as a gesture of good will, before turning back to the movie. *In four years, every time I see you dance, I see you obsessed, getting each and every move perfectly right, but I never see you lose yourself.* That line had Kara grab a pillow and hug it tight. She was in tears by the time Nina locks herself into a bathroom stall, overwhelmed with emotion, and calls her mother. *He picked me, mommy.* *Did you hear me? I'm going to be the Swan Queen.*

“Actually, do you mind if we turn this off?” Maggie asks, remote in hand.

“No, go ahead.” Lena says right away, with a last glance at Nina frantically wiping off the word *WHORE* written with lipstick on the mirror, by a rival or her own mind. The screen goes black and Lena turns her attention back to Maggie. “Are you okay?”

Maggie is silent for a while. “Yeah. I just. It feels like... I'd rather talk with you than watch a movie. Is that okay?”
“Yes, of course.” Lena gathers their plates, chopsticks and cups onto the tray and puts it away. She feels calmer. She pours them the last of the wine when she notices Maggie’s empty glass, gives her an apologetic smile. “I suggested watching something because you… we'd hit a point in the conversation that you said you couldn't talk about right now. I was trying to make you comfortable.”

Maggie nods. “I appreciate it. I do. Look.” She scratches her forehead, seems to struggle with… something. “I'm just going to say it. I don't want Kara or anyone to ever be a taboo subject between us. But sometimes you say things or she says things and it feels like…” She looks up, takes a breath. “It's hard for me to join in on the conversation. And I like hearing you talk about your family, but it's hard for me to talk about mine. And... I'm afraid to sit here. Giving you nothing. I'm an NCPD detective. I know what your family means to you. I know you're not them but they're a part of you. All of us have... hard families. And you're such a remarkable person given all of that. I guess I don't know my place in a lot of this. And we're figuring it out and Jesus, that sounds really dramatic. I just don't want to screw up our night. We were having such a nice night. I don't get to do things like this and.” She exhales. “Now I'm the one who's rambling.”

Lena takes Maggie’s hand because she needs time to think, but she doesn’t want her to feel like she’s pulling away. She strokes her knuckles with her thumb. She doesn’t dwell on the part about Kara. She can tell Maggie truly feels excluded from something, but what, she will never understand. And what does she mean, she doesn’t get to do things like this? Like what? Lena hopes she doesn’t mean a night of casual sex in a nice hotel. No, that’s not it. Can’t be it. But then what? Doesn’t she spend cozy evenings with Kara, talking and kissing and having dinner? Hell, even Lena does that with Kara. Minus the kissing. But the part about families… she appreciates Maggie’s kind words but Lena must have communicated something she didn’t mean to, because she wasn’t looking for reassurance, or comfort. Or to be repaid with Maggie telling her something private about her own family. It was just… something she shared with a friend, without effort. She looks over at Maggie. “What do you mean, sit there, giving me nothing?”

“I want to be able to engage in a conversation with you. Mutual sharing. It's so nice to have you be able to open up to me. I just have a hard time doing the same sometimes. And it's not you. It's… the way that I am. I've had exes who've called me a sociopath. People don't just say something like that.”

Oh. Interesting. Lena props herself up on her elbow to finish her glass before setting it on the nightstand and fully turning towards Maggie. “I'm not expecting you to do the same. If you told me, right now, that you'll never share anything about your past? I'd respect that. I don't mind if you, or anyone, struggles with words. Or, certain words. But I do mind silence. When you ask me something? Anything? And I give you as truthful an answer as I can? Don't make me feel like I said the wrong thing. That's the way I am,” she says softly. “And no, people don't just say something like that. They don't just call their partner or ex a sociopath. Why would they call you that?”

“I'm sorry. I felt… I don’t know. I felt bad so I didn’t say anything.”
Lena nods. Resists the urge to draw her close, not wanting to interrupt what she means to say next. She watches her put her own glass away, lie down next to her.

“As to why they would say that,” Maggie continues, taking a breath. “I haven't always been a good person. I get scared. I burn bridges. I hurt people before they hurt me. I lose myself in work. I've prioritized it. It's important to me. It makes a difference. Sometimes it's the only way I make a difference. But I'm probably just an asshole.” She smiles faintly. “So that's probably why they call me that.”

Lena searches her face. Her eyes. “Do you really think that? That you're an asshole?”

“I know that I hurt good people. People who don't deserve it.”

“No one deserves to be hurt. Not your exes. Not me. Not you.”

“Yeah,” Maggie says, lost in thought.

Lena smiles. “Glad we're in agreement.” She tries to think of a way to give Maggie some well-deserved mental space after this conversation. Grabs her phone, connects it to the room’s sound system. “What's your opinion on Philip Glass?”

“Are you going to put The Hours on?

Lena gives her a why not shrug. “I was thinking, something a little more sedate, but...” She launches the Spotify app. “The Hours it is, then.”

“Are you sure? I chose Black Swan. That didn't work out. Do you have Metamorphosis somewhere? Mh, that's choosing, though.”

“Oh, but Black Swan did work out. It got us talking.” Lena hands her the phone. “Pick whatever you like.”
Maggie takes it, her eyes darting from the screen to Lena’s face. Soon, the first notes of The Photographer fill the room. Lena holds her gaze for a while before shifting closer, palming her cheek and kissing her. “So… you said you wanted to talk. Rather than watch a movie or…”

“Or?” Maggie turns the volume down. “I wanted to tell you.” She takes Lena’s hand. “Before. What you did. When we came in here. No one’s… no one’s ever done a thing like that for me.” She kisses her fingers. “I won’t make you regret it. I promise.”

A thing like what? A thing like someone willing to turn an ugly memory into an act of trust? Like someone determined not to let past circumstances dictate who they could be to each other? Like someone taking a chance, risking something? Once more, Lena finds herself wondering why signs of affection and respect seem to leave Maggie dumbfounded. Lena wants her happy, not grateful.

She wraps an arm around her. “I believe you, but… it was then. This is now. There's no debt, nothing owed. You give me whatever you want to give me, not whatever you think you owe me, all right?”

Maggie considers her words, nods. Kisses her. Between the light notes trickling from the speakers, the wine, and Maggie’s body heat, Lena finds herself deepening their kisses, almost smiling when she notices how closely Maggie follows her lead. Lena’s not exactly one to lead in the bedroom, but… she is one to experiment. In the lab and elsewhere.

She pulls away, sees a flash of worry in Maggie’s eyes, gone the second she understands Lena is only taking off her robe. She follows suit, and soon they find each other’s lips again, skin against skin.

“Are you tired?” Maggie asks between kisses. “I know you barely get any rest.”

“Yeah, I’m tired. So are you. We were tired yesterday night in my office, this morning when you dropped by, we’re tired now… we’re always tired.”

Maggie smiles. “Let’s just power through it.”

And she kisses her again. Lena closes her eyes before their lips touch. Their tongues brush as she runs a hand along Maggie’s side, up her back, through her hair. She’s almost gotten used to the sensation of Maggie’s body against hers. Almost familiar, the scent of her skin. She breaks their kiss to nuzzle her neck instead, breathing her in. Maggie’s arms come around her. Lena exhales,
trapping the heat of her own breath between them, and presses a kiss to her pulse. It quickens under her lips. Another kiss, her lips pressing a little harder this time. Maggie’s fingers twitch slightly.

Ah. Most definitely not a coincidence, then. Lena quickly reviews her mental notes from all the times they’ve kissed. She’s pretty sure she’s not wrong about this, but… She pushes herself up a little and shifts so that Maggie is lying on her back, pressed into the pillows, Lena on top of her. Lena takes off her glasses with one hand, sets them on the nightstand. Looks back at Maggie. Her hair forms a curtain between them and the dim glow of the lamps. Maggie’s eyes are so dark.

“Comfortable?” Lena asks.

Maggie nods, smiles up at her, her hands settling on her hips. “You’re beautiful.”

Lena licks her lips, focuses on the feel of their stomachs touching. Moment of truth. “Yeah?” She smiles back, shifting her own weight so that she’s mostly supporting herself with one arm, bringing her free hand up to cup Maggie’s throat, lightly. She leans down to whisper in her ear. “Stop talking.”

She pulls back, gauges Maggie’s reaction. Surprise. Then… something passes through her eyes and her heartbeat quickens under Lena’s palm.

Lena strokes her neck delicately. “Is that okay?” Maggie gives her a small nod. “Good.” Lena presses their lips together briefly. Her eyes flicker down to her hand around Maggie’s throat. “Have you done that before?” Maggie shakes her head no. Well, that makes two of us, Lena thinks. But. Anatomy isn’t that complicated, and Lena trusts herself. She’s always had steady hands when it counts. Maggie’s pulse is beating against her palm, more erratic than before. She smiles at her. “Do you want to go further? I need to be sure.” Another nod. “All right. A couple of rules, then: pressure here,” she traces Maggie’s hyoid bone, “and here,” her carotid artery, “is a very bad idea. It shouldn’t happen because I’m going to put my hand,” she shifts it right under Maggie’s jaw, “here. And you should always be able to breathe normally. So, to sum up: pressure in the wrong places, difficulty breathing? You let me know immediately, even if it feels nice. Okay?” A nod. “And try to keep your eyes on me, because yes, I’d like to make sure you’re not passing out, but more importantly, you have the loveliest eyes,” she adds teasingly, earning herself a smile.

Lena takes a few seconds to look at her, to detail her features. She’s… real? But Jack was real. Alex is real. No, Maggie is… here. Present. That’s what’s new.

Her thumb skims along Maggie’s lower lip, soon replaced by the tip of her tongue, slowly mapping out the softness of her lips. Their breaths mingle. Maggie’s hands start roaming along her sides,
and Lena shifts so Maggie’s legs are on either side of her. She gently presses her into the mattress, careful not to put too much weight on her, and with the hand she has resting under Maggie’s jaw, Lena presses lightly upward for a few seconds, keeping their eyes locked, before giving her a questioning look. Maggie nods, breathing more heavily. She puts one hand on Lena’s hip, pulling her closer, and cups her face with the other.

Lena leans into her touch, starts moving against her. They look at each other as Lena takes her time to set the right pace, clutching the sheets with the hand she’s supporting herself with when a warm, pleasant tension starts spreading from their closest point of contact. She gives Maggie a small smile and lets herself be pulled down into a heated kiss. It’s harder, messier than the previous ones.

Lena progressively tightens her fingers around Maggie’s neck again. Maggie’s breath hitches and she bites Lena’s lower lip, so Lena sucks on her tongue in response. Maggie moans into her mouth. Oh, Jesus. Lena begins moving a little faster against her and Maggie follows. She pulls away slightly to look at her, her swollen lips, doesn’t loosen her grasp on her neck. Maggie’s eyes bore into hers.

“You all good?” Lena chuckles breathlessly. “Do you need me to ease up?”


Lena nods. The heat between Maggie’s legs seems to radiate directly into her, and she wonders how long she’ll be able to keep herself up as her arm starts shaking imperceptibly. She thinks of the blood rushing to her core, delights in the almost painful pulsation between her own legs. She leans down, nibbles on Maggie’s lip, careful to keep her hand steady on her neck. Maggie’s hands settle on her hips, then lower, pulling her even closer as another faint moan escapes her lips.

“Wrap your legs around me,” Lena whispers.

Maggie complies, allowing Lena to deepen her movements, bringing them impossibly close. They settle into this new rhythm for a while. Maggie’s fingers twitch in her hair, soft sounds coming out of her lips every time she exhales. Her face is flushed, bangs sticking to her forehead. She’s gorgeous.

Lena smiles. “Are you getting close?”
Maggie nods, kisses her. “I feel like you’re inside me.” She breathes against her lips, her voice a little hoarse because of the slight pressure on her windpipe. She closes her eyes for a moment, her fingers digging into Lena’s shoulder. “Don’t stop.” She opens her eyes. “Fuck, don’t stop.”

Lena shifts so that she can put more weight on her, push her further into the mattress as she keeps grinding against her. She carefully presses a little harder on Maggie’s neck, maintaining eye contact to make sure it’s not too much. Maggie gives her a small smile, and Lena feels her shaking under her. She kisses the part of Maggie’s neck that her hand isn’t covering, sucks on the sensitive skin there, not hard enough to leave a mark. Maggie’s hand leaves her shoulder to clutch a pillow instead, and she covers her face with the other. Lena bites her gently. Maggie’s legs tighten reflexively around her, and the muffled sounds coming out of her mouth stop. Everything goes still for a moment. The room is again filled with the crystalline trickle of Philip Glass’ piano.

Lena removes her hand from Maggie’s neck, giving it a once-over. No marks, no future bruises. She waits until she’s sure that Maggie, now covering her face with both hands, is breathing normally, then slowly pushes herself off of her to lie down beside her. She doesn’t know whether Maggie likes to be touched after coming, so she just settles into the pillows, watching her.

Maggie finally takes her hands off her face and smiles at the ceiling. Soon enough, she’s laughing, almost giddy. “Wow. That was something else.” She licks her lips. Lena watches her try to catch her breath. After a while, Maggie turns to face her, still chuckling like she can’t quite believe… something. Lena smiles, brushes a few strands of hair away from Maggie’s forehead. Maggie snuggles against her and hides her face in her neck, kissing her there. Lena likes that new side of her. She pulls her close, strokes her back, kisses the top of her head. She feels mellow, a little tired. Content.

“Do you need anything?” She asks. “Water, melted chocolate ice cream…”

“No. This is good,” Maggie says quietly, kissing her jaw before tilting her head up to look at her. “What about you? What can I do? What would you like?”

Lena shakes her head and brings Maggie’s hand to her lips, kissing her knuckles. “I’m fine. Better than fine.” Maggie blinks like she isn’t sure what to make of Lena’s answer. “You know what I’d like?”

Maggie watches her in a daze. “Tell me. Please.”

Lena keeps a straight face. “I’d like for you… not to make fun of me if I were to, say, get out of bed to go brush my teeth and wash my face, because that's the kind of boring and reasonable person I
am. And then, if you're amenable, I'd like to turn off the lights, and... we can talk, we can kiss, we can sleep...” She smiles, sits up. “But I really am fine. Watching you... enjoy yourself was its own reward. Okay?”

Maggie gives her a puzzled look. “Are you sure? I really don't mind. I want to. If you're tired, that's fine... But we can do whatever you want. Um. Go brush your teeth and think about it.” She sits up too and kisses her.

Lena leans into it, a hand on Maggie’s shoulder. “Maggie, it's... remember what I told you, a few days ago? Some things are for free. And trust me, I got everything I needed out of it, too. I'm good for now.” She gives her a peck on the nose, grabs her glasses and puts on her robe as she goes to the bathroom.

She closes the door behind her. Phew. She looks at herself. Tousled hair, cheeks slightly flushed. She massages the back of her neck, glances at the door, wonders if Maggie is sitting in bed wondering why they’re not following the script, my turn, now yours. Surely it’s not that strange, for someone to have enjoyed the moment intensely enough not to feel the need for more than cuddles and kisses afterwards.

She starts brushing her teeth. Oh, eucalyptus toothpaste. That’s nice. Or is it that Maggie isn't used to being told she doesn’t have to put out? Is it that people usually aren’t that interested in making sure she has a good time, in prioritizing her? Hm. But she’s with Kara, and Kara doesn’t strike Lena as someone who would be selfish in bed. But what does she know. She knows that Kara always makes sure she’s comfortable, has whatever she needs when she sleeps over at her place. If she does this for a friend, she can’t imagine… oh, it’s none of her business.

She washes her face and goes through the rest of her bedtime routine before exiting the bathroom, leaving the lights on for Maggie.

While Maggie’s in there, Lena wheels the tray outside the room and leaves it into the hallway so the night staff can collect it. She retrieves two bottles of water from the fridge, puts one on Maggie’s nightstand and has a drink out of hers before setting it by her phone and turning off the music. She turns all the lights off except the one above the bed. It casts a faint golden glow upon the sheets. She folds her glasses, slips out of her robe again and into bed.

Maggie joins her a few minutes later, smelling of the same toothpaste, soap and moisturizer. It makes Lena smiles, the idea that their respective scents are, for a short while, almost the same. It’s only after Maggie’s slid back into bed, facing her, that she’s close enough for Lena to see her clearly. She can tell she’s a little nervous again. About not returning whatever she thinks she owes Lena? About sleeping next to her?
Lena turns off the last of the lights and shifts closer. She hesitates, tentatively puts an arm around her. Hopefully, that’s not too much. Is Maggie a cuddler, in bed? Is Lena? She isn’t sure. She looks at her until her eyes start adjusting to the darkness.

“You look... slightly puzzled.”

Maggie smiles, strokes her arm. “It's nothing bad. I'm thinking, that's all.”

If there’s one thing Lena holds sacred, it’s thinking. Or rather, being given space to think. “All right. If those thoughts turn into questions, feel free to ask. And I'll feel free to answer, or not. Sounds fair?”

“Sounds fair.”

Maggie trails her hand along Lena’s side, scoots a little closer. The contact is soothing. Lena doesn’t want to crowd her. Lord knows she often does a lot of thinking herself before falling asleep. So she just pulls her close for a few seconds, kisses her. “Shall we call it a night, then?”

Maggie strokes her face, gives her one other, soft kiss. "Goodnight."

That’s so nice. It was different with Alex. The affection might occasionally be there, but not the tenderness. And Jack was loving, but his touch wasn’t the same. Not as delicate. Not quite right. She’s about to say goodnight to Maggie when she remembers she didn’t see Maggie’s phone anywhere. Does she need to be up before a certain time?

“Do you want me to set my alarm?” Lena asks. “I know you work on Saturdays, sometimes.”

Maggie blinks. “I’m okay… Oh. But do you have an early morning? If you do... that’s… you usually do.”

What? Why is she rambl— Ah. Right. Lena sighs quietly, playing with Maggie’s hair. Even after all this, Maggie is still expecting her to find elegant ways to express how little time she wants to spend with her, deep down. All Lena can do is show her how she feels. She smiles, shaking her head. Kisses her. “Checkout is at noon, so as long as we're up early enough to enjoy breakfast in
Maggie lets out a breath that sounds suspiciously like relief. “Nine is great.”

“All right...” Lena turns to grab her phone, winces at the brightness of the screen and quickly sets her alarm. What’s her current tone again? Agnes Obel’s September song. That works. Nothing to feel self-conscious about. She puts her phone on the nightstand and turns back to Maggie. “All done. Come here.”

Maggie wakes slowly, her eyes taking in the shadows of the room. She’s warm. Comfortable. Where is she? She shifts in the bed. Lena’s asleep beside her. Maggie freezes. Swallows. Looks at her sleeping form. The lipstick is gone, leaving her lips a pale pink. Her lashes are long, cheeks rosy. She looks like an illustration out of a fairy tale book. Some sleeping princess. Maggie resists bringing her lips to hers. They kissed until they couldn’t stay awake anymore, bidding each other goodnight. They fell asleep. Lena Luthor trusts her enough to fall asleep beside her.

Maggie carefully picks up her watch from the nightstand and looks at the time. 7:10am. Lena set the alarm for nine. Will she sleep until it goes off? That’s a while from now. She lies back down, fingers curling lightly around her pillow. What was that last night…? Sex between friends who are not dating out on a date. That’s all.

She closes her eyes. That’s all. Is that how Lena is with Alex? With Kara? Or does Kara let Lena take lead? She must. No bruises. She can’t wrap her head around it. Even at her gentlest, Kara leaves her with little fingertip-sized marks all over her. It’s been long enough now since the last time they were together that she barely has any bruises. It’s an alarming thing to be sad about. What’s Kara doing? Maggie cut herself off from the world. No news, no phone, no work since last night.

Maybe she shouldn’t have turned her phone off. But she isn’t on-call, so it’s okay. What did Alex call about? Was it okay to stay the night? Why was it like that? So many questions. Too many questions. She thinks of Lena’s hands skimming over her back, into her hair. The light pressure of her hand on her throat. Fuck. Has Lena had a good time? Has she thought about Kara? Why did it feel that way? It shouldn’t have felt that way. Even if it’s a feeling unfamiliar to her. Her eyes open. She needs to shut her brain off. She doesn’t know how to shut her brain off.

She lies there thinking, watching the shadows stretch and fade over the room; the light growing until all that’s left is pale sunlight. She doesn’t know how long has passed. Long enough for
Lena’s alarm to go off. Maggie tenses. The bed shifts under Lena’s weight as she turns the gentle alarm off, lies back down. Maggie’s still.

Should she face her? Should she say something? She can’t think of what to say. She draws a long breath. Feels Lena move again. Maggie tightens her fingers along the pillow. Lena’s closer now. Her heat spills through. Maggie bites her tongue, glances back. Lena’s close. Maggie smiles, takes her hand, lying back down, draping Lena’s arm over her waist. She tenses, thinking maybe she shouldn’t have. She’s always been so sure in the bedroom. Maybe she’s not used to the morning after.

Lena spoons her, pressing a kiss to her shoulder. Maggie closes her eyes, exhaling softly. Lena’s hand drifts over her arm, over her stomach. This is what Lena and Alex do together. What Kara and Lena do together. A lesser version, somehow, on principle. Breathe. Just breathe. She skims her fingers over Lena’s arm, her knuckles. “Did you get some rest?”

“I did.” Her voice is soft, not fully awake yet. “I occasionally have a hard time falling asleep but other than that, I sleep like a baby. Though, I suppose it’s a bit of a strange analogy because don’t babies wake up all the time?” Maggie smiles softly. “Anyway, yes.” Lena pulls closer, pressing against her back, moving her hair lightly. Maggie feels a small kiss pressed behind her ear. “What about you?”

The tension keeps easing out of her. She bites her lip, considers. “I’m glad you slept. I have a harder time getting to sleep. Working myself to the bone tends to do the trick.”

“More exciting than a tisane and a documentary, I guess. Please don’t tell the tabloids I don’t actually drink bourbon all night in my dark mansion, though, I need to maintain my image. How does it work, though, do you just... tell them you're available even when you're not technically on a shift?”

Maggie frowns lightly. “Sometimes I’m on call. Other times...” she thinks of Emily, Darla, Linda, others who’ve accused her of being unable to let work go. “I don’t know. They tend to know I’m available. I pick up the holiday shifts when I can. That kind of thing.” They know she doesn’t have a life. They know she doesn’t have family. They know she’s made it a point to not have a life. “You don’t actually live in a dark mansion, do you?” She only vaguely remembers dropping her off.

“I used to. And I technically own one, so... but no. Just an apartment.”

“Do you ever visit the mansion?”
“Until recently—when my mother went on her mad crusade, I still considered it her main residence. Even though, legally speaking, Lex and I own it. Are you curious? For the record, I don't mind.”

Her words buzz against her ear softly. She thinks of sound vibrations. “About which part?” She wants to look at her. She turns to face her, settling an arm around her waist, fingers stroking along her back. “I am curious.”

Lena smiles at her. “Oh, hi.” She kisses her, sweet and fleeting, before settling more comfortably against her. “About where I've lived, where I live...”

“About all of it.” She kisses her cheek. “Good morning.”

“I imagine curiosity is something scientists and detectives have in common. Ask away.”

They both have the resources to sate that curiosity. She could have pried deeper into Lena’s more personal details when working on that case. She didn’t. “Are you planning on returning to the mansion? Is it home?” Maybe the question is too much. Questions of homes too invasive.

Lena thinks, her hands gliding along Maggie’s back. Maybe it wasn’t too much. “Yes, I'll return. Not to live there, I mean... My home is here, now. But, yeah, the mansion was home. Not necessarily homey, and a lot of my memories aren't happy ones, but... some are. And it's beautiful. There's a gorgeous park around it. Gardens. I'd rather not sell it, if I can help it. I thought of turning it into some kind of... I don't know. Orphanage, school, whatever. But I can't. It would be an empty gesture.”

“A home for unwanted or lost children.” A home for throwaways like her. “Why would it be an empty gesture? It sounds beautiful. Sad, too.”

“Because...” She smiles. “I'm not quite the philanthropist my charity work paints me as. For those who bother going beyond the name. This mansion has been in my family for a long time, part of it belongs to my brother, part of it to my mother, whether that's on paper or not. There's history, there. Who knows what it will become in time, but for now, the only lost children it belongs to are my brother and I.”

“Yeah. I get it.” In a sense, anyway. She contemplates Lena Luthor. Her family has attempted to
kill her multiple times. Betrayed her over and over again and yet they’re closer, they seem to care more for one another than Maggie and her own family. Her family’s disagreement seems petty and small in comparison. Maybe in the end it’s all about legacies, even if some are more insignificant than others. “Do you think things will ever improve with your family?” She sighs. “Sorry. That's none of my business.”

Lena pokes her in the stomach. Maggie makes a face, smiles, takes Lena’s hand squeezing it. “I’d rather you ask whatever you want, and trust me to let you know whether I'm comfortable answering, than let you make the decision for me by not asking, okay?” Maggie lowers her eyes. Is Kara normal, safeguarding her privacy or is Lena extraordinary? She shouldn’t think about Kara. Kara who seems to dislike conversation. With you. She blinks. “And, oh dear, I don't know. Lex got people killed, tried to get me killed, my mother is a human supremacist who would press the ‘kill all aliens’ button in a heartbeat if such a thing existed... so, no. I don't think things will significantly improve unless they make amends, which they won't. The two of them, they're... interesting. Beyond the madness, they're brilliant, and strong. I do want to see them again. But what kind of relationship can you build with people like that, you know?”

“Happy families are all alike. Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. Family's complicated. Maybe they'll come around. People change. Sometimes for the better.” Does that apply to her? She wonders again if this is all right. It feels nice. It makes her feel worse. She studies Lena’s hand. “Thank you for answering. I'll work on asking.” Work on being welcomed to ask.

“Good. See?” A smile. “Someone's changing for the better already.”

Really…? Lena snuggles closer. Maggie continues to examine her hand. Her fingers are long, beautiful. She uses her hands often when speaking, to emphasize points. Maggie hasn’t been able to stop watching. She smiles wryly. “You're a bit of an optimist, aren't you?” She brushes her lips over her fingers. “What would the world think?”

“Oh, the world is such a hazy concept. And a certain someone told me they weren't a fan of haziness.” Lena turns her hand, playing with Maggie's fingers instead. “What that certain someone would think is what interests me.”

Maggie's eyes flicker to her face, back to their hands. "What I think about what? Your optimism?" Kara's optimistic too. She loves that about her. "Something else?"

Lena’s fingertips skim her palm. “My optimism, yes.”
She smiles. “I think it's sweet.”

“One night together and you've already exposed my most carefully hidden secret. You're a remarkable detective indeed, Maggie Sawyer.”

“And silver tongued, too. You are the menace of National City.” She kisses her, feels Lena’s smile.

“Well, I have the best NCPD detective, the best FBI agent, a Super, and an earnest reporter to keep me honest. I'm not too worried.”

Maggie smiles faintly. Kara and Lena need this separation. This... illusion. She wonders why. "Mh, well, we're all lucky you deign to spend time with us." She kisses her again, surprised when Lena leans back into the pillows and draws Maggie on top of her. Lena palms her face, bringing their lips together. They kiss for minutes, Lena’s hands trailing over her hair and back. Maggie pulls away. “I've lost my train of thought. You are extremely distracting,” she gives her another peck on the lips, smiles down at her.

“I was all out of witty repartees.”

“I don’t mind.” Another kiss. “As long as you don't think I'm only here for your extraordinary body.”

Lena narrows her eyes, pulls her close. “Oh? What are you here for, then?”

“Isn't it obvious?” She laughs softly. “Your fine conversation, of course.”

“Well, you better cherish that memory, then. I'm not usually that talkative.”

“Is that your way of telling me to stop talking?”

Lena suppresses a smile, kisses the corner of her lips. “On the contrary. It's my way of telling you that I usually prefer listening, and that... witty banter is something I reserve for situations I'm not quite comfortable in. And this isn't one of them.”
“Then you're comfortable? I'm glad. I didn't want this to be a… regret.” Will it change anything between Lena and Kara or Alex? Maybe those relationships are secure enough to survive anything. She wonders if she's projecting. No. She's been a regret more times than she cares to count. She'd hate to be that to Lena.

Lena shifts, wrapping her arms around Maggie's neck. “I'm only going to say this one more time. So, pay attention, okay?” Maggie is still as Lena kisses her nose, brings their foreheads together, raising an expectant eyebrow.

“All right. You've got my full attention.”

“Where I want to be is up to me. Not you. Trust me when I say I want to be here.”

Trust is hard. But she trusts her. What would the others at the NCPD say? What would Alex, Kara? Maggie finds a smile, brushes her fingertips to her face. “Okay. Message received.”

Lena smiles. “I hope so.”

“I guess an old dog can learn new tricks.” Where has Lena learned hers? How has she learned to dismantle?

“No tricks. I told you, the other day. Let’s just respect and trust each other on this.” Maggie studies her, focusing on the sensation of her fingers delving into her hair, over her scalp, her reassuring weight. “It’s too complicated, otherwise.”

“Do you know how hard it usually is for those things to develop?”

“Trust and respect?”

She nods. “Is it easy for you?”

Lena considers. “It’s just what you’re owed as a person. Trust and respect. If you prove me wrong,
if you prove my trust was misplaced… that’s on you, not me. You don’t need to earn it, you have it.”

It seems so simple. How can she struggle when it’s so easy for people like Kara and Lena who’ve endured so much more than she has? How are they so similar… so radically different? “That’s…” she searches for the word. “Generous. I wish people afforded you the same courtesy.”

“Well, perhaps it’s precisely because I know firsthand how harmful it is not to be afforded the same... courtesy, that I refuse to doubt someone's motives unless they've given me a reason to. It's not altruism. I just don't have the energy for it.”

Maggie looks at her for a small while. Her eyes look green in the light. Are they green? She lifts a hand, easing a thumb along her eyebrow. “You’re a very busy woman. Maybe it makes sense to be practical.” She trails her fingers along Lena’s arm. It wasn’t until last night that she allowed herself to do this. She wonders how they decided it silently amongst themselves. Goosebumps follow her fingers’ path. “Where do strangers fall in this?”

Lena follows her touch, looks back at her. “Innocent until proven guilty. But really, it's just... a principle to live by. Most people don't interest me on a personal level.”

It surprises her. “What does it take to interest you on a personal level?”

“I don't know. I'm not sure there's a particular recipe for it, and if there is, I don't want to know. Alex, you, Kara... what’s the common denominator? Because aside from my family, and Jack, for a time at least... no strangers have caught my attention.”

“Maybe we were all at the right place at the right time.”

She thinks of the night Cyborg Superman crashed L-Corp. He tried to kill Lena but Kara stopped him. He didn’t leave a mark on Lena. Her skin is smooth and unlined. She’s heard that scars add character. Or maybe that’s what she tells herself. She thinks of her adventures with Kara and Alex. A scar on her shoulder. Another on her forehead. Will Lena leave a mark…? Kara saved Lena. That was enough. More than enough.

“No. Making yourself available... that's an active process. As far as I'm concerned. You have to make time, you have to put effort into it. And time, effort, energy... that usually goes into my work. When it goes into relationships? That's a significant decision.”
Maggie looks at her, off to the tulips on the table. She’ll snap a picture of them before she goes. Enough time passes that she no longer feels like she has to swallow. “How do you decide to make the effort? When?”

Lena kisses her briefly. “When something gives you joy? In whatever way, and doesn’t hurt you? You hold on to it.”

She tells herself it doesn’t mean anything. That Lena Luthor is prone to saying terribly romantic things. What does her place look like? Her bookshelves? She and Kara share books. What moves her? Maggie wraps her arms around Lena’s waist. “I guess I should do my part.”

Maggie brings their lips together. She needs to think. It’s hard to think when she’s with her. When she’s thinking of the texture of her skin and lips, the temperature different between her fingertips and her mouth, all the other fires she builds. She tries not to think of how they move as steady as the riverflow. Joy. Does she give Lena joy? She holds her closer before slowing, maneuvering them so they face one another on the bed. Lena’s cheeks are flushed. Her lips are the pale pink of roses. She drifts a hand along her leg. "You've been... really open with me." She folds her arms in front of her, looks at her. "Is there... Is there anything I need to clear up for you?"

“Let's see... Hm, there's one thing I've been wondering about since yesterday, actually.”

Maggie tenses. She smiles. “Yeah, shoot.”

“... What do you usually have for breakfast? I was having mine yesterday morning, before I texted you, and I just started wondering.”

The tension slips away. It never stays too long when she’s near. Maggie laughs. “You goof. I usually have a cup of coffee. If I'm feeling fancy and I have a ton of time I'll have a bagel. Plain.”

“We do have... well, what I suppose amounts to a ton of time for people like us. Are you feeling fancy?”

“Are you going to dazzle me? Or the kitchen boy can dazzle us, I guess. What do you usually have? Maybe company to share breakfast with?” Maggie never sees Kara in the morning and she doesn’t have to hurry into CatCo these days. “We keep early hours.”
“Oh, I’m sure their bagels are dazzling all right. I’m not particularly extravagant either. Tea, muesli, yogurt, toast... and old documentaries to keep me company.” No Kara, then? Or maybe Kara doesn’t want Lena to share what they do together. Maggie tries to decide whether it’s comforting. “Background noise, really. But, I think we should both make an effort and go all out. What do you say?”

Maggie picks up her watch. She looks at the time, sighs inwardly, before sliding it onto her wrist, closing the clasp. “I only have you for another few hours. Let’s make the most of it.”

Lena orders room service, asking for breakfast essentials, coffee, bagels, a little of everything. Maggie stands from the bed, wrapping a blanket around herself, walking over to the desk where she left her wallet previously. She touches the tulips. The room should reflect what happens in it, Lena said. Thoughtful. But that’s Lena’s way. She filled Kara’s office with flowers. She thinks back to visiting Kara at CatCo long ago. They were talking about girls disappearing. Lena’s gala. Maggie hadn’t wanted her to go. But she and Kara flirted. It was fun.

“Did you get lost over there?”

Maggie blinks, turns, smiles, lifts the wallet. “Making sure I have enough to overtip again.”

Lena points at the sofa. “If you think it’s not sufficient, my bag’s right there. And the lady on the phone said... ETA, ten minutes.”

“So now you want me to dig through your purse for money like a common thug. No way.”

She chuckles. “Suit yourself. There’s only one important thing in that bag, anyway.”

Maggie wanders closer, settling a hand on the back of the couch. “Now you’re just teasing me,” she looks from the purse to her. “What’s in it?” Some alien gizmo? A USB of vital importance? Plans to destroy the Deathstar? Some trinket Kara gave her, maybe. She has no idea.

Lena holds out a hand. “Can you get it for me?”

Maggie retrieves it and hands it over. “Putting me to work in my spare time.” She tsks.
Lena opens the bag, rummaging through it. “Oh, I'm just getting started.” She pulls out a thin box. “This? It's an EpiPen. I ever accidentally eat something with peanuts in it? You know what to do.” She points at her own neck. “That's the best spot. Only you and Kara know. Well, Alex might know about the allergy, but the pen in my bag? Just you and Kara.”

Maggie looks from the EpiPen to her. “Well. I'll keep this in mind for all our future meals.” Her fingers drift to Lena's hair. Maggie presses a kiss to her forehead before sitting beside her. “I've always wanted to save a damsel in distress.” Sure, make a joke about an allergic reaction that could kill her, you idiot. She grimaces. “But seriously, I'll kill whoever serves you peanuts. Thank you for trusting me.”

Lena settles a hand on her knee. “Yes, well... I think you and I have spent enough time in jail, so don't kill anyone on my behalf. And I do trust you. Ironically, if I believed people needed to earn my trust... you would have proven yourself the night you arrested me.” She chuckles. “Funny, huh? How things work out.”

Maggie thins her lips, ducking her chin thoughtfully. “I wish…” she sighs. “I've thought a lot about that night. I can't... imagine what it must have been like to have Kara standing there telling me not to do it and I... just doing it anyway. I know it's done. I get that.” The evidence was all there. She looked at it over and over again. Winn said it wasn’t tampered with. But it was tampered with. “And I don't think you're angry. I hope you aren't, anyway. I'm just sorry I put you through that experience.”

“She did what she thought was right, as my friend, as someone who knew me. You did what was right as a police officer. You don't make the laws; you uphold them. You were fair. That's all that matters.”

She smiles with relief, kisses her cheek. “Thank you for understanding. My job doesn't always make me popular.” At least Lena isn’t as mad as Kara was.

Lena tugs her down. “Well, it might be Stockholm syndrome speaking, but you have at least one devoted fan.” They kiss again, not as briefly as before, Lena kissing her deeper, Maggie following her lead.

Maggie breaks the kiss, smiles and kisses her again before pulling back. “So do you.” A beat. “I was going to ask that you not tell anyone but I don't mind if you do.”
Lena frowns, wrapping her arms around her. “About the arrest?”

“About Detective Maggie Sawyer being a big ass Lena Luthor fan.” It’s like the universe went out of its way to troll her. Lena Luthor everywhere. Now, Lena Luthor, everywhere.

“Oh my goodness, no. That's no one else's business, and what's the point of bragging if it's only going to result in your... spirited coworkers pouncing on it, anyway?”

She winces. “Who cares what they think?” Everyone you work with.

“Not me. That's utterly irrelevant. You not being bullied at work, though? Now that I care about. I know the kinds of reactions my name tends to provoke. Trust me, you don't need that.”

Maggie smiles faintly. “Will I be your scandalous little secret, then?” It wouldn’t be the first, second, third, fourth time.

Lena scoffs. “Why on earth would anyone hide you? As long as it doesn't cause you problems at work, I would be delighted to be seen in your company.”

Maggie looks at her. Is it an act? It’s not an act. How is she real? She looks off, smiles. “You are dangerously charming. You could lead a cult. If you were the kind.” She kisses her, goes to the door when there's a knock, thanking the attendant for the food and tipping again. She closes the door. “Does that mean you're bailing on being my date to the police gala? How am I supposed to show off now?” She wheels the food over.

Lena wraps the sheets around herself. “Oh, I'll be your date, don't you worry. You'll have to tell me who I may or may not be rude to beforehand, though.”

“Deal. Luckily for you the ‘polite’ list is pretty short. Scoot back.” Lena does. Maggie sets the tray on her lap. “Coffee or tea?” She looks at Lena, situating herself on the bed, touching the tip of the tray. Maggie looks away in a daze.

Lena puffs her cheeks. “I... don't know. Whatever you're having.”
“You've done it now. You're having coffee. Black. And a bagel.” She pours her a cup of coffee and a glass of water. “Do you want anything on it? Or can you bear a disgusting plain bagel?” She looks through the cart of food that was brought. “Oh, there's fruit. You know, I can't remember the last time I had breakfast with anyone. Unless you count Murphy, bitching over coffee about not getting head the night before.”

Lena snorts into her glass of water, coughs. Clears her throats. “Excuse me.” She pats her chest, trying to get air. Maggie smiles, leans over to pull her slipping blanket up. “Well, I like him already. If he regales you with... colorful tales, or lack thereof, you must be doing something right. And yes, black coffee and a plain bagel it is. Thank you.”

“He's filthy. I'll introduce you.” Maggie looks at the bagels, gently toasted and sets one on a plate for Lena. “This isn't exactly going all out. You clearly haven't lived the luxury life I have. Where's the caviar?” She jokes. She sits beside her, careful to not dump the tray of food.

Lena points to the basket of croissants and pains au chocolat. “Right here.” Maggie rolls her eyes. “This is tasty,” she nods at the bagel, swallowing a bite. “Is eating plain bagels unusual?”

“It is if you're Alex Danvers. You'd think I'd bitten a chicken's head off.” She looks at the croissant.

“Speaking of chicken. What did she tell you about me and chicken wings? The night you talked. She wouldn't say.”

Maggie cocks an eyebrow. “She asked if I could imagine you eating a chicken wing.” A beat. “Sorry. Is this a joke?”

Lena tenses, putting the coffee back on the tray. “A joke?”

“Yeah. I don't get it. Why is she asking about that?” She imagines Alex and Lena together, wonders what it is they talk about. It must be hard when Alex can't tell her what she does at the DEO. She doesn’t know how Kara and Alex do it. It must be exhausting to keep track of every word coming out of your mouth. “She's so funny sometimes. I think the idea was that you were too refined to ever eat one?”

“Well, to be fair, we've only gone out a few times and I was always the one picking the place, so.” She shrugs apologetically.
Maggie smiles. “But that’s stupid. You’re a person, not a walking money bag.”

Lena kisses her cheek. “Thank you. But in her defense, I haven't truly lowered mine around her. Maybe I gave her the wrong impression. I don't know, I thought...” She thinks for a while. “On Valentine's Day? I knew she wasn't doing anything, I wasn't either, so I thought, why not have fun on this stupid day? And we had a sort of ridiculous joke date.” Better than her own night with Kara, then. Fuck. She screwed that up. She said too much. She didn't show up at all when it mattered. She should make it up to her. She should... “I thought after this, maybe she'd stop turning my... wealth, I guess, into a joke. Evidently, I was wrong.”

“Hey,” she sets her coffee to the side. “I can't speak for Alex and I can't speak for how she made you feel. It's... an easy thing to fall back on. You're gorgeous and you're smart. Clever. You're a billionaire and worst of all, you're kind. I get it. When she says something like that. When I've said things like that. It's not about you. It's about us... And not feeling. I don't know. Like enough.” She smiles tiredly. “And that’s on us, not on you. Danvers likes you, okay? Maybe she doesn't always show it in the best way but I'm guilty of it, too. I know you've been patient. Maybe I don't know how patient but. Whatever way it came out—” the chicken wing debacle, “she's probably sorry.”

Lena smiles. “I appreciate you saying that. I really do. But Alex fucked things up. With you, with me. I don't think justifying it does her any favor. At the end of the day, whatever you're both guilty of when it comes to my wealth, whatever I represent, the difference is, you and I are talking right now, and maybe we're making mistakes but we're considerate, we're trying. She might come around soon, I hope she does, but Maggie, she did fuck things up. What she said to you, to me? That wasn't okay.”

More than about the chicken wing debacle. Maggie stills, looking around the room. Lena’s clothes are still folded on the couch. The card key is on the desk. Next to her cell phone. She blinks. “I don't know what she said to you. And whatever it was, she probably shouldn't have said it. She was upset.” She considers telling her that Alex called last night in the middle of their dinner. She doesn’t. “Maybe I haven't been fair to her,” she smiles grimly, “but you're right. I hope she makes it up to you. You haven't done anything wrong.”

“Maybe you haven't been fair to her?” Lena cocks her head. “What does that mean?” She breaks off a piece of croissant and offers it to her.

Maggie scratches the scar absently, takes the croissant, holding it. “I wasn't as focused as I could have been when we were together. I... had a lot going on. I hurt her. She knows that you and I didn't get along before. So when I told her about us... I think it was a slap in the face. I didn't mean it that way. I mean. This all kind of just happened, didn't it?” How did it happen? Would it have happened if Lena hadn’t been with Kara? If Kara hadn’t suggested the open relationship? If Lena
hadn’t kissed her first? No, probably not. But it’s pointless to think back on that now. It has happened. Kara is with Lena. Maggie kissed Lena back.

“Look, I... let's not sugarcoat it. I had a drink with her after you two broke up. I barely knew her then, beyond the fact she was Kara's sister and someone I'd given my card to if she ever needed a friendly ear. And she made it very clear, then, that she thought ending things with you was for the best. She may feel differently now, I have no idea and that's none of my business, but back then? She stood by her own decision. It had nothing to do with whether you and I got along at the time. She doesn't get to use this as an argument in whatever debate she thinks we're having.”

Maggie bites her tongue. Mentioning Alex was a mistake. “Okay. Look, I don't want to fight about it. I want right now to be about us. So let's... just have fun while we can and focus on us. No Alex. No Kara. At least for now. Is that okay?”

Lena frowns. “Are we fighting right now?”

Maggie sighs. “We're disagreeing about Alex, I think. I think maybe she has a right to be angry with me. You don't. I don't want our memories of our time here to be about a disagreement about Alex. I don't want that to come into it.”

“Well, I'm sorry, I can't put things aside the way you do.” Maggie frowns. “To me, talking comes first. Understanding what's going on comes first. I don't think about it in terms of... fighting, or disagreeing. If you tell me something like I haven't been fair to her? I want to understand. Because it affects me, too.”

Maggie says nothing, unsure of what she should say, what's expected. What will end the conversation? Agreeing that Alex was out of line? She’s devoted time to that train of thought, debating herself. Has she been unfair? Is Alex right to be hurt? What should Maggie do about it? Why does she have to talk about it? Minutes pass. Maggie puts the croissant aside without a bite. “I met Kara first. Alex didn't know. And when Kara learned how Alex felt about me, she ended it. We were bad at not being together but Alex still didn't know so I ended it with Kara. And then Alex and I were together and— it was.” She sighs. “I wasn't with Kara but I saw her. It was awkward and I didn’t want to be around. Alex thought that I didn't like Kara— Jesus Christ, this sounds like a fucking telenovela. Alex and I were getting close so I told her about Kara and I before. I thought she should know, even if it happened before I met her. And Alex fucking lost it. Is that— I mean, does that answer your question?” She leaves the bed, going to look out the window. She crosses her arms and tries to get her chin to stop quivering. Great. There goes the fucking morning.

Maggie sees Lena’s reflection in the glass. She has a drink of coffee. “It does. She was still out of line.”
“Fine. She was out of line. Is there anything else I need to answer or can we move on?”

Lena runs a hand through her hair. “Sure. But you'll have to tell me where to, because if what I think is a candid conversation about someone we were both involved with can turn into this? I have no idea what you're comfortable talking about.”

“I don't see what she has to do with anything. I'm not with her. Maybe you are. That's your business. What do you want me to say? I've talked more about Alex in the past half hour than I have since she and I broke up. So seriously, Lena. Tell me what I'm failing to understand here. How candid do I have to be to get your seal of approval?” Her throat is tightening until it’s hard to speak, until it catches. “This is hard for me, okay?” She touches a hand to her forehead. Breathe, breathe.

“With her? Maggie, I'm not with her. That's the point. We're not with her, and you had to sit there and take it, and you called me, and I could tell you'd been through hell, and then I had to, as well. This is...” She shakes her head. “I'm not used to this. To any of this. And I apologize if I've said something hurtful, that was never my intention. But... I feel like there's just so much I don't know. And you and I, we talk, and I think we're just having a normal conversation, and suddenly it's... no longer okay, and I don't know what line I've crossed, and last night you said you didn't want anything to be a taboo between us. I was trying to get some clarity, you seemed fine when you mentioned her, so I thought we could... talk about it.”

Maggie sighs, tired. She returns to the bed, sitting on the other end, unsure of how close Lena wants her to be. “I'm not used to any of this either. I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know how to navigate any of this. I'm not used to these kinds of conversations. They're a lot. It just feels like I'm answering question after question and... my answers aren't any good.” She takes a shaky breath. “I like that we talk. So let's talk. But please... can you try to understand that this is all new to me, too? I don't always have the right answers. Or the right responses.” She looks at her, helplessly. “What else do you want to know?”

Lena breathes out, setting the tray aside and moving to join her on her side of the bed. She wraps an arm around her shoulders and Maggie feels the breath spilling out of her, able to breathe again. “I don't want to know anything in particular, I just... I told you, I don't do well with closed doors. I told Alex... when I dropped her off, that night, I told her not to forget she wasn't the only one with complex feelings. And I guess I failed to apply my own advice. I'm sorry if I pressured you into sharing things you weren't willing to share. Or ready to share. It's just...” A silence follows. “It's not your fault, and I'm aware there's a lot I don't know, but every time you and I get comfortable, I feel like someone yanks the carpet from under my feet, and I don't know why. Because I've been quite open with everyone involved but I feel like... we keep blindsiding each other, you and I, and obviously just brushing whatever concerns we have aside isn't the answer, so... but perhaps it wasn't the right time for a conversation about this. Like I said in the bar,” she smiles ruefully. “I'm not good at this.
She takes a breath. “Lena. This... all of this has been a steep learning curve for me and honestly... I'd like for this to be the one thing I haven't screwed up. But it... takes me a while to be able to say things. And what I really would have liked to say is 'can we talk about this later, can we talk about this later, can we talk about this later' but I wasn't sure if you'd think that was fair or if... it would seem as if I was closing doors or wanting to avoid the issue?” She takes a minute. “You and me...? Ask me whatever you want. But with the others— I just need time, okay? This is just as strange for me as it is for you. Maybe... you don't feel like you can give me that time. And if you can't. Then I don't know.”

Lena keeps her arm wrapped over her shoulders, her gaze out the window. Minutes pass. “I don't want to know about whatever's going on between you and the others. I mean, if you ever want to talk about it, that's fine, but this isn't...” she pinches the bridge of her nose. “This isn't some kind of test. I haven't asked you anything about Kara, because she's been very clear with me. I know where I stand, with her. But Alex... I felt like.... like I'd stepped into the twilight zone, to be honest. I told you what she said, about you and me. And she said other things. About Kara and me.” Maggie frowns lightly. “And you've alluded to feeling left out, and I just. I don't understand. But you know what?” Lena rubs her arm. “I can tell you're upset, and sincere, and that's enough for me.”

Maggie turns her head to look at her. “What don't you understand?” Do Kara and Lena want to keep their relationship under wraps? That wouldn’t make sense. Kara opened their relationship for her. “Please, can you just put it as plainly as you can? I don't know what you mean about stepping into the twilight zone.”

“I'll try, but... didn't you feel like it was... weird, and surreal, when Alex went off on you?” No. “Because I sure did when she went off on me. Like there was this great betrayal going on even though neither you nor I have any obligations towards her, and she said all these things, and... What I don't understand is why it always seems to come down to... and don't get me wrong, you asked in a much more respectful way, but you and Alex basically acted like I was interested in the wrong person and I should just focus on Kara or something. And... okay, I'll say it, I haven't been with many people, and when I kissed you, I had no idea I was setting off this chain of events, I just wanted to be closer to you.”

Maggie tries to keep up with every admission Lena’s entrusted to her. It’s hard to keep up. The sincerity is almost overwhelming. She parts her lips but the words don’t immediately come out. “Look, you can be interested in whomever you want. I don't think you owe me, or anyone an explanation. But... with you and Kara... there's a connection. And the way Kara talks about you and the way you talk about her...” This started because Kara admitted to herself there was a connection there. “It's really easy to feel like...” She sighs. “Like we don't measure up. Kara talks to you about things she won't share with me. When you said Kara always cries during the beginning of Black Swan. I just... locked up. I didn't know that. I wonder if I would have ever known that. And... I've.” She bites her tongue. She can’t think about that now. She can’t spend her time being bitterly jealous of Lena one minute, and making love to her the next. “Whatever. I’ve accepted that. But it doesn't mean I don't feel... like I'm on the outside sometimes. You kissed me and I'm glad you did. And for the record, logically I know that I don't owe Alex anything. This isn't her business. But I've
made mistakes in the past and I feel guilty. Maybe I'm harder on myself than I should be.” But she doesn’t think so. “Forget what Alex said. Forget everything else. You and Kara do what you want. It's no one's business but your own.”

“Our business? But…” Her sheet is starting to slip. She pulls it up to cover herself. “Look, if you'd rather not talk about it, that's fine, really, but there's so much Kara shares with you that she doesn't share with me, and I don't mind, I mean it's just... things are clear.” Maggie tries to find a way to believe her words. You know she’s Supergirl. But Kara didn’t tell her. She found out. So what does she share with her that she doesn’t share with Lena? She can’t think of anything. “And I'm just thankful for whatever I get. I thought that's how it was for all of you, when I kissed you. Clear.” She sighs. “You're right, I'll put aside whatever Alex said, and I'll stop ranting about the way she treated you that night – which, for the record, and for the last time, was not okay – but you? I don't want you to feel like Kara is prioritizing our friendship over your relationship. It just isn't true. You're so lucky to have each other.”

Maggie furrows her brow. What a joke. How can Lena believe it for even a second? Kara shares everything with her. Kara takes pictures with her. Goes on dates with her. She searches for words. “And she's lucky to have you and I'm lucky to have you. We're all lucky. And thank you for ranting about that night. Really. But if Alex hadn't ranted I might not have called you, we might not have planned wine adventures, you might not have committed to being my gala date. All right?” She touches her chin, kissing her briefly. “I know this is all awkward but there's good in it, too.”

“I'm not sure I agree that her ranting was instrumental in any way. Not as far as I'm concerned. This fiasco with her sped things up, at best, but I liked you before.” She runs a hand over her face and Maggie wonders if they’ll be able to find any common ground when it comes to Alex. “And I still don't understand what the problem is with me and Kara sharing the things we like with each other. But... “ She hesitates. Swallows. “Look, Alex keeps asking me why I'm not together with Kara and says I'm in denial about what I'm feeling, and you've said things like, you're with Kara, and sometimes it sounds like... I'm sorry if I'm misinterpreting things here, and feel free to correct me, but sometimes it sounds like you think Kara and I are friends with...” Maggie waits. Lena stumbles over the word. “With benefits. But we're not, no benefits, just... she's my closest friend.” Maggie stares at her, not understanding. “And if you're worried that this, between us, is... yes, I'm interested in you, I like you, but as I said when we talked in my office, I would never come between you two. She's your priority. I respect your relationship. That's what I meant yesterday, when I said I wasn't looking for anything. Sure, I'm not unavailable, I mean, I'm not seeing anyone. Aside from you.” Maggie goes cold. She’s lying. She has to be lying. No. Lena doesn’t lie. No bruises. No bruises. She can’t breathe. Lena’s still talking. “But I'm happy with whatever you want to give me. I'll never ask for more. I like what we share and I don't want... again, I don't want a misunderstanding to ruin this, you know?” Lena massages her closed eyelids with her free hand before glancing at her. Maggie looks back. What does Lena see…? Maggie can hardly see. Color has been stripped from the world. Words are far away. Her fingertips are losing feeling, her face. “I don't know what else I can say, so I'm just... I'm going to go take a shower, now. If you need space, I understand, but if you want to join me, then... feel free. That'd be great. I've never had a shower with anyone. Anyway, up to you.” She squeezes her shoulder, stands, walking off to the bathroom.
Maggie remains, paralyzed. They’re not together. They’re not together. Kara and Lena are not together. Lena and I kissed. Is that okay? Her heart is trying to crawl its way out of her chest. You and Lena can do whatever you want. She can’t breathe. It’s not what you have, Maggie told her. Her head feels like it’s floating away. The room is spinning. She can’t get the room to stop spinning. And here she was angry and resentful about the museums, about the movies… about their fucking… friendship.

She stands on uncertain legs, clutching the blanket to her. She was wrong. She was wrong about everything. Kara opened the relationship for Lena. She hasn’t kissed Lena. Hasn’t been with Lena. Hasn’t dated Lena. She takes hold of the couch, closes her eye. She can’t stop everything from tilting. She opens her eyes. Vertigo. She can’t swallow. She has to swallow. She shouldn’t have done this. She shouldn’t have come here. She shouldn’t be here.

She goes to the desk, picks up her wallet, picks up her phone. Is this cheating? Is this like cheating? Kara isn’t with Lena. Kara isn’t with anyone. Why didn’t Kara just tell her? Why did you assume? She fucked up. She fucked up. She fucked everything up. Her grip on the desk slips, knocking into the vase. Maggie drops the wallet and keys, lunges up. The vase is spared. The tulips. She returns them to where they were with trembling fingers. When something gives you joy? In whatever way, and doesn’t hurt you? You hold on to it.

She picks up the wallet and keys from the floor and returns them to the desk. Fights to breathe. Stares at the tulips. She doesn’t know how long passes before her heart slows, gets some feeling back into her face and fingers. She runs a hand over her face. She can’t leave. She has to stay. She wants to stay. She shouldn’t stay. Get it together.

She remains until the room stops spinning. She picks up the blanket, carries it with her until she’s at the bed, tosses it there, goes to the bathroom door, touches a hand to it. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. She knocks on the door slightly. “It’s me.” Who else would it be? She sounds normal, at least.

She enters. Lena’s already in the shower. Lena moves, sliding the door open. Steam falls out in waves. They face one another for a moment. Her fingers are still shaking. She can’t get them to stop shaking. Maggie smiles, stepping behind her and wrapping her arms around her waist, leaning her forehead into her back. Lena settles her hands over her own. Maggie exhales as the shower water falls over her hair, slides down her face. She has to be calm. She has to breathe. She has to be kind to Lena, who walked into this clusterfuck of a situation.

Enough time passes. Minutes. She slides her arms back, turning Lena carefully. She takes Lena’s face in her hands, looks up at her. This was all a big misunderstanding. The air is gone again. Lena looks back at her and Maggie licks her lips, finds an easy smile. “Hi. So I’m the first lucky adventurer to join you in the shower? I’m honored.”
Lena searches her face. Does she see something? Does she know? Lena’s hands fall to her hips. “Well, that’s... that’s where I do most of my thinking.” That makes two of us. Lena winces. “Sorry, that was random. But true.” She smiles wanly. “Anyway, I’m glad you joined me. I wanted to give you a graceful escape, spare us the... awkwardness, in case you didn’t want to stay any longer.”

She thought about it. She wanted to leave to preserve some shred of dignity. To preserve some shame. To atone for what she’s done to Kara? But she wanted to stay. For herself. For Lena. For joy. Some lies are kind. “And leave a beautiful woman on her lonesome in the shower? I wouldn't dream of it.” She’s done it before. Had people do it to her before. She lifts her hands, brushing the hair back from Lena’s face, studying her. “But thank you for thinking to spare my dignity.”

“Mine, too, to be honest. Do you know about… Have you heard of Emily Post?”

“Hm. Sounds familiar but I'm coming up empty.”

“She must pop up in the American curriculum here and there, I guess. She was born around 1870, I think, and she wrote these books on etiquette that just... they're still updated to this day. I found them fascinating, the library at my school in Ireland had them all and... the guiding principle was basically, ‘etiquette isn't about being a snob, it's about making people comfortable.’ And...” she chuckles to herself. “Emily Post? She didn’t smoke, but when she had a guest who did, she'd smoke too just so that they wouldn't feel self-conscious. So... now you know all my tricks.”

Maggie smiles faintly. “That can't be all of them. But…” She considers her thoughtfulness. The way she’s able to put her at ease. “That explains a lot.”

Lena nods. “So... are you all right?”

Maggie listens to the water tapping against the tile walls. She breathes in slowly. “I'm all right. I'm...” Losing it. No. She’s fine. “We've gone over a lot. And it's not bad,” she adds quickly. “I'm...” freezing “adjusting.” Just be honest. Just tell the truth. “But I'm all right. I'm happy to be here. With you.”

“The temperature is perfect.” Everything about—Kara can stop bullets. She can stop thoughts. She looks down, taking hold of Lena’s fingertips, feeling her warmth seep through to her fingers. She needs to get steady. Find her equilibrium. Lena’s not with Kara. Lena’s not with Alex. Lena’s with her. Oh God. Get it together. “Would it be okay if I kissed you?” Lena looks at their hands, nods. Maggie steps closer, brushing a kiss onto Lena’s lips, hoping she can’t tell how her own tremble. Her eyes slip shut. How did this happen…? Is she selfish? Would it be more selfish and reckless to leave? Kara already knows. But Kara doesn’t know that she didn’t know. And Kara doesn’t know about this.

Lena kisses her back just as softly, fingers trailing along her back, over her hair. Is this their most honest kiss? Everything’s out in the open. But Lena doesn’t know she misunderstood. That she entered into this under false assumptions. But Lena has been open, giving, honest. She thought she had been, too. Can she tell her? Should she tell her? Was it a lie if she didn’t know it was a lie? Telling Lena might give her the wrong idea. That she isn’t worth it otherwise. And Lena’s so careful. Trusting. Giving. What’s the point in telling her? In making her question herself?

The water falls. They go slow, careful, getting reacquainted. Lena palms her breasts, kisses her neck. Is this right? It feels right. Her lips skirt over Lena’s neck and shoulder, her hands traveling over her sides, her wet skin. Lena presses closer. Deepens their kiss. Maggie’s thoughts start to drift away. She opens her eyes, looks at her, meets her gaze. I’m here with you. But she can’t say it, the words are stuck in her throat.

More kisses. Slower. Until she’s drowning in Lena. Her mind quiets. Lena guides her to the wall. It’s not the shock of cold she’s expecting. Lena lifts Maggie’s arms around her neck. They can’t seem to stop kissing. Her head is going light again, Lena’s hand wandering over her. How long passes that way?

Everything is floating, her body, floating, all the negative feelings, leaving her. Lena trails kisses up her neck, nibbling very lightly, lips against her ear. “Tell me what you want.”

Maggie opens her eyes, looks at her. “I want what you want.” She turns her face, lips grazing along her neck, going up to her ear. “I want what you want.”

Lena nods, kisses her languidly. She whispers against her lips. “Okay, then I’m going to go down on you. Would you like that?”

Maggie hesitates. Is this okay? The way Lena makes her feel. Can it not be okay? She nods, out of words again. Lena unhooks Maggie’s arms from around her neck. Kisses her palms. Maggie blinks the water from her eyes again, warm. Lena kisses her mouth, her neck. Maggie thinks of her pressure, watches her trace a path down her chest, to her stomach until she’s on her knees. Maggie swallows hard as Lena nuzzles her face on her stomach, peppering it with kisses. She looks up at
her. Maggie stares, in a reverie, brings her fingertips to the sides of Lena’s face. Does she want to? Does she feel she has to? Maggie doesn’t want any more uncertainty. “Are you sure?”

Lena gives a small smile. “I’m sure I want to make you feel good, yes.” She presses another flurry of kisses to her stomach. Maggie’s unsteady. “You’re so beautiful.”

She can’t speak. She closes her eyes, skimming her fingers over Lena’s hair. She focuses on sensation. Lena’s lips kissing the skin below her navel, the tension in her stomach, anticipation, Lena’s hand gliding over her thighs. The gentle tug on her leg, the suggestion. Maggie swallows, allowing Lena to lift her leg, hook it over her shoulder, the way her hand holds her steady. Lena begins, moving nice and slow. Maggie feels a jolt move through her, hears her breath catch, forces herself to breathe slowly. She lets her hand fall over Lena’s, waits for a reprimand that doesn’t come. Maggie’s fingers tighten over Lena’s.

Maggie tells her, quietly, how nice it is. Like a dream, warm and drifting. She has to steady her breathing. It’s hard when Lena pauses in her ministrations, brings Maggie’s hand to her lips, kissing her knuckles. Maggie’s heart thuds hard, startling her and she’s set at ease again, Lena’s hand coming between her legs and stroking. The words push past her lips, soft encouragement, breath. She touches Lena’s shoulder, her hair, flexing her jaw when Lena slips two fingers inside of her and tastes her again. Maggie flushes, tilting her head back, her hand coming to a careful rest at the back of Lena’s neck.

She thinks of Lena’s hands. Artist’s hands. Maybe engineering is a little like art. Engineers build, they… This is like flying. Maybe something like flying. Not fast. Not cold. Not slow. Nothing like flying. She brings an arm over her eyes, as if she could block the image in her mind. She can’t think. Not now. She feels Lena’s pressure and is propelled to the present, her stomach tightening. This is so nice. For the moment, everything. She has to tell her. Lena holds her hand tighter. It’s impossible to contain her breath. “I’m going to come,” she doesn’t know if Lena hears the words, if they’re drowned out in the sound of water, her own, short breath, her body soaring with ecstasy.

Lena remains kneeling. Her fingers slid out of her, and Maggie narrows her eyes thoughtfully, missing them. Lena turns her head, kissing the inside of her thigh before standing. Maggie presses her hands to the wall, afraid she’s going to fall over. Lena presses to her, steadying Maggie, stroking her hair. She doesn’t deserve this. Kara deserves this. Alex deserves this. Kindness. Her eyes burn. She blinks them, turning her face before wrapping her arms around Lena’s neck. She has to breathe. Everything will feel clearer with air in her lungs. She can’t remember—

She stops the thought. She palms Lena’s face. She’s so beautiful. Tastes of her. “What do you want?” Her words aren’t even, emotion or her inability to catch her breath making them light.

Lena rests her head on her shoulder, nuzzling the crook of her neck. “Let’s just stay like this for a
little while, okay?”

Maggie holds her a little closer. “Okay.” A stillness falls between them. Calm. She feels calm. “This is nice.”

“It is.” She kisses her neck, closes her eyes.

They remain pressed together, Maggie’s hands skimming along her sides, her back, pressing the occasional kiss to her shoulder, her cheek, her ear. Lena takes Maggie’s wrist, bringing her hand to her breast. Her lips to her neck until they’re kissing again, as tenderly as in the office. Different now, here. Stronger, maybe. More—she stops the thought.

Maggie switches places with her, pressing her carefully to the wall. Trails kisses over her. Tells her how good she feels, blushing as the words leave her mouth. Lena nods, her eyes following her movements. Maggie finds her mouth and Lena wraps her arms around her neck. She cups Lena’s breasts, thumbs stroking, lips hovering over the pulse in her neck, keeps close, eyes on Lena’s as her hand begins its trail down. Lena’s hands come to her hips, pulling her closer.

Maggie’s hand eases between Lena’s legs. They keep their eyes locked. Maggie isn’t sure whether her breath or Lena’s is more unsteady. Lena’s soft and hot, wet. A flush crawls up Lena’s chest, to her neck and face.

Lena breaks her gaze, turning her head to the side, tilting her face up. Maggie feathers kisses to her neck, her jaw, her shoulders, Lena’s arms around her neck keeping her close. Maggie likes how their bodies feel together, slick with water, but it’s good without, too. Maggie lifts a hand, tilting Lena’s face up higher, kissing beneath her chin as she slowly slips her fingers inside of her, watching her face.

Lena’s tight around her. Maggie kisses her, keeps her tempo slow and light, withdrawing her fingers to stroke her, watching her before allowing them to slide back inside. Dots of water continue to rain down on them. Maggie tries to pick out the heat of the water from Lena’s skin, compares it to the heat of her mouth, to the fire she makes her feel. She moves with her, lips catching Lena’s when she comes, feeling the shape of Lena’s teeth against her lower lip when they clamp down, liking it.

Lena breathes. Maggie breathes. They breathe, Lena’s weight against her, Maggie’s hand braced against the wall, brushing kisses over her until she removes her fingers, strokes her back. Holds her close. Hugs her. Heaves for breath. Feels naked again, their bodies pressed together. Her heart feels as if it’s about to burst.
Lena pulls back, enough to look at her. Maggie stares back, trying to keep from shaking. Lena cups her face, kisses her, her free hand finding Maggie’s, lacing their fingers. Maggie kisses her back. She can’t get enough air into her lungs. This is—

Stop.

Their kiss drifts to an end. They stand in the water, dazed. Maggie brings Lena’s hand to her lips, kissing it. She smiles faintly. “I’m guessing we can’t stay in here forever.” Lena shakes her head, kisses her as she turns the water off. It’s so quiet. Maggie touches a hand to her shoulder, a kiss to her cheek, opens the door to the shower. “I’ll get you a towel.”

“Can you… sorry,” she points to the sink.

Maggie spots the glasses, wraps the towel around Lena first before bringing the glasses gently to Lena’s face. “There you are.”

Lena smiles, unhooking the towel to wrap it around the both of them. Maggie laughs. “Thank you,” Lena says.

“Anytime.”

Lena kisses her cheek playfully, keeps the towel around them with one hand, takes Maggie’s wrist with the other to check the time. “We should probably get dressed. It’s almost noon.”

“Time flies.” She bites her tongue, gives her another slow kiss. “All right. Let’s get dressed.” There’s water in her ears. She hadn’t noticed before but now she feels it, tilts her head, tapping her ears lightly.

Lena chuckles, kisses her cheek. “That’ll go away.” She wraps her arms around Maggie. Maggie stills, turning her head to look at her best she can. “Hey. Checkout at noon means they won’t even wonder whether we’re still in here an hour from now. We have time. I’m just…” she smiles. “Keeping track.” She lifts her bare wrist. “I was determined not to, yesterday.”

“What changed?”
“You can’t press pause on time forever.”

She thinks of that conversation out on the street with Alex. What would Lena think if she knew the extent of it?

*We’re not dating,* Maggie said.

*You’re just fucking.*

*No. No, we’re not doing that, either.*

She brings a hand to her face, rubs the corner of her mouth, her eyes. Takes a breath. You can’t press pause on time forever, Lena says. “Yeah, I guess not.”

Lena smiles, pressing their foreheads together before tugging her outside the bathroom. She drops the towel on the bed before wrapping her arms around her waist. “A few more minutes? Before we become responsible adults again?”

Maggie smiles thoughtfully, stroking her hair. A responsible adult. Is this what being a responsible adult is? So many paths. Uncertain destinations. She wraps an arm around Lena’s shoulder, holding her close. She has no answers. She’s thinking about it when Lena kisses her again. She finds herself responding without meaning to, letting Lena maneuver them to the bed. They sit, kissing. Eventually Lena gently pushes her down on the bed, stretching out beside her. Maggie shivers. Lena pulls the blanket over them. Maggie battles with the heaviness she feels, the bright and reaching lightness, kissing Lena, feeling her hands. Too bad about check-out time.

Eventually their kisses come to an end. Lena holds her near. Maggie exhales softly, thinking of the fragrance of her skin. She’s quiet. Maggie’s quiet. They’re quiet. Maggie lifts her face. “Are you okay?”

“I am. You look a little… lost. Is something wrong?”

Maggie closes her eyes, shakes her head, opens her eyes and looks at her. “Nothing’s wrong.” She presses a kiss to her temple, letting Lena palm her face, kiss her. Fleeting. It’s always fleeting.
“Okay. Let’s get dressed, and then… if that’s all right, I’d like to tell you something. Nothing like earlier, I promise.”

Maggie looks at her in a daze. What else could Lena possibly tell her? She braces herself but feels too exhausted to stand against anything. A feather could knock her over. “Of course it’s all right,” she kisses her. “Let’s get dressed.”

They get dressed. Maggie turns her phone on and sets it face down on the desk. She wants to get a picture of the tulips before she’s gone. She wants something to remember this by. Something clear and unbiased by memory. She leans against the desk, watching Lena dab at her hair with the towel. Eventually Lena sits on the couch. Maggie draws a breath, joins her. She touches the watch, wiping beads of water from the face. Adjusting it on her wrist. Lena looks at her for some time. Maggie smiles at her. “Ready when you are.”

“So I've been thinking, in the shower... not that I wasn't paying attention to you, it's just my way of working through...” Maggie waits. “Anyway, there's a few things I need to say, a few things I want you to know. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to. Just... Please, listen. Okay?”

“Okay. I'm listening.”

“Thank you. So, the first thing is... earlier, when you asked what Alex had to do with anything, I should have been clearer. It wasn't about Alex. It was about you. I was trying to... because, it often sounds like you think you deserve whatever people throw at you, and you said you didn't have many friends to talk to, so I thought it might be important for you to have someone to tell you that you deserve better. That no one has a right to treat you that way, no matter how hurt they are. And I'm sorry if it felt intrusive, or like you had to justify yourself, or like I... disrespected your privacy in any way.”

Maggie’s eyes burn. She closes them, clasps her hands in her lap. Lena says she doesn’t deserve it but Maggie isn’t sure it’s true. Maggie keeps her eyes closed, waiting until the sting goes out of them. She opens them. Exhales. Nods.

“Okay. Now, the rest of it is... I've never been particularly inclined to share personal things, or to open up when it comes to my feelings. If you'd met me in Metropolis, you would have found me a lot more guarded than I am now. But I came to National City, I met Kara... maybe it was her kindness, or the fact that she trusted me when no one else would, simply because I'd never given her a reason not to... either way, I thought, if I don't lower my defenses around someone like her, I never will. So I did, and it was like putting down a suitcase after carrying it for a very long time. And when you and I started working together, became friends... I didn't realize it at the time, but I
assumed that if you and Kara were together, if you'd chosen to be in each other's lives that way, then surely it must be the same between you two. The same kind of communication, the same... lightness, I guess. So, ever since we had that conversation in my car, about telling Alex that we kissed? And you agreed that we should talk whenever something was on our mind regarding the situation? I've been taking that for granted. I assumed that from then on, you'd be all right with my questions, or with asking me anything, that you'd trust my answers and we'd defuse any uncertainty before it had a chance to turn into a problem. And that was... presumptuous, and inconsiderate. To think that I could just operate with you the way I do with Kara. That because it works for me, it works for you. So, if you want to see me again as a... as more than a coworker, I promise I'll do my part when it comes to finding our own way to share. Something that works for both of us. Not a half-measure, just... our own thing. Our own pace. I'll be more patient, I'll be clearer when I feel like I need to know something. Or, you know, whatever else you think I could be better at. And I'll trust you to do the same. To let me know if I do something wrong, give me a chance to talk it out or fix it before you pull away. I'd really like that. For us to just... figure things out together.”

Figure things out together. She dwells on the words. She dwells on it all. She doesn’t know how long she goes in silence. She could sit here forever thinking about it. She takes Lena's hand. Even if she’s still she doesn’t want Lena to think she’s pulled away. "You're more than a co-worker to me. You're a friend." A good friend that is just a good friend to Kara, nothing more, no benefits. A good friend that she’s not dating but is on a date with, who has—she stops the thought. She squeezes Lena’s hand lightly. “Thank you for... taking the time to talk to me.” To explain. “I'll do my part. Whatever happens... we'll work on figuring it out together, okay?” She forces a smile, fighting the panic. This is what friends do. Friends with benefits do.

Lena wraps her hands around Maggie’s. “We will. And, for what it’s worth... no matter where this goes, I’m your friend. Nothing less.” She squeezes her hand. “So, shall we go? Close this particular chapter of our adventures and let the next one surprise us?”

She finds another pale smile. “To all our future adventures.” She leans forward, giving her a soft kiss. Lena returns it, drawing it out, keeping it in whispers.

They gather their things. Maggie snaps a shot of the tulips while Lena flutters around the room gathering her things. She jams the phone into her jacket pocket as Lena’s turning. They walk to the door together. This was great. She doesn’t say it.

Lena takes her hand, draws her out of the room, pulling the key from the door lock. They walk to the elevator. Maggie memorizes the halls, the wavy hair cascading down Lena’s back. Maggie realizes she forgot her hairpin. She decides to leave it, grateful maybe to have something that will remain, even if not for very long. She thinks of it while they wait for the elevator.

The elevator arrives. They step inside, Lena pulling her into a slow, gentle kiss when the doors close. Why does it feel this way...? Stop. She stops, allowing herself to enjoy it while it lasts.

The elevator doors open and they step out, Lena going to take care of the checkout at the desk. Maggie hangs back while one of the desk hosts looks between Lena and her. She mouths ‘wow’ at Maggie, before turning her attention to an incoming call. Maggie considers telling her it’s rude to make assumptions— but Lena takes her hand as soon as she’s finished. They exit the hotel together into the sunlight. The breeze is cool but there isn’t a cloud in the sky. Lena takes her other hand, facing her. “Igor has the weekend off, so I’m going to grab a cab.”

“Igor gets days off?” Sometimes she forgets what his real name is. “Um.” She looks at the ground, back up to her face. She looks stunning in the daylight. Is there any light that doesn’t love her? “The valet was unimpressed with my car but it’s available if you want a lift home. Or to L-Corp. Wherever. No pressure.”

“A lift home would be nice. Thank you.” She kisses her cheek. Maggie smiles. “What did he say, though? The valet?”

“He didn’t say anything. Wait. He did say I could say less. The window was finicky. The engine.” She spots him. “There he is now.” The dick.

Lena smiles. “I’ll be right back.”

“You really don’t have to—” and she’s gone.

Lena goes to the valet, has a word with him, tips him. He brings Maggie’s car around. He’s magically lost the attitude. He’s flustered, holds the door open for Maggie. “Thanks,” fucker. She gets inside and watches him fight with the passenger door until he gets it open and Lena gets inside. He shuts the door. Lena puts her seatbelt on, smiling when Maggie looks over at her.

Maggie smiles back, turns the radio on. Dreampop floats out. They drive in silence. Driving calms her. The limitless vistas. The air. Speed. She drives slowly now. Traffic is light. “Can I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

“It’s a two parter. Part one.” Her fingers tighten on the steering wheel. She steals a look at her.
“What would you have done if I hadn't agreed to stay the night?”

Lena doesn’t respond immediately. “I would have... apologized for misreading the situation, made sure you knew it was an honest mistake. And if you still wanted to have a couple of drinks and talk before heading home, I might have asked where the line was between what we do in my office and spending the night somewhere.”

Maggie tries to imagine a situation that would have led to shooting Lena down. If she had known. If she had known about Lena and Kara. But she knows now. And she knows what it is to be with Lena. She thinks of Lena removing her clothes in front of her, the way her hands shook. What she would have done doesn’t matter anymore. All she knows is now. “That’s a tricky question. Lines are blurry. I'm glad I didn't have to answer it.” She smiles ruefully. “Thank you for answering.” Lena nods. “Part two. You've been working with Igor for a while. You trust him implicitly. You must spend a lot of time with him. I'm sorry if this is... invasive but, do you... avoid driving?”

Maggie hears the smile in her voice. “Yes, I avoid driving.”


“You get as many questions as you want. And I avoid driving because if I did drive, you'd have to arrest me. I never got my license.”

“Why not?”

“It's just not something I can imagine myself doing. Driving. It's like... this mysterious skillset I don't think I can wrap my head around. There's just so much to keep track of, and when you have a wandering mind like mine, it's not a good fit.”

“But you're... you. I can't imagine not driving. I'd feel trapped.”

“I can see why depending on other people, or public transports, walking distance... might feel like being trapped.” She thinks it over. “But it's the opposite, for me. I can relax, look around, trust whoever is driving the car, the bus... I feel safe.”

"I'll make sure to take the curves slowly for you."
“Your driving is fine. Don't change anything.”

"I didn't know if you needed more time to focus on work. That sounds silly now."

“Sometimes use the time I spend being driven somewhere to get work done, but that's just... incidental. How long have you been wondering?”

“Since I learned about Igor.” She smiles. “I know I ask questions professionally but it's not easy to get answers in my personal life.”

“Can I ask why?”

“Why it's hard to get answers?” She looks at her. Lena nods. Maggie turns back to the road, shrugging. “I'm not sure. Dynamics? Maybe I'm not asking the right questions. Not everyone is as... giving as you are.”

“Do you... is there such a thing as a wrong question? I mean, I guess some questions are more meaningful than others, and sometimes we ask irrelevant ones, but it doesn't make them wrong. Besides, isn't asking something harmless? If the question is genuine and not mean to hurt, then... I don't think it can be hurtful, no matter how relevant.”

“I think a person can be well intentioned and kind and still ask hurtful questions. And navigating that is... trickier than... any malice. You can't be angry when no harm is intended. But all you're left with is that sadness.”

“So... Would a well-intentioned question be hurtful because it inadvertently hits a sensitive spot? Or because its irrelevance shows a... lack of understanding of what truly matters in a given context?”

“It can be either. It can be both.” She glances at her. “How's the temperature? Should I kick the AC or heat on?” Maggie feels her gaze.

“I'm good. I'll let you know if I... need anything.”
“Do you think I'm changing the subject?”

“I think that... if you want to keep talking about something, you'll make sure I know.”

“You know what the problem is? You're easy to be around. I start conversations that I can't finish. Not then and there. I should... think more before I speak.” Her mouth has always gotten her into trouble. Nothing new there.

“Please don't. Ask whatever you want, start whatever conversations you want. I can't speak for anyone else, but as far as I'm concerned? I don't need things to end as neatly as they started. They rarely do, anyway. It doesn't mean nothing was gained along the way. And just because... you don't know what to say after a while, it doesn't mean I'm drawing all sorts of incriminating conclusions about you. I'm not. I'm just happy you wanted to talk in the first place.”

“Contrary to what you may have witnessed in the past twenty-four hours, I do want to talk.” She smiles. “I'd kiss you if I wasn't driving,” Lena reaches out, covering her hand with her own. Maggie smiles, twining their fingers together. What are you doing? The thought snaps like a whip.

Maggie fights the urge to slam on the gas. She doesn’t want to go fast. She wants to go slow. Everything with Lena has been slow. She realizes she’s taking the scenic route, past the mountain bluff she used to visit with Kara. She remembers Kara lifting the pink sweater over her head. Don't think of her. Maybe she should. Is it wrong to think of her? Wrong not to?

They drive past the mountains, past the oceans.

“Do you like flying?” Maggie asks. “Air travel, more specifically.” Is that better or different than cars? Does she have a pilot’s license?

“You mean, as a passenger?”

“Yeah. Unless you have a pilot's license you’ve hidden away somewhere.”

“The Luthors do love their jets, so I actually do have a private pilot certification.”
Oh. Maybe it shouldn’t surprise her. “Do you use it?”

“Good poker face, Maggie. I’m just messing with you. I don’t have a license. The jets were one of the first things to go when I inherited the company. And no, I can’t say I like flying very much.”

“So you're not willing to fly me to some deserted island when I need to beat feet out of National City?” She tsks. “As I recall you had a choppy helicopter flight. Is that what did it?”

“Just ask Kara to give Supergirl a ring, she’ll fly you to your paradise island in no time. And she’s fast, I’m sure you’ll find the experience exhilarating. I’ll join you by boat. Two months later, but. And no, I never was particularly fond of flying even before the helicopter incident. I can somewhat forget I’m flying on a regular plane, but small aircrafts? Not my thing.”

“I'll ask Supergirl if I run into her in one of my crime scenes.” She smiles wryly. “How do you feel about bikes?”

Lena looks at her sheepishly. “Sorry, I’m not very comfortable on those, either.”

Maggie laughs. “But you'll host a press conference on the regular. You have an odd way of living dangerously.”

“Don’t forget potential explosions in the lab. So, is that what you like about riding a bike, going fast? The danger, I mean.”

“Sure. Who doesn't like adrenaline? Speed. It's the closest you can get to flying.” She smiles faintly. “Mh. But I suppose you know what that's like.”

She nods. “That’s true. A few of us in this city have had the pleasure to be rescued mid-air by an alien. Or flown away from a kryptonite nuclear blast.”

The night Kara nearly pulled her off the cliff. She flushes thinking of later on in the night, when Kara came through her window, broke her lamp, the green lines coursing over her skin. Supergirl in her bed. “Is that better than the plane? Flying with her? I'm glad Supergirl was there for you.”
She considers. “It’s different, for sure. I was passed out for most of the, uh, flight away from the nuclear blast. I was disoriented when I woke up, didn’t even realize we were flying for a while, and then I was too groggy to care. And when she caught me after I got pushed off the L-Corp balcony... That’s a very strange sensation, falling for that long. But then, here she was, and I was safe. She’s very careful.”

“I imagine you have to be when you're that strong.” She thinks of her rib and tells herself it won’t happen again. It was an accident. It’s different when it’s an accident. Kara has so much on her mind. She has the weight on the world on her shoulders. “Everything must be so fragile.”

She nods. “She wasn’t in great shape when she flew me away from the blast, and when we landed on my balcony? It was a little rough and the tiles cracked like they were just... a thin layer of ice. But the few times she’d landed at L-Corp before then? I couldn’t even hear her, it was so delicate. So that tells me everything must require constant, conscious fine tuning for the Supers. It’s fascinating.”

“It sounds exhausting. But I'm sure she has the best control of it that she can. Even if there are a few hiccups now and then.”

“We’ll never know what it’s like, I mean...” Lena leans forward, looking out the windshield. Maggie wonders if she’s searching for her. “To be powered by the sun. Photons, neutrinos... I can’t wrap my mind around it.”

“Do you think about that a lot? The science behind it? Or do you just enjoy her company?”

Lena settles back into the seat. “The science behind it certainly tickles my brain, yeah. And I wonder how advanced the society they lived in on their planet was, what we could learn from... even remnants. I don’t know if you’ve ever had a conversation with her, but there’s a seriousness there, a kind of... regal gravitas, and I wonder how much of it is her hero persona, how much is cultural heritage, how much is just her...” Maggie frowns lightly. “So, in that sense, I do enjoy her company. And she’s very insightful. Some of the things she’s told me have stayed with me. But we’re not friends, these aren’t... social calls, you know?”

“Sure. Supergirl and I have had a few chats. I think our relationship differs a little from yours.” To put it mildly. “But I like her. I believe in what she does. Usually anyway.”

“Means and ends...”
Maggie looks away from the sky, realizing she’s been looking for her, too. She glances at Lena. “I didn’t mean to go on about Supergirl. How did we get into this conversation? Moving fast? Flying.”

“Yes. So, in short: cars, buses and trains are my first choice. Big planes, I can make it work. Anything smaller, I’d rather avoid. Unless it’s wearing a cape, which means it’s probably saving my life again.” She smiles. “Now you know everything.”

“I doubt that. We can get you a bumper sticker: My other ride is Supergirl.” She smiles, feels her chest and stomach tighten, her cheeks hurt. She isn’t sure whether she wants to laugh or cry. They’re not together. They’re not together.

Lena snorts. “Why, so she can one day land in a huff on my balcony and demand to know why CatCo mag is peddling a fake star-crossed lovers story between a Super and a Luthor?” The words sit like lead in Maggie's stomach. This is all a joke. “I wouldn’t do that to her dignity. But... I might get myself a tee-shirt and a mug with that tagline printed on because it’s just too good to pass up.”

She smirks. “You'll have to show it off to the rest of us. And if we get Kara back at CatCo maybe we can get Supergirl's hot take before she gets huffy with you.” How does she not know? Why doesn’t she want to know?

“With my luck, if she’s back at CatCo when we unleash that rumor, Snapper will ask her to write the story, get an interview with Supergirl... what a soap opera. I wouldn’t mind that sort of press rather than the usual negativity. But for the sake of Kara’s journalistic integrity, I’ll stick to a tee-shirt and a mug.”

“Maybe you'll let me borrow it for when I'm at a crime scene. Maybe she'll take it easy on me and —” Give me a kiss instead of a hard time. Maggie’s only flown with Supergirl once. When she took her to Alex at the DEO to patch her up. Maggie barely remembers it. Lena waits. “Um. Maybe we’ll become friends.”

“Deal. I’m not sure Supergirl is meant to be anyone’s friend, but perhaps you’ll be the lucky exception.”

“Maybe I will.” Lena smiles, looks out the window. Maggie wonders what she’s thinking about, lets her thoughts drift as Lena strokes the back of her hand. “Barring any emergency, would it be okay to stop by for a coffee break on Monday?” That isn’t for another two days. “We can go for
“Of course. Just let me know when a little in advance, I think I have a ton of meetings and some of them aren’t even at L-Corp.”

“Look at your schedule and send me a text? If I can make it work, great. If not.” A shrug. “Some other time?”

Lena pulls out her phone. Mutters to herself. “Jesus Cassius, get a life.” Maggie smiles. “So... I have a meeting at 11:45, then a business lunch at 1:00pm, so I think... if you can drop by around 12:15, whatever time I have between the end of the meeting and having to leave the building is yours.”

Maggie looks over at the phone. “I think I can find a way to make that work. What’s Cassius doing this time?”

Lena looks at her with vacant eyes. “Existing. In my life.”

“Has Cassius done what no one else could? Defeat Lena Luthor? Tell me it isn't so.”

“I think I might retain my sanity if you allow me to regale you with the inevitably disastrous adventures of Phyllis. No, wait. What’s her name? Wallis? Anyway, the wife.”

“It’s Wallis, isn't it?” She can't remember having heard the name prior to the conversation. “Does Cassius have stock in your company? I can't imagine tolerating him otherwise. But yes, please regale me with stories of Wallis or Phyllis or whoever it is. And feel free to regale her with stories about the angry little detective, eager to take you out.” *To dinner, not a date.* Or a date. She sighs inwardly.

“He’s a patent infringement expert. An excellent one, tragically. Got the company out of a lot of tricky situations, long before I even worked there. And yes, I’ll make sure to tell her that I’m being hounded by an angry little detective who gives me rides home and occasionally asks for 15 minutes of my time. Do you like dogs?”

“So he has his uses. Too bad.” She crinkles her nose. “And who doesn't like dogs? You in the market to get one? Or are you more of a cat person?”
“Oh, I love both. But the only living creatures I have time to take care of are flowers and plants, I’m afraid. I will monitor the health of your next little bonsai closely, if you’re still willing to send me updates. And really, I only asked because the next time Phyl—Wallis calls, I’ll transfer the call to you and let her talk your ear off about whatever her infernal poodle Cleopatra is up to for thirty minutes. She made her an Instagram account. In character. She relieves herself absolutely everywhere. Cleopatra, not Phyllis.”

“Christ. She sounds like a handful. Wallis—mh. Both of them. I’ll stick to my bonsai trees. They’re quiet and they don’t piss everywhere. Not as catchy as a poodle’s Instagram account, though. You’ll share the link later, won’t you? I’ll send you pictures of the little bonsai. Whenever I get around to picking one up.” Maybe she shouldn’t. She hasn’t had much luck at keeping them alive. Maggie feels the phone vibrate in her pocket.

“Link sent.” Lena chuckles. “Wallis knows her stuff, though. She named the account Cleopatra Philopatent.” Maggie drives, listening to Lena go into laughing fits. She looks as Lena wipes under her glasses. “I’m sorry. She’s so funny.”

She’s adorable. Maggie smiles. “Send me the link to your Instagram account, too.”

“Only if I can follow back.”

“Oh. I don’t have one. There is an NCPD account I use to snoop, but I don’t have a personal account.”

“My account’s locked though, so I don’t think you can see anything if you don’t have one. But feel free to steal my phone whenever you like to peruse my account and Cleopatra’s latest feats.”

She’s never had an inclination to get an account despite her interest in photography. She’s never understood the appeal of social media. A means to connect to strangers, to invite people in, to reveal as much as you can about yourself. “I’ll create an account and follow you. I don’t need to post anything.”

“Just let me know what your username is so I can approve it. I get a lot of requests from god knows who every day.”

“How do they find your account?”
“It’s under my name. Verified, even, blue tick and all.”

“What do you upload? Do you have a lot of followers?”

“Oh no, I’m the weirdo with a blue tick and seven followers. I just post everyday things. Tiny things. To... keep track of what happens. The places I visit on business trips, my plants, the drinks I try out, my vinyls, what I cook...”

“Sounds intimate.”

Lena nods. “It’s mostly for me, you know? I could pay someone to develop a more PR oriented social media strategy, but... I don’t really want to.”

“Some people stalk celebrities just waiting for some kind of screw up.” She smiles faintly, thinking of Lena Luthor’s scandals. She doubts Instagram can put a damper on her reputation when the rest haven’t. She realizes with some sadness that they’re getting closer to Lena’s.

Lena looks around. “All the screwups they’re getting from me are culinary ones.” She points. “You can park in this street, right there to the right. There are always free spots.”

“Culinary screw ups?” She pulls over and finds a space, leans back against the car seat.

“Kara and I have been known to get... over ambitious in the kitchen. But the good thing about culinary screwups is that they might not look pretty, but they almost always taste good anyway.”

She cooked eggs with Kara the morning she told her about Darla. They didn’t cook before then. They haven’t cooked since. “Do you two cook together a lot?”

Lena nods. Smiles. Maggie tells herself to not feel the knot in her stomach. “Not every time, but... more and more. She got me back into it, she took to it too... She almost burned down my kitchen a month ago.”
Kara didn’t tell her she nearly burned down Lena’s kitchen. Her mouth is dry. They’re not dating. Why does she still feel this way? “That sounds like her.” She smiles, shakes her head, draws a breath.

Lena leans on the armrest, shows Maggie her phone. “So, that’s her face after I... because she always slings whatever dish towel she’s using over her shoulder, you know? And she was leaning against the stove, telling me about... amoebas, I think, and the end of the towel caught fire, and she didn’t even notice.” She snorts. Maggie finds herself smiling. Why would Supergirl notice a little thing like fire? Maggie isn’t sure if it makes her sad. “I mean, I wasn’t laughing at the time but all of a sudden there was this huge flame and she was still rambling about sea life when I grabbed the nearest vase, threw the flowers away and emptied it on her. The picture is her... thirty seconds later. I don’t think I’ve ever laughed so hard.” She catches her breath. “Sorry, it’s just... she’s funny.”

Kara’s funny. Is Kara funny? Is Kara funny with Lena? Do they have a different sense of humor? Is Kara easier with Lena? She fights the sadness edging inside. There’s no reason for it. Kara is funny. She says... funny, odd, sweet things. Maggie looks at the picture, Kara dripping wet and she still looks... amused. Light. “And you've immortalized it. For posterity.” Maggie continues to stare at the picture. She hasn’t seen Kara like this before. She wonders if Kara would mind that she’s seen this picture, if it’s as scandalous as showing her some piece of her heart. She decides not to mention it to her.

“She wants the four of us to have dinner and movie night at her place as soon as things are better with Alex.”

“Kara does?” She considers. “Alex called me.” She doesn’t know what about yet. She wonders if she should listen to the message. “I'll have to get back to her. Maybe things will be better soon.” But it’s hard to believe that things could ever be all right between them.

Lena kisses the back of her hand. “I think they might. She and Kara already had a... Danvers sisters movie night, as they call them, a couple days ago. Now, she’s calling you.”

Maggie looks at her. “And she'll call you. I know it.” She sighs inwardly. “It'll be nice. The four of us.”

Lena smiles. “She’ll do what she has to do in order not to have any regrets, one way or the other. And, you know...” She shrugs. “I think, for once, it might actually be nice. That dinner. Kind of a... peace offering of sorts. To ourselves.”

A peace offering to themselves. She can’t tell them how she misunderstood, how everything
spiraled as a result. It’s better to let them have their peace, to swallow her stupid mistakes and
smile. “We’ll plan it out.” A silence passes. They can’t put parting off forever. “So, here we are.”
She kisses Lena’s hand. “Thank you for... last night. Today.”

Lena palms her cheek, gives her a brief kiss. “I know we’ll probably see each other on Monday, or
during the week at least, but do you...” Maggie waits. Lena swallows. “Would you like to do that
again?” They watch each other apprehensively. “Spend time together outside the office, that is. Or
was it just a one time thing?”

She wishes she could talk to Kara. She wishes she could tell Lena. Get advice from Alex. She takes
seconds, tests her jaw. Her decisions are her own. “Yes. I’d like to do that again.” She tugs at
resistance, feels like a rubber band. She looks hard at Lena. Her fingers wrap around Lena’s
seatbelt. She leans forward and kisses her. The heavy thoughts fly, scattering like a flock of birds at
approach. They kiss languidly, forgetting any passerby, losing themselves in the kiss. The car is
getting warm.

Lena pulls away slightly but they remain close, Maggie catching her breath while Lena battles with
the armrest between them. Lena gives her a long-suffering glance. Maggie smiles, lifts it up,
undoes her seatbelt, undoes Lena’s, pulls close, joining their lips.

Maggie rests a hand lightly on Lena’s neck, feels Lena’s arms slip to her waist, tug her shirt out of
her pants, her hand slipping beneath, resting against her skin. Maggie’s fingers press carefully to
the nape of Lena’s neck, deepening their kiss. She thinks of gasoline sparking, chasing, racing
faster. Minutes pass. Maybe more. It goes too fast. Eventually she breaks the kiss, leans in again
before catching herself, bowing her head, smiling. “See you later, Lena.”

“Yeah.” Lena pulls her close for another kiss. Once more she gives in to it, to her. “Thanks for the
ride. For the night. For staying.” Lena strokes her cheek. Maggie turns her face to kiss her palm.
“Can I open the door myself and preserve my dignity or is it the one that gets stuck?”

Maggie smiles. “I’ll get it. Just to be safe.” She gives her another brief kiss, exiting the car into the
cold, taking the steps slowly, her fingers closing around the door handle, pressing her knee into the
car, lifting the door and pulling. “Tada.” She takes her hand, helping her out, memorizing her this
way, the glasses, cheeks flushed, her response to her, happy. She can’t help another kiss. She can’t
stop smiling. Lena hugs her, nestling her face in her neck. For moments Maggie holds her, arms
locked around her before the tension begins its creep. She takes Lena’s face in her hands, kisses her
again before forcing herself to relinquish her, making herself walk away. She laughs. If she doesn’t
leave, she could be here forever. “Bye.”

“Bye. See you Monday?”
“I’ll count the hours.” She gets into the car, slamming the door shut. Lena remains where she stands and Maggie starts the car again, lifting a hand. Lena waves back. Maggie smiles and goes. She turns the radio off. The streets are relatively empty. The car is growing cold again. She frowns, rolling the windows down, letting the air numb her. What’s Kara doing? Alex doing? How’s Lena feeling? Her muscles tense as she drives. She slams on the gas, the heavy thoughts hurtling back to her the further and faster she goes.
Part 1/2

Chapter Notes

A/N: and we're back with another short chapter. so short, in fact, that we had to split it. this is Part 1/2, but Part 2/2 is pretty much written and you'll get it soon. in the meantime, here's Who Wrote What for Part 1:

- the_diversionist: everything from Maggie or Alex's point of view, their dialogue/body language in other scenes, Kara's phone call with Maggie
- sparklefox: everything from Kara's point of view, her dialogue/body language in other scenes, Lena's dialogue on the phone

X

Maggie still remembers the fragrance of soap on Lena’s skin. Lavender. It was only hours ago but every time she shifts, raising her fingers to the scar on her forehead, she smells it on her skin, too. Soap. A simple scent. It can trigger memories. You smell so good, Lena said the night Maggie stopped by at L-Corp. It’s just soap.

Now they share that scent. Lavender. She’s not willing to relinquish it. Not yet. If she’s still and closes her eyes, she can almost remember the exact pressure of Lena’s lips against her own. She only has tendrils of her voice, but she plays them over in her mind like a recording. They’re friends. It’s nice to have a friend. Kara and Lena are friends, too. Not like she and Lena are.

That tightness in her chest again. She runs a hand over her face. She never wanted this fucking open relationship. She never wanted to venture outside of what she had with Kara. Alex is a ‘what if’. Maybe Alex will always be a ‘what if’. The timing was wrong between them, but timing is important. It can make and undo everything. She knows that Lena inspires Kara. To inspire is to fill a person’s lungs with air, making them come alive. Kara and Lena make each other so happy. Is it so strange to have thought they were together? The conclusion wasn’t illogical given what she knew.

Maggie sits on the couch, thinking about them. She’s missed other things. Heightened emotions have made her think less objectively. She was wrong about Lena from the beginning. She let the media narrative and the boys at the station have too much influence over her thoughts. She allowed her jealousy over Lena’s relationship with Kara to color the situation. She thinks of the color of Lena’s eyes.

She thinks about Alex. It took too long to put things together. Her mind gridlocked and refused to
accept that ‘Just Kara’, could be related to Danvers. If she’d figured it out early on they might have avoided… everything. It took her too long to put Kara and Supergirl together. Sometimes eyes refuse to see and other times they see things that were never there.

Kara and Lena have never been a couple. *But you’ve gone to bed with Lena.* She has. It’s done. It can’t be undone. It can’t be unknown. She thinks of Lena’s hand gripping her own, of future adventures. Is Lena thinking about any of this? Has she returned to her normal existence because she didn’t have an atomic bomb dropped on her? They’ll see each other Monday for a coffee break. They’ll talk. Touch. Through the guilt, she wants to do both.

She thinks of Kara. It’s been days since they’ve talked or touched. She gave Kara a ride home. They discussed Supergirl and Krypton, about Lena not ever finding out about Supergirl, on ways for Kara to show Maggie she loves her. Maybe it’s unfair to ask. Kara says she loves her but she doesn’t owe her love. No one is owed love. Everyone expresses things differently. Lena doesn’t love her but she’s warm, giving. Kara gives in other ways. To the world. She gives in other ways.

Maggie calls her. Will Kara hear her heart racing from a distance? Will she pick up on the frequencies in her voice? Do her senses make her a sentient lie detector? Handy for work, but maybe awful in every other circumstance. Will Kara know, somehow? Maggie’s cold. Kara hasn’t been with Lena but still didn’t care if Maggie was. When will Kara talk to Lena about how she feels? Will she ever? Maybe being Supergirl makes it more difficult. Will it make it impossible? What if Lena finds out the truth? Kara’s talking on the other end.

“Hey,” Maggie hears the smile in Kara’s voice, soft and gentle, and is calmed. “How are you?”

“Good.” *I want to die and I am a terrible girlfriend.* She has to shake the thoughts off. *This is an open relationship. This isn’t wrong.* “I’ve been thinking about you.”

“You have?”

“I have.” She digs a hand in her hair, pulls her legs onto the couch. Kara used to come over. They would sit with their heads in each other’s laps, talking about their day. She never thought she’d miss the days of that Mxy imp, Valentine’s Day and renegade geese. Kara was bothered by Alex seeing Lena, and Maggie was bothered that Kara was bothered. But Kara looked beautiful in that Vera Wang wedding dress. She remembers the small tab between her fingers, drawing it down, her fingers trailing down Kara’s back. No one has softer skin than Kara. “So, what’s new in the world of Kara Danvers? Your world, not that other one.”

“Hm, they’re both my world. But I have been spending more time thinking about Kara Danvers,
and not ‘that other one’. I probably shouldn’t talk about myself in the third person.”

Maggie smiles. “I won’t tell if you don’t. What kind of things have you been thinking about?”

“Lots of things. For example, that I’d like to be employed again?” She laughs softly. “When I lost my job I thought, I don’t know. I could find… something positive about it. I needed to. Finding the good in something is… it’s better than being sad. Being a reporter at CatCo just meant so much to me.”

Maggie chews on the inside of her lower lip. Kara came to her that day to tell her she’d been fired. In return Maggie told her about Darla. Is that when things began to shift? It’s her fault Kara doesn’t tell her as much as before. Maybe it’s hard for Kara to trust her. “Yeah. I know it did.”

“But I didn’t want to sulk. I don’t like to dwell on negative things. I don’t think it’s good for me.”

Maggie bites her tongue. “So I thought I could use that time to focus on the finer things in life. Reading and museums and catching up on all of those movies I’d missed when I had a full time job and you know, the work of ‘that other one’. Spending time with Lena and…” Maggie smiles faintly. “My painting. Because art… and culture, all the ‘humanities’. That’s what being human is about. Some days it feels really important to hold on to that. I really like Kara Danvers. Even if I can’t always make sense of her.”

“I really like her, too.” Even if she can’t always make sense of her, either. “But… I mean, Kara, you know that who you are is…” she thinks. “You’re not human and that’s okay.” There’s a long silence and she doesn’t know if that’s what she should have said. It’s true. Is it wrong? There’s a reason she prefers aliens to humans on most days. “I just—I love you the way you are. And of course you should explore all those things that interest and move you… It’s… I mean, you’re more human than most humans.” She’s rambling. Maybe she’s insulting her. She grimaces, embarrassed. “So, you’re looking for work?”

“Yes,” Kara perks, perhaps eager to move on. “Well, in a way. There are a few things I’m … turning my attention to. And that’s all I’m willing to say about it right now.”

“Maybe you’ll tell me sometime.”

“I— yes, I’d like to.” Her voice changes again, as if she’s just woken up. “But you called me for a reason and I went off on a tangent. Sorry.”
“I like your tangents.” Kara laughs. Was it funny? There’s something young about her laughter. Something innocent about it. It’s different from naïveté. She doesn’t think Kara is naïve. “Um.” Her palms are sweaty. She switches the phone to the other hand and wipes her hand on her pant leg. “I was thinking it would be nice if I could see you this weekend. If you have time.” She bites her tongue, continues. “We don’t see each other enough.”

“Oh.” She considers and Maggie wonders where the surprise came from. “I have some free time in a few hours if you want me to stop by then?”

Maggie considers. Too soon. She touches her neck gingerly, licks her lips. Smells lavender again. She hasn’t been out of bed with Lena even six hours yet. She gets up, runs a hand through her hair, exhaling softly. “I can’t today.” She wasn’t expecting for Kara to agree to meet her at all. Why is that? “Sorry, that’s my fault. I should have been clearer. I have… I just have a few things to take care of.” Thoughts to sort out. “Can we try for tomorrow morning?”

“I will pencil you into my day planner. Or I would, if I could find it. I packed it into a box a few months ago when I left CatCo. I should look for it. But I’ll remember. Tomorrow morning it is.”

“Great.” She doesn’t know if she’s relieved or afraid. Some part of her thought that once Kara was with Lena Luthor, a decision would be made. Kara would stay or go. She thought the decision had been made and Kara had chosen to stay because she felt a connection to her. But that’s not true. Kara and Lena aren’t together. Not yet. And when they are…? Kara will go. Lena will go. They’ll move on. She shakes the thoughts. She’ll focus on the moments. On the present. On surviving seconds. That’s all she can do. “Hey. I can’t wait to see you, Kara.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow morning. Have a good night, Maggie.”

“Goodnight. I—” but Kara’s already hung up the phone.

X

In the sunlight the defects of the apartment are glaring. The last time Kara visited it was a rainy, foggy day. The light was milky and wan and helped to mask some of the imperfections. Or maybe that’s what guilt and fear feel like. Today is different. The sun highlights the cracks in the blinds, the scuff on the kitchen counters, the laminate paneling peeling at the corners. Maggie makes a face, tracks down some crazy glue and pins down the paneling, pressing her hand hard into it until the corners of the counter make indentations on her palm. The apartment feels like a mockery of Kara’s. The noir vibe it has at night, if one is being generous, doesn’t translate in the daylight.
Once the counter laminate has been set she moves around the apartment. She sees the slanted nail on the wall, frowns, and leaves it there. She looks at the couch. It’s old and worn but soft and comfortable. It isn’t as nice Lena’s office couch or Kara’s. It was left behind from the previous tenant. She got a steam cleaner just in case, but her lips thin, unsure if it should have been replaced. Company is more unusual than not. She left everything behind in Gotham outside of what she could fit in her car. She didn’t even fill her car. She left so much behind. She always brings the suitcase. Everything else is lost. Some things can be replaced.

She looks around the apartment. Everything’s been dusted. She likes to keep up with cleaning. The space is neat, and still she can’t shake her nerves. Will Kara know or care what’s happened between Lena and her? Has Lena already told her? She wrings her hands, stops once she notices she’s doing it.

She takes a hot shower, thinks of Lena’s weight against her. What would Lena’s weight feel like against Kara? The same as her weight? How much is Kara able to fine tune and differentiate? Does Kara even think about stuff like that? She exits the showers, dries off, putting on jeans and a light sweater.

She thumbs through her phone. They didn’t decide on an exact time to meet. She realizes with some alarm that she has a better sense of when Lena gets up than when Kara does. Not that ‘getting up’ is the right way to put it, necessarily. When she starts her day. It was easier when Kara was at CatCo. These days it’s harder to tell. There’s a new text message from Murphy.

Murphy 1:47am: Did you fingerblast her?

There’s an emoji of fingernails having nail polish applied to them.

Maggie deletes the text. She’d hate for Kara to pick up the phone and think—well. That it’s about anyone, really. Idiot. She looks through her picture gallery and sees the shot of the tulips. The composition leaves a lot to be desired, but it’s to be expected from the hit and run shot she took. There’s a blur as if they were in motion. The thin white curtains billow behind the tulips. Maggie stares at the picture feeling that same icy shower sink into her, followed by a shot of heat.

Kara’s coming by soon. She goes to the fridge, anxious to see whether there’s orange juice to offer her. There isn’t. A near empty container of almond milk sits on the top shelf, accompanied by two apples. She thinks she can run to the corner shop and pick up a few items when she hears a knock. Maggie shuts the refrigerator and heads to the door.
Kara stands bright and pristine against the ugly light and dull colors of the hallway. There’s a new crack in the stairwell wall. Kara’s carrying two coffees. Maggie blanches, recovers quickly. “Hi. Good morning,” she keeps a hand on the doorknob, leans forward to kiss her cheek. It’s warm. “Come in.” Kara does. Maggie shuts the door. “You didn’t have to pick up coffee.”

“I got off the bus a couple of blocks from here and walked past this coffee shop, so I thought... this one is a regular latte and that one is a caramel macchiato.”

She doesn’t drink either, preferring bitter, darker roasts to sweeter and creamier drinks. Fitting, maybe. She brought coffee and you’re going to drink coffee. Even if they’ve never had coffee before, and she now realizes she’s come to associate it with Lena. But coffee is a tradition. It’s everywhere. It’s without meaning. Accessible to everyone. She won’t think of work. She won’t think of Lena. She can recontextualize. “Those sound amazing. Thank you,” Kara smiles brightly. The smile of a person who took a chance and was rewarded. “If you have a preference I’ll have the other one.”

“They spelled my name wrong on both cups. But differently.”

Not exactly an answer to her question but Kara doesn’t seem attached to either. “I’ll take the caramel macchiato, if you don’t have a preference.” This drink is furthest from anything she might regularly have. It’s hot in her hand and she switches it to the other one, lamenting the absence of a cardboard cup holder. Has Kara noticed the drinks are scalding? Maggie looks at the name on her cup, big and loopy. “Keira, huh?” She thinks of the few times she’s gotten a ‘Patty’ or ‘Tammy’ on her drink orders. “Thanks for coming by.”

“It’s weird, because Keira sounds different, right? Ms. Grant was doing it on purpose, but that barista has no excuse. The only spelling mistake I’m fine with is Cara, with a C, because that’s more common and also, Lena told me it means beloved in Italian. I like that it means something beautiful on Earth. My name.” Kara looks at her own cup. “Anyway,” she kisses Maggie’s cheek. “Cheers?”

“Cheers.” She smiles, has a drink, burns her tongue. She uncaps it, hoping it’ll cool down this century. “And it is beautiful. It’s a good fit for you.”

Kara has a drink of her coffee and Maggie wonders whether she likes it after all. “Do you like that you’re named after a flower?”

“Is that the origin?” Ven aquí, Margarita. Margarita. Margaret. Flowers. Too feminine for her, maybe. Misleading for her parents. Maybe they chose it with heavy expectations. Names. She
wonders if it’s the kind of thing Lena and Kara talk about. Names must be important to people like
them. Maybe less so for her. They would have taken it, she thinks, if they could have. “No, I guess
I don’t like it. How’s the coffee?”

Kara licks her lips, as if trying to scrub the taste away. “I don’t know. It’s... like they burned the
flavor out of it? And yes, I think Margaret is Italian and French for daisy. Being named after a
flower is lovely. In my opinion. But so is being named after a pizza, you know? Margueritas are
great, when done right.”

Marguerita, different than Margarita, from Margaret, different than Maggie. Only her parents
called her Margarita. After she moved in with her aunt she didn’t hear it again. It was almost as if it
would have been sacrilege to use a name for a person no longer associated with the family. When
she came home one afternoon insisting on ‘Maggie’ her aunt went along with it. It would be one of
her easier battles. “Isn’t all pizza great when done right?” For the most part, anyway. Kara’s
looking at her expectantly. “Uh. I wonder if Mom and Dad knew that when they picked my name
out.” She shrugs. “We can trade coffees if you don’t like that one.”

Kara shakes her head. “It won’t make a difference.” Maggie’s readying to ask about her taste buds
when Kara continues. “Maybe they picked it because of Saint Margaret? I read that she’s the
patron of expectant mothers, and the legend says she escaped from a dragon.”

She doesn’t want to talk about why her parents chose her name. She doesn’t want to talk about
them at all, even if indirectly. She shouldn’t have mentioned them. “Escaping from a dragon
sounds pretty impressive.” She has another drink of the coffee. It’s like swallowing spoonfuls of
sugar. At molten lava temperature. Why did Kara pick this for her? To be nice. But, at least she
knows now that Lena doesn’t talk to Kara about the kind of coffee she drinks. “So, how have you
been? Let's sit.” She takes Kara’s hand, tugging on it gently.

Kara follows and sits. “Sure. And Alex? I think we can trace her name back to Alexander the
Great, and it would be so fitting. Bold, a little reckless, always moving forward into the unknown.”
She sets the coffee on the coffee table and takes her jacket off. “And I’m good, I’ve been— Oh,
and Lena? That either comes from Helena, you know, like Helen of Troy? Starting wars because of
her great beauty.” Kara laughs. Maggie holds her coffee tighter. “Or Magdalena. The prostitute
part of that story doesn’t quite fit but being hounded and shunned for who she is? Well. Either
works, really.” She clasps her hands in her lap. “What about you? I mean, what’s up?”

Some of the tension dulls and she wonders if they’re ready to move on from family legacies and
names, from the talk of families. “You’re like a walking encyclopedia. I’m great. I just wanted to
see you. You never told me how you are, by the way. You distracted yourself before you
finished.” She has another lump of sugar.
“I’m... the same, I think? Unless something big is going down I try to take the weekends off. From DEO things, I mean. I know it doesn’t matter but it’s nice to recreate a more normal schedule, you know? Easier to meet up with all of you, too. So yesterday, I just went for a walk all afternoon. I came across an old theater showing a bunch of classics, so I went in on a whim and saw a movie.” What movie, she wonders. Did Lena go with her? “Oh and speaking of movies, Alex called me a couple of days ago to have a movie night with me. We hadn’t done that in a while.”

“I think it’s a great idea to take weekends off. You can have some ‘me’ time. And maybe the two of us can meet up. Plan out a date, you know?” She hasn’t asked since Kara declined her every invitation the day Kara was in a bad mood. Or bored. Or uninterested. The day she decided she told her she intended to go the exhibit with Lena instead. Maybe she’s been sensitive. Maybe she doesn’t want to think of how every rejection stung. Kara says nothing about the date. “Um. Things with Alex are okay?”

“Between Alex and I? Yeah, I think so. We had a nice, quiet time. She needed it, from what I could tell.”

And still no acknowledgment on the date. Is it wrong that Lena served as a reminder to try again? She debates what’s worse: Kara shooting down her every suggestion or Kara ignoring the question was posed to begin with. Let it go. She has to. “That’s great about Alex. She's crazy about you.”

“Yeah, I love her too. Are things a little better between the two of you?”

“I don't know yet.” She’ll listen to the voicemail. Maybe it’s nothing.

Kara nods. “So... did you have a nice day yesterday? You sounded like you could use some rest on the phone.”

The memory of soap seems to waft by her. The sensation of a seatbelt sliding along the palm of her hand. Kissing until her lips were tender. The revelation that knocked the air out of her. “It was good.” I spent Friday night into Saturday with the woman you’re in love with. Her stomach feels hollowed again. She wonders if they’ll ever have normal conversations when Lena’s involved, or if they’ll do this little dance until one of them explodes. “I had a few things to take care of.” She gives a small shrug.

“Good, um... Do you want to...” She looks around. Maggie doesn’t know whether she’s glad Kara hasn’t asked. Is Kara trying to be polite? Has she sensed some discomfort? Like she did with the name etymology a few minutes ago? More likely, it hasn’t occurred to her to ask. Maggie thinks she’s grateful Kara hasn’t asked but isn’t sure. Will she ever ask? “Do you want to watch a movie? 
Or go for a walk, maybe?’

She can’t remember the last time Kara took the initiative to ask her out when it wasn’t a response to something Maggie complained about. Maggie tries not to think about it. She doesn’t want to be needy. “Let’s go for a walk.” She finishes the rest of her coffee, reaches for Kara’s cup. “Do you want me to throw yours out? You shouldn’t finish it if you don’t like it.”

Kara looks at her as if in a daze. Where are you, Kara? Maggie waits. “Oh, I just... it’s not like I need the caffeine and...” Kara rubs her eyes. “Anyway, yes, unless you want it. I don’t think I’ll finish it.”

Maggie takes the cup, emptying what’s left into the sink, watching the color drain. She runs water to clear what remains and throws the cups into the recycling bin. She looks at the counter. The edge is peeling up again. She turns back to Kara. “You okay?”

“I think so, yeah. It’s just... I’ve started painting again and it’s given me a lot to think about.” Maggie thinks of Lena’s picture by the easel. Inspiration. Kara waves it away before Maggie can ask. “I’m working on it. Are you good to go? Maybe you should wear a jacket or something, some people outside even had scarves.” Kara slips into her jacket.

Maggie takes one of her own off the hook by the door. “What have you been thinking about?”

“All sorts of things.” Kara opens the door for her. “The color spectrum, mostly.”

Maggie steps out into the hallway, waiting for Kara to join her. She doesn’t like the light here. It’s drab. Unbecoming. Nothing that would give Kara a kick. She waits for Kara to shut the door behind her before locking it. “What about the color spectrum?”

Kara starts down the stairs, her fingers tapping the banister along the way. “I think I see a lot more of it than you do. Than people do. More values, more shades. And it got me thinking about... there’s no way to know what anyone else sees when I paint. I’ll only know what I see. And then I thought, duh, it’s how it always is from one person to another. But it’s still... strange. To paint knowing that. And I’ve been working on... I guess it could be called a monochrome for short, but it’s really hard to tell how big the gap is between what I see, and what others see. So I’m not sure how to get to where I want, for people to see what I want them to see. That’s what I’m working on.”
Maggie considers, wondering how stark the differences are when they look at the same artwork. Does it enhance the work? Does it enhance flaws? Is the world more beautiful or ugly to her? She suspects beautiful. “That sounds tricky.” She takes the steps down. “Do you think if you... I mean, is there any literature you can look into?” Maybe that robot at the Fortress of Solitude or the Alura hologram. She doesn’t know how to help. How can she? “Or... you know. Something left behind... from your family.”

Kara scrunches her forehead. “I don’t... sure. So if, say, there was some kind of kryptonian Google in the Fortress, which there kind of is, what would you search for?”

“I’m not sure. But Jeremiah made you those glasses, right? And that helped. And there are glasses now for colorblind people so they can see normally or close to. Kryptonians are more advanced. So... if they have any kind of... I don't know, database on human physiology and kryptonian physiology... there must be a way to... shift things, like with your glasses— or.” She’s embarrassed. It’s embarrassing to ask a kryptonian to come down to their level. It seems unfair, somehow, to suggest she handicap herself so she can see like they do. “I don’t know. If you can find something... you may have a better sense of what you're looking to come up with. Closer maybe to how we see.”

Kara thinks. “I’ll look into it. Well, not from the Fortress, just what we have at the DEO. That’s a good idea.” She smiles over at her. “Thanks, Maggie.”

Maybe she’s not a complete insensitive clod after all. She feels warm. It’s a different heat than shame. She smiles back. “Anytime. Let me know if you come up with anything. I hope you do.”

Kara nods. “So... have you been to any galleries or somewhere like that lately?”

She goes to the front door, cringing at the squeak of the hinges. Kara steps out. Maggie catches up, walking alongside of her. “Not recently.” She’s felt sensitive about shows since the postcard conversation with Kara. She’s been busy with work, coffee breaks... Debating whether she should try to ask Kara again somewhere else. Somewhere new. “Any shows you're looking forward to?” She lifts a hand to Kara’s arm, hooks it through, bites the inside of her lower lip, feels so nervous. “Is this okay?”

Kara looks at their arms and back to her. “Of course. You don’t have to ask, you know?” She’s not sure she does know. This intimacy seems egregious for them. “I mean, it’s thoughtful and I appreciate it but from now on, you don’t need to.” Maggie nods, unsure whether they’ll ever reach a point where they can be so brazen in their affection, at least publicly. Kara fiddles with her glasses with her free hand. “And no, no temporary exhibit I’m interested in at the moment. But I like hanging out in museums even when I know the permanent collections. It’s relaxing.” Maggie puts that away, wonders what collections she likes best, wondering, if she knew, if she’d
understand why. “But for now I’m just... mostly reading art books, researching stuff.”

“Anything in particular you're looking into?”

“Yeah, anything to do with... monochromes. That sounds a little reductive, but that’s the idea. Values of a given color.”

“You’ll have to show me what you come up with.” She looks at her, away, wishes she’d listened to Emily more, wishes she had something more to contribute. Maybe this is why Kara prefers the museums with Lena. She tells herself she’ll go to the library, pick up a book on monochromes. She’ll invest. Learn. She’ll make conversation.

“I will. Hm...” Seconds pass in silence. Maggie focuses on the cold of the air, hoping it’ll penetrate, squinting her eyes, paranoid that tears will come. *It’s not the two of you. It’s guilt. You took something that belonged to her.* But Lena’s a person. She can’t take what is offered. She can only accept it. “How is your injury? The one from work.”

She blinks. What work injury? “Oh. It’s better.” She smiles with relief. She thinks of their communication. Maybe that’s why she’s felt adrift. The broken rib made it near impossible to be physical with Kara. Maybe she should have pushed past the pain. But would it have been better to follow through and reveal something in her expression? Something that would hurt Kara? *It’s over now. One time fluke.* “So...” She wishes she had an affinity for words like Lena does, thinks of the words that she’s so often let die in her throat. “So... we can spend more time together... you know, when you want.” She dares a look at her.

Kara looks at her, off. “You mean... sleeping together, right?”

“Well... not only that. Obviously not only that.” She realizes she’s clamped her arm more tightly around hers but Kara hasn’t noticed. “But that's not bad either. I'm sorry, should I not have said that? It's just that last time... Or recently I've had to pull away. But it was only because of the injury.” She looks ahead to the distance, wondering if she prefers her own dull vision of cloudy day, if it would be heightened if her vision was more like Kara’s. If they could see eye to eye. Wasn’t it sunny only minutes ago? It’s frightening how swiftly clouds can roll in.

“You can say what you want. And really, I don’t... you can want what you want, too. Or not want what you don’t want. And I trust you on both. Just let me know, and you don’t have to explain, you know?” Maggie walks with her, trying to make sense of it, feeling stupid, needing a translator, trying to decipher if Kara just doesn’t want her to communicate anything. “I mean, unless you feel you should but... I trust you.”
She doesn’t understand. She takes a breath and tries to turn her attention to what she can understand. Kara trusts her. After the Darla fiasco, that’s big. After Lena, that’s big. “I trust you too, Kara. Look, I know we don’t always see eye to eye but... I love you. I... I just want us to want the same things. At least some of the time. And by that I mean... Yes, I enjoy making love to you. And I hope you like it, too. But I like this too. Just being with you. Talking.”

Kara blinks. “Sure. You wouldn’t be here if you didn’t want to be. That’s what I mean.”

Then she does know. They walk in silence for a while. "Do you ever think of that cliff we used to go to?" They went on their late night drives when Kara was the eccentric nerd blonde she met on the National City streets after the disaster. What would their lives have been if she’d just kept driving instead of offering a ride because of the rain? But she didn’t. They went up and talked about relationships. They kissed. It felt daring somehow, even if in thinking of the things she’s experienced, those moments with Kara were chaste and a little clumsy. “I miss going there with you.”

“No, I’m sorry.” Oh. She looks down at their feet, at their steps. They’re both walking. Somehow she’s still walking. Is it because Kara’s holding her upright? “I haven’t thought about it in a while.” Her throat is tight and dry. “But we could go now, if you want. Maybe... go to the store, get some things for lunch and enjoy the view.”

It doesn’t matter to Kara. That place. Those memories. They’re not worth storing. Her vision blurs and then it returns to normal. She forces herself to breathe again. The previous days have heightened everything. She’s overly sensitive. “No. It's okay.”

“Are you sure?” Her voice is… “It could be nice. Make some new memories up there, you know?”

But the newer memories can’t be better. They were better then. Freer, maybe. Hopeful. They can’t be better. Not when things feel like this. Not when Maggie knows it meant nothing to her. She realizes that the cliff has been painted with some broad stroke of indifference. She has to say something. “What do you think about?”

“What I... You mean, in general?”

“With us. With memories of us. You don't think about the cliff.” She tells herself it’s fine. “Is there anything you think about?”
“Oh, like things I only associate with you?” She nods. “Yes, of course there are.”

“Like what?”

“That’s really...” She licks her lips. “Private. It’s nothing bad but it’s very... and it wouldn’t sound like much, but to me it means a lot.”

“Yeah. Okay.” Her fingers brush over the scar on her forehead. Breathes. Maybe there’s nothing for Kara to say. Maybe it’s impossible to leave a mark on the girl of steel. Maybe Kara Danvers just doesn’t care about her. *Maybe you’re inferring what isn’t there.* Seconds pass, Maggie listening to their footsteps. Does Kara drown in sounds when she needs space…? When she has to disappear?

“Making me feel like... a woman,” Kara says. “That’s what I associate with you. You’re the first person who made me feel that way. There will never be another first.”

Maggie looks at her. Her sensible hairstyle. Her eyes the color of robin’s eggs. The perpetual rose of her cheeks. That little line that cuts into her brow when she’s thinking. Maggie feels, once more, that she’s taken something that wasn’t hers to take. A sacrifice instead of an offering. Kara’s private thoughts. Those things Kara wants to guard. She knows how hard it is to give those things. It hurts to look at Kara. Maggie’s hurt her. She looks away. “I don’t know what to say. It probably sounds...” Words. Words. She thinks of that Valentine’s Day card. Language. Words. Poetry. All those things associated with romance, things she came to reject. She wishes she hadn’t now. “When I met you, I couldn’t get you out of my head. I felt this...” There is no word at the tip of her tongue. She doesn’t have it. What she has is a feeling and maybe some feelings are impossible to capture in words. “Craving.” Is that the word...? It has a sexual connotation. Maybe the word should have been ‘hunger’. For the... strangeness she radiates, for her soft gaze. Her curiosity. When Kara asked questions about her, not circumstances, current events. For her kindness. It spilled out of her. Her beauty. *Tell her.* No. She can’t put it in the right way. Lena could say it properly.

Kara looks at her thoughtfully. Nods.

She didn’t say it the right way. “What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking... well wondering, rather, why you’re telling me this. I don’t mind, I just wonder if you needed to say it for yourself, or for me... That’s what I’m thinking.”
“I thought we were just talking.”

“We are, of course, maybe I worded that wrong, I meant…” She runs a hand through her hair, tilts her head up to look at the sky for a second. Maggie wonders if she’s exasperated. If she’s asking Rao for patience. “I didn’t mean, why are we talking. I meant that you seemed to need to know if I have any particular, positive associations with us, and I told you one, but I didn’t… I don’t think I have the same… concerns as you. I know you love me. I know you have good memories of us. I don’t need confirmation.” Maggie’s jaw tenses. It’s okay. Breathe. Just breathe. “So like I said, I don’t mind you telling me what I was to you when we met, and early on, but I wondered if you thought I needed to hear it, or if you were the one who needed to say it. But I wouldn’t have asked, it was just a thought, and not necessarily one I felt like I could articulate. But you asked what I was thinking.”

Her tongue feels thick. Her mouth numb. She can’t feel anything when she speaks. “It was… it was just something I wanted to share with you.” She shakes her head. She feels crazy. “But never mind.” Never mind sharing things with her girlfriend.


“Never mind because… because sometimes I just say things Kara, and I don’t… have a motivation. I think about us a lot. And sometimes I wonder if…” she runs out of air, out of words. Now she sighs. She rubs at her forehead. Ask whatever you want, start whatever conversations you want. I’m just happy you wanted to talk in the first place. Her eyes sting. She closes them a moment. Kara isn’t Lena. Lena isn’t Kara. She doesn’t want Lena to be Kara. She doesn’t want Kara to be Lena. And yet…

“I’m listening.” Kara glances at her. “If you want to finish that sentence, I mean.”

“I don’t know how to finish it without sounding… unfair.” She smiles tightly, but feels her lip quiver. She quickly forces a smile. “Forget it. I’m just being sensitive.”

“Okay. But just so you know? Whatever it is, I can hear it. I can listen.”

“All right. Look, I know... everyone expresses themselves differently. But sometimes I worry... you’re not as invested in this as I am. That you don’t feel a connection to me. And I know what you
said earlier... but. We’re not obligated to hold on to strong moments. Powerful moments.” So what if she made her feel like a woman? She was fourteen when she was made to feel like a woman, by a woman nearly twice her age. Feeling like a woman. That’s for girls. Young girls who move on. The thoughts pass and she hates herself. Kara gave her something precious, something she wanted to protect. She won’t dirty it with cynicism, by tainting it with her past experiences. She meant something to Kara. She hasn’t meant much to a lot of people.

Kara nods, looks at the ground. “By powerful moments, you mean... we don’t always need precise emotional landmarks to care about someone?”

“That’s true, too. But I mean that sometimes a powerful moment is just that. Maybe it doesn't need to go past that moment. Love shouldn't be an obligation.”

“Do you think I feel... obligated to love you?”

“Honestly, I don't know what I think. I don't understand anything.” She hears her voice coming faster and higher and fights to slow, clamp it down. “Everything I thought I understood...” They walk. Kara unhooks their arms. Maggie stops, looks at her, feels as if she’s falling deeper.

Kara puts her hands on her shoulders. “How can I help? What do you need to know?”

There’s a lump in her throat. She swallows but it stays. “That’s just it, Kara. I... I don't want to give you a tutorial on... how to express that you care about me.” Wasn’t this the last conversation they had? The last real one. When Kara told Maggie how Lena told Kara she ought to show that she cares. Maggie’s heart beats faster, her fingertips losing feeling. It’s just the cold. “You've never needed a tutorial for Alex or Lena. So what can I do for you to make this easier? To make it... less challenging?” They’re going in circles with this.

Kara tilts her head. Her hands fall to her hips. “You feel like... I show Alex and Lena that I love them. Effortlessly. And that they know they’re loved. By me. But you don’t feel loved. I don’t show you that you’re loved. That I care. Is that what you mean?”

The truth is packaged so neatly, clear and cutting. Maggie exhales unsteadily, lowering her head for a moment. When she looks up at her, she smiles. “Yeah. That’s what I mean.” She can’t hold her gaze. She looks off to the sky. That grey blanket. The light’s poor today. You're being a baby. Stop it.
“Okay. Give me the tutorial, then.”

“Are you serious?” Her voice is wispy but she feels the grit building in her throat. Kara nods. Maggie’s mouth goes dry. “Do you listen to me?”

“Yes.”

“Did you miss it when I said two minutes ago that I don’t want to give you a tutorial on how to express that you care about me?”

Kara shakes her head. “I didn’t miss it. I’m not saying I’ll use it. But I want it. I want to know what I’m doing for Alex and Lena that I’m not doing for you.”

“Jesus, Kara—!” She stops, pulls away from her, puts her hands over her face. She’s on edge. She feels guilty. Lena is too… fresh in her mind. Their contrasts are… *Breathe.* She can’t yell at her. Kara’s trying. But why is this so fucking hard for her? Isn’t this… basic? *Maybe it’s only hard for her because it’s you.* There’s a rope around her neck, cinching. She scratches her neck. No noose. No Lena’s hand, no Lena’s eyes. “Sorry,” she mutters. Kara looks at her, looking as lost as she feels. “Um. There’s a little deli over there. Let’s pick up some sandwiches and go somewhere. Your choice. I need— I just need a little time to... think.”

Kara agrees. They walk in silence, arms unlinked. Maggie balls her hands in her jacket pockets. Kara does the same. The market is within eyesight but feels impossibly far away. The quiet makes her unsteady. Kara looks ahead, a blank.

Maggie turns her thoughts to the shifts in the neighborhood. When she first moved in there were more bodegas than not, windows barred, liquor and smoke shops. It was affordable and she needed affordable. Little by little, pizzerias have moved in. A co-op is coming soon. Small markets and delis are springing up everywhere. She’s already received a notice for a rent increase. How many more will come until she can no longer afford the neighborhood? Maybe she’ll be pushed out of the city and further away from everyone.

They draw close to the shop. A brick building with a few small tables outside for customers to eat. She has to say something. Anything. *I’m sorry I yelled.* She’s not sure she’s sorry. No. She is sorry. Maybe not sorry she felt the way she did. It’s hard to rattle her. She looks at Kara, following after her. *I’m sorry.* Bites her tongue. “I discovered this place the last time I worked like an 18 hour shift. There was a line out the door at 7. They have amazing breakfast sandwiches.” She rubs her hands, trying to warm them. “Is there anything you’re itching to try?”
“What’s the best thing you’ve had here?”

“They have this sandwich that sounds bizarre. It’s chipotle mayo, apples, turkey and brie. Hot sandwich. You can get bacon on it, but I don’t.” She tries to read Kara’s face. Can’t. “But they have other good ones, too. And the fruit here is incredible. So are the vegetables. I think more people would get behind them if they had the kind that aren’t stuffed with pesticides. Less stuffed than most.” She bites her tongue. “Oh, and they import lots of weird little sodas and juices. All the veggies are locally sourced…” She said that already.

“If the... the bizarre sandwich is good, I’ll have that. And... do they have kombucha?”

“They have a whole wall of kombucha. Knock yourself out.” She keeps her expression neutral. “I’ll have one of whatever you have.” Gross. “And I’ll order sandwiches to go, and pick up a few treats if that’s okay? You should look around.”

“Okay.”

She wanders off and Maggie watches her move around the shop. She’s graceful, maneuvering herself around customers, peering at the fruits before she goes to stand in front a fridge with all the kombucha bottles. Maggie orders sandwiches, dessert and Kara joins her in the line with two bottles. “Welcome back. I picked up these flourless cocoa walnut date rolls?” She lifts the plastic bag with the cheerful ribbon tied around it. “They’re pretty good. Have you had them before?”

She looks at the bag. “I haven’t. Sounds good, though.”

“I’ll do my best not to hog them all.” It’s still hard to breathe. She pushes her voice out, light and airy. “Thought of a spot we could go?”

“We can get more if you like them a lot?”

That’s a ‘no’ to a destination, then. She nods absently. Maybe she’ll go home and talk to a wall after this. “No. This is enough. We’ll make do.”

“Okay. Hm... Is there any park or plaza or something like that nearby? Within walking distance.”
“I can get the car and take us somewhere else. We don't have to limit ourselves to walking distance. But I get it if you don't want to drive anywhere.”

Kara shakes her head. “I don't mind. We can walk back to your car.”

Maggie pays for the food, thanks the cashier when the bag is handed to her. “Okay, let's head back to the car.” They step outside. Everything seems normal. Everyone seems happy. She looks at the couples walking by, wondering if they're putting on happy faces, wondering if she's anywhere near as convincing. She walks beside Kara. Her hand is out. Maggie looks at it. The shape of her hand. Her skin is so smooth. It’s always warm. She reaches out and takes it. Kara doesn’t notice right away. Once more she considers asking but Kara said to not to ask.

Kara doesn’t pull her hand away. “Thanks. For...” She gestures at the bag of food. “Do you want me to take that?”

Maggie smiles. “I got it. My NCPD jacket weighs more than this.” Kara smiles back but says nothing. They walk, Maggie holding Kara’s hand lightly, trying to draw in her warmth, thinking that warmth is more than physical. It can be words and glances. The day is chilly.

Minutes later they arrive at the car. “Do you need to run up to the apartment for anything?” Maggie asks. Kara shakes her head no. Maggie opens the side door for her, thinks of kissing Lena outside her home, the ages it took to separate. Kara gets into the car. “Do you mind holding this?” She extends the bag and Kara takes it now, settling it between her legs on the floor of the car. Maggie shuts the door and returns to the driver’s side, opening the door and getting in. The seat feels stiff. The leather creaks. A minute later Maggie slips the key into the ignition. Kara looks at her. Say something. Say something. Kara says nothing. “Um. Where to?”

Kara looks as if she’s been asked to solve the meaning to life. “The closest park, maybe?”

Maggie frowns lightly. “The park? We didn't need the car for that.”

“But I asked... if there was any park around here, and you said we could take the car. I thought you had some place in mind.”

“Sorry. I meant... we don't have to limit where we go to walking distance. It doesn't have to be a park.” She starts the car. “Let's just drive around. Maybe we'll find something that piques our
“Maybe the beach?”

The beach. The last time she was at the beach she reeked of alcohol. She called Lena Luthor. Words and memories and encounters keep reflecting. Another beach, then. “Yeah, that sounds great.” Kara agrees silently, leans back into her seat and watches the road, looks out the window. Maggie looks at her profile. Where is she? Lost in a fog of thoughts? Maggie plays with the heat system, waiting for it to kick on. “Do you like beaches?”

“I like the background noise. And the seagulls.”

She thinks of seagulls, loud and squawking, fighting over the remains that beachgoers have left behind. “Background noise?”

“The waves. It's like rain, it's loud but it's so... regular.”

“I like that too. It's soothing, I –”

Kara looks at her. “You what?”

She’s tongue tied again. *I would really love to go down on you.* Why are those words easier for her? “I was going to say...” She laughs, flustered. “I was going to say... I think your voice is soothing, too.”

Kara smiles. “Thank you. I like yours, too.”

She’s never received compliments on her voice. Sometimes in the bedroom. “Thank you. Mh. There’s this spot off a ways that's a waterfall... and there are these little caves. If you want to try that out. It's really tall. Pretty. I know it’s not a beach.” It is background noise.

“Waterfalls? Okay, I'm game. How do you know about those caves?”
Her grip on the steering wheel loosens. “It's a grim story with a happy ending.”

“I like stories.”

She smiles. “It's not much of one. We had a missing persons case. Five-year-old kid, gone. Everyone thought he was dead, it was just a matter of you know, finding the body and giving the family some kind of peace. It’s strange that death can be peace, huh?”

Kara mulls it over. “I don’t know about peace, but… closure, maybe? For those who remain. Those who die… who knows.”

“That’s what it’s all about, right? For the ones left behind. They get trapped, unable to move on. It can’t be easy. It eats people up. You find bodies and people have bad nights, weeks, sure. But it’s not like the uncertainty. The survivors become ghosts. Static.” She shakes the thoughts. “Anyway, eventually there was talk that the family used to go to these waterfalls. They're a little removed... not anywhere we might have normally searched. So we go to this place in the dead of night and it's raining its ass off. It was so loud. Just... deafening. NCPD got everyone there. All the equipment to do the dragging, and the scuba divers. We blockaded the road off, but we didn't find anything. I looked it up later to see if anyone had ever been found there and no one had. I haven't been in the day.”

“What's the happy ending?”

“Oh. We found the kid a few days later. He'd been taken by his birth mom, but he was okay.” She tries to imagine the desperation necessary to abduct a child. When they found them, he was dirty and the mother was sobbing. It took three uniforms to hold her back as Maggie plucked him up, took him to the police cruiser. He was crying, too. What’s the line between love and desperation? She thinks of Lillian Luthor.

“Good. Kid found, waterfalls discovered.”

“Right. Of course, seeing that kicked my brain into overdrive. Who doesn't love The Goonies, right? I would have died if I'd found these waterfalls as a kid.” That would have been paradise for a girl, freshly kicked out of the home. The only thing that might have topped it would have been Neverland, to join the lost children.

“Oh? What would you have done?”
Maggie smiles. “I’d find a princess or a girl, and we would live a pirate life, scouring the seas and caves for treasure. Kid stuff.” Those kinds of ideas didn’t last long once she got to her aunt’s and out on the streets, violating curfew.

“Yeah. Kid stuff. With the, uh... the kids on their bikes, like in E.T. or Hocus Pocus? And their parents are always off-screen.”

“How else are you supposed to have fun?” If your parents are around. She won’t say it. It’s too light a thing to make fun of and Kara doesn’t have her grim sense of humor.

“Alex showed me those movies.”

“Yeah. It’s easy to get lost that way when you think about the past. When you can’t always see things clearly. When things aren’t exactly how you remember or how they felt. Sometimes you have to decide when to look forward and when to look back. It’s nostalgia or... you know, the test of time. Those things are like filters.”

“Why not both? Looking forward and back. I mean... wanting to be a pirate as a kid is fine, right?”

“Definitely. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad at my age, either. Unfortunately pirates tend to be highly criminal, and there’s a new sheriff in town I’d have to contend with.” She imagines taping up pictures of Supergirl to her cell wall, keeping one folded in her uniform until the creases fold and it falls away to nothing. The inmates would beat the shit out of her.

Another long silence passes. Kara didn’t think the joke was funny, then.

“What did you mean, though, when you said it’s hard to decide when to look forward or back?”

“Oh.” She glances at her. “I just mean... Sometimes there are hard things in life, right? So do you put them behind you and focus on the future, or is it better to reconnect with some of those painful things and hope you'll gain some kind of understanding and grow?” She can’t think of how many times she’s thought of reaching out to her parents. But they never tried to reach her. Not when she was a teen. Why would they care now? She shrugs. “I’ve been accused of burning a lot of bridges. I don't know, Kara.”
“What don't you know? Are there things about your past you're not sure what to do with?”

“I don’t always know what the right thing to do is.” Leave Lena at the hotel, don’t leave Lena at the hotel. She made the right decision. Except when she thinks of the misunderstanding it was all based on. So give Lena up, Alex might say. “Sometimes it feels like I don't know how to be a good person. I don't know a lot.”

“I don't think anyone does. You do what you can. Surround yourself with the people who bring out the best in you.”

“You’re good.” So is Lena. So is Alex. “You bring out the best in others.”

“That's good to hear. But I don't have answers. What you can put behind you, or reconnect with... I don't know about that. I can listen, but... is that why you said sometimes you have to decide when to look forward and when to look back? Or were you talking about me? I don't... I'm sorry, I don't know what we're talking about, here. But I want to understand.”

“That's what I meant. That I don't have answers.” She looks at her. She was speaking more generally. It’s not like she can have the conversation about the Lena misunderstanding with her. “I want to look forward with you, Kara. I want to go forward with you.” She wants to reconnect. She wants to obliterate the distance that’s come between them.

She speaks slowly, puzzled. “So... you mean, make plans? Long-term plans?”

Maggie sees a flash in the road. She swerves, glances back, wonders if it was imagined. Her heart screams. Was it her imagination, desperate for an interruption? “What?” She drifts back into the right lane. “Is. Long-term? ... What's long term to you?”

Kara touches her glasses. “Well... what does looking forward mean? Besides making plans? It's not like we're looking back, right now, so... are you saying you want more? Than what we have now?”

She’s unnerved Kara, somehow, suggested something that maybe she isn’t entitled to suggest: a future. Her mouth is dry again. She wishes she could ask Kara to open one of the drinks. “No— I just mean I want – to continue to get to know you and be with you. I mean, is that ‘more?’” She manages another quick glance at her. “Is that too much?”
“But isn't that what we were already—” She stops. What they already do? No. It hasn’t felt that way to her in a while, anyway. “You know what, yes. That's how it should be. Get to know each other and be together. I mean, what else is there?”

Maggie watches the trees pass by, standing tall and flanking the road like soldiers. It’s a bleak day. “Nothing, I guess.”

“But if there's something else... you'd tell me, right? Because getting to know people, and being with them, that's what I do with everyone I care about. Nothing more, nothing less. So I'm not sure what else I should be doing. But like I said, I can listen.”

“What do you mean?”

Kara’s frozen again. Maggie doesn’t know why. “What do I mean about which part?”

“When you said you could listen.”

“Oh...” She’s still tense. Deer in the headlights. “Shouldn't I? Listen, I mean. No, scratch that, that's probably not what you're asking. When I say I can listen, it means that I want to understand where you're coming from, and I want you to know that you can talk to me. Because you said some things... you know, about looking forward, and you sounded a bit doubtful when I said getting to know people and being with them is all there is, and there's also what you said earlier, that you needed time to think. So I’m just trying to listen. To hear what you might want to tell me. And maybe you don't have anything in particular to tell me and I'm just... mistaken. But if you do, then... you can let me know. That's what I meant.”

Her jaw is tight again. Nerves. Run towards the hostile target, no problem. Talk to her sweet, superhero girlfriend—terrifying. “Right. I did say that. I needed to get my thoughts together.” Her fingers tighten around the steering wheel. Her knuckles are white. “I’m sorry I got frustrated before. I shouldn’t have snapped at you.”

“That happens. And in your defense, you’re far from the first person to ‘Jesus, Kara’ me so I guess it’s not totally undeserved.” She gives a small smile.

Maggie returns it, sad and tired. The road continues to wind like a snake, then they reach one of the softer curves. Maggie pulls in to the clearing, checking to see that the ground is dry. The last thing she’d want is to leave them stranded in the mud. She considers a little longer. Oh. They wouldn’t
be. She releases the wheel. Her hands feel like they’re gnarled into claws. She flexes her fingers and puts the car into park, taking her time, listening to the click of the parking stick, the ding of the car. She puts it on idle before shutting it off entirely.

The waterfalls are in the distance. A haze of water spray rises like a cloud. The falls are loud and powerful. “When I spoke about looking forward versus looking back.” Her jaw is wired shut. She tries again. “Sometimes things happen... and they aren't what you thought they were. I've been mistaken. And I've been... so frustrated, Kara. I've been unfair to you. It's felt like we've been at a distance for a while. And that's my fault. I screwed up Valentine's Day. I didn't get you flowers. I didn't tell you why that day was hard for me...” Even now it’s hard to talk about. Why did she say those words on that day? “I'm sorry if I... pressured you in any way to say those words back to me. I don't...” she clears her throat. “I don't want forced things. I don't want pity.” It’s cold. She feels cold. She leans back into the seat, pulling her arms close.

Kara looks at the water. Is this beautiful to her? Does it remind her of Krypton? Not remind her? Which one’s better? Maggie wishes Kara had Krypton. Kara turns from the water to her. When she speaks, her tone is soft. “I'm sorry, Maggie, but... I can’t keep up with all you’re saying, I don’t mean to but there’s just... so much hurt there, and I don’t know where it comes from. I don’t do it on purpose, I really try to respect people’s privacy, but I can feel more than all of you, you know? How... tense you are, right now. And I don’t know what to say. I don’t pity you. I never pity anyone I love. I’m not forcing myself to be your girlfriend, or to be here, in your car, or anything. I don’t understand why you think you’ve been unfair, or what you’ve been mistaken about... and I feel like someone, I don’t know, sharper than me, perhaps, would understand right away, but I don’t. And it frustrates you, I know it. But what can I do except ask?”

“I know. I'm glad you're asking.” She scratches the scar, notices, stops. “I don't always say things the right way.” When she talks again her voice is hoarse. “Sometimes I don't say things because... I'm afraid of how I'll come off.” She pauses, thinking, trying to be more truthful. “I've... felt insecure about things between us. Lena and you.” She frowns. “But I've been focused on the wrong things. Going over things in my head instead of talking to you. I've expected things to get better without working for it. Without letting you know. And then my rib— um— with work. I love being with you so much, Kara. Physically. But that isn't why I'm here. And I think I've used that as a crutch. That's what I've always been told I'm good at. And when we weren't able to be together... the silences have felt so big. I'm not the kind of person who handles long silences well,” she smiles quickly at her. “But I've been afraid to talk to you. I'm not good with words and usually... or lately... it just feels like my words are creating a bigger wedge between us. I've been defensive. I've been afraid of being rejected by you.” She laughs. Her eyes are hot. She squints them until they clear. “So I haven't made the efforts I should in trying to work things out. I want to spend more time with you. When I say I want us to be closer... that's what I mean. I love you. I love being with you. I'm sorry I... can't be sophisticated. I'm sorry I haven't been better.”

Kara leans into the headrest. She breathes. Maggie watches her, thinking of watercolors. Why hasn’t she taken any pictures of her…? Is it still hard to believe they’re together? Is it guilt? Is she frightened they’re only temporary? She doesn’t want to have to throw pictures away. To see them and be stabbed with emotion. All the photographs that matter to her are in boxes. “I’ll try to talk to
you more. In general, I mean. Not because I have concerns about us that I haven’t shared. Because I don’t. Really. I’m... I’m okay. With us. But I don’t want you to feel like I don’t want to talk to you, so I’ll work on that. As for your apology...” she holds her hand out. “I don’t care about who you’re not. I love what you are.”

Maggie looks at the hand extended to her. She takes it. The air in her chest is bursting at the seams. She lets out a sigh, or maybe it’s more akin to gasping for air. It’s quiet but seems so loud. She brings her other hand over her eyes when they sting again. She’s a basketcase. A goddamned hysterical woman. She needs to get it together. Why are tears brimming at her eyes? Why is she shaking? “God. I'm sorry.”

Kara cradles her hand in her own. “For what? You've just listed a whole bunch of things already.”

Maggie shakes her head, sniffs, wiping at her eyes discreetly. The tears are scalding against her fingertips. Only when she’s sure they’re gone does she lower her hand. Fuck it all. “For not being better.” She shakes her head. “Um. Do you want to look at the water? Or we can stay in here. We have our sandwiches.”

Kara smiles, fishes the bag from the floor. “You're the one who's been here before. What's the best spot?”

“The rocks are a little slippery. But if you walk along the edge you can get to one of the caves. It’s pretty cold in there though. At least on a day like this. And you'll get wet. Or... there's a spot at the top of the waterfall if you climb. It’s a bit of a hike, but it’s probably worth it. I haven’t made it all the way up myself. What sounds better to you?”

“If it’s not too much of a climb for you, we could go up there?”

Maggie smiles, clinging to the normalcy drifting back into her. “Let's do it.” She gets out of the car, considers leaving the keys in the ignition but takes them with her. She goes around to the passenger door and opens it, taking the bag of food from her. “You ready?”

“Let’s be adventurers.”

Maggie holds on to the smile, despite feeling like she’s been kicked in the teeth. Maybe once they’ve all been in this open-relationship for a while all these reminders won’t be so glaring. They start the climb. There’s a small, worn path, already starting to be overgrown by grass. Slim trees
peak above them, casting shadows, broken by beams of light. It stirs a memory in her she can’t remember. It’s a little colder than she anticipated. It’ll get colder as they go on. The air is surprisingly damp.

They’ve been walking for ten minutes when Kara speaks. “If you need me to take the bag, or if you want my jacket…”

Maggie smiles back at her. The climb is steep. She’s grateful she hasn’t skipped out on her runs, doesn’t smoke regularly. Kara could make it up in the blink of an eye but she trudges up for her benefit. “Why not warm me up with your body heat?” She continues the climb. Eventually she hears Kara’s footsteps. Kara matches pace with her. A moment later she’s wrapped an arm around her shoulder. Maggie glances at her, bemused. “You know, I don’t mind, but I was only teasing.”

“Oh. You're not cold?”

“I am a little cold,” she admits. Kara’s pretty as a painting. Flushed cheeks. Flushed lips. All day, every day. She thinks of the photograph Lena showed her, Kara soaking wet after Lena literally had to put the fire on her out. “Do you ever get cold, Kara? Is it okay to ask you those kinds of questions? Please tell me if it's not.”

Kara looks at her, then back at the trail. “It's fine, really. And no, I don't get cold. I feel the cold, but I don't get cold.”

“Does it feel nice? Do you have a temperature preference?”

She shakes her head. “No preference. Everything is interesting, nothing's unpleasant.”

It sounds like depression. But maybe it’s a state of mind. Maybe it’s more like a happy daze. Nothing too sharp. Everything… just right. “It sounds nice. Maybe a little lonely.” What would happen to small talk if no one could complain about the temperature? She takes Kara’s hand, ‘tugging’ her after her. Kara goes along with it. The falls get louder the higher they climb, the air growing misty.

It’s beautiful even if the weather is a little dreary. Is it dreary to Kara? What associations does she have with temperature fluctuations, the color of the world around her? Maggie doesn’t mind spring, summer, fall. It’s been a long time since she’s liked winter. Maybe Kara will enjoy it. Maybe Kara will enjoy today. Right, who doesn’t think back fondly to their girlfriend projectile vomiting their
feelings all over them? She looks up to Kara and Kara, when her eyes come close again and focus, smiles at her. Maggie wishes they could stop moving. She could ask but it strikes her as important that they keep moving ahead, towards something. For the time being, that steady march forward is better than the momentary comfort of her embrace.

They climb, Maggie’s arm circled around Kara’s waist. She’s slim and athletic but still soft, not as hard as Alex’s wiry body, not as soft as Lena’s welcoming one.

Maggie’s feeling a little winded when they reach the top. She’s grown warmer with Kara’s arm around her, though she’s begun to lose feeling in her fingertips. Her legs will burn tomorrow. Kara looks the same, wisps of her hair starting to curl, but not so much as the waves forming in Maggie’s hair. “Here we are,” Maggie tells her. She removes her arm from around Kara’s waist and Kara does likewise with the arm around Maggie’s shoulder.

Boulders border the top of the waterfall, the water rushing over the edge and crashing below. Maggie walks along a long flat stone, near the crest of the waterfall. The water churns below. She looks at the color, a white, fading into a bright green, flattening into a light blue. How deep is it? She leans forward, peering before looking back to see Kara watching.

Kara turns her gaze away, looks around. She points at a stretch of grass. The vibrant blades are dewy with drops of water. “We could sit there. I can put my jacket on the ground, I don’t mind. I’ve had it for years.”

Maggie looks back to the water for another few moments, reluctantly turning and joining Kara. Kara takes her jacket off, stretches it on the ground, sits. Maggie hesitates before sitting beside her. She begins to rummage in the bag, pulling out their sandwiches and drinks. She hands one of the wrapped sandwiches to Kara. Maybe they should have taken them back to her place. They might have stayed warm and Kara would have had it the way it was intended. “Sorry it got cold. I don’t know if the taste will pop.”

Kara takes the sandwich with a smile. “If it’s good hot, it’s good at room temperature.” She looks around, taking in the sights, the clouds billowing in the distance, the birds singing their songs, flitting from tree to tree. “So to speak. It’s peaceful up here. Thanks for showing me this place.”

“Sure.” She wonders if it was a mistake to bring her. Kara initially suggested the beach. Would she have preferred the beach? What if a different route would have led to a more positive, peaceful conversation? Kara’s supportive but Maggie’s never sure how she’s feeling. She hopes happy. “I hope you like the sandwich,” she finds the two kombucha bottles and sets them between them.
“Thank you. I got two different ones because I like them both, so I thought we could share, or you can take the one you like more.” Maggie smiles. Maybe it’s silly. How sharing something with Kara can make her this happy. Kara bites into her sandwich. “Oh, this tastes good. You were right, it’s... bizarre. Good bizarre.”

“I like that. ‘Good bizarre’.” She leans over, giving her a peck on the lips. She won’t linger, uncertain if Kara’s lips would be stiff against her own, would only barely flutter in response. A stolen kiss isn’t meant to be literal. Not between girlfriends. It’s been a hard morning. “Now let's dig into the kombucha.” One of the bottles looks like it has mossy water in it. The other looks like embryonic fluid. Yum.

“Good Bizarre is pretty much Kara Danvers' motto. A little less... inspiring than Supergirl's, but. It works.” She cracks open the green tea kombucha, and hands it to her.

Maggie takes it. “I love the Kara Danvers motto. And Kara Danvers.” She has a drink of the kombucha. It tastes healthy. Just swallow it, just swallow it, just swallow it. Kara is playing with the other kombucha bottle, Elderflower.

“What's Maggie Sawyer's motto?”

“You mean Detective Maggie Sawyer or Civilian Maggie Sawyer?”

“Well, Kara Danvers and Supergirl and Kara Zor-El all have different mottos, so... if Detective Maggie and Civilian Maggie have separate ones, I'm curious either way.”

“Hm. Well, for Detective Sawyer it's probably something like... I don't know. ‘Give it everything’. Civilian Maggie's tougher.” Work has guidelines in place, protocol, supervision when things get complicated, when a situation might be outside her scope. It’s not that easy in her life. If only the people she were closest to weren’t so entangled in one another’s lives she might be able to seek guidance.

“What's—” She stops, chewing and swallowing her sandwich bite before continuing. “What's tougher than giving it your all?”

“Knowing what to do. Not being afraid all the time. Not... becoming a certain way.” Though it’s possibly too late. She’s too cynical, bitter, defensive. The kind of person that’s hard to get to know. A person that may be unlikable. “Being a detective is easy. There are rules. There's right. There's
wrong. Bullets and bad guys and dead bodies. Who cares?"

“Who cares about what?”

“Those things don't scare me. They may disgust me but they don't keep me up at night.”

Kara nods, reaching across to take the bottle of the green tea kombucha. Maggie watches her face as she takes a drink. No reaction. Maybe that’s normal. Maggie doesn’t put on a show when she has a drink of soda. “So it's harder not having rules to live by. Isn't that the same for everyone, though? And isn't that comforting? That... none of us knows what to do, most of the time.”

Maggie has a bite of the sandwich. A stall tactic. The sandwich really is better warm. Does it make a difference for Kara? Alex told her once how Kara heated up a Thanksgiving turkey with heat vision. Kara told her she hated those shortcuts, those magic tricks. Did the turkey taste good to her? Did anyone ask? How often do they ask? Is it like getting a leatherman out? A tool for every job? Maggie decides she won’t ever ask her to do something a human couldn’t do. “Is it comforting for you to not know what to do?”

Kara shifts on the jacket, sitting straighter. “As Kara, yes. As Supergirl... not really.”

“Isn't it easier as Supergirl? Bad people do bad things and you stop them.” Isn’t it simpler when it’s black and white? “What's the hardest thing about being her?”

“Knowing that... I can't pick and choose.”

“You mean... the greater good or...?”

“I mean that...” She has another bite of her sandwich and Maggie’s glad to have brought them, unsure of how else they might have stalled to get their bearings and answer questions without them. “Whoever needs Supergirl's help, gets it. And... whoever Kara might have a personal connection with isn't Supergirl's concern.”

Maggie nods. She’s never been put in that kind of predicament though she understands what it is to be with someone who has to put the greater good above personal relationships. Kate left her in vulnerable situations before, all in the pursuit of the greater good. Maggie knew it. Understood it. Supported it. And despite knowing she would have been angry had Kate chosen to stay at her side
—there was always some ebb of sadness there. For what Kate felt. For the things Kara will feel.
For the terrible things they witness. “I get it. Not like you, obviously. It must be scary and... heavy.
You're so strong.”

“It's the same for you, isn't it? You chose to serve. Everyone.”

She chose to serve. She tells herself she wanted to help people. She does. Has. She wonders if
some part of her thought her family would find out, would be impressed, whether it would be
enough to redeem her in their eyes. That’s a big, fat no. “Yeah. But... I watch over a kiddie pool.
You watch over oceans.” She wishes she could believe she takes as much pride in her work as she
did before Supergirl came along. She helps but not to the extent Supergirl does. And sure, there are
situations so far above her paygrade she could never address them. She’d have to be a super to do
it. It doesn’t help that NCPD has gotten its funding cut since Supergirl hit the scene. They should
be less busy, in less dangerous situations, but they’re more so, given the cuts in officers and
criminals upping their weaponry in response to Supergirl. It’s hard to keep up. She doesn’t have the
luxury of bullets bouncing off her. It feels selfish to dwell on it. Supergirl is a gift. “I'm glad Earth
has you.” Is that another insensitive thing to say? Earth has Kara because she lost Krypton. She
sighs inwardly. “Even... if I'm sorry we have you?” She reaches over to take her hand. It’s still
warm, despite that Maggie’s fingers have gone relatively numb. She wants to hold on to it. She lets
her go.

Kara looks at their hands. Moments later she scoots closer and kisses her cheek. Maggie smiles at
the flicker of warmth against her skin. “I'm sorry you went through bad things, but I'm glad I have
you. I'm sorry Alex didn't get to live her life the way she could have, but I'm glad I have her. I'm
sorry Lena is so sad, but I'm glad I have her.” Lena is so sad. Oh. “We're all sorry. We're all glad.”

Her smile grows. “Yeah.” She looks up from the sandwich she holds. “I like... seeing the world
through your eyes, Kara. You have a different perspective.” Bright and positive despite the
sadness. She hopes to one day possess even a fraction of it. “That's what I liked about you the night
we met. When we kept meeting. You were different.”

Kara smiles and Maggie’s glad she’s sitting. She’s always a little lightheaded when Kara turns that
light her way. “Different from...?”

“From anyone. It wasn't about Supergirl. I didn't know that. I couldn't stop thinking about you.”
They had that fight at the park. Maggie shot her mouth off and told her she was a terrible lay. You
made me feel like a woman. Maggie flushes, hating herself, hating how she takes hurt and turns it
around, amplifies it to hurt others. It’s so much easier than to admit you hurt me. Afterward, she
could barely focus on work. She traded one blonde for another. But Linda was nothing. It occurs to
her that Kara would be disappointed in her for thinking a thing like that. She can hate herself later.
She has to focus on Kara now. “I remember the first time you stopped by and I... I was acting as if
you were just anyone else even though I felt there was something special about you. And then I
said… what I did and I wasn’t sure if I scared you or… shocked you. And I got defensive as usual
and I said I didn’t need to be fixed. And you told me you hoped my heart felt better. That really
stuck with me. There was no reason for you to care about me as more than just…” she bites her
tongue. “And you were so beautiful. Are so beautiful… and…” she trips over the words,
embarrassed again that she doesn’t have the talent for them like Lena does. That she doesn’t have
the skill to say what she feels, to make Kara’s heart feel better.

Kara puts her arm around her shoulders again. Looks off to the waterfall. Maggie can’t ask what
she’s thinking. Not again. She doesn’t want to put her against a rock and a hard place. Maggie leans
into her. For minutes she listens to the water, the cries of the birds. She searches for words. Thinks
of the crossword puzzles she’s collected for Kara and has to give to her. If only conversations
could be as simple as finding a number, looking at a clue and the letter count. She’s never liked
long silences, but maybe between them it’s safer. Maybe between them, for the time being, this
will do. It’s nice. She won’t question nice.

X

Alex settles her hands on her hips, staring into the DEO monitors, appraising the risks to National
City. It’s been three days since she left Maggie a long, rambling voicemail. She mentally recited
what she would say until she had it down. Maggie’s phone rang seconds before abruptly cutting off
and going to voicemail. Alex was staggered. She ducked into one of the DEO server rooms,
flushed, hesitant and stammering.

Maggie, it’s Alex. I was hoping to catch you, but voicemail it is. Please don’t delete this until
you’ve listened to everything I have to say. I’ve been turning over what happened the last time we
talked. I want to try to apologize, face-to-face. I know I don’t deserve it. You tried to talk to me and
I flipped out. I shouldn’t have responded that way. So… if you would have me. If you’re able to see
me, I’d really appreciate it. I hope you’re having a good night. And I hope to hear from you. Bye.

She doesn’t like rambling. Or apologizing. If she apologized the way she leads DEO mission
briefs, it would have been direct. You took me by surprise with the Lena thing and I was an
asshole. Sorry.

The voicemail was awkward. Maggie’s always flustered her. She’s resisted calling Kara to ask if
Maggie’s mentioned it. She will not drag Kara into her bullshit if she can help it. Maggie seemed
sincere that night at the distillery. Alex’s own memory of the evening is hazy. She had too many
drinks before arriving, just to steady her. They seeped into her perception. Everything ignited. In
the end she was anything but steady.

Now she’s restless. She called Friday night. Monday is drawing to a close. Is Maggie with Lena?
How often do they see each other? Again she tries to imagine what they could see in one another
but their good looks. What adults don’t bother moving past kisses? She imagines them kissing. If she ever sees it, she’ll puke. Grow up. Her jaw is hard. She managed to alienate Maggie and Lena in one fell swoop. She’s controlled her temper at work. That’s a start. J’onn’s steady eye helps keep her from boiling over. She shouldn’t need J’onn. She doesn’t. She’s able to control herself.

*Like when he rescued you from jail after that OUI? How many nights did you spend trying to fuck the gay away?* She bites her tongue. J’onn didn’t want her. He wanted a connection to Kara. Whoop de doo, just like everyone else. So she gave up her plans and her dreams to keep Kara safe, all so Kara could sabotage it and reveal herself to the world. *You’re alive because of her.* And so are countless others but that’s not the point. The point of the DEO is to exist without Supergirl. Now they call on her at the drop of a hat. Cat in a tree, sounds like a job for Supergirl. Bah. Kara prefers to put herself in front of the firing squads rather than tissue paper humans, but she’s not invincible. Alex worries more than ever. She never used to spend this much time pacing in front of the monitors. It’s not fair that it has to be Kara, more than anyone else, putting her life on the line.

Alex looks off to the side. Susan Vasquez is staring at her. Was. Vasquez looks away quickly, turning back to the panel in front of her. Alex returns her attention to the mini blips of alien activity lighting up the maps. Sensation, hot and cold runs through her. It seems like she always finds Vasquez looking at her. Is Vasquez gay? Has Vasquez thought about being gay with her? And if she has, is it because she… knows or senses something about her? The idea of discovery scares her.

She’s still not used to it. Her gay awakening no longer feels like winning. The freedom she felt with Maggie is gone. All she has is sorrow and anxiety. She never came out, out. She came out to Kara, and maybe that’s why it felt like she came out to the world. But she hasn’t. J’onn knows. Lena. No one else needs to know. No one else matters. It’s not like she has to announce it to everyone. It’s her business and if people assume that she’s straight, that’s their problem. Maybe it’s better, period. What does it matter without a girlfriend at her side? She’s out enough. She’s free.

But there are days she feels more trapped than ever. Maybe one day what she feels for Kara or Maggie won’t make her feel like shit all the time. Alex frowns, crossing her arms. She remains minutes longer, depressed that there isn’t a crisis at hand to occupy her thoughts. Eventually she gives up and takes the steps down, nearly running into J’onn.

“Agent Danvers. You’ve been here nearly sixteen hours. Go home.”

She shrugs, going for casual. She’s never mastered feigning indifference like Lena, just like Supergirl will never master her power pose. She doesn’t want to go home. “I’ve got nothing else to do.”

“Clearly.”
Alex walks with him. After her suspension she wasn’t allowed to walk the DEO without an escort. She was subjected to so many psychological assessments she considered getting a master’s degree in psychology. She’d practically earned the internship hours. She’s still not allowed to question any DEO detainees on her own. They think she’s some kind of savage. J’onn glances at her. Alex frowns, wondering if she can ask Winn to rig something up to protect her thoughts from spilling all over him.

“It’s possible, Alex, but believe it or not, I have a black ops government agency to run. Whether or not Detective Sawyer chooses to return your call is the least of my concerns.”

“I really hate when you do that.”

“Think less loudly.” He stops. “This is one of the rare opportunities that doesn’t call for your presence. I won’t tell you to go home again. If there’s a crisis, I’ll call you in. In the meantime, I expect you to follow the direct order of your commanding officer.”

“Yeah. All right,” she lifts her hands, but feels helpless, not wanting to return to the solitude of her apartment and the reminders of her lonely existence. She should call Lena. She could make a Ghost joke. Maybe she could pick up the soundtrack for her. Lena was good to her that night. Other nights, too. And you told her what a great lay Maggie was. Maybe Lena already knows.


She nods, mortified, hoping he hasn’t heard… everything. There must be more interesting places to linger than a near gay virgin. She goes to her work locker and searches for her car keys, looking at the picture of herself and Kara on the inside of the door. It’s an old picture from their college days. Kara’s holding ice cream and laughing about something. Whatever Kara’s laughing at, Alex doesn’t find it as humorous. Her smile is faint and sad.

She needs a drink. She un hooks her belt, removes the holsters strapped to her thighs. She’s like a walking tank. Who needs an armory when you’ve got Alex Danvers? Kara used to say cute things like that. Alex has never known whether to believe her or not. Those were in the first few weeks of Kara’s Supergirl days. It wasn’t long before Kara got used to her alien skin. Throwing a punch. Flying. Saving the day. Kara has always been able to adjust to everything. Not everything.

Her phone’s ringing. She fights with the handful of belts she’s holding, digging in the locker with her free hand before realizing the phone is in her back pocket. She picks up without looking.
“Danvers.” She hasn’t looked at the caller ID and pulls back to do so. *Maggie.* She freezes, her stomach doing flips. There’s silence on the other end of the line. Alex hears it, absent, even, of the texture of static. Dead air. “Maggie, are you there?”

“I’m here.”

Thank God. “Hey.” The word comes out with a relieved sigh. “I’m glad you called.”

“I thought about not calling.”

Her tone is brusque. The words sting. She’s never heard that tone out of Maggie before. *You pushed her to this.* For the time being it’s not about *her* hurt. Seconds pass before she’s able to unstick her mouth. “I wouldn't have blamed you if you hadn't.” She leans into the locker, looking at the picture of herself and Kara before closing it.

“I wasn’t expecting your voicemail. Last time we talked you told me to stay away from you. It was one of the nicer things you said.”

Alex rubs her eyes. She takes a seat on one of the benches. “Yeah. I said a lot of awful things.” It’d be nice if one of these days she could stop wrecking everything around her. Everyone calls her an ice queen, but when it comes to Kara or Maggie she can’t ever keep it together. *Just apologize.* But she’d rather apologize in person. “There are a lot of things I want to say to you. I wasn’t expecting your call.”

“You asked me to call.”

“Yeah, I know. Sorry. I don’t feel prepared. Maybe if I ramble long enough I’ll find the right words to start making things right. But I don't want to stumble into making things right with us. I want to be more thoughtful than that.” Her mouth clamps shut again. God. She wishes she could just see her. She lowers her head, grips the bench, forces the words. “Maggie, if you want me out of your life—”

“I don’t.”
Maggie says the words so quickly it doesn’t register right away. Alex exhales, feeling as if a string has been pulled from her, spilling her loose. “Meet me somewhere? Where ever you want. I have a lot to say and I’d rather say it to your face. I just.” She licks her lips. “I want you to know that I’m sincere.”

“That’s the problem, Danvers. I’ve never doubted your sincerity. It’s one of your best qualities.”

The words should be a comfort but recently she’s had nothing positive to say. Alex wants to tell her she never meant those terrible things. Even if she meant them at the time. “Okay. Then can you believe that I don’t always mean what I say? I have a shitty temper. It’s no excuse.”

“Sounds like an excuse to me.” Alex flexes her jaw. Maggie used to be patient with her. And you asked if you could hate her instead of Kara. You called her an asshole. You literally scarred her.

“Can I be honest?”

“Yes, of course. Please.”

Maggie doesn’t talk right away. Where is she? What is she doing? Is she home? Is she leaving another late shift at work? She nearly asks when Maggie speaks. “I know everything’s been a lot. And I know I’m not blame free in any of this, but I’m not sure I have it in me to be called on the carpet again. Alex, I—” she exhales. “I just hate that everything turns into a fight with us.” Not everything. “We fight about Kara, we fight about Lena, we fight about us, we fight about me.” Just everything they talk about. “I don’t want to do that with you all the time.”

“Me neither.” She isn’t sure if Maggie hears.

“I know I’ve fucked up, but those conversations are hard, and they make me feel like shit.” Alex rests her forehead against her palm. Closes her eyes. Breathes out. “I can’t do that with you anymore. If we meet somewhere is that what it’s going to be?”

She’s so tired. “It won’t be, I swear. I know you have no reason to believe me.”

A brief silence follows. “I believe you. Alien bar tomorrow night at ten.”

She wants to cry with relief. “I’ll be there. Maggie, I know I keep making the same mistakes. All I can promise is to be better. I know you don’t owe that to me. But …” she sighs. She’s not saying
anything new. She's paranoid of her voice echoing in the locker room, traveling. If others hear her say Maggie's name, they'll know who she is, what she is. It'll become her new identity. Something spoken about in hushed whispers. “We’ll talk more in person?”

“We’ll do that. See you around, Danvers.”

Maggie ends the call. Alex brings the phone down beside her, hearing footsteps. Vasquez again. Did she listen? Alex stands, storing items in her locker. Feigning looking for something. It’s a show. She can’t think. Maggie’s open to seeing her again. She bites back a smile.

Vasquez moves around the space, going to her locker, running a hand through her short, cropped hair. Alex studies her only a moment longer. If Vasquez is gay, she is unabashedly gay. Brazenly gay. Maggie would tell her she’s being homophobic. That’s your internalized homophobia talking. She isn’t judging anyone, but it makes her uncomfortable. Maybe Vasquez isn’t gay. It doesn’t matter to her, though if she thinks back to her time at college, she always unconsciously made the decision to not spend time with women who looked similarly. She’ll change at home.

“You headed out of here?” Vasquez asks. She smiles easily.

Alex flexes her fingers anxiously, looks away from her. Maybe one day she’ll be comfortable in her skin. She slams her locker shut. “Yeah.”

She leaves without another word. She has no interest in befriending work colleagues.

X

Alex anxiously texted Maggie hours ago. We still on for tonight? She anticipated agonizing over a response. Maggie responded minutes later with a thumb’s up emoji. Not the undying declaration of love she would have preferred, but better than nothing.

If Maggie weren’t Kara’s girlfriend or Lena’s whatever, she might call one of them to get a sense of what she should say. What Maggie might respond positively to. That’s cheating. No, it’s intelligence gathering. She should have a better sense of these things. They dated for months. Alex was giddy for that time, hooked on such an unfamiliar feeling, she rarely ventured deeper. She thought they had time. You took that time when you ended things.
Yeah. Impulsive Alex strikes again.

Alex paces her apartment. She won’t drink. So what if it’ll steady her hands. Her hands are never steady around Maggie anyway. She just has to keep cool. She can’t explode like before. She can’t ice her out like she did with Lena. *That was a spectacular failure.* She just wishes someone else would be the punching bag for a while. Kara’s in love with Lena, Lena’s in love with Kara, and now Lena’s doing whatever she’s doing with Maggie and here she is, begging to be let back into Maggie’s life. What a joke.

She hasn’t heard from Lena recently. Too bad. She never told Lena how good she was for her. Lena entered her life on one of the most emotionally debilitating nights of her life. A night of heartbreak. Something she should have experienced long ago, had she known who she was, had she known she had the capability to be shattered in that way. To think she’d always considered herself invincible, silently judging the girls who stayed up all night sobbing over some loser guy. She thought she was better. Controlled.

Lena sat with her while she cried silently. Lena did that for her, a stranger. And later, as Alex tried to adjust to what felt insurmountable, Lena was there... like padding, as she seemed to throw herself against the walls. She never told Lena how she made her feel human again after she found out about Maggie and Kara. Maybe she knows. Maybe not. Fuck. How did it get this way?

She grabs her keys and drives to the alien bar.

Before she knew about Maggie and Kara, she'd drive there with butterflies in her stomach. If asked, she wouldn’t be able to describe the excitement she felt when she knew she would be seeing Maggie. It was the way she sometimes felt when she was younger and looked at Kara. The same alarming bolt that hit her the first time she saw Kara in that suit Winn designed.

*Don't make it weird. It's not weird.* But sometimes it still feels weird. *She* still feels weird. *She is* weird. She still thinks about kissing Kara. She still thinks of Lena taking her hand and pulling her down the love hotel hall, uncaring at who might look on. Lena, who has made her feel beautiful on days she felt like a dirty dishrag.

But now she’s seeing Maggie. Her thoughts drift to her the way they usually do. The first time they kissed was in the back alley. Alex remembers how it felt, like she’d been struck by lightning. Everything was electric. Maggie pulled away. Alex didn’t know why, but now she knows. Maggie pulled away because of Kara. And then Maggie lied to get out of the party Alex invited her to at Kara's place. Maggie was awkward about it because she and Kara were sleeping together while she lay in bed at night thinking of that kiss in the alley. *You fucking idiot.*
She can’t think of that now. She has to let go of that anger, but where to put it? She’s lucky she’s not like Kara. Someone as angry and bitter as she is shouldn’t have the power of a god. Maggie told her the truth. Would Kara have ever told her? But she can’t be mad at Kara. She’s tried. It always fizzles out. She can’t be angry at her reason for being.

She parks close so she can make a hasty exit if need be. She doesn’t see Maggie’s car. Maybe she hasn’t arrived yet. Maybe she’s parked further off. Maybe she’ll blow her off. Alex goes inside. It’s bustling, as usual. A few of the patrons look her way, some with more interest than others. Maggie's not here. Shit.

She finds a booth and sits. The alien bar is a terrible idea. This is where she began to fall in love with Maggie. This is where she began to fall deeper into a bottle, trying to figure out what the hell she was feeling around Maggie Sawyer, unsure of why it reminded her of Kara. She wanted to drown her sorrows and questions. When she and Maggie ended, some part of her wondered whether she’d meet someone else. Maybe someone who admired her from a distance while she was wrapped up in Maggie. She hasn’t met anyone else. She doesn’t want to meet anyone else.

She hears the heavy groan of the front door.

Maggie wanders in, attention lighting to the bar first before scanning the room, meeting her eyes. She doesn’t move over right away. Alex stands, watching her come closer, the other occupants fading in the background until Maggie’s in front of her. The jacket’s new, but the light blue scarf is old. There’s a hole near the bottom of an end. How did that happen? Alex asked. Stray bullet. Maggie smiled. Was it a bullet? Was she teasing? Alex remembers tugging on the scarf to get a kiss one night. Snow swirled around them. She remembers the smile she elicited. Careful there, Danvers. Alex doubts Maggie remembers. She wouldn’t have worn it.

“Thanks for meeting me,” Alex says. She wants to hug her but doesn’t know how. She can't ask. Too bad. Outside of Kara, Maggie gives the best hugs. Maggie looks to the booth and back to her. Alex searches for a smile but there isn’t one. Maggie looks more serious than usual. Is she imagining the jitters she sees? “I haven’t seen you here in a while.”

“Yeah,” Maggie shrugs, “some haunts are worth avoiding.”

What does that mean? Has Maggie avoided it because she comes here? “Um. I’ll pick up some pints?”

“Sounds good.”
Alex nods, making her way to the bar, grateful for the small break. She’s not sure how much of that cool intensity she can handle. Jesus, is that what she’s like? She gets to the bar. Surly Darla isn’t there. Mon-El is. He pours two pints from tap and Alex walks them back to the booth. Maggie’s tugged the scarf down, frowning at the hole she seems to have rediscovered. She hasn’t taken her jacket off. Her hands are laced tightly on the table, eyebrows furrowed in thought. Golden light splashes on her. It isn’t sunlight but she looks beautiful. Is beautiful.

Alex sets the beer in front of her. “One pint as promised.”

Maggie looks at it and back to her. “Thanks, Danvers.” She folds her arms on the table and Alex sits, deciding that ‘Danvers’ is distance for Maggie. If there was affection in the name, it’s gone now. Maggie’s face is unreadable. Brown eyes are meant to be warm but hers aren’t. Not like she remembers. They’re professional. Distant. Shit. “I’m here. It’s your show.”

Alex nods, holding tightly to the beer. She wants to drink it down but at this point it’s more ceremony than anything. It’s going to take a lot more than one beer for liquid courage. She thought they might make small talk before getting down to business. “Right.” She nods. Looks at the beer in her hands, pushes it aside to look at her. Maggie looks back steadily and Alex thinks of that night she came out—as best as she could, to her. “I don’t know where to start.” Maggie remains silent. Waiting. Listening. “First and foremost I want to tell you that I’m sorry.” Alex meets her eyes. “I am … so sorry for the way I behaved.” There’s a ripple in Maggie’s jaw. Alex waits but she doesn’t say anything. “You offered me a courtesy… that frankly I wasn’t entitled to. We’re not dating,” she nods, “and… you’re dating Kara and.” Alex can’t quite look at her, eyes skimming the lamp above them, the bar, seeing it in colors and shapes, “and you’re in an open relationship. But that doesn’t entitle me to anything. Not to an opinion about it. Not to… your privacy or… your dating life. Or you.”

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Maggie’s brows stay gently narrowed.

“I’m still in love with you, Maggie. I haven’t… stopped being in love with you. Jesus. And I don’t know if I’ve ever told you. In a way that didn’t make it sound like I was complaining about not being compensated for something.” Maggie takes a slow breath, lifts her eyes, searching, returning them to her. “And you’re in love with Kara. And I… I understand that. I mean, she’s Kara and… of course…” Maggie tilts her head slightly. Alex’s throat is dry. She thinks of Kara’s lips. She has a drink of beer. “Maybe telling you how I feel is wrong. I know you’re in an open relationship but I still don’t get… all the particulars. I don’t know if that’s disrespectful to Kara—or to… to you and Kara as a couple. I don’t know. I don’t know much about relationships. Real relationships,” she frowns, “because in that regard… you’ve pretty much been it. I mean. I was with guys before but…” she dares a look at her. Maggie gives her a small, sad smile. “I know I put a lot of pressure on you when we were together. Maybe I was overbearing,” she breathes in. “I was… just so excited. And I was happy. I’d never known what it was like to be happy with someone else like that.” Maggie’s hands slide off the table to her lap. “I… lost it when you told me about Kara.” Was
she jealous when Maggie told her? Of Kara? Of both of them? “I’ve always felt second best to her. And that’s not her fault and it’s not your fault. Those are just… my feelings. They’re ugly feelings and I’ve tried to shake them off.” A beat. “I’ve never been able to shake them off completely. It’s been nearly a life’s worth of… So when you told me about Kara I overreacted. And I was cruel. And when you told me about Lena I overreacted and I was—” she can’t continue. Her eyes are burning.

Maggie reaches across the table, covers her hand. “Take your time.” The contact remains. Warm. Like her eyes. Her voice is soft. “I’m listening.”

Alex nods, looks at their hands. It feels so good to be touched by her again. She still hasn't forgotten what it is to be touched by her. She looks back at Maggie. “I didn’t come out for you. I came out for me. And I feel… I don’t know; I feel like I have this second chance to start a life. I feel… I just feel so much. All those years… suppressing everything… I think. I was numb to everything that wasn’t Kara. And when I came out… I attached so much of my happiness to you. To us. To us as a couple. To my own… worth.” Maggie’s thumb strokes her hand absentely. “I didn’t mean to but it happened. So when all these emotions came to the forefront, things I’d never really had to deal with… I couldn’t handle it. And it was so unfair to you. I’ve been unfair to Kara and Lena.” She takes a shaky breath. “I don’t like the person I’ve been around you. She’s ugly and mean and I wouldn’t want anything to do with her, either. I know I have a lot to work on. And part of me was so tempted to just… leave it. To stop putting myself out there. Get back to work and focus and let you have… whatever life you wanted to have with whoever you wanted to have it with. But I thought—that’s selfish, to not want to pick up after my own messes. To leave you feeling the way I made you feel. Like shit,” she says more quietly. “So… I just wanted to say … that I’m sorry. You’re not an asshole. I’m an asshole.” Maggie shakes her head. “I was wrong. I’m oversensitive and you’re… giving and kind and thoughtful.” Maggie’s hand pulls back to her lap. Alex bites her tongue, wishing she could ask why she pulled away. “I love you and I’m sorry. And that doesn’t mean you owe me anything. It doesn’t mean you have to accept my apology. You don’t. You don’t owe me an explanation or forgiveness or… a relationship. You don’t owe me friendship or love. I would still like to be your friend. I’d take more, if it was offered.” Her hands are freezing. Why did she say that? She’s going to puke. “And I wish I could keep that to myself. But I thought … I thought the least I owed you was the truth.”

Maggie draws a breath, her eyes shrouded. She doesn’t speak right away. “Thank you. For all of that. Um…” her brow crinkles, fingers to her lips. “I know how hard it can be to say…truthful… personal things. I’m not always able to.” Her eyes are dark and thoughtful. “And look… For what it’s worth, I forgive you. If there was anything there to forgive.”

“There was.” Maggie's small smile makes her heart pitter-patter.

Maggie looks at her for a long time. Thinking. Deliberating. She bows her head, fingers grazing along her beer, and then over to the scar on her forehead. Alex hates herself for leaving it there. Maggie finally looks back at her. “I’ve heard what you said and…it really means so much to me, but…” her lips flutter soundlessly. “I’m sorry. I can’t give you anything more than friendship right
Alex focuses on the scar instead of the knife slipping into her heart. She nods. She has to nod. “Okay,” her voice sounds like a dry leaf. “That's fine. I... I mean, I'm lucky for that.”

“It's just that... I've got a lot on my mind and a lot going on and... I don't think I could be there, you know, in the way that you... In the way that I should...” she grapples with the words. “Is that okay?”

“Yes. Of course. Friends is... friends is great.”

“It is. But,” she's hesitant, head bowed before glancing at her. “We've tried to be friends, Danvers.”

“I know. I'm the one who messed it up. I pushed for more.”

She cocks her head, smiling faintly. “I wanted more. I wanted us to mess it up. And it wasn't b—” she stops. Regroups. “I wasn't... I should have been more thoughtful.” She sighs. “But that was then. And now... I just don't know how I can be friends with you when... God. Everything that matters to me seems...like friendship kryptonite to us.”

“Because of Kara and Lena.” Maggie doesn't answer. Because of Kara and Lena, then. “I get that. I know I screwed up.”

“It's not about screwing up. You think the open relationship thing is a joke. You think I'm... desperate to hold on to Kara?”

“Aren't you? I would be.”

“I know it's fucking weird. And it's not—what I ever expected. None of it is.” For a moment Alex sees the anguish on her face, “and you think Lena and I are—” Alex waits. “I don't know how to be friends with someone who doesn't respect me. You don't respect my job, you don't respect my choices.”
“I do— I—” she reaches across but there’s nothing there to hold on to. “I do.”

“When? When it meets your standards? Hey, I’m no saint—”

“No one is a saint, Maggie. I don’t expect you to be a saint.” Saints don’t exist. She’ll settle for decent.

“All right. But sometimes it feels like I can only exist in your life when I’m exactly what you want me to be. But I’m my own person, and no one person can ever… be everything to everyone.”

“I know.” But you can be everything to a person. Isn’t that better than diluting yourself to please everyone?

“Can we ever hang out and talk about Kara? Can I mention Lena? I don’t want to walk on eggshells around you. If I’m going to have a friend, I want to be able to share some of the things that matter to me. The people that matter to me.”

“I hear you. I do, Maggie. I’ll be better. I’ll work on being better.”

“And for the record, you matter to me. So much.” Alex can’t speak. She closes her eyes, remembers her face, her voice when she said it, the tightness of her voice. “Do you know what a selfish asshole I feel like, sitting here and talking to you as if I were some paragon of virtue? As if I have the right to hand out forgiveness? This was never about… tracing faults or placing blame. I’m not here to ask you to be better. I don’t think you need to be ‘better’. I came here because despite everything, I want things to be okay between us and I don’t know how to do that.” Maggie bows her head, thoughtfully. “I just… look, I’m not Facebook or tweeter or whatever. I don’t want to live my life giving you status updates every time something changes in my personal life.” Alex nods, despite the ice growing in her stomach. Oh. So there have been more changes. More changes coming. Are Lena and Maggie sleeping together? Planning to? Are Maggie and Kara moving in together? “I don’t think I owe you that, and I don’t want you taking it out on the people I care about. And it’s… God, it’s exhausting, Alex. And it’s private.”

She’s numb. “I understand.”

“Do you?”
“I understand that you and Kara and you and…,” she forces the name, “Lena, are none of my business.”

“Lena and I are friends.”

“But not normal friends.” Maggie cocks her head at her, frowning. “Yeah, all right. I get it.” What the hell is friendship anymore? What is Maggie propositioning now? Another makeout partner? Is that all Lena and Maggie do these days? Jesus she can’t keep up with it all. Kara said Maggie’s in love with her. Maggie doesn’t act like she’s in love with her. Is it true? Would Maggie tell her if she was?

“Do you get that Lena’s your friend, too?” Alex bites her tongue. “Look, I don’t know what went on with you two, but maybe you should take it easy on her. She cares about you. We all do. It sucks when you lash out.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Maggie sighs, has a drink of the beer. “I never wanted to hurt you. None of us did. This all got… out of hand.”

“I believe that.” Under the clear light of day, anyway. “But is it… so crazy to believe that I was hurt anyway?”

Maggie looks at her, face soft. “No, I guess not. I hated making you feel that way. God, Alex. I didn’t sleep.”

Her mouth is dry. “I’m sorry.”

Maggie shakes her head and Alex isn’t sure whether she doesn’t believe her, or just wants to move on. Eventually she offers a weak smile. “So is the apology tour over, then?”

“Did I leave anything out?”

“Nothing that comes to mind.” She touches her lips. “Look, please just be respectful to all of us.
That’s all I’m asking.” Alex nods. “I'm sorry, too, okay?”

“For what?” Maggie shakes her head. “You don't have to explain.”

Maggie smiles wanly. “Then the apology tour is concluded.”

Alex nods. Lena’s another story. She’ll have to call her. Find a way to. Jesus, this is all fucking insane. Everyone acts like it’s elementary but it’s weird and confusing and hurtful and why does she feel like the alien for not knowing her place in any of it?

Maggie looks her over. “Anything else you’re looking to talk about?”

Alex scoffs, picking up her beer. “What makes you say that?”

“Because I can tell when you’re thinking. You crinkle your nose, and your eyes…” Maggie waves a hand over her eyes, looks off, back to her. “If we’re going to do this friendship thing, we’re going to have to take a stab at talking things out.”

Alex has a drink of beer. “I appreciate it but… I’m going to go out on a limb here and say we should take things slow.” She’ll go out on a limb and assume Maggie won’t react well to being demanded to confess her love. “I have a lot to think about and this situation with everyone… it’s. It’s weird for me, Maggie.” Maggie nods gently. “And I don’t want to keep making mistakes because I haven’t thought things through or haven’t thought out how my words will be received.”

“So we’ll be friends who sit in silence, then?”

Alex cocks an eyebrow. “Don’t be a smartass.” Maggie smiles. That smile. “Why don’t you finish your beer, get loose and limber and then I can kick your ass solidly at pool, for old time’s sake.”

“That’s one hell of a boast.”

“Please. When have you ever been able to beat me?”
Maggie laughs, lifts the beer to her lips. “It’s on, Danvers.”

Droplets trace paths down her hair, her suit. They drip, drip, drip onto the floorboards, painted black by soot. Outside, the rain rages. Kara tilts her head up, eyes wide open. Forest fire in the hills, animals fleeing, flocks of birds lost and soaring in pillars of smoke. Like poems. She looks at the pile of library books on her coffee table.

*Here all the winds let go sooner or later, all of them.*

*The rain takes off her clothes.*

*The birds go by, fleeing.*

*The wind. The wind.*

She can’t remember the rest. She iced that wall of fire. She did what rain couldn’t do, what firemen couldn’t do. What she herself couldn’t have done a couple of years ago. The look in their exhausted eyes, on their blackened faces. Blessed and grateful that she risked nothing, so that they wouldn’t have to risk everything. Reporters were already there by the time she left. She knows how the interviews will go. *All seemed lost, a flash of red and blue, and all was well.* A picture of her smiling, surrounded by firefighters taking their helmets off, too awed to ask for a handshake. The inevitable footage of her taking off.

*You don’t get to be a real person. You’re a superhero. You get to represent all the goodness in the world.* Kara wishes she could tell Cat that she understands, now. What’s in a name, in an outfit, in a symbol. That Kara will welcome all the bad days Supergirl doesn’t get to have. Where’s Cat, now? People leave. But not empty-handed. *You’ve changed me. And I am not easy to change. Just be Supergirl. It’s all anyone’s ever needed from you.* Kara smiles and looks down at her own chest and, past it, at the puddle forming at her feet. Supergirl was Supergirl, today. Now, Kara can be Kara. Boundaries. Freedom and relief in boundaries. She unclasps her cape.

Wiggling out of her suit is tricky on the best of days, but when it’s soaked, it’s the worst. She puts on an oversized tee-shirt, grabs her glasses and carries the suit to the bathroom. She wrings as much water as she can out of it. It comes out black. She retrieves one of the briefcases Alex gave her and folds the suit into the large ziplock bag inside, sits as her desk, grabs a pencil and an orange post-it pad.

*Sorry guys, things got a little*— the tip of her pencil breaks. Lovely. She sharpens it carefully, rips the post-it and starts over.
Sorry guys, things got a little messy. It’s just water, soot and dirt, no alien goop or anything dangerous. Thank you <3

— Supergirl

She draws a little plane for good measure. Is it ridiculous? She’s never met the people who take care of dry-cleaning at the D.E.O. Maybe they look at her pastel notes and think she sounds like a twelve-year old. Or an adult trying too hard.

She sighs and sticks the post-it on the ziplock bag, closes the briefcase and leaves her hand on the display until it detects her fingerprints and seals itself. She pushes it under the bed and picks up her phone.

To Alex Danvers [Today 04:02 PM]: got some laundry for you to pick up, if you want to come over later.

From Alex Danvers [Today 04:04 PM]: What am I, your butler?

To Alex Danvers [Today 04:04 PM]: yes.

From Alex Danvers [Today 04:05 PM]: Dork. Supergirl did good today (and every day). I’ll be here in a couple hours. Chinese + Ben & Jerry’s? I’m feeling magnanimous.

Kara wonders if she’s in the mood for food. She can’t tell. As long as she’s got air in her lungs and sunlight on her skin, basic nutrients, some water, she’ll thrive. Like a plant. Maybe that’s why she likes them so much. Hunger is barely a thing. Physiologically. At least her brain remembers what it’s like, it tricks her stomach into growling, into feeling like she could use some food. What about Kal? He’ll never know hunger. But food is comforting in other ways. Something to fill hollow hours and many forms of emptiness with. Something to enjoy. Something to prepare, to take time for. Something to share. She closes her eyes and tries to remember the last time she ate something her body truly needed. Her last meal on Krypton. Her father’s lackluster cooking. She can’t remember the taste of anything from home. She can’t remember her first meal here. She remembers sitting at the dinner table, in Midvale, watching meals unfold like some twisted reenactment of her previous life, with the wrong people around the wrong table and the wrong food on her plate.

To Alex Danvers [Today 04:17 PM]: yes please. You’re the best butler. I’m gonna hop in the
shower now because I look like a chimney sweep. See you soon! love you

It’s raining inside. Kara goes to close the window, gets what she needs to mop up the floor and clean up the rain and the grime that dripped from her suit. It’s soothing, knowing that should anyone be watching her right now, all they would see is a young woman in a tee-shirt doing her chores. No, not soothing. Liberating.

She looks at her hands. She can have soot under her fingernails. She can be disheveled. She looks at her reflection in the mirror, glances at the postcard tucked in the corner. A woman, life growing inside her, whose body changes, adapts and ages. For Kara, it’s all superficial. A hot shower will wash it all away. Unless she’s poisoned by kryptonite, she’ll never look tired, or pale, or sick. Or real.

She walks up to the mirror, touches her finger to the glass. What do they see? People. They see a blonde girl. Blue eyes. Rosy cheeks. An image. A surface. But what does she see, when she looks at the people she loves? What they would call imperfections don’t make them more tangible. They’re all… smoke and mirrors. Not so different. Not so readable.

What are you thinking about? Maggie asks her. You’re not human and that’s okay, she says. That’s okay. But she is human. On Krypton, she was human. She was one of the intelligent life forms her planet has birthed, nothing less, nothing more. On Earth, she’s not human. That’s not okay. She’s not okay. She’s unequipped.

She blinks, focuses on her reflection, the soot on her face, her dirty hair. Almost convincing. Almost human. Not convincing enough for Cat, probably. Not convincing enough for her girlfriend. Almost a person. Almost someone. She swallows and turns around, reaching for her phone on the bedspread.

All these things Maggie said.

Is it hard for you to talk to me?

Is it hard for you to show that you care about me?

I know everyone expresses themselves differently. But sometimes I worry you’re not as invested in this as I am. That you don’t feel a connection to me.

I don’t want to give you a tutorial on how to express that you care about me.

Do you listen to me?
Things feel a little hazy. She sits on the bed and pulls her glasses away from her face just enough to check whether they’re dirty. They’re not. She rubs her eyes, she blinks, but the haziness doesn’t go away. She doesn’t know how to be there. She does listen. She listens to Maggie, she listens to Alex, she listens to Lena. She listens to… the sounds of the world. She remembers all their words, all these sounds. She unlocks her phone.

To Maggie Sawyer [Today 04:42 PM]: Supergirl put out a forest fire today. All the birds were fleeing so she got to fly with a flock of geese. They’re friendlier in the sky. Majestic, even. Maybe they wish they were up there all the time and that’s why they’re so cranky and take it out on you on the ground?


She leaves her phone on the bed and goes to the bathroom. Looks at the new shower curtain. Lena picked it for her, helped her put it up. You’ve got it down to a science, now. Turning my minor inconveniences into fun little moments. It’s beautiful. Kara runs her hand on the weighty, slightly coarse linen. Lena going on about how the flax was grown in France and Belgium, made into linen in India, and don’t worry, it follows Global Organic Textile Standard and International Labor Organization guidelines. Kara, stop that. You promised you wouldn’t check the price tag. Don’t perjure yourself. Also, you need a bath mat. So you won’t slip again. I’m thinking bamboo. And… this color, for the curtain. It’d go well with your tub and your wooden shelves. You restored those, didn’t you? And the little cabinet, you know, the one you put your bottles of perfume on?

Kara turns around with a smile, looking at her furniture. She wishes she could enjoy relaxing baths the way Lena does. But heat is just… nothing. Do you ever get cold? Kara doesn’t know how to explain. She doesn’t remember what it’s like. To be cold. To enjoy the shade on a hot day. But she feels warm, now. In her mind. Maybe that’s the equivalent of a relaxing bath. Because there’s a little bit of her friend here, now, and every time her eyes fall on that curtain, that mat, her shelves? The memory of herself, naked and soaked on the floor, holding her old shower curtain that a human wouldn’t have been able to rip apart just by grabbing it, fades away. Weightless, scattered to the four winds by the good, steadying memory now springing to mind, of an afternoon spent exploring a luxury department store with Lena, making faces at weird-smelling, overpriced soaps, trying out perfumes.

She exhales slowly, gets the water running and lights a couple of scented candles. Takes off her clothes, her glasses. Steam rises. Scalding, probably. She steps into the tub, tilts her head up right under the showerhead. Rain in her ears, again.

She washes her hair. She’s been watching a lot of video tutorials to learn how to make her how shampoo. It’s not hard. It smells just right, now, no aggressive chemicals assaulting her senses.
anymore. She’s having fun toying with subtle fragrances.

Once all the soot has been washed down the drain, she sits in the tub, pulls her knees up to rest her head there, enjoying the light pounding of water on her back for a few minutes. Water. She thinks of the legend behind Rama’s Bridge, the now submerged stretch of land connecting India and Sri Lanka. She’s been reading about names, what they mean, where they come from. The deity Rama, seventh avatar of Vishnu, sends his loyal servant Hanuman to rescue his beloved, Sita. But Hanuman sees no way for Rama’s army of Ape Men to cross the sea and get to her. Frustrated, desperate, he throws a stone in the water, thinking of his lord Rama. The stone floats. Every time a stone is thrown in the name of Rama, it floats. Hanuman rejoices, and gets to work, building a bridge. Rama manifests himself to do his part, but all the stones he throws sink. How can this be? *My lord*, Hanuman tells him, *you do not have the power to make stones float. Only your name does.*

Kara smiles. All those names. Danvers, Sawyer, Luthor, El. Powerful names, some of those. More powerful than the individuals bearing them. All of them, embedded within continuity. Jeremiah. Alura. Lionel. Eliza. Zor-El. Lillian. She doesn’t know the names of Maggie’s parents. Maggie didn’t want to talk about her own name, where it came from. Kara wanted to tell her a story, about saint Margaret of Antioch. How, after dedicating herself to her god, she was disowned by her father and adopted by her nurse. She became a shepherdess, a protector, then was swallowed by the devil in the shape of a dragon for refusing a man’s advances. How she broke free, because she was stronger than evil and he couldn’t keep her in. And that’s why, the story says, she protects all things being born now, all the little children, from wherever she is. Why Joan of Ark said she spoke to her, strengthened her spirit, gave her the courage to fight for what she believed was true, and good. *Escaping a dragon sounds pretty impressive. So, how have you been?* Kara felt like a four-year old telling her babysitter about her day in kindergarten when Maggie changed the subject.

She understands, though. A little. That not everyone finds strength in stories. That it was the wrong thing to do, to try to offer… an alternative legacy. A brighter one. Kara thinks of the world the Black Mercy pulled her into, between reminiscence and fantasy. Being back on Krypton, feeling the weight of the almost abstract dragon-bird sculpture she made as a child for her father. Sometimes, she feels like the only way to embed herself into some sort of continuity, of personal narrative here, on this planet, are the stories of Earth. All the legends, all the art, all the beauty created by its people to make sense of their existence. Because it was the same on her planet. They had culture, and questions, and tentative stories to answer them.

She turns the water off and steps out of the tub. Dries herself off, wrings the bottom of the shower curtain the way Lena showed her and puts on a tee-shirt, sweat pants and fluffy socks. Her glasses are all fogged up. She wipes them meticulously, slips them on.

She spots her planner, back on her desk. She dug it up after her call with Maggie. Leafing through the pages certainly was a trip down memory lane. Becoming aware of how much her handwriting has changed since the last time she used it was a shock. What would a graphologist say? *Someone who learned to write later than usual, perhaps in their teens. Someone who seems to have forgotten how to hold a pen, recently. Someone who learned again, later in life.*
Kara flops onto her bed with a sigh. Freezes for a second. She can’t afford to break her own bed, not right now. Luckily, it seems to hold up. Small mercies. She looks at the ceiling. How long did she stay in the shower? She reaches for her phone to check the time. Oh, Maggie answered.

From Maggie Sawyer [Today 04:59]: *The majestic geese are likely in better spirits when they have such winsome company. I’ll work on my bedside manner with them, and offer snacks and gratitude for allowing me their time, instead of complaints. Thank you for the beautiful story. I love you.*

There’s something a little different about this text. The language. The humor. Making sure she thanks her for a random story. It’s… Kara can tell she wrote it with care. Tailored it. It’s kind. Loving. The screen goes black, Kara sees her reflection, the smile gracing her lips.

Maybe that’s all it takes. Reaching out. Something, instead of nothing. But sometimes, she gets the sense that what feels like something to her, means nothing to Maggie. And most likely, what feels like something to Maggie, sometimes means nothing to her. And it hurts Maggie. Makes her feel that the timing says too much. It says that Maggie asked because she went on such a date with Lena, which made her realize she hadn’t done that with her own girlfriend.

But it was a date, wasn’t it? Their picnic at the top of the waterfall. It was them, as a couple, doing something a little out of the ordinary together. It doesn’t need to be formally acknowledged as a date to be one. When she told Lena she didn’t want a pity party, that she had it better than most, Kara wasn’t lying. And if Maggie and Lena now go on dates, proper, formal dates, and have a lovely time, it’s their own beautiful thing. Not something Kara could or should try to emulate. Lena knows how to make anyone feel at ease, to focus all of her attention on them, to make conversation flow and be generous with what she shares. She’s the ideal person to go on a date with. Kara shouldn’t try to mimic that. She’ll come up short and it will feel all wrong for Maggie. For herself. *Find your own thing to show her that you care,* Lena said.

Be creative, Kara. Invent your relationships. She closes her eyes and rubs her hands on her thighs, as if it could get more than blood flowing.

*I like seeing the world through your eyes,* Maggie said. *There’s no way to know what anyone else sees,* Kara told her, about her painting. She looks over at the easel. Failed attempts at her black monochrome. Her black polychrome. Failed attempts at showing Lena that she cares, failed attempts at giving her a window with a view that she could get lost in, a blackness that isn’t darkness, that doesn’t swallow light but reflects it, a view Lena could pull her little mind trick with, *tempt the devil* and fall as long as she needs to, not into the dark void between the stars, but into the
luminous blackness of something created with intent, birthed by hand, vision, something addressed, something for her.

Kara goes to sit on the stool by the easel.

Her glasses only prevent her from seeing through things. Lead in the frame, infused in the lenses. A marvel of life-changing simplicity. True engineering. Kara smiles to herself, thinking that in some alternate reality, Jeremiah, Alex and Lena would make a wonderful team in the lab. Perhaps she could be part of the team, too. Their little alien friend from the Kryptonian Science Guild she never got to join.

Regardless, in this reality, she’s looking at things… a painting, her apartment, and she sees nuances she’s pretty sure she wouldn’t perceive under a red sun. Surfaces shimmer. A little overwhelming, sometimes, but… interesting. And her lot, anyway. Besides, it is beautiful, not seeing what others see, to have that little bit of distance. It makes meeting halfway worth it. Trying to understand, to find words, worth it. To fail, worth it. Maybe.

Maggie and Lena certainly did bridge the distance between them. At first glance, it seemed like a considerable gap. They didn’t get along. One arrested the other. Things were tense. But Kara thinks that, perhaps, the distance wasn’t so great. Circumstantial, superficial. Why wouldn’t two women who have dedicated their careers to changing the world for the better in whatever ways they can, and are accountable for every single one, big and small, both fighting to be seen as legitimate in their field, both close to her, why wouldn’t those women be, at the very least, friends? Why not more, if the attraction is there?

At first, they bridged the distance out of respect for her. Kara places a hand on her chest, picks up on her own, steady heartbeat. From a wedge, she became a tentative bridge. And now, it’s not about her anymore. Because they bridged the rest of that distance with work, their important, humane work. They didn’t need the D.E.O. for that, didn’t need a Super. They needed late night meetings after work, they needed to use their connections, to get people to work together, and… no one talks about it. No newspapers, nothing. People should know. And then, they bridged the last of the distance with mutual understanding. That takes work, too, of a kind.

Her heart picks up speed under her palm. You’ve never needed a tutorial for Alex and Lena. Maggie meant, it’s never felt like an effort, like something Kara had to work on. But how could it, with Alex? Until recently, she couldn’t think of anything on Earth that wasn’t, in some capacity, connected to Alex. And yes, they bickered as kids and they fight now, sometimes, but even the ability to do that developed organically. And Maggie and Lena growing closer is proof that effort can be a good thing, right? That distance itself can be the bridge, because it encourages one to… find their own tutorial. And with Lena, she hasn’t known her the way she’s known Alex, over time, over a lifetime. So, she should have needed to make efforts, and yet... she remembers thinking, a while ago, about herself and Lena, There are no demands, no expectations. In some way, no
challenges. Does it mean it’s less than? More than? Just different? But… there are expectations. Not from each other, but from themselves. It’s a virtuous circle. Finding their best selves for each other, for someone who wasn’t in her life from the beginning, someone she chose to make room for. And in doing so, her space didn’t shrink, it expanded. Her heart grew bigger, calmer. Her mind reached further.

What did it say? Chapter 14. Kara could grab the book, it’s right there on the table. But she wants to remember. It says… Your friend is your field which you sow with love and reap with thanksgiving. She is your board and your fireside. You seek her for peace. And let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the spirit. And let your best be for your friend. If she must know the ebb of your tide, let her know its flood also. And in the sweetness of friendship let there be laughter, and sharing of pleasures.

So what if there are demands and challenges with Maggie? That’s not necessarily a bad thing, either. It’s a different thing. Find your own thing to show her that you care. Kara rubs her eyes under her glasses, trying to chase the haziness away again. She should answer Maggie’s text. It was so kind. She should be better at answering. Not just texts.

She unlocks her phone again but it slips from her hands like it wasn’t even there. Kara watches it fall. It lands face down on the floor. She grimaces, hoping the screen isn’t cracked. It’s fine.

To Maggie Sawyer [Today 05:26 PM]: I’ve been—

I’ve been what? Kara doesn’t know.

To Maggie Sawyer [Today 05:26 PM]: I love you too and Alex is coming over for laund—

Kara groans, rubbing her lips. Words aren’t working, right now. But there needs to be something. Something instead of nothing. She erases the message, gets her laptop, a notepad and a pencil. She googles a few images of geese in flight for reference and draws a happy-looking, cartoony one, carrying an olive branch in its beak. She takes a paintbrush and mixes a tiny amount of blue and yellow gouache until she gets a popping shade of green. She thinks it’s a popping shade of green, at least. She colors the leaves of the olive branch to make it stand out, snaps a picture of the drawing. Not exactly a masterpiece, but. She sends it to Maggie. It gets marked as sent but not delivered. Probably because of lousy cell coverage wherever Maggie is, right now.

Kara sits down on her stool again, feeling oddly drained. Stares at her failed painting. That’s not something you can get lost in. It’s flat. It’s a wall, not a window. It’s oppressive.
To Lena Luthor [Today 05: 42 PM]: *Do you have a few minutes? No emergency, just felt like talking for a bit.*

She stands up and faces her window, touching her forehead to the glass, half-expecting cracks to spread like tendrils from the point of contact. She slowly splays her fingers on the glass, too. She likes touching glass. The forest fire she put out earlier… at the raging heart of it were a bunch of cars in a parking lot, near the start of a popular hiking trail. They were all on fire, their windows pulverized. The ground around them, vitrified. Kara saw herself reflected in it. Stained glass windows. Lakes.

Lena calls her four minutes later.

“Hey, Lena.”

“Oh, I know that tone. You okay?”

Kara closes her eyes. “An unemployed reporter thought she’d call her best friend, because hearing her voice puts her in high spirits.”

A pause. "*My favorite reporter was not in high spirits when she texted me, then.*"

Kara smiles. Lena never forgets anything. “No, I’m not in high spirits. How are you?”

“I am…” Lena is typing, Kara can tell. “*All yours.*”

“You didn’t just cancel a meeting, did you?”

“I rescheduled a trivial Skype call. It can wait until tomorrow.”

Kara chuckles, tears prickling her eyes. “Thank you.”
“No, thank you. For texting me. You had me worried for a bit.”

“I know. I wanted to call you. Last Saturday, I went out for a walk and I found this arthouse cinema, and they were showing *The Trial*. Welles’ 1962 adaptation. And I wanted to…” she swallows. “I wanted to get you a ticket, and call you, and tell you to hurry up because the screening was in 20 minutes. I didn’t.”

“*Because of my date with Maggie the night before*?”

“No really. I mean, yes, sort of. I just wanted to give you space. So you wouldn’t feel like every time you see Maggie, you have to see me, or… I don’t know what I’m saying.”

“*Did you go see it? The Trial.*”

“I did!” Kara leaves the window and starts pacing slowly. “And then I bought the book. Kafka’s. They were selling a beautiful edition at the theater. I read it all night.”

“I read it when I was… seventeen, I think. What’s the thing with the parable, again? I remember getting so hung up on that.”

“The *Before the Law* parable? Right. So, K. is in a cathedral and the priest calls him. The priest is also a court employee, because of course he is. He tells him this story: a man wants to access the Law through a doorway. The doorkeeper says, maybe, but not now. So the man waits and waits, he tries bribery, and the doorkeeper goes, sure I’ll take your bribes, but only so you know you’ve tried everything. And the man waits, doesn’t try to force his way into the Law, until he’s about to die of old age. He asks, why has nobody else tried to access the Law for all these years I’ve been here? And the doorkeeper says, this gate was made for you alone, and now, I will shut it. Talk about defying interpretation, right? That’s me, Kara, saying that. Not the doorkeeper.”

“That’d be pretty funny if it was actually the doorkeeper saying that. Or the priest. Winking at the camera, hashtag #meta, you know?”

“Yeah,” Kara smiles. “We should reenact it. Make a YouTube channel called Hashtag Meta where we ruin all the classics with fourth wall-breaking Criticism 101. Film students would love it. I’ll be K. You can be the priest. Or Romy Schneider.”
“Romy Schneider, thank you very much.”

“Thought so.” Kara shakes her head. “I should have bought you a ticket. I should have called you.”

“You got to enjoy a film by yourself. I used to do that almost every weekend in boarding school. We’d go to the nearest town and everyone would go to the pub and I’d just… go to the movies. I loved it.”

“There’s something special about it, isn’t there? Being among strangers, alone together, all sharing the same experience, not having to talk, or give a hot take as soon as the credits roll…”

“Yeah. And I wanted to call you, too, for what it’s worth. On Sunday. Just to chat, maybe do something. Go to the gardens. But I thought, it must be your day with Maggie. I mean, she works a lot, so I imagine you’re only be able to go out and do things together on weekends.”

Kara sits on the couch. Shuts her eyes tight. “Yeah. We went to, uh… we had a picnic. She took me to a waterfall she found when investigating a case a while back. It had a happy ending. The case. It was a bit of a hike, forty minutes or so, then we sat down at the top.”

“Maggie must know the city and its surroundings so well, considering what she does. All the out of the way spots, the nooks and crannies… and that picnic sounds ideal,” Lena says, the warmth in her voice almost palpable. “Fresh air, nature, a romantic getaway…”

“Yes.” Kara swallows. “We…” She can’t stop the words from tumbling out of her mouth. “We meant to go to the beach, you know? With the… for the…” And then the words stop, she can’t get them out.

“The birds?”

Kara grips her knee until it hurts. Sits a little straighter. She remembers telling Lena about that day at the beach with Alex, when she couldn’t stop going on and on about the seagulls, because she hadn’t seen any before, we lived inland, you see, my family and I, and Alex begging her to shut up, begging her not to embarrass her in front of her friends. “Yeah. But the waterfall was a better idea. There were also those caves behind the waterfall that we could have gone into, but we decided to climb and go to the top instead, and… you know what I liked best about the hike?”
“Tell me.”

“The air was damp, there were all these trees and bushes and ferns, and I could hear the sound of drops falling on leaves. When we got to the top, the noise of the waterfall drowned it all out, but the hike, and the falling drops? It was magical. I didn’t even realize it then and there, I was just… in it. Part of it.”

“Water’s magical.”

“It really is. Can you hear it, now? It’s pretty much stopped raining.”

“Give me a minute. The windows are soundproof. And bulletproof.”

Kara hears her move about, open the balcony door.

“Yes. I hear it.” They stay silent for a while. “Symphony in rain minor.”

Kara smiles, eyes closed. “Rain major, Lena,” she says softly. “Symphony in rain major.” The sound of water dripping from the roof into the gutter outside her window, and below, and all around, mingle with the distorted vibrations of the same sounds coming out of the phone. Kara could reach out, hear it for herself, perhaps listen to Lena’s heart beating in the dying rain, but no. No need.

“All right, Sunshine. Rain major it is. Jesus, it’s cold and windy up here. I’m closing this.”

Kara starts laughing. She hears Lena shuffle around, plop down on the couch in her office. She can’t stop laughing. Nerves, relief, something.

“What?” Lena asks, amused.

“I don’t know,” Kara giggles uncontrollably, pinching the bridge of her nose. She lies down on the couch, holding her phone to her ear with one hand and hugging the cushion Lena uses as a pillow with her free arm. “You said Sunshine and I just…” It must be contagious because Lena starts laughing too. “I thought, if I’m Sunshine, you must be Moonshine and… Lena Moonshine Luthor.
Illegally distilled, highly sought after, Sunshine approved. My own little pick-me-up for rainy days. I’m sorry, I can’t—“

“God,” Lena says, laughing just as much, “do not let stand-up comedy be your next calling, please. I can’t be the only one laughing every night at your elaborate non jokes.”

“Oh, you’re the only audience I care about, anyway.” Kara wipes her eyes. “Gosh, I don’t know why I’m being such a goofball. I’m just so glad to hear your voice. I’m sorry I didn’t call you sooner.”

“I didn’t call you, either.”

“Yeah,” Kara muses. “But I’m the girlfriend. You’re trying to be respectful and not take up too much time. Too much space.”

“Am I succeeding?”

Kara furrows her brow. “Lena. With me, you’re always… just right. Don’t worry about a thing.”

“I’ll try.” A pause. “It was lovely to hear you laugh.”

Kara smiles faintly into the cushion. “Did you miss it?

“It’s been a while, sure, but…” Lena’s voice trails off. “No, I don’t miss it.”

Kara closes her eyes again. “Why not?”

“Because with me, you’re always just right, Kara.”

There’s a smile in Lena’s voice. Kara sinks into the couch. “Okay.” She feels so lucky. “Actually, there’s… I’ve been struggling with something. I didn’t want to tell you, because it was meant to be a surprise. Even though I’m pretty sure you already know. But I can’t make it happen.”
“Do you know why?”

“It’s because the least figurative things I’ve painted so far are landscapes abstracted into… composition. You’ve seen them. But under all this, there’s still a landscape. Purely abstract painting? You can’t cheat with that. Everything is amplified, glaring. I wanted to… I first got the idea when you told me about your mind game, in the Conservatory. When you look up and up becomes down and you feel the pull.”

“Go on.”

“I thought I’d make you something that would both… let you fall and catch you, but I didn’t know how to paint that. I hadn’t even painted in ages. And then I found your book. About Pierre Soulages’ work. I knew that was it. And obviously, I’m not anywhere near his level, and I don’t even want to copy him, per se, but you said you hadn’t seen one in person, and I thought… that, I might be able to do. Give you a glimpse of… that intensity. That presence. You know, something that changes, that moves under the light, but that’s also… there. Strong. Physical.”

She hears Lena’s shaky intake of breath. “Right. So, why isn’t it working out?”

Kara bites her lip. “I don’t think I see colors the way you do, but…”

“Are you colorblind?” Lena asks after a while.

“No, the opposite.” Luckily, Kara’s done her research. “Increased color differentiation.”

“Are you serious? You have tetrachromacy? That’s so rare. Three to eight percent of— anyway, what’s it like? If that’s okay to ask.”

“Sure, it’s…” Kara’s throat is tight. She’s going to tell someone who doesn’t know why she is the way she is, what it’s like to be the way she it. It’s the first time. It’s… “Overwhelming. Not always, but. Busy. Visually. Beautiful, though. I mean, I don’t even know what it’s like for you. I just know that sometimes, it’s too much for me.”

“Are you… are you crying?”
“A little.”

“Oh, Kara. Do you want me to come over?”

“Yes. But you can’t. Because you have work, and Alex is bringing dinner soon anyway, and I’m fine.” Kara blinks the tears away. “I mean, I’m not crying because I’m sad. I just don’t get to talk about it very often. I don’t like talking about it. Unless it’s with you.”

“Why me?”

“Because… I don’t know, to you these things are interesting, not alarming or sad. And it makes me feel like sure, I’m an outlier in some ways, but it’s fine, we all are. And that’s important to me, because sometimes I feel like there’s been a mistake and I shouldn’t be here. Or I should be here, but different.”

“You don’t feel like you belong here?”

Kara shuts her eyes. “Not today.”

Lena says nothing for a while. “Happy existential crisis, Kara. I had one last night.”

“See, that’s why I keep you around,” Kara chuckles wetly. “You make me feel so ordinary.”

“You are ordinary. Not feeling well is ordinary. But I think we should talk about this. Not now, not on the phone, but soon. Okay?”

“Are you concerned?”

“Maybe a little.”

“All right. We’ll talk.”
“Good. So, your painting. Spill.”

“Your painting,” Kara corrects. “Your… black polychrome.”

“My black polychrome. What’s the problem?”

“The problem is… I don’t know what you see. I tried coming up with different shades of black, but all I see every time is a freaking rainbow. That’s how I felt, at first. But then, I realized it doesn’t matter. I mean, Maggie had some great ideas, like trying to find glasses or filters or something, you know? So I’d see things the way most people see. And I looked them up, those ideas. But… we will never see what others see. It’s not about the color spectrum. And it’s a good thing. A good distance. I don’t want to see what you see, I want to know what you see, and what you feel when you see it. But I can’t find a way. “

“I can: just ask me. You won’t see, but you will know.”

Kara blinks. “But… I don’t have a finished canvas. Besides, I want it to be a surprise. The final product.”

“Then… let’s keep it simple. Make a board with samples of all the textures, values, shades of black you’re interested in. Number them. I can come over… let me check my schedule. Tomorrow, if you’re free. I’ll move things around to leave work early so we get an hour or two of natural light. You can show me the values you’re not sure I could tell apart the way you do, side by side. And I’ll try to articulate… how it all makes it me feel. Sounds good?”

Kara can’t speak. So, she doesn’t. Lena waits. And waits. And waits.

“Sounds good. Will you stay for dinner, afterwards?” Kara blurts out, forcing the words out. “I mean, unless you have plans.”

“I don’t. Dinner tomorrow night, then. Should I bring anything?”

“Actually,” Kara says, feeling the telltale signs of word vomit bubbling up and resigning herself to her fate, “that’s not what I meant to say. Not about the dinner, of course. I want you for dinner. I
mean I want you to come.” What? “To come over,” she adds hurriedly. “For dinner.” Oh God, Rama, Rao, Sigmund Freud, anyone, put me out of my misery. Deep breath. “What I meant to say before that was, thank you. So much. For always finding a way to make things work. This painting’s really important to me. First one of my new period, if we’re being fancy. And I tried and tried, and nothing felt right, but our picture was right there and… And even if it turns out I’m not cut out for abstract painting, thank you for… rolling up your sleeves and helping. That means the world to me.”

“That you would paint me something, and something so personal, at that? That means the world to me, too… Besides, even if it wasn’t for me, we’re in this together, now. Even if we fail spectacularly, what’s not to like?”

Kara grins. “Then… in success and in disappointment?”

“In the kitchen or by the easel,” Lena follows with mock seriousness.

“From this day forward.”

“So long as we both shall live.”

“This is my solemn vow,” Kara concludes, laughing. “We’re silly. How come you know wedding vows? Is there something I should know?” she teases.

“…Yes. I watch Don’t Tell the Bride. It’s a reality TV show in the UK.”

“What’s it about?”

“Well, the groom is given a budget, and has to organize everything without contacting the bride. Dress, cake, venue, style… it’s so easy to mock, because you have these brides who want… I don’t know, a church wedding and a tasteful dress, or a Lord of the Rings-themed ceremony in the woods, and on the big day, they inevitably find out their boyfriend has picked an atrocious garment and planned for the ceremony to happen in the amusement park they had their first date in, or that for some reason he bought a mammoth metal elephant as the centerpiece of the procession… but they’re always so happy, anyway, and the guys genuinely try to come up with something the bride would like, even though it’s always wrong. So lots of people make fun of it, but I think it’s sweet. And that it can be a learning experience for them to realize they might want to pay a little more attention to what their wife wants in the future. I don’t know. I’m a sap.”
“It sounds like a lovely show. And being a sap is a great quality. I mean, you know how I feel about cynicism.”

“Yes. Not worth it. I take it to heart. And how come you know wedding vows?”

“Oh,” Kara sighs. “I just think they’re beautiful. Well, not the part about forsaking all others. And not for obvious reasons, but because I think those vows give good guidelines for commitment and fidelity, and they don’t have to be restricted to marriage or romantic love. It works for friends and family, too, right? I’ll certainly be here for Alex and Maggie and you in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, and all that.”

Lena hums. “You try to learn from everything, don’t you?”

“I think learning is to the spirit what oxygen is to the body,” Kara says resolutely.

“…Wanna join L-Corp’s Girls in STEM initiative? Those one liners of yours would inspire many a calling.”

Kara smiles. “Let me get back to you on that in ten years, once I’ve completed my PhD in astrophysics.”

“Deal. And… I really don’t want to hang up, but I’m afraid I have to. Especially if I want to reschedule a few things so I can leave early tomorrow.”

“Yeah. Thank you again for doing that. And for taking the time to talk to me.”

“Always,” Lena says warmly. “And to be honest, I needed a break, too. I will now return to those riveting earnings reports with renewed determination.”

“Okay. Don’t work too late.”

“I’ll try. Oh, and say hi to Alex for me, please?”
Kara perks up. “Oh, she called you? That’s great!”

“No, she hasn’t called. I don’t mind. But there’s no harm in giving her a little nudge, is there?”

“None whatsoever. I’ll tell her.”

“Thanks. Bye, Kara.”

“Bye. I lo—” Kara catches herself. Slowly covers her mouth with her palm. Silence at the other end of the line. It almost came out. That’s fine, of course she loves her. And Lena knows that. But, just like that? As if she said those words to her every day, even though she never has? “Um.” Nothing else comes out.

Another long silence. Lena’s voice again, gentle. “I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?”

But she has told her she loved her before. Many, many times. Just… not with words. Words are only one language among many. “Tomorrow,” she repeats blankly, her heart beating hard, strong, demanding her attention, banging at the door. She should listen to it more often.

“Oh, and Kara?”

“Hm?”

“Me, too. Obviously.”


She hangs up and takes a long, heady breath. She stays on the couch, brushing her fingers to the plushy carpet below. She tries to list all the good things that make her life beautiful. Not the big ideas, the heroic feats, the people… No, just the little things. Lena’s coffee machine. Birds. Alex saying it like it is even when it’s not what she thinks it is. Maggie’s eyes. The dark pond in the gardens. Ice cream. The old man playing sitar she used to walk past every day when she worked at
CatCo. Her car. Sunrises in Midvale. The picture in her wallet, of her first Earth birthday with Alex. Taking her time. Being able to tell when Maggie enjoys their kisses. Rain. The soft bed sheets Lena bought for the guestroom, just for her. Bringing leftovers to Mrs. Needleberg next door and petting her little dog.

Kara closes her eyes. Focuses on her immediate perceptions. The carpet under her fingertips, the cushion against her cheek, the air caressing her skin. Her own breathing. The—

A knock pierces her eardrums. Her door opens violently. Her heart jumps to her throat and she almost falls off the couch. Looks at her hand. She’s torn a handful of strings from her carpet.

“Your friendly neighborhood butler has arrived.”

Get it together. Kara stands, takes half a second to plaster a big smile on her face, her heart still hammering in her ears, then turns around and walks up to Alex.

“Hey.” She waits for her to finish putting the bags of takeout on the kitchen island before pulling her into a bear hug. Out of nowhere, the memory of Alex wincing when she hugged her, ages ago, the night she became Supergirl, assaults her. Oh! sorry, that... that was too hard, I'm s—I'm just, I’m so excited! She loosens her hold immediately. “So, how was work? I could have dropped by the D.E.O, but I just wanted to go home and shower.”

“Work was okay. We got an alert on an alien attempting to break and enter into a residence but it turns out Brian just lost his keys...” Alex sighs, giving her a brief hug in return.

Oh. She seems tense. Did something happen with Maggie? “Go easy on him, okay? He's nice,” Kara says with a small smile. She wonders if the person who reported him did it out of genuine concern, or because he’s an alien. She wonders why the D.E.O. took over and didn’t let NCPD handle it. Maggie knows Brian. Maggie knows the alien population of National City. They know her. Trust her, for the most part. If it’s just breaking and entering, why not let the police take care of it? Aliens need to know they can count on local police, too. That’s why the work Maggie and Lena do together is so important. Maybe she should... tell James about it, ask him to have Snapper assign a reporter to— Alex is talking to her.

“—glad you're spending more time at home and less at the D.E.O.” She takes off her jacket, hangs it on a peg by the door.
Yeah. Easier that way. Alex gets to be the D.E.O.’s true number two again, and Kara gets to go home, feel less like a puppet. “I told Maggie, the other day, that I’m trying to recreate office hours. And also, Supergirl can’t be… a regular employee. I just do my thing, I don’t want to get involved in paperwork or workplace politics. I mean, I will if it’s needed, I’m on their payroll, you know? But…” She shakes her head, goes to put the ice cream in the freezer.

Alex leans against the kitchen island. “The last thing we need is Supergirl weighing in on workplace politics. Just show up and look pretty and punch what we tell you to hit.”

Kara knows she’s teasing, but still. Superman doesn’t punch anything or anyone because someone tells him to. He trusts his own judgment. He’s calm. He goes to work every morning. He goes home to the woman he loves every night unless something comes up. What happens the day Supergirl’s goals and the D.E.O.’s no longer align? What happens if she wants to go home to the woman she loves every night, and pick her battles?

She nods. “Will do. Do you want anything to drink?”

“I'll have something if you do.”

Kara opens a cupboard, gets two plates out. Is Alex wording is that way because she feels uncomfortable drinking by herself? Kara has a couple of good bottles of wine. She’s learned to enjoy it even though she doesn’t get a buzz out of it. She has some whisky, too, because it seems like something normal people would have in their home, for guests, or for themselves. She even has beer in her fridge. But maybe they should stick to alcohol-free drinks? But she doesn’t want to make Alex feels like she… ugh. Lena is so much better at this. She looks over at Alex. She’ll let her decide. “Apparently, you're my boss, so act like it. What are we having?”

Alex fidgets. “Let's have a beer.” She starts meandering around the apartment.

Kara looks at her. Did she make her feel self-conscious? Should she have poured them glasses of water? Or iced green tea? But Alex would hate that. Why is she walking around the place like she’s rediscovering it? She walked in like it was her own home a minute before. Kara pushes all her concerns aside, decides to trust the moment. She gets two beers out of the fridge, makes sure to use a bottle opener instead of her own strength. Pulls the food out of the bags and puts everything on a tray, before carrying it to the coffee table. She sits cross-legged on the couch and observes Alex, sees her look at her bed, her paintings. Their eyes meet. Kara smiles. Alex returns it and heads back her way to join her on the couch. "Nice picture,” she says, nodding at the framed photograph by the easel with a wry smile. She reaches for the beer. “So you're painting again.”
Kara nods, glancing at the picture. She remembers her stomach doing a flip when, at the last second, Lena turned to look at her instead of the camera. “It’s beautiful, isn’t it? The picture, I mean. Not my painting. We took it at the botanical gardens and James gave me tips on how to make it look... the way it felt.” She grabs her own beer and has a drink. It tastes like bubbles and bitterness. She should stock her fridge with better beer in case Alex comes over. Or perhaps the beer is fine and it just tastes like nothing to her? She’ll ask Maggie what the good brands are. What she likes. What Alex likes. What was the one Maggie brought for that dinner? Kara tries to picture the bottle on the counter, the one that had Lena’s lipstick on it. Did they share a beer, then? Was it the first thing they shared? Maybe the writing was on the wall. Maybe sometimes, the world is fair and good things happen to good people. “And yeah,” Kara gestures at the canvases. “That’s my first attempt at getting back into the swing of things. It's not going great. But I'm going to get some help, and it might happen.”

“Well,” Alex says, “I know how you love it. I'm glad you're getting back into the swing of things. And the attempts that you're not wild about you can gift to me and I can hang on my walls.”

Kara nods. “Maybe.” But she doesn’t mean it. She’s not giving her sister anything she considers a failure. She’s not giving Alex anything that wasn’t meant for her, anything that wasn’t good enough for someone else.

Alex has a drink of beer. “Is that how things feel with Lena? Beautiful?”

Oh, here we go again. Kara passes her a plate, hoping to entice her not to drink on an empty stomach. “Yes. I mean, not beautiful like something unattainable, just... just right. Why?”

“I'm just trying to figure out what she means to everyone,” Alex shrugs, scooping food onto her plate. “Not just her.”

Kara plays with her bottle. She’s grateful Alex didn’t push about her and Lena, for once. She isn’t sure she could handle it, not when Lena’s voice lingers in her heart after that call. But she isn’t sure what Alex is talking about, exactly. “You mean, what Lena means to Maggie?”

“No, no.” Alex has a drink. “I mean, that too. But I don't need to figure that out. They're friends.” She nods. “And that's great. Good for her. Good for Lena. Good for everyone.”

So... What Lena means to whom, then? Or is she talking about what Maggie means to everyone? Kara feels like she’s wading through quicksand. She decides to go for solid ground, points her chopsticks at her. “Sure, but... what about you?”
Alex gives her an indecipherable look. So much for solid ground. “I thought you called me here for laundry.” A beat. “I talked to Maggie yesterday.”

It mustn’t have gone swimmingly, then, if Alex isn’t on cloud nine. And she’s most definitely not on cloud nine, right now. She’s barely touched her food. Kara glances at her own empty plate, half-heartedly puts some potstickers on it. “Okay. Did you reach out, or…?”

“I called her. Friday. I just... I felt bad about everything.” She picks at her food. “I didn't hear back until a few days later and she agreed to meet. It was….” Alex shakes her head. “I don't know.”

Oh. Maggie didn’t get back to Alex right away because it was the day she went on a date with Lena. A date that, Kara suspects, went so well that Maggie needed a day to process it before she could see her own girlfriend on Sunday. So well that she needed even more time before calling Alex back. Why? Kara has a gulp of insipid beer to give herself a few more seconds to think. Maggie needed so much time because of the contrast. She went from being yelled at by Alex, to being, Kara imagines, treated so respectfully by Lena. From thinking she deserved Alex’s ire, to, perhaps, catching a glimpse of how Lena gets when she stops being conciliatory. When she says no to someone she loves, to Lex, to Jack, to Lillian, to Alex. Kara isn’t expecting the pang of pride and hurt she feels in her chest. She didn’t stand up for her girlfriend. Lena did.

She focuses on Alex. That’s what matters for now. Being here for her. “I don't want to pry, but what were your expectations going in? When you met with her. Did you have to... adjust? And obviously, I’m not asking as Maggie's girlfriend. I'm asking as your sister.”

“Don't get me wrong. It wasn't bad. You know, we talked. And she listened. And she... she accepted my apology. And she...” Alex has a bite of food, takes a minute to think. “It went better than I expected. Not as well as I might have hoped,” she adds with an apologetic smile.

Kara buries the sadness, schools her face, not wanting to make Alex feels like she’s pitying her. Her sister is so proud. Fiercely so. Kara loves that about her. She sets her plate aside. She can’t eat. “I'm sorry. I hope... I mean, you know, even with me – Maggie and I, I mean – it's a process. One step forward, two steps back. I don't know what you told her, what she told you, but what I do know is that things aren't set in stone.”

“No, it's fine. I don't get any of this anyway. I'm sorry, Kara. I just don't get it. And I'm going to work at being more understanding and less judgmental. Less defensive. Insecure.” Alex pauses. “I'm sorry for the things I've said to you. For the assumptions I've made. I swear, I was less crazy when I thought I was straight.”
Kara frowns and scoots closer. “Sure, fine. All your sins are forgiven. But more importantly, I don't think anyone gets it. What this is. What I set in motion when I opened this thing up. So it's better to ask, and if you can't ask Maggie, or Lena – who says hi, by the way, I was on the phone with her before you got here – you can always ask me. I mean, we're... you have my back, always, and I have yours. I don't have all the answers, but I'll never resent you for asking.”

Alex smiles. “I know that.” She rests her head on her shoulder for a few seconds. “I don't know if you can even answer my questions. I guess I...” She puts her food on the table and leans into her. Kara may not feel her weight, but she’s glad she can support it. “Kara, I told her I was still in love with her. And... I don't know what I expected but she didn't say it back. I know you're in an open relationship but I don't know if that means I can say those kinds of things... I mean, she's your girlfriend.” Alex looks up at her. “I'm sorry. I feel like a shitty sister. But it's what I feel and part of me thinks I should be upfront and... follow your lead. You're so brave, Kara. And it's not like I think she would ever leave you, or... “ A sigh. “Do you hate me?”

You're so brave. You're so strong. Things her sister and her girlfriend say. Happy existential crisis, Lena says. Kara looks down at Alex, suppresses a smile. “Oh yes, I hate you so much. You and I, we're a Greek tragedy in the making, two sisters pitted against each other by fate. Come on.” She kisses her forehead carefully. “More seriously, though. You can tell Maggie whatever you need to tell her. As far as I'm concerned, it really is open, and we shouldn't... I mean, if we accept that premise? That anyone is free to pursue what they want with someone else as long as we don't go behind each other's back? Then I can't be with you because I'm with her, or I can't be with you because you're with her are just moot points. It shouldn't matter. It matters if it's just too much, of course, but not... I guess what I'm trying to say is, we should make decisions for ourselves. Not for other people.”

“When you put it that way,” Alex sighs. “She told me... she couldn't give me that. That she isn't in the place... that she can't give enough... or be with me in... I don't know. I mean, I can pretend to be cool and modern but I don't know, I don't know if I can share someone I care about in that way. How do you do it? I mean, she said she wants to be friends. If we even know how to do that. But what's a friend to someone like Maggie? She once told me she didn't even have any but now there's Lena... she's friends with Lena. But you're friends with Lena. I thought friends were easy.”

Kara licks her lips. This is tricky. Maggie wants to be friends with Alex. Nothing more, for now. Okay, fine. But why? Because she’s already in a relationship, and exploring whatever it is she has with Lena, and she doesn’t have the energy for more? Because she no longer wants to be with Alex that way, regardless of her other relationships? Or because what she has with Lena is getting... better than anticipated, better than— Well. Alex first. Thoughts later.

She gives her another forehead kiss and shifts to face her, still cross-legged on the couch. “There's a lot, there. I don't know how... traditional or modern you are, but if what would make you happy is to be in a more conventional, exclusive relationship, that's fine. I mean, from what I can tell,
Maggie doesn't think of herself as particularly... I think she went along with it, you know? Because I suggested it, and the idea of sharing me with someone else was more bearable than not having me at all, I guess. And then Lena came along, and you know how she is. Most of the time, being around her is so calming. That's really appealing to someone like Maggie. As for friendship... I don't know. It is easy for me. With Lena. And yeah, I think Maggie and I are friends, too, but like I said, it's a process. I'm in the dark too, in a way.”

Alex looks puzzled. “What are you in the dark about? You know, she said it was... strange for her, but there seemed to be some part of her that was... defending it. Or seemed guarded in some way. And I don't know if that's because of how invested she may or may not be... or if by defending it, she's defending whatever she has with you and Lena. I think some part of her is... “ She pauses, mulls it over. “Afraid. Maybe I'm wrong.” She pauses. “Does she make you happy?”

Kara looks past Alex for a few seconds, to the sky beyond the glass. Happy like a stupid bird. Like a mindless forest fire. Happy just because. Not feeling well is ordinary.

“Look, I'm...” she says with difficulty. She puts her hand on Alex’s but doesn’t trust herself to take it. “It's the wrong question. It's not up to one person to make me happy. It's up to us to make ourselves available for happiness, and there are so many factors coming into play that have nothing to do with who we're dating or sleeping with or being friends with.” Factors like names. Losses. Fears. Kara knows Alex thinks she hasn’t answered her question. She knows what the next question is going to be. At least she’s warming up Alex’s hand with hers. That’s something.

“Does Lena make you happy?”

The haziness is back, clouding her glasses, her eyes, her mind. Lena respects my unhappiness and still thinks we can share time and joy. What’s happy, anyway? Moments? Feeling like if you could change everything, you wouldn’t change a thing? A general sense of peace with oneself and one’s choices? You are ordinary. Not feeling well is ordinary. Not feeling well is ordinary. Not feel—

“No,” Kara answers quietly. “She makes me feel real, and loved, and like we would have been friends no matter what. That's better. Happiness...” She gestures vaguely. “That's hazy.”

“Well, how dignified.”

Kara feels like she’s been slapped. She swallows uneasily. “I'm just speaking for myself, here. We're all different.”
Alex returns to her food, drinks some beer. Kara glances at the picture by the easel, Lena’s eyes on her, making her real. Thinks of Maggie’s last text. Thank you for the beautiful story. I love you. All right, Sunshine, rain major it is. Do you ever get cold, Kara? The sound of Alex’s voice startles her.

"It's a simple question, Kara. And fine, make it about semantics and availability but it's yes or no. You make me happy. Maggie makes me happy. Even Lena makes me happy. And I don't need to make a diagram and punch in the values to get the exact degrees of happiness. Correct me if I'm wrong, but sometimes you just don't seem that into her." Alex shrugs. “And I wish I could stop feeling that way. It would sting less.”

Kara glances at the potstickers. She couldn’t swallow a bite even if she wanted to. Make it about semantics and availability but it’s yes or no. No, it’s not. Not for her. She carefully sets her beer down on the table because if she holds it any longer, the bottle will shatter in her hand. She pulls up her knees and wraps her arms around her legs, resting her chin there. She wants Alex to leave her alone. She wants her to back off. She wants her to stop questioning her love for Maggie. To stop making her feel like she’s twisting things, avoiding things, like she’s incapable or unwilling to form healthy, simple connections with others. To stop making her feel like her mind is a labyrinth and who the hell knows what goes on at the heart of it. I don’t need to make a diagram and punch in the values to get the exact degrees of happiness. That’s what her mind is to Alex. An overcomplicated, badly designed piece of software. But. Kindness first, kindness last, and kindness in between. Kara doesn’t punch down and her sister is down, right now. Hurting.

So Kara pushes her own hurt aside. She pushes it to that mental corner she’s been designing, a soft little place where everything that hurts can lick its wounds, rest a bit, until she has the resources to take care of it.

“I believe you,” she says, and her own voice sounds distant to her own ears. “About knowing who and what makes you happy. But it’s not like that for me. I can’t put it in such clear-cut terms. I’m not trying to be complicated, or to pretend I’m above feelings, or... all these things. I'm just grateful for every moment I get to enjoy with someone, every moment I feel like I've made a difference.” Every moment I feel like being here is worth it. She looks over at Alex, keeps her voice calm. “And honestly, I love you, but who are you to tell me I don't seem that into my girlfriend, like this is just... something you can read off people?”

Alex laughs caustically. “You're right. What would I know? Every question I ask about the two of you, you turn it into a discussion about ideas and people. But if it's Lena, that's easier. She makes you feel real and loved. You have a picture of her up by your easel. Why aren't you dating? Maybe dating is too basic to someone so enlightened.” She sets her chopsticks down. “You know what? I'm going to stop. Because I'm doing it again and I didn't come here to fight with you.”

Well. Now Kara knows, somewhat, how Maggie and Lena felt, being subjected to Alex’s bile.
She remembers Maggie’s heaving breath on the phone that night. Maybe I didn’t say it in the right way. Kara tries to swallow the anger and the tears burning her throat. Maggie crying in her car by the waterfall, sorry for all she wasn’t. I don’t care about who you’re not. I love what you are. Kara wants to cry, too. She should have stood up for her. She should have told Alex to never, ever speak to her girlfriend that way again. To leave Maggie and Lena alone, to find something else to be bitter about. She can’t look at her own sister.

She remembers that other night, making Lena hot chocolate. That look on her face. That absence of look, as she recounted her confrontation with Alex, not wanting to say too much, and then saying it all after Kara knelt by the bed to say goodnight, pulling the covers over her. Wise one, to whom such crude concepts like being in love and wanting to take someone to bed are reserved for the unenlightened. That’s what Alex said to Lena.

And now, to her, why aren’t you dating? Maybe dating is so basic to someone so enlightened. Well. We’re not dating because Lena doesn’t know why I can’t touch her the way she deserves to be touched. We’re not dating because she’s having a good time with a wonderful, normal person like Maggie and I’m not going to screw that up for them. We’re not dating because she sees a version of me that’s closest to the person I would have become on my planet. We’re not dating because if we were, she would figure it out, and she would love me just the same but we wouldn’t be able to support each other the way Kara and Lena do. Because she would never again ask me if I need another blanket for the night, or if I got hurt when I slipped in the tub. We’re not dating because loving is more meaningful to me than being in love.

But Kara can’t say any of this. Doesn’t want to. It’s private. It’s semantics, for someone like Alex. And she wants to be kind to her, but she doesn’t want Alex to spit her kindness back in her face. And she can’t let her say things like that. She can’t let Alex’s anger and hurt twist all the good things people that aren’t her bring into her life.

She picks up her phone delicately, because her hands aren’t quite steady yet, opens it on Maggie's latest text and passes it to Alex without a word.

The majestic geese are likely in better spirits when they have such winsome company. I’ll work on my bedside manner with them, and offer snacks and gratitude for allowing me their time, instead of complaints. Thank you for the beautiful story. I love you.

That’s not the kind of text someone sends when they feel ignored. It’s a text that says, thank you for reaching out, thank you for remembering the geese, thank you for thinking about me when I’m not here with you. Right?
Alex is staring at Kara’s phone, her jaw tight. She gives it back to her. “Good for you.” She exhales shakily.

“No,” Kara says, more vehemently than she intended. “Not good for me. You want to be Maggie’s friend? Or more, or whatever she’s willing to give you? Then maybe the first step is trusting her to make her own decisions. If she wants to dump me because she feels I’m not into it? She will. But she hasn’t, so far. So don’t treat my relationship with her like it’s some sort of charade and I’m just leading her on. Is it perfect? No. Do we try, do we make efforts, do we care?” Is it hard for you to show that you care about me? “Yes.”

“You’re right,” Alex replies, her breath short. “You’re right. I’m sorry. That was wrong. I don’t know what’s going on with you. And it’s none of my business. You are the person who matters most to me and I haven’t been doing a great job of showing you that. All you’ve ever been is supportive. I still have a lot to learn. I still have a lot of growing to do and... a lot of bitterness to leave behind. I just get lonely sometimes,” she says quietly, taking a breath, offering a smile. “But I have you. And my work. That’s all I need.”

Kara can’t muster the compassion, the understanding Alex deserves. Kara is just Kara. She’s hurt, too. But Supergirl? Whoever needs her help, gets it. She flips a mental switch. Better. She smiles. “You have to work on your acting skills, is what you need to do. Me and your work? Please. Why do you think we can argue so easily? It’s because we know that at the end of the day, we’re here for each other. I don’t doubt that. Ever. Even when you’re being Grumpiness incarnate. And of course you get lonely. I get lonely. We all get lonely. And you have every right to. But what matters is, you have me, you have Lena who, yes, might not give a monkey's bum about being your BFF, but would sell half her company's stock if it meant you got to be... happy, if that's the word you want to use. And you have Maggie. Who loves you. I don't know what she can give you, and I'm determined not to meddle anymore, but she cares, that I know for sure. So, just... cherish that. And who knows what's in store for you. Don't lash out, is all. Please. Nobody's out to get you.”

“Maggie said...” Alex whispers. “It sucks when you lash out, and I told her... Sometimes I feel calmer when I've got something to focus on. When I have a drink. Kara. Sometimes I just feel like no one could love me the way they love you. And I know it's stupid but it's the way I feel. And I'm working on getting over that. And stop feeling like I'm getting the short end of the stick. I'll work on being a kinder, better Alex. And work on being grateful.” She sighs. “You're right. I don't know what's in store. I know that I have to continue my apology tour. It started with Maggie, took a nose dive with you,” she mimes crashing and burning, “and maybe I'll finish it off with Lena. Since you and Maggie seem so convinced that she's ready to be there for me,” she huffs. “In the meantime. Can I get a hug?”

“In a minute,” Kara says softly. Hope, help and compassion for all. That’s what she does. That’s what she has to give. But Supergirl isn’t a person. Alex needs Kara, right now, not Supergirl. But Kara is... not strong enough. Kara wants to be selfish. And angry. She needs help, she needs something, someone to give her the strength to be here for someone else, right now. She thinks of all her books, all her stories, all her— her gaze alights on the pile of books on the coffee table. And
there are those who give with pain, and that pain is their baptism. Oh. The third stage of giving. She has a lot of work to do, to be able to give with joy, and then, to give for the sake of giving. But it’s a start. “First,” she tells Alex, “I’m so sorry that... that your mom paid more attention to me. That you got headhunted by the D.E.O. because you were my sister. That you didn't become a doctor. That you rose through the ranks only for me to barrel into that part of your life, too. And now, I’m the D.E.O.’s mascot. I'm sorry I met Maggie first, I'm sorry I... I'm just sorry. Not for you. I don't feel sorry for you, I don't pity you. Not for a second. But I do feel sorry for how it all turned out. As for your apology tour... Alex, it's over. Lena isn't expecting an apology, you gave it to her already. In the car. And yes, I know about that, because I'm her friend, and I was the only one she could talk to that night. Just call her whenever you feel like it. The way you would if nothing had happened. Now,” she says lightly, opening her arms.

Alex hugs her tight for a long time, strokes her hair. “You don't have anything to be sorry for. I wouldn't change a thing. I wouldn't trade you for anything.” A beat. “I'll call that twat soon.”

“You better,” Kara murmurs, rubbing her back as gently as she can. She’s so tired. Just a couple more hours. And then she can sleep, then she can be Kara, as frail and sad as she needs to be. “I love you. I'm like... your personal headquarters. You're always welcome here. Grumpy or not. And that's good, right? You have a home, no matter what. You can do a lot of things when you know you have a safety net. But more importantly... I'm not in the mood for potstickers, amazingly. So... ice cream? And a horrible movie of your choosing?”

Alex tightens her embrace. “You're home. My home.” She takes a breath, pulls back. “And Kara, I have your back. Through anything. If you ever need to bury a body— not that you're the type to bury a body. But if you were.” She sniffs. “Ice cream it is. Let's watch Dracula. It has horror and romance. And Keanu Reeves’ accent, which I think qualifies as a comedy? Something for everyone.”

Something for everyone. Kara smiles. “Dracula it is. Put it on, I’ll go get the ice cream.”

She stands, goes to the fridge. Vampire movies. She spotted Nosferatu in Maggie’s old VHS collection. Maybe Alex should watch it with her some time. Maybe the two of them can geek out about horror films and vampires. Although, Kara thinks Maggie’s taste is perhaps a little more… discerning. No, that’s condescending. Alex is one of the smartest people she knows. Even though she hates musicals. Either way, Alex and Maggie both love horror movies, classics or not. They could bond over this, and become friends again, or whatever they want to be, and run together in the park again, and everything would be… the best it can be. She takes a deep breath and opens the freezer to get the ice cream.
Part 2/2

Chapter Notes

A/N: Part 2/2, as promised. Here's who wrote what:

- Section 1 (Maggie): The_diversionist wrote everything except Lena's lines (texts + coffee date memories)
- Section 2 (Maggie x Lena): I wrote Lena and the non-dialogue stuff, The_diversionist wrote Maggie's dialogue/body language
- Section 3 (Alex): The_diversionist wrote everything, we co-wrote Lena's lines during the phone call
- Section 4 (Kara x Lena): This mammoth section is all me.

X

Her shift ends.

Maggie trades her squad car for her personal one and makes the drive home in bumper to bumper traffic. Where’s Igor when she needs him? Not that she could imagine having a chauffeur. It might be nice to close her eyes and let someone else do the driving. On those days and nights when she’s tired. The last thing she needs is for Supergirl to stop her car from going off a highway overpass again. She’d be so disappointed in her.

The sky spills into the distance, pale blue with soft pink clouds, pulled like cotton candy. The roofs of cars ahead of her shine with bright color. Her thoughts idle, ticking like her turn signal. Tick, tick, tick.

She thinks of her coffee date Monday afternoon with Lena. Her nerves fraying as she waited on the balcony of Lena’s office, worried about how their conversation might go. If Lena would have taken the weekend to decide it wasn’t anything she would pursue after all. It wouldn’t be the first time. Easy girls never get the girl. That’s what they say. Or would if the world wasn’t so heteronormative.

Maggie waited for Lena’s meeting to finish, wondering what would happen if Supergirl were to land on that balcony. Supergirl didn’t arrive but Lena did, wearing a deep blue blouse. She stood at the balcony door with a smile. Hey. So much of the tension Maggie was holding slipped away. They made jokes about the blouse’s plunging neckline. About gaining monopolies. Their kiss skirted on tender. Calming. It made her heady. Lena palmed a hand to her face.
The green turn signal comes up and Maggie drives. Now she listens to the hum and crank of the car. She glances at the newspapers sitting in the passenger seat. They tend to be her only company. The past few weeks the car has had more passengers than she’s used to. Lena. Kara. It’s been months for Alex. The last time was when they ran into each other at the park during the rainstorm. Alex issued another one of her apologies. The open relationship was new then but Alex didn’t know. Alex’s thumb touched along her forehead. It scarred. Maggie worries that Alex takes it as a failure.

They met last night.

Alex kicked her ass at pool. They drank another few pints of beer and while she felt herself relax, she can’t say the same for Alex. Her energy crackled, her gaze like a lance that Maggie worked to remove. It’s about raising walls. They circled the pool table like sharks, Maggie catching her glances and releasing them. Watching as she lined up her shots. Later they walked out together, talking about nothing that mattered. Every moment was weighted. Maggie reclined against her car, smoking a cigarette, while Alex stood beside her, arms crossed, chin dipped in thought. Maggie watched her through the haze of smoke. Alex has always been serious and intense. Her silences aren’t peaceful. Her silences are bottled storms. Maggie wanted to kiss her. An impulse, selfish desire, nothing grounded in thought or sense. In love? She may be in an open relationship but she’s not a hedonist. They parted ways, Maggie with an apologetic smile. See you around, Danvers. Alex walked away. Some part of Maggie was relieved.

Friday and Saturday: Lena.

Sunday: Kara.

Monday: Coffee with Lena. Phone conversation with Alex.

Tuesday: Alex at the alien bar.

Work, work, work.

She’s tired. How does anyone do this? How do they have the time? The resources? The emotional capacity? She skipped out on the opportunity for OT tonight. The body found inside the dumpster was more than enough for the day, thank you very much. The uniforms and detectives made jokes while the scene was being blocked off and the CSIs took their pictures. Maggie smiled and laughed between sips of coffee. What does this work do to a person?

Maggie looks at her odometer. Five miles per hour, on the highway. A car accident, she thinks. Someone who won’t ever be coming home again, maybe. Others who will wonder what their last words were, what they would be had they known. Another forty minutes pass before she gets
She parks and grabs the stack of newspapers before entering her building. A walk up the creaking stairs and she enters her apartment, throwing the newspapers onto the coffee table in front of the couch. She sheds her jacket, hanging it on the hook by the door before pulling the cell from her back pocket. She reads Kara’s text again and smiles.

Just Kara 4:42pm: Supergirl put out a forest fire today. All the birds were fleeing so she got to fly with a flock of geese. They’re friendlier in the sky. Majestic, even. Maybe they wish they were up there all the time and that’s why they’re so cranky and take it out on you on the ground?

Maybe they’re not so far removed. They’re a work in progress. Maggie will continue her efforts into being patient, giving, and grateful. It’s harder for her than it is for people like Kara and Lena. But Maggie knows she should be grateful. She is grateful. She sent Kara a response but hasn’t heard back yet. Maybe Kara has nothing to say in return.

She goes to her bedroom, grabs a pair of scissors from the desk pressed against the wall and returns to the living room. Maybe tomorrow there will be a story about Supergirl putting out a fire. She wonders if there will be a shot of the geese flying off, Supergirl amongst them. She doubts it. But it would be nice. In the meantime, there’s a photograph of her hoisting a collapsed highway onto her shoulders, terrified onlookers frozen while others flee to safety. The National City infrastructure is terrible but Maggie can’t say she’s surprised given the constant alien and terrorist attacks they have to withstand.

*Looks like a job for Supergirl.* Or better yet, a unionized construction crew. It shouldn’t always be Supergirl using heat vision to weld metal back into place. *Those aliens are taking our jobs.* She hears that kind of crap at the station. Maggie smooths out the newspaper on the coffee table, before cutting out the article and picture. Her cuts are straight and neat. No jagged edges.

She cuts out the crossword puzzle, too. Kara likes them. She isn’t sure how Kara’s mind works. She pictures it constantly spinning, curious and eager for understanding and discovery. In a different way than her own. Maybe something about puzzles is soothing to her. She likes words, etymology. It makes sense though ‘sense’ isn’t always an indicator of validity.

Maggie takes the clippings with her to the bedroom, opening the desk drawer and putting the Supergirl pieces with all the other ones she’s saved. She hasn’t told Kara she does this, doesn’t know if she’d think it was weird. This all started with Batwoman. Gathering whatever she could to try to figure out who the mysterious masked woman getting a jump on all her crime scenes was. Kate and Kara both have a knack for interfering with due process and her job. Both got under her skin.
Maggie doesn’t know how she would explain it if Kara ever found the stash. It’s unlikely. Kara doesn’t visit often. In any case, Maggie’s not sure why she saves the pictures and articles of Supergirl. She started after she found out who she was. Is it strange? No. It’s a cop thing. It’s also a serial killer thing.

But she’s not a serial killer. It’s nice to see all of Supergirl’s good deeds. She inspires people. And she’ll continue to inspire her, along with Kara. It’s a reminder of all the good there is in National City, of all the lives being saved. They don’t work together, and the Supergirl defense has officially gotten old, but they work for the same purpose: the safety of National City. It’s too bad there isn’t a picture with the geese. She wonders if Jimmy Olsen has one. It would be easy to ask her to the park, to take a picture then, but the ask seems too daunting. Can I get a picture of you? Not a picture of ‘us’. There is an ‘us’. Shaky as they are. But they’ll never have that picture, will they, like Kara has by her easel. She can’t imagine the two of them existing in each other’s walls, something on display. What they are. What they’re worth.

She closes the drawer gently, settles the crossword stack at the corner of the desk with the others she’s saved. They’re weighed down by the pot of the first bonsai tree to die in her care. She has to be more careful. She told Lena she’d pick up another one, take pictures. She hasn’t yet. She doesn’t know when she will. She’ll bring the crosswords to Kara later.

She leaves the bedroom, goes to the freezer. A lone shrimp scampi dinner remains. She takes it out, ripping the box open and throwing it into the microwave. Not as nice as a picnic with Kara or dinner in bed with Lena. She folds her arms on the counter, watching the tray spin slowly. Her thoughts return to her meeting with Alex at the alien bar. Was it cruel to not tell Alex how she feels? Isn’t it crueler to lead her on when there’s nothing she can offer her? Kara, Lena and work already take up the majority of her time. They’re both so gentle she feels like a wrecking ball around them most of the time. And if she’s a wrecking ball, Alex is a nuke. But there’s something calming about that kind of directness. She won’t ever question that Alex cares.

The dinner finishes and Maggie pulls it out, balancing it on her fingertips, setting it on the table. She finds a fork and sits at the kitchen table, eating in the quiet. She hopes Kara’s having a nice evening. After the fire today, and the mess, she hopes she got a nice shower. She hasn’t taken a shower with Kara yet. She wonders if she ever will. She thinks of Lena. Okay, then I’m going to go down on you. Would you like that?

Maggie finishes the dinner, throwing the plastic tray into the recycling bin. She washes the fork, drying it and returning it to the utensil drawer. Her GCPD coffee mug is sitting by the sink. There’s a hairline crack on the side from when she dropped her tea the first night Kate arrived, bleeding, clad in black, the crimson bat symbol on her chest, her mask in tatters. Come on, Mags, I’m about to pass out, so please help me now and gape later.
She puts the coffee mug in the cabinet, thinking again of the coffee break with Lena on Monday. It’s easy to focus at work. When she’s alone, thoughts and memories lap over her, unbeckoned. She wades through them. Once they left the balcony and got into the office, Lena sensed… something. She was anxious, too. So… no regrets? Lena asked. None on my end, for the record. She has a playful way about her. Circling before returning to the question at hand. She provides her time to adjust. Maggie found a smile. How could I regret a thing like that?

They talked. Flirted. Kissed. Lena told her about the 92 year old conservative trust fund baby she was meeting for lunch. The one who always offers Lena a cigar when they order coffee at the end of a meal. Maggie told her about upcoming interviews. They want to watch each other work. Is it as strange for Lena to hear as it is for her? To watch someone at their craft implies worth and value. Who praises the CEO of L-Corp? Lillian? Who would it have to be for it to matter to Lena? To take pride in it? Maybe she doesn’t need anyone like that.

Maggie returns to the living room and starts the record player. The Etta James vinyl spins, the arm stretching out to the record before returning to its original position. Maggie frowns and tries again to the same result. “Come on, not you, too.” The walkman died two nights ago. She smacks the side of the record player, resulting in a screech of music before she quickly lifts the arm and sets it back to its starting position. She closes the cover. She'll have to take it to the shop.

No music, then. She sits on the couch, thinking back to Lena. The anxiety she experiences always dulls when they’re together. And so it was on Monday. Their hands wandered, Lena's resting beneath her shirt, rising up, cupping her. To think that only the week before they’d barely moved past chaste kisses.

I know I’m acting like a teenager but… this is really nice. I'd already forgotten how much.

Then let’s be teenagers together. I never really got to do that with anyone my age.

Lena told her she’d only had three lovers. Jack, Alex, herself. Another revelation said in whispers between kisses. Maggie flushes thinking about it. She can’t be sure whether Lena was teasing or not. She likes to do that, yet she’s sincere. Maggie doesn’t know what to think. She was the first woman Alex took to bed. If Alex was Lena’s first… She can’t overthink it. It doesn’t matter. Inevitably this ends up happening in small circles of queer women. But to say or even think that they pass each other around is cheap. Lena isn’t like that. Neither are Alex and Kara.

They parted; Maggie back to work to run interviews, Lena to meet with the conservative ninety-two year old trust fund baby. Want to come with me to the business lunch? Lena asked. I’ll tell her you’re my gal pal who’s been working very closely with the company these past few months, and that half an hour before this lunch, we were making out on the couch she usually sits on. That way, she’ll have a heart attack and kick the bucket and I’ll never hear from her again.
A tempting offer. A handful of lingering kisses later and Maggie was able to extricate herself from the situation, exiting the office with rumpled clothing she hastily had to put back into order. That was Monday afternoon. Now it’s Wednesday evening.

They never set up a time to meet or call, instead saying they wanted to hear about how their prospective follow ups went. She takes out her cell, pulling up Lena’s contact information. She’s uncharacteristically nervous about reaching out to her. Your tongue has been inside her. You’re past the point of being shy. True.

A breath. She texts.

Did you pitch the crone into the oven or do you need your gal pal to come to the rescue?

Lena Luthor 8:03pm: I smoked a cigar. I am a changed woman.

From her smoldering corpse or?

Sorry, too dark?

Lena Luthor 8:08pm: No, sadly she lit it for me with her 5k zippo. If I thought the perfume I was wearing that day didn’t smell right, that cigar sure put things into perspective.

Maggie smiles. Lena complained about her perfume when they met, listed it as one, of many reasons she hadn’t initiated a kiss. Maggie leaned forward, drew in her scent, kissed her neck. I’m afraid I’m unconvinced by your first reason.

She fires back a text:

My last lighter ran 99 cents. Someone doesn’t know how to bargain shop.

In the market for a new perfume, then?

Lena Luthor 8:13pm: On the other hand, I’m pretty sure she hasn’t had to buy a lighter for the past 60 years so maybe she’s the savvy shopper in the end? And I’m always in the market for a new perfume. I have my go-tos but variety is the spice of life. How did those follow-up interviews go?
If I buy 5 lighters a year for the next 30 years it'll still run me 150 dollars. I'll pocket the other cash for a retirement home. If I’m able to survive the last day before I retire.

If you pick up new perfumes and I'll be your lab rat. Let you know if they make it unbearable to be around you.

As for the follow up interviews, they went okay... one of the guys lawyered up with a really bad attorney. The accomplice found a great one that likes to get cases thrown out on technicalities. Luckily my work is up to snuff. I took a lot of notes.

Lena Luthor 8:20pm: (she smokes like a chimney. I think five lighters would last her a couple of weeks tops. I don't understand how she's still alive.) You do seem quite meticulous. Do you take handwritten notes?

(Maybe she's not human).

I do take handwritten notes! Easier to remember that way. Electronic notes can be lost in the server or cloud or hardware crashes. Not to mention hacked. Handwritten it is. Is that terribly offensive to a tech genius like you?

Lena Luthor 8:32pm: Even if I did take offense, it's not up to you, is it? I imagine you're following NCPD procedures. But as it happens, I don't find it offensive in the slightest. You know those initiatives that have sprung up all over the country these past few years to help scan all the ancient manuscripts etc. sleeping in the archives of libraries big and small, make it all available to the public? L-Corp sure is doing its part. Best of both worlds.

I'd hate to not be called one of the most uptight NCPD officers on the force. Following procedure is akin to a compulsion for me. But that sounds like a great project. Old things should be preserved, even if they're not in my preferred form. Call me old fashioned, but there's something about the feel of something in your hands.

Old things disappear often, their memories lost to the wayside. Things should be documented. Remembered. Paper is tangible. Photographs, tangible. Things worth preserving, worth remembering. Digital is vulnerable to manipulation. The traces of their vanishing harder to find. She doesn’t remember what she looked like as a child anymore. As a child you're dependent on those around you. She rubs her forehead.

Thinks of the tulips she photographed in the hotel room. Digital photograph. She never prints the pictures in her phone gallery. They exist until something happens. The phone is destroyed or crashes, until something happens to no longer warrant that memory. She remembers Lena's breath against her shoulder.
I haven't been able to stop thinking of that night with you.

It's honest, but she regrets telling her. Even if it seems important to her that Lena know. Lena's been open with her. At least when it comes to the two of them. Isn’t returning that sincerity the least she can do?

Minutes pass without a response. Her palms start to sweat. Maybe it was wrong to tell her.

Lena Luthor 8:45pm: The next time I'm given a tour of some prominent establishment's archives because they're trying to convince me to support their digitization effort, I'll let you tag along.

And it's been on my mind, too. I'd love to spend some time with you outside the office again soon.

Maggie exhales. Touches her lips, smiles, going to the kitchen and retrieving a beer. She'll have to take Lena to one of the breweries. Maybe one of the more upscale ones. Lena hasn’t struck her as particularly snobbish. She didn’t like the one she brought back to Kara's the night of the dinner party. Something else, then. She wonders if she'll ever be invited to Lena's home. It was ages before Kara invited her inside. The thought of having Lena over to hers is mortifying. So what if it’s clean? It’s a ruin. Sometimes she wonders why she’s still here. She can afford better. But Lena wants to see her again. That’s what matters. It shouldn’t be a revelation. Not after they parted ways on Saturday. Or Monday. Why does she like her so much…? She shouldn’t like her so much. It’s an infatuation. It’s new. That’s all. And temporary, until Kara and Lena manifest. It’s okay to be free with her sincerities, easier when there’s an expiration date, when there’s no commitment.

I'd like that. To come along on the tour.

And to spend time with you outside the office, obviously. I enjoyed our morning, too. So...

She feels hot. It’s the beer. It’s all this sappy bullshit she’s typing out to Lena Luthor. If Kara read it (she wouldn’t care), if Alex read it… She bites her lip. Being as removed from Kara as she has been has made her memories fuzzy. Forget beautifully composed shots by easels. There are no photographs of them together, period. Maggie hasn’t dared to take one, Kara hasn't thought to. Or maybe she has and decided against it. When was the last time she and Kara spent the night together? When she broke her rib. And before then? She can’t remember.

Lena Luthor 8:52pm ...so, would you like to meet up for dinner somewhere this week? Or next weekend.

She finds herself smiling and tries to squash it. Does she mean this coming weekend or the
following weekend? What does dinner entail? Just dinner? More? She’d prefer to see her sooner rather than later. What happened to being exhausted? Sometimes it’s worth being exhausted. She tries to be clear.

I would love to meet for dinner sometime this week.

Lena Luthor 9:01pm: I’m not doing anything after work this week, except for Thursday, so what works for you works for me. I’d love for you to pick the place, this time.

I can do that. I'll take care of everything.

She grimaces, unsure of what exactly ‘everything’ entails. She writes again.

I'm sorry if this is really forward or inappropriate, but I would love to spend the night with you again. I can find a place for dinner but if you’d like to spend more time together afterward, we can do that, too. If you only have time for dinner I understand. Even if you do have time and just want to take things slowly. I can take things slow with you.

It’s not about the sex. She feels a flicker of panic. No, it is about the sex. No. It’s about the friendship Lena has offered her. It’s about their conversation. That makes her feel more at ease. She won’t deny the rest is fun. Feels good. They’re friends with benefits. This one just feels different than those previous arrangements. She never had a girlfriend and a friend with benefits on the side, for one. That’s why it feels different. She has to adjust.

Lena Luthor 9:09pm: Dinner and more sounds perfect. I was afraid to ask, or that you’d think I was feeling entitled to too much of your time. I just want to make sure you know I’d take just dinner over nothing in a heartbeat.

Maggie breathes a sigh of relief, taking a long drink of the beer. She wonders what Lena had for dinner tonight, whether she’ll be having a glass of her favorite wine.

Me too. Are you free Friday night? If you need to look through your schedule and get back to me that's okay.

They did Friday last time. Maybe it’s too much for Lena. It’s important to give her an escape. A way for them both to salvage their dignity if she’s being too presumptuous.
Lena Luthor 9:11pm: I can pretty much make it work every week night, except for Thursday, as long as we don't meet up before 8pm or so. So just let me know what works best for you, even on short notice.

*Let's plan for Friday night. I'm not on call this weekend so if you don't have an L-Corp merger or whatever in the works we won't have to rush off at the crack of dawn.*

She should flush the phone. Stop texting. She doesn’t like writing things down. This conversation would be better on the phone. She’s saying too many things that could be dissected and analyzed. Evidence. She nearly asks where she’d like to have breakfast. She won’t ask where to have breakfast.

Lena Luthor 9:15pm: That will certainly make the rest of the week fly by (weekly call from Cassius scheduled for Friday 4pm fml).

*Fun. You'll regale me with stories of Wallis later on if need be. I'm looking forward to seeing you, too.*

Her stomach clenches. Should she have said that? Kara's her girlfriend. Things are improving with her. She feels guilty only because things with Lena are … easier, lighter, fun. But that’s what happens with airy things. With weightless, impermanent things. Lena and Kara have an easier time, too, maybe because there’s the reassurance of permanence. Time. Maggie touches her temple. Is this what she should be doing? What about Alex?

No. She’s doing the right thing with Alex. The best thing she can do. Things with Kara are complicated and heavy. She needs to give that as much care and thought as she can. Lena’s… a reprieve. Shelter from the storm. And Alex… what can she give her now? What that would be fair? Maybe once things settle down with Kara. Maybe once she adjusts to all of this. It’s going to take a bit to adjust to all of this. Is she allowed to experience a little joy with someone else? Why does it make her feel guilty? Shouldn’t she be honest? She gives Lena another out.

*If something comes up and you need to reschedule just let me know.*

Lena Luthor 9:19pm: Nothing will come up (unless Cleopatra the poodle passes away tragically and I'm expected to attend the wake overseas). I'm just glad you have time for me. I know you're busy.
Glad she has time for her? She is busy. But her post work hours are sprawling, despite their limited availability. She hasn’t asked to see Kara again. She won’t be clingy. She won’t push her. If Kara wants to see her Kara will ask. She hopes Kara will ask.

I try to make time when I think someone wants it. You’re worth making time for. Oh. I made an Instagram thing. It’s msawyer52. Maggie Sawyer was taken.

Lena Luthor 9:21pm: Did you send a request?

Maggie pulls open the app, tracks down Lena’s page, searching until she finds the ‘follow’ button. She’s established her own account and immediately set it to private, knowing the last thing she needs are the men and women she’s taken into custody (or ex-girlfriends), going over her (non-existent) gallery. She doesn’t intend to upload any pictures.

Lena Luthor 9:23pm: Got it. I’ll send you a follow request, then. Obviously I’m not expecting you to post anything if you don’t feel like it, or to fawn over my weekly updates on Lazarus (my sage plant that keeps dying and coming back to life).

She finds Lena’s request and approves it.

I’ve approved you. I still can’t see your miraculous plant, though.

Lena Luthor 9:27pm: There, all sorted out. You’re my seventh follower. Lucky number.

The app notifies her that the request has been approved. Lena’s page is as random as promised. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to her pictures. No people. Things. She thinks back to the one in Lena’s gallery with Kara soaking wet again. Crisis averted. She skims Lena’s gallery, afraid to let her eyes settle on something that will leave her feeling gutted.

And you’re my first. I’m sure there’s something to that number, too.

Lena Luthor 9:30pm: Probably. On day one, let there be light, on day seven, let there be rest, right?
That's a nice spin to put on it.

Lena Luthor 9:31pm: It is. Find poetry wherever you can is my motto.

You're a romantic.

Lena Luthor 9:32pm: So are you.

Me?  
Okay. I do know you mean me.

Lena Luthor 9:35pm: No, my bad, I had you confused with the lady I spent a terribly romantic night with and who served me breakfast in bed last weekend. Silly me.

Is it that easy with Lena? They had hard conversations. Maggie shut her out but Lena was patient. Maggie did her best to be honest. Is that all it takes?

I'm relieved you found it romantic rather than frustrating.  
You deserve breakfast in bed. I can't say I've ever been called a romantic. I didn't know breakfast in bed qualified.

Lena Luthor 9:36pm: It does. Takes one to know one.

Does that earn the romantic little detective (better than angry little detective?) a question?

Lena Luthor 9:38pm: Absolutely. The romantic little detective gets to ask the romantic little scientist whatever she wants.

She silently acknowledges to herself that she would roll her eyes if anyone shared this exchange with her. That she would ridicule anyone else having this conversation. That she would hope the earth would swallow her if anyone were to read it. She’s not a romantic. She doesn’t do romantic things. Valentine’s Day remains a corporate scheme to monetize ‘love’. But maybe gestures are okay when love isn’t involved.
All right. How did the romantic little scientist... deduce what she did the night we were together?

You know.

‘You know’ is more diplomatic than ‘when you choked me’. She still remembers the pressure of Lena’s hand on her neck. Sensation heightened. She’s never asked anyone to do that. Hasn’t know she could trust anyone to do that. Alex would be appalled. Maybe, anyway. And Kara... Kara broke your rib. Kara could never.

Lena Luthor 9:47pm Ah. See, deductive reasoning would have gotten me nowhere. Inductive reasoning, though... but more prosaically, I just pay attention. Because that's what I do, but also, in that context? I'm not exactly sure of myself, so I guess I'm more attentive than most. And I wanted to make sure you were aware that you having a good time was my priority.

It’s usually the other way. Her partner’s good time their priority. Hers, too. She always had to be sure to deliver. She touches her fingers to her lips. She’s never been open about some of her more unconventional desires. Her family made her feel like a pervert. The kids at school did, too. How does one explain and ask for what they don’t fully understand themselves? Maybe it’s the kind of thing a shrink would have a field day with.

I've never known how to talk to anyone about that. It's weird. So I never ask—

_I had a great time. I trust you'll ask if there's something you would like._

Lena Luthor 9:50pm: I will. But I'm afraid I'm terribly vanilla (which I know you approve of when it comes to ice cream, at the very least). I love figuring out what makes people tick, though. Or happy and content, in general. Maybe that's what I like. My own unconventional thing.

So it’s curiosity, then. The scientist in her, exploring and tinkering.

_All right. But you'll tell me if you need more or less. I want you to have a nice time. We can take all the time you need._

She adds, quickly.

_I don't mind vanilla._
The last thing she wants Lena to think is that she’s some kind of degenerate. That she’s opposed to what Lena is comfortable offering.

Lena Luthor 9:54pm: We can take all the time we need. That’s what I’d like.

I didn’t know if that would sound too...

‘We’ it is. That’s what I’d like, too.

I hope that doesn’t sound—

Lena Luthor 9:58pm: Good. There’s been a lot of me, myself and I in my life. I could use some more we. Someone else to make time with.

Me too.

I mean before.

Obviously. But with you, too.

Her phone should be confiscated. This is an embarrassment. She worries she’s not making sense.

I’m happy to make time, love, you name it.

And I’m sure there are others happy to do the same.

Kara and Alex for example. Others. It grounds her to think that she isn’t the only one. Still, it might be best to flush the phone and forget everything she’s written.

Lena Luthor 10:01pm: Well, so far it’s just you, and that’s more than enough. Making friends, making time and making love is a pretty solid manifesto.

Maggie smirks faintly. Texts back. You're making me blush.

Lena Luthor 10:04pm: Blushing agrees with you. I would know, I’ve seen it.

Now her face is warm. I'd say it agrees with you even more. You flush everywhere.
Why is Lena Luthor single? Is she biding her time with Kara? Trying to give them space? Is she too busy to commit to a full time relationship? That would make sense. Maybe something casual is more attainable for her. Despite the Luthor name, Maggie doesn’t doubt there are legions who would be eager to be in a relationship with her. Who wouldn’t want to be with her?

Lena Luthor 10:07pm: It's a testament to my sincerity. Even if I felt like hiding how much I enjoy your company, my infernally pale complexion wouldn't let me.

Maggie remembers her in the shower. In bed. Her complexion hides nothing.

*Then I will lovingly and gratefully gaze upon your sincerity.*

Lena Luthor 10:10pm: Feel free to hug my sincerity, too. I have it on good authority that's it's a big softie, under the right circumstances.

Maggie’s mouth goes dry. All she has is the phantom sensation of Lena in her arms. It feels good to hold her.

*I'll make sure we work on that.*

*My battery's dying.*

She looks at the battery. 84%.

*For our time together Friday night, would you prefer the same hotel as before or would you like me to find somewhere else?*

Lena Luthor 10:13pm: "I want what you want." I'm fine with either. And for the record, simple is fine.

*I'll cancel our reservation for Dubai. Mh. Safer that way, actually. I'll text you the details soon.*

*I can't wait to see you.*

Lena Luthor 10:16pm: Dubai can wait. Unlike us, apparently. I'm glad I asked you out last week. I was expecting it to come bite me you know where, but it didn't. Anyway, I won't deplete your battery any further with my nonsense. Have a good night, Maggie. Highlight of my week, once
again.

Mine, too.

She’s unable to hide her smile this time.

_Sweet dreams, Lena._

She sets the phone on the desk in her bedroom, beside the two books on monochromes she took out from the library earlier this week. She showers.

When she exits she sees a blinking notification on her phone. Is it Lena with some other witticism?

Just Kara 5:40pm: [attachment]

The reception in her apartment has always been lousy. It’s better in the bedroom. Fitting. Kara responded to her text with a photograph. It’s no wonder it didn’t come through for hours. She runs a hand through her wet hair, looks at the picture attached. It’s a skilled drawing of a dopey looking goose with an olive branch. The green of the leaf is bright. She smiles faintly but doesn’t know what to say. It’s been hours since it was sent. ‘Cute' isn’t enough. Maybe it's condescending. She doesn’t respond. She picks up one of the library books, taking it to the bed with her. Maybe she’ll have something better to say in the morning.

X

“And here we are. Right before I ran the tank to empty.”

When the engine and the music fall silent, Lena realizes the hum of the city is gone. She looks around. The small restaurant nearby casts a warm glow in the night. They drove along curvy mountain roads, catching glimpses of the ocean. She turns to Maggie.

“That quite the change of scenery. I love it.”
Maggie playfully undoes Lena’s seatbelt. Probably a good idea. It seems like the easiest thing when Maggie does it, but Lena knows she’d be wrestling with it for entirely too long. She hasn’t gotten the hang of it yet. Kara may feel clumsy about all sorts of things, but she has nothing on Lena when it comes to locked doors and fiddly seatbelts.

“I was counting on you being too busy to stop and smell the flowers to have been here before. It's a bit of a drive, but it's a nice view.”

Maggie’s smiling, a little embarrassed. About the forty-five minute drive? About the darkness obscuring the view? Lena returns her smile and opens the passenger door. Fails to open the passenger door. All right. Maggie pushed it open from the outside the week before, so pulling it should do the trick. It does not. “Have you been here before?” She asks, still smiling while trying to discreetly get that bloody door open.

Maggie laughs quietly. Right, so much for discretion. “I haven't eaten here. I found it one night when I couldn't sleep. I was driving. It was a light in the dark. So I came over and took a look at the menu and told myself I'd come back. But I did read extensively on it and it has rave reviews. I thought we could have our first go at it. You know, tonight.” She kisses her cheek. “Need help with the door?”

Lena narrows her eyes at the offending door. “Yes. How do you open it from the inside?”

“You put your shoulder into it. But don't, you'll bruise. Um. I'll get that fixed for next time. I promise this isn't some scheme to trap you.”

Maggie is out of the car and going around to the side, opening the door before Lena has had a chance to say anything. She extends her hand. Lena wants to take it and brush a proper, aristocratic hand-kiss to it, just to see Maggie’s reaction. She raises her index finger instead, looking up at her. “One moment, please.” She closes the door, puts her shoulder into it, fails twice to get it open, and almost falls out when it unexpectedly yields, grabbing Maggie’s hand to steady herself. “Victory!” She climbs out, Maggie looking at her with a smile somewhere between fondness and disbelief. “Don't bother getting it fixed on my behalf. I've got it now. I like quirky contraptions.”

Maggie kisses her. Lena leans into it. Their previous kiss was... barely an hour before, when Maggie picked her up in front of her building. She was getting out of her car when Lena spotted her. For a few surreal seconds, Lena looked at her, her lovely dress, the way her hair fell on her shoulders, loosely held up at the back, and knew, intellectually, that she was the person this woman was waiting for. The person she was about to take on a date. The person she wanted to go on a date with. But there was this burning feeling at the back of Lena’s neck, that if she were to turn around, there would be someone else there. Someone more this, someone less that. But it’s just her. Being kissed. Now.
Maggie’s lips leave hers, curve into a smile. “No, it should be fixed. In case of emergency. I always forget about it because I never have passengers and — Kara’s learned the trick. But I am very impressed by you.”

“What can I say, I’m a problem solver.” Lena slips an arm around her waist and gently steers them towards the restaurant, feels Maggie’s arm come around her shoulder. It’s nice being able to do that. Just casual touches. Less casual touches. To no longer wonder if they’re welcome. “But you’re right, safety first. So, you go for a drive when you can’t sleep?”

“Sometimes when I can’t get my mind to slow down. Or I’ll go for a run. Do you have nights like that? Not that I see you taking curves at high speeds.”

Lena pulls her a little closer. Nights like that. Days like that. You may only tempt the devil when I’m around to catch you. Just to even the odds. And Lena promised Kara she wouldn’t do it anymore, not by herself.

“I do have nights like that,” Lena admits good-naturedly. “I take curves at high speeds… in here.” She taps her own temple. “I’ll tell you about it once I’ve had a glass or two. My racing mind is my weakness.”

“Let's try not to careen off the edge.”

They get to the restaurant and Maggie opens the door for her. “Thank you.”

“The wine selection here isn't as extensive as our first— second outing, but I hope there's enough to pique your curiosity.”

Lena smiles, steps inside. Warmth, mouth-watering smells and the loud, indistinct rumor of a small crowd enjoying a nice meal engulf her. She looks around. Cataloguing everything. Sometimes, she wishes she could stop doing that. The place is simple, the right kind of simple. A waiter approaches her right away.

“I believe we have a reservation,” she tells him, turning to Maggie with a questioning look.
“We do. Sawyer, party of two.”

He quickly checks what Lena assumes is the reservation book. “Let’s see… yes, here you are. Follow me, please,” he smiles, before leading them to a smaller room. There are people there, but it’s quieter, the lights dimmer. It’s restful.

“May I?” he asks, pointing at Lena’s coat.

“Oh, thank you.” She hands him her coat. She remembers the day Jack bought it for her. A symposium in London. They decided to skip one of the talks and go for a walk instead. He saw it displayed in the window of a Burberry store, joked about rewarding her for keeping everyone awake during the panel she spoke at. He slipped it on her shoulders, his hands warm. She shakes herself out of the memory when their waiter pulls her chair back for her, thanks him with a smile and sits down. Jack did that, too. Always. “This is so lovely,” she says, once again taking in their surroundings. “Good choice. Thank you for finding a place. I kind of put you on the spot, there.”

Maggie smiles. “By asking me to choose?”

“Yes. The place, and also the... type of outing this would be.”

“The type?” Maggie reaches out to brush her fingers. “I wanted us to have a nice night. It's nice to be able to go out with you.”

Lena nods, takes her hand. “I think we'll have a nice night. I wanted a night. Not just an evening.”

Maggie leans closer. “Me too.” Before Lena can say anything, she picks up the little clipboard listing the wines and drinks. “Do you think glasses or should we get a bottle? We can wait for him to make his recommendation or we can be daring all on our own.”

Lena looks at her. She’s flustered. The wine is a distraction. From… something. Lena glances at the clipboard, stroking her hand as her eyes skim the menu until she finds something she can vouch for. “Why not a bottle of… this.” She points at the Murua 2008.

“Absolutely. But I'm driving tonight so I'll have to be mindful. Maybe it was a bad idea not returning to where we...” Maggie pauses. “Shared our first night.” She looks at her for a bit longer, turns around as the waiter returns.
“It wasn’t. We have time,” Lena says quietly before he gets to their table, bringing glasses and a cold bottle of water. She doesn’t let go of Maggie’s hand, hoping she doesn’t mind. And if she does, maybe a little embarrassment is preferable to feeling like Lena doesn’t want to hold her hand in public. She thanks the waiter as he pours them glasses of water.

“You’re welcome. Menus are on the way, but in the meantime, is there anything you’d like to drink?”

“The lady and I will share a bottle of the Murua 2008,” Maggie tells him.

“Coming right up,” he says with a smile before taking his leave.

Silence stretches for a few seconds. Lena doesn’t mind. She looks at their hands. The last time she did this, holding hands in a restaurant… she can’t remember. With Jack, public displays of affection were limited. She didn’t mind that, either. Sometimes, she feels as though she should mind more. Care more. About things. People. But this is good. A hand in hers. Eyes onto her.

“It was good to see you Monday. I hope I didn't come off as overbearing by asking to see you so soon after our last time together.”

Lena shakes her head. Overbearing. Like anyone else is clamoring for that kind of attention from her. But then, she does value her own space. Too much, perhaps. “Actually, I was about to tell you that...” She lowers her eyes when she realizes she’s never said those words to a lover. “I've missed you. I mean, we texted and kept in touch, but I like being around you. I like your presence. And when I saw you outside my building tonight, I just... remembered. Again.”

Maggie’s fingers twitch against hers. That disbelieving smile again. “I like being around you, too.” Seconds pass. She licks her lips. “Um. You're easy to be around. Things feel... good. I feel good when you're near. You're—”

The waiter returns with the menus and the wine, opens the bottle for them. Maggie thanks him and goes back to trying to find the right words. Seems to give up. I’m not good with words. Lena watches her. She wishes she could tell her how moving that is, someone trying to give her... words, or anything that doesn’t come easily to them. Someone making an effort for her.

“I do make it a point to be easy to be around when I like someone, or even in general. But right
now, I’m not trying to make you comfortable.” She pours Maggie a small amount of wine with her free hand so she can make sure it’s not corked. “I just... I'm the one feeling comfortable, for once. That's new.”

Maggie takes in the words, pours Lena a glass. Oh. Maybe Lena should have skipped the wine tasting part. She remembers their night at the hotel, when she did the same thing with their bottle of rosé and— hm. She should have poured herself a minimal amount, made sure it wasn’t corked, then poured them both a glass. No fuss. That wouldn’t have been very courteous, though. It might have looked like she didn’t trust Maggie to be able to tell whether she was drinking wine or vinegar. She feels a hint of resentment towards their waiter, who didn’t do his job and poured one of them the requisite sampling of wine, sparing her the embarrassing situation she now finds herself in. Or worse, the possibility of embarrassing Maggie. But then, he took her coat with such a kind smile. Ah, to hell with etiquette. Lena switches their glasses, mournfully skips the swirling and smelling part – a shame, she vaguely recalls this wine smelling like... heady memories of Spain. She had it in Toledo, the first time – and has the small amount she initially poured Maggie. Not corked. Right temperature.

“It's good. I'm giving it the Luthor seal of approval,” she says lightly, pouring herself a glass too.

“Ah, the Luthor seal of approval. Now I know it's solid,” Maggie says, not a hint of sarcasm in her tone, only gentle teasing. “And I'm glad you're comfortable. That drive is a haul otherwise. I wouldn't take it with just anyone. You're warm. You're...” she shakes her head, smiling a little. “Anyway, that's a relief.” She hesitates. “I know it's weird but it feels like I've known you longer than I actually have.”

Lena blinks. This is... not quite the reserved and perhaps a tad defensive side of Maggie Lena has grown accustomed to. Or rather, has begun to figure out how to navigate her way around. So, it does pay off, sometimes. Kindness and lowering her own defenses. Lena’s had a good teacher this past year or so.

She gives Maggie’s hand a light squeeze. “I think we have known each other for a while. And there's something to be said for bridging the distance.”

“I know we've been in each other's lives for probably longer than either of us might have wanted for a while there,” Maggie replies with a wry smile. “Should we toast to you making the first move that night in the conference room?”

“If you don't mind, I'd rather toast to us making it through. And being here, tonight. There were... quite a few obstacles.”
Like the fact Lena is reasonably sure they wouldn’t have gone much further than a kiss, if that, had Maggie not been mistaken about the nature of her friendship with Kara. A misunderstanding that made it… safer to pursue whatever she wanted with the person she thought was Kara’s lover. But, well. They crossed their own Rubicon. *Alea jacta est.*

Maggie takes her glass, lifts it. “To making it through. And continuing to make it through.”

Lena clinks their glasses with a smile and has a sip. Maggie looks so lovely in the dim glow of the lamps. Lena wants to kiss her.

Maggie has a drink. “Good choice.” She strokes Lena’s hand, making her skin tingle. “I’ve realized, heathen that I am, that I haven’t told you how beautiful you look tonight. I was too busy thinking you might have thought this too long of a drive for our second date.”

Lena hesitates. She’s never done that before, in public. Not with Jack, not with a woman, not with anyone. She brings Maggie’s hand to her lips and kisses her knuckles. “I like long drives, actually. And…” She feels a blush creeping up her neck, because paying a sincere compliment to someone she’s on a date with, and attracted to, and moved by, is also new. “You should wear your hair like this more often. You're gorgeous.”

Maggie watches her, bows her face with a smile. “We really need to get through this dinner so I can kiss you. We don't have to limit our adventures to wine. We'll hit the road. I'll drive.” Her hand comes up, stroking the inside of Lena’s wrist.

Lena’s eyes follow her movements. It’s hypnotic. It’s like she’s watching her touch someone else’s skin. She breaks the spell by kissing Maggie’s palm. “You’re right, let’s get through this dinner.” She flags their waiter, grabs a menu. “I’m ordering for us.” She knows enough, has eaten enough meals in boardrooms and elsewhere with Maggie to have a pretty good idea of what she’d like.

“A woman who takes charge,” Maggie grins. “I suppose you can’t help yourself.”

She’s teasing, but Lena feels laughter bubbling up. She has a drink of water to stop herself from snorting like a piglet. She remembers her first laughing fit with Kara. Lena had asked Kara to pick the movie and they ended up watching *Babe,* which Lena hadn’t seen before. She lost it when Babe the piglet started bleating the sheep’s secret password at the shepherding contest. Kara was crying just watching her laugh. They couldn’t stop. She has to stop thinking about this or she’s going to start cackling all over again. She sets her glass down. So, taking charge. Oh, if Maggie knew. And maybe she will, if this is to continue, between them. She’ll know that the second Lena steps out of L-Corp, and whenever she’s with someone she no longer feels she needs to perform
“What if I told you—” she begins, but their waiter is coming their way. “I guess it'll have to wait.” She smiles up at him when he gets to their table, then glances at the menu. All the names are in Greek. Well. She speed-reads the descriptions. “We’ll have... I'm sorry, I can't pronounce any of this, but we'll have the three dipping spreads with pita, the vegetarian roasted vegetables, and the daurade royale. Oh, and we’ll share so if could bring an extra fish knife…”

“Of course.”

“Thank you,” Lena says. He nods with a smile and walks away. She focuses on Maggie again. “So, what if I told you that I hate taking charge. Of anything.”

“I'd believe you because it must be *exhausting* to do everything you do constantly?” Maggie cocks an eyebrow. “I'd want a break, too.”

“And what about you?” Lena asks. “Do *you* ever want a break?”

“Oh, god, all the time. But I'm used to doing everything myself. You must know what that's like.”

“I don't know. I do... what no one else can do for me. But if someone offers to take over, even for a little while, for the most trivial thing? I go for it.”

“I'll keep that in mind. And I just let you order,” Maggie sighs apologetically. “I'll order next time. You might be sorry, but I'll do it.” She takes her hand, kisses her wrist.

Maggie’s lips pressing on her skin, warm, soft. Lena swallows. She really wants to kiss her. But what if… what if what? She can ask. Easier, that way. “Can I kiss you? I'm not sure how comfortable you are with...” She looks around.

Maggie leans over, palms her face and kisses her, reassuring and slow. “I hope that's one of those instances where it was okay to take over. And for what it's worth? You never have to ask.”

“Okay.” Lena leans in for another kiss, and it’s just as gentle as the first, but a little less careful, a
little deeper. She pulls back when their tongues brush, because that’s something that should be for the two of them alone. “Chalk it up to... my lack of experience. Feel free to take over whenever you like.”

“Careful what you wish for,” Maggie smiles. “I’ve had lousy times with people far more experienced than I am. What matters is what you put into it. How engaged you are with your partner, trumps experience every time. You’re attentive and warm and giving. I’ve had a lovely time with you.”

Lena nods. Attentive, warm, giving. Maggie’s a good person. She wouldn’t kiss you if she didn’t think you were, too, Kara told her when Lena wondered if Maggie would disappear from her life, should she get back with Alex. “Thank you. But as for what I wish for... I don't need to be careful. I trust you, remember?”

“All right,” Maggie smiles. “You trust me.” Lena sees a hint of tension in her jaw, but it’s gone right away, replaced with Maggie’s hand taking hers again. “If we’re not careful, what does that make us?”

It makes us normal people who don’t expect others to hurt them for no reason. Lena shrugs. “I don’t know. People who aren't doing anything wrong and are trying to do right by each other?”

“Oh.” Maggie blinks. “I don’t think we’re doing anything wrong.” A beat. Worry flashing in her eyes. “Do you thing we’re doing something wrong?”

Lena opens her mouth, but she spots their waiter heading their way with their order. He sets the plates on the table, asks if they need anything else. Lena shakes her head, thanks him and has a sip of wine after he’s gone.

“Come on,” she tells Maggie. “We're past this. The only person I could wrong at this stage is you, and I have no intention of doing that.”

The relief in Maggie’s eyes makes her heart clench. “Okay. Let's dig into this food. And maybe this isn't something I should say, but... I want to be careful with you? Not because you're fragile or anything. I care about you. And I try to be thoughtful with the people I care about. Even if what that means with you is that I stop overthinking things and just enjoy our time together. Because I do. I didn't see you since Monday and...” she laughs. “I know we texted but it felt like a while.”
“It sure did,” Lena says softly. On Wednesday morning, she entertained the notion of stopping by the station to give Maggie a hug. She didn’t, because it wasn’t scheduled, because that might have gotten this awful woman at the reception, Morris, talking. Because she wasn’t sure it was okay. “Can I ask you something? About your relationship. Not about Kara, just... the logistics of it.”

“Yeah, okay.”

“How do you... because, you work a lot, and the time you have to spend with your partner and whoever else is limited, right? Is it hard to... spread yourself out?”

Maggie frowns lightly. “Do you mean... do I get to spend enough time with... the people I need to spend time with? Yeah, I think I do.”

Ah. So… It’s two Friday nights in a row that Maggie is spending with her, not Kara. And Lena knows they had their picnic this past Sunday. But they didn’t do anything on Saturday. Or during the week, probably. It’s somewhat comforting. Knowing that two wonderful people can make it work together while preserving their need for space and making room for others. Even though Lena suspects they might not be quite evenly matched when it comes to just how much space they respectively need. But then again, who is? They’re making it work and working on it.

“No, I meant, making yourself available for more than one person. Emotionally, physically. That’s... sorry, I’m just curious. I’m not judging. I feel like doing this for one person is already considerable. I don’t know how you do it.”

Maggie scratches the faint scar on her forehead. Lena idly wonders if she used to do this before Alex took out the stitches.

“Don't be sorry. I think it's... manageable with how giving you and Kara are. Um.” Maggie has a drink of wine. “Is it okay for you? How things are?”

“You mean being involved with my best friend’s girlfriend? Or being involved with someone in an open relationship?”

“I meant the second. But you're welcome to answer both. Or neither.”

“Oh,” Lena sighs pensively. “It’s oddly freeing. I suppose it’s a bit selfish, but on my end, it’s
just... I get to enjoy whatever you want to share with me.” It’s not like I have a relationship to cultivate outside of this. “It’s nice. Welcome. And the rest isn’t for me, and I get that. Everything is...” she smiles. “A nice bonus.”

Maggie returns her smile. “Yeah. There's... there's nothing to be afraid of. It's honest, that way.”

Lena looks at her. She tucks a strand of hair behind Maggie’s ear. “Nothing to be afraid of? I suppose danger and adrenaline are better suited to a good, cathartic bike ride, than relationships. Still. You took a chance on me, however small. That doesn’t happen very often.”

“You took the first chance. And the second. And the third.” Maggie smiles. “The shirt and the collaborative and the kiss. It's been nice discovering you. I've never been a big fan of surprises but you've turned that around. So let's keep taking chances.”


“Wise words,” she says instead. “And to demonstrate my good will, I’ll take a chance on...” she observes the plate of root vegetables, picks something up. She chews thoughtfully. “I have no idea what that is, but it’s sinfully good. It looks like one of those... you know, those ancient vegetables that you only find in obscure organic food stores, and you have no idea what they are, and you ask an employee, and they say, that’s a banana, and inwardly you go, uh, no it’s not, but it turns out that’s what bananas used to look like centuries ago, and there’s a resurgence in farmers trying to grow all sorts of things the old fashioned way?”

”Do you spend a lot of time in obscure organic food stores? I can't imagine you picking up the chemically infused products available at our local shops. They taste awful. Or don't taste like anything. Then again, I had a frozen dinner the night I texted you. So what would I know?”

Maggie rolls her eyes. “Was it the parsnip you had?” She has a bite. “That’s good.” Tries some sweet potato. “I bet everything tasted better before.”

“Actually,” Lena objects, “I’ve read that if we were to try medieval cuisine, I mean, recreate the way they cooked and seasoned their food? We’d find it awfully bland. But then, maybe our taste buds aren’t as sensitive as they used to be. Maybe those people would find our own food atrocious. And yes, when I have some time on weekends, I like poking around little stores and markets. I visited one once, and they had this Heirloom Vegetables booth. As it turns out, an ancient, authentic zucchini is as big as a baseball bat. Incredible.” She shakes her head, remembers the enormous penis-shaped carrots next to the zucchinis, considers showing Maggie the pictures she took. Would that be in poor taste? A little. “And don’t feel bad about your frozen dinners. I may make myself organic kale smoothies but whenever Kara asks if I’m game for some awfully good pizza from Domino’s, of all places? My Pavlovian reflex kicks in, so go figure.” She has some
wine and a bite of daurade. “Oh my goodness, try it.”

“Awfully good or awful good? And I don’t feel bad about the dinners. It’s... just how it is. But! Pizza-wise, I’ll stick to Giovanni’s.” Maggie smiles faintly. “I’m glad you and Kara have a Danvers/Luthor tradition. Not the only one, I’m sure.” She tries the daurade. “I have to say, you killed it with the plates you picked out.”

Lena is starting to recognize that smile of hers. So again, she’ll tread lightly, but not too lightly. “Thank you. I don’t think I could have gone wrong, though, I mean, have you seen that menu? You killed it by picking this place. We’ll have to come back and make our way through all this.” Because, all these things Maggie said? About what Kara shares with Lena, what Lena thought Kara shared with others, not just her... perhaps it was easier to accept for Maggie when she thought they were lovers. Now they’re just friends, and still they share... differently. “As for Domino’s... I must confess that sadly, it’s just good, period. I think half the appeal is customizing your pizza in their ridiculous app for half an hour before ordering.” With Kara. Customizing their order with Kara and all her cute additional requests, as though making her pizza look lovely was more important than what went in it. Lena leaves that part out and looks at Maggie with a smile. “And I’m pretty sure you have your own Sawyer/Danvers traditions. A little bird may or may not have told me about a certain picnic by a waterfall.”

A glimmer of surprise in Maggie’s eyes. “Kara told you about that?” She pauses. “It was nice spending time with her. At a beautiful place like that, I mean. We just...” she smiles, has a drink of wine. Shakes her head. “She’s... Anyway, yes, we’ll come back here.”

“She did tell me. She said you found it while investigating a case and that it had, I quote, a happy ending. That’s all I know.”

Another one of those faint smiles. “That’s sweet.”

Lena nods. “Yeah. And it got me thinking about your wandering ways. Combine that with having to explore all sorts of different areas for work, and I imagine you must know so many interesting or unexpected places.”

“I tend to move around. I think I’ve always been a little restless. So, you combine the sleepless nights and work and... my cat-like curiosity that will supposedly get me killed one of these days... mixed with talking to the locals about the hidden places... you’re bound to land somewhere exciting.” She shrugs. “But when you find a place you weren’t looking for? That’s something else. It must be what the old explorers felt like. The real ones, not Columbus.”
Lena returns her smile. “Like Marco Polo and his unicorns? You know, when he discovered rhinos and thought they were unicorns, just, uglier than expected? Or Magellan and his obsession with finding the fabled Island of Spices? Or Alexander who just wanted to see more, always more? Ah, the good old days.” She has some wine. “So... what’s your favorite spot? Some special place you weren’t looking for and stumbled upon.”

Maggie laughs. “Way to put me on the spot. Let’s see. Mh well, I’m afraid it isn't very exciting. Back when I was a kid, I went to a party with some people I knew. College kids. It was this... bonfire in the woods, which ought to tell you how smart we all were. I got wasted and it was cold and— I ended up leaving. I didn't know where the hell I was so I just walked and walked and walked. Everything looks the same in the dark. Anyway, I ended up finding this tree house. I don't know how I climbed up the plank steps but somehow I did. I don't even know whose place that was. Or... I mean there were beer cans everywhere and it was cold,” she says, shaking her head. “But there was a sleeping bag and I must have just passed out. When I woke up ... I don't know how to describe it. All the light was streaming in... in shafts. It... was warm and golden. I was hungover but it was beautiful. I think that was the first time I really started to think of beautiful. If it wasn't about a girl, you know?” She has a drink of wine.

Lena rests her chin on her palm with a small smile. “You’re right, it’s not exciting. It’s better. It sounds like an eerie fairy tale, and the moral of the story would be... sometimes, lost children find a nefarious witch’s house in the forest, or evil men who would harm them and snatch them away, but on occasion, the forest keeps lost children safe and teaches them beauty. That’s a great story. Thank you for sharing it.” She takes her hand. Thinks of the little alien boy Maggie told her about, the one she found alone in his apartment, his parents missing. “And to think that now, you’re the one trying to find all the lost children the forest couldn’t protect. I’m guessing all endings aren’t happy, but... some?”

“If you keep flattering me like this I’m going to get an ego.” She gives a small headshake. “But seriously, you have a really lovely way of putting things. Find poetry where you can, right? You have the children's hospital. Not all endings are happy. Not enough but some. And that's better than none. Even if it's not as many as we'd like.”

Lena has some wine. She doesn’t need to look for poetry in the children’s hospital. It’s already there. People coming together out of love, to support each other through hardship, to try and relieve unfair, arbitrary pain. That of the kids, that of their loved ones watching them suffer, losing them. The little ones in there aren’t the lost children. The lost children are Lex telling her that their father had never once said I love you to him. They’re Alex losing her own father and watching her mother devote her attention to the child she thought needed it most. They’re Maggie, cold, drunk and passed out surrounded by beer cans in a stranger’s tree house. They’re Lena, sleeping on the hardwood flood under her bed for a year after her mother died, because at least there were no monsters there. They’re Kara always pausing and adding in Midvale after saying back home, as if she had another home somewhere, waiting for her.

“You should get an ego. I believe it’s not a bad thing, being proud of yourself once in a while. And
you find poetry where you can, too, don’t you? With your pictures.”

“Don't get me wrong. I believe in the work I do. It's important. As for the pictures...” Maggie pauses for a while, deep in thought. Drinks some wine. “It's... I don't know that... It's not quite the same.”

Lena nods. Maggie’s reasons for expressing herself artistically, or whatever it is photography means to her, are certainly her own. “You know best. And I don’t doubt that you're proud of your work. But being proud of yourself? That’s important, too.”

_Sometimes work is the only way I make a difference. But I’m probably just an asshole,_ Maggie told her, eight days before, in their hotel room.

“It is. I am.” Maggie shifts. “Sometimes, I wonder. Maybe there's more I can do. More I should do. It's not about being the best but being the best I can be?” She’s fidgeting. “Have we gotten to the part where you tell me about the curves you take in your mind?”

“Perhaps part of being the best you can be is to do what you can... today?” Lena says slowly. “And maybe that’s less than what you did the day before, more than what you’ll do the next, but sometimes the big picture isn’t all that representative. I think.” She smiles. “I’m partial to little pictures. And yes, let’s talk about my speed racing mind.” She refills their glasses. Takes a moment to consider how to phrase it. What angle to present. “When I can’t fall asleep, and there’s nothing else to do but think, thoughts pick up speed. More than usual. And I feel like I’m not on solid ground. That everything is... paper thin. Everything I’ve done, everything I’ll do, everything I am... and then, I find a steadying thought or two, if I can, and fall asleep. And when I wake up, the world is solid again. Not quite a night drive, but... there’s speed and sharp, risky turns all right.”

“But with the wheel you can at least choose a direction. Or steer in a certain way.” Maggie thinks for a while. “I know this probably isn’t... Everything about you feels solid and... genuine. Tangible.” She lowers her voice. “Your breath on my skin... There's nothing about you that is paper thin. You are no paper tiger. Whatever racing thoughts come, I know you'll keep pace.”

But it would be better not to. It would better to let go and let it all slow down. _Aware of his weakness, a man decides to give in rather than stand up to it. Wishes to be down, lower than down._ This is one of her steadying thoughts, words she read long ago and keeps like an invaluable, secret lifeline.

“I believe you, and I’ll keep that in mind. To help said mind shut up for a bit, ironically. And...” Lena takes a breath. “You’re quite tangible to me, too. Hence my repeated amazement when we go
from speaking on the phone or texting to seeing each other in person.” She has some food, a drink of wine. Furrows her brow. “You know, the day before our... date, last week? I kept wondering, at the most random times, how long it would take for me to remember certain things about you. Physical things. You know, like your scent, or,” she says quietly, “the feel of your lips. And part of me doesn’t really want to learn that. Because I like rediscovering it every time.”

She feels self-conscious, saying these things. But she doesn’t want to regret not saying them, down the line. She gives Maggie a sheepish shrug.

Maggie picks at her food, mulling it over. “Me too. I was nervous that night.” She smiles briefly. “We’d been having our coffee breaks and they were really nice and maybe safe.” She glances at her. “But why be careful? I just felt... I’d been feeling and... take this, um. Whatever way you want to take it. But I just wanted to be closer to you. There's a draw there for me. And I can't say I don't know where it comes from. I do. It's who you are. The draw is obvious.”

Obvious. Latin, ob-viam, ‘in the way.’ That’s the word Lena used with Kara on the phone, two days before. Things have a way of... echoing, between all of them. She smiles at Maggie, wonders whether she lets those inevitable echoes reverberate, or silences them. “That moves me more than you know. Or maybe you do, and I’m the one who knows very little. Very few people have expressed interest in who I was, beyond the name or my position as head of a major company, or my bank account... least of all my mother. I’m not Lena to her. I’m a Luthor, or not enough of one, or... I don’t know. So, this is new to me. Finding friends, people who want to be around me. Close to me. And what’s even newer is having one who went from, perhaps, not having any interest in looking past the name, to...” she nods to their surroundings. “This. Thank you for telling me.”

“I don't know it. Not the way you do. I don't have a... my family name doesn't mean anything to anyone not in it. But I'm not really a Sawyer, either. Not to them.” She shrugs indifferently. “But, it doesn't surprise me that you have people who want to be close to you. This is all new to me, too. Friends. People who care about me.” Maggie takes her hand. “I'm glad we're here.”

Not really a Sawyer to her own family. So… are they not in good terms? Does that have anything to do with Maggie stealing her father’s camera? Lena resolves to be extra careful.

“Well,” she says gently, “if you ever feel like sharing your take on the... intricacies of familial expectations, I dare say I might be the right person to do that with.” And now, she suspects, time to change the subject to something a little lighter. She kisses Maggie’s hand before reaching down to take her phone out of her bag. “There’s another grave matter we must discuss, something I’ve kept hidden for fear it would change your opinion of me forever.” She impassively unlocks her phone, scrolls through her gallery until she finds the freaky penis-shaped carrots. She hands Maggie her phone. “Those were next to the giant zucchini at the Heirloom Vegetables booth.”
Maggie leans forward curiously. Her eyes go wide for a second and she lets out a delighted laugh. "Luthor, you perv! Did you take those home and chop them up? Wow, look at them.” She looks closer. “Sounds like this place was a sexual bonanza.”

“I know, right? But the lady manning the booth kept giving me weird looks for peering at those particular carrots, so I didn’t have the... well, let’s stay on topic, I didn’t have the balls to purchase them. I just took pictures and sent them to Alex and Kara. It was a while ago. You would have been included otherwise, I mean, how could I let any of my friends miss out on mother nature’s... peerless wonders.”

“Don’t worry about it. We text now. And I know you weren't the lucky girl to take them home but I'm sure they were enthusiastically taken home for uh— well.” Maggie smirks. “You know. And the nurses at the hospital had a fun story for the following morning.”

Lena raises an eyebrow. “I’d love to see that x-ray... actually, when Alex got the pictures? She texted back something like, Make sure it’s properly lubricated, I went to med school but I’m not a miracle worker and this looks huge.” Lena blinks. “And Kara just asked if I could take her to that market the next weekend.” And said those carrots looked less like penises and more like atomic mushroom clouds to her. “The Danvers sisters certainly are a unique package.”

Maggie smiles. “They're both something else, that's for sure. So, did you take her to the market? I'm sure it would have been a different trip if Alex was involved.”

“I did take her to the market,” Lena chuckles. “She spent over an hour at the booth asking the gruff lady about the history of everything, and how to cook this and that, charming her to the point she offered us an assortment of the strangest ancient vegetables that had caught Kara’s eye. But now that you mention it, I sort of wish Alex had been there to undo her good work with all sorts of inappropriate questions that would have gotten us banned from the market for public indecency. Can you imagine if you’d been called to take us in?”

“Nothing would have delighted me more.” She pauses. “Though I tend to be the bad influence and not the other way around. Scandalous for a cop, I know.”

Lena picks up a piece of pita bread and dips it in tomato and aubergine caviar. “So... you got merrily drunk around bonfires in the middle of the woods as a teen, you were perhaps a bit of a troublemaker, but now you’re painfully by the book – something I’m personally grateful for, as you know – and are considered a bad influence, apparently. That’s an interesting puzzle.”

Maggie shrugs. “I'm not sure it's that interesting. You have a family legacy. And you were too
busy spending time at the science club to worry about relationships and still you are perceived as
an icy CEO overlord. When in fact you are an effective businesswoman and a very affectionate
lover. Our families don't make us. Or maybe they do, in our response to them,” she smiles. “Can
you imagine us in school together? Not that I would have been allowed near you. Or that you
would have been interested in...” She shakes her head. “Making trouble, I guess.”

Ah, but Lena being perceived one way even though she’s not like that privately is one thing,
Maggie being several contradictory things at once is another. Lena decides not to press.

“In all fairness,” she says, “I don’t let many people see that other side of me. And I can be quite
the icy CEO. But you’re right, whether our families raise us or we raise ourselves against their
values, they’re always in the picture, somehow. And we always come from somewhere.” She has
some wine and pushes her empty plate away. “But let’s play that game. We’re about the same age,
so picture yourself at age twelve or fourteen. Where would we have met? Boarding school in
Ireland?” She smiles. “Maybe not. How about your school in... Nebraska, was it? It could have
happened. I know very little about my biological mother, so for all I know, if she’d lived longer,
maybe we’d have settled in Nebraska for some reason.”

Maggie smiles faintly. That smile again. “Um. All right. Well. That depends. Either in science class
or...” she laughs. “Smoking a cigarette while class was in session. Skipping. Yeah, I was a punk.”
She rolls her eyes. “I skipped a lot later, actually.”

Right. Difficult family dynamics, a stolen camera, rejecting authority.

“So...,” Lena follows, “one day, you deign to show up in science class, and you’re a bit late. Gotta
finish that smoke, you know? Waste not, want not. So I often sat alone at the front, and one of the
reasons was that, this way, I couldn’t pair up with anyone during experiments. I preferred working
alone. Twice as much work, but done my way.” And the others reasons were, she couldn’t see
anything from the back because she was self-conscious about wearing her glasses, and also, she
had a hard time concentrating if anything was between her and the teacher. “But oops, you show up
late, the science teacher gives you a disapproving frown when he sees you headed towards the
back of the lab, and politely demands that you sit at the front for once. What happens?”

“I continue to move to the back of the class until he threatens me with detention, ha ha, and I've
already had them call my aunt four times in the past two weeks so I sit resentfully in the front, slam
my books on my desk and... I don't know. Wait for it to end. And probably resent you for being a
teacher's pet.”

“Oh, dear.” Lena says with mock shock. “Fourteen-year old me would have been too intimidated
by such brazen rebellion, to ask if you wanted to do whatever the experiment of the day was
together. But I might have offered to let you copy my notes at the end. Because everybody always
asked for my notes, in every class – I guess even before I was rich, people came to me for stuff, not my winning personality – but I’m guessing you wouldn’t have asked, which would have endeared you to me.”

“I don’t need your notes. I don’t need anyone's notes!” Maggie says with that smile again, that doesn’t quite reach her eyes. “I would have refused your notes and gotten the hell out of there the second class ended. And then,” she grins, “hoped I’d see you at... I don't know. One of the parties with the older crowd.” A frown. “I never really... I don't know. I think kids my age scared me, so I didn't bother.”

Difficult family dynamics, living with her aunt, not her parents. Camera stolen from her dad. Rejecting authority. Risk-taking. Not having friends her age. Growing up... too fast?

Lena files all this away and nods. “They can be cruel. At that age. But I’m afraid nobody ever invited me to any party, much less with older people. And I wouldn’t have had the courage to show up uninvited, if I was even aware a party was happening. Which I wouldn’t have been. So we would probably have been condemned to only run into each other in whatever classes we shared, you hoping to see me at one of your grownup parties, me hoping you’d show up late again and you’d be asked to sit next to me.”

“The good news is that we ended up...” She rubs her forehead scar. Lena wonders again if there’s some phantom itch, if she picked up that habit because she associates that scar with Alex. “I swear there was a point where I thought the universe was out to get me. When really it might have been telling me to pay attention to the woman in front of me. And I'm glad I did. You're still a nerd. And I'm slightly more pleasant to be around these days.”

Lena plays with the stem of her glass, crosses her arms on the table, leans forward a little. “I did notice I wasn’t exactly a sight for sore eyes for you every time we ran into each other, until that fateful dinner and your heroic rescue when you battled spaghetti sauce on my behalf. But hey, you did get something out of all those skipped science classes. You’re dating a nerd, now, and you’re going on dates with another one...” She almost mentions Alex being a bit of a nerd herself, but she has no idea how things are between Alex and Maggie at the moment, so… perhaps not. “Someone has a type.”

“I’d have hated for that lovely dress you were wearing to get ruined.” Maggie falls silent for a moment. “You know... maybe it's not my place to say but I don't think you and Kara are at all alike. You're both fantastic, don't get me wrong, it's just. Different. Not in a bad way,” she adds quickly. “But you are both nerds.”

“We are,” Lena nods. “And be thankful you didn’t accept my notes in our Rewriting History session, because teenage me would then have asked you if you wanted to come to the science club
after class, to help us build our planetarium.”

“I probably would have liked to help you build it, to be honest.”

Lena tilts her head with a smile. “Well, we’re building something else, now. But what do you mean, Kara and I aren’t alike?”

“I should really think before I speak. You're not... unsimilar. You're both generous and accepting. You're both kind. But... you're funny. Kara is too, but in a different way. You're open. And...” Maggie shakes her head.

Funny and open. That’s where Maggie thinks they differ. Kara’s funny in a different way, all right. Lena knows most people have laughed at her, rather than with her. Kara isn’t witty. Or, more accurately, has no interest in being witty. And yet, they laugh so much together. About silly, harmless things. And Kara’s either open to a fault, or utterly unreadable. Lena understands how that could be... unsettling, for some. She finds it calming.

“Yes, she’s...” Lena says, chuckling to herself. “I was on the phone with her a couple of days ago, and she made a non joke and I went, please never do stand-up comedy, because I’ll be the only one laughing. And you know, we do talk a lot, Kara and I... but sometimes we don’t? Sometimes, it’s silent. I mean, not that she’s sulking or anything. I don’t think she means to close herself off. Or be... unresponsive.” Her mind is her sanctuary, is all. But that’s not for Lena to say.

Maggie thinks for a while. “You're probably right. I'm not looking for anyone to fix me. People have tried and... But she's been good to me. Patient when I wouldn't have been or didn't deserve it. And I don't need her to heal me or anything but I think she... teaches me to a better person. To be kinder and patient. So I think I just need to be more understanding. Sometimes it's hard for me to take words at face value, but you're sincere. She's sincere. I'll keep working on it. I need to... not be so defensive.”

People have tried to fix Maggie. Maggie has been defensive around Kara. Thinks she doesn’t deserve her patience. I know I do have a lot of love to give, but with Maggie, and even with Alex now, I seem to give the wrong things. Or to run out of things to give. Hm. Lena scratches her nose. Whenever Kara alludes to the disconnect she feels between herself and what she ought to give the people she loves, or in order to feel like she belongs... what if the gap isn’t imagined, but felt by others, as well? And the very day Kara told her this, Lena told Alex… What am I in denial about? That she makes me a better person? Is Kara tired of making people like Lena, like Maggie, like Alex, kinder, more patient, more open, better? Or is it what keeps her standing? Both?
Lena looks at Maggie for a while. “One thing I know, is that Kara has no intention of fixing you, because she loves you just as you are. Obviously, I don’t know the details and I’m sure you have your disagreements, but she’s never said a word to me that sounded like she wanted to change you.” She hesitates. But what if Maggie needs to talk? What if she needs a friend? Lena’s the only one. But she’s Kara’s friend, too, so… does that negate whatever inclination Maggie might have to confide in her? She doesn’t know whether to keep silent or offer to listen. “Do you think… and I don’t want to pry, I really have no interest in doing that, I just want to be a good friend to the two of you. But when you said that she and I aren’t alike, did you mean that… you two don’t communicate as well as you’d like?”

Maggie tenses up, subtly but visibly. Returns her hands to her lap. Well. Speaking up was the wrong decision, then. “Look, I get that... there are ebbs and flows. In all relationships. You are a good friend. Kara and I... we're good. We're working on it, you know? I have to do my part. I've never been good at words and... so.”

Lena has some water. What to do… one the one hand, wrong choice. On the other hand… she’s been on the receiving of Maggie’s indifference and dislike, for a time, before they agreed to a truce for Kara’s sake. She knows what it feels like. And what Maggie is showing her right now isn’t that. It’s vulnerability, of a kind. Which, on some level, implies… trust. So. Perhaps not such a wrong choice, after all.

“I didn’t mean to imply that you and Kara were going through a difficult time. I apologize. I don’t know how you two are together in private, we all show different sides of ourselves to different people, so I shouldn’t have assumed anything. I just know that it’s been difficult for you to see that Kara and I are close. In some ways, not... you know. And I’ll never repeat anything you tell me to her, or vice versa. I just hope you know I’ll be here if you ever want to talk.”

Maggie doesn’t relax. “I know. And I appreciate it. But I don't know how to talk about it... without it coming out in the wrong way. Kara deserves more than that. No, sometimes I don't feel as close to her as I'd like to. I've been jealous of the two of you.” Her jaw is tight. “But everyone’s different. What I am to her, what I am to you, what you are to us. No relationship is the same.”

Lena just needs to let her know one more thing, and then she’ll switch to something lighter, let her relax. She nods. “I agree. And I understand if I’m the wrong person to talk to about these things, considering my place in all this. You two are remarkable people, understanding, able to recognize your own... perceived shortcomings. And above all, people who would never willingly hurt each other or anyone else. That’s quite a strong foundation for any sort of relationship, in my book. And that’s all I’ll say on the matter, because…” You know what the problem is? You’re easy to be around. I start conversations that I can’t finish. “This is one of those conversations you don’t quite know how to end, isn’t it?” She has a sip of wine. “So… what if I told you that this morning, I received a confirmation email informing that me a certain order had shipped. One which may or may not contain a custom mug, tee-shirt and hoodie?”
A relieved smile spreads on Maggie’s lips. She leans over and gives her a brief kiss. Lena almost palms her cheek to keep her there a second longer. “A custom order? What did you pick up?”

Lena cocks her head. “Well, it wasn’t technically my idea,” she says slowly, taking her time to wipe her glasses with a napkin. “Maybe you should work in advertising? Catchy taglines are a rarity these days.”

Maggie looks at her in disbelief. “You didn’t.” A pause. “Did you?”

Lena shrugs apologetically. “I’m afraid I really do mean what I say. It’s delightful, you’ll see.” Delightfully retro, at least. Supergirl is my other ride! Lena didn’t use the Girl of Steel’s likeness, or her symbol, so the design doesn’t quite pop as much as it could, but… a joke is one thing, trivializing a visual that has come to mean a lot to many, Lena included, and probably even more to Supergirl herself, another.

“You troll,” Maggie teases with a laugh. “I hope Supergirl sees it and is very impressed. Maybe she'll offer you another ride. But! If we're all set here, you can settle for me and we could go for walk? I know a place.”

“Jesus, I hope she never sees it. I'd be mortified. Private use only. And yes, I'd love to go for a walk. Also, the food and wine were wonderful. You do know places, romantic little detective.”

Maggie smiles as they stand, goes to pick up the check while Lena retrieves her coat. They walk out hand in hand. Outside, the cold air replaces the warmth, and the night, the lights. Maggie kisses her. Lena’s eyes flutter shut before their lips touch, her arms coming around Maggie’s waist to draw her close. She does not want to get used to this. She wants to marvel every time, at the softness of her lips, and breathe her in again and again.

"Thank you for having dinner with me," Maggie says quietly when they separate.

Lena shakes her head, rests it in the crook her neck. “Don’t say this like I did you a favor,” she whispers, kissing her there. “It was entirely selfish.”

Maggie breaks the hug to kiss her again. “In praise of selfishness, then.”

And again, after they’re both seated in the car. And again, if Lena had her way, but Maggie turns
her attention to Lena’s seat. “Get your seatbelt on. You don’t need help, do you?

Help? Lena looks at her. It could be a cheeky joke, because it’s not like Lena hasn’t fastened her seatbelt all by herself in this car before, but then… it is a fiddly seatbelt and, well. Lena couldn’t get the armrest up, couldn’t get the door open. It might just be Maggie being thoughtful. “I’m afraid I can build a small nuclear reactor in no time, but basic contraptions elude me, as you’ve no doubt noticed. So.” Lena spreads her arms slightly. “I welcome your help.”

Lena tries to pay attention to how Maggie tugs the capricious seatbelt free, but she’s being kissed before she’s had a chance to figure it out. Not a bad tradeoff. Lena gently holds her in place before she can pull back. Gives the seatbelt a pointed glance when it clicks into place. “Another... idiosyncrasy I should put to good use later on?”

She’s kidding, but as soon as the words pass her lips, she wonders if this could actually be another thing Maggie’s into but hasn’t had a chance to experience before. Lena briefly imagines the two of them experimenting with bondage, Maggie looking at her with the same mesmerized look she gave her when Lena put her hand around her neck during their first night, and… getting increasingly puzzled as she watches Lena struggle with knots the way she struggles with keys and fiddly doors and quirky seatbelts. She bites back a smile.

“Well,” Maggie says, her breath ghosting on Lena’s lips. “You are the romantic little scientist.”

“My bad. I’ll run you a candlelit bath with a trail of rose petals leading to it, if romance is more your thing.” She kisses her with a smile, gives her lower lip a playful bite. “And we’ll keep the silk ribbons handy, just in case.”

“Are you implying that I’m a kinky little detective?” Maggie asks with mock offense.

Lena strokes her cheek. “I think you’re many things, and so far I quite like every single one.”

“I’m game for anything, if my partner is, too.” Maggie gives her another brief kiss and pulls back, starting the car. “Romance.” A frown, soon gone. “Kink. Why not both?”

“What a positive attitude. You should do sex ed in high schools. I’m only half-joking. That could be our next project after the collaborative is up and running.” Lena chuckles. “NCPD and L-Corp partner up once again, defeating heteronormativity, kinkshaming, and promoting consent, one school at a time.”
Maggie laughs. “What an enticing proposition. But you know, I wouldn't be opposed to keeping it between the two of us.” They drive in silence for a while. “What I said earlier about being jealous? I know that's not an admirable quality. I know that's more about me than you or Kara. So I'm working on that.” She glances at Lena. “I don't think I could create issues but I don't want to be in the way. I don't think I am.”

Oh. It definitely wasn’t the wrong choice earlier, then, speaking up instead of keeping silent. Ripple effect. Maggie feeling comfortable enough to say these things, now? Worth the gamble. But there’s something about trying to explain what it is that works between Kara and herself, that Lena finds difficult. Perhaps because she doesn’t quite know herself? No, that’s not it. It’s because… this is the one part of her life where questions and answers have become irrelevant. Being around Kara is being… Being what? Maybe… just being. As opposed to becoming. And the now is anchored, and the weight of the past, of the future, lessens.

But that’s hard to contextualize, to put a timeframe on. And Maggie deserves more than vagueness and concepts. She deserves clarity. Lena clears her throat. “You’re not in the way. And we all get jealous, or feel left out. That hurts, no matter what. But... you know how I am, questions over misunderstandings: by in the way, you mean in the way of my friendship with Kara? Or potentially more?”

Maggie glances at her again, focuses on the road ahead. “In any way. Relationships shift. They did for us.”

“That’s true.” Headlights cutting through the night, devouring the asphalt in a blur. There was a time, before Kara told her she was dating Maggie, and after, when Lena felt oppressed by the maybes and the might-have-beens. Still feels that way, at times. Fleetingly. Because then, she sees Kara, shares time with her, shares so much with her, and it’s intimate. I feel close to Kara already. We’re together in other ways, she told Alex on that dreadful night. Yes, if there was more, it would probably be meaningful, but what we have now… Evidently, it was the wrong way to put it. Or perhaps Alex wasn’t capable of hearing any of it, that night. Lena sighs inwardly, runs a hand through her hair. Maybe she can put it differently. Maybe Maggie will hear what Alex couldn’t. “I understand what it looks like, from the outside. Why people who are close to us, you and Alex, would think that this is the next logical step for Kara and I. But... and I tried to explain it to Alex, when she practically accused me of not being with Kara, that it’s just not something we’re… missing, exactly. And, Maggie, she… Alex laughed in my face. I’m—” Lena needs some air, but the window won’t open. She fiddles with the button. Nothing. She could try to open it manually, just a crack… oh. It worked. She looks at Maggie. “See, I figured it out? Wonders never cease. Um, what was I saying? Oh, yes. So, I can’t say what the future holds, for any of us, but Kara and I, we have our own thing. It’s a very good, very solid, very important thing to me.” She reaches out for the handle above the window. “And there’s something to be said for finding such a… rare balance. We’re good where we are. The reason we’re not somewhere else now isn’t because of Alex, or because of you. Is that... does that make sense to you?”
“It makes sense.” Maggie smiles over at her. “I hope you don’t think I’m trying to push you into anything. I’ve decided... I’m just going to enjoy every moment that I have. I’m done trying to question things or... trying to make sense of them. I’m happy spending time with you and you’re both happy spending time together. If it makes sense for you two, if it makes sense for us, why question it?” She pulls to what looks like a grove. The sound of the engine dies down, replaced by the distant lull of the ocean. “Here we are. Should I let you fight with the seatbelt and then we make out, or should I undo the seatbelt for you and then we make out?”

Lena squints at her seatbelt. “No, this infernal thing and I are going to settle our differences once and for all.” She gets to works. “And no, for the record, I don’t feel like you’re trying to push me into anything. I think you’re trying to understand and that you’re—” She glances up at Maggie, trying to tug the belt free and returning her attention to it when it refuses to budge. “Well, it’s easier to put on than to remove, I’ll give you that. Anyway, I think you’re afraid you’re going to wake up one morning, and Kara and I will have disappeared from your life.” The end of the belt pops out of the buckle. “Yes!” Lena exclaims triumphantly. She blinks. That was excessive. “Sorry.” She turns in her seat to face Maggie. “So, in short, you can ask me whatever you want, whatever you need to know, and it won’t feel intrusive to me. Because you’re kind and respectful about it and you have a right to be worried. It’s not my place to judge what is or isn’t something you should be concerned about when it comes to your relationship with her, or to what we have, you and I. If no longer questioning things is the best way for you to feel at peace and make the most of your separate... relationships, dynamics, then that works, too. But don’t hesitate to ask.” She strokes Maggie’s cheek. “Kara might have difficulty talking about these things, but I don’t.”

Silence settles between them for a long time.

Then Maggie takes her hand, kisses her palm. “Thank you. Maybe that seems like nothing to you, but it means a lot to me. I don’t... get many good things. And when I do, I don't tend to hold on to them. Sorry if—” She takes a shaky breath and smiles. “So. That walk.”

Lena nods. “Yeah, well. Lucky for you, I know all about watching the few good things in your life go away, one by one. And holding on to the remaining ones is tricky. You start thinking... wouldn’t it be easier if there was nothing to hold on to? Why not get rid of that future baggage in advance, spare yourself the heartbreak. So. Never apologize for not having much, or for not knowing how to hold on to it. Not to me, at least. Are we clear, little detective?” she teases, holding her gaze.

“You know, you're barely taller than I am,” Maggie retorts, smiling. She gives Lena a peck on the cheek. “I won't apologize. And I'm sorry you haven't had much. Have lost so much. But I'll give you everything I can. All of us who want you in our lives will.” She exits the car. Lena watches her go around to the other side and wonders what it takes to make that kind of commitment, on one’s own behalf and on the behalf of others. To give everything they can. Lena doesn’t even know what she has to give. What everything is. Maggie opens the passenger door for her. “For the record, I know you can open it but let me open it. Leave your shoes!”
Lena complies. “I’m wearing tights. Should those go as well?” She looks up and waggles an eyebrow.

Maggie leans down to kiss her, her teeth grazing Lena’s bottom lip. Lena’s hand comes up to cup the nape of her neck, her fingers threading in her hair. It’s like running a hand through water.

“Yes.”

“Oh my,” Lena sing songs. “Phallic carrots have nothing on that scandalous naughtiness. Or on that kiss, for that matter.” She wiggles out of her tights. “The only reason I’m not asking you to close the door is because it’s nothing you haven’t seen before, by the way. I have many flaws but being an exhibitionist isn’t one.” She pockets her phone, just in case, and climbs out of the car, leaving her handbag inside. The grass is cool under her feet. There’s a chill in the air, caressing her bare legs.

Maggie kicks off her boots and leaves them there on the ground. She takes Lena’s hand and tugs her towards the beach. “You're not an exhibitionist? You know I could have helped you out of those tights. I would have been very professional.”

Lena’s mind goes straight to the night of the arrest, but she’s pretty sure Maggie had no intention of alluding to it, so she lets the thought come and go and laces their fingers. She bumps into her playfully. “Hey. Give me time. For all my bravado, I can’t quite loosen up as smoothly as I’d like. I don’t really... let’s say the mere idea of letting anyone undress me terrifies me.” She glances at her apologetically, squeezes her hand. The back of her neck is burning. “Even as a joke.”

Maggie looks surprised. “Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. We can do whatever you want when it comes to that kind of thing. It's okay.”

The grass is giving way to sand under their feet, the ground starting to slope gently down to the shore. Lena looks up at the sky. “This is so nice. I feel like I’m on vacation. Look at the stars. Slightly less light pollution, here.” She gazes at the constellations for a while. Kara knows them all. They spent an evening at the National City Observatory, it was one of the first things they did together, other than trying out cafés and little restaurants. They didn’t know each other very well. Every time I go home, in Midvale, Eliza sets up the telescope for me. I used to have an imaginary friend, Captain Stargazer. I drew her everywhere. Drawing was easier than writing. “Don’t worry,” Lena says, her eyes falling on Maggie. “I only ever do what I’m comfortable doing. Unless I’m at work. And I don’t mind jokes, you’re very considerate when it counts.” She disentangles their fingers to put her arm around her shoulders instead. “Shall we dip our toes in the vast ocean?”
Maggie wraps her arm around her waist. “Why do you think I told you to leave your shoes behind? The water might be a bit cold.” She looks at her. “Is that okay?”

Lena scowls. “Are you implying you didn’t have an ocean-sized jacuzzi prepared for me?”

“I know you're used to being pampered but you're really going to have to lower your expectations.”

They stop where the sand is starting to get wet under their feet. Receding tide, then. Maggie kisses her, the warmth of her skin a nice contrast to the breeze. Lena palms her face, deepening the kiss. “That’s cute. But darling,” she whispers against her lips, “you’re talking to someone who used to sneak out of school to go skinny dipping in the ice cold lake half a mile away.” Alone. To stay sane. The colder, the better. Cold and calm, her mother’s voice whispers at the back of her mind, an unsettling, consoling mantra.

Maggie nods. “So when I go into shock, I’ll count on you to breathe life into me.” She walks them over to the water. “I promise I’m not going to dunk you in it.”

“Oh, I’d just laugh and pull you along if you did.” A wave laps at their feet, sending a pleasant shiver up Lena’s legs. She tugs Maggie a little further and sighs contentedly. “It feels good. Were you barefoot the night you called me from the beach?”

“I was. I wanted you to look at the moonlight.”

Lena smiles and looks up at the bright cloud the moon is hiding behind. And then Maggie pushes her and she falls face first into a wave. Her hand comes up reflexively to hold her glasses in place before the cold even registers. And then it does, another wave crashing over her, punching the air out of her lungs, soaking her coat. Christ. She pushes herself up into a sitting position, blinks at Maggie, who looks mildly worried.

“Are you going to laugh?”

“Yes,” and pull you down, like I said, “but allow me to mourn my coat for a minute.” Jack would find her predicament hilarious. He wouldn’t care about the coat. All he cared about was the work. She wants to laugh, too. Oh no. Her phone. In her coat pocket. Well, rest in peace. She tries to rub the salt out of her eyes. “Help me up?”
Maggie winces, stretching out her hand. “Should I take your coat?”

Lena shakes her head. “It’s quite all right.” She takes Maggie’s hand and, instead of standing up, firmly pulls her down. She watches her resurface a moment later, coughing and spitting out water.

“You weren’t kidding around. I swear, I wasn’t planning on this for our romantic walk. Holy shit, that’s cold.” Maggie laughs, taking a few deep breaths.

Lena grins, watching her trying to adjust to the temperature. “I mean what I say, don’t I?”

Maggie goes to her. Lena lies down on the sand, pulls Maggie on top of her in the same movement so the waves won’t wash over her. Lena, for her part, welcomes them.

Maggie looks down at her. Strokes her face with a smile. “I just want to look at you.”

Lena almost wraps her arms around her neck, but her coat is soaked, and water would drip all over Maggie, who looks cold enough as it is. Lena’s hands settle on her sides instead. “I don’t blame you. I am a gorgeous billionaire, after all.”

“About time that you realized.”

Maggie leans down to kiss her. Lena savors the kiss, and the waves, and the numbness creeping up her legs. But she feels Maggie shiver against her, so she lifts herself up slightly. “And the best part is, I foresee a hot shower in our very near future, to get rid of all that salt and warm you up,” Lena smiles, brushing Maggie’s hair away from her face. “Your lips are turning blue.”

"I'm not sure about the shower, actually. Definitely a tub, though." Another kiss. "I think you'll like it."

“Oh no,” Lena laments as a particularly strong wave surrounds them. “You’ve found the ultimate secret weapon. I’m at your mercy, now.” She kisses Maggie’s nose. “Come on, let’s get up. You dying of hypothermia in my arms after you promised me a bath would be in poor taste.”
Maggie stands and pulls her to her feet.

“Thank you.” Lena takes off her coat. It sits heavy on her arm.

Maggie wrings the water out of her hair. “So, would this be the first bath you're sharing with someone or are you experienced?”

“That’ll be another first.” They start the walk back to the car. “What about you?” Oh god. Why did she ask this? It was a reflex. Maggie is with Kara. She’s been with Alex. Alex who told Lena exactly how nice taking a shower with Maggie was. Maggie has been with other people. Of course she’s taken a bath with at least one of them at least once, and if Alex and Kara are on the list… how very awkward.

Maggie eyes her coat. “Let me take this. I'll pay for it if it's ruined.” She winces again, takes her hand. “It'll be my first time with you and that's all that matters.”


“Pay for it? You will do no such thing. However…” She leans down to pull her ruined phone out of her coat pocket. “I might need to use your phone for a minute.” She chuckles when water trickles out of the headphone jack. “Just to make sure I have a new one waiting for me at home tomorrow.”

“Oh, shit. I'm so sorry,” Maggie says quietly, her eyes darting helplessly between Lena and the phone. “Next time, I'll make sure that nothing valuable is on your person before I dunk you in the water I promised not to dunk you in. My phone is yours.”

Sand becomes grass under their feet. It’s soft. Lena can barely feel her toes. “Oh, it’s not valuable. Just expensive. What was inside was valuable, and lucky me, not only is it all backed up, but I can afford a replacement. So, catastrophe averted. And thank you for lending me your phone. I won’t look at anything, I just need to text my assistant.”

“What a relief. I'm really sorry. I feel bad.” They pause by the car. “And there's nothing on my phone. I don't really text anyone so explore away.”

Maggie doesn’t text anyone? What about Kara? Sure, Kara isn’t the enthusiastic texter most people might expect from someone as warm and open, and her texts are few and far between, mostly to the
point, or bizarre and endearing once in a blue moon, but… still, Kara texts. And Maggie and Lena text. Ergo, logically, Maggie and Kara should— bloody hell, shove your fucking logic up your ass for once in your life, Luthor.

She nods. “I’m curious, but where’s the fun in exploring and snooping by myself?” She looks at the car. “Hm. Should we put my coat in the trunk? Do you have a… I don’t know, anything to wrap it in? Or we can leave it here. Pick it up tomorrow. I don’t want to ruin your seats.”

“We’re not leaving your coat. Throw it in the backseat since you won’t take advantage of me back there. What do you mean about the snooping?”

Lena is glad her complexion and the absence of light ensure Maggie won’t see her paling. Taking advantage of her in the backseat. People usually prefer me in the backseat. What happened? Maggie, hanging out with older people, growing up too fast… She wrings as much water as she can from her coat, trying to keep her face composed. Does anyone know? Did anyone look out for her? Her aunt? Before dating this… Gotham vigilante, was she with women who only cared about… Lena swallows uneasily as she bundles up her coat before putting it on the floor behind the driver’s seat. She hopes it doesn’t ruin the carpet. Maggie’s car may be a little quirky on the passenger side, but it’s pristine. God, what happened to her? At least she’s with Kara, now. Kara, who can make even a pariah like her feel loved and valued for who they are. So it won’t happen again to Maggie. Ever. Not with Kara, not with her, not with Alex if they… grow close again.

Oh, and Maggie asked about the snooping. Wait. Why did she ask about the snooping? Did she think Lena was joking about being a Luthor and stealing NCPD contact names or something like that? Fabulous. Again, she swallows her discomfort and smiles over at Maggie. “I just meant that if you’ve taken lovely pictures, I’d rather you show them to me than go snooping through your gallery.”

Maggie smiles back as they get in the car. “You’re being so overly polite I don’t know what to do with you.” She kicks on the heat, unlocks her phone, opens her gallery. “You can look through. It’s just places.” She scrolls, shows Lena a picture of the place they just ate at. Layers of blue against the white of the restaurant. “And here’s this one. The sun had just set but there’s still a gradient. I was flipping through this when I thought to invite you.”

Lena’s glasses are all fogged up. She rummages through her bag, finds Kara’s lovely blue handkerchief and uses it to wipe her glasses. “Ah, better. Let’s see.” She takes Maggie’s phone. Oh, that’s gorgeous.” She scrolls. Yeah, just places. No people. No Kara. It’s funny, Lena’s Instagram account is a clinical journal of all the plants, objects and places in her life, an attempt to bear witness, to remind herself that she was there. But her personal gallery, on her phone? Not so clinical. Maggie’s Instagram account is empty, her personal gallery on her phone is devoid of people. But full of beautiful shots. “You have all those backed up, right? On your computer, or in the cloud?” Oh. There’s a shot of… the tulips Lena got them, for their first night. She feels herself
smile. So, they meant something to Maggie, too. But she isn’t sure Maggie meant for her to see that picture, so she keeps her face neutral and scrolls past it, not wanting to make her feel self-conscious.

“No. I probably should.” Maggie shrugs. “You warming up a little?”

Lena glances at her. No people. Hm. She turns her attention back to the phone, pulls up the camera app and leans across the armrest to snap a surprise selfie of the two of them. “Well, now you absolutely must back it all up. And yes, I’m warming up. Not that I was shivering in the first place, unlike a certain delicate someone.”

Maggie blinks, looks at her. “And now I’m delicate.” She looks at the picture. Smiles. “I’ll try to remember to back it up.” She gives Lena a light kiss. Her lips are warm again.

“You can always send it to me. For safekeeping, of course. Now, let me just text my assistant...” Lena doesn’t mean to, but before she can press the New Message icon, she catches Kara’s name. The last message is a picture. So, they do text. Good. Maggie just meant she doesn’t text much, then. Lena quickly texts her assistant, then locks Maggie’s phone and hands it back to her.

Maggie takes it, her eyes on Lena’s own phone. “Are you sure you don’t want to me to cover anything? For the record, the dunk and follow up— first time for me. It's a good thing you kept your stockings in the car.”

Lena snorts. “Right? My most treasured possession is safe. And no, don’t worry about the costs. I might ask if I were struggling to make ends meet, but...” Wait, does this sound entitled? Snobbish? “I mean, just because I could buy hundreds of those in the blink of an eye doesn’t mean I don’t know they’re a significant investment for the average person, you know? But what good is all that money if I can’t be self-indulgent once in a while?”

Maggie frowns. “But it wasn't handed to you. You turned Luthor Corp around. Made it your own, I mean. In the beginning, I wasn't so sure. I don't think a lot of people were but you put in the work and time. Don't tell anyone, but a few people at the station have mentioned your name without any colorful adjectives. You're really making a name for yourself. In any case, I'll be more careful in the future.”

“They have? Thank you for telling me. That’s heartening. It’s such a fine line, you know? Between doing good things because it’s right and I have the resources for it, and doing good things because I know it’ll reflect positively on the company, thus making it more attractive to investors and shareholders, thus allowing me to do even more...” Lena makes a spinning motion with her index
finger. “And I have to be careful not to be overambitious. Not to become my brother.”

Maggie starts the car. “Is that something you worry about? Becoming like him?”

Lena puts her seatbelt on. They start driving. “Oh, yes. Constantly. Sometimes, the only steadying thought I hang on to, at night?” She looks over at her as they pull away from the clearing and onto the road. “You know, when I can’t sleep? It’s knowing that if I ever cross that line... she’ll be here. Supergirl. She’ll do what she needs to do, the way she did when my mother went on her crusade, the way Superman did when Lex lost it.”

Maggie tenses. What did she say? Should she not have shared that? Does it make Maggie uncomfortable because she’s police? Because she doesn’t always agree with Supergirl’s methods?

“I don’t think it’ll come to that. You’re a good person. Supergirl believes in you. Kara. Alex.”

Lena frowns. “Of course. I mean, I know, and I’m so grateful, and it helps. But I need that, you know? That guarantee. And she knows that, too. That’s the deal. I help her, she helps me. We keep each other in check. We both wield... terrifying power. Hers more... natural, or raw, I guess. Mine, financial, intellectual... it balances out.” Hopefully.

“It won't happen,” Maggie says, eyes on the road.

Lena has to suppress a nervous laugh. How can Maggie say this so categorically? She doesn’t even know the half of it. “I hope not, but... insanity runs in my family. I can’t ignore that.”

Maggie glances at her. “We're almost there.” Lena sees her fingers tighten on the wheel. Well, that seems to be a sore subject. As always. Lena doesn’t blame her. Kara is the only one who never seems uncomfortable discussing these things. “If you ever feel yourself slipping,” Maggie says, “you know there are people there for you.”

Lena briefly touches Maggie’s hand. “If I feel myself slipping, you and Kara will be the first to know. I guess what I’m scared of is how it went for my mother and Lex. They didn’t feel themselves slipping. I saw...” She shakes her head to herself. “What was in one of his vaults, when my mother broke me out of jail. He’d created... frightening things, Maggie. Frightening.” Brilliant. “And I’m smarter than him.”
If a two-bit player like Maxwell Lord managed to almost replicate Kryptonian physiology, if Lex could... well. Lena could so much worse. As they say in Gotham, all it takes is one bad day.

“We're here.” Maggie parks the car, turns it off and turns to look at her. “I know you're brilliant. But you care about this world and the people in it. And if that ever changes...” She palms her face. “There will still be people in this world who care about it, who care about you, that will do what it takes to set things right. For everyone. Okay?”

Lena smiles and nods. Those people wouldn’t be able to do anything about it. Lex outsmarted them all. The police, black ops agencies... only a Super could stop him. Barely. She knows, she hopes, that if it comes to this, Supergirl will do the same for her. She turns her head to kiss Maggie’s palm. “I appreciate it. I really do. And I trust you. But that’s not... I’ll always carry this with me. I think worrying about it is a way to keep it from happening. Lex and my mother? All they do is out of concern for this world. Twisted concern, but genuine concern. So, I can’t believe a hundred percent in what I do. I have to keep at least one percent free. To ask myself, is this right? To call myself into question. I need that doubt. It’s not scary to me. It’s comforting.”

“You know,” Maggie says pensively. “I've worked with addicts. And it’s not the same,” she shakes her head. “But they've said to me— when they think I've got this, that's when relapse happens. They need that fear. Or caution. So I think I get where you’re coming from.” She smiles and undoes Lena’s seatbelt. “Do you want to try the door? I’d like to get out of the car before our clothes dry.”

“Watch me.” Lena tries to open the door. Nothing happens. Well, that’s just swell. Another attempt, and... veni, vidi, vici. Lena mentally high-fives herself. “I think I deserve a considerable reward for that extraordinary feat.”

“I'd hate to break precedent.” Maggie kisses her, her fingers tracing the curve of Lena’s ear. Lena decides almost dislocating her shoulder to open that door was well worth it. Maggie exits the car and comes around. “You can bring your shoes this time.”

“Are you saying I can’t frolic barefoot in the lobby? How dull.” She puts her shoes on, grimacing when she feels sand scraping again the insole. She grabs her handbag, reaches for her coat at the back and climbs out.

“Wait until you get to the room,” Maggie smirks. She takes her hand again and leads her towards the building.

The rumor of the ocean is almost inaudible, but it’s still there, somewhere in the distance. Like the restaurant before, the small hotel is the only artificial source of light in the night. They walk in,
soaking wet. It’s dim in the lobby. An old receptionist looks up from her desk. For a second, Maggie’s grip on Lena’s hand loosens. Oh. It makes sense. Maggie is no stranger to bitter, homophobic receptionists, after all. But then, Maggie tightens her hold again. Lena smiles at her as they stop by the desk. The attendant turns out to be kind and professional, shooting Lena an amused glance when water drips from her hair onto the counter and she tries to wipe it off but only makes it worse. Lena gives her a sheepish smile and looks away as Maggie pays for the room, not wanting to make her feel like she’s under scrutiny. Maggie thanks the receptionist and tugs Lena towards the staircase. The walls are made of aged stone, cool to the touch.

“No elevator, I’m afraid.”

The building only has two or three floors. Lena looks down at her shoes. “Oh, look. No high heels. Bring on the high-rise.”

Maggie leads her up. “Need a piggy back ride?”

Lena stops, raises an eyebrow. “Do you?” She’s fairy sure she could do it.

“I’d take you up on that but I refuse to let you throw me down the stairs,” Maggie laughs.

“Damn it. My evil master plan, thwarted once again.”

“Not on my watch, Luthor.” They reach the next landing and Maggie stops by the closest door, handing Lena an old key. “This should keep you occupied for the next while. Long enough for me to foil any of your plans.” She takes Lena’s coat and handbag.

Lena observes the key. Beautiful. She waves it in Maggie’s face. “I’ll have you know I grew up in a very traditional house. Wrought iron keys hold no secrets for me.” She slips it into the lock, turns it to the right. Nope. To the left. Nothing. Come on. “I’m channeling Kara here, but... golly. It’s like those USB ports, you know? You try one way, it doesn’t fit. The other way? Still doesn’t fit. Try the first way again? For some reason, it works this time.” She tries a couple more times. “I give up. You do it.”

Maggie cocks an eyebrow. “Are you actually a vampire?” She opens the door in no time and gestures towards the inside. “Please. Come in.”
A vampire? Oh right. They need to be invited in. No, Lena thinks, it’s only post-traumatic stress disorder after literally every door in the mansion was gently closed in her face, save for Lex’s room and her father’s study. She steps inside the room. “Well, rescind your invitation, then. See what happens.”

Maggie closes the door behind them. “But this room feels chilly. Who will keep me warm if I send you on your way?” She goes to turn on the low lamps. “So, this is it.” She looks apprehensive.

Will the billionaire find this humble abode suitable? Lena suppresses a smile and walks around, taking in the atmosphere. Old stone, wood, no television, nothing superfluous. It’s perfect.

“That’s gorgeous. I’d take a couple of pictures but someone ruined my phone. It feels like one of those troglodytic homes in Greece or Italy.” Abruzzo. Santorini. She stayed in hotels like this one, there. It’s uncanny. “How did you find out about this place?”

“I’m afraid it was another one of my late night discoveries. I keep a notebook in my glovebox. I write down the places that catch my attention and come back to them when I’m a little clearer. Feel free to use my phone if you want to snap pictures. I’ll unlock it for you.” She does so right away, clasping her hands after Lena takes it. “And I looked it up, nothing awful has happened here. Habit, whenever I stay anywhere.” She tugs Lena to show her the bathroom. She looks so nervous. “It’s kind of cramped but the tub is a nice size. Not quite a shower, I know.”

Lena wants to pull her into a hug, tell her it’s fine, that her billions are nothing next to feeling like someone cared enough about her to try to find a hotel she’d like in the first place. But that might come off as condescending. Instead, she hands Maggie’s phone back to her. “You’re the photographer. As long as you promise to send me everything, you’re in charge of the memory-making.” She looks around. “I love it. I really do. I feel like I’m on one of my business trips to some of my favorite European countries. I miss them. Anyway. Did you keep a notebook like this in Gotham? I’ve only been there a few times.”

Maggie smiles anxiously. “Not really. Gotham’s different from National City. I can get lost here. Even with, you know, rampant alien attacks, it’s still relatively safe. Normal. Gotham’s mean. Getting lost there might mean never coming home. And being held captive and tortured just to piss a vigilante off.” She goes to set Lena’s coat and bag on the nearby table. “What are your favorite European countries? You must get to see nice places.”

Lena wonders if Maggie chose to leave Gotham after things with her vigilante girlfriend went south. “Gotham’s a piece of work. Lex once considered moving Luthor Corp’s headquarters there, but… nope, too much of a headache. And yes, I’m very fortunate.” She walks up to Maggie and wraps her arms around her waist, kissing her cheek. “So… I love the UK and Ireland, obviously,” she says, rolling her eyes. “And Scandinavia, Germany. Did you know Luthor is a Germanic
name? Kara has declared I have Viking ancestry. Mediterranean countries are my favorite, though.” She traces an invisible map in the air. “We start with southeastern Spain, then France, Italy, the Balkans, Greece, Turkey...” She lets her hand fall to Maggie’s hip and kisses her.

Maggie leans into it, her tongue gliding along her lips, hands resting on Lena’s arms. “Let's add cartography to the high school curriculum.”

“I do love maps,” Lena whispers. She palms Maggie’s face delicately and joins their lips. She feels drunk on how soft Maggie’s lips are. “Thank you. For finding this great restaurant, this beautiful hotel, for offering to go on a romantic walk with me. And for throwing me into the ocean.” She thumbs her cheeks, touches their foreheads together. “That was the loveliest date. I was promised a bath, though.”

“Yes. I've been completely selfless and have gotten nothing out of this.” A beat. “I'm relieved you didn't lose your glasses in the water.” She gives Lena a swift kiss. “I'll go run that water for you.” Lena misses her warmth right away. She watches her run the water, adjust the temperature. “Come test it and tell me if it's too warm for you.”

Lena dips her hand into the water. “Feels about right. I’m going to turn lobster red anyway, as you’ve already witnessed, but it doesn’t mean I’m being cooked alive. So. Shall we?”

“Yeah, um. I can turn around if you...” Maggie laughs. “Do you want to get in first, or...? I can come back when you're decent.”

Oh, right. Because Lena told her earlier she wasn’t ready to be undressed by anyone. So now, Maggie can’t tell what she’s comfortable with. “How about,” Lena says slowly, “you take off your clothes, I take off my clothes, and whoever’s naked first takes the plunge?” She starts unbuttoning her dress.

Maggie watches her, smiling. Her fingers drop to the bottom of her own dress. She presses her fingers to her skin and lifts it slowly. "You're on."

“I’m on.” Lena lets her dress pool at her feet, unclips her bra, takes everything off. “And I win.” She steps into the tub, sits down and feels her muscles relax right away. She looks up at Maggie, who smiles and pull her dress off in one movement, getting rid of the rest almost as quickly before getting in and sitting across from her, draping her arms over the sides of the tub.
"I would have taken my time but I'd hate to keep you waiting."

Lena leans back, shivering when the cold of the porcelain enameled steel and the heat of the water clash against her skin. “As lovely as watching you take your time would have been,” when in doubt, go for the truth, “I want you close. For as long as I can have you.” They can’t press pause on time. Seconds, hours are trickling away from them. “Come here.”

Maggie shifts again, kneels between her legs, kisses her carefully. “Admittedly, it’s been a very long time since I’ve done this. Tell me how you want me. Should I be big spoon? Do you want to be big spoon? Is there some other configuration you have in mind?”

Lena chuckles. “Big spoon... It sounds funny when you repeat it over and over in your head. But I’m staying where I am. You decide where you want to be.” A very long time. Not with Kara, then. Maybe not with Alex, even.

Maggie kisses her, gently pushes her knees apart and turns around to sit between them. "Who needs the iron throne?"

Her fingertips ghost over Lena’s knees. She's not quite reclining against her, like she isn’t sure what Lena would be comfortable with. Lena wraps her arms around her and draws her close, letting her hands settle on her stomach. “Cersei does. She’s my favorite. Though, I must say, in most indo-European languages? The throne is a synonym for the toilet. So I suppose everyone needs it.”

Maggie laughs. “And now you've made it weird.” She leans back into her. It’s the nicest sensation, that weight against her. Lena’s been missing out. She hugs her a little tighter. “Cersei’s not getting the throne.”

Lena wonders if one day, they’ll be watching Game of Thrones together. Maybe at her place? Would Maggie like to come to her place? What’s Maggie’s place like? “Fine. Sansa, then. I won’t accept anyone else. And yes, I make things weird. So do you, by the way.”

She kisses her temple. Maggie smiles and turns to look at her. “What do I make weird?”

“Oh, plenty of little things,” Lena says, tucking Maggie’s hair behind her ear. “And I’m sure I do, too. Comes with the territory, when you decide to make room for a stranger. But what’s really, really strange,” she says, resting her chin on Maggie’s shoulder, “is that I’m now in a hotel I’m convinced is in fact in Italy, and the front door was probably a portal of some sort, and the light is
warm and restful, and I’m having a bath with a gorgeous little detective who, another one of my very scientific conclusions, probably was a cat in a past life, hence her curiosity. Because…” She kisses Maggie’s neck, under her ear. “She can be a bit skittish, and she snuck up on me, and now I like her, but she can also be a little git who pushes her good friend into the ocean and hangs up on lovely room service people, much like a cat who, gracefully sat on a mantle piece, will give a priceless vase a little push and watch it shatter below, because why not, before purring contentedly. That’s you. You’re weird. We were probably destined to get along, at some point.”

Maggie closes her eyes for a moment, her hands are stroking Lena’s legs absently. "Destined is a big word. Maybe I had to grow up too fast and I’m making up for lost time." She turns to look at her. “Or maybe I was a cat, and I’m with a beautiful woman and I’m desperate to get her attention. It’s not every day Lena Luthor and her beloved coat and phone go for a swim in the ocean. I should have snapped a picture of that.” She pauses. “But I won't forget.”

Lena sinks a little lower into the water, gesturing for Maggie to turn around and wrapping her arms around her when she does. They’re so close, now, facing each other.

“There will be other opportunities for you to document whatever ridiculous situation I get myself into. Or get pushed into, I suppose.” She strokes Maggie’s hair, brushes a few strands away. “And, I mean… you have a picture of me, drenched in your car, glasses askew. So you do have something to remember your appalling behavior by.”

Maggie smiles. “Appalling? I'll have you know, if you were anyone else, I would have tried to seduce you then and there. Sex on the beach isn't just a drink.” She frowns. “The sand can be obnoxious, though.”

Anyone else. Someone… more this, less that. But Lena’s not anyone else. Lena doesn’t want to have sex on a beach, or in the backseat of a car. She wants to make love in a bed, she wants to be warm, and safe. “I’m afraid I’m already seduced. And I agree, why make love on the beach under the moonlight when we can drag each other under the waves, ruin each other’s clothes and giggle like preteens? Making up for lost time, indeed.”

“Have I seduced you so quickly? Maybe I am the lesbian whisperer.” She smiles. “Hey. So, tonight. Whatever you want. I just… I thought it'd be nice to have a night and morning with you. The rest is optional.”

Lena cups Maggie’s cheek and kisses her. “I know.”
Alex pulls back on the force of the punch at the last minute, but it still grazes off Winn’s cheekbone. He recoils, hand to his face, falling to the floor and lying (pathetically) on the training floor mats. “Is that it?” Alex asks. “I thought you were ready to step out from behind the computer and be a hero?” She never understood Winn and James’ sudden insistence on redefining what a hero is. They’re there for Kara Danvers. What more could they want? What can two men without a day’s training have to contribute to the streets of National City?

“That mugger didn’t hit as hard as you do, and he was trying to kill me,” he complains. She watches him sit up, limp to a standing, doesn’t hide her smile. “I changed my mind. Maybe I’ll get a normal person to train me.”

“Like who?”

“Like Kara. She knows how to be delicate.”

Sure. Delicate Kara Danvers. Delicate as a freight train. Alex rolls her eyes, picks up her bottle of water and has a drink though she isn’t parched and hasn’t built up a sweat. Combat training against Winn is like battling pocket lint: annoying but with complete victory assured. “You’d know all about delicate.”

“What does that mean?”

She doesn’t know, to be honest. She goes to him, takes his face hard in her hand, turning it to look at the small welt forming there. “Put some ice on it. You’ll be fine.” He’s still pouting when he starts to leave the room. She smiles, looking at his plaid country boy shirt. It looks like it could be out of Kara’s collection. So do his pants. “Let me know when you’re ready for more.”

“Does that mean you’re going to spare me next time you’re pissed?” She narrows her eyes and he leaves the room quickly. Sigh. It’d be nice to have someone who could properly challenge her. Her regrets these days seem silly given how badly she’d wanted to be a medical doctor. And yes, she has her PHDs and masters but this isn’t how or where she thought she’d be applying them. Oh well. Life changes. Adapt or die.

She picks up her phone from the bench where she left it.

It’s 2:17pm.
Maggie [today 2:02pm]: I’m glad we talked, too. Let me know if you’re ever looking for a running buddy.

Alex smiles wanly. Maggie always did like her early morning runs. They would meet at the park or go together when Maggie slept over. Kara’s never liked running. Alex doesn’t blame her. It must be like faux racing a child, pretending to just barely keep up. Only in Kara’s case she could be halfway across the world in the time a human took ten steps. It bores her, Kara said. But Maggie loves it. Alex loved going with her. Doing those couple things. It was their couple thing. Or maybe it was only that to her. Maggie’s kept running. Maggie will always run, whether anyone goes with her or not. And now she texts Kara her confessions of love and cute geese parables. Maggie hates geese.

Alex starts a response. She won’t tell her she’s missed their morning runs. Will do, she sends back. She doesn’t want to get in over her head. She has to take things slow with her. They’re friends. And for all she knows, they’re friends who are in love, but until Maggie tells her so, nothing changes. Nothing can change. She still doesn’t understand how Kara seems so convinced when Maggie would rather be with Lena than with her. And sure, Lena is fantastic but she and Maggie hardly know each other. What could they possibly have in common? Great sex? No. She can’t think like that. She’ll drive herself insane.

She scrolls through her very short list of contacts.

James Olsen
Jon
Kara
Lena Luthor
Maggie
Mom
Winn Schott

It annoys her that Kara, Lena and Maggie’s names are lined up. It’s been too long since she’s reached out to Lena. Lena, who told her that Kara makes her happy but whom Kara will only say makes her feel real and loved. You’re right, that’s totally different. Pish, posh, who cares for oh, so, vague happiness. Tell it to the people who don’t feel anything, who jump off a bridge, who would settle for ‘vague’ happiness. Fucking Lena and Kara. She doesn’t get their ‘vague’ verbal masturbation. Their semantics acrobatics. Their adroit agility when it comes to defining who they are to each other. Their fucking resistance to the obvious. Whatever. They can enjoy, enjoy, enjoy.
Some people have to live on planet Earth (and hope for ‘vague’ happiness).

She sets the phone down. She won’t call now. Not when she’s getting lost in bitter memories. Why is she so bitter? Kara makes everyone a better person, la dee dah. But what they don’t realize is how much others had to sacrifice so Kara could have that freedom, so she didn’t have to see all the ugliness necessary to preserve what innocence and childhood she could.

Does she make Kara happy? She tries to imagine what little spin answer Kara might give her, compare the feeling she provokes to a worm finding a drop of water on a leaf on a dry summer day. Bah, she gives up. Maybe she wasn’t made for love or be loved. Her parents are scientists. She works for a black ops government agency. She should forget love. She has purpose, agency, a mission. Love’s a liability for someone like her. And yet, how many times has Kara been what’s pushed her through what she thought were impossible situations? Life or death situations? It wasn’t about her disgusting feelings. It was about Kara. It was about good. It was about doing the right thing. Don’t ever kiss me again, Kara. Why does the right thing always feel so lousy?

Alex circles the punching bag, throwing punches, weaving when the bag swings back, roundhouse, front kicking hard. She joined the DEO at the top of her class, despite drinking her nights away and gratefully crawling out of men’s beds, having reaffirmed something (it was a mystery then) for herself, despite how… uncomfortable it made her. Headhunted by the DEO. Turned and trained into a lethal killing machine. And no one knows the half of it. They don’t know what she’s seen. They don’t know what she’s done. They will never know what it has taken to keep Kara and this city safe. The Cadmus agent she beat to a pulp, the one everyone flipped out about, that wasn’t authorized. But the other, terrible things she has done, under the direction of the DEO, to safeguard National City, Kara, and the rest of the world, those were authorized. Snapping bones. Pins under nails. Killing. She doesn’t regret it. There’s a reason she’s risen so quickly through the ranks. She’ll never regret doing everything it takes to keep those she loves safe. But if they didn’t have Kara to lord over her, would she feel the same? How often does love push people to terrible things?

She goes for another twenty minutes, emptying into the bag, kneeing hard, jabbing and uppercutting. When she stops she feels more restful, adrenaline, bright and heady moving through her. She grabs her bottle of water, downing the whole thing in seconds, feeling sweat on her brow as she sits on the bench and leans back into the wall.

She picks up her phone and calls Lena. Maybe Lena won’t pick up and she’ll have to leave another voicemail. Sorry I was a bitch. Drinks sometime? Or Fucking Maggie yet? Or Did you and Kara braid each other’s hair last night and talk about your delicate bird feelings? Don’t talk about how happy she makes you, that’s basic. Lena picks up.

“Hey, Alex.” Her voice is warm.
Alex breathes. Smiles wryly. Feels like a bitch. “Ms. Luthor.”

“Call me that again and I’m hanging up.”

“Don’t hang up.”

“You sound out of breath.”

Alex laughs softly, running the back of her hand over her forehead, fingers pushing the hair back from her face. “Just a rigorous afternoon workout. Nothing fun, I’m afraid.” But that’s a lie. If Maggie likes her runs, Alex lives for her training. There’s very little she can control in this world. Not Kara, not other’s feelings, not the enemies National City faces. But she can control herself. She can shape herself. Maybe one day she’ll exercise complete control over her emotions, her heart. Maybe one day she’ll be the machine everyone at the DEO thinks she is. “What are you up to?”

“Mh, well, I’ve just returned from a delightful brunch not too long ago.” Only Lena would refer to a brunch as ‘delightful’. Scratch that, Kara would, too. Did they have brunch? Thanks for the invite! She doesn’t think she’d have gone. “Now I’m planning to go over a few meeting notes in preparation for the rest of the week, and then do my best to spend the rest of this weekend doing absolutely nothing.”

“Don’t you break out into hives when you’re doing ‘absolutely nothing’?”

“Come to think of it, I’m not sure I’m even capable of doing nothing. It’s always busy in there. Too busy. But I meant, nothing productive. Although I suppose relaxing is productive in its own way. Where are you? At the gym?”

Alex smiles. “I’m working. We have a gym here. Eat it, L-Corp.”

“No need to be so smug about it, I’m not a sore loser. Unlike some.” Uh huh. “And surely you’ll be gracious enough to get me a visitor’s pass and show me what L-Corp is missing out on. Unless the receptionist is once more adamant you don’t work there.”

Fuck. She puts a smile into her voice. “The last thing I need is Lena Luthor visiting me at work. I’d never hear the end of it. But if you want to hack the FBI database and get a look at our layout, I’m all for it. It might be slightly illegal but hey, you’re a Luthor. Live dangerously.”
“Normally that joke would really sting, but… I’m glad you called, and even your clever barbs can’t do anything about that. So I’ll let it slide.”


Nice apology, Alex. Alex closes her eyes. She grounds her body. Feels her feet on the ground, thighs pressed to the bench, back and head resting into the concrete wall. Breath emptying out of her before swooping in again. “But the joke is that you wouldn’t. Obviously I’d never encourage you to infiltrate our database if I thought you’d hack said database. But thanks for letting it slide.”

“That’s what friends are for. Cutting you some slack… once in a while. Anyway, how have you been?”

“Oh, you know. Trying to hang on to my last shreds of sanity.” She shrugs. Lena said (she thinks) that she was stressed leading to the time of their meetup at the distillery. That she and Maggie thought of how to approach her about what happened. Like a battle plan. No, like a couple. No, they’re not a couple. Are they a couple? Maggie says they’re friends. And then gets irritated when Alex points out they’re not normal friends. Alex rubs her temple. She is too educated to be this confused. “Anyway, it’s been a while since we talked. There are some women in my life who have kindly encouraged me to get my head out of my ass. So here I am. Attempting to do just that.”

“Attempting? I’d say you’ve already succeeded. I mean, we’re talking. You’re gently insulting me. Whoever those women are, they give excellent advice and you’re lucky to have them in your life.”

“Yeah. Look.” She lowers her voice. “I…” Say it, say it, say it. “Wanted to apologize. I wanted… there’s a lot of things I want to say.”

“And I’ll gladly hear them, but no more apologies. Not to me. That’s been taken care of the last time we saw each other.”

“I know I was awful that night.” What she remembers, anyway. What has faded and blurred, hidden in the black? Are there some memories she’ll never get back? Were they ever stored? The thought makes her cold. She waffles. Stands. Fidgets. Goes to the punching bag again, pressing her palm flat against it.” Her mouth is dry. “I was hurt and… I just thought. I might as well hurt everyone else, too. Mature, I know. I don’t always know how to deal with…”

“With what?” Lena asks softly.
“Feeling things.” She’s flippant. “Guess I’m not practiced, you know?” Work liability. Her hand goes from flat to curled, knuckles pressing against the punching bag. “Anyway. I called for a reason. I’ve been thinking a lot. About you. And us.” Her face warms. She scratches her cheek. “Not like… I mean. Not like that.”

“So have I.”

Maybe she wasn’t out of sight, out of mind with Lena Luthor. “You have?”

“Yes. I think we should talk. Not about what happened, not about the others, but… maybe make sure we’re on the same page when it comes to what we want and expect. From each other, I mean.”

She isn’t sure what that means. What to expect. She’d expected to talk, not a conversation. She prefers to do the talking. She doesn’t know how Lena and Kara function, like smoke in the ether, coiling and shifting, evolving prettily, beautiful and without labels. Flowing. She doesn’t know how to flow if it’s not in combat. Her hand flattens again. She has to try. She has to ‘just be respectful’. “I’d like that.” Say something honest. “I’ve missed hanging out with you. You always make me laugh. I don’t laugh a lot, Lena. I know we’ve never talked about anything because…” she looks around cautiously, despite the room being empty, despite that, for all she knows, someone (Winn) is actively listening in right now. “It’s always been casual, but.” She lowers her voice. “There are things I want to say to you, if you’re open to it. Nothing bad. Preferably in person.”

“Of course I’m open to it. I think this week is going to be a crazy one schedule-wise and I’ll probably be stuck at the office until dead o’clock most nights, but… next weekend?”

Alex breathes out, feeling some of the rigidity in her body slip away, but not all. Will she be able to say anything she means to say to Lena if they’re face to face? She doesn’t know. Lena, her friend. The love of Kara’s life. Whom Maggie would rather make out with than her. She has to laugh or she’ll blow her brains out. “Sounds like a plan, Luthor. See you later.”

“Yeah. Take care, Alex. I mean it. And thanks for reaching out.”

Alex scoffs softly. “Don’t get all mushy on me.” She hangs up. Pockets the phone. She’ll hit the showers and go home. Maybe everything isn’t awful.
“And here it is.”

Lena runs her hand along the edge of the wrapped canvas. Kara smiles up at her, takes off her shoes and places them next to Lena’s. She shrugs off her coat, Lena takes it wordlessly. She looks tired. Her eyes aren’t red. She’s not wearing her comfort MIT hoodie.

“Should I…” Lena gestures at the canvas. “Open it now?”

Kara shakes her head. Lena closes her eyes and takes a slow, deep breath. Kara thinks that maybe, this is the part where she hugs her. She stays still. She doesn’t want to make it awkward instead of comforting by being too careful, or not careful enough. She doesn’t think Lena wants to be hugged now, anyway. She wants a presence, her presence, and she wants space. At the same time.

Lena opens her eyes, they fall on hers and they exchange a small smile. Lena nods towards the living room. “Kettle’s on.”

Kara picks up the box she brought and follows her further in. Lena glances at it when they get to the open kitchen.

“Flowers,” Kara says helplessly.

Lena’s gaze softens. “Let me get a vase for them.”

“No need. I found this tiny, tiny shop,” Kara explains, putting the box on the kitchen island. “It’s not fancy or anything, but the florist? She’s positively ancient. Knows everything about plants and flowers. She’s probably a witch. A nice one. I wasn’t sure what would be appropriate, so she helped me choose. She even asked what kind of person you were. And she said, for you, not freshly cut flowers that would wilt in two weeks, but perhaps…” She opens the box, takes out the small, hand-painted ceramic planter and unwraps it, making sure not so spill any of the soil mixture. “Something alive, that you can grow yourself. Because I told her I wanted something that would accompany you for longer than the socially accepted period for… mourning whatever it is you need to mourn. She helped me plant the seedlings the right way.”

Lena traces the rim of the pot, brushes her fingers to Kara’s and lets them linger there, not quite taking her hand. Maybe it means thank you. Maybe it means that her heart feels like a stone, that it presses against her lungs and there’s not enough air in there to push words out. Kara focuses on
blocking out the sound of Lena’s heartbeat. She only wants to know what Lena wants to show. It’s difficult, when they’re so close. She hears the calm, steady thump of Lena’s heart, until she succeeds and it fades away, and all she can hear is the kettle on the stove behind them.

Lena peeks at the barely visible top of the seedlings. “What flowers are they?”

Carnations. White, for loving with integrity, and pink, for I will never forget you. “You’ll see. In time.”

Lena looks at her, unsmiling and focused. “Another bit of advice from the witch? Let time do the work?”

Kara shakes her head. “That one’s from me. However,” she adds lightly, “Worry not, I’ve written you detailed instructions. What kind of light exposure they need, how you should water them… you might even be able to coax them into blooming more than once.”

Lena pulls the folded pages from the box and reads them quickly. Kara remembers the first time Lena handwrote something for her, the information she needed to find Veronica Sinclair’s fighting ring. There’s something generous and free about Lena’s handwriting. Not like her own. Lena looks up from the light blue paper, like she can’t quite figure her out. “Since the day we met, you’ve shown up. Every time. Your first article, the gala, when you grilled me about my mother and I pushed you away, when you brought me donuts, when you stood up for me. When you were the reason Supergirl even knew I needed help. You’ve been there for me.”

Kara nods and says nothing. She stays there. Where Lena wants her. But she should say something. People get uncomfortable when she doesn’t say anything. Lena doesn’t, but what if she just hides it better than most? “You know that feeling when… if you could be anywhere you want in the blink of an eye, you’d just stay right where you are?”

The kettle starts whistling behind them. Lena ignores it, crosses her arms on the island. “Once in a while. I’m working on that. On being… where I am. On wanting to be where I am.”

Kara wants to kiss her cheek again, like she did in the car. But she’s afraid. Stupidly afraid she’ll do it wrong, and that Lena, unlike Alex, unlike Maggie, who can tell her when she misses the mark and won’t read anything into it, she’s afraid that unlike them, Lena will need an explanation with a cost Kara isn’t willing to pay. So she leans forward to catch her gaze instead. “Lena.” She loves saying her name. If she can’t take her in her arms, it’s the next best thing. “Today, of all days? I don’t want you to work on anything. Today, regrets are allowed. And wishing things had turned out differently.”
Lena glances at the shrieking kettle, wincing slightly. Kara turns off the stove. “And tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow, too. And however many more days you need. And then, whether you like it or not, time will do the work,” Kara smiles. “Come on, go sit down. I’ll get tea ready.”

“No, you go sit down.”

Kara crosses her arms. “Uh, why?”

“Because I made you a blend and…” Lena pinches the bridge of her nose with trembling fingers. “Okay, you do it. This cup is yours, that one’s mine.”

“Got it.”

“Sorry.” Lena lets out a mirthless chuckle. “I know you can tell them apart, I know you know exactly how I like it. I just— I haven’t slept in over forty-eight hours. I don’t even know what I’m saying.”


Lena nods and goes to sit on the couch. Kara takes a looks at the small tray. It’s her favorite. Of course it is. A Meiji era tea tray, glossy black lacquer adorned with an exquisite rendering of a fisherman at dusk in gold relief. The tea ball in her cup is filled with a small quantity of what looks like… rooibos? No. But something herbal, for sure. No tea plant. Kara looks at Lena across the room. She was so interested when they started making tea together. They tested quantities, blends, how long to let it infuse, until they found what was just right for Kara. Most people would say it doesn’t taste like anything, but to her, it’s just fine, subtle and rich. It’s just enough. She peeks at what’s in Lena’s cup. Her usual jasmine-based blend. Kara hesitates. She knows where the shortbread biscuits and the Jaffa cakes are, but if Lena didn’t put some on a plate… maybe she can’t eat, right now.

She fills their cups before going to the guestroom to retrieve the blanket on the bed while the tea infuses. When she comes back, Sue’s familiar voice is coming out of the television at low volume, asking a contestant, _When you were foraging in the hedgerows, did you eat any weird mushrooms that maybe have inspired this bake?_ Kara chuckles and Lena turns her head to look at her briefly.
She’s not quite smiling, but there’s an amused twinkle in her eyes.

Kara lets Lena’s blend infuse a little longer, puts the tea ball in the sink and brings everything over to the coffee table. She drapes the blanket over Lena’s legs and sits on the couch at a respectable distance, but Lena, her eyes not leaving the screen, lifts the blanket and motions for her to slip under it right next to her. Kara smiles and complies.

They watch in silence. Kara keeps an eye on Lena’s hands, watches her fingers run along the edge of the saucer absently, waiting for her tea to cool down. Kara knows how long it takes for most humans to be able to drink tea without burning their tongue, but she feels so insecure about these things around Lena. Not the intimate conversations, not the flowers, not the feelings. The practical things. The physical things. When Lena takes her first sip, Kara knows she can believably do it too.

“Did everyone treat you okay, at the funeral?” she asks when their cups are almost empty.

Lena nods, tears her eyes from the screen and shifts to face her. “They did. It was a dignified affair. Lots of people. Most of them barely knew him.” She shakes her head. “God. Kara, if Lex, or my mother, or whoever comes after me next has their way, and I don’t make it out alive? Small, private ceremony, with the… what, three people who care? No, four. Jonathan. And maybe… anyway, I will leave detailed instructions, but you’re in charge.”

Kara sets her cup on the tray. “You’re serious, aren’t you?”

Lena frowns. “The thought of hundreds of random acquaintances and journalists showing up like they did for Jack, just because he was rich and the story around his death was juicy… And let’s be real, if something happens to me, who else is there? To take care of things.”

Kara thinks of her parents. No grave, no resting place. Of Astra, who had her husband and niece to send her off. Those things are important. “Yeah, okay. I’ll keep it together long enough to take care of your funeral arrangements, and then,” she smiles brightly. “I’ll mourn you for the rest of my life.”

Lena returns her smile with a soft one of her own. “What happened to whether you like it or not, time will do the work?”

Kara pulls her legs up under the blanket, propping her elbow on the back or the couch and resting her chin on her hand. “What do you think time will do the work means?”
Lena puts down her cup by Kara’s and stays silent for a long time. Kara can practically see the gears turning in her head. It occurs to her that all she needs to do to literally see her synapses fire electrical impulses, to see her bones, her nerves, is to look at her above the rim of her glasses. She closes her eyes to banish the mere possibility of such an image, but it’s even worse in the darkness behind her eyelids. All she has to do to turn her world into a grotesque horror movie, is to look at it without her glasses.

“I’m guessing it doesn’t mean that time heals all wounds.”

The gentle sound of Lena’s voice calls her back, she opens her eyes and the vision of horror is replaced by her friend, pale and exhausted, beautiful.

“It doesn’t. It just means time will drag you back to work. Not just your job, but… the work of living.”

“Well,” Lena says, smoothing out the wrinkles in the blanket. “I’m going back to work tomorrow. I wonder what that says about me.”

Kara goes to give her a playful shove, becomes paranoid about breaking her shoulder. Her hand ends up landing awkwardly on Lena’s forearm. Lena glances down at it. Her sweater is soft. Let’s be awkward together.

“It says you’re going back to work tomorrow. The job and the other kind of work.”

Lena sighs, her hand coming up to cover Kara’s, turning her bizarre gesture into something resembling… into something that makes sense. “I wasn’t just being obnoxious, though. I felt… removed. Before, during and after the funeral. I was his last girlfriend, you know? I think his mother needed someone she could treat like a daughter-in-law. Not for propriety’s sake, just… emotionally.”

“To feel like he had a special someone who misses him as much as she does?”

“I think so. It’s understandable, but it was a performance. Not that I pretended I was still with him, but acting like my heart was in it. It really wasn’t. I was there physically, I was sad intellectually, but that’s it. And…” She pauses, licks her lips.
Kara wait but nothing else comes. “And?”

“And it reminded me of...,” Lena says thickly. “When Lex was arrested, my mother was there. Saw her son dragged, bleeding and raving, from her house. And when I got there, Lillian was tidying his room like he’d been away on a business trip. That’s how I feel. Cold and calm. And then I think of his assistant dying in jail and I feel warm for a minute. And then, cold again.”

“What would you rather feel?

Lena looks at her. “Something.”

“I think,” Kara says quietly, not looking away, “that most of the time, you feel a lot. A lot of sadness, among other things. So for once, let yourself feel nothing, okay? Give your heart a break. The good kind of heartbreak. And you know what?” she adds with a smile. “I can feel for two. I’ll keep your feelings safe for you and you can have them back when you’re ready.”

Little white lies, told to inconsolable children by adults who wish to god they were true. Lena nods. Kara scoots closer and stretches her arm across the back of the couch, nodding at Lena to lean into her. Lena puts her head on her shoulder and Kara brings her arm around her, letting herself relax into the embrace until she’s not particularly holding back in any way. She looks at their hands, Lena holding hers so lightly. She wants to see her play piano again, like that day in the street. Lena hadn’t practiced in ages, but it was even lovelier for it, for all the little mistakes. Five minutes of harmony. The people gathered around the street piano went quiet. A baby, watching her with big, watery eyes even stopped crying. The mother came closer and, not wanting to disturb Lena’s concentration, gave Kara a smile and a questioning look, and Kara nodded, and the mother stood by the piano so her baby could watch Lena’s hands from up close. Kara wonders if some part of this tiny human’s mind will remember this, carry it with her. Being fascinated and calmed by music before she could even talk, or walk, or comprehend that she’s an individual. Kara’s read about human children’s developmental stages. Until a certain age, they think they are the world. That all others creatures see what they see, feel what they feel, and to them, everything is alive, and they are everything. They think like all-powerful little gods. And then they become separate from the world, a second birth, a second primal parting. And some of them, much later in life, through various means, spend the rest of it trying to be one with the universe again.

Lena is looking at her. She hadn’t noticed. Kara blinks her daze away. “Do you remember that beautiful baby who watched you play piano?”

Lena smiles, pulls out her phone and a minute later, Debussy’s Rêverie is playing in the room. She opens her gallery and finds the picture Kara took of her holding that little girl after she was done
playing, her mother smiling besides them, draped in the traditional, brightly colored garments of her native Kenya.

Kara’s throat is tight, but she wants to smile. “Look at how you’re holding her.” So securely. “The way you’re looking at each other. The way her mom looks at the two of you. Every time you think you’re following in your mother’s footsteps, look at this. Just for a few seconds.”

Lena looks at it until the screen goes black and the phone slips from her hand. She turns slightly, draping an arm around Kara’s waist and tucking her head beneath her chin. Kara rests her cheek on Lena’s head, pulls the blanket a little higher. She doesn’t know who’s comforting whom.

They stay like this for so long, unmoving, that a ray of sunlight starts creeping out of the guestroom and into the hallway. Whenever she sleeps over on a clear day, she stands before the floor-to-ceiling window of the guestroom and watches the sunset. Lena told her that the word Occident comes from the Latin occidere, “dying, killing.” Because the west is where the sun goes to die, as opposed to the Orient, the east, from oriri, “originating, rising.” It’s interesting, because the light of the setting sun on that side of the apartment reminds her of the light that her home’s red sun emitted. Rao, all amber, gold and rust, forever setting. Rao, in the Andromeda galaxy, 2.5 light-years west of the Milky Way. Andromeda, space’s Occident where her past went to die. In approximately four billion years, according to the latest Hubble data, the two galaxies will merge, their stars far enough apart that they won’t individually collide. Her two homes, reunited. What will be left of Krypton’s ruins then, of Earth? Of herself. Who will send her off and say the prayers, if she outlives everyone she loves?

Lena’s breathing is so regular Kara wonders if she’s asleep. She tilts her head down, Lena tilts hers up. “Good evening,” Kara smiles. “I thought you’d fallen asleep on me.”

“I think I did take a brief nap at some point.” Lena glances at Kara’s shoulder. “I didn’t drool on you, so there is that.”

Kara shrugs. “If you’re going back to work tomorrow, I’d say you need all the sleep you can get, but… I’m not letting you go to bed before you’ve eaten something. Unless you had lunch before I got here, but… I doubt it.”

“No, I didn’t have lunch.” Lena hugs her briefly before disentangling herself and stretching for a few seconds, stifling a yawn. “I haven’t eaten anything since whatever they served us on the plane this morning. And I mostly stuck to coffee, to be honest. My stomach’s been in knots for days. But enough about me. Are you hungry? I can whip something up.”
“Are you hungry?”

Lena ponders. “Not precisely, but… I could eat something.” She gives Kara an apologetic smile. “Turns out, sorting out my funeral arrangements with my best friend and then napping on her does wonders for an upset tummy,” she says, patting her stomach.

Kara imagines giving in to her natural impulse, which would be to laugh and pull her into a big warm hug, to offer to be her personal pillow any time she wants. Instead, she breaks into a smile she hopes conveys all this, all the love, all the warmth, all the hugs she wishes she could give her without thinking twice.

Lena averts her eyes for a second, but she’s smiling, too. “How are you?”

Kara makes a so-so gesture. “In general. But right now, it turns out taking care of my friend does wonders for a troubled mind. And on that note,” she says, standing up, “let the therapeutic pampering continue. You aren’t going to whip anything up for dinner, you are going to go take a bath, with candles and a glass of wine and a book and music, the works. And when you come out,” she glances at the kitchen, “I’ll have improvised something suitable for… a sensitive tummy.”

Lena looks up from the couch, searches Kara’s eyes. Kara knows that look. It’s Lena’s 3% of me is here and the rest is busy elsewhere look. She kneels by the couch so she’s the one looking up at her. “What’s up?”

“What you said. It reminded me of something. I remember… being sick, I must have been very young, and someone taking care of me. I don’t know who, or whether it happened before the mansion, if it’s even real or just a fantasized memory of, you know, those days as a kid when you can’t go to school and someone stays with you at home, taking care of you, putting on your favorite movies.”

Kara nods, playing with the hem of the blanket still on Lena’s legs. “Well, real or not, I think it’s meaningful that you remember this. I didn’t get sick much as a kid, but when I got adopted, I couldn’t go to school for a while. And Eliza was great. I mean, it was horrible, because she wasn’t my mom, it wasn’t my home, but… yeah. Disney movies and cartoons and musicals all day, comfort food. One day, Alex and Jeremiah covered the ceiling above my bed in glow stars. Not randomly, accurate constellations and everything. So I could look at them when I couldn’t sleep.” Didn’t want to make myself sleep. “That helped.”

Lena smiles. “You liked astronomy before, then? Before Midvale.”
Kara shouldn’t go on. This was supposed to be about Lena, not her. But words are pressing against her throat, begging to be let out. “Oh, yes. So did my family. I grew up watching the stars, learning all about them. So when the Danvers took me in, the little glow stars above my bed? That was so thoughtful. It was Jeremiah’s idea but Alex wanted to help, to do something for me. And when I started getting better, that’s when it got hard for her, I think. It was one thing to see her parents take care of an orphan who couldn’t even leave her bed for weeks, but it was another to see them keep paying more attention to me when I seemed fine.” She sighs quietly. “Sorry, I made it all about me.”

“I don’t know.” Lena brushes a lock of hair that escaped Kara’s loose half-braid behind her ear. “Brought into an unfamiliar house at a young age, having lost your family, with a new sibling named Alexander, or Alexandra,” she gives her a dim smile, “trying to welcome you, but feeling neglected because one of their parents is more focused on you. Having to adjust to a completely different lifestyle… It’s not the same story, exactly, and yet.”

“And yet. I’m guessing glow stars and cartoons weren’t what made it easier for little four-year old you. Do you remember how you… coped?”

Lena surprises her by sliding off the couch to sit next to her on the floor. “Plenty of little things, I suppose. The staff was nice to me. But mostly… the park and the gardens around the mansion. I’d spend hours and hours there. I didn’t have friends my age, since I was home-schooled, so I talked to things. Plants. Books. Hugo the Tiger. One day, I, uh…” Lena chuckles absently. “I had no concept of time, I was too young for that. Everyone was looking for me. The gardener found me, but instead of bringing me home, he fetched my father, and he— my father, grabbed his camera and filmed my spirited debate with a bunch of flowers and stones for half an hour.”

Kara feels a wide smile blossom on her lips. “Do you still have the video?”

“Yeah. I’ll show you. And the unsettling part? My mother kept them all after he died. The videos, the photo albums. And I don’t know if it was out of respect for him, or because she knew I was a Luthor and that name is just… catnip to her.”

“Would you like to ask her, one day?”

Lena nods. “She’d probably lie, or not even realize what’s a lie and what’s true… but yes. I’d like to hear it from her. Lies and all.”
Kara thinks about her mother’s hologram. Telling a broken illusion about her day, her hopes. “Hey, do you know *The Secret Garden*? The 1993 movie.”

“No,” Lena admits, unbothered by the abrupt change of subject. Maybe she trusts that it will make sense. “What’s it about?”

“It takes place around 1900. It’s about a little girl, Mary Lennox. She was born in India, when it was still a British colony. It’s all she’s ever known. Her parents are rich, their life a parade of military duties and parties with the Maharajah. They have no interest in her and she resents them, but she says, *I never cried. I didn’t how to cry*. One day, there’s an earthquake and everyone but her dies under the palace’s rubble. Now an orphan, she’s taken in by her uncle, a reclusive lord. She leaves everything she knew, the warmth and colors and traditions of India, to go live in dreary England, in this huge, cold manor. She learns that her uncle closed himself off after his wife died. She was Mary’s mother’s twin sister. Did I ever tell you my aunt and my mother were twins?” Lena shakes her head no. “Well, they were. Anyway, one day, wandering around the park, Mary finds a hidden door. It leads to her aunt’s secret garden, forever sealed and abandoned after her passing. She finds the key in her aunt’s old bedroom, goes back to the secret garden, gets in, and… brings it back to life.”

She looks over at Lena, whose eyes are already on her. “Sounds like I could have used that movie when I was little,” she says with a small smile. “Let’s watch it, sometime.”

“You bet. I have the DVD, so… the next time you come over?”

“Deal.”

Kara nods resolutely and gets up, picking up the tray. “In the meantime, you go get that relaxing bath running, and I’ll take a peek at what’s in your fridge. And your wine compartment.”

She doesn’t wait for Lena’s reaction and goes to the kitchen, stifling a laugh when she hears Lena mutter *O Captain! My Captain!* to herself. She sees her fold the blanket and disappear into the guestroom to put it back on the bed. When she exits the room, she seems to hesitate between joining Kara in the kitchen, and heading to her bathroom, but a little goodbye wave from Kara is enough to send her in the right direction.

Kara puts the teacups and saucers down in the sink, wipes the impeccable tray and puts a tall glass of water and a small wine glass on it – Lena finds the huge balloon glasses excessive. She opens the wine compartment above the fridge and settles on a light, dry Gewürztraminer from Alsace. She fills one of Lena’s cute porcelain bowls with a mix of stuffed olives. She wonders what it’s like
to drink on an empty stomach. Does it go to one’s head faster, does it burn on the way down? She should ask Alex. Or not. *Sometimes I feel calmer when I’ve got something to do. When I have a drink.* It’s strange. Alex drinks too much, meanwhile Kara’s in her late twenties and has only had two drinks in her life. Technically. And there won’t be a third. The last thing the world needs is a drunk kryptonian breaking everything she touches because her coordination is off. Or kissing Maggie too hard and hurting her. Or telling Lena something she shouldn’t. But there’s only one thing, really. The rest is fine, the rest is true. Loss, love, interests, difficulties, quirks, habits… all this, Lena knows. Will continue to know. Unfiltered by this one other thing Kara can’t say, it will mean something.

She thinks about the very beginning with Maggie, when she didn’t know. *I just wanted to not be careful, for once in my life. I wanted to be irresponsible. I just wanted to feel human.* And as a result, she was selfish and careless. Not carefree. Not human. She was a teenager sneaking out past curfew, not an adult interested in getting to know another complex person. Or in letting this other person know her. She reveled in seeking excitement, freedom, anonymity. They fought. A lot. About each other. About Alex. *I want something normal. This… this isn't normal. You aren't normal. Neither am I. I want to be able to come home and tell someone about my day. I want to hear about their day, too. You shut me out.* So Maggie got her normal with Alex, then Alex dumped her. Kara and Maggie got involved again. They tried *Tell me about your day,* and little work anecdotes, and let me bring you lunch at work because *I saw it in a movie once,* the failed dinner at Noonan’s because that’s not where Maggie wanted to go and Kara didn’t listen. Maggie brought what they needed to make brownies, added candles in the shape of a K. *We don’t have a thing yet. You know… like an inside joke thing.* They started dating. *So, Kara Danvers, what do you say about being my girlfriend?* Kara had asked her what she’d get out of it. *I get an enigma. Every word that comes out of your mouth is sincere, even when it pisses me off. I get someone who pushes me to be better. I get a hot alien babe.* Kara blinks, her breath shallow. She’s trembling. Massages her temples. She slipped on the very thought of someone being in love with her, of being in a relationship for the first time, without having to hide her identity, at that, the way one slips on a new persona, an experimental disguise, instead of stripping layers away to offer something closer to the truth… and it wasn’t smooth sailing, it was a roller coaster, alternatively exhilarating and exhausting. Push and pull. And they kept arguing. About Lena and Cadmus, about Lena, period, about the DEO and NCPD, about Valentine’s Day. Maggie cheating on her. All of this interspersed with peaceful interludes, some of that normalcy Maggie found with Alex. Kara will never be Alex, but she sees, now, that not being normal can also be a crutch. That she can be better. As Kara. And if she can, she must. She will.

Because all the while, without realizing it, she was becoming that more grounded adult wanting to know another complex person, wanting this other person to know her. She didn’t realize it because there was no roller coaster. Lena wasn’t her hidden lover, then her girlfriend. Lena was Lena. An amicable acquaintance who made her feel like she was being taken seriously as a reporter. The first person she interviewed and disagreed with on that same day, without it becoming an argument. Then someone she admired for her intelligence, for fighting against her legacy, for fighting for it. Then a friend.

Not a friend like Winn, a funny coworker to geek and hang out with, a friend who wanted to be a boyfriend. Not a friend like James, her crush before he was her friend, sent explicitly to keep an eye on her by her cousin, and never someone she knew in a context that wasn’t somehow related to
being Supergirl. Not a friend like Cat, who warmed up to her but remains a mentor, a teacher, not an equal. Not a friend like Alex, who’s been in her life, her Earth life, since the beginning, the family she was given here, who gave her the strength to at least try to live in this senseless world. No, Lena was someone she met in her adult life who, knowing nothing of her secret, saw beyond the looks, the kindness, the mystery or the awkwardness. Who saw her intelligence, valued her opinions, wanted to share with her all the things she loved. Wanted her in her life as a friend first and foremost, would come to her for advice, for comfort. Someone who feels good around her. Someone she’s never hurt.

Perhaps Maggie saw this more clearly that she herself did. She’s older, more experienced, a detective by nature and by trade. She may not understand, but she sees. So does Alex, but… unlike Maggie, Alex now takes it as a personal slight, an insult to wholesome simplicity, when Kara refuses to use her vocabulary to describe whatever it is she feels – *Dating. Happy. Yes or no.* Kernels of truth wrapped in layers of anger, misunderstanding, pain. Weren’t Kara’s answers clear? Weren’t they *crystal clear*? Didn’t she say that happiness was about allowing oneself to experience it, rather than expecting it from others? Didn’t she say that feeling real and loved was more important to her, was that answer not good enough for her sister? Alex “*fine, make it about semantics and availability but it’s yes or no. And I don’t need to make a diagram and punch in the values to get the exact degrees of happiness*” Danvers. Well, good for you, Alex Danvers. But you don’t make me happy. Maggie doesn’t make me happy. Lena doesn’t make me happy. I don’t know what happy means. But real and loved, I know what that means, I know how that feels, in my mind, in my heart, in my bones. Do you, Alex?

Kara wants to scream, fling the tray off the counter, break everything. But she can’t. She can’t. She tries to get her breathing under control. Why can’t she do this, why can’t she scream and break things? List the reasons, Kara. One, this is Lena’s place, these are Lena’s beautiful things. Not yours to break. And you don’t want to break them. She loves them. You love them. Two, Lena would be scared, and worried, and it would be dangerous for her if you lost control, she could get hurt. And three… three what? Three… *find the anger behind the anger.*

Kara tries, comes up short. There’s no anger behind the anger. There’s nothing but bearable sorrow. A planet’s worth. No, two planets. It would be easier if it wasn’t bearable. But it is. And she will bear it. And now she feels tired. *I do not do well with change,* she told Cat when it was time to say goodbye. What she didn’t say, because how could she have known, then, is that when change comes from within, and you can no longer tell endings from beginnings—

“Kara?”

And just like that, no more planets. Only an apartment. She looks up, realizes she’s slumped on the counter, her face in her hands. She straightens up. Lena stands in the doorway, wearing her thin, lovely blue bathrobe. Kara almost says *I’m fine,* but that too has changed. No more white lies. She opens her mouth but nothing comes out.
Lena looks at her, her gaze penetrating, almost analytical. “I got the water running, but let me just go turn it off and I’ll be right back.”

“No, no, Lena,” Kara calls, not as assertively as she’d like. “No need. I was telling myself I felt like I’d aged a hundred years in a very short time. And with that, and before that, came a lot of thoughts. I just lost track of time. I was about to bring you this,” she lifts the tray, “and let you enjoy your well-deserved, luxurious bath. Doctor’s orders.”

Lena bites her lip. “All right. Go ahead.”

She gestures gracefully towards the hallway, evidently not intending to follow her right away. Kara doesn’t question it and they exchange playful smiles when she catches Lena’s spellbound glance at the way she’s balancing the tray. Lena’s fascination for the waitressing tricks Kara has managed to retain from her three-year stint at Noonan’s is a source of amusement for both of them, and Kara is always willing to show off.

She goes to Lena’s bathroom and sets the tray on the ledge of the tub. She’s lighting a candle when Lena walks in with another glass of wine. She puts it on the tray, lowers the water pressure to a minimum.

“At this rate, it’s going to take a while for this to be filled to my— well, your satisfaction, since you’re calling the shots tonight,” she says, helping Kara light up a few other candles. “So in the meantime, I figured, why not have a glass together and talk. About your newfound growth, about what bubble bath I should use… you name it.”

She sits on the edge of the tub, giving Kara that soft, unguarded yet undecipherable look that makes her feel the way she imagines sailors of old felt when, after perilous months at sea, they caught sight of distant shores. They would not know where they were, or what they would find there, but they knew there would soon be solid ground under their feet.

She turns away to study one of Lena’s shelves, picks a long, elegant glass bottle of organic bubble bath. Lena looks at the label and gives her a thumbs up. Jasmine, citrus and tuberose. Kara uncorks it, grateful it’s just like uncorking a bottle of wine and there’s no risk she’ll just snap the neck of this thing clean off because she’s never handled it before. She sprinkles a few drops into the tub before sitting next to Lena, who hands her a glass and raises hers with a questioning look.

“To…” Kara mulls it over. “To anyone who has, does and will matter in your life.”
Lena looks at her, murmurs a thank you inaudible even to Kara. Either she didn’t actually voice it, or Kara’s doing an admirable joy tuning out all the sounds a human wouldn’t be able to hear. The thing is, it’s been about fifteen years since she was under her own sun. It’s getting difficult to recall what she could or couldn’t hear, or see, then. They clink their glasses, Kara stopping an imperceptible fraction of a second before contact so Lena is in fact doing the work. Not that she thinks Lena would be alarmed if their glasses shattered, she’d probably just laugh and help her clean up the mess. Still.

She takes a sip, savors the light, dry tingle on her tongue. Lena is in no hurry to get her to talk, offers her the bowl of olives instead. Kara takes one. They’re from Lena’s Cretan caterer friend, the one who handles L-Corp’s smaller receptions and parties. He’s so funny.

“So…” Kara says quietly, watching the water fill up the tub, so slowly it’s hypnotizing. Bubbles are starting to form and the scent of jasmine wafts up. “I do want to talk, but I don’t want to put you in the position of… having to devote your attention to my problems, or questions, today.”

Lena shrugs. “Maybe I’ll burst into tears about Jack in the middle of dinner, maybe I won’t… it all comes and goes. Right now, I’m fully available. So talk.”

“Thanks, Lena,” Kara whispers, trying to sort through her thoughts. The situation is intimate. Drinking wine in Lena’s private, candlelit bathroom, the soothing trickle of water and steam rising behind them. Lena, so close to her, comfortable enough to wear nothing but a bathrobe, even though they’re not lovers, or even childhood friends. She blinks drowsily. She wonders what it would be like to just… hold her. Not to have sex, just to feel her skin against hers. Alex has. Maggie, maybe. And she knows Lena is such an affectionate person, when she feels allowed and welcome. Has she shown them that side of herself? Do they appreciate it? She both hates and loves how respectful Lena is of all these boundaries she doesn’t quite understand. Lena is the only person on this planet who holds back with her, who touches her carefully, not the other way around. She doesn’t know if the irony of it all makes her sad or relieved. Someone thinking of her as fragile. The idea of fragility isn’t something she gets to experience physically with anyone else. It’s grounding, it’s the light of the red sun she misses every day. Kara looks up from the water, now halfway up the tub. As usual, Lena hasn’t said a word to fill the silence, she’s just looking at her with gentle interest. This is who she is, then. Kara has a drink of wine to swallow the lump in her throat. Her human red sun. “I’ve been thinking. A lot. All the time. About…” she says hoarsely, even though she hasn’t cried. “About taking a step back. Not just taking my time, I mean… finding measure. In all things.”

Lena waits until she’s sure Kara isn’t going to add anything. “What you said in Waterlily House all these weeks ago? It sounded to me like the culmination of something. Maybe it was a long time coming, and this whole open relationship thing, Maggie telling you we’d kissed, just… facilitated it?”
Kara narrows her eyes playfully. “Sounds like you’ve given it a lot of thought, too.” She doesn’t know why, but she wants to let herself fall backwards, splash into the bubbles and the water. “Does it make it harder to be around me? I mean, I feel like you’re comfortable, but you’re great at making people feel that way, and I’m afraid that deep down you’re just as... exasperated or lost as…”

“As?” Lena asks. Kara shakes her head. Lena doesn’t insist, gives her an olive instead. It’s stuffed with blue cheese, makes Kara’s mouth water before it touches her tongue. “Look,” Lena says after taking a sip of wine, “I don’t know about the others, but as far as I’m concerned? It’s made being around you even more interesting. We’ve been spending more time together, you’ve opened up more, so have I… I love when we talk, I love when we don’t, I love that we have… little habits, now. And I no longer feel like you’re sometimes guarded around me.”

Kara bows her head. Yeah. And Lena’s not talking about flying on buses. “I’m sorry I made you feel… like you were on the outside, looking in. For a long time.”

“For what it’s worth, I knew it wasn’t because of my name. I just felt like maybe I was your escape from the things you didn’t want to think about, and I wasn’t supposed to step out of that role and… I don’t know, be involved in your life beyond brunches and exhibits. And I liked being that, your respite from whatever you wanted to get away from, it was a nice ego boost, but…” Lena catches her eyes. “I like having access to other aspects of you more.”

“The broody, scattered, clumsy aspects of me?” Kara teases.

“The contemplative, bookish, vulnerable aspects of you, yes,” Lena counters. She massages the back of her neck, her brow furrowed in thought, “but I also know that this kind of realization, that you need to slow down, to shift your perspective… it comes with growing pains, and not just for you. For the people who love you, too.”

Kara forces her free hand to stay relaxed on the edge of the tub, resists the urge to clutch the porcelain enamel, even lightly. Imagines it turning to dust, like clean, weathered bones. “But you don’t mean you, right? Because you just said…”

“No, no. Not me. But what for me has felt like a net gain might, for others, feel more like…”

“A loss?”
“At this stage, at least. Like you’re less rather than more. Less light-hearted, less understandable, less active, less… reliant on others to give you what you need. And feeling like someone you love is finding within herself what she used to find in you, as a sister, or a girlfriend… even if it’s not accurate, it’s still something to adjust to. And I don’t know if they will, but… they might. And that’s something.”

Kara hesitates, has a drink of wine. She thinks liquid courage can be like a placebo, but the placebo effect only works if you think there’s a chance you’re drinking the real deal, right? Her glass is almost empty, now. “But that’s the thing, Lena. They both think that… I find it all with you. Or through you. And I’ll be the first to admit that you’re a constant source of discovery for me, about all sorts of things, external or personal, and I’ll go out on a limb and say I think I’m the same for you, or I hope so, but it’s not… as simple.”

“Kara, so what?” Lena asks softly. “You can’t fault them for trying to make sense of things with what they know, what they understand, or misunderstand. I bet you misunderstand a lot of things about them, too. But don’t use them as a convenient obstacle to… I mean, you have things to do, and paths to explore, and you’d be doing yourself a disservice by just stagnating. What was it Cat Grant told you the day we met, the day I mistook you for a reporter and you became one?”

“You know what she said. I’ve recited that speech to you at least ten times.”

“Make it eleven.”

“Okay. She said, *you are standing there, looking out at your options, the icy blue water, the fast flowing river and the choppy sea. And they all look very appealing to you because you’re dying to go for a swim, but you know that the water is going to be cold, and the journey is going to be hard, and when you reach the other side, you will have become a new person. So,* Kara sighs, “time to dive, then?”

“I’d say you already have.”

Kara nods. “Maybe that’s why lately, I’ve had conversations that were… difficult. With Maggie and Alex. Because I didn’t take shortcuts, easy ways out, I didn’t smooth out the rough edges, I didn’t say anything to fill the silence… and I think they both hated it. We didn’t fight, not really. It ended well both times, but it left me feeling like I’m failing to communicate anything meaningful. I mean… Maggie listens. She tries to understand. But Alex? God. She chewed me out for not… I was so angry, Lena. I still am. Because…” Kara feels herself getting agitated again, looks around for a safe spot to put her glass but Lena takes it from her hand and puts it on the tray. Kara gives her a grateful look. She flexes her fingers, realizes she’s not even hiding it. “Because… she keeps asking me what she thinks are simple questions, and she gets so annoyed when I don’t answer the way she thinks I should to prove that I know what I want. Like I’m just… like I have zero self-
awareness and I’m just taking everyone for granted, and I don’t live in the real world were words have one meaning that all sensible people agree on.” Kara stops, a little breathless.

Lena idly glances at the water level behind her, then pops an olive into her mouth, her gaze focused on Kara like she just gave her an interesting riddle to solve, something bearing no emotional charge. Kara loves that she can never tell how much of Lena’s detachment is genuine, something she simply feels comfortable displaying around her, and how much of it is for Kara’s benefit, like a balm, a gentle stop sign.

“What words? Give me an example.”

Kara tilts her head up, closing her eyes. “Happy.”

“Nice,” she hears Lena say appreciatively. “Alex knows her classics. Happiness. Go big or go home.”

Way to make it feel less dramatic than it is. Kara can’t help but laugh, opening her eyes to look at her. Lena gives her a mischievous smile as she turns the water off.

“She says it’s yes or no. She says she knows exactly who and what makes her happy.”

Lena nods. “That’s a good thing. A precious sort of personal compass, I suppose. What did you say?”

“Um… she asked the night Maggie told her about the two of you. If I was happy now, as in, with this new development. I said I wasn’t unhappy. Wrong answer. Then last week, the day before you came to help me out with the painting, she asked if Maggie made me happy. I tried to explain that being happy wasn’t, you know… something another person makes you, that it’s something you work on welcoming when it doesn’t come to you the way it comes to Alex, I guess. Wrong answer. Then, she asked if you made me happy. I said no, but that you made me feel more important, more tangible things. Important and tangible for me, I mean, I’m not generalizing… anyway, wrong answer. I could have told her that joy is easier to identify than happiness for me, and that it’s something I’m more interested in experiencing anyway, but… she was so over it, at this point.”

Lena looks at her with the beginning of a smile. “I’m not as earnest as you. I pick my battles, I take shortcuts. I’ll say happy if it’s convenient. And plenty of other words, if it’s convenient. Especially in a heightened context where… the conversation might not really be about you, in the end. When
it’s more about the other person’s frustrations. And it does make things easier. Smoother. Not
truer, exactly, but… it’s all about what you want to emphasize, right?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, do you think communication should be as accurate and uncompromising as possible, that it
should break rather than bend? Or do you allow approximations for the sake of keeping it going,
hoping it will pay off down the line? Both are fine, but the tricky part is when you realize you have
a choice in the first place. That’s the tricky part for me, at least.”

Kara frowns. “I think Alex would strangle me if I put it in those terms. Is truth radical, or is it a
compromise… Just more bullshit, she’d say. And I get it, nobody wants a heartfelt conversation
about someone they love to turn into one of Plato’s dialogues, but where does that leave me, if I
make my relationships or my feelings sound simpler than I think they are?” She stares at Lena’s
bottles of perfume lined up on the windowsill. Shalimar scintillates in the dying sun. “Now,
everything that comes out of my mouth, or doesn’t, causes… confusion, tension, anger, hurt. It’s
disconcerting, being the source of so many negative emotions for them.”

“To be fair,” Lena objects evenly, “the situation itself is a source of volatile emotions. Positive and
negative alike, it seems.”

“It seems?” Kara repeats, quirking an eyebrow.

“Yeah,” Lena says, running a hand over the surface of the water, tracing a path through the
bubbles. Kara follows her movements, mesmerized. “Out of the four of us, I’m the only one who’s
not anyone’s girlfriend or ex, so I’m more of an observer, I guess. Nothing about my situation is
confusing, or hurtful… at least not in the sense it might be for Alex, or Maggie… or you, perhaps.”

“It’s interesting,” Kara says slowly. “Each of us, in our own way, we think we’re on the periphery
of this thing I started. Maybe we’re right, and we’re all just circling an empty center.”

“Or,” Lena muses, “it’s a changing center. One that shifts according to the person you ask.”

Kara stands up, smiling to herself. She goes to Lena’s elegant towel warmer rack and puts her hand
on it, realizes belatedly she can’t tell if it’s on. She finds the switch. It’s off. She flips it on. “It’s
like our own Labyrinth, you know?”
Lena watches her intently as she moves around the bathroom to get a fresh towel from the ancient wooden chest against the wall. “As in, capital L Labyrinth?”

“Yeah,” Kara says distractedly, frowning at the piece of furniture even as she folds the towel over the rack. She crouches besides the chest, runs a hand over its surface, its discrete carvings. “Remember the story?”

Lena comes to sit on the carpet next to her, watching her examine the chest. “Only vaguely. All these mythical names spring to mind, Daedalus, Minos, Ariadne, but how they all fit together…” She huffs. “I forget. Here,” she says, holding the chest open now that Kara is prodding the lining.

“Thanks.” Kara glances at her, amused that she’s cooperating without having any idea why Kara is taking such an interest in her beautiful antique. “You should brush up on all that stuff, you’ve got it all on your Mare Nostrum shelves.”

“My what?”

Kara gives her a blank look, goes back to observing the state of the sandalwood inside the trunk. “Come on, keep up.”

“Well, since you’re asking so nicely. Let’s see, Mare Nostrum, Roman name for the Mediterranean Sea… you mean my ancient literature shelves, in my room? That’s cheating, those writers didn’t all live in that region.”

Kara perks up. “Excuse you?” She starts counting on her fingers. “Apollonius, Diodorus, Herodotus, Hesiod, Homer, Ovid, Plutarch, Pausanias, Virgil—”

“All right, all right,” Lena interrupts, making a slow down gesture with her free hand. “You win.”

“Nah, you do. Unlike me, you’ve actually read them all.”

“True. And thanks to Hesiod I now know when to water my crops and how to take care of my goats, and from Ovid I learned how to court pretty people, a few possibly lethal recipes for cosmetics, and fashion tips.”
Kara snorts, sticking her head into the trunk again. “How to rock that toga, 2 AD edition. I did read that one.”

“See? You’re worthy of my book collection, so into the last will and testament it goes. You’re officially inheriting it if I kick the bucket.”

“You’re not scared I’ll speed things up to get my hands on all those rare editions of yours?”

“Why would you? You have full access to them already.” Lena pulls Kara’s hair up as it’s getting tangled in the wrought iron handle. “So, what about that Labyrinth, what have I forgotten?”

“Right. Minos, King of Crete— ha, like your caterer friend,” Kara chuckles from inside the chest, pushing soft-smelling towels aside to get to the bottom. “Maybe they’re related. So, Minos was fighting with his brother for the throne, and he asked Poseidon to send him a beautiful white bull as a sign of support. Poseidon does, and Minos gets the throne. But then, instead of sacrificing the bull to honor Poseidon, he decides to keep it, because it’s such a marvelous animal.” Kara almost x-rays the wood to check its condition, but… nobody’s ever needed to do that to maintain furniture. Besides, what if she accidentally sees through twenty-five floors, or deeper, into the earth, through the earth— she cuts these thoughts short and sits up, crossing her legs before resuming her story. Lena mirrors her position attentively. “Poseidon does not appreciate Minos’ ungratefulness, so he punishes him accordingly: he makes his wife, Pasiphaë, fall in love with the bull. The monstrous Minotaur is their hybrid offspring. Pasiphaë takes care of her baby, but he grows to be ferocious and uncontrollable, so Minos has the architect Daedalus build a giant maze to trap the Minotaur. Nothing but human flesh sustains him, so over time, the maze becomes this place where young men and women are sent as ritual sacrifices to be devoured, to avert plagues and other disasters thought to be caused by angry, neglected gods. But Theseus, the mythical founder of Athens, vows to enter the Labyrinth, slay the beast once and for all and put an end to the sacrifices. The daughter of King Minos and Queen Pasiphaë, Ariadne, falls in love with him, and gives him a ball of yarn, or Ariadne’s Thread as it’s commonly known, so that he’ll find his way back out of the maze.” Kara releases the breath she forgot she was holding while recounting the story.

Lena nods, eyes narrowed in thought. “Why do I need all these books when I have you? So, you said that this open relationship wasn’t unlike the Labyrinth. Who or… what’s the Minotaur? Who’s got Ariadne’s Thread?”

“Well, I…” Kara stutters a little, “I haven’t thought the analogy through, exactly, but I think I’m onto something. About… what happens when, like Pasiphaë, we decide to go off the beaten path and love or desire in a different way, and what needs to be sacrificed to contain the results of… transgressing certain boundaries, I suppose? And the Minotaur is the moving center of the Labyrinth, and he’s not evil, just… neither human nor beast, or both, and… out of everyone’s control. I don’t think any of us here feels in control of anything.”
Lena sighs, looks at her a while, shaking her head slightly. “Kara, you need to write these things down. I can’t be the only one who… sees how you think. How you understand things, how you make sense of them. It’s too valuable.”

Kara scoffs. “Right, because you show everyone else how you think.”

“Touché.”

“I’m sorry,” Kara swallows, pushing her glasses up her nose. “I didn’t mean to snap at you.”

“You didn’t snap at me.”

“Still. I’m sorry. I guess, it’s just…I know other people can understand and give it some thought and find it interesting, but…” she winces. Condescending condescending condescending. When she started being able to speak English, a few months after the Danvers took her in, she was unintentionally, but so unbelievably condescending towards Alex and her parents. Krypton, as a society, placed such emphasis on knowledge from the earliest age. And her House was expected to represent the best of what Krypton had to offer. How do you go from being a daughter of the House of El, to being… “But not everyone finds meaning in the stories of… the stories that humanity tells itself. Or the origin of words and names and idioms, like you. Nobody else will let me ramble on about Cassini and turn it into a metaphor for my life to make me feel better about it.”

“Do space probes dream of electric sheep?” Lena teases. “And yes, true, these things don’t resonate with everyone. But do it for yourself, then. Get a notebook, write it down. You’ll be glad to have it later, to see how you used… the stories others came up with, to make sense of your own as a person. To think more deeply, more richly about yourself. Because who knows, maybe one day, you won’t know how to do that anymore. We take ourselves for granted, and pardon my French, but time is a bitch. Change is a bitch. We forget. We move on, and that’s not bad, but some things shouldn’t be lost in translation. So, keep a trace. You might need it to remember and be inspired by… who you once were.”

Kara feels overcome with affection for this… fragile human in front of her. She imagines herself, hundreds of years from now, trying to remember who this young woman was, who painted and loved pizza, and cooking, and gardens, who had a sister and a girlfriend and a best friend. She can’t. “It’s happened, you know. Once. Having to remember that part of myself.”

Lena gives her a questioning look, but then her lips form a knowing oh.
“Yeah,” Kara whispers. “My aunt would tell me stories all the time. Every time I asked. Which was a lot. And she was *fun*, and lively, and... my mother told me stories, too, but they were more educational. In a good way. She’d tell me about our... about history, and myths, and when I lost them all, I felt like that part of me was locked away. Maybe not completely, because I did get into art instead, that was my major in college, and I liked books and movies, but... passively. They only became an active source of understanding when... I guess when I stopped finding it anywhere else."

“I don’t want to assume, but your family?” Lena says, picking at the pristine carpet between them, “Before the Danvers, I mean. The way you talk about them, it seems like one of their priorities was raising you so that you’d have all the tools you need to... find your way. Intellectually, emotionally. And it sounds like you had such a safe, happy childhood.”

“Yeah.” Kara keeps her eyes fixed on the carpet. “Safe and happy. That was me. I knew what happy meant, back then. Or... I didn’t even need to know what it meant. I just was. Happy.”

Lena leans forward until she catches her eyes. “That’s very self-indulgent of me, but... knowing that someone I care about very deeply had the safe and happy childhood I didn’t have? That gives me hope. I don’t know why, but it does. And...” She stops.

Kara’s hand settles over Lena’s, as lightly as she can. She opens her mouth, hesitates. But, well... it’s the truth. “I think my family would have liked you, if they’d had the chance to— no, the privilege, to meet you. And I like to think that you would have felt at home with them, too. At least, as I want to remember them. As caring people, with... a sometimes excessive sense of responsibility. And they would have seen then, as I see now, how much you have to give. You’re a treasure, Lena. Not just to science, but to your friends.”

Lena takes a moment to compose herself, or so Kara assumes. “So are you, Kara. As god is my witness, so are you.”

The hint of a smile or her lips clues Kara in. “Wait.” She squints. “Lena Luthor, did you just quote *Gone with the wind*?”

Lena’s smile widens. “I’m going to live through this and when it’s all over, I’ll never be hungry again. No, nor any of my folk.” She stops, looking at Kara expectantly.

Kara rolls her eyes, but she can’t help grinning. “*If I have to lie, steal, cheat or kill. As god is my*
witness, I’ll never be hungry again!” They look at each other, smiling, Lena’s eyes still a little too bright. “Well, speaking of hunger, I should get started on dinner. Whatever dinner is going to be.” She looks at the tub. “Your bath is probably lukewarm.”

Lena gives Kara’s hand a squeeze. “It’s fine.”

She stands and Kara sees her begin to hold out her hand to help her up as well, but she doesn’t go through with it and lets Kara stand up by herself. A reminder of the incident at the botanical gardens, a reminder that Kara has no idea how to pretend to be pulled up by a human without potentially hurting them. It’s sad, but also… nice. That Lena remembers what she is or isn’t comfortable with, no matter the reason. That she doesn’t need a reason.

“So, um… do you have everything you need? Do you want a book or something?”

“No. But thank you. I think I’m just going to float in there and pretend I’m one of our koi fish from the pond. Try not to think for a while. Losing battle, I know, but…”

Kara scratches her nose. “Okay. I’m pretty sure they think, though. Our koi fish.”

“True. But if their placid demeanor is anything to go by, those must be pretty peaceful thoughts. I wouldn’t mind being a carp for a while.”

“Yeah,” Kara ponders. “Hey, let’s just be koi fish in some fancy Japanese pond in our next life. All we’d have to do all day is sleep, play, and eat all the food people throw us reverently. That’d be a nice rest before the next life.”

“Deal. Let’s be fish.”

“That’s settled, then,” Kara says determinedly, stopping in the doorway. “You start practicing for that and I’ll go make dinner. Call if you need anything.”

“Will do,” Lena promises with a somewhat disbelieving smile.

Kara closes the door behind her and exits Lena’s room, closing that door too to give her some
privacy in case she exits her bathroom in a towel or something. She goes back to the kitchen and
takes stock of what she has to work with. Something… healthy. To make up for all the skipped
meals. But not too heavy. Easy to digest. What’s easy to digest? Kara can digest any food. Hm. She
eyes the lovely fruit and squash bowl on the kitchen island. Her epiphany comes in the form of a
glorious butternut squash sitting in the middle. It’s so pretty. It’s almost a shame to cook it. She
thinks of this article she read about recent scientific discoveries regarding the cerebral activity of
plants. They don’t have brains, of course. They are brains. They make decisions constantly. To
germinate, or not to germinate. When to look towards the sun, when to draw water from the soil…
unlike animals, they can’t run in the face of danger, but they have defense mechanisms. Do plants
get stressed? She thinks of the new carnivorous one at the botanical gardens. Does it hate it there?
Does it care at all? Maybe it’s as happy as a clam. Do clams think? God, everything edible is a
thinking being. That’s… unsettling. Maybe Kara should stop eating so much. It’s not like she needs
ninety-nine percent of the food she consumes. The sun is mostly enough to sustain her, and even
though she’s pretty sure one day, science will prove solar radiation is intelligent in its own way, it’s
not like eating an animal or a… brain-plant. But food is… important to her.

She pats the butternut squash experimentally. Apologetically. When she’s sure she isn’t going to
accidentally crush it, she lifts it carefully from the bowl and sets it on the counter. She retrieves a
sack of potatoes, washes her hands, dries them on a dishtowel and slings it over her shoulder. She
promised herself she wouldn’t do that anymore after the last one caught fire and she almost outed
herself as an alien because she couldn’t feel it – one of the scariest moments of her life, until Lena’s
hilarity snuffed out her fear just as surely as the water she drenched her with snuffed out that fire.
But it was close. Too close. So she promised herself she wouldn’t do it anymore, but that was a lie,
because habits die hard. Not all of them. It’s funny, how… it’s the little habits that are hard to
break, not the big ones. No more flying, only buses? Easy peasy. No more superspeeding as Kara,
no more anything alien as Kara? Done. Pleasurable, even. No more dishtowel on her shoulder as
she cooks? Problematic.

She sets about peeling everything before chopping it all up into small cubes. It’s been…
seven days since the last time she cooked dinner for the two of them. And a little longer since they
cooked together. And before that, it was Lena’s turn. Not that they take turns. It just happens. Lena
made her pizza, forbade her to lift a finger, ordered her to sit down and watch whatever she liked
while Lena cooked. A documentary about Larsa, a major city-state of the earliest known
civilization in Mesopotamia, Sumer, and the center of the cult of their sun god, Utu. Six thousand
years ago. Lena joined her on the couch partway through. She had flour on her nose.

Kara grabs the biggest pot she can find, lets a generous slab of butter melt at the bottom on medium
heat while she minces a couple of onions, then puts everything into the pot. That’s a lot. Oh well.
Leftovers are always a good thing, especially home cooked ones. She adds some paprika, turmeric,
salt and freshly ground pepper to the mix, stirs for about ten minutes, the repetitive movements
easing her mind into loosening its grip on concrete thoughts. It’s interesting, watching your own
mind, Kara thinks. It’s easy to fathom that a person isn’t their body. But to realize they’re not their
own mind, either, since they can observe it? Now, that’s fascinating. Because, what are we, if not
our minds?
She adds vegetable stock until only a few bits and pieces of potato and squash are poking out. She starts a fifteen-minute countdown on her phone. That should be enough for everything to be fully cooked. Is there fresh bread anywhere? The kind Lena buys from the bakery down the street would go so well with— nope. Makes sense, Lena hasn’t been home since Tuesday, and her priority on her way back from the airport was probably not bread. Kara wonders if fifteen— no, fourteen minutes and eighteen seconds is enough to… oh well, Fortune favors the bold!

She rushes out of the living room, slips her shoes on, grabs her wallet and her coat, borrows Lena’s keycard and exits the apartment, calls the elevator.

To Lena Luthor [Today 07:12 PM]: *Popping out to get something for dinner, brb. Kitchen is off limits.*

She waves at the security guy behind his desk. Abel, she thinks his name is. He started recognizing her after Lena had him put her in the allowed visitors registry, so he wouldn’t have to check with her every time Kara came by.

Her phone vibrates in her pocket halfway to the bakery.

From Lena Luthor [Today 07:15 PM]: *Need me to open the door for you when you come back (I won’t look at the kitchen, scout’s honor) or did you take my key?*

Kara glances at the line. Only two people before her, now.

To Lena Luthor [Today 07:17 PM]: *I took it. Don’t stop building bubble castles on my behalf.*

It’s her turn. She gets a big loaf of garlic bread, adds a slice of Lena’s favorite cheesecake on a whim. Even if she’s not in the mood for it tonight, it’ll be there in the morning, or when she comes home from work tomorrow. Kara wants to buy everything. She remains reasonable and only adds four croissants to her order, and a cup of coffee, asking that it be bagged separately along with two of the four croissants. She hurries back to Lena’s building.

“Here,” she tells Abel, dropping the paper bag on his desk. “To make the night shift go a little faster. Coffee and croissants.”

It’s not the first time she’s done this. He smiles. “Thanks, Ms. Danvers. That’s really thoughtful of
“Kara. And I know, right?” she says, walking backwards to the elevator. “Ms. Luthor has excellent friends, if I do say so myself.”

The countdown comes to an end in the elevator. Not too shabby. She realizes Lena has answered her previous text with a picture of… a foamy igloo?

To Lena Luthor [Today 07:27 PM]: Is that supposed to be a castle?

She swipes the keycard. Green light, beep, click. She pushes the door open, balancing the bag in one arm and smiling at her phone in the other.

From Lena Luthor [Today 07:28 PM]: It was. Around 500 AD. It may be in ruins now, but any archeologist worth their salt would see what an awe-inspiring citadel it used to be. Keep up, Kara Croft.

The smells wafting out of the kitchen and the warm, underlying scent of Lena’s place welcome her. Kara checks on the vegetables as soon as she’s washed her hands again, poking them with a knife the way Lena showed her. It’s such a useful trick, especially for Kara. The knife goes in as it would through butter. Properly cooked, then. She turns the stove off and plugs in the food processor. A few minutes later, enough soup to feed a small army (or one kryptonian foodie) now sits in the pot. She adds some heavy cream and stirs until it’s all blended to perfection, then covers it to keep it warm.

She hears Lena emerge into the living room as she’s chopping some fresh chives she spotted in the fridge when she opened it to store the cheesecake.

“Kitchen still off limits?”

“Nope, you’re right in time.” She turns around to give her a smile. She looks so cute in her pajamas, her cheeks rosy and her hair wet and wavier than usual from the time spent in what must be the equivalent of a sauna. Kara feels her heart banging on the door again, demanding that she pay attention to how nice it is, to see someone like Lena so comfortable around her, and she’s about to open her mouth to tell her, when she notices the hoodie she’s wearing. It’s dark blue, and reads Supergirl is my other other ride! in some eighties inspired, neon-colored font. What the…
Kara blinks. “That’s… that’s new,” she says, wincing internally when she stutters again.

Lena follows her gaze. “Oh, this? Yeah. Maggie came up with that a couple of weeks ago.”

Two weeks ago. Kara swallows. “On your date?”

Lena nods with a smile, sticking her hands in the hoodie’s kangaroo pocket. “I think she was driving herself crazy trying to figure out why I never seemed to, well… drive. Pun unintended. And we ended up talking about modes of transport, and I told her that when it comes to flying, anything smaller than a big old commercial airliner was a no-no, unless it was wearing a cape. And she came up with that line. She thought I should get it as a bumper sticker, but obviously, I can’t joke about that publicly. But it’s funny, and kind of… reassuring, actually. And true. So I designed this. There’s a tee-shirt and a mug, too.” A pause. “Please don’t tell Supergirl. It’s just a joke, I won’t wear it outside and I didn’t use the, uh…” she traces a diamond shape in the air.

“Sure,” Kara whispers breathlessly.

So, they have fun together, Maggie and Lena. They talk, they’re comfortable enough around each other for Maggie to make jokes. Jokes Lena finds funny. And… Kara blinks again. She’s upset. Is she upset? What is there to be upset about? That they like each other? No, no, no. That’s a good thing, and besides, she knew already. So is it… the joke’s crude undertones? No. Maggie makes these jokes all the time. Needs to, probably. Kara might not find the kind of easy, playful comebacks that Alex and… maybe Lena, can come up with on the fly, but it’s okay. Or is the very thought of Maggie playing with fire, joking about Lena’s history with Supergirl, upsetting to her? No. She trusts Maggie to keep her secret. Any secret. So… is she really upset? Maybe not. Maybe she’s just dazed. Reassuring and true. Lena finds the thought of Supergirl flying her to safety, if she’s able, reassuring and true. And she didn’t use the House of El’s—

“Kara? You all right?”

Kara shakes herself out of it. “Yeah, I just. The…” she mimics Lena’s earlier gesture. “Do you know what it is?”

“I just know what it’s not. An S.”

“It’s—” Kara’s throat tightens unexpectedly. She clears it. “Her family’s coat of arms.”
“Oh.” Lena looks down at her hoodie again. “I figured it was something with personal significance. And it means so much to so many. I wouldn’t have used it as a joke even if it was just as S. The MIT hoodie hits a bit too close to home for me today, so when it comes to comfort clothes, I don’t see what could top anything Supergirl-related, considering all she’s done for me. What she does every day. So the… coat of arms, I don’t take it lightly.”

Kara plays with her belt, unable to look up. “Isn’t that what it’s for, though? To give people hope, comfort, inspire them to take a stand? You know, when I see little kids wearing it, or even adults… sure, it’s not great that manufacturers and toy companies get to make money off of it, but… I think anyone who needs it or believes in it gets to wear it. Isn’t that what she signed up for when she chose to display it?”

Lena nods. She takes a measuring cup out of a cabinet, fills it according to Kara’s written instructions, and waters the soil mixture in the planter in a calming circular motion. “To tell you the truth, I also thought of it in terms of… and I know she doesn’t see me that way, but a Luthor deciding she has a right to wear the symbol? Kind of grotesque. Insulting. But…” the last drop of water hits the soil, briefly reflecting the soft lighting. “I’m wrong. And you’re right. About… the idea that if you believe in it, or need it, then you de facto have a right to wear it.”

Kara tries to smile. It’s one thing to feel proud of what she accomplishes as Supergirl, but feeling proud of someone else? Not proud of the nameless people who follow a hero’s example and honor her values by finding strength in togetherness. No. Feeling proud of someone she knows, someone she loves, for doing the same thing, without shying away from sounding like a goody two-shoes in front of a friend, without knowing who that friend is… it’s something else. More personal. “I… I wholeheartedly believe that she would agree.”

Lena smiles faintly. “Why would she trust you the way she does, if you didn’t believe?”

“Right back at you,” Kara retorts.

Lena looks away, as if the very thought of not being merely tolerated by a Super, but trusted, was too much to bear. Kara focuses hard to block out the sound of her heartbeat. She owes her that. She owes everyone that.

Lena exhales audibly. “Okay, let’s move on before I ask you to get me an autograph. This smells divine,” she says, pointing at the pot. “What is it?”

Kara rolls with it, gestures at the nearest stool by the kitchen island. “Take a seat. Butternut squash and potato soup,” she explains, filling two soup plates. She sprinkles chives and ground nutmeg
over them before setting them on the island in front of Lena and her own stool. “And this,” she unwraps the loaf of garlic bread, “is why I went out. To the bakery.” She cuts a couple of slices into a dozen soldiers and leaves them on the wooden cutting board, to add a rustic touch. She fills two tall glasses with Lena’s favorite sparkling water. “Oh, and I got some of your cheesecake while I was there. It’s in the fridge, ready when you are. And uh... this,” she points at the bag by the fruit bowl. “For breakfast. Or if you want to take them to work, or... anyway. Croissants. It’s kind of an unpopular opinion, but I think they taste even better if you warm them up the next day. Please say something, I can’t stop rambling, and I know it all sounds like way too much but I just wanted to get you... everything you needed, or might want, or... say something.”

Lena nods. “Spoons.”

“Spoons... oh! Yes, yes. Here.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

Kara sits on her stool, waits for Lena to dig in before doing the same, grateful for the silence. They eat quietly for a minute. Lena reaches out for a soldier, dips it in her soup and has a bite. “So... is this a family recipe?”

“A family recipe?” Kara frowns. “No, I made it up. Why?”

“I don’t know. I’ve told you what a great cook we had at the mansion, but my parents’... exacting standards ensured it leaned more towards gourmet than homey food. And Alex told me Eliza is kind of a more traditional, home cooked all the way sort of mom. And...” she has some more soup. “I feel like that’s exactly what it’s supposed to taste like. Homey food.”

“What does it taste like?”

Lena shrugs. “Tasty, filling, familiar even if it’s not. Nobody’s ever cooked me that sort of thing. It’s really good.” She takes Kara’s free hand. “Thank you. For all this. The future flowers, dinner, cheesecake... the painting I haven’t unwrapped yet. It’s been a hard week, and I know I didn’t call or text after hopping on that plane, but... with his relatives, or all these strangers, every time I felt out of place, or like I wasn’t feeling the right emotio? Thinking about what you’d say, what you’d do... it helped. That’s why the first thing I did when I got back this morning was to call you. I
Kara wants to lace their fingers, bring Lena’s hand to her lips, but she doesn’t trust herself to do it safely, not to break her bones, not to... She’s too emotional. What can she safely do? She has to do something. She can’t let those words... hang in the air and float to the ground like dust. She leans across the island and kisses Lena’s cheek. It’s safe. It’s just contact, barely any pressure, and it doesn’t feel weird for the person on the receiving end. Hopefully. Hopefully, Lena knows how much she cares. How much she loves her. Somehow, Kara thinks she does.

They go back to eating in silence.

“You’re staying here tonight, right?”

“Yeah.” Kara finishes her plate. “I’m having seconds. You?”

Lena nods. “You know what the worst part is, about this whole thing?” she asks as Kara fills their plates once more.

“I’m guessing it’s got something to do with his CFO, but I stayed away from articles covering the story. I figured you’d tell me, or...” She quickly chops some more chives. “So, what’s the worst part?

“Thanks,” Lena says when Kara sets her plate in front of her. “It’s such a sordid affair. Remember when I told you Jack and I created our own startup after we graduated, and humbly decided our first order of business should be to cure cancer?”

Kara chuckles. “Yeah.”

“So, we get on it, figure out nanotechnologies are the way to go, and for three years that’s what we work on. Not exclusively, but... almost. We create these nanobots, but no matter what we do, how we program them, they remain passive. They don’t fix anything, they behave like a confused
swarm in need of a queen. We can’t crack it. And I’m starting to have to step up more and more over at Luthor Corp, because Lex is going cuckoo over there and the science division isn’t going to run itself profitably. As a result, I have less and less time to hang out in a garage with my boyfriend to work on what, at this stage, is beginning to look like a dead end, or something we should downscale and find other, smaller applications for. But Jack, he remains obsessed, he’s still getting a kick out of repeatedly getting so close, but of course never actually there. We start fighting about it, I throw a microscope at him—”

“What? A small one, right?”

“Well…” Lena dips dome garlic bread into her soup, going from animated to dainty suspiciously quickly. “Maybe not that small, but he dodged it easily. Still, though. Not my proudest moment. It was a very expensive, custom microscope I’d built myself.”

“I’m so sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you. I rather liked it. Anyway, it comes to a head, I tell Jack we should let go, it’s not working, we’re wasting valuable time and resources we could be spending on more attainable goals. And you know the rest, he accuses me of wanting to devote myself to Luthor Corp. Maybe he wasn’t entirely wrong. And then Lex is out of the picture, I’m CEO all of a sudden, and Jack tells me, our work’s more important, if you don’t step down, if you move to National City, we’re done. So… all right, bye then.”

Kara hides her smile behind her glass of water. “And that’s when he founded Spheerical Industries.”

“Yeah. Turned our startup into it, really. And he had to diversify to make it profitable, but at the heart of it was still our work on the nanobots. And it’s not like he asked exactly, but… I was fine with him using it. Because I deeply believed we were at an impasse, and we couldn’t solve it, there was a fundamental… mistake, in our approach. I still don’t know what it is. Because we tested it on animals, right? Which is always horrible, but… what else can you do? It’s science. And every species we tested it on, had the same reaction, displayed the same symptoms: abulia, and—“

“Abulia?”

“Loss of volition. Coupled with quasi hypnotic susceptibility. In short, the worst combination. And no matter what we did, how efficient the nanobots got in terms of fixing damaged tissue, we couldn’t get past those side effects, couldn’t get to a level where human trials were even an option.” Lena pauses to finish her plate. “Kara, this was so good.”
Kara smiles. “Really? Well, there’s plenty left, so…”

“I’m taking some for lunch tomorrow. And the cheesecake. Culinary moral support from my best friend will make the transition easier, and I’ll need all the pick-me-ups I can get. To say I have a mountain of work to catch up after being away for three days is an understatement.”

“And you’ll think about that tomorrow. For now, if you’re done, I’m going to do the dishes while you finish telling me all about what happened, and what the worst part is.”

Lena slides off her stool, gathers their plates and the cutting board, obviously having no intention of letting Kara do all the work. Well, if keeping her hands busy helps… and Kara likes doing the dishes with her. She just needs to remember not to dip her hands in water Lena hasn’t touched, in case it’s scalding.

“Right.” Lena gets a couple of Tupperware glass containers and proceeds to fill them with the leftover soup while Kara washes the blender. “So we broke up, I moved here and I thought, he’ll either waste his brainpower on this until the cows come home, or he’ll crack it one day, in which case, I’ll be there to pop the champagne corks and celebrate his perseverance.”

“But you don’t like champagne.”

“I should, though,” Lena muses, taking the dishtowel from Kara’s shoulder to dry the clean blender. “It’s dry, it’s got bubbles galore… and yet. I do love cider, though. Go figure.”

“Oh, me too. Eliza makes the best cider. I’ll ask her to bring a few bottles the next time she comes visit. Anyway, sorry, I interrupted you. Go on.”

Kara shifts so that she can wash the pot in one sink while Lena takes care of the rest in the other.

“Well, very recently, I heard rumblings in the scientific community, of a potentially world-altering medical breakthrough that Spheerical Industries was about to unveil. But then, days later, Jack was dead. Foul play? A greedy rival? Corporate espionage? No. This… this imbecile,” Lena hisses, squirting dish soap into the sink, “ended up testing the damn things on himself. I checked the public records. Human trials supposedly took place about two months ago. But there were no human trials, plural. He was the sole human subject. That’s what I got from what little the authorities were willing to disclose: official cause of death is basically a freak accident, an
experiment gone wrong, and there are some falsified records.”

Kara sighs. “So at the end, he was possibly… just a puppet? More or less.” She starts drying the pot.

“Yeah. I don’t even know why his CFO was arrested, it’s all very hush-hush, but if the side effects were anything like what we observed on animals, I bet pushing our faulty nanobots on the market had more to do with Jack doing whatever someone else was telling him to do, for profit, to keep the company afloat, who knows, than… although, what do I know? A week ago I’d have said sure, he’s obsessive and insufferable, but he’s not greedy, and as a scientist, he genuinely has people’s best interests at heart… but then, to go and inoculate himself with this because he knew it wasn’t safe enough for properly regulated human trials? That’s desperate. Did he feel like he’d wasted five years and sunk his fortune into a pipe dream, lost his girlfriend in the process, all for nothing, and what he did to himself was some crazy, last-ditch attempt at making it work? Did his CFO prey on that desperation, egged him on, and then pressed a kill switch so he wouldn’t talk? Or is it something they decided to do together, and it just got out of control and killed him because… I mean, who knows what those things do to human physiology. Maybe they cause catastrophic organ failure over time, maybe… anyway. Not the point.”

Kara puts the pot back in its usual cupboard and moves to dry what Lena has put on the dish rack. “I’m guessing that if I offered to ask Alex or Maggie to look into the details – nothing illegal, just making some calls – you’d tell me that it’s the least of your concerns.”

Lena nods, passing her their spoons and emptying the sink before drying her hands. “Maybe not the least, but… close to the bottom of my priority list, yes. He did something foolish, for whatever reason, he died because of it, and that’s that. But our work, my work, almost got a mass market release even though it’s a deadly time bomb, the results of two kids fantasizing about eradicating death, but unlike most stupid kids who think that way, we had the brains and the money to make it happen. Talk about hubris and flying too close to the sun. And it worked. If I sliced my palm open now, those nanobots would fix it in milliseconds. And then turn me into… whatever they did to those mice, to Jack. But it’s still brilliant, we still got further than anyone else ever did. And it would be so easy to think, oh, I’m older now, I’m different… but am I? I still want to cure cancer. Eradicate famine. You name it. And if I did find a way… what else could it be used for? What horrors? What unintended consequences would it have? Look at my mother. Dr Frankenstein all right, slapping an unstable kryptonite core into a cadaver to power it back to some semblance of life. Not to mention what my brother was on the verge of doing. It’s… insane, but all of it was done for the betterment of humanity. And then, oops, genocide or something.”

“I guess a key difference here is that unlike all these people, Jack, Lex, Lillian… you don’t cut corners. But still, the more ambitious the work, the higher the risk of it being misused. Or misguided,” she adds with a pointed look at Lena. She puts the loaf of garlic bread back into its paper bag, wraps it in a clean towel. Best way to keep it fresh, Lena taught her when they began cooking together. “I’m sorry it keeps happening, Lena. That all of your contributions end up… I’m sorry.”
Lena leans against the kitchen island and finishes her glass of water. Kara pushes her half-full one towards her, Lena takes it with a thankful glance. Kara can’t say she’s happy Lena needs those tricks to feel calmer – although, she’s one to speak – but… at least she stays hydrated? And it’s better than… Sometimes I feel calmer when I’ve got something to focus on. When I have a drink.

Kara.

“So am I,” Lena says. “You know, there have been headlines and articles already. Jack Spheer, esteemed member of the scientific community, partnered up with the youngest Luthor and met a tragic end working on their shared findings. Or stressing what a peculiar coincidence it is that days before the unveiling of something extremely lucrative, my name pops up as one of his partners, and maybe I undeservedly wanted my share, and maybe we didn’t see eye to eye, and maybe… maybe. This is what they’re printing. And even if it blows over, because it’s baseless speculation and tabloid journalism, it’s still… it still looks like the blueprint for my future as a scientist, as a CEO. Everything I do will either be insignificant and forgotten, or it will be significant, and stolen, or misappropriated, or… Even my mother steals from me, from my labs. Or tempts me with Lex’s inventions. Because, Kara, they’re remarkable. The positive applications of some of the technologies he developed… you can’t even imagine. For example, a worldwide dispersal system no bigger than…” Lena lifts a small red kuri squash from the bowl. “This. In a matter of hours, the global population could be vaccinated against diseases that kill people every day. Malaria, Ebola, the plague, polio, maybe AIDS, one day. That, or… or what, Kara? What’s the alternative?”

Kara takes the squash from Lena’s hand and puts it back into the bowl. “Or, close to eight billion people could be inoculated with every single one of those viruses, or worse.” Medusa all over again, but worse. Some other virus designed by her father, blanketing the world via L-Corp proprietary tech. A Luthor and a Super, indeed.

“Precisely,” Lena whispers, running a hand over her eyes. “So obviously, I’m not going to use any of this, I’m not going to give in to other grand ideas I might have, but… it’s still in there. The possibility of it. I can sign checks, I can have hospitals and schools built in my name, give to charity, fund this or that, but… it’s killing me. That I could be doing so much more, not with money, but with my mind, and all of it, all of it, could be turned against me, against others, twisted into its abject opposite. You know, the Greek word for poison? It’s the same as the word for remedy, cure. Pharmakon. That’s how I feel. I’m the one Luthor with a conscience, which is good, because it means I’m not a mass murderer, or a soulless businesswoman, but it sucks, because I can see just how… every good idea I have could, in the wrong hands, including my own, become of a living nightmare.”

What can Kara say to this? Lena may be exhausted right now, more pessimistic than usual, but it’s all true. Empty reassurances are something Kara knows Lena would hate hearing from her. She traces the abstract carvings adorning the fruit bowl.

“I haven’t told many people, but my father? He was a scientist. A... virologist.” Lena tilts her head,
and Kara knows she’s found the right angle. “I recently did some digging, and what he had no problem working on? Let’s say that… from what I can tell, he had a lot in common with your mother. As a scientist, I mean. Not as a parent. So my advice would be to think small. Not to get carried away with big ideas, because with a mind like yours… but I can’t give you that advice, because there’s no cure for intelligence,” she smiles. “What if you do eradicate famine, or major diseases, and put an end to all kinds of suffering? Those who say pain is part of the human experience? Screw that. Because maybe it is, but it’s still unfair, and horrible. So I can’t tell you not to make progress. Not to think big. But I would tell you to keep doing what you’re doing, to keep working ethically. Because, look, I’m not going to lecture you on the age-old conundrum when it comes to scientific discoveries. You’re neither the first nor the last genius to wonder whether nuclear fission is going to result in a near limitless energy source with virtually no air pollution, or in Hiroshima or Fukushima or… like you said, it’s science. Those doubts come with the territory. Should come with the territory. And as a researcher, sure, you have a moral obligation to ask yourself these questions, but also… you’re a scientist, not an ethics committee. Surround yourself with the right people, without conflicts of interest. It may sound naïve but I believe that as imperfect as it currently is, and always will be, the system has some pretty solid safeguards in place. So… focus on R&D. You’re not going rogue in hidden labs and vaults, you do things with integrity. Look at what happened with the alien detection device. It wasn’t something you developed in secret and unleashed on the market. So, keep coming up with whatever you want, publicly, and I guarantee you there will be journalists and other scientists to question you. That’s how it should work. And for the most part, I think that’s how it does work when you’re not a Lex or a Lillian Luthor or a Maxwell Lord who think they’re above the law.” She leans forward, even though Lena hasn’t look away. “And don’t forget. There’s one part of your work that can’t be misused. It’s not flashy, but it’s building a better world and saving lives just the same. The collaborative you and Maggie put together. And I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that. Because I’ve been thinking about how nobody knows, nobody cares. Not just about what you and Maggie are doing, but the issues it’s meant to be a response to. Humans don’t know. Or, don’t want to know. And the press isn’t doing its job. So… I know I’m not a reporter anymore, but I still have connections to one of the biggest media empires. I could put together a dossier, something solid, and present it to James, ask him to pass it on to Snapper. If I can gather enough material for them to see that there’s a story worth telling, I don’t care whether I’m on the byline. And if we can get this out there? I don’t see what negative consequences it could possibly have. It’s not a cure for cancer, or famine, it’s not a brilliant invention. It’s just… community work. On the ground. And that is also what you’ll be remembered for. Not just your IQ or your bank account or the children’s hospital or your family history. And more selfishly, I want people to know what Lena Luthor and Maggie Sawyer have put together. How they got L-Corp and NCPD to work together to make the city a safer, more welcoming space for people who have lost everything. That’s the kind of world I want to live in. A world where not every problem can be solved with a Super flying in, where humans make decisions like this, that this world is for everyone, and everyone deserves to be protected. The opposite of what your mother believes is you, and people like Maggie, who don’t have superpowers, who don’t break the rules, who work from within the system. As a reporter—former reporter, that’s the kind of story I’d want to pass on to the public. Admittedly, I also loved it when Snapper sent me to write articles about animal shelters, or when I could write little puff pieces about my favorite cafés, but… still. So, what do you say? Would you be willing to let me interview you and Maggie, to point me in the right direction when it comes to the people I should talk to? I’ll do your work justice, you have my word.”

Lena hides her face in her hands. “I’m thinking,” she informs Kara a while later, her voice muffled.
“Okay,” Kara laughs. “I’ll make some herbal tea in the meantime… what’s the plant that’s a natural sedative, again? The one you used when you found me reading at three in the morning.”

“Valerian root,” Lena replies from behind her hands.

“Right. Valerian root,” Kara whispers, her eyes skimming the labels of all the teas and infusions in Lena’s cupboard. She finds what she’s looking for.

By the time she sets the two steaming mugs in front of them, having added a dash of honey to each on a whim, Lena is just looking at her. They sit in silence for a few minutes, waiting for their tea to cool, Kara quietly breathing in the heady, earthy smell of valerian root every time she inhales.

“I’m on board,” Lena finally says. “Talk to Maggie, and if she’s game too, we’ll do it. Give you access to everything you need.”

“Okay, good. And thanks for trusting me. It could really give the collaborative a boost if the Tribune runs the story. And you’ll get hate from xenophobes, naturally. No good deed goes unpunished.”

“Naturally,” Lena echoes, but there’s no bite to it. “And… Kara, what you said before? I heard every word. It’s rare for me to feel like someone else has given me something to think about. Words meant for me, not read or heard somewhere else. So thank you. For always talking things out.”

Kara touches her fingertips to her glazed ceramic mug, as if it could warm her up. “It’s not often that I feel like my words carry some weight. I find that… invigorating. To be asked for my opinion about things that have nothing to do with me.” With Supergirl. With Kara. She has a drink of tea after Lena does. “Oh, and there’s something equally unrelated that I might be able to help with. I wanted to ask you during dinner, but I forgot.”

“Do tell.”

“The little chest in your bathroom? It wasn’t in your bathroom before you moved here, was it?”

“No. Why?”
“Your long showers and baths don’t agree with it. Humidity’s not good for that kind of wood. It’s not moldy and the hinges aren’t rusty or anything,” she says hurriedly, “but... give it a couple years and they will be.”

“Oh. That won’t do. I’ll move it somewhere else. I hadn’t realized how humid the room was. I should have, I mean, I do spend a lot of time in there, but I thought it was well ventilated.”

“You don’t need to move it out. A good oiling and waxing, and, hm…” Kara considers. “A coat of lacquer or some other sealant over the edges and cross sections. Those tend to attract moisture more. It should do the trick. I could do it for you, it would only take me a few hours. I’ve done it for my shelves, in the bathroom.”

Lena almost says something, but decides against it, drinks some tea instead. “Normally, I’d say no, because I’m not going to take advantage of your skills and kindness, and I’d have a paid cabinetmaker take care of it, but... you like doing that, don’t you?”

“Yes! I love fixing things. I mean, nothing as complicated at the sort of machinery you fix, but... It’s relaxing, and so rewarding. I could come over on a weekend? You can do your usual lazy Sunday thing and I’ll be quietly fixing it in a corner and you won’t even know I’m here. And you’ll have a good as new, Lena And Her One thousand and One Baths proof antique trunk.”

Lena taps her fingers on the island. “Okay. Except for the part where I won’t know you’re here. I won’t pester you, because I know you prefer working by yourself, but I will pay you for your hard work, with...” she scrunches up her nose. “Well, I was going to say dinner somewhere nice, but we kind of already do that now and then, so... name your price.”

Kara tries to think of something they haven’t done. Nothing too outlandish, but— “The opera. You can take me to the opera. I couldn’t make it when you invited me a while ago, and...” Say it. “I was kind of jealous Alex got to go with you instead. I mean, I’m glad she had a great time. Or, well, I imagine she did. Did she? No, don’t answer that, it’s none of my business. But I’d really, really love to go with you, if the offer still stands.”

“Of course it does,” Lena smiles. “I’m on their mailing list and I remember reading something about their upcoming season... There’s going to be a production of Tannhäuser that really caught my eye, and there was something else... damn it, what was it,” she mumbles, biting her thumb.

“You just said it.”
Lena blinks. “I said what?”

“Damn it.”

“I’m not— oh! The Damnation of Faust. Good catch. Wait. How do you know?”

Kara smiles briefly. “I used to book opera tickets for Ms. Grant once in a while and she’s part of their exclusive Circle of Friends membership. Top tier, at that, considering the amounts she donates.” She narrows her eyes. “But I don’t need to explain how that particular membership works, do I?”

Lena scratches the back of her head. “Guilty as charged.”

“Thought so. Anyway, they’d send her… I’m guessing you get them too, those beautiful, detailed online booklets about each upcoming production and special events or exclusive performances for members. Everything got transferred to my work email because she was way too busy to sort through that stuff, but I loved reading them. And they didn’t stop coming after she left CatCo. But obviously, I don’t have a work email anymore, so… no more of that.” Kara shrugs. “I miss it though, so I still keep up with what’s playing. Just, you know, as a regular newsletter subscriber.”

Lena nods, stifling a yawn. “I could set up an automatic transfer so you get a copy of everything I get from National City Ballet, if you want.”

“That’s…” Kara touches her lips. She’s trembling again. “That would actually mean a lot to me. Thank you. Also, you should go to sleep. You’re falling-down tired.”

“I really am,” Lena admits, putting her mug in the sink. “You know where everything is, if you want to watch television, or…”

Kara shakes her head. “No, I’m going to bed, too. I might read for a bit, I don’t know.”

“Okay.”
They turn off the lights in the living room and the kitchen, exchanging a smile when Lena comes back from the entrance with Kara’s wrapped painting under her arm.

“That’s my stop,” Kara says, coming to a halt by the guestroom’s open door.

“Wait a second, I’ll be right back.”

Kara watches her disappear into her own room, and reemerge without the painting, but carrying folded clothes.

“I put the pajamas you left last time in the laundry basket, and… I haven’t had a chance to do laundry.” Lena tells her with a sheepish shrug. “This should fit. And I’ve had that shirt for years, so it should be… soft enough for you.”

Kara take the offered clothes, resisting the urge to run a hand over the shirt. “Thank you. Will you be okay? Once the lights are off and all the thoughts… come back.”

“I don’t know.” Lena smiles. “But I’m pretty sure you’ve managed to shut some of my demons up, and besides, you’re right next door, so… I’m hopeful.”

“Sweet dreams, then. Come bug me if you need anything.”

Lena pushes Kara’s glasses up her nose. “I will. Goodnight, Kara.”

Kara waits until Lena has closed the door to her room to step inside hers. She doesn’t like closing the door, not here. She goes to the bathroom to brush her teeth and wash her face, just to have the faint fragrance of Aleppo soap cling to her skin. She changes into the clothes Lena lent her. Beneath the light smell of the organic laundry detergent she uses, Kara perceives her scent, the scent of her place, of everything she’s come to associate with her.

She sits on the bed, looking out the window, taking in the city lights. It’s not late. Alex and Maggie are probably still at work, night owls that they are. Kara tries to recall their scent, too. It’s hard with Alex, because they’ve lived together for so long. Although, now that they don’t, it’s a little easier to distinguish. And when Kara comes over, Alex’s place doesn’t smell like her own. It’s good that their lives are a little more separate, now, Kara thinks. And Maggie’s scent? Well, that’s a lot easier. She wore one of Kara’s shirts, the one with the caged bird, during that dinner with the
others. Kara put it on the next day when she went to bed. It was funny, Kara kept waking up and looking around like Maggie was there, only she wasn’t.

She lowers her head and looks out the window above the rim of her glasses. Gently loosens the mental iron grip she keeps on her vision, and… she sees. Beyond the city lights, beyond the pollution, beyond the atmosphere. The twinkle of Ursa Major. Cassiopeia. Andromeda. And if she pushed, would she see Venus rising, and comets, hundreds of them, big and small? Jupiter’s raging auroras, Pluto’s blades of ice, as tall as skyscrapers?

She closes her eyes. It’s too much. Way, way too much. Way too far. She focuses on the sensation of Lena’s clothes against her skin. Her scent surrounding her. The covers under her palms, the carpet under her feet. All things immediate. That’s better.

She did that on her way to Earth, in her pod, whenever it woke her up from stasis for hours on end. Opening her eyes was… not an option. The vastness of space would have driven her insane, just as making the cockpit opaque would have driven her insane. Everything would have driven her insane, except closing her eyes and focusing on what she felt, visualizing her home, visiting it in her mind. Her bedroom, always sun-kissed. And the hallways, a little darker, airy, dotted with patches of light. The dining room. The taste of water. Kal can’t remember any of it, he was too young. She’d take him in her arms and tell him stories, even though he couldn’t understand them. Maybe her uncle remembers her home, vaguely. The layout, the artworks. But not the way she does. And even she’s starting to forget. When she dies, it will be truly gone. Nobody will know where Kara Zor-El grew up, what her favorite reading spot was.

She sighs, checks her phone. Oh. Picture from Lena. She opens it. It’s a shot of her bed, the black polychrome now above it. Kara chose an unusual format, a long, rectangular canvas. It fits well. There, it will catch the afternoon light, the setting sun. Lena has sent a link along with the picture, to The Rolling Stones’ *Paint it Black*. Kara smiles, plugs in her headphones and clicks the link. *I see a red door and I want it painted black. No colors anymore I want them to turn black. The song’s energy starts seeping into Kara’s mind. If I look hard enough into the setting sun, my love will laugh with me before the morning comes. Do kryptonians secrete dopamine the way humans do? Black as night, black as coal, I wanna see the sun blotted out from the sky. I wanna see it painted, painted, painted, painted black.* Kara bites her lip when the song ends.

To Lena Luthor [Today 10:26 PM]: *if only I’d known this song during my karaoke days…*
From Lena Luthor [Today 10:27 PM]: *It’s never too late for the classics. Can I drop by or are you sleepy?*

To Lena Luthor [Today 10:27 PM]: *not after listening to this, I’m not (and I wasn’t anyway). Door’s literally open, come come.*

The lights in the hallway come to life. “I’ll be right here,” Lena says, walking past the guestroom. Kara turns on the lamp on the bedside table as she comes back with two vinyl records under her arm. She sits beside her on the edge of the bed and shows her the cover of the first one. *AFTERMATH*, the young faces of the five boys, half hidden in stark shadows, half bathed in dusky purple light. Kara’s eyes go from the cover to Lena’s profile. She’s been crying.

“Lex got those for me. First press. April 1966 for this one, it’s the fourteen-track British version. And June 1966, American version, ten tracks, including *Paint it Black*."

Kara peers closer. “Can I see?”

“No course,” Lena nods enthusiastically, handing her the record sleeves.

Crap. She thought Lena would just show her. Kara’s never handled a vinyl record. She might snap it in two. “Um… I hear those are pretty fragile, so it’s probably better if you show me.”

Lena doesn’t seem to understand for a few seconds. “You’ve never touched a vinyl?”

Kara shakes her head. “Maggie has a collection but I haven’t really taken a look or played one.”

“Oh,” Lena says, slipping the April 1966 record out of its sleeve. It’s a beautiful, popping shade of blue. Persian Blue, Kara thinks it’s called. *Made in England by the DECCA Record Co. Ltd. London. Full frequency stereophonic sound. Mick, Keith, Charlie, Brian & Bill*. “They’re not actually that fragile. Mostly, they just attract dust like magnets. I’ll show you how to use my player, if you want.”

Kara turns the sleeve over, smiling at the goofy black and white pictures of the band next to the track listing. “I’d like that. Lets blast it tomorrow morning, get your blood pumping before work. You’ll breeze through whatever meetings you’re not looking forward to thanks to that Jagger swagger.”
Lena chuckles. “Neighbors be damned?”

“Eh. Blame your uncouth guest, if they complain.”

“Deal. I’ll tell them I occasionally like slumming it with a bespectacled little painter who bribes security with pastries. You hooligan.”

Kara grimaces. “I can’t believe he ratted me out.”

“He didn’t,” Lena smiles. “He just asked me if it was all right for him to accept your offerings the first time you brought him something. And speaking of painting…”

Kara waits, a little anxious. “Yeah?”

Lena slips the record back into its sleeve and sets it aside. She pulls her legs up on the bed, looks out the window. “So… I haven’t cried once this week. Not when I got the call, not when I booked my flight, not during the ceremony, not after, not when I landed back here, not when I looked at our old pictures from college and our early startup days. And then I unwrapped the painting, propped it up, took a step back. I stared at it for ten minutes and felt absolutely nothing. And then the flood gates opened for half an hour. The more I looked at it, the more I cried.” She glances at Kara. “The only thing I felt when tears stopped falling, was exhaustion, and… immense relief. I don’t know what about, but either way, if one key characteristic of art, in any medium, is to be interactive… then you truly are an artist, Kara.”

Kara takes a deep breath. She isn’t sure she can withstand the intensity of Lena’s gaze right now, so she takes her phone and goes on Wikipedia instead. She clears her throat. “Hm. Catharsis: purification and cleansing of emotions through art or any extreme change in emotion that results in renewal and restoration. It is a metaphor originally used by Aristotle in the Poetics.”

She sees Lena smile in her peripheral vision. “Ditto.”

“Right, uh… about that.” She hesitates. “Feeling things. Or not feeling things. What you said earlier, about your mom tidying Lex’s room, detached, and you feeling the same way?”
“Yeah.”

Kara finally looks at her. “I don’t think it’s proof that you’re like her. I think it’s proof that she’s like you. A person who feels things. Who needs to defend against feeling too much. That’s all it is. You’re two women who have lost a lot, and there’s no... family curse.”

Lena swallows. “Sometimes, I’m not so sure about that. I wouldn’t be so hell bent on not being like them if I didn’t feel like part of me has the potential to be.”

“Lena. I wish... I wish Lillian could have loved you the right way. But she doesn’t know how to do that. Look what it did to Lex, being loved so much by her. She planted bad seeds in his mind, and whatever dangerous ones were already there, she cultivated. As sad as it is, I think that by not loving you like she loved him, she protected you from herself. You weren’t loved the way a child should be, but what little love you got? It was the right kind of love. From your mother when you were very little, from your father until he died, from your brother before he lost his mind. And they’re gone, but that kind of love? It doesn’t go away like people do, it leaves a mark. It protects you, even years later. If anyone knows that for sure, it’s me. Lillian... I don’t know what her life was like, why she turned out the way she did. You’re both strong, but the difference is, she has no choice. She has to be strong. Who will support her in her madness, if not herself? No one else believes in her. But you? You have a choice. You’re just as strong, but unlike her, you can afford to be weak. You have me. You don’t need me, but you have me. Always. I promise.”

“Kara, you can’t promise me that.”

“Yes, I can,” Kara says firmly. “I may not promise you forever but I’m not afraid of always, of every day. I’m not going anywhere. I will always protect you. I will be your friend every day. When you feel things again, I’ll be here. If you don’t know who you are when you do, I’ll be here. To help you remember or to figure it out with you.”

Lena looks at her like she desperately wants to believe her. “I’ll take every day over forever.”

“Here,” Kara says, taking off her necklace and putting it around Lena’s neck delicately. “My mom gave it to me the night my home... you know. She didn’t have time to explain why. All she had time to say was I love you, Kara, and so that’s what it means to me. Something to remind the wearer that they’re loved, and I think knowing this would keep anyone’s mind safe. Even from itself. I gave it to Alex for a little while, when I thought she might need it. Now, you. Return it to me when you’re ready.”

“Won’t you miss it? Don’t you need it?”
Kara clears her throat. “Yes, but… Two years ago, James confided in me about not knowing how to make a name for himself, to be his own man. And I told him something my family taught me,” she glances down at the necklace so Lena will know which family she’s referring to. “That accepting help from people is not a shame, it’s an honor. And part of being your own person, of making a name for yourself, Lena Luthor,” she adds with a wry smile, “is knowing when to accept help.”

Lena wraps her arms around her. And Kara doesn’t what to do. She wasn’t prepared for a hug. The last person she hugged was Alex, and Maggie before that. And as long as it’s not hurtful, they wouldn’t tell her even if it was a little forceful. Because they understand, and they wouldn’t want her to feel bad. But Lena wouldn’t understand. The bizarre notion that she might not get to hug Lena again for a long, long time crosses her mind. She tentatively returns Lena’s embrace, realizes she’s been holding her breath and releases it slowly. She tries to remember what it was like to hug someone close, really close, and not worry about killing them. J’onn, Superman… not Alex, not Maggie, not Lena. Not her human family. No, don’t think about that. Think about now. Don’t think at all.

She hesitantly puts her head on Lena’s shoulder. The chain around Lena’s neck brushes against her nose. She closes her eyes. Lena’s no longer wearing her hoodie, just a tee-shirt. Kara tries to commit the shape of her body to memory. And it becomes too much, to pretend to hug her back, her arms held up as if around thin air, because she’s afraid to hurt her, to reveal her secret. She didn’t have time to prepare for that hug. It took her by surprise. She lets her arms drop, but Lena keeps hers around her. Kara inhales steadily. Lena’s skin smell like her jasmine bubble bath. And underneath, her own indescribable scent.

“You okay?” Lena whispers.

“I’m sorry, I’m just… I don’t mean to be, but I’m just…” Tired. A circus lion.

“Feeling clumsy?”

“Yeah. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Lena holds her a little while longer, kisses the top of her head.

And just like that, it’s over, they’re not touching anymore. Kara wipes her eyes under her glasses. She may be a circus lion but she’s still a lion. Lions don’t lie down and die. They never give up.
She thinks of *The Old Man and the Sea*. It was the first book she read as part of her school’s curriculum, here on Earth.

*When I was your age I was before the mast on a square rigged ship that ran to Africa and I have seen lions on the beaches in the evening.*

*He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife. He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy.*

*I wish he’d sleep and I could sleep and dream about the lions, he thought. Why are the lions the main thing that is left? Don’t think, old man, he said to himself. Rest gently now against the wood and think of nothing.*

*After that he began to dream of the long yellow beach and he saw the first of the lions come down onto it in the early dark and then the other lions came and he rested his chin on the wood of the bows where the ship lay anchored with the evening off-shore breeze and he waited to see if there would be more lions and he was happy.*

“Have you talked to someone about this?” Lena asks gently. “Feeling clumsy, I mean.”

Kara shakes her head no. “In those terms? Just you.”

“Has this happened before?”

“Yes. After I got adopted. Then it got better, overall. It always comes and goes, on some level. And at the moment, it’s coming, not going.”

“And the rest? What we said we’d talk about?”

“You mean, have I told someone else? No. I told you why.”

Lena chews on her lower lip pensively. “Because I’m not alarmed by it, I don’t find it sad, I find ways to relate to it.”

Lena and her perfect memory. Whenever she says she forgot something, Kara always wonders if it’s a game. If she ‘forgot’ about the *The Damnation of Faust* just so that she could drop a hint in her sentence and let Kara figure it out, if she ‘forgot’ about the myth of the Labyrinth so that Kara
would tell her the story. Lena’s like a mischievous kid, sometimes. Lena is many, many things.

“And that’s really important to me,” Kara says. “Not that Alex and Maggie don’t ground me in other ways, but you? You ask the right questions. You keep me accountable.” The way only someone who doesn’t know can.

“To whom?” Kara pats her own chest. Lena seems taken aback. Her eyes flicker down to Kara’s chest and for a horrible second, Kara thinks Lena sees Supergirl. But that’s not even what she meant, she meant as Kara, as— “Oh,” Lena breathes out. “That’s quite something. Accountability to oneself. Okay. If I ask the right questions, then I have one.”

“Go ahead.”

Lena hesitates. “Have you considered talking to someone else? A professional, I mean.”

“Oh, like… a therapist?”

Kara’s tranquil tone of voice seems to set Lena’s mind at ease. “Yeah. Even if it’s just for a few weeks, it might help. You’re not feeling comfortable in your own skin at the moment, you don’t feel as… grounded as you’d like. You’re sad, too,” she says with a brief smile, “and I think you’re…” Another hesitation.

“I’m what?”

“Struggling with a loss of meaning. And that’s not necessarily a bad thing, because you’re looking for it everywhere you can, and that’s actually pretty healthy in my book, but… I think it weighs on you. And you feel out of place. And there’s also a lot of… God, I feel like I’m assuming so much,” Lena sighs, running a hand through her hair.

“No. Please, go on. Even if you’re wrong, I won’t be offended. I want you to talk to me like that. The only other person who did that was Cat Grant, and it was really good for me. Made me feel like my problems were something she could wrap her mind around. Even when she was being mean about it. Which you never are. So please, talk to me…” Kara smiles. “About me.”

Lena looks at her, her eyes clouded. “But it’s a fantasy, you know that, right? Wishing someone else could tell you who you are.”
“I know. And I understand that it’s not what therapy is about. It’s not what this is about, either. I’m not asking you to tell me who I am. I just want to know… who you think I am. What you see.”

This time, Lena is the one smiling, glancing briefly towards her own room and, Kara assumes, the painting. “Okay. So what I meant to say was… you often talk to me about your parents, about the early years after you got adopted, how in some way, it cost Alex her childhood, her friends… and I think there’s a lot of regret there. And grief, still. Which, again, isn’t a bad thing. I mean, I think about my biological mother every day and I barely remember anything about her. But grief, I think… can go from being a necessary outlet, to calcifying into… something you no longer know how to live without. And there are ways to perhaps sublimate that, or elaborate it, without getting rid of it… I don’t know. But a good therapist might. Or rather, they’d figure it out with you and keep the right distance. And, you know… even if it’s less than that, if it’s just one hour a week where you get to say anything you want in a safe, confidential environment, even the negative things you’re not proud of, the things that worry you, that you’re angry about… anything, and explore it all with someone you’re not emotionally involved with? That could still be a good outlet.”

Kara feels like gratefulness has her in a chokehold. For having someone who hears clumsy and thinks you’re uncomfortable in your own skin, who thinks therapy, not alien. Who looks for human solutions to a human problem. Because that’s what it feels like, when she has to be careful. When she breaks a mug Alex made her. It doesn’t feel like super strength. It feels like clumsiness. Basic, stupid, human clumsiness. Like being drunk and uncoordinated. Supergirl? Supergirl is pure power. She’s vibrant energy and unwavering determination, splintered concrete, unburdened brightness and a shattered sound barrier, and all the goodness in the world. But Kara? Kara is clumsy, Kara misses her dad’s cooking, her aunt’s hugs, her strength. She misses everything. Nothing here was made for her. Everything here ages and dies, but she doesn’t. And maybe home can be people, maybe she will be Alex’s home until Alex is no more and Kara remains. But places matter, too. Her beautiful planet mattered.

The cliff matters to Maggie. Kara wanted to throw up when Maggie asked her if she ever thought about it. When she had to decide whether to lie and say, Yes, I think about that cliff too, it’s our special place, or to tell her the truth: It’s the place you went ‘Jesus, Kara!’ on me, and not for the first time. Where I said I didn’t make me want to be a better person. Where I almost killed you by pulling off too hard to save Lena’s life, the place we argued about her innocence. She went for something in between. Something factual. I don’t think about that cliff. Let’s make new memories there. Maybe it was worse. Maybe it was—

Kara rubs her eyes under her glasses, feeling like she just woke up. She doesn’t think about the cliff. She doesn’t like the cliff. But the waterfall was... a blank canvas. And they painted it with the colors of who they are now, separately and together. The colors of change. Even if they never go back, they painted it. Places. People. Do some cultures on Earth believe places have a soul? That places are like people?
Lena hasn’t said anything. She’s watching her. Unknowingly wearing a little piece of Kara’s home, her eyes echoing its color, but clearer. Clearer by an entire world.

“I think… maybe.” Kara contemplates, then shakes her head. Nothing to contemplate, here. “Yeah. I’m gonna give it a try. Thanks for… being honest and suggesting it.”

“You’re welcome. But you know it’s not my way of telling you not to talk to me anymore, that it’s become an inconvenience, right?”

“I do know that. A shrink won’t replace you.” Kara narrows her eyes. “And you won’t replace a shrink.”

Lena smiles. “Music to my ears.”

Kara’s eyes go to Lena’s ears. Wonders if Maggie has kissed her there, if... She hopes Maggie has, she hopes Lena liked it. She hopes they’re generous with each other, that what is offered is wanted, and what is wanted is offered. They both deserve it. Everyone deserves it.

“Do you know any?” She asks.

“Any therapist?” Lena furrows her brow, taps her lips with her index finger. “Not in National City. But I can ask around, come up with a list of trustworthy ones, if you’d like?”

“I’d appreciate it. I don’t really know… I mean, I know who Ms. Grant’s therapist was, but that probably wouldn’t be a good idea to go see that person, ethically speaking. Besides, he prescribed her Lexapro like candy, and…” Kara makes a face. *I’m happy to take you to Dr. Shuman for emergency Lexapro. That is, if your alien brain will respond to the SSRIs.* “I mean, medication is fine, but not the approach I’m looking for.”

“I hear you. And I’m not sure how to say this, but…” Lena scratches her nose. “I don’t know what your situation is now that you’re no longer at CatCo, if you still have health insurance, but therapy isn’t cheap, so… I’d be more than happy to pitch in, if you need it. It’s not a handout,” she adds quickly, wincing. “I mean, not that I’d want you to pay me back, either… I’m so bad at this. God. What I’m trying to say is, as your friend, I will always help you if I can, and that means financially, too. If that’s what you need.”
“I’m doing okay on that front, but… I know a lot of people have taken advantage of your generosity, so being trusted not to? That means a lot. And if I wasn’t doing okay financially, I would gladly accept your help.” Kara shrugs. “No shame in that, right?”

“No shame in that,” Lena repeats, toying with the pendant around her neck. She seems to realize what she’s doing and chuckles. “Well, that didn’t take long. I’ve been wearing it for twenty minutes and it’s already a stress-relieving, transitional talisman.”

“Talisman. That’s a good word for it.”

“I think so, too. And on that self-congratulatory note…” she stands up. “Do you want me to pull down the blinds, before I leave you to it?”

Kara looks up from the bed. “No, I like to look at the city. I don’t think I can sleep, anyway. I’m just going to listen to some music.”

Lena nods. “Music usually does the trick?”

“As in, helps me fall asleep?”

“No.”

“Oh.” Happy existential crisis, Kara. “Somewhat. It’s something to focus on, at least.”

Lena gathers the records and puts them on the armchair by the closet. “Better than a book or, I don’t know… cat videos?”

“Someone knows me well. But with music, there’s something about the vibrations. I can focus on them and occasionally drift off. Not sleep, exactly, but my mind just… floats.”

“You mean, like binaural beats?”

“Sometimes.” Kara hesitates. Her fingers twitch on the bedspread. “Do you want to stay with me
for a little bit? We can share my earphones.”

Lena cocks her head, regarding her curiously. Kara searches her eyes.

“Okay,” Lena finally says, breaking into a smile.

She goes around the bed and Kara tucks the covers and sheets free. Lena slips under them and takes the offered earbud as Kara turns off the bedside lamp, unlocks her phone and hands it to Lena. “Pick something.”

She lies down, watches Lena scroll through her music, absently playing with her mother’s necklace with her free hand. She sees her switch apps, then lock the phone and put it between them. It’s only when Lena turns on her side to face her that Kara realizes there’s sound rising in her ear. Rain. Just rain.

“Symphony in rain major,” she whispers with a grin.

Lena smiles back. “Just go to sleep, Sunshine.”

Of course, Lena is the one in Morpheus’ arms twelve minutes later. Kara shakes her head fondly. She lowers the volume progressively until there’s no more sound, carefully pulls out the earbud and removes Lena’s glasses. Glasses, she can handle. It’s probably the one object she’s so used to manipulating she’s never broken a pair. She folds them on the bedside table, puts her phone there once she’s set her alarm for Lena, then quietly goes to lower the blinds. She slips back into bed and pulls the covers up, making sure Lena’s all tucked in. She looks at her for a while. She remembers what Alex said, a few months before, when Kara exposed Jeremiah’s cybernetic arm and he said Cadmus had damaged his arm so badly they had to replace it. How Alex went off on her. *Maybe it means nothing to the girl of steel. What would you know about physical torture? What would you know about breaking?* Kara closes her eyes.

Oh. She remembers. The poem that eluded her when she came home after putting out that forest fire. Bits and pieces, at least. She should really start learning poems by heart, instead of relying on her immediate memory. Learning *by heart*. By one’s heart, rather than through one’s eyes, or ears. How does it go? She only recalls fragments.

*You are like nobody since I love you.*

*Let me spread you out among yellow garlands.*
Who writes your name in letters of smoke among the stars of the south?

Suddenly the wind howls and bangs at my shut window.

The sky is a net crammed with shadowy fish.

Here all the winds let go sooner or later, all of them.

The rain takes off her clothes.

The birds go by, fleeing.

The wind. The wind.

You are here. Oh, you do not run away.

You will answer me to the last cry.

Cling to me as though you were frightened.

Even so, at one time a strange shadow ran through your eyes.

My words rained over you, stroking you.

I will bring you happy flowers from the mountains, bluebells, dark hazels, and rustic baskets of kisses.

I want

To do with you what spring does with the cherry trees.

She smiles at Lena’s sleeping form. It’s never too late for the classics. Pablo Neruda. Khalil Gibran. Velasquez. The Rolling Stones. And all the others whose words and sounds and images will speak to her, like she has every right to be here, to find a piece of herself in the humanities. She thinks of all the birds fleeing the fire, terrified and free, of the wind and the rain, she thinks of the koi fish in our happy place, of the lions on the beach. All the goodness in the world. She told Alex, a while ago, that the world needed more love, not less. But there are so many ways to love. To love in the abstract, to love in particular. When you put on that suit, be goodness incarnate, and when you take it off, be a good person. No more anger.

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